



# CULTURAL DISCOURSES OF MASCULINITY AND RITUAL: ANALYSING INDIRA GOSWAMI'S *THE MAN FROM CHINNAMASTA* IN ASSAMESE SOCIETY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Indira Goswami, an esteemed Assamese novelist, is known for her literary portrayals of the intricate rituals of Hinduism in her novels. Her writings not only vividly depict various socio-economic and religious facets of Assam but also of many other regions. One of her notable works, *The Man from Chinnamasta*, is set around the ancient Kamakhya Temple of the Shakti cult, dating back over 2,000 years. The narrative unfolds in the 1930s, a significant period marking the final years of British governance in India. The novel explores the intricate connections between religion, animal sacrifice, and masculinity, highlighting how these elements intersect to reinforce power dynamics and social hierarchies. The protagonist, Chinnamasta Jatadhari, struggles with internal conflicts and moral dilemmas, challenging readers to confront the ethical implications of violence in the name of tradition and religion. Goswami's narration sheds light on the marginalization of women and animals within patriarchal societies, prompting reflection on the intersections of power, violence, and belief systems. Through a critical perspective on traditional notions of animal sacrifice, *The Man from Chinnamasta* offers insights into how these elements shape social structures and perpetuate systems of oppression. This paper aims to uncover how traditional practices shape and influence gender roles, power dynamics, and notions of masculinity by examining the protagonist's journey and the cultural significance of ritual sacrifice in the novel. Through a detailed analysis of Goswami's narration, this study aims to elucidate the complex interplay between tradition, gender, and power in ritual sacrifice, offering insights into these dynamics' cultural and social implications.

**Keywords:** Kamakhya, Masculinity, Marginalization, Oppression, Religion.

## **INTRODUCTION**

“What difference was there between sacrificial animals and women?” (Goswami, 2016, p. 99). In many societies around the world, women and animals are often perceived as the weaker beings, subjected to domination and control by patriarchal structures. This perception stems from deeply ingrained cultural norms and beliefs that assign inferior status to both women and animals, positioning them as vulnerable and in need of protection or guidance from those in power. The intersection of gender and species in this context highlights the interconnectedness of oppression and exploitation, as both women and animals are often marginalized and exploited for the benefit of those in positions of authority.

Throughout history, women and animals have been relegated to subordinate roles, their agency, and autonomy restricted by societal expectations and norms. Women have long been subjected to discrimination, violence, and objectification, while animals have been exploited for labor, entertainment,

and consumption. The patriarchal system reinforces these hierarchies, perpetuating the subjugation of both women and animals through systems of control and domination.

In a society where men hold the power, women are often held accountable for all negative outcomes, despite not always being responsible. They are mistreated under the guise of religion, with their actions and behavior constantly monitored and judged. The culture demands that women make sacrifices in many forms, often at the expense of their own needs and desires. They are expected to fulfill numerous roles, including those of a mother, daughter, and daughter-in-law, and their worth is often measured by how well they fulfill these roles. Additionally, animals are often sacrificed to fulfill the selfish desires of those who hold power in the patriarchal society. This practice can perpetuate a cycle of exploitation and oppression, where the weak and vulnerable are made to suffer for the benefit of those in positions of power.

Animal sacrifice is a customary practice in many religions, including Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. The Latin word 'Sacrificium' means 'to make holy', and the ritual of spilling animal blood at the altar establishes a connection between blood and the divine. This practice has been around since ancient times and continues today. However, in recent times, several people have voiced their disapproval of this harsh practice. The novel, *The Man from Chinnamasta*, aims to expose the brutal practice of animal sacrifice in the significant Shakti cults of Kamakhya. The protagonist of the novel, Chinnamasta Jatadhari, opposes the practice of animal sacrifice and offers alternative ways of pleasing the deity. The text can be read as a piece of animal activism and gender studies.

Indira Goswami, also known by her pen name Mamoni Raison Goswami, has written several novels, hundreds of short stories, and research papers. Her works have been extensively translated into various languages, including English. Her novel, *The Moth Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* represents the plight of widows in the traditional Vaishnavite institution, *Sattrā*. Her other novel *Neelkantha Braja* or *The Blue Necked God* represents the bitter reality of Vrindavan and the plight of widows in the holy city. Animal sacrifice and the subjugation of women form the major theme of her work *The Man from Chinnamasta*. The publication of this novel infuriated Brahmins and priestly class and they ran a long chain of intolerance against her for condemning and rejecting such an ancient practice. The publication did not bring an end to the tradition of animal sacrifice, but it was able to highlight and bring this issue to the attention of the public. Tillotoma Misra refers to Indira Goswami as a "bold one" for her representation and rejection of traditional taboos and patriarchal authority and revolting against the subjugation of the weaker section.

## Background

The Kamakhya temple located on Nilachal Hill is one of the most important sites of Shakti worship in India. The temple dates back to ancient times and has been destroyed and rebuilt numerous times. The current structure was renovated by Koch Behar King Naranarayana in the 16th century and is still functional today. The novel, *The Man from Chinnamasta*, originally *Chinamasta Manhuto*, by Indira Goswami and translated by Prashant Goswami, is based on this temple and its practices, which include animal sacrifice.

The legend behind the temple involves Prajapati Daksha, who opposed Lord Shiva's devotion. Sati, the youngest daughter of Daksha, married Shiva against her father's wishes, causing Daksha to humiliate her at a yajna. Unable to bear the humiliation any longer, Sati jumped into the yajna's flames, and Shiva became depressed and started the dance of destruction holding Sati's body in his arms. All the gods were afraid of Shiva's wrath, so they went to Lord Vishnu seeking help. Lord Vishnu decimated Sati's body into 51 pieces to spare the world from Shiva's wrath. These pieces fell at various locations and became holy sites of Devi worship. Kamakhya is one of these sites and is considered one of the most significant power sources. However, it is rooted in folklore rather than historical facts.

The inner sanctum of the temple is a small cave where a hidden spring beneath a stone, resembling a woman's genitalia, continually provides water. Each year during the *Ambubachi* season, which represents the menstruation of the Goddess, the water turns crimson for three days. In observance of this period, daily worship is halted, and all agricultural activities such as digging, plowing, sowing, and transplanting of crops are prohibited. Brahmin widows and Brahmacharis are required to fast strictly and abstain from cooked food. On the fourth day, red cloth and water are distributed to the devotees as a symbol of the goddess's blood. Due to the goddess's legendary powers, the Kamakhya temple attracts numerous pilgrims,

especially during the *Ambubachi* season. The main theme of the novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* revolves around the blood sacrifice at the Kamakhya temple.

One of the key rituals other than *Ambubachi*, celebrated in the Kamakhya temple and given much importance by the author is known as *Deodhwani*. This festival takes place every year from August 17 to August 19 and is associated with the worship of Goddess Manasa, who is the daughter of Lord Shiva. During this festival, temple dancers known as Deodhas, dance as if they are possessed by a spirit. They are not part of the priesthood nor do they receive any special privileges. It is believed that they are visited by gods and goddesses and live a life of piety and purity for a month. It is also believed that in their possessed state, they have the ability to predict the future. These dancers drink the blood of pigeons, goats, or whatever is offered by the devotees.

### **Tradition, Ritual Sacrifice and Masculinity**

Animal sacrifice is a customary ritual that has been practiced in Kamakhya for centuries. During the annual *Ambubachi Mela*, which occurs after the *Ambubachi* festival, and *Deodhwani*, devotees offer innocent animals such as buffaloes, goats, and ducks as sacrifices to appease the goddess. This ancient practice is considered sacred, as it is believed to bring prosperity to the devotees and rid them of their life's troubles by the goddess's grace. Additionally, it symbolises the devotees' surrender of their ego and desires to the deity, as it is often said that "deliverance comes only when sacrifice is offered. Sacrifice alone will lead you to heaven" (Goswami, 2016, p. 93). This practice, though controversial, continues to be an integral part of the temple's traditions, attracting visitors from all over the world who come to witness the deeply held beliefs and customs of the Kamakhya temple.

However, upon deeper contemplation, it becomes clear that this practice is far from what it seems. In reality, the sacrifices are made solely for the fulfillment of the devotees' desires. After the sacrifice, they wait for their wishes to come true, and if they are not fulfilled, they are ready to make another one. The truth is that human desires can never be fully satiated, and devotees always have a long list of wishes that they want to fulfill.

Meanwhile, innocent animals are killed in the name of fulfilling these selfish desires. They are sacrificed for reasons that are not their own, and they have to suffer the consequences of the devotees' insatiable desires. This practice is inhumane and goes against the principles of compassion and empathy that are essential to a just and fair society. For instance, in the text, Bidhibala's father had earlier sacrificed a buffalo to save his son. Still, he died. This time he has come to the Nilachal to sacrifice a buffalo so that his daughter can have a happy married life. It is the pandas and *tantricks*, who preach that if one offers blood to the deity his prayer will be answered within six months.

Haladhar Purohit thundered, "...The sacred texts very clearly state that the blood of a deer satiates the almighty goddess for eight months. The blood of a black bull or a boar appeases her for twelve years." (Goswami, 2016, p. 81)

Upon analyzing the text, it becomes evident that the reasoning presented is not fully substantial. It suggests that the suffering of these animals is mainly driven by the greed of Pandits and *tantricks*, who receive meat and numerous offerings from devotees. Ratnadhara's father expresses concerns to his wife Bishnupriya that the prohibition of animal sacrifice could result in them being deprived of their meat ration. In the essay *Productive Labour, Consciousness, and History: The Dalit Bahujan Alternative*, Kancha Ilaiah discusses

...Prayer is a weapon in the hands of a Brahmin. It sets him apart from the rest of the masses. It is through this prayer that he establishes his hold over the rest of society. In a fit of madness, which might be a result of their lifelong alienation from work, life itself begins to appear to them to be meaningless. They call this madness the life of penance. (Goswami, 2016, p. 195)

Most of the devotees of the region, belong to the illiterate section of society and are vulnerable to exploitation by priests. To make them in favor of using blood sacrifices to worship goddesses, priests often cite ancient scriptures like *Kalika Purana*, *Devi Bhagwat*, and *Yogini Tantra*. However, these same scriptures also offer alternative methods of worship, such as the use of flowers. In fact, *Yogini Tantra* specifically recommends using flowers to worship the goddess and even claims that offerings of flowers can earn one a place in the sun. Despite this, those who advocate for blood sacrifices choose to ignore these alternative methods, as they believe that adhering to them would diminish their power.

Goswami aims to portray the suffering of the animals who are brought to be sacrificed from a humanistic perspective, which is the central theme of the novel. Throughout the narrative, we see a recurring motif of animals being led to the altar to be sacrificed, which is established in the first chapter itself. Ratnadhar, a disciple of Jatadhari, attempted to prevent a buffalo from being led to the altar when he saw it. He implored the men who were leading the animal to the slaughter and requested them to reconsider their actions.

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 beast. It wants to live and play on Ma's Earth. Stop I say! Stop! (Goswami, 2016, p. 10)

Goswami portrays the poor animal being led to the slaughter through the character of Ratnadhar. The vivid details given by the author show how the animal is quivering with fear because it knows what fate awaits it. Through this, Goswami conveys that animals are not just mindless creatures without any sense of feeling; they are sentient beings who, like us, also feel pain and fear. We learn from Goswami that the animal attempted to break free as it was being taken to the slaughterhouse in an attempt to escape death, which came in the form of pilgrims. However, the harbingers of doom continued to tug at the animal, shoving, yelling, and prodding it. In the name of tradition, Goswami shows us how some people have become deaf to the cries of animals who desperately plead for their lives, trying to escape death.

*The Man from Chinnamasta* is a story that takes place in 1920s Assam and revolves around the conflict between two philosophies. One side is represented by the influential priesthood and their supporters who believe that blood sacrifice is crucial to the Shakti tradition of goddess worship while the other group, led by Chinnamasta Jatadhari, an ascetic, believes that offering flowers is equally valid. This conflict becomes the main focus of the story and drives the plot forward.

Although Jatadhari is absent from the action for a significant portion of the novel, he is portrayed as a mysterious character who remains crucial to the plot. He is a powerful man and a yogi, known for his healing abilities and knowledge. People regard him as a follower of the goddess, and he is known to meditate in the Brahmaputra and swim through it even during intense rainfall. Legend has it that snakes dwell in his dreadlocks. There is an aura that surrounds Jatadhari which widespread his popularity. Many people come from far places to receive his blessings. Ratnadhar, Dorothy, and Bidhibala are some of his followers.

Dorothy Brown, a woman from England, went to Jatadhari seeking peace of mind. She was unable to have a child with her husband Henry Brown, who was a professor at Cotton College. Dorothy went to London for sterility treatment while Henry began an illicit affair with a Khasi woman whom he impregnated. When Dorothy received a letter addressed to her, she discovered the truth. She left her husband and was advised by Jatadhari to come live in the Darbhanga house. However, her arrival caused a stir in the community, sparking curiosity among locals. Some Tantricks and priests regarded her as impure and immoral due to her foreign status, treating her as a *melecha*, or polluted person, and opposed her presence in the holy place. This prejudice towards Dorothy by the people shows the caste system and the narrow mind of society. However, Jatadhari's taking her to his shelter shows his open-mindedness.

Dorothy's decision to reside at Darbhanga House can be interpreted as a form of resistance against the patriarchal norms of their society and her husband's authority. In patriarchal societies, men were often permitted to have extramarital affairs, while women were expected to remain faithful and subservient to their husbands. When Henry Brown attempted to persuade Dorothy to accompany him, she declined, leading to his use of derogatory remarks. He fabricated a story about her involvement with Jatadhari in an attempt to tarnish her reputation. However, he eventually seemed to forget his actions. Furthermore, the British Empire took offense at Dorothy's choice to seek refuge with the Indian man Jatadhari. According to Henry, her "absurd decision to come and live in this fashion wasn't just a slap on his face. It was an affront to the Empire, their Britishness, their heritage." (Goswami, 2016, p. 35). The intertwined nature of gender and imperialism is evident, though, in this specific context, it is apparent that gender plays a more prominent role in the sociopolitical framework.

Some literary experts have analyzed Dorothy's decision to submit to Jatadhari as a symbolic representation of a brown man saving a white woman from a white man. This idea is similar to the notion discussed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* of "white men saving brown women from brown men." Scholars have often characterized the relationship between Jatadhari and Dorothy as a blending of Eastern and Western cultures.

Dorothy and Jatadhari decide to take a short break and move to a different location following a horrific attack on Dorothy at Darbhanga House by an unidentified individual. Before departing, Jatadhari gives Ratnadhar the assignment of coordinating a signature drive with the help of Cotton College students. Jatadhari pledges to return before the Deodhwani festival. The priest Manohar Sarma is the father of Ratnadhar. But because of his support for Jatadhari's effort, Ratnadhar is being publicly humiliated by the priesthood. The students' signature campaign highlights the impact of colonial schooling. The campaign argues that liberal education has a colonial legacy, at the same time it also hints that the students were keen to accept the logical reasoning contrary to the local populace who most of the time blindly relied on the words of the priests and were skeptical towards Jatadhari's campaign.

Upon their arrival back, Ratnadhar and fellow young students had collected signatures on a petition aimed at halting animal sacrifice. Tragically, during the *Deodhwani* festival, Dorothy met her demise, with suspicions pointing towards Henry as the perpetrator. But Jatadhari is arrested representing the biasedness of the colonial authority. Rajul Sogani asserts that Dorothy's murder stemmed from her defiance against an unspoken decree that permitted Englishmen to maintain relationships with native women and bestow their assets upon them and their offspring while forbidding English women from associating with local Indians or engaging in their affairs.

Jatadhari, following Dorothy's passing, prepares for the final confrontation. He encourages his supporters to consider making a significant sacrifice, if necessary, in order to prevent the senseless slaughter of innocent animals. When the group approaches the chief priest to present their appeal, they are surrounded by opponents who challenge them to offer their own flesh and blood before demanding an end to animal sacrifice. Jatadhari steps up to the challenge and offers a piece of his own flesh to Mother Kamakhya. His young followers join him in chanting "Ma! Ma! Ma!" as they pay homage to the goddess, resulting in the sacrificial altar being symbolically anointed with their blood. "...blood flowed in the sacred abode of the goddess until after midnight" (Goswami, 2016, p. 86). Thus, the novel can be interpreted as a conflict between liberal humanism and age-old superstitions in the name of religion, between religion and rituals, and between violence and nonviolence.

Indira Goswami was a writer who aimed to bring about social change through her work. She believed that her writing could be a response to the social and political violence experienced by marginalized groups in society. In her works, she highlighted the inherent cruelty in human nature that often manifests itself in various forms of violence. Goswami's literary works had a sociological perspective and depicted the lives of people in her contemporary community. She used writing as a tool to bring about awareness and change in society. Goswami did not shy away from portraying the harsh realities of human existence. She believed that her stories were based on actual events and only made slight alterations to reality to create compelling narratives.

In numerous societies across the globe, a prevailing patriarchal structure often grants men dominant roles in decision-making processes. When someone dares to challenge this established order or seeks to instigate change, they frequently face attempts at subjugation or oppression from those in power. This dynamic is not exclusive to conventional societal structures but also manifests in sacred contexts, including within the hallowed grounds of Kamakhya. At Kamakhya, the worship of the goddess Devi's yoni and the veneration of her menstrual blood as pure stand as stark contradictions to the prevailing norms of purity and impurity associated with menstruation in many patriarchal societies. Despite the reverence accorded to the divine feminine, the same patriarchal influences seep into the cultural fabric, perpetuating oppressive beliefs and practices. Therefore, it is customary for girls to be married before they reach this stage.

Bidhibala was thought to have reached puberty due to her physique, which caused people to raise questions during the Kumari Pujan ceremony. However, her father, Singhadutta, defended her. Despite this, rumors began to spread, and Bidhibala was forced into a marriage with a man from Bangara who was already married twice and had two daughters. The man was remarrying to ensure the continuation of his lineage, as it was believed that women were responsible for determining the gender of a child. Bidhibala was unhappy with the marriage, but Singhadutta was pleased to have found such a wealthy groom for his daughter.

The scripture, like *Manusmriti*, mentions that a woman does not look for a man's appearance, wealth, or behavior within the institution of marriage. It is simply required that the man is, in fact, a man. However, this may not always be true. In many cases, marriage is not chosen by the woman but rather by her father

or other patriarchal family members. Bidhibala's opinion is not considered, and even after expressing her unhappiness with the marriage, she is powerless to override her father's choice. Even Bidhibala's mother had an opposing view concerning the husband-to-be of Bidhibala, But Singhadatta told his wife to shut up and not carry the discussion any further. This shows the status of women in Assamese Society. They were deprived of any role in decision-making.

Despite having cared for the buffalo since it was a young animal, Bidhibala was unable to stop its sacrifice. She feels that it would have been better if she were sacrificed instead of the innocent animal. The author draws a parallel between women and animals, highlighting Bidhibala's anguish and pain.

The sight of Singhadatta sitting on the cane stool, massaging the animal's neck wrenched Bidhibala's heart. She used to wonder if it might be better if she died herself. She had seriously considered placing her own head on the sacrificial altar. (Goswami, 2016, p. 120)

Through the character of Bidhibala, Goswami shows the emotional attachment that animals can create with one. She shows the deep mental anguish and torment that Bidhibala goes through when she sees that the young buffalo which she had played with when it was small, is to be sacrificed for her sake. She entreats Ratnadhar to help save the young buffalo from being sacrificed despite knowing the consequences such an action might entail. She is ready to even give up her life to save the innocent animal.

When Bidhibala's father returns and finds out about the missing buffalo, he is furious and asks Ratnadhar where he has hidden the buffalo. Bidhibala chimes in and tells her father that she does not want to see the young buffalo sacrificed for her sake. This enrages the father even more and he pulls Bidhibala's hair and kicks her viciously. Despite suffering through all this, Bidhibala still entreats and begs her father to spare the buffalo. Here, Goswami also shows us how an attempt to change the status quo is seen by some people as an attack on their beliefs. Bidhibala's father Singhadatta represents the orthodox section of society which does not want to accept changes and sees any attempt to do so as a threat to the very fibre of their existence, their way of life. Singhadatta's daughter, Bidhibala becomes a victim of her father's rage and inability to accommodate more than a single point of view. Bidhibala dies of grief due to her father's insistence to sacrifice the young buffalo and in the process, Singhadatta loses his young daughter due to his rigid unaccommodating worldview.

Dorothy also leaves her husband due to his affair with a Khasi woman, whom he impregnated. However, society gossips about her instead of questioning her husband's actions. Despite this, her relationship with Jatadhari is scrutinized. Ratnadhar is also chastised for assisting animals in escaping. The priests' wives are marginalized and not involved in decision-making. They had spent their lives cooking for their husbands and the *Jajmans* i.e. seventy-eighty people every day. They worked tirelessly, such that their skin was chapped and black from the constant contact and exposure from the kitchen fire. Despite such conditions, these women were not allowed to use ointment for healing. Priests' wives are portrayed as meek characters who silently bear everything.

Indira Goswami has been widely recognized for her masterful use of female characters to showcase the struggles and sacrifices that women endure in society. Her portrayal of these characters is subtle yet powerful, as she highlights the various rituals of sacrifice that women are subjected to under the influence of different socioeconomic and religious codes. Through vivid descriptions of characters like Dorothy, Bidhibala, the dutiful wives of priests, and even the buffaloes being carried to slaughter, Goswami masterfully captures the lack of freedom that women have in choosing their paths in life. She draws a poignant comparison between the lives of women and animals being led to slaughter, emphasizing the oppressive nature of masculinity which leaves women with little to or no agency in their own lives. With her brilliant writing, Goswami leaves a lasting impact on readers, opening their eyes to the struggles of women in society.

Within the pages of the novel, Goswami expertly incorporates the rich tapestry of Assamese history and its intricate details. With a succinct yet informative account of the reign of the Ahom kings, their eventual defeat to the Mughals, the British conquest of Burma in the late 1800s, and the period of British control, the author skillfully provides readers with a glimpse into the historical events that have shaped the region. Using engaging dialogues among the characters, the intriguing whispers of the gossipers, and the captivating historically-themed paintings of Ratnadhar, readers are transported on a journey to gain deeper insights into the Ahom monarchs and the English rulers, ultimately fostering a greater understanding of the people and events that have significantly impacted the region's rich cultural heritage.

In her writing, Indira Goswami provides a detailed account of the customs and rituals that are observed during festivals, including the traditional dances, devotions, and sacrifices. Her aim is to create a vivid image in the reader's mind so that they can understand the omnipresent nature of these practices. She hopes that readers will support Jatadhari and his disciples in speaking out against these practices. Her descriptions of the sacrifices, tantric rituals, and animal slaughter serve to achieve this goal. Overall, her efforts are successful in conveying the significance of these customs and rituals.

Dr. Prafulla Kotoky, who wrote the preface to the original Assamese *Chinnamastar Manuhto*, says:

It is difficult to categorize it under the genre of the novel in the strict sense of the term. It can at best be described as a loosely woven web of Kamakhya lore. In writing it, the author draws heavily upon myth and history, religion and folklore, rituals and cultural practices. Lacking a consistent storyline, it is a blend of chronicles, events, and actions that took place around the temple of Kamakhya during the nineteen thirties, the last few years of British rule in India. (*The Book Review Literary Trust*, 25)

In the novel, *The Man from Chinnamasta* the author Goswami highlights the importance of temple festivals like *Ambubachi* and *Deodhwani*, which play a significant role in the story's action. The narrative devotes a significant portion of the text to describing the horrifying accounts of animal sacrifices and the bloodthirsty devotees known as *deodha* or *ghora*. The author's words bring these practices to life, and we witness the *deodha* sinking his teeth into the goat's neck, causing it to bleed and struggle to free itself. Moreover, the text extensively discusses the practices of tantric worship and the techniques employed by its adherents. The author describes in vivid detail the customs observed during the festivals, including the dances, devotion, sacrifices, and tantric rituals.

Throughout the novel, the recurrent depictions of animals being taken to slaughter seem intended to sway readers' opinions in favor of Jatadhari and his supporters' opposition to the custom of animal sacrifice. The characters who fight against this practice appear to be enthusiastic participants in this fight against animal cruelty. Overall, the book provides an eye-opening perspective on tantric worship's customs, practices, and rituals while highlighting the need to protect innocent animals from cruel practices. The author, while advocating for the prohibition of animal sacrifice, also highlights the historical practice of human sacrifice in temples, which was outlawed by the British in 1835. A child who was playing with his friends finds a human skull near the shore where the white men practice their shooting. The mother is afraid that “*some inauspicious star would cast its evil spell on her son*”. Goswami then, through Jatadhari shows us her knowledge of the Puranas by telling us about what the Kalika Purana says about human sacrifice. After going into detail about what the Purana says regarding human sacrifice, Jatadhari tells the woman,

. . . these are 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 dark recesses of dark caves. We will bury this past in a tomb of flowers. (Goswami, 2016, p. 26)

Goswami through Jatadhari tells her readers that just as the tradition of human sacrifice has been relegated to the pages of history, so also would their attempt to ban the tradition of blood sacrifice by offering flowers to the goddess instead of blood. Whereas the temple priests attempt to show that the goddess wants blood and would only be sated with blood, Goswami presents us with a very different picture of the goddess who is kind, compassionate, and loving towards all forms of life.

However, Indira Goswami presents her emphasis on the necessity of evaluating the current boundaries of social organization in terms of a didactic approach. In the novel, Goswami questions and challenges the rationale behind ritualized spirituality, however, it is a critical exercise rather than a demand for a radical overhaul. When form and content come together to express the potential of a different order, the quest for balance offers the solution to the narrative oscillations.

Indira Goswami was herself a staunch follower of the goddess but despite this, she has never been in favor of animal sacrifice and the associated rituals as she never believed that any kind of bloodshed can appease the goddess. In her *Unfinished* Autobiography, she recollects her memory of when she was taken by her mother to the temple at the suggestion of some astrologers, and her forehead was daubed with blood. She felt guilt, pain, and trauma following that incident and could not sleep for days. She through the novel expresses her suffocation towards blood sacrifice. She writes how

a large man held a three-year-old child on his right arm, a goat in his left. The child played with the plump stippled male goat. Soon the child's forehead would be smeared with his playmate's blood. (Goswami, 2016, p.2)

The novelist has effectively conveyed her perspective on the worship of Goddess Kamakhya through various voices. Indira Goswami is not opposed to the worship itself, but rather to certain rituals that deviate from religious norms. By addressing this sensitive topic, she has presented her viewpoint thoughtfully. By drawing from quotations in Holy Scriptures, university journals, and government documents, she has provided substantial support to Jatadhari's group without explicitly expressing her own strongly held personal opinion on the matter. Through the character of Jatadhari, she offers alternatives that are equally as valid for offering obeisance to the goddess. She refers to "the twenty-fifth incantation of the sixty-seventh chapter of the Kalika Purana" in defence of their position regarding the ending of blood sacrifice. In the incantation, it is revealed that the goddess is just as satisfied with "offerings of white gourd, melon, sugarcane, and alcohol" as with blood sacrifice. Thus, without mincing any words, she supplements and augments her position through the use of the very same puranas through which the priests educate the common folk. Further, Jatadhari's towering personality and his campaign to end animal sacrifice have a huge impact so much so that the priests are worried. And his sacrifice in the end brings a positive change in society.

Throughout the years, the novel has taken various paths and been shaped by different cultural contexts. Indira Goswami, throughout her career, has consistently drawn attention to issues of identity and traditional societal structures. In this text, she skillfully portrays the cruel treatment of animals, in addition to the colonial era setting. The novel overall paints a realistic picture of Kamrup in pre-independent India. The characters who inhabit the novel are not one-dimensional but rather they seem to be fully fleshed-out individuals with their drives and faults. While Goswami doesn't offer us a satisfying conclusion, leaving it open-ended – she ends the novel on a hopeful note, noting that "In the clear light of day, no one could see a trace of blood. Not a single bloodstain remained." (Goswami, 2016, p. 186) While the practice of animal sacrifice still continues to this day in the Kamakhya Temple; however, Indira Goswami achieved her objective of bringing the issue to the notice of the general public.

## Conclusion

The novelist boldly explores the representation of cultural spaces in their works and doesn't shy away from examining controversial religious practices and their societal condemnation. The novel *The Man from Chinnamasta* portrays the unyielding struggles between the powerful and the powerless with raw and unflinching honesty. Indira Goswami's writing challenges readers to question the status quo and immerse themselves in an ever-changing world that demands our attention. She passionately urges everyone to take an unwavering stand against the inhumane practice of animal sacrifice at the revered Kamakhya temple. The story is a powerful tool to raise awareness about animal sacrifice and promote feminine consciousness, and it offers a rational and thought-provoking approach to modifying societal perceptions. In short, the narrative is a call to action and a rallying cry for change.

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