

## ANIMAL SACRIFICE THROUGH THE GLASSES OF INDIRA GOSWAMI

**Akanksha Agrawal**

Research Scholar

Rani Durgavati Vishwavidyalaya,  
Jabalpur, M.P.

### Abstract

*This article focuses on the practice of animal sacrifice about which Indira Goswami has given a detailed description in her famous novel The Man from Chinnamasta. The novel was written when Goswami was at the top of her literary career. The novel was published in the year 2005 and it highlights the cruel practice of animal sacrifice at Kamakhya devi temple which is located on the Nilachal hill in Guwahati. Goswami's main agenda to write this novel was to stop this practice for which she got support from her readers. After getting published the novel brought a revolution in Assam due to its rebellious theme. Especially the Brahmins were unhappy and disagreed to stop animal sacrifice. Goswami witnessed the chaos and disorder that prevailed in the Assamese society at the turn of the twentieth century. In the novel she mentions a holy book Kalika Purana. Any act of animal sacrifice follows the rules mentioned in this book. The protagonist of the novel is Jatadhari, a reverend, who performs the veneration before animal sacrifice. Detailed information about the harbinger of good or bad omen is also provided by him to the devotees who offer sacrifice. He not only follows the rules from Kalika Purana for sacrificing animals but also takes support of it in order to stop it as the book suggests various alternatives that can be used instead of killing animals. In the novel Jatadhari is accompanied by Ratnadhar, Bidhibala and some students from Cotton College to campaign against animal sacrifice. Bidhibala, a young lady, even sacrificed her own life to save an animal. Indeed Goswami has painted the novel with kindness and humanity.*

**Keywords-** *Animal slaughter, religion, culture, superstition, beliefs, human sensibility, rituals, compassion, empathy.*

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- Akanksha Agrawal

**T**o write *Man from Chinnamasta*, Goswami read religion, history, myth, folklore or anything that was related to the process of animal slaughter. Goswami briefly informs about the origin of the place. It is believed that Daksha prearranged a big yagya and he didn't invite his daughter Sati and lord Shiva to attend it as she had married against her father's wishes. Still Sati came up and her father Daksha used very embarrassing words against her husband. Sati couldn't bear this and jumped in havan kunda. This made lord Shiva very furious and upset and he started doing tandav which is the dance of destruction carrying the dead body of his wife. The whole scene horrified all the gods and goddesses. Only lord Vishnu could stop it. He followed lord Shiva and started to cut Sati's body with his weapon popularly known as Sri Chakra. The parts of Sati's body fell at fifty one places which are now considered as holy places. The genitalia fell at the Nilachal or Kamagiri hill and a holy sanctuary was set up there. Goswami states, 'The sanctum sanctorum of the temple is a cave with a small hidden spring of water which constantly moistens a stone with the structure of female genitalia, yoni' (6). For three days, every year, the water turns rosy known as Ambubachi or the time of the Goddess' feminine cycle. A concise portrayal of Ambubachi Fair is also drawn in the novel. The Ambubachi Fair takes place once each year in the Kamakhya temple. This fair attracts a large number of devotees everywhere throughout the nation and abroad. It is trusted that every year Mother Earth winds up unclean, this contamination is the same as the adultery of ladies because of feminine cycle. For ladies it occurs every month however as she is Mother Earth it happens to her every year. During these three days, the temple entryways are shut for enthusiasts. In this duration Brahmin widows keep rigorous fast. The goddess in the sanctuary of Kamakhya became famous due to the belief that the goddess is pervaded with incredible forces making the site an eminent place of journey particularly at the time of

Ambubachi. The entryways are kept open on the fourth day and the pilgrims accumulated for the event, are permitted to worship mother goddess.

Born and brought up amidst religious Assamese people, Indira Gowswami had observed the importance of Kamakhya temple for the local people. She wrote whatever she had seen related to animal slaughter and the perception of people about it. What's more, she has never been judgemental about it and never forced her views on her readers. Her characters belong to different fields of life. There are ordinary people who even sold their properties so that they can visit the temple and/or buy an animal like a goat, calf or a buffalo to offer it to Maa Chinnamasta in the expectation of celestial intercession in their lives. It is believed that only blood sacrifice can satiate and appease mother goddess therefore it cannot be replaced by anything else. Aruna Chakravarthi remarks,

'There are those who argue that offerings of fruits and flowers are sufficient propitiation. This polarization is seen in the form of a signature campaign against blood sacrifice starred by the students of Cotton College and the violence it sparks off.' (25)

Animal slaughter has not only been constrained to the Hindu religion and cultural practices alone but also exists in other religion as well.

In *The Man from Chinnamasta*, spiritual narrow mindedness is shown by the cruelty and badgering of the novel's hero Jatadhari, the Hindu tantrik. Jatadhari irritates a substantial bit of ardent Hindus and individual tantriks through his supplication to end the deep rooted routine with regards to animal slaughter before the Mother Goddess. As it is customarily trusted that the Mother Goddess can be effectively assuaged and satisfied with blood, Jatadhari's suggestions to supplant the act of animal slaughter to worship mother goddess with to receive the Mother Goddess' benediction makes him a victim and as a result he undergoes through derision and contempt.

Possibly religious abuse is established in individuals' lack of concern. For example, when some less proficient individuals, who are apparently to be the pastorate, misuse individuals under the name of religion, at that point individuals judge religion through their hypocrisies and remain far from such practices. Religion doesn't keep people together. Truly religion is the soul of a

general public. It tries to propel humankind towards flourishing. In addition, the reason which makes religion scary and complicated is the religious individuals who preach and advocate religion incorrectly. They do not reveal its facts clearly so that they can exploit them. These hypocrites earn a huge amount of wealth in the name of religion. This is the present scenario of Indian culture. In Indian society, religion is illustrated in various ways by different groups of people. For instance, the religious radicals decipher it to bolster their fortune; researchers in their own particular perspectives and the legislators also do the same thing. Individuals are killed, offended and abused mostly by such groups under the veil of religion. To put it plainly, religion has become a narrow minded apparatus in the hand of a considerable number of groups to utilize it for their advantage. Henceforth, it is the main driver of Indians' backwardness.

Goswami has also portrayed the poignant feelings of women towards animal through the character of Bidhibala. Just like Goswami she doesn't believe in this practice and proposes the idea to stop it. Although she couldn't convince people to support her but it was her love for animals which encouraged her to sacrifice her own life in order to save an animal. It was a young calf which she had cherished ever since her childhood. Therefore, it was impossible for her to bear the fact that it will be killed so that her marriage can successfully take place with a forty-year-old man. She asked her old friend Ratnadhar to help her to save the life of the animal. About the controversy on animal slaughter Subhajt Bhadra remarks:

'The sanyasis became agitated and told that animal slaughter should not be stopped as it was an integral part of Hindu Ritualistic region. Kalika Purana supports animal slaughters but it also says that baikuntha could be attained by offering a garland of flower also.' (20)

Forlorn Bidhibala begged Rathnadhar to help her. She wanted to rescue the calf from slaughter. She was advised to read scriptures, but she denied doing so. Bidhibala disliked reading the scripture as it suggested bloodshed. Although it suggests various alternatives as well but it was meaningless to convince Bidhibala to read something which encourages such malpractices.

Under the guidance of Jatadhari, Ratnadhar along with disciples and students scheduled a rally to stop the cruel practice of animal sacrifice. People raised their voice to stop the practice of animal sacrifice. In the novel there is a mention of a hermit who appears with his crooked voice. He refused the idea to stop this practice. He even warned everyone that their efforts will become meaningless and if people try to do so then Devi Chinnamasta will destroy the whole city. He even threatened,

‘The curse of Chinnamasta Devi will blast you to oblivion. Your endeavours will come to naught. The very plan you are hatching to stop animal sacrifice will turn on you like a sword of slaughter. Your blood will flow on the sacrificial alter.’ (55)

In Kamakhya Devi temple, rituals are performed according to *Kalika Purana*. It is an encouragement for the people, who believe in such practice. In *Kalika Purana* it is mentioned that if a person cannot afford an animal for sacrifice then he can offer his own blood but not more than four times the volume that can be placed on a rose petal. If the western corner of Chinnamasta is dug up, the skulls of animals sacrificed to the goddess will be unburied and if its southern end is dug up then blood will be found. Goswami makes her intentions clear that she dislikes the practice of animal slaughter through the character of Jatadhari. Jatadhari instructs Ratnadhar to visit every house and ask the householders about their feelings towards taking someone’s life for their own happiness. Indeed it is very selfish to kill someone whether it is an animal or a bird for one’s own happiness. A person suffering from Tuberculosis sacrifices five buffalos to save his own life. Still he dies within six months. It clearly shows that animal sacrifice is an old practice and it doesn’t solve any problem.

In the novel Goswami mentions one incidence where a child suffered from complete breakdown after seeing a goat being sacrificed. The child was forced to watch animal sacrifice despite knowing the fact that he was not able to bear it. Later on, for his treatment, he was sent to north bank where a family kept him inside a pit to cure him. Inside the pit the child could survive for four days but on fifth day he died. Goswami asks a valid question, ‘What need had he to watch if he couldn’t bear it?’(80) This incidence shows that for superstitious people to watch an animal being killed is as important as to sacrifice it.

It is believed that the blood of a deer keeps mother goddess happy for eight months while the blood of a black bull or a boar satiates her for twelve years. The Brahmins and hermits didn't want a ban on animal sacrifice because it was the main source of their earning and this process helped them to fulfil the necessity of food and feast. Goswami states that 'Human sacrifice stopped only after it was legally suppressed in 1835.'(82) Even Gandhiji protested for ban on animal slaughter at Dakhineshwar temple.

From her childhood days Goswami had seen this cruel practice. She always wanted to get it stopped. Perhaps this was the main reason to read *Kalika Purana*. She found out that this Holy Scripture suggests various alternatives. She suggests, "We can also please the Mother with honey, milk and yogurt. It doesn't say anywhere that the rituals cannot be performed without blood." But the devotees of Maa Kamakhya were too reluctant to get convinced with the idea. It is wrong to kill an animal with bare hands while the one who offers flowers especially Kundu flowers will get all his wishes fulfilled. Assam is full of natural beauty. It is a clear sign that Maa Kamakhya loves nature.

Through the character of Shambhudev, Goswami asserts the people killed thousands of animals just to get their desires fulfilled. The process of animal sacrifice to Mother goddess was very complicated. During this process drums were also beaten. The neck of the animal was massaged everyday for one month so that it could be beheaded in one single stroke. People believed that if it is not beheaded in one stroke then it is a harbinger of bad omen. After performing several rituals an animal was slaughtered with a single stroke of machete. Both devotees and tantrik used to colour their forehead with blood. The way in which Goswami described the whole process of animal sacrifice shows that they didn't want to stop the practice as they enjoyed the whole process a lot.

Even the tantriks encouraged the devotees to injure those who try to stop this practice. Naturally the devotees agreed to do so. People were constantly being encouraged to not only offer animal's blood but also their own blood to please mother goddess for a thousand years. Usually, tantrics preached for a long time and they repeatedly asked to offer blood. The novel mentions one incidence where a woman came forward and burst out in anger when she is asked to offer blood. It seems not the woman but Goswami was deeply hurt after seeing so

many slaughters. Through the character of this old woman Goswami kept her own views. After being frustrated the woman asked them to kill her as well. In this way Goswami has portrayed a few characters who not only disliked this cruel practice but also expressed their feelings about it fearlessly. Ratnadhar made a praiseworthy effort to stop animal slaughter through his art. He beautifully painted the scene of bloodshed and death of king Rudreshwar. Through his painting Ratnadhar not only portrayed animal sacrifice but also portrayed emotions and fears of animals. Animals cannot speak but it doesn't mean they are not terrified or scared. Whenever any animal was pulled for sacrifice, it tried desperately to set itself free. The fear and restlessness could be seen in their eyes. Their fear of death is natural as nobody wants to die whether it is a human or animal.

The patriarchal society used all its power to support animal slaughter. As Neena Kishore says "Central to the idea of power structure in women's experience is the concept of patriarchy." (3) For instance, Bidhibala protested against animal sacrifice. She even denied getting married which was the root cause of sacrificial ceremony. Her refusal made her father so angry that he became violent and threw his slipper at her which hurt her very deeply. She was kicked viciously.

A number of times Jatadhari preached devotees not to sacrifice animals. It is a false norm that mother goddess wants bloodshed. A mother cannot be thirsty of her own creation's blood. Some people who were against this anti sacrificial movement wanted to kill Jatadhari as well as his disciples. Both Jatadhari and students from Cotton College wanted to stop this practice. These people were not scared of death. They could even offer their own lives to stop animal sacrifice. By the end of the novel Jatadhari who was grief-stricken at the death of Dorothy got provoked by onlookers and offered his own blood. It was not only him, but his supporters as well offered their blood to Maa Chinnamasta.

Ratnadhar, with the students from Cotton College and other supporters, got the signature on petition and numerous people bolstered this idea of ban on animal sacrifice. Registers were heaped up with the signatures of common people. Despite of these endeavours, in the celebration of Deodhwni, a number of creatures were slaughtered fiercely in the temple. Different tantriks and reverends butchered these creatures on the sacred place of Goddess. They not

only smeared their faces with blood but drank it as well. They acted like frantic beings and were treated like God by the general population. The author portrays this unforgiving picture realistically in her novel. But Jatadhari was determined to sacrifice even his own life to stop this practice. Therefore, he presented the appeal to the head priest. It was declared in the petition that any creature could no longer be harmed in the name of sacrifice. Therefore, these innocent creatures must not be dragged to the holy place. If necessary, then enthusiasts should offer their own blood.

At the point when the petition was displayed to the priest, he asked Jatadhari to shed his own blood by cutting a piece of his body to demonstrate his petition. Jatadhari cut off his own flesh from beneath his navel. In this way Jatadhari made dreadful endeavours to stop animal slaughter. At last, the author leaves us unreciprocated with an expectation that perhaps the day will come soon when these practices will completely stop. As Prashant Goswami says, 'In the morning the sun rose once more. In the clear light of day, no one could see a trace of blood. Not a single bloodstain remained.'(186)

In a nutshell, we can state that Goswami presents a sensible photo of Assamese society where she draws out the firmness and lack of wisdom existing since ages. She not only expresses her views on the issue but also attempted to emphatically request for bringing changes. Her endeavours to stop such malpractice have expedited an upheaval on the younger generation. She without being terrified, talks against the social blemishes. Through her novel, her readers perceive her thoughts in which she realistically draws out the clear picture of society and raises her voice against social issues like animal sacrifice and many others.



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