

A Peep into the Gynocentric Study of Indira Goswami's *Ahiron*

Patel Sonal Shankarbai

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History

Published Online: 10 November 2018

Keywords

Gynocentricism, Gynocentric Theory, Gyno, Kentron, Biological, Linguistic, Psychoanalytical, Cultural, Feminism

*Corresponding Author

Email: snlpt1126@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Gynocentrism refers to a dominant or exclusive focus on women in theory or practice; or to the advocacy of this. In short, anything which is concerned exclusively with a female (or specifically a feminist) point of view can be considered Gynocentric. In literature, Gynocentric theory has come into existence. Many female and male writers too have dealt with this theory in their literary works. Indira Goswami is one of those writers who deals with the theory of gynocentric theory in her novels. *Ahiron* is a novel, deals with the concrete gynocentric theory.

1. Introduction

Gynocentrism is a term derived from the Greek gyno, means 'woman' and kentron, means 'center' is a fundamental feminist discourse that champions woman centered beliefs, identities and social organization. It also challenges the androcentric promotion of masculine standards. From a gynocentric perspective, gradually the assumption of masculine neutral norms has meant that femininity has traditionally been presented as lacking, secondary and deficient. To revalue sexual difference and femininity positively Gynocentric feminism is emerged in the field of literature.

Gynocentrism refers to a dominant or exclusive focus on women in theory or practice; or to the advocacy of this. In short, anything which is concerned exclusively with a female (or specifically a feminist) point of view can be considered Gynocentric. Feminist theorists have believed that gynocentrism gives the privacy to discuss women's views, needs and desires in their own words in their own literature. Gynocentric theory is built upon four pillars - biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural.

In the present paper, I am going to discuss cultural and linguistic models in detail applying to *Ahiron* novel. To understand Indira Goswami's work the study of these four models of gynocentric theory are very necessary. Having read her all works, we may say that she is a gynocentric writer by every inch. She is very simple in her writing so there is no problem to understand her language. She does not write but she narrates and describes her works in such a way that entire picture is seen in front of readers' eyes. In Indira Goswami's works, how women have been harassed in the patriarchal society both, biologically and linguistically are reflected very clearly. It is also shown how their body and language are immense source of inspiration and energy to them. The present novel exhibits and represents the camp life in general and the pathetic situation of women in the camp life in particular. Within the broader existential framework of freedom, choice and responsibility the claim of rights over the female body will be assessed.

2. Gynocentric Study of *Ahiron*

To understand the biological study of *Ahiron*, Rich asserted:

In order to live a fully human life we [women] require not only control of our bodies, we must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, the corporeal ground of our intelligence (39).

The gynocritics believe that females are different from males biologically and so they have a different set of biological experiences. The experiences of male differ from the female in every matter. It is necessary to study the biological imagery in women's writing. As per the opinion of the gynocritics, woman's body and its associated experiences are the source of immense energy and power for women writers.

Ahiron is the third novel of Goswami in which she completely avoids the issue of female biology. The biological aspects of women are apparently, fully and perfectly narrated in many works of Goswami. Because of her body, a woman has to suffer a lot and Indira Goswami has clearly mentioned her own physical harassment in her autobiography *An Unfinished Autobiography*. Violence against women is a worldwide social phenomenon which is not new. It has been inflicted in one form or another. Rehana Ghadially rightly observes:

[Though] violence against women is often seen as an assault against her body...more importantly it is a negation of her integrity and personhood (177).

Ahiron is the reflection of Indira Goswami's self-experience while she was living in Madhya Pradesh. In many of her novels like *Ahiron* and *Mamare Dhara* Troroval she has expressed her own experiences. While Indira Goswami was living in Madhya Pradesh, a bridge was being constructed over the *Ahiron* River which she had observed from close quarters and has been incorporated in her novel *Ahiron*. Her husband was an engineer so she has obviously observed the whole construction business through her own eyes. She appears very knowledgeable in all these matters but the main focus of her fiction is the suppression of women.

Goswami represents the physical harassment of women workers by the supervisory staff. Here, she has described the camp life of the engineers, who were looked after by servants. To satisfy their hunger for sex contractors supplied women to them and they attacked on poor and helpless women as hungry wolves. As a result, they became pregnant and abandoned by the men in critical situation. This fact is clearly reflected in many works of Indira Goswami. Poverty and penury drive tribal women and rural women to beg for a bare livelihood and sell their bodies to baboos from the towns in Ahiron. In the chaos of hunger and appetite, all moralities seem to perish. Kadambai, exploited by Gaurishankar, the truck driver, is an excellent example of it who after making her pregnant left the place. Kadambai, a pregnant mistress of Gaurishankar, waited for him to return as he had promised her to come back to take her with him but all these promises are nothing but an illusion. She, with developed pregnancy, waited for him every day and night. She asked everybody about the message of Gaurishankar's arrival, but all her efforts were futile. At last, her all the hopes of life came to an end and she gave birth to a child, without father. Goswami writes:

Do you see that woman? Do you see how she stands under that naked tree?

Harsul looked up.

The woman came forward.

Harsul recognized her. She was Kadam, Gaurisankar's Kadam. She had a baby in her hands. Harsul understood only too well. This was Gaurisankar's child.

Today she did not ask Harsul about Gaurisankar. She knew. It was time for the Sahib to go back.

Harsul took the baby in his arms.

This time Kadam could not hold back the flow of tears.

Going near the bare tree, she started weeping loudly (210).

At last, Kadam lost all her hopes about Gaurisankar's arrival and felt helplessness. Gaurisankar did not come back. He left Kadam in the lurch and vanished. Here, the symbols 'naked tree' and 'the bare tree' are artistically used by the author. Here, the tree is not naked or bare, but a woman who becomes naked or bare in the patriarchal culture. The circumstances created by men are responsible for a woman to be 'naked' or 'bare'.

The incident in Jivram's room is also very horrible. Men treat women only as an instrument to satisfy their physical hunger. They neither even care a little about the situation of women nor about the feelings and emotions of women. For them, a woman is only an object, a voiceless entity, nothing more. To make it effective Indira Goswami describes:

In Jivram's room, too, shouts of two or three men could be heard. The monstrous truth dawned on Harsul. For a few moments, Nani had become the common possession of all these men! Who were these men?

Harsul could not believe his own ears (153).

The horrible and disgusting thing is that whenever any new forester comes in the camp, the chowkidar, a man, named Ujagar Singh fetches a woman to spend a night with him. Patriarchy seduces the helpless, poor and needy women who does not have enough food to eat or clothes to wear. In order to fulfill their primary needs, these helpless women have to become prostitutes. It shows dark side of the patriarchal culture. In this way, the patriarchal culture forces a woman to become a prostitute. To emphasize this point, the author narrates:

When a forester sahib or a company Sahib comes, Ujagar Singh fetches her [Nani] here. This has become a routine. I hear that Bhalmiya Company. Sahib, probably you did not realize that Ujagar Singh carried her off on his cycle while it was still dark. We are poor people, sahib, and at Tarbha, Ujagar Singh rules the roost (159).

So, in the patriarchal culture, prostitution becomes one kind of business for those helpless women who want to satisfy their children's belly. Indira Goswami in *An Unfinished Autobiography* has also emphasized it by quoting the examples of helpless whores in Vrindavan who are exploited by the pujaries and the trustees of the temples. Through the description of all these incidents, we understand that Indira Goswami has satirically highlighted what patriarchy believes in. But she differs from the views of patriarchy in many ways.

In Ahiron, Goswami has used many words and phrases like 'a nude female form' (158) 'Haven't my breasts nine a pair of ripe melons?' (158) 'a fallen woman' (168), 'aided of clay' (158). All these phrases indicate how Goswami's mind has been conditioned by patriarchy which presents women's such inherent experiences as hateful, shameful, filthy and disgusting. She is almost echoing men's opinions and thoughts. The way she describes the above issues and experiences of women are not her personal belief but cultural conditioning determined by men. Yet, one feels the description of most of the incidents is completely centric. The description of Nirmala's desire for pregnancy shows that Indira Goswami writes like a woman. Her writing is full of womanhood.

If we read Ahiron from the gynocentric point of view, Goswami has described the positive aspect of woman and her body. She appreciates the courage of both and Nirmala. Through the description of Nani and Nirmala, Goswami has described that those women behaved and done what they wanted to do, not ding to the norms of patriarchy. When Nani had taken bath with Mansa, there was a fight between Mansa and Chota Sahib, between two men, for a woman. But none of them bothers to ask the desire of a woman. The fact is that she has voluntarily taken bath with Mansa. Nani does not want to obey anybody, she only thinks about her happiness and her happiness is with Manasa. So, she takes bath with Manasa, not with Chota Sahib though he desires her and wants her. With a voice barely under control, Mansa started screaming in his defense:

It is true I hold her hand. But we know each other since we were so high and bathed together naked in

the Ahiron at Charpara What had intention could I have sahib (128).

Here, as a gynocentric writer, Indira Goswami has described the willingness of Nanibai. If we look at this incident from the gynocentric point of view, there is not the exploitation of a woman's body. The self-desire of a woman is properly arid clearly indicated by the author. Here, the author has shown the true love between Mansa and Nanibai. Here Nanibai willingly submits herself to Manasa and establishes her individuality. Against the background of exploitation of women and perversion of sex, Mamoni Goswami has portrayed a positive love affair of a couple in conscious pursuit of fulfillment. In Ahiron, this affair is between Harsul, the thoughtful, serious and humane elderly Manager of establishment, and Nirmala, formerly Mrs. Pandey, who has been recently widowed. As the author narrates the love affair between them;

Their reflection trembled in the water of the Hashdeo. Here was another's woman by his side by one who was about to be liberated! As the poet said, honey flows from the lips of another's wife (114).

Before her marriage Nirmala was raped by a student lover on a public road and so in order to save herself from the hatred, ill treatment and comments of the society, she married a sickly man, Mr. Pandey, who died very early after their marriage. So her desire for love remained unfulfilled. She said to Mahesh Thakur that she could not survive without love and for her this love is not merely physical, either. So, the rape of Nirmala changed the course of her life, her dreams of a happy married life is shattered with this rape and in order to avoid all complexities and miseries of life, she marries to that sickly man whom she does not love at all.

Harshul, her second husband, is much older and there is a sense of inadequacy in his sex life. His loneliness increases and he begins to leave Nirmala too freely with his younger assistant engineer Mahesh Thakur. The romantic yearning of Mahesh Thakur takes the advantage of the loneliness of Hershel's wife, Nirmala, Mahesh Thakur feels tremendously attracted to the beautiful and exciting female body of Nirmala and so one day he says to her:

Nirmala, for me, you are always nirmal. I don't quite understand what is happening to me. Today, I feel like comparing you to Isadora Duncan, who transcended all the inhibitions and conventions of society despite retraining the purify of her soul. For me you are such a natural artist.....(198).

This could not have been a danger to a mature woman like Nirmala. But the deeper trouble is that Nirmala herself fears that perhaps she cannot conceive. She has an elemental urge to test herself; and goes out with Thakur to watch Hashdeo river in full spate. The barrage gate will be opened in no time but she persuades her younger admirer to go to a small island on the shallower side of the barrage, in a small boat. To quote this from the text:

The fragrance of her body which was like mat of a newly cut unripe coconut whirled his head as she came closer and closer to him. The demon in his head nicely tucked away in a corner through great restraint was. Waken up. Come, come this way. Step into the boat I am used to rowing. That island, this small patch of land surrounded by thorny bushes wasn't it specially created for you (186)?

The above description is symbolic. The rescued and brought to the camp by the police in the early morning. The friendship ends in a disaster. Nirmala has conceived but her dream of founding a new life in freedom cannot be sustained. She cannot be an Isadora Duncan, who talked of freedom of a woman, of woman's right to have children from any person she liked. She is overpowered with a sense of sinfulness. She aborts herself thumping on her bulging abdomen.

The situation of Nirmala is very pathetic at the end of the novel. Indira Goswami has portrayed the character of Nirmala as a woman who was raped by a student lover became a widow, loved Harsul and conceived the child of Thakur sahib. There are so many ups and downs in her life. She suffers a lot, bears pain and miseries given by patriarchy. But her strong will power led her towards victory. And at last, Nirmala achieved what she wanted, what she desired. She did what she felt. She did not bother about the views and comments of the patriarchal culture. Indira Goswami appreciates the thoughts and ideology of self -fulfilment of Nirmala in the following way:

A woman like her was totally free to love and bear children as she wished. Was it not a common truth applicable to both Nirmala and Isadora (208)?

So, if we look at the character of Nirmala from the gynocentric point of view - she is an excellent example of it. She is a woman who has 'control of her body' and after her pregnancy, a physical experience, she has become mature. So, her biological experiences lead her towards maturity and self - centeredness. This glorification and admiration of a woman, who without bothering about social and religious norms, went ahead to offer a helping hand and refuge to women exploited by the society. It becomes an important stance to be noticed by a gynocentric reader.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, the key to female emancipation lay in woman's release from her bodily identification. She views that although we are tied to our bodily selves by hunger or lust; we can overcome these base desires and pursue our full intellectual and emotional potential. According to Raman Seldom:

Now the time has come when woman's body must be heard and woman must uncensored herself, recover her good, her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal. She must throw of her guilt...(150 -51).

The woman has to realize her position and uplift herself. There is no one else to give her a helping hand. She has to

help herself, express herself and find a firm footing for herself in the family and the society.

3. Conclusion

To conclude we may say that Indira Goswami is a realistic female novelist of the Indo English literature. She has all the qualities of a real novelist. She is best in her all narration and characterisation. She has minutely observed all her male and female characters in her life and put them in her works very effectively. She is a real gynocentric writer of her contemporary time. From her early life of childhood to her old age she has felt all her bitter and sweet experiences and poured out all her

experiences in her literary works. Her best experience as a widow in very young age may be a result of her novels and short stories. She has perfectly portrayed widows in her novels. It is very clear that male and female writers differ from each other in many ways. Female writers poured out her sufferings and suppressed desires and wishes in her novels. She has raised her voice against the male dominated society. She has made milestone in the field of literature. She has made new path in literature for her existing and emerging women writers. All the four models - biological, linguistic, psychoanalytical and cultural of gynocentric theory are reflected in her literary works.

Works Cited

1. Ghadially, Rehana and Kumar, Pramod. "Bride Burning: The Psycho – Social Dynamics of Dowry Deaths" in *Women in Ghadially, Rehana, Women in Indian Society*, New Delhi, 1988.
2. Goswami, Indira. *Ahiron : A Novel. Selected Works of Indira Goswami*. trans. Pradipta Bargohain, 2004.
3. Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*, New York and London W.W. Norton, 1986.
4. Seldon, Raman. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981.