



Indian Authors and Poets

Indira Goswami

"Indira Goswami is one of the pre-eminent literary figures in India and a woman of remarkable courage and conviction... She has also been an important voice in championing women's causes, and has done much to highlight the plight of widows. [She] is one of those rare figures whose achievements as a writer are closely paralleled by their accomplishments as a social and political activist."

- Amitav Ghosh

Indira Goswami was an Assamese writer, teacher and a scholar. She was born in Guwahati, Assam, North-eastern India to Umakanta Goswami and Ambika Devi, on 14th November 1942 and died at the age of 69 after a prolong illness on 29th November 2011. She was born in a traditional Vaishnavite family of Assam which owned a satra (monastery). Indira Goswami started her college life in Cotton College, Guwahati and took honours in Assamese and graduated in 1960. She worked as a Professor in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literature in the University of Delhi.

Indira Goswami writes under the pen-name Mamoni Raisom Goswami. She



started writing as a young child; it was only after her husband's death in 1967, only after 18 months of her marriage that her intense and persistent involvement, committed herself to a literary career. She wrote in Assamese and became popularly known as Mamoni Baideo (Sister Mamoni).

Being young and widowed, Indira Goswami had to withstand much unwanted attention and stigmas traditionally faced by widows in India. But this did not stop her in raising her voice and showed the social and psychological deprivations of widowhood in her first novel 'Neel Kanthi Braja (Shadow of Dark God, 1986. *"I have tried to show how the mental and physical state of a young widow takes a different shape and how this change affects her life after her widowhood,"*. She continually addressed social injustices in her work and made her life as an academic in Delhi, writing numerous short stories and novels, some published in serial form in magazines. Goswami gave a candid voice to the grief and loneliness of widowhood in her memoir, Adhalekha Dastaveja (A Half-Written Autobiography, 1988), and in a later novel, Dotal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker, 2004), in which she portrayed the lives of widows in a satra (traditional monastery).

Indira Goswami is probably the first Indian novelist to strongly raise her voice and reveal the cruelty, violence and pathos that surround the helpless widows. Her life and experience in Vrindavan during her early widowhood helps in shaping the novel and is her finest achievement as a novelist. She also wanted to pursue her research on the Ramayana, one of her lifelong passions. She conducted research and subsequently published the book Ramayana from Ganga to Brahmaputra. And later bringing together Ramayana scholars from across Asia, she founded the South-east Asia Ramayana research institute in 2008. Indira Goswami was especially fascinated by the way the epic and its array of heroes and villains shape shifted across cultures.

Two of the main features in Goswami's writing have been the focus on women and the cultural and political construct of the Assamese society. Apart from novels, Indira has also written many exquisite short stories and poems. Her 1988 novel Daantal Hatir Une Khoa Howdah (English version: The Saga of South Kamrup, or alternatively, The Moth-Eaten Saddle of the Tusker, 1993)

vividly brings out the superstitions, the abuse of power and the deadweight of oppression that widows had to confront, the complications of caste and social hierarchies. A part of this novel has been made into a film. The film, Adahya (that which will not be burnt out) was awarded the Silver Peacock award in the National Film Festival in 1998. This is probably her best novel, and is considered one of the modern classics of Assamese literature.

Indira's anthologies of short stories include Chinaki Marom (1962), Kaina (1966) and Hriday Ekti Nadir Nam (1990). There is also the autobiographical piece, Adha Lekha Dastabej (1988). Among her major novels are Nilkanthi Broja (1976), Ahiron (1978), Mamore Dhara Tarowal (1980), and Tej Aru Dhulire Dhusarita Pristha (1994) - the last-named being a novel written with reference to the Delhi riots that followed the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984.

Awards and honours-

The recipient of the highest literary awards in India, Jnanpith Award (2000), Goswami also received a Prince Claus award from the Netherlands in 2008 for the cultural and social value of her work. Indira has also received many other literary prizes including the Sahitya Akademi award in 1982, awarded the Ambassador for Peace from the Inter Religious and International Federation for World Peace, Katha National Award for Literature, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Gold Medal from Asiatic Society, etc.

Having a complex and compassionate vision, Indira Goswami made her work unique not only in Assamese but in all of Indian literature. She is a celebrated name in modern Assamese literature. Writing was her way of overcoming the emotion, pain and views not only of her personal life but also about the social strata. She is considered not only as a great author but a great human being who devoted significant amount of her life into social reformation of the region. She was considered the major force for peace talk initiative between the militancy (ULFA) of the region with government. She was a woman who was affectionate and had great compassion, who wanted to bring peace and also enrich the culture of the region. Many of her works have been translated into many Indian languages and English.

Activity-

1. In which year Indira Goswami won the Jnanpith award?

2. Who was the first Assamese literate received the Jnanpith award?

3. Write in short about the work Indira Goswami has done in the field of social and political life.

4. Who is your favourite author? Describe in short why he/she is your favourite author?

Reference-

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