



WIDOWHOOD: REFLECTION ON OPPRESSION AND SOCIETAL DILEMMA AS ILLUSTRATED IN INDIRA GOSWAMI'S TEXT

Rashmirekha Barman

Student

The Assam Royal Global University

Abstract

Jnanpith award winner Indira Goswami (1942 – 2011) was a prolific writer in Modern Assamese Literature. In her novels *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (*The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, 1988) and *Nilkanthi Braja* (*The Blue-necked God*, 1972) she portrays the themes of caste system, effect of opium, religion and widowhood. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990), challenges the conventional notions of gender and develops her theory of Gender Performativity. She asserts that being born a male or female does not determine behaviour. Instead, people learn to behave in particular ways and the idea of gender is just a performance which she calls “Gender Performativity.” Erick Erickson developed his theory of Psychosocial Development in his book *Childhood And Society* (1950). The theory describes the impact of social experience across the whole life span. It represents human development as the product of the interaction between individual needs and societal expectations and demand. This study aims to examine the widows psychosocial development and as a part of gender performativity of Goswami’s novel’s *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (1988) and *Nilkanthi Braja* (1972) through the theory of Judith Butler’s Gender Performativity and Erick Erickson’s Psychosocial Development.

Keywords: Widowhood, Gender Performativity and Psychosocial Development.

Chapter I

Introduction

Indira Goswami was born to Umakanta Goswami and Ambika Devi, a Brahmin family, at Amranga in South Kamrup, Assam. She is one of the pre-eminent contemporary Assamese writer. She has written thirteen novels and numerous short stories. She has achieved a great success and recognition in the field of Assamese literature. She published her first work in the form of short stories *Chinaki* (1962), when she was a student. She completed her schooling at Pine Mount School in Shillong, Meghalaya and graduated from Cotton College, Guwahati. She had contributed a lot in the field of Assamese literature and some of her novels were made into movies. Some of her widely read novels are – *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 1988)*, *Nilkanthi Braja (The Blue-necked God, 1976)*, *Mamore Dhora Tarowal aru Dukhon Uponyas (The Rusted Sword and Two Other Novels, 1980)*, *Tej aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha (Pages Stained with Blood, 2001)*, *Arihon, Chinnamatsar Manuhto (The Man from Chinnamasta, 2005)*, *Chinavar Srota (The Chenab's Current, 1972)*. “*Chinavar* (1972) is her first novel, a work marked by a sympathetic rendering of life and situation of a group of men and engaged in building a bridge over the river Chenab. The work is further marked by vivid realism, penetrating insight and deep poetic sensibility. On the whole, it is an impressive work full of promise. This promise was more than amply fulfilled in her next novel, *Nilkanthi Braja (The Blue-necked God, 1976)* with which she came into limelight in Modern Assamese literature” (Kotoky, p 63). Goswami was an outstanding writer who reveals the lived experience of ordinary people. Her powerful graphic descriptions and haunting images bring to light the centrality of the body in human affairs and the codification of political, religious and cultural systems through the body: the bodily processes of life, the impact of gender and age, and the physically of poverty, norms and conflicts. Goswami highlights the diverse cultural context of her remote region. She depicts contemporary political and social dimensions, avoiding romanticism and anthropological tendencies. Her intimate knowledge of community realities is closely woven into strong narratives that tackle controversial subjects such as the plight of widows and the experience of Sikhs in the anti- Sikh riots., as well as the impact of caste system, prostitution and ethnic strife on the human body and psyche. Her *An Unfinished Autobiography*

(1988) is a remarkable for its utter frankness. An important voice for the marginalised, she also writes about Madhya Pradesh, Kashmir and Vrindavan, bringing local issues to the fore.

The novel *Nilkanthi Braja* (1976) set in Vrindavan. The plot revolves around the plight, the exploitation and miserable lives of Brahmin widows who spend their remaining years in the holy city of Vrindavan. The novel is an exploration of the terrible misery and helpless widows in Vrindavan suffered everyday and in almost all aspects of life. Saudamini, the protagonist of the novel is a young widow woman who has lost her husband. Her parents took her to Vrindavan in the hope that she will find peace in the environment of the holy town and accept her misfortune.

The novel *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 2004)* set at the dawn of independence in India, in small sattras in South Kamrup in Assam. The author holds up a powerful picture of change and transition, of degeneration and decay, which finds suitable expression in the central metaphor. Interwoven with the main story is a poignant tale of the tragedy of widowhood—the plight of Brahmin widows encased in the sattras and their responses to a fate worse than death. The novel revolves around the lives of three female characters—Durga, Saru Gossaine and Giribala, who were forced to eat, live and interact as per the deeply patriarchal norms of the ashram. Goswami's own childhood experiences and her time in Vrindavan, spend researching the lives of widows, form the backdrop of this classic, as she writes of the emotional, physical and social deprivation of women victimised by the feudal Vaishnavite sattras system. The book was adapted to a National Award winning film *Adajya* in 1996. Religion, especially the practices of the orthodox Hinduism into which she was born, has remained a major concern in Goswami's writing. It has fuelled her uncompromising, direct engagement with violence, custom and prejudice. She never afraid to take a stand on principle, whether as a woman writing about the sex trade or as a vegetarian condemning animal sacrifice, she has made her art into a potent instrument of social change. This has brought her death threats from fanatics as well as the highest literary awards in India such as Sahitya Akademi Award (1982) and the Jnanpith Award (2000). Her shorter fictions is equally admired and widely anthologised. She has published poetry in English, though she disclaims the title of poet, preferring to be known as a novelists and critic. She has researched the epic *Ramayana*, comparing the *Ramayana* of Tulsidas with an 11th century Assamese *Ramayana*. Through her creative writing in her mother

tongue and her translations, she had brought her native Assamese language to the forefront of India's literary scene.

“Widowhood brings in its fold a number of problems for the widow and she has to live a life of isolation and dependency. Emotionally, she suffers the most and she has to make many compromises with her life. The sense of isolation haunts the childless widow. Although, widows with children are able to pass their days in the company of children, yet a large number of widows feel anxious about their future. Being financially inadequate they are at a disadvantage to shape the careers of their children” (Kitchlu. *Widows in India*, p 21). “Her image is that a helpless and unfortunate woman with or without children, who is expected to suffer because of the sins committed in her past birth. Due to such misconception, a widow does not enjoy any status in the community. Except sympathy and a few words of pity, no concrete help is offered to her to sustain herself and her children. It may be getting a suitable life partner for her daughter; getting her male child married; it may be hiring some suitable accommodation or giving proper education to her children, etc. The widow finds herself at a disadvantage in all walk of life” (Kitchlu. *Widows in India*, p 22). Due to the death of the husband, a widow experiences considerable change in her social relationships. Not only does a widow experiences change in the attitudes of people around her but she also undergoes change which affects her own behaviour towards others. An average widow experiences a hollow around her and feels that something is missing in her life without husband. Therefore, she does not like to relate even though there may not be any change in the attitudes of people towards her. “The stereotyped patriarchal values brings about a social death for a widow. The widows social death stems from her alienation reproduction and sexuality. The society attributes personhood to woman only if she married and is living with her husband. Once she ceases to be a wife she ceases to a person. The female child soon after birth is groomed to develop characteristics that are considered such as selflessness, patience, endurance, masochism, caring, loving, aesthetic, passive, diffident and religious” (Reddy. *Problems of Widowhood in India*, p 9). Widowed women in traditional societies often face a strong drop in status and limited life choices. Widowed women's life could be highly disrupted if she does not have economic means of support because she is not likely to have skills with which to obtain well paying job. Myths are dangerous when they result in over simplified stereotypes that influence personal perception, social interaction and social policy. “For a Hindu women, widowhood is considered a punishment for the crime committed by her in her previous life.

Hence she is locked down upon as sinner. Widowhood in India among the upper castes is a state of social death. Widows are considered inauspicious beings” (Reddy. *Problem of Widowhood*, 2004, p 10). The problem of widowed women raises many queries, because though she is socially dead, she remains an element in society. The widows institutionalized marginality a liminal state between being physically alive and being socially dead is the ultimate cultural outcome of deprivation of the widow. The widows marginal state means that she is, functionally incorporated into the household while being considered an outsider.

Theoretical Background

Erick Homburger Erickson (1902- 1994) was a German- American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on psychosocial development of human beings. Erickson developed his theory of psychosocial development in his book *Childhood And Society* (1950). His theory revolutionized developmental thought (Hoare, 2002). He was one of the first to propose a life-span model of human development which included eight successive psychosocial stages. Each stage is associated with an inherent conflict or crisis that the individual must encounter and successfully resolve to proceed with development. Erickson’s theory described the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan. He was interested in how social interaction and relationships played a role in the development and growth of human beings. In each stage, Erickson believed people experience a conflict that serves as a turning point in development. In his view, these conflicts are centered on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times, the potential for personal growth is high but so is the potential for failure. If people successfully deal with the conflict, they emerge from the stage with psychological strengths that will serve them well for the rest of their lives. If they fail to deal effectively with these conflicts, they may not develop the essential skills needed for a strong sense of self. He also believed that a sense of competence motivates behaviours and actions. Each stage in his theory is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. During each stage, the person experiences psychosocial crisis which could have a positive or negative outcome for personality development. For Erickson, these crisis are of psychosocial nature because they involve psychological needs of the individual (i. e., psycho) conflicting with the needs of society (i. e., social).

Judith Pamela Butler (1956) is an American philosopher and gender theorist whose work has influenced political philosophy, ethics, and literary theory. The theory of Gender Performativity was first coined in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). The theory of ‘Gender Performance’ or ‘Gender Performativity’ was first coined in Judith Butler’s book titled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler’s theories on gender identity and gender performativity were based on the notion of destabilizing gender identities and categories. Gender performance is the idea that gender is something inscribed in daily practices, learned and performed based on cultural norms of femininity and masculinity. The main point of gender performance is that neither gender nor sex is completely natural, and both are performed and become naturalized over time; we act and walk and talk in ways that consolidate the idea of “being a man” or “being a woman.”



Review of Literature

Bhattacharya, Kumar Sankar. Marginal Identities in Indira Goswami's Works. *UMI Dissertation Publishing*. 2011. This study demonstrate that Goswami's work open up opportunities to further demonize marginality from the all pervasive and inclusive western perspective while exploring its particularity in diverse contexts.

Das, Prasenjit. Adajya: What Does It Represent? *International Journal of Communication*. 2013. This study explores how production, exchange and circulation of cultural values not only problematic for the issues of representation but also provide valuable insights into the process of representation.

Das, Papari. Germination of New Women in the Fictions of Indira Goswami: A study of the characters of Giribala and Saudamini. *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*. 2014. This study explores how the author created such a society in her novel where women were marginalized to great extent, especially the widows.

Bhusan, Ravi. Estranged Identity: The Problem of Hindu Widows in India Goswami's Nilkanthi Braja. *Lybrinth: An International Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014. This study examines the uglier side of widowhood in Hindu traditions and mental agony of Indira Goswami's experienced herself on becoming a widow.

Arora, Neha. "Vrindavan: The Image of Broken Homes, Shattered Hopes in Indira Goswami's The Blue-Necked God." *Lybrinth: An International Referred Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014. This study explores the case of widows who have to sacrifice their desires and hide their tears under the garb of fake smiles.

Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. Re-Writing Women, Revisiting Women's Narratives in Film: Adajya And Joymoti. *Margin: A Journal of Literature & Culture*. 2014. This study tries to track how the re-telling is attempted act of recovery of the female agency which in terms of the palimpsest of history and context, is forever an incomplete project.

Chakraborty, Shekar. Widowhood: A Social Harassment Reflected in Indira Goswami's Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah. *An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal*.2015. This paper examines the three widow characters in the novel who are victimised in the orthodox Assamese Brahmin society.

Das, Debarati. Infirmities of Women in the Sattras of Assam with Reference to Mamoni Raisom Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker. *International Journal on Multidisciplinary Literature*.2015. This study explores the vulnerable condition of women because of their widowhood on one hand and on the other it also depicts the power of women which has bloomed up from their suppression.

Sharma, Malavika. Indranath and Giribala-The Young Adult Dystopian Characters in The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker. *Journal on English Language Teaching*. 2015. This paper examines the characters of Indranath and Giribala from the perspective of young dystopian protagonist.

Lakhimai, Mili. Forgotten and Abandoned: The Widows in Indira Goswami's The Blue-Necked God and The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker. *International Journal of Humanities & Social Science*.2016. This paper demonstrates how the widows in Goswami's novels are forsaken victims of the society where freedom is only imaginary or wishful longings.

Ghosh, Sandipan. A Texture Of Passion And Pathos: The Plight of Hindu Widows in Brindavanas Portrayed in Indira Goswami's novel The Blue-Necked God. *The Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University*.2017. This study explores rich texture of Goswami's narrative to analyse how the author portrays the physical and emotional deprivation faced by the widows.

Hazarika, Devika Rani. An Unconventional Narrative on Widowhood: Reading of Indira Goswami's Adha Likha Dastavez or An Unfinished Autobiography. *The Literary Herald: An International Referred Research e-Journal of English Literature*.2017. This paper explores how Goswami's autobiography came across a

deviant account of 'self-chosen' celibacy associated with widowhood where the author goes and resides in a place which is the most traditional refuge for widows.

Sandhya.K. A Saga Of South Kamrup: English Translation of the Assamese Novel Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah by Indira Goswami a Cursory Study. *Journal of English Language and Literature*.2017.This paper examines how the author captures the societal concerns in her lens and vividly deals with them in the post colonial context.

Bhattacharya,Kumar Sankar. Writing the periphery: Indira Goswami and the economically marginalised. *The Registrar,Netaji Subhas Open University*. 2017.This study demonstrates Goswami's persistent endeavours to give voices to the lowly of the laws and the basic nature of struggle of such people and societies indifference to them that undercut the promise of inclusive growth and equality as guaranteed by Indian Constitution.

Ahmed,Abdul Barique & Dr M N Anjum. Widowhood in India:The Societal Persecution as Represented in Indira Goswami's Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities And Management studies*.2018. This study examines that Goswami hoist a brawny complaint against the orthodox and trational practices of Hindu society.

Mahanta,Rebat & Mallika Tamuly. Revolutinary Women: A study of the character of Giribala in The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary*.2019. This paper explores the women's characters, especially the character Giribala who emerge as a 'new women'.

Kaur,Monbinder and Dr Devika Rani. The Living Dead: Portrayal of Widow's Indira Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker. *New Delhi Recognised Journal*.2019. This paper examines the female objectification, marginalisation and socio-trauma and discrimination.

Pegu, Satya Nath. Women as 'other' in Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker* And Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*. *SMART MOVES JOURNAL*, 2019. This paper examines Goswami's women characters act passively due to the fear of conventional norms.

Dutta, Sikha. Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah Of The Tusker*: Manifestation of Society and Culture. *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*, 2019. This study explores the socio-cultural picture portrayed by the author in her novel.

Project Title

Widowhood: A Psychosocial and Gender Performance Study in Indira Goswami's Selected Works.

Research Gap

From the above cited literature reviews we came to know that there have been a number of valuable studies on Indira Goswami's *Nilkanthi Braja (The Blue-necked God, 1972)* and *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth Eaten Howdah of The Tusker, 1988)* mainly covered points such as manifestation of society and culture, women as 'other', social and economic marginalization, germination of new women, re-writing of the story, estranged identity and social harassments.

In this study I have made a special reference to widows psychological development and as part of gender performativity of the novel's *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (1988)* and *Nilkanthi Braja (1972)* through the theory of Judith Butler's Gender Performativity and Erick Erickson's Psychosocial Development.

Aims and Objectives

- To study about the socio, culture conditions of widow in the novels.
- To look at their conditions from a gender perspective manner.
- To study about the psychosocial development of widows.

Research Methodology

This study is based on both primary and secondary sources. It includes books and other critical references that are used in discussing the study in detail. The primary data is reviewed through the works of Indira Goswami's novel *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 1988)* and *Nilkanthi Braja (The Blue-necked God, 1972)*. The study will be based on the theory of Gender Performativity and Psychosocial Development and the data is reviewed through the books of Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and Erick Erickson's *Childhood and Society* (1950). For citing the sources it will follow *MLA* style.

Work Cited

Ahmed, Abdul Barique & M N Anjum. "Widowhood in India: The Persecution as

Represented in Indira Goswami's *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah*. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities And Management Studies*." 2018, Print.

Arora, Neha. "Vrindavan: The Image of Broken Homes, Shattered Hopes in Indira

Goswami's *The Blue-necked God*." *Lybrinth : An International Referred Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014, Print.

Bhattacharya, Gayatri. (trans) *The Blue-necked God*. New Delhi:Zubaan.2013, Print.

Bhattacharya, Kumar Sankar. "Marginal Identities in Indira Goswami's Work." *UMI*

Dissertation Publishing.2011, Print.

Bhattacharya, Kumar Sankar. "Writing the periphery: Indira Goswami and the

economically marginalised." *The Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University*. 2017, Print.

Bhusan, Ravi. "Estranged Identity: The Problem of Hindu Widows in Indira Goswami's

Nilkanthi Braja.” *Lybrinth: An International Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014,

Print.

Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. “Re-Writing Women, Revisiting Women’s Narratives in Film:

Adaijya And Joymoti.” *A Journal of Literature & Culture*. 2014, Print.

Das, Prasenjit. “ Adaijya. What Does it Represent?” *International Journal of*

Communication. 2013, Print.

Das, Papari. “Germination of New Women in the Fictions of Indira Goswami: A study of

the characters of Giribala and Saudamini.” *Journal of Humanities And Social*

Science. 2014, Print.

Das, Debarati. “Infirmities of Women in Sattras of Assam with Reference to Mamoni

Raisom Goswami’s *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*.” *International Journal on Multidisciplinary Literature*. 2015, Print.

Dutta, Sikha. “Indira Goswami’s *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*: Manifestation of

Society and Culture.” *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*.

2019, Print.

Erickson, E H. *Childhood and Society*. New York, NY: Norton. 1950, Print.

Goswami, Indira. (trans) *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*. Kolkata: Rupa & Co.

2004, Print.

Goswami, Indira. (trans) *An Unfinished Autobiography*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers

Private Limited . 1990, Print.

Ghosh, Sandipan. “ A Texture of Passion and Pathos: The Plight of Hindu Widows in

Brindavanas Portrayed in Indira Goswami's novel The Blue-necked God." *The*

Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University. 2017, Print.

Gogoi, Meghali. "The Death of the Voice Women in Indira Goswami's The Moth Eaten

Howdah of the Tusker: A Reflection on the Status of Women in South Kamrup of

Assam." *Smart Moves Journal*. 2019, Print.

Hazarika, Devika Rani. "An Unconventional Narrative on Widowhood: Reading of Indira

Goswami's Adha Likha Dastavez or An Unfinished Autobiography." *The Literary*

Herald: An International Referred Research e-Journal of English Literature.

2017, Print.

Kaur, Monbinder and Devika Rani. "The Living Dead: Portrayal of Widows Indira

Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *New Delhi Recognised*

Journal. 2019, Print.

Kitchlu, T.N. *Widows in India*. New Delhi: APH Publishing. 1993, Print.

Lakhimai, Mili. "Forgotten and Abandoned: The Widows in Indira Goswami's The Blue-

necked and The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *International Journal of*

Humanities & Science. 2016, Print.

Mahanta, Rebat & Mallika Tamuly. "Revolutionary Women: A study of the character of

Giribala in The Moth Eaten Howdah The Tusker" *International Journal of*

Multidisciplinary. 2019, Print.

Pegu, Satya Nath. "Women as 'other' in Indira Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah of

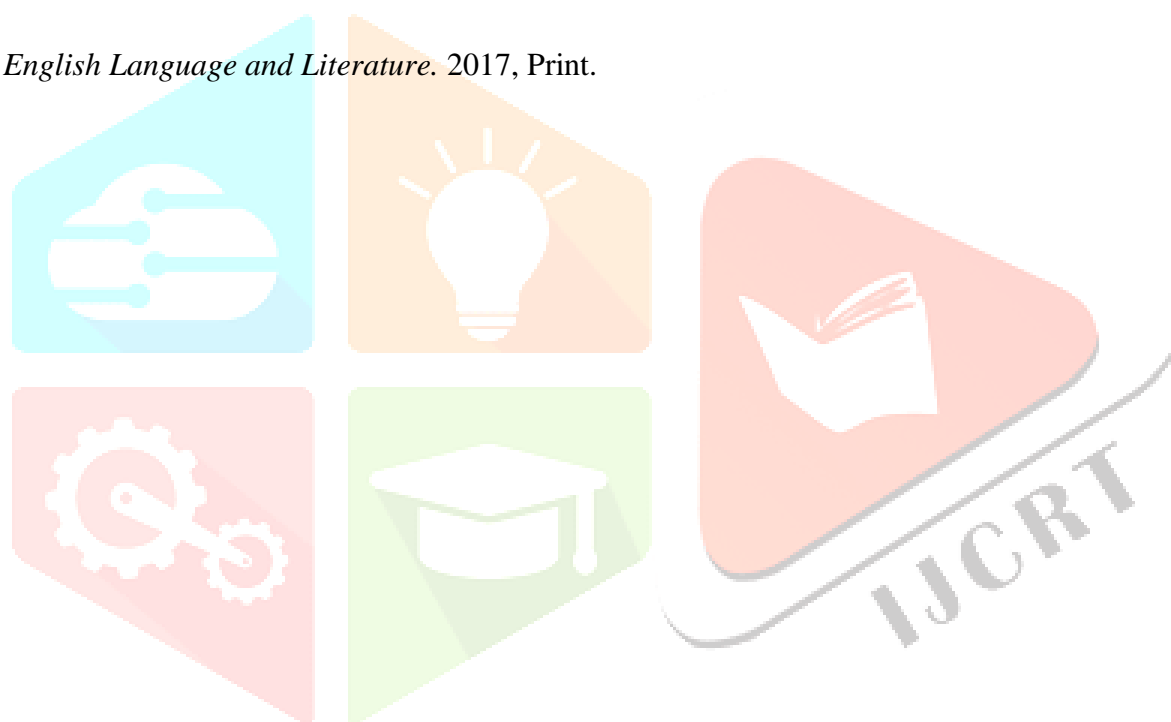
the Tusker and Isabel Allende's The House of the Spirits." *Smart Moves*

Journal. 2019, Print.

Reddy, P. Adinarayan. *Problems of Widows in India*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons.2004, Print.

Sharma, Malavika. “Indranath and Giribala- The Young Adult Dystopian Characters in
The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker.” *Journal on English Language Teaching*.
2015, Print.

Sandhya. K. “A Saga Of South Kamrup: English Translation of the Assamese Novel
Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah by Indira Goswami a Cursory Study.” *Journal of
English Language and Literature*. 2017, Print.



Chapter II

A Changing Life: Psychosocial Development of Widows in *Datal Hatir*

Une Khowa Howdah and Nilkanthi Braja

“Widow, the compassionate tress bend in,

The tress of loneliness, the tress of mourning.” (*Widow*; Sylvia Plath)

Indira Goswami throughout her literary career, remains the spokesperson of the oppressed and marginalized – the helpless victims of obnoxious violence and exploitation and deprivation. The pangs of widowhood and the particularly the emotional trauma and deprivation these women are subjected to, is a recurrent motif in Goswami’s writings as clearly manifested in her two novels, *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 1986)* and *Nilkanthi Braja (The Blue-necked God, 1972)*. *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth- Eaten Howdah of The Tusker, 1986)* is based on the nostalgic memories of Goswami’s own “sattra” (Vaishnavite monastery) in Amranga situated in South Kamrup, Assam. The main theme of the book is the plight of widows. Aruni Kashyap states that “What makes *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* different from the rest oh her corpus is not its exceptional position in modern Assamese or Indian literature, or even its themes, but because it is the only novel where the author is completely absent in the narrative. Indira Goswami’s life, especially after the publication of her frank autobiography, has been an open book; ever since its publication it has been used to draw strong parallels with the novels she has written. A reading of her novels demands familiarity with her autobiography, blurring the lines between fact and fiction; in many interviews she has said that she does not like ‘imagine’ plots. She often wrote about incidents that had taken place in her own life” (Kashyap: p 43). “Indira Goswami who became a widow at a very young age, within two and a half years marriage, presents stories of the marginalised through the experiential voice of widow herself. Thrown into a life of depression with suicidal tendencies after the tragic death of her husband. The issue of widowhood and the complexities of it is a recurrent theme in Indira Goswami’s works” (Hazarika, p 40). In her autobiography *Adha Likha Dastavez (An Unfinished Autobiography)*, she depicts her experience as widow and her depression associated with widowhood. “ Indira Goswami’s autobiography came across as a deviant account of ‘self-chosen’ celibacy associated with widowhood where the author goes and resides in a place which is the traditional refuge for widows. Her depression which stems not out of some cultural practices of widowhood but of the loss

of her loved one is juxtaposed with the lives of the widows of Vrindavan who are pushed to live a life of drudgery, mendicancy even prostitution not out of their own choice but out of her compulsion” (Hazarika, p 56). Goswami’s *The Blue-Necked God* is sensitive and true portrayal of the plight of widows. The plot revolves around the exploitation and miserable lives of Brahmin widows who spend their remaining years in the holy city Vrindavan in the hope of ‘mukti’ and salvation. The novel is an exploration of terrible misery and that the countless widows in Vrindavan suffered every day and in almost all aspects of life. Most of these widows were from East Pakistan and West Bengal. They were of all ages, from young to old. But the common thread that bound them was their cause for living in town was similar being rejected or becoming unwanted in their own families for being widows. “Goswami in her autobiography, *Adha Likha Dastavez (1998)* she recalls how she accepted a life in Vrindavan and spend two years amidst the widows in Vrindavan. She stayed there as a compassionate member as well as researcher who witnessed the pain of these helpless women and it reflects at many contexts of her works. Her experience as widow belonging to the Assamese orthodox family is reflected in her works like *Nilkanthi Braja (1976)* and *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (1988)*” (Chakraborty, p.45). The novel *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* is based on different social issue and mainly revolves around the plight of three widows who are victimised in the orthodox Brahmin society. The three main characters – Durga, Giribala and Saru Gossaine played roles in the novel who unfortunately becomes widowed and have to suffer a lot in their remaining life.

Erik Homburger Erikson (15 June 1902 – 12 May 1994) was a German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst known for his theory on psychological development of human beings. Erick Erickson’s theory of psychosocial development is the first and most influential, lifespan theory of development. Erickson’s writings are extensive and complicated , covering quite a bit of conceptual ground. He mixed detailed treatments with vague proclamations, and returned to the same themes repeatedly throughout his career. Erickson’s model of psychosocial development is a very significant, highly regarded and meaningful concept. Life is like a series of lessons and challenges which help us to grow. Erickson’s wonderful theory helps to tell us why the theory is helpful for child development and adults too.

Erick Erickson first published his eight stage theory of human development in his book *Childhood and Society* (1950). The word ‘psychosocial’ is Erickson’s term, effectively from words psychological (mind) and social (relationships). Erickson believed that his psychosocial principle is genetically inevitable in shaping human development. It occurs in all people. He states that, “Each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society, and this for the simple reason that the human life-cycle and man’s institutions have evolved together” (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 224). Erickson was highly influenced by Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of development, but extended it in two substantial ways. First, Freud’s focus was limited to childhood, arguing that the bulk of personality is formed around age five (following the phallic stage). In contrast, Erickson developed *lifespan* theory; that is, he theorized about the nature of personality development as it unfolds from birth through old age. Second, Freud’s theory is considered as psychosexual theory of development, emphasizing the importance of sexual drives and genitalia in how children develop. Erickson’s theory is considered psychosocial emphasizing the importance of social and cultural factors across the lifespan. Despite Erickson’s departure from the sexual primacy of Freud’s theorizing, Erickson theory is undoubtedly a psychoanalytic theory strongly influenced by Freud. Yet, although social tensions are highlighted above sexual tensions, Erickson’s theory still records a prominent role for infantile sexuality, lifelong libidinal drives, and the unconscious. Thus, Erickson’s theory is quite a bit more expansive than Freud’s. It accounts for a greater range of psychological domains (e.g., sexual and social) as well as a much larger chunk of the lifespan.

The most well-known aspect of Erickson’s theory is his description of eight fundamental psychosocial tensions that individuals must balance throughout their lives. The eight tensions are frequently referred to as “stages”.

Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust

Basic Trust vs Basic Mistrust is the first stage in Erick Erickson’s theory of psychosocial development. This stage begins at birth continues to approximately 18 months of age. Erickson states that “ The first demonstration of social trust in the baby is the ease of his feeding, depth of his sleep, the relaxation of his bowels. The experience of a mutual regulation of his increasingly receptive capacities with the maternal techniques of provision gradually helps him to balance the discomfort caused by the immaturity of homeostasis with which he was born. In this

gradually increasing waking hours he finds that more and more adventures of these senses arouse a feeling of familiarity, of having coincided with a feeling of inner goodness” (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 222)

During this stage, the infant is uncertain about the world in which they live, and looks towards their primary caregiver for stability and consistency of care. If the care the infant receives is consistent, predictable and reliable, they will develop a sense of trust which will carry with them to other relationships, and they will be able to feel secure even when threatened. If these needs are not consistently met, mistrust, suspicion and anxiety may develop. If the care has been inconsistent, unpredictable and unreliable, then the infant may develop a sense of mistrust, suspicion, and anxiety. In this situation the infant will not have confidence in the world around them or in their abilities to influence events

Autonomy vs Shame and Doubt

is the second stage of Erick Erickson’s stages of psychosocial development. This stage occurs between the ages of 18 months to approximately 3 years. According to Erickson, children at this stage are focused on developing a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of will. If children in this stage are encouraged and supported in their increased independence, they become more confident and secure in their own ability to survive in the world. If children are criticized, overly controlled, or not given the opportunity to assert themselves, they begin to feel inadequate in their ability to survive, and may then become overly dependent upon others, lack self-esteem, and feel a sense of shame or doubt in their abilities. He states that, “Too much shaming does not lead to genuine propriety but to a secret determination to try to get away with things, unseen if, indeed, it does not result in defiant shamelessness” (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 227)

Initiative vs Guilt (early childhood)

Initiative vs Guilt is the third stage of Erickson’s stages of psychosocial development. In early childhood, children learn to take greater risks in separating from caregiver, actively engaging with their environments on their own terms-talking initiative. This most often takes the form of independent play, with children demonstrating the ability to engage with concrete materials or their own imaginations. The negative pole, guilt,

corresponds to the guilt associated with engaging in work that is not intricately tied to the caregiver-that initiating independent play serves as a betrayal of the established bond.

Industry vs Inferiority (middle childhood)

Erickson's fourth psychological crisis, involving industry (competence) vs inferiority occurs during childhood between the ages of five and twelve. Children are the stage where they will be learning to read and write, to do sums, to do things on their own. Teachers begin to take an important role in the child's life as they teach the child specific skills. If children are encouraged and reinforced for their initiative, they begin to feel industrious (competent) and feel confident in their ability to achieve goals. According to Erickson, "The child's danger, at this stage, lies in a sense of inadequacy and inferiority. If he despairs of his tools and skills or of his status among his tool partners, he may be discouraged from identification with them and with a section of the tool world. To lose the hope of such 'industrial' association may pull him back to the more isolated, less tool-conscious familial rivalry of the oedipal time. The child despairs of his equipment in the tool world and in anatomy, and considers himself doomed to mediocrity or inadequacy" (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 233-234). If this initiative is not encouraged, if it is restricted by parents or teacher, then the child begins to feel inferior, doubting his own abilities and therefore may not reach his or her potential. If the child cannot develop the specific skill they feel society is demanding then they may develop a sense of inferiority.

Identity vs Role Confusion

The fifth stage of Erickson's theory of psychosocial development is Identity vs Role Confusion, and it occurs during adolescence, from about 12-18 years. During this stage, adolescents search for a sense of self and personal identity, though an intense exploration of personal values, beliefs, and goals. He states that, "The growing and developing youths, faced with this physiological revolution within them, and with tangible adults tasks ahead of them are now primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are, and with the question of how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the occupational prototypes of the day" (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 235). Identity was a central concept in Erickson's thinking, and his writings have made a huge impact on subsequent theory and research, as well as popular culture.

Intimacy vs Isolation

According to Erickson, “The danger of this stage is isolation, that is, the avoidance of contacts which commits to intimacy” (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p 239). Intimacy vs Isolation is the sixth stage of Erickson’s theory of psychosocial development. This stage takes place during young adulthood between the ages of approximately 18 to 40 years. During this stage, the major conflicts occurs on forming intimate, loving relationships with other people. During this period, we begin to share our feelings more intimately with others. We explore relationships leading toward longer-term commitments with someone other than a family member. Successful relationships at this stage can result in a happy relationships and a sense of commitment, safety, and care within a relationship. Avoiding intimacy, fearing commitment and relationships can lead to isolation, loneliness, and sometimes depression.

Generativity vs Stagnation

According to Erickson, “Generativity thus is an essential stage on the psychosexual as well as on the psychosocial schedule. Where such enrichment fails altogether, regression to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy takes place, often with a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment.” (Erickson. *Childhood and Society*, p. 240) Generativity vs Stagnation is the seventh of eight stages of Erickson’s theory of psychosocial development. The stage takes place during middle adulthood between the ages from ages 40 to 65 years. Once individuals move into adulthood proper, they begin to think about what they want to leave behind. That is, now that they have developed an identity and shared it with other people, what of themselves do they want to pass on to future generations? This is the trust of generativity. For many, generativity takes the form of having children, as reproduction contributes to survival of our species and allows individuals to transmit their culture. Engaging in activities that will benefit future generations, including mentoring, teaching, artistic ventures, civic participation, and activism, are all ways in which people can develop a sense of generativity; that they have something worth passing along to subsequent generation.

Ego Integrity vs Despair (old age)

Ego Integrity vs Despair is the eighth and final stage of Erickson's stage theory of psychosocial development. This stage begins at approximately age 65 and ends at death. It is during this time that we contemplate our accomplishments and can develop integrity if we see ourselves as leading a successful life. Erickson believed if we see our lives as unproductive, feel guilt about our past, or feel that we did not accomplish our life goals, we become dissatisfied with life and develop despair, often leading to depression and hopelessness. Success in this stage will lead to the virtue of wisdom. Wisdom enables a person to look back on their life with a sense of closure and completeness, and also accept death without fear. Wise people are not characterized by a continuous state of ego integrity, but they experience both ego integrity and despair. Thus, late life is characterized by both integrity and despair as alternating states that need to be balanced.

“Loss of spouse is one of the most negative life events, next only to the loss of a child” (Bennett, 2005). “Ironically, the disorganization and trauma that follow the death of a spouse seem to be greater in women than in men whenever either loses their spouse” (Fasoranti, 2007). The greatest problem in widowhood is still emotional. Even if it had been a bad marriage, the survivor feels the loss. The role of spouse is lost, social life changes from couple oriented to association with other single people; and the widowed no longer have the day-in, day-out companionship of other spouse that had become an intrinsic part of their lives. “People respond differently to loss and overcome grief in their own time. Frequently, the most difficult time for new widows is after the funeral” (Scannell, 2005).

“Young widows often have no peer group. Compared to older widows, they are generally less prepared emotionally and practically to cope with the loss. Because the widowed identity may be treated as temporary and changing, the process of reconstruction and adaptation are psychosocially dynamic. Therefore, one notion developmentally central to a woman's adaptation to widowhood is balance. Erickson's theory delineates eight different yet interconnected stages he described as psychosocial crises” (Erickson, 1963). Each of these crises covers a period of psychosocial and social development in which the individual strives for balance amidst maturation, experiences, and social interactions. According to Erickson his book *Childhood and Society* (1963), everyone progresses through these stages in an invariant sequence, and for an individual to successfully negotiate

later life crises, earlier stages must be successfully balanced. To put it another way, the degree to which individuals achieve balance in earlier stages affects the processes that occur in later stages or crises. Therefore, disruption in later stages can upset balance that was established in earlier as well as future development. “Psychosocial development as a process, ensues by way of the confluences of mind, body and social interaction” (Erickson, 1998). “Development of one’s identity begins in youth and persists throughout adulthood” (Erickson, 1963).

Widows psychosocial balance between intimacy and isolation is theoretically at the heart of psychosocial development following the loss of a spouse. Because there is no direct link between normative and young widowed. According to Erickson in its highest and progressively developmental sense, the strength of an intimate communion between two healthy ego-identities gives outlet to successful creativity, productivity, and procreativity. On the other hand, as a result of fostering and nurturing ego-identities in successful intimate relations, normatively, individuals seek opportunities to be generative (concern beyond the self to care for future generations, creating a legacy) or stagnate in their development. “In sum, well-balanced individuals align with compatible romantic partners or close associates, and from that stability pursue parenthood, suitable careers, and ideologies from which and around which their actions will adapt to impact others including future generations” (Erickson, 1998).

“For young widows, untimely death complicates the present due to loss of the future” (Ossefort,2000). After the death of her husband their situation gets complicated. “The psychosocial implications of young widowhood commonly include moving from a familiar home and neighbourhood, changes in labour force participation, and managing relationships with others, including potentially pursuing further romantic relations” (Wu & Schimmele, 2005). These processes of re-balance are subject to perturbation and disruption. When a spouse dies, the grief process and subsequent transitions not only impact widows’ psychosocial development, but that of her close family and friends. Widows may find themselves sustaining long held roles while juggling attempts at transitioning into new roles (e.g., single, again). Past relationship quality and strength of intimate relationships may balance and stabilize affective wellbeing in widowhood. Current intimate and empathic

interactions and friendships can bolster the psychosocial wellbeing of those not currently engaged in romantic couple hood.

In the novel, *The Blue-Necked God*, Saudamini get widowed after an year of an happy marriage. She befriends with a Christian man and this relationship is forbidden by her parents. They shifted to Brindavan to snap the emotional ties between her and the friend. In the holy city Vrindavan, she witnessed different forms of perversions that were rampant there and found no solace there.

“Their only daughter, Saudamini, had suddenly lost her husband. Saudamini was very young. And as if this was not bad enough, she had started having an affair with a Christian youth soon after she became a widow. Her behaviour was completely unacceptable to the orthodox and God fearing Roychudhury family. So, they resolved to take her to Brindavan in the hope that a few years at Braj might change their daughter’s mind and bring her face to face with the realities of her life.” (Bhattacharya. *The Blue-necked God*, p 1-2).

Saudamini tried her best to forget her loneliness, but it was not easy. Sometimes she would scrutinise her own body. Even the mental imbalance and torture of past years had not been able to leave from her body. She wondered, was there anyone else who had suffered as she had, who had been compelled to face a situation like her? She was not the only one who was suffering in ‘Braj’, but many others like her of all ages who were biding their time in the holy city were silent sufferers. “ Saudamini returned home, and entered her dark room again. She was trying her best to forget her loneliness, but it was not easy. Sometimes she would scrutinise her own body. She had lovely , soft young body. Even the mental imbalance and torture of the past seven years had not been able to leave any permanent mark on this lovely body. Try she might , she could not come to terms with the condition of her life or her situation. Was there anyone else, she wondered, who had suffered as she had, who had been compelled to face a situation like hers? “ (Goswami; 1976: p 13). She resented the life of emotional inadequacy and looked for fulfilment in life. She longed for a life of love and companionship. Being young she found it difficult to rein in her desires; her frustration comes out when she discusses her longings with her friend, the painter Chandrabhanu. “You are an artist and you understand feelings, emotions. Believe me when I say that I have seriously analysed myself, and that I know that my zest for life, my emotions, and my passions and desires

have not undergone any change.” (Bhattacharya. *The Blue-necked God*, p. 71) Saudamini, even after sacrificing everything is not finding any peace, we assume time heals every wound, but it is not possible in the case of widows every now and then they are reminded their past. At last out of frustration of loneliness she asks one old Radheswamys “You cannot completely erase all memories of your husband from your mind. But now so many years have passed since he died.” She tried to forget her past and want to move on but it was not mentally possible for her.

Based on Erickson’s stages to early to middle adulthood, a potentially vast amount of adjustment may take place for the widow to become psychosocially balanced in her new environment. Women’s sense of self will adjust with how she balances her identity vs role confusion as a widow. Widows balance between intimacy and isolation will be considerably altered as one reflects on the qualities of “we,” as she returns to “I,” as well as how she is received by her current social network. And, the adjustments in productivity, creativity, and generativity will need to be balanced with stagnation in concert with the other adjustments. In the novel, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, the character Durga is the eldest of the other two widows and is an epitome of patience and obedience; the traditional Gossain widows in Assam, accept whatever comes to her life as a fate. After the death of her husband, she never demands for her right to property. She never questions the traditions, and rituals of widowhood. She always tries to adjust them happily as a part of her life. She was not only sent out of her husband’s house but also disinherited from her property. But her only dream is to carry her husband’s ashes to Puri and to immerse them in the holy waters of the sea in Puri. In doing so she believes that she will get salvation and her husband’s soul will rest in peace. She adjusted herself in the society. Goswami states that, “Her mind has become a graveyard. Day after day it is a tortuous task for her to find something tangible to hold on, to hold on to her sanity. All those customary rituals of widowhood that she performed till a few years back without much effort are now a source of fear for her. A wave of annoyance mixed with fear passes through her body.” (Goswami. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p.11)

Giribala, is another unfortunate young bride who has lost her husband at the age of 18 years and returned to live in her mother’s house. Child marriage was very common and girls before attaining puberty were married off. Those who could not marry their daughters were punished and publicly despised. In order to avoid

humiliation people married their daughters at an early age. Same faith shadowed Giribala she too was married off early only to return as a widow to the family. She tried to get away with the traditions by questioning and refusing to follow widowhood rituals that are imposed on her by her in-laws. When Giribala came back home for the first time after her husband's death, women folk from neighbourhood came to see her to express their sorrows, but she refused to meet them. "Don't touch her! You women with sindoor! She is a widow now" (Goswami. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 27). The gossip of the women shows how they themselves work to propagate the rules and regulations of inhuman patriarchal ideologies determined by male members of the society. All her movements are not only discovered by the women but it is also being discussed, analysed and criticized. The day she is brought from her in-laws house she is harassed by the women. They all want to have a glimpse of her, curious to see her bodily as well as the emotional changes. Thus, Giribala feels suffocated and uncomfortable. However, she tried to adjust herself in the situation but survival becomes difficult for her.

"Widows grieve not only for the loss of their spouse, but also for the loss of their identity as a married individual, goals, future plans and other factors associated with the adjustments in widowed status and unfamiliar roles and responsibilities" Worden & Silverman, 1993). "The outcomes associated with the death of a spouse range from health complications and financial stresses to loneliness, emotional distress and changes in the survivor's identity. As each challenge lingers, the effects are potentially exacerbated during younger widow or widower's adaption while mourning and parenting, providing, and adjusting to the new roles" (Gass-Sternas, 1994). These some challenges may be complicated by other contextual factors such a loss that transpires off-time (i.e., occurring much earlier than society expected) triggering unprepared for changes in home and social life. "Widowhood at a younger than expected age, is a non-normative life event" (Elder, Johnson, & Crosnoe, 2003). It is commonly an experience that is unanticipated and therefore unprepared for individually as well as socially. It carries potentially greater or more complex biological and psychosocial challenges than loss of a spouse at older age. Young widowhood is commonly associated with little opportunity to prepare. Thus, premature spousal loss may precipitate challenging and perhaps prolonged process of grief, mourning, adjustment, and adaptation for the survivor.



Work Cited

- Bennett, K.M ., Hughes, G.M, & Smith, P.T. “Psychological response to later life widowhood: Coping and the effects of Gender.” *Omega-Journal of Death & Dying*. 2005, Print.
- Bhattacharya, Gayatri.(trans) *The Blue-necked God*, New Delhi: Zubaan.2013, Print.
- Chakraborty, Shekar. “Widowhood: A Social Harassment Reflected in Indira Goswami’s Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah”. 7ol.2 Issue I. 2015.
- Erickson, E.H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis : New York, NY: Norton*.1968, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Childhood and Society (2nd ed.)* New York : NY: Norton.1963, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. & Erickson, J.M. “*The life cycle completed (extended version)*”. New York, NY: Norton. 1998, Print.
- Goswami, Indira.(trans) *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, Kolkata:Rupa&Co*.2004, Print.
- Goswami, Indira. *An Unfinished Autobiography*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited. 1990, Print.
- Gass Sternas, K.A.”Single parent widows: Stressors, appraisal, coping, resources, grieving responses and health.” *Marriage & Family Review*.1994, Print.

Hazarika, Devika Rani. *An Unconventional Narratives on Widowhood: Reading of Indira*

Goswami's Adha Likha Dastavez Or An Unfinished Autobiography, Vol no.3,

Issue 2. 2017.

Mortimer, J.T., & Shanahan, M.J. *Handbook of the Life Course*. New York: NY.2003,

Print.

Ossefort, C.S. "Shimmering in the darkness: Bearing witness to inconsolable

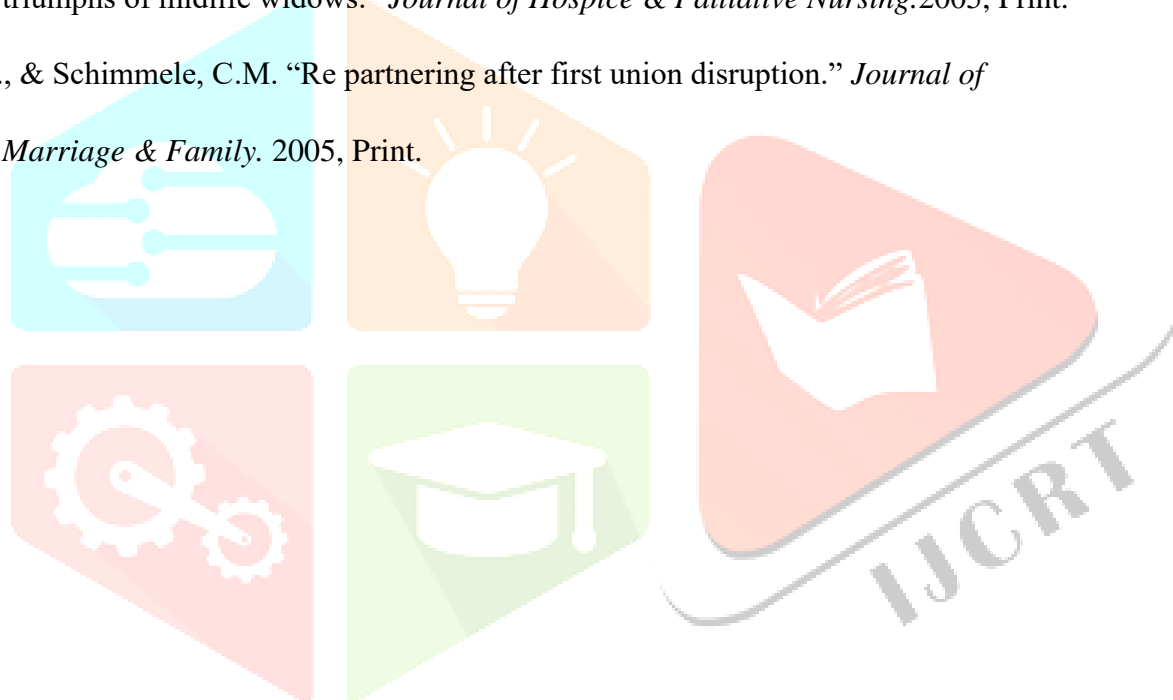
suffering." *Pacific Graduate Institute*, Carpentaria. 2000, Print.

Scannell, Desch & E.A. "Pre bereavement and post bereavement struggles and

triumphs of midlife widows." *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*.2005, Print.

Wu, Z., & Schimmele, C.M. "Re partnering after first union disruption." *Journal of*

Marriage & Family. 2005, Print.



Chapter III

A study on gender performance of widows in *Datal Hatir Une Khowa*

Howdah and Nilkanthi Braja

“The body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and our sketch of our project” (*The Second Sex* ; Simone de Beauvoir)

In the novel *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (*The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*) Goswami depicts an Assamese village on the banks of River Jogolia. Though the novel follows the life of three widows, it is basically preoccupied with obsolete traditions and their clash with impending modernity which leaves behind a trail of devastation. Goswami examined the problems of widows in the orthodox community. Goswami presents the pitiful existence of widowhood women of her “sattrā.” In the sattrā, widows are treated as inferior one against men. They are subjugated and victimized due to the religious laws and ethics. In the novel the position of women is determined by religion, custom, culture, beliefs and practices in the Vaishnavite sattrā in South Kamrup of Assam. The marginalization of women is not only from the religion, but also from the patriarchal ideologies. The widows have no rights to possess property, they are deprived of their freedom and decent livelihood. They are all ground to dust by the grinding wheel of the system. Widows are not allowed to leave their homes and are supposed to make themselves invisible, because their sight or their touch may bring misfortune on others. They are like “ghosts pretending to be human beings” (Goswami. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p 10). The harsh rituals they are forced to perform make them vulnerable to life-threatening diseases. “Some customary rituals of widowhood are continuous fasting, following a strict eating regime which includes abstaining from cooked food and surviving only on raw food such as vegetables for days, sleeping on a bed of bamboos, wearing the areca nut tree’s bark as one’s shoes, bathing and undergoing more purification rituals of their body is touched

even by the shadow of low-caste man, and so on” (Goswami. *The Moth- Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p 11). Widowed young girls are deprived of education for it is thought to be of no use to them have to stay enclosed in the four walls of the house.

The theory of ‘Gender Performance’ or ‘Gender Performativity’ was first coined in Judith Butler’s book titled *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). Butler’s theories on gender identity and gender performativity were based on the notion of destabilizing gender identities and categories. In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, initiated a reinterpretation of Simone de Beauvoir’s statement “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one” (Butler, p.8). By this, de Beauvoir does not mean us to believe that no one is born with reproductive organs, but that the social role of ‘woman’ comes from a collection of behaviours into which we are socialized. This statement implies that the sexed body may or may not come in terms with the gender role assigned. Body thus, is a surface on which various performative acts can be carried out, to affirm one’s gender identity. But Butler makes it clear in her work *Gender Trouble* that, “performativity must be understood not as singular act, but rather as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names” (p.xii). Butler argues that “There is no recourse to a body that has not always already been interpreted by cultural meanings; hence, sex could not qualify as a pre discursive anatomical facticity. Indeed, sex, by definition, will be shown to have been gender all along.” (Butler; 1990). Butler presents her fundamental theories of gender as performative in *Gender Trouble*, with the arguments that drag is performative in its destabilization of the performative iterations of gender, drag performances can be constructed as political escape from structures of gender binary oppositions. In her follow up work *Bodies That Matter : On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, he explains performativity as, “Performativity is thus not a singular act, for it always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition (Butler. *Bodies That Matter*, p.13- 14). According to Butler, all the performances that are understood as reflections of an essential identity or ‘self’ are ‘constative performances’. There should be no confusion that gender performativity is a qualified daily choice made by individuals. Butler argues that there is a repetition involved in gender performativity, which results in immense difficulty in trying to escape the constructions of naturalized restrictions of sex and gender through making conscious daily performative choices.

The question of gender performance is related to ideas of gender identity in society, whereby certain codes of behaviour are assigned according to gender. There is an initial essentialist view of social identity whereby gender is determined biologically and gender is recognizable physical essence. The concept of gender performance or construction made up of behaviours and roles which are then assigned to a specific gender. Gender then becomes a repetition of behaviours and acts, which are not natural or inevitable, are open to change and dependent on the context in which they are performed, and are part of a wider discourse of gender, sexuality and sex in society. Butler insists that, “The reading of ‘performativity’ as wilful and arbitrary choice misses the point that the historicity of discourse, and, in particular, the historicity of norms (the ‘chains’ of iteration invoked and dissimulated in the imperative utterance) constitute the power of discourse to enact what it names” (Butler. *Gender Trouble*, p. 187).

According to Butler gender performativity is a repetitive act which serves to perpetually reproduces itself. He states that, “Sex is not an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of the body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize ‘sex’ and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms.” (Butler. *Gender Trouble*, p.1-2). The performativity of gender roles can be examined through the notion that all gender roles are constructions which are performances being played out by an individual, which are then either upheld or refuted by society. These gender ‘performance’ utilize and the gender identities are reinforced by the reiteration of the behaviour of the gender. This means that because the performance of the gender role is repeated it becomes a recognizable behaviour of that particular gender as a part of a wider societal discourse.

The concept of gender is exposed to particular norms in society, and causes people to think within the context of binary oppositions such as male and female, man and woman, nature and culture. Some sort of identities and gender forms are imposed on people. A person experiences some threats such as isolation, being cast out of society in the event that he/she does not fit into all these norms that are imposed on them. The concept of gender does not have a specific role in sexuality and captures a person’s ability and right to choose on a large scale. According to Butler, the concept of gender must be extended by accepting variations, forms and views that do not fit into norms. He defines the concept of gender as “Gender is the mechanism by which notions of

masculine and feminine are produced and naturalized, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalized” (Butler. *Undoing Gender*, p., 43). In other words, gender is a concept that reflects limitations, stability and reconstruction, supported by the notion of heteronormativity, which means the acceptance of heterosexuality as a natural and social norms.

Performance is the totality of acts and behaviour of a person in life according to their genders and sexes in society. She stated that, “Performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition and ritual, which achieves its effect through its naturalization in the context of a body, understood , in part, as a culturally sustained temporal duration” (Butler. *Gender Trouble* , p.,15). Here ,the Butler claims that performativity is not a temporary concept. Besides, it might be seen as a habit that is suitable for being repeated. So, the concept of performativity must be maintained through different and new performance without limiting ourselves with gender roles. Performances are changeable, but they might be described as habits that can be repeated.

Gender, in Butler’s opinion, is a social construct, and we act our gender, both in actions and speech. In her book *Gender Trouble*, Butler begins her discussion of gender by criticizing earlier feminists “women” a group with common characteristics. She claims that this approach reinforces the binary view of gender relations because it allows for two distinct categories: men and women. Butler believes that feminists should not try to define “women” as collective group, but rather focus on defining “the subject”, because, she emphasizes: “The very subject of women is no longer understood in stable or abiding terms” (Butler; 1950). Gender performance is the idea that gender is something inscribed in daily practices, learned and performed based on cultural norms of femininity and masculinity. The main point of gender performance is that neither gender nor sex is completely natural, and both are performed and become naturalized over time; we act and walk and talk in ways that consolidate the idea of “being a man” or “being a woman.

According to Judith Butler, gender is something that is socially and culturally constructed and something that is also performed. The way how a widow talk, how she dress herself , she present herself in public are all acts. This is how widows are performed. In India, widows are expected to dress in a white saree, they are not allowed to attend any social and religious functions and so they restrict their right to live in public sphere. Thousands of India’s widow seek refuge in holy cities of India like Vrindavan where they carry out a sentence

to repent for a death they are presumed culpable for shaving their heads, wearing white, eating bland foods and never remarrying. Large section of widows are living places like Vrindavan, Mathura , Puri etc. Strict social customs and rituals are imposed upon them, and they have to performed as a widow. In the novel, *Nilkanthi Braja*, “Goswami talks about the exploitation of women, through the widows of Brindavan, which is suggestive of the violation of the natural order. The poverty of widows are beautifully presented in the novel who were abandoned to die there because their families did not want to have anything to do with them. The treatment of the society towards the widows and their use of languages towards them are very much suggestive of the plight of women” (Boruah, Linashree). Saudamini, the protagonist of the novel, is a young widow who has lost her husband soon after her marriage. She has fallen in love with Christian youth, violating the strict code of a Hindu widow. Her pious and conservative parents brings her to Brindavan in the hope that she will find peace in the environment of the holy town and accept her misfortune. Her father, Dr Roychudhury starts a hospital for destitute patients and soon acquires a reputation for his selfless service. He expects that the suffering of the people would arouse Saudamini’s compassion and she would willingly join his enterprise. Saudamini’s mother takes her to visit holy places in the hope that she would get reconciled to her misfortune. Saudamini makes a sincere effort to submit to the will of her parents but seized with secret rebelliousness and a growing sense of loneliness and despair. She was horrified to see the life of widows at Vrindavan. Though she herself is a widow but very much confused with the orthodox rituals of the family. The widows are not allowed to participate in any religious celebrations. “Saudamini wanted to be familiar with the life of Brindavan, once she met a group of widows who lived in a small and dark dilapidated rooms. They were ghostly under nourished and wore dirty and faded old dhotis” (Bhattacharya. *The Blue-necked God*, p., 12).

In the novel, *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* Saru Gossaine, Durga and Giribala are all widowed women in different circumstances but sharing the same fate. Durga is the oldest and the weakest. Durga is thrown out of her husband’s home after her husband’s death. Her in-laws seize all her property and abandon her at her maternal house. However, Durga continues to harbour the hope that her husband’s family will come back one day and escort her back home with respect. She does not even fight a legal battle to obtain her share of the property because her clan believes that respectable women should never step into a court of law as the gaze of thieves and criminals would make them impure. Living a cloistered life and fasting continuously make her vulnerable.

But Durga refuses to go to hospital and get medical aid. Instead she goes back to her estranged in-laws house for she wants to die with some semblance of dignity. She sticks to tradition, never sceptical of the injustice that customs and traditions have meted out to her, or to women like her. A helpless women, her only dream is to immerse the ashes of her husband in the sea off the coast of Orissa's Puri, a sacred place for Hindus. She believes that doing so will pave the path to heaven for her. At her mother's house, she sits beside the fire for most of the day, with her health gradually failing her. Goswami describes her body as blackened by the smoke from the fire, her figure almost resembling a living skeleton due to continuously losing weight over the years. Durga's condition evokes deep pity, suffocating the atmosphere in the novel. The character Durga who does not have the audacity to express her views and desires. So, she is shown unwillingly performing the societal norms and customs imposed on her. She is very weak to question the traditions, and rituals of widowhood. She follows them as a part of life. Durga was not only sent out of her husband's house but also disinherited from her property. Being childless matters become worse for her as it leaves a very little scope of negotiating her share in the deceased husband's lands and property. Her only dream is to carry her husband's ashes to Puri and to immerse them in the holy waters of the sea in Puri. In doing so she believes that she will get salvation and her husband's soul will rest in peace. Her health is deteriorating day by day and due to constant weight loss she has almost become carcass, but still follows all the widowhood rituals sincerely. Goswami sates that "Her mind has become a graveyard. Day after day it is a tortuous task for her to find something tangible to hold on to, to hold on to her sanity. All these customary rituals of widowhood that she performed till a few years back without much effort are now a source of fear for her. Amoti is soon approaching. A wave of annoyance mixed with fear passes through her body" (Goswami. *The Moth- Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p.,11). She has been performing as a widow and the customary rituals for many years as she started believing herself as the outcaste. The widows in Indira Goswami's novels are victims of the social structures where caste system and religious practices intermingle to frame laws.

Butler states "When we say that gender is performed, we usually mean that we've have taken on a role; we are acting in some way and that our acting or our role is crucial to the gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world. To say that gender is performative is a little different because for something to be performative means that it produces a series of effects. We act and walk and speak and talk in ways that

consolidate an impression of being a man or being a woman. We act as if that being of a man or that being of a woman is actually an internal reality or something that is simply true about us, a fact about us, but actually it's a phenomenon that is being produced all the time and reproduce all the time, so to say gender is performative is to say that nobody really is a gender from the start. It's my view that gender is culturally formed, but it's also a domain of agency or freedom and that it is most important to resist the violence that is imposed by ideal gender norms" (Butler, *Your Behaviour Creates Your Gender*). He explains that when we say gender is performed we usually mean that we've taken a role or we're acting in some way and that our acting or our role playing is crucial to gender that we are and the gender that we present to the world. We act and walk and speak and talk in a ways that creates our impression of being a man or woman. Butler perceives gender as being socially constructed through a sets of acts that are said to be in compliance with dominant societal norms. Thus, it is the performance which produces the individual. Therefore, the widows in the both the novels are compelled to follow the rituals and traditions. They are compelled to wear white sarees, eating bland foods and thereby performing widow as a gender performativity.



Work Cited

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.1990, Print.

Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. London: Routledge, 1993, Print.

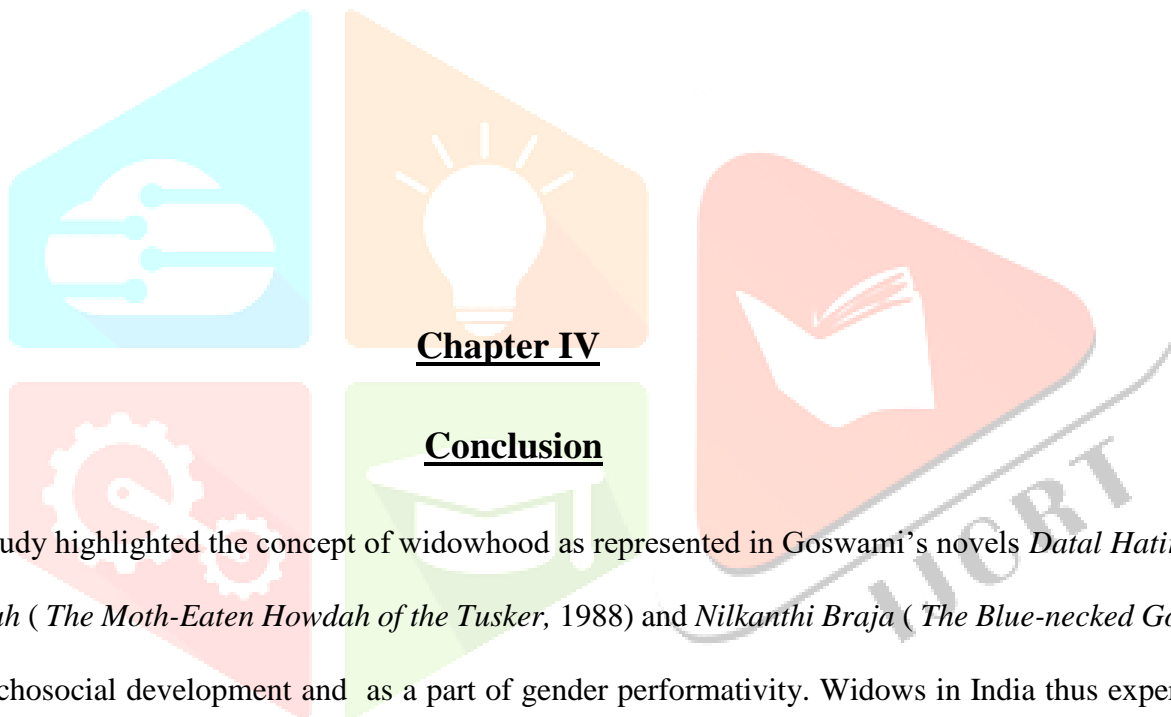
Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge, 2004. Print.

Boruah, Linashree. "The Blue-necked God: An eco-feministic perspective". *Indian Review*. 2009.

Bhattacharya, Gayatri. *The Blue-necked God*. New Delhi: Zubaan. 2013, Print.

Goswami, Indira. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*. Kolkata: Rupa&Co.2014, Print.

Goswami, Indira. *An Unfinished Autobiography*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited. 1990, Print.



This study highlighted the concept of widowhood as represented in Goswami's novels *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (*The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, 1988) and *Nilkanthi Braja* (*The Blue-necked God*, 1972) and its psychosocial development and as a part of gender performativity. Widows in India thus experiences many psychological problems as well as social problems in the society. Widowhood is a factor which serves to seclude a particular section of women from the mainstream society. As they age, their condition deteriorates and they experience from mental illness and health problems. There are numerous problems that are experienced by them. Restrictions are imposed upon their clothing and participation in social function. Widowhood exposes the opening between cultural and social realities, and between principles and practices. Strict social customs and rituals are imposed upon them, and they have to abstain themselves. They are not allowed to attend any social and religious functions and so they restrict their right to live in public sphere. Upon attaining widowhood, most widows in India are subjected to economic decline, social isolation and emotional deprivation. They are restricted

about how and where they live and in terms of inheritance, remarriage and employment and kind of social support they can receive from relatives and to community. Religious impact on society cannot be overestimated. Through the sociological lens, it is among the major reasons for these widows marginalized and dejected condition having been abandoned by their families and society. Goswami's both the novel's *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* (*The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, 1988) and *Nilkanthi Braja* (*The Blue-necked God*, 1972) shows the plight of widowhood. The main characters – Durga, Giribala, Saru Gossaine and Saudamini played the roles in the novel who unfortunately becomes widowed and have to suffer a lot in their remaining life both socially and mentally. According to Erickson's psychosocial developmental theory covers a period of psychosocial and social development in which the individual endeavour for balance amidst maturation, experience, and social interactions and everyone progresses through these stages. Widows psychosocial balance between intimacy and isolation is theoretically at the heart of psychosocial development after the death of the husband. During this stage, we begin to share our feelings more intimately with others. We explore relationships leading towards longer-term commitments with someone other than a family member. Successful relationships at this stage can result in a happy relationships but if someone failed in relationships can lead to isolation, loneliness and also depression. The characters Saudamini and Giribala get widowed after an year of marriage. Being so young they found it so difficult to rein in her desires and get frustrated in her life. They tried their best to forget their loneliness and try to adjust in the situations. They longed for a life of love and companionship again in their life. But failing in their marriage life after the death of their husband they feel the sense of loneliness in their life and get depressed. Based on Erickson's stages to early to middle adulthood, a vast amount of adjustment may take place for a widow to become psychosocially balanced in her new environment. The character Durga is a widow who after the death of her husband accepts whatever comes in her life as a fate. She never demands her right to property to her in-laws and also never questions the rituals, the traditions that she need to follow. She always make adjust herself in the situations to become psychosocially balance in the environment. According to Butler's theory of gender performativity it means when we say gender is performed, we usually mean that we've taken role; and we are acting in someway and that our acting is important to the gender that we are and the gender we are presenting in the society. He says that gender is culturally formed through a sets of acts that are said to be in compliance with dominant societal norms. The characters Saudamini, Giribala, Durga and Saru Gossaine in both

the novels are all widows. After the death of their husbands they all are compelled to follow the rituals and traditions in their life. They wear white sarees, eating bland foods before sunset and restricted to go in a social place. Therefore they all are performing as a widows gender performativity.



Bibliography

Ahmed, Abdul Barique & M N Anjum. “Widowhood in India: The Societal Persecution as

- Represented in Indira Goswami's Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah." *International Journal of Arts, Humanities And Management Studies*. 2018, Print.
- Arora, Neha. "Vrindavan: The Image of Broken Homes, Shattered Hopes in Indira Goswami's The Blue-necked God." *Lybrinth: An International Referred Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014, Print.
- Bhattacharya, Gayatri.(trans) *The Blue-necked God*. New Delhi: Zubaan. 2013, Print.
- Bhattacharya, Kumar Sankar. "Marginal Identities in Indira Goswami's Works." *UMI Dissertation Publishing*. 2011. Print.
- Bhattacharya, Kumar Sankar. "Writing the periphery: Indira Goswami and the economically marginalised." *The Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University*.2017, Print.
- Bhattacharya, Gayatri. *Relive Indira Goswami: The Legacy of her Stories*. New Delhi: Vintage Publishing Pvt. Ltd. 2014, Print.
- Bennett, K.M ., Hughes, G.M, & P.T Smith. " Psychological response to later life widowhood: Coping and the effects of Gender." *Omega- Journal of Death & Dying*. 2005, Print.
- Bhusan, Ravi. "Estranged Identity: The Problem of Hindu Widows in Indira Goswami's Nilkanthi Braja." *Lybrinth: An International Journal of Post Modern Studies*. 2014,Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London: Routledge.1990,Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter*. London: Routledge. 1993, Print.
- Butler, Judith. *Undoing Gender*. London: Routledge. 2004, Print.
- Chaudhuri, Asha Kuthari. "Re-writing Women, Revisiting Women's Narratives in Film: Adaijya And Joymoti." *A Journal of Literature & Culture*. 2014, Print.
- Chakraborty, Shekar. "Widowhood: A Social Harassment Reflected in Indira Goswami's Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah." *An International Multidisciplinary Research e-Journal*. 2015, Print.

- Chakravarti, Uma, and Preeti Gill. *Shadow Lives: Writings on Widowhood*. New York: BPR. 2001, Print.
- Das, Prasenjit. "Adaijya: What Does It Represent?" *International Journal of Communication*. 2013, Print.
- Das, Papari, "Germination of New Women in the Fictions of Indira Goswami: A study of the characters of Giribala and Saudamini." *Journal of Humanities And Social Science*. 2014, Print.
- Das, Debarati. "Infirmities of Women in Sattras of Assam with Reference to Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*." *International Journal on Multidisciplinary Literature*. 2015, Print.
- Deka, Rupajyoti. "Rebellious Singers: Mamoni Raisom Goswami's Women Characters." *Galaxy: International Multi-disciplinary Journal*. 2013, Print.
- Dutta, Sikha. "Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*: Manifestation of Society and Culture." *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research*. 2019, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton. 1950, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton. 1968, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. (2nd ed.) *Childhood and Society*. New York: Norton. 1963, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *The life cycle completed*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 1982, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Insight and Responsibility*. New York: Norton. 1964, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Psychological Issues*. New York, NY: International University Press. 1959, Print.
- Erickson, E.H. *Youth: Change and Challenge*. New York: Basic books. 1963, Print.
- Elder, G.H., Johnson, M.K & Crosnoe, R. *The emergence and development of life course theory*. New York, NY: Springer. 2003, Print.
- Gass, Sternas. "Single parent widows: Stressors appraisal, coping, resources, grieving responses and health." *Marriage & Family Review*. 1994, Print.
- Goswami, Indira.(trans) *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*. Kolkata: Rupa & Co. 2014, Print.
- Goswami, Indira.(trans) *An Unfinished Autobiography*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Private Limited. 1990, Print.

- Ghosh, Sandipan. "A texture of Passion and Pathos: The Plight of Hindu Widows in Vrindavan Portrayed in Indira Goswami's Novel The Blue-necked God." *The Registrar, Netaji Subhas Open University*. 2017, Print.
- Gogoi, Meghali. "The Death of the Voice Women in Indira Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker: A Reflection on the Status of Women in South Kamrup in Assam." *Smart Moves Journal*. 2019, Print.
- Gogoi, Hridayananda. *Dr. Indira Goswami: In Search of Modernity*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation. 2010, Print.
- Hazarika, Devika Rani. "An Unconventional Narrative on Widowhood: Reading of Indira Goswami's Adha Likha Dastavez or An Unfinished Autobiography." *The Literary Herald: An International Referred Research e-Journal of English Literature*. 2017, Print.
- Kaur, Monbinder and Devika Rani. "The Living Dead: Portrayal of Widows in Indira Goswami's The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *New Delhi Recognised Journal*. 2019, Print.
- Kitchlu, T.N. *Widows in India*. New Delhi: APH Publishing. 1993, Print.
- Khaund, Malaya. *Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom): A Critical Study of Her Writings*. New Delhi: BPRC. 1994, Print.
- Lakhimai, Mili. "Forgotten and Abandoned: The Widows in Indira Goswami's The Blue-necked God and The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *International Journal of Humanities & Science*. 2016, Print.
- Mahanta, Rebat & Mallika Tamuly. "Revolutionary Women: A study of the character of Giribala in The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *International Journal of Multidisciplinary*. 2019, Print.
- Mortimer, J.T & M J Shanahan. *Handbook of the Life Course*. New York: NY. 2003, Print.
- Nath, Devarshi Prasad. "Indira Goswami's Under the Shadow of Kamakhya." *Muse India- the literary e-journal Issue 55: May- June*. 2014, ISSN: 0975-1815.
- Ossefort, C.S. "Shimmering in the darkness: Bearing witness to inconsolable suffering." *Pacifica*

Graduate Institute, Carpentaria, C.A. 2000, Print.

Paul, Amar Krishna. *The Humanist: A Short Life Sketch of Dr. Indira Goswami*. New Delhi:

Akansha Publishing House. 2002, Print.

Pegu, Satya Nath. "Women as 'other' in Indira Goswami's *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*." *Smart Moves Journal*. 2019, Print.

Reddy, P. Adinarayana. *Problems of Widows in India*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons. 2004, Print.

Sharma, Malavika. "Indranath and Giribala- The Young Adult Dystopian Characters in *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*." *Journal of English Language Teaching*. 2015, Print.

Sandhya, K. "A Saga of South Kamrup: English Translation of the Assamese Novel *Datal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* by Indira Goswami a cursory Study." *Journal of English Language and Literature*. 2017, Print.

Scannell, Desch & E. A. "Pre bereavement and post bereavement struggles and triumphs of midlife widows." *Journal of Hospice & Palliative Nursing*. 2005, Print.

Sogani, Rajul. *The Hindu Widow in Indian Literature*. New Delhi: OUP. 2002, Print.

Worden, J.W & Silverman, P.S. "Grief and depression in newly widowed parents with school-age children." *OMEGA—Journal of Death & Dying*. 1993, Print.

Wu, Z & C M Schimmele. "Re-partnering after first union disruption." *Journal of Marriage & Family*. 2005, Print.