International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences
Vol-10, Issue-5; Sep-Oct, 2025

Peer-Reviewed Journal
Journal Home Page Available: https://ijels.com/
Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels

Widowhood, Orthodoxy, and the Crisis of Modernity: Re-Reading Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*

Akangkshya Sarma[1], Dr. Mukuta Borah[2]

[1]Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India
[2]Assistant Professor, Department of English, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Sharda University, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India

Received: 19 Aug 2025; Received in revised form: 16 Sep 2025; Accepted: 20 Sep 2025; Available online: 25 Sep 2025

Abstract— *This paper presents a critical examination of Indira Goswami's novel, The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker, reevaluating its portrayal of cultural decay and social transformation in 20th-century Assam. Departing from a traditional thematic reading, this study argues that the novel functions as a complex commentary on the dialectic between inherited tradition and revolutionary change. The fall of the feudal Adhikar family and the crumbling Vaishnavite Sattra are analyzed not merely as allegories of decline, but as sites where ideological and material contradictions are fiercely negotiated. Drawing on theoretical insights from postcolonialism and subaltern studies, this analysis interrogates how Goswami's narrative unsettles colonial and indigenous power structures. The paper delves into the gendered oppression embodied by the tragic figure of Giribala, whose subtle acts of resistance and eventual demise reveal the systemic violence of patriarchal orthodoxy. Concurrently, it examines the character of Indranath as a failed liberal humanist, whose tragic end exposes the pitfalls of both ossified tradition and uncritical revolutionary fervor. Ultimately, the paper will examine how Goswami's work transcends a simple elegy for a bygone era, presenting instead a nuanced critique of modernity and a compelling case for a more ethically grounded path toward social evolution.*

Keywords— ***Indira Goswami, Widowhood, Tradition, Feudalism, Caste, Gender, Violence.***

I. INTRODUCTION

Mamoni Raisom Goswami, one of the most celebrated voices in Indian literature, stands as a distinguished figure in Assamese literary and cultural history. Born as Indira Goswami in 1942 in Guwahati, Assam, was an Indian writer, poet, professor, scholar, and editor. Known by her pen name, Mamoni Raisom Goswami, she was awarded the prestigious Jnanpith Award in 2000, becoming the first Assamese writer to receive this honor. Goswami's works are characterized by their profound humanism, evocative portrayal of Assamese society, and relentless critique of oppressive socio-religious practices. Her deeply empathetic storytelling explores themes of gender, caste, spirituality, and social transformation, often set against the backdrop of a changing Assam.

Assamese literature, to which Goswami contributed significantly, is a rich tapestry of oral traditions, religious texts, and modern narratives that span centuries. Emerging initially through ancient scriptures like the *Kirtan-ghosha* of Srimanta Sankardeva, the founder of Assamese Vaishnavism, it gradually evolved to encompass diverse forms of storytelling, poetry, and prose. The colonial and post-colonial eras saw a surge of modern Assamese literature, reflecting the region's socio-political struggles, cultural heritage, and aspirations. Writers like Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Homen Borgohain, and others laid the

groundwork for a literary tradition that resonates with universal themes while remaining deeply rooted in Assamese culture. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, through her works, elevated this tradition by addressing critical issues such as gender oppression, feudal decadence, and the challenges of socio-political upheaval.

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's acclaimed novel *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* (Goswami, 2004) translated from Assamese as *Dantal Hatir Une Khowa Howdah* emerges as a profound exploration of Assam's socio-cultural and political landscape during a time of transition. Mamoni Raisom Goswami's novel *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is a Realistic novel, it is a novel of Social Realism. She received the prestigious Sahitya Sabha Award for this novel. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is a powerful novel that is listed as a masterpiece of Indian Literature by Sahitya Akademi and the National Book Trust. The novel is set within the confines of a *Sattra*, a religious Vaishnavite institution integral to Assamese society, the novel offers a poignant narrative of decline and transformation. The novel portrays how the rigid religious conservatism within the household of the Sattra Adhikar stifles the human instincts and desires of men and women, ultimately setting religion in opposition to humanity. Critics have noted that the story lacks a conventional villain, with the system and nature as antagonists. This unique approach makes the novel a remarkable work that vividly captures the true essence of the local setting. The Adhikar family, central to the story, symbolizes the erosion of the feudal order and the rigid religious orthodoxy that once shaped Assam's social fabric. Through this microcosm, Goswami unravels broader themes of decay, resistance, and reform that are deeply intertwined with Assam's history and its cultural ethos. The novel's title, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is imbued with symbolism, encapsulating the fragility and decay of a once-mighty socio-religious order. The elephant, representing strength, and its moth-eaten howdah, symbolizing decline, underscore the central theme of the novel: the inexorable fall of traditions unable to adapt to a changing socio-economic landscape. "The decadence and fall in the new politico-economic setup of a family of former glory and power forms the novel's theme. This decadence and fall of the family take place in the eyes of the author-narrator of the story. She has empathy for the family in the simultaneous struggle for life and futile effort to assert its power and spent-up force; and yet as one who also sees the limitations of the family to survive in the New Age with its new ethos, she sees the inevitability of the fall of such a family" (Sarma, p. 44). Goswami's narrative deftly intertwines the personal and the political, with the lives of her characters reflecting the larger struggles of a society caught between tradition and modernity. The novel revolves around the lives of three widows, Durga, Saru Gossainee, and Giribala along with Indranath, the Future Sattra Adhikar (Future head of the monastery). One of the central figures in the novel, Giribala is a young widow whose tragic experiences lay bare the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal and religious orthodoxy. Her forced isolation, the small acts of rebellion in the novel that define her resistance, and her eventual death at the end during a ritualistic penance reveal the intersection of gender, caste, and religious dogma. Giribala's story becomes a powerful critique of the socio-religious order, illustrating the human cost of maintaining outdated traditions. Parallel to Giribala's plight is the journey of Indranath, who grapples with the tension between preserving heritage and embracing reform. Indranath's evolution reflects the complex and often painful process of societal change. His interactions with the rising communist ideologies and the violent misunderstanding of his progressive intentions highlight the ethical dilemmas and human suffering that accompany revolutions. Goswami's portrayal of Indranath mirrors her time's societal and ideological conflicts, capturing the nuances of Assam's socio-political transformation. Mamoni Raisom Goswami's writing is marked by its rootedness in Assamese culture, enriched by her use of local dialects, historical realism, and symbolic imagery. Throthugh *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, she offers a nuanced commentary on progress and its ethical costs, questioning the violence often associated with revolutionary change. At the same time, her critique of feudalism and religious orthodoxy serves as a call for humanism and resilience, advocating for societal reform that prioritizes empathy and inclusivity. This research paper delves into the layered dimensions of *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, exploring its symbolic representation of decay, its critique of religious orthodoxy, and its examination of gendered oppression. It also investigates Goswami's portrayal of socio-political upheavals and their implications for Assam's cultural identity. Ultimately, the paper seeks to illuminate how Goswami's work serves as an elegy for a fading order and a beacon for a more equitable future, making her novel a timeless reflection on the challenges and possibilities of social transformation.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To investigate the decline of traditional familial and socio-political structures within the changing economic and cultural dynamics of the Assamese society, as portrayed in *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*.
2. To explore the interplay between religious orthodoxy and liberal humanist ideals, highlighting how the novel critiques oppressive

customs and advocates progressive transformation.

3. To analyze the representation of women, particularly Giribala, in the context of socio-religious conservatism, focusing on their struggle for agency and humanity.
4. To examine the ambivalence in the novel's treatment of tradition, where it simultaneously laments its loss and critiques its repressive nature.
5. To study the character of Indranath as a symbol of liberalism and social conscience, reflecting the novel's engagement with socio-economic change and resistance to orthodoxy.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to analyze Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, focusing on its thematic, cultural, and socio-political dimensions. The methodology involves close reading of the text to explore themes such as feudal decay, religious orthodoxy, gender struggles, and socio-economic transitions. Comparative analysis situates the novel alongside Goswami's other works and global literary traditions of social realism. Cultural-contextual interpretation examines Assamese feudal society, Vaishnavite traditions, and emerging liberal ideologies. Theoretical frameworks like postcolonialism, feminism, and socio-political criticism are applied to uncover deeper meanings, supported by a study of Goswami's narrative techniques and symbolic elements. This integrative approach aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the novel's relevance in Indian literature.

III. RESEARCH ANALYSIS

"It is believed that change in the society can take place only if the youth feels the necessity for such a change. Goswami's characters are portrayed as the rising youth who suffer at the hands of existing norms and customs, but eventually picks up courage and convincingly move forward to bring about change" (Sharma, 2015). Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is rated a classic by the Sahitya Akademi which deals closely with the harsh lives of Brahmin widows and the share-croppers of South Kamrup. "The novel is a bold description of the misery of the downtrodden and the Brahmin widows in the background of the decaying social order of the Sattra institution at the threshold of Independence. The novel is a melancholy poetry of human suffering, amidst the spread of the menace of opium and the rise of the Communist voice against the sharecroppers" (Baruah, 2007, p. 5). Numerous writers have centered their works on the need for societal transformation, challenging entrenched customs. Their narratives often focus on women as central figures, portraying them as individuals oppressed by patriarchal norms who rise to challenge these constraints. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, however, while maintaining the depiction of a marginalized woman, also shifts focus to a male protagonist representing the aspirations of the modern generation. In her novel, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, Indranath, a young man destined to become the next Adhikar of the Sattra, becomes a critical voice against the blind adherence to outdated social practices. Through his journey, the narrative highlights issues such as caste discrimination, the secondary status of women, and the harsh rituals imposed on widows, exposing the flaws in traditional societal structures. In short, the novel serves as a poignant exploration of societal decay, religious orthodoxy, gendered oppression, and socio-political upheaval within the context of Assamese society. One of the central objectives of this research is to examine the narrative's critique of religious orthodoxy and its connection to societal decay. The novel's setting within a *Sattra*, a Vaishnavite religious institution, becomes a microcosm of the broader societal transitions and challenges of early 20th-century Assam. Goswami meticulously captures the erosion of feudal structures through the Adhikar family, illustrating the disintegration not just of physical institutions but of their moral and spiritual significance. The Sattra system, with its rigid hierarchies, marginalizes individuals based on caste and gender. Postcolonial theories, such as Frantz Fanon's concept of 'internalized oppression', illuminate how these outdated systems contribute to their collapse by resisting reform. Fanon's concept of 'internalized oppression' is a critical lens for understanding the psychological and societal dynamics of colonized or marginalized groups. It refers to the phenomenon where individuals or communities internalize the ideologies and hierarchies imposed by oppressive systems, ultimately perpetuating their subjugation. This concept is deeply relevant in *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, particularly in the portrayal of the Sattra system and its resistance to reform. In the novel, the Sattra is depicted as a crumbling relic of a feudal and colonial past. While it represents a significant cultural and spiritual heritage, its rigid adherence to outdated traditions and hierarchies mirrors Fanon's idea of internalized oppression. The custodians of the Sattra, including the Adhikar family, uphold practices that alienate and marginalize others within their community, even as these practices contribute to the institution's decline. This perpetuation of rigid orthodoxy illustrates how oppressive systems can survive through the complicity or acquiescence of those they subjugate. Fanon's theory, articulated in works like *The Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 2004) and

Black Skin, White Masks (Fanon, 1967) argues that colonized societies often adopt the values, norms, and prejudices of the colonizers. This adoption creates a cycle of self-perpetuated oppression, where the marginalized groups internalize the belief in their inferiority and enforce the structures that subjugate them. In the context of the Sattra, this can be seen in its leaders' resistance to reform, even when such resistance accelerates the institution's demise. Their refusal to embrace change reflects a fear of losing authority, rooted in a colonial and feudal mindset that prioritizes hierarchy over adaptability. The character of Indranath serves as a counterpoint to this dynamic. As a progressive thinker, he recognizes the stagnation within the Sattra and seeks to challenge its practices. However, his efforts are met with resistance, not only from traditionalists within the institution but also from the broader community, which fears the disruption of the status quo. This resistance underscores the depth of internalized oppression, where even potential beneficiaries of reform view change as a threat rather than an opportunity. Fanon's concept also highlights the psychological toll of internalized oppression, which is evident in the lives of the marginalized characters in the novel. For instance, Giribala's suffering, along with other widows such as Durga who is Indranath's Aunt, and Saru Gohainne as widows within the Sattra reflects the entrenched patriarchy and religious orthodoxy that oppress women. Their marginalization is both a result of and a reinforcement of the system's inequities. Despite the visible decay of the Sattra, its adherents cling to its rituals and hierarchies, illustrating Fanon's assertion that oppressed groups often reproduce the very structures that confine them.

Another significant aspect of this research is the analysis of gendered oppression and patriarchy as depicted in the novel. Goswami's characters, particularly Giribala, offer a deeply empathetic portrayal of the struggles faced by widows and marginalized women. Giribala's life, marked by isolation and systemic discrimination, serves as a critique of societal norms that deny women agency. Giribala lost her husband at a very young age, being a teenage widow she had to face the harsh reality of widowhood both from her maternal home and her in-laws. She was married before she attained puberty, like most of the girls during that era. If a girl attained puberty before her marriage, society would most likely consider her family an outcast. That was one of the reasons why young girls like Giribala had to go through widowhood because of the huge age gap between the partners. "That girl's father will soon be made an outcast if he doesn't get her married fast….Right, you are my fellow! See how her body has shot up like a sturdy palm tree." (Goswami, 404) Giribala is the daughter of the Adhikar of the Sattra. She left her conservative and orthodox in-laws after the death of her husband and decided to spend the rest of her days at Sattra under the shadow of her family. Unfortunately, even the daughter of such a respectable family had to face the same rituals and religious constraints of widowhood in her equally conservative family. From the day she returned to the Sattra, she faced the problem of coping with the religious orthodoxy. People commented on her late husband's affairs and her mother-in-law's torture. One even asked her if the rumor of a baby dying in her womb between the chaos of the torture from her in-laws was true. All the women had come to Giribala on her arrival only curious to hear and gossip about the dreadful reality and torture of her in-laws from her mouth, but Giribala didn't utter a single word. In one instant, one woman suggested to Giribala's mother, "Listen Gossainee! You keep her for a few days and send her back. Her Husband's place is like heaven for a woman. If she runs away from her husband's house, she is like a naked woman loitering on the streets. Even if she tries to cover herself with clothes, people will snatch them away from her body" (Goswami, p. 410). While Giribala was on her way to the Sattra after returning from her in-laws, someone from the crowd commented, "Don't touch her! Don't touch her! You women with sindoor. She is a widow now. (Goswami, p. 407). Simone de Beauvoir's theory, as articulated in *The Second Sex* (Beauvoir, 1949) provides a compelling framework for understanding Giribala's character in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*. Beauvoir's concept of women as the "Other," relegated to a subordinate position in patriarchal societies, is vividly reflected in Giribala's life. As a widow in a rigidly orthodox Assamese society, her identity is reduced to her status within a patriarchal framework, where she is denied agency and subjected to systemic oppression. The cultural and religious norms of the Sattra institution enforce harsh restrictions on widows like Giribala, dehumanizing them and using tradition to maintain patriarchal control. Giribala's tragic death at the end during a religious ritual symbolizes the ultimate cost of such oppression, highlighting how societal structures sacrifice individual lives to preserve outdated norms. Despite her marginalization, Giribala's subtle acts of resistance, such as quietly rejecting certain rituals, reflect an assertion of agency and humanity, resonating with Beauvoir's emphasis on the psychological toll of "Othering" and the resilience of women in oppressive systems. Giribala's story serves as a critique of the dehumanizing effects of patriarchal traditions, aligning with Beauvoir's call for women's liberation from cultural constructs that deny them autonomy. Widows like Giribala found it difficult to live as human beings, suppressing their desires and accepting their fate. Once on the anniversary of Giribala's grandfather's death, the Adhikar family hosted a

feast. She was locked up in a remote chamber since widows were not permitted near any religious gathering because their presence was deemed unlucky. In Hindu Brahmin society, widows are also required to adhere to a rigid dietary routine. It is prohibited to eat meat when one's spouse has passed away. The aroma of the wonderfully cooked mutton curry prepared for the feast was too strong for Giribala to resist. She was severely humiliated after consuming the mutton curry, and her family severely punished her for disobeying them. Giribala experienced numerous instances where she believed that living was a punishment for widows like herself at the time, and she was only being eaten by social conventions. Another turning point in Giribala's life was her interaction with the European scholar, Mr. Mark, who visited the Sattra to study ancient Assamese manuscripts. Giribala helped Mark to assist with the work. While Mr. Mark or Sannyasi Sahab as he was named gained affection from the villagers for his devotion and integrity, a misunderstanding led to his downfall. Giribala, battling loneliness, approaches him privately with an emotional appeal, but Mr. Mark maintains his moral restraint. The villagers misinterpret this encounter as immoral and, driven by conservatism, accuse him of misconduct. Despite his innocence, Mr. Mark is forced to abandon his research and leave the region. Giribala faces severe societal condemnation and extreme penance imposed by the village priest. Her punishment culminates in a tragic act of self-immolation during a ritual of "purification," leaving Indranath a helpless observer of the injustice. This story reflects the clash between liberal ideals, societal norms, and individual suffering. Her death was a form of rebellion against the system and also a result of her giving up on society and its norms during a religious ritual becoming a symbolic indictment of a system that prioritizes tradition over individual well-being and rights. Goswami's nuanced exploration of widowhood aligns with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's concept of the subaltern, highlighting how women like Giribala are denied a voice in the societal discourse. Yet, her subtle acts of defiance, such as refusing to adhere to certain oppressive rituals challenge the patriarchal structures that seek to silence her. These acts underscore the resilience of marginalized individuals and hint at the potential for resistance and reform, even within deeply entrenched systems. The socio-political upheavals of Assam during the novel's setting also form a critical dimension of this research. Through the character of Indranath and his engagement with emerging communist ideologies, Goswami captures the clash between tradition and modernity. The Adhikar family possessed an extensive expanse of landed property, symbolizing their social and economic dominance. However, a specific region within their estate became a hotspot for rising communist agitation. The revolutionary tenants, emboldened by their ideology, not only challenged the Adhikar family's traditional authority but also demanded land redistribution. They went further by insisting that if the Adhikar family wished to retain ownership, they must personally cultivate it, an act deemed unthinkable in their Brahmin Hindu society. For the Adhikars, engaging in manual labor such as plowing the fields was only unconventional but a deeply ingrained cultural taboo. Ploughing, traditionally performed by lower castes or laborers, clashed with their societal identity as upper-caste landowners. The communists' demands struck at the heart of both their economic power and their deeply held religious and social traditions, creating a profound ideological and cultural conflict that challenged the very fabric of the Adhikar family's heritage and their place in the hierarchy of the time. Indranath as a person exemplifies liberal values despite the obstacles he faced. He helps an ostracized leper, makes sure a Muslim elephant hunter is buried and maintains composure in the face of growing danger by going against the religious taboo. But seeing his sister die as a result of social inflexibility drastically changes his viewpoint. He later chose to give up his land to the dissident tenants after realizing the connection between social conservatism and the current political-economic structure, arguing in favor of a framework that would allow liberal ideas to thrive. Unfortunately, others misinterpret his gesture. As he approached the tenants unannounced and unattended, he was brutally slaughtered after being mistaken for an enemy. Even while the tenants saw this needless violence as a sign of progress, it begs the question of why there should be bloodshed, particularly since Indranath had previously supported their cause. The episode critiques both Indranath's naivety and the communists' resort to excessive violence, offering a somber reflection on the costs of societal transformation. The Adhikar family's dwindling fortunes reflect the larger economic and social transformations brought about by colonial rule and the collapse of feudalism. Indranath's interactions with communist activists highlight the growing discontent among marginalized groups and their struggle for equitable societal structures. However, Goswami's critique extends to the ideological rigidity of revolutionary movements, emphasizing the need for empathy and inclusivity in the pursuit of genuine progress. Cultural identity is another thread woven into the narrative. The Sattra, as a symbol of Assamese heritage, represents the richness and limitations of tradition. Goswami explores the challenges of cultural preservation and adaptation by juxtaposing the decline of the Sattra with the rise of new ideologies. Symbolism and metaphor are integral to Goswami's storytelling. The title of the novel, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, encapsulates the themes of decay and transformation. The

image of a majestic elephant burdened by a deteriorating howdah can be seen to serve as a powerful metaphor for the decline of traditional institutions. This symbolism extends throughout the narrative, with the crumbling Sattra, hollow rituals, and individual struggles reflecting broader societal decay. By anchoring these symbols in Assamese culture and history, Goswami ensures that her critique resonates universally while remaining deeply rooted in local realities.

Goswami illuminates the intricate interplay of tradition, modernity, and social justice in Assamese society through her incisive critique and empathetic storytelling. Her work not only exposes the limitations of outdated systems but also envisions the possibilities of a more equitable and compassionate society. The analysis of *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* underscores its enduring relevance in understanding the societal transformation of Assam. "The death of a tradition is certainly very painful as the novel makes us feel but the novel also makes us feel that the to bear that pain is inescapable. The novel depicts human desires and the human longing to live by fulfilling those desires" (Sarma, p. 46). In *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker*, Goswami uses the Sattra as a microcosm to explore the broader societal implications of internalized oppression. The institution's inability to reform mirrors the struggles of colonized societies grappling with the legacies of colonialism. By depicting the gradual disintegration of the Sattra, Goswami critiques the dangers of clinging to oppressive traditions and highlights the necessity of introspection and reform for societal progress. Fanon's insights thus provide a valuable framework for understanding the novel's themes of decay and resistance. They illuminate how deeply ingrained systems of oppression sustain themselves and underscore the transformative potential of challenging internalized hierarchies. Through this lens, Goswami's work becomes not only a critique of Assamese society but also a universal exploration of the challenges faced by communities seeking to reconcile tradition with modernity.

IV. CONCLUSION

Mamoni Raisom Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is a profound exploration of the complexities of societal transformation, deeply rooted in the Assamese socio-cultural milieu. Through its rich narrative tapestry, the novel lays bare the tensions between tradition and modernity, shedding light on the human cost of preserving rigid socio-religious systems in the face of inevitable change. The analysis of this literary masterpiece reveals a nuanced critique of feudalism, religious orthodoxy, gendered oppression, and the socio-political upheavals that shaped 20th-century Assam, providing a microcosmic reflection of larger global transitions.

Central to the novel's thematic resonance is the portrayal of the Adhikar family's decline, serving as a symbolic representation of the erosion of entrenched feudal and religious structures. The moth-eaten howdah and the tusker are enduring metaphors for a decaying socio-political order that fails to adapt to the egalitarian demands of a changing world. This decline is not simply an economic or institutional collapse but a moral and spiritual disintegration, exacerbated by the internalization of oppressive traditions. The Sattra's resistance to reform epitomizes the tragic inertia of systems that prioritize hierarchy over humanity, mirroring Frantz Fanon's concept of internalized oppression. Goswami's portrayal of gendered oppression, particularly through the character of Giribala, further enriches the narrative's critique of patriarchal and religious orthodoxy. Giribala's journey from silent suffering to tragic defiance highlights the dehumanizing effects of widowhood in a rigidly conservative society. Her acts of quiet rebellion and ultimate demise during a ritualistic penance underscore the systemic subjugation of women, resonating with Simone de Beauvoir's critique of the "Othering" of women in patriarchal systems. Giribala's story stands as a haunting indictment of societal norms that sacrifice individual agency and well-being at the altar of tradition. The novel's exploration of socio-political upheaval, embodied by Indranath's interactions with communist ideologies, offers a layered critique of revolutionary movements. While the communist agitation challenges the oppressive feudal order, Goswami raises questions about the ethical costs of violent reform. Indranath's tragic demise serves as a poignant reminder of the dangers of ideological extremism and the importance of empathy and inclusivity in the pursuit of progress. His character encapsulates the painful dichotomy of preserving heritage while advocating for reform, reflecting the universal struggles of societies navigating the complexities of modernization. Moreover, Goswami's use of cultural symbolism and historical realism grounds her universal themes within the specific context of Assamese heritage. The Sattra, as both a cultural touchstone and a crumbling institution, encapsulates the dual challenges of preservation and adaptation. The meticulous depiction of local dialects, rituals, and societal hierarchies ensures that the novel's critique remains deeply rooted in its setting while resonating with broader themes of cultural and spiritual transformation.

In conclusion, Goswami's work stands as a testament to the power of literature to critique, inspire, and transform, offering a profound commentary on the cultural and spiritual metamorphosis of Assam and beyond by engaging

with the themes of tradition, transition, and tragedy. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* is more than a lament for a decaying order; it is a call for a more humane and equitable society. Goswami's narrative weaves together the personal and the political, the local and the universal, offering a timeless reflection on the challenges and possibilities of social transformation. Her critique of rigid traditions, coupled with her empathetic portrayal of marginalized lives, underscores the necessity of reform that prioritizes humanity and resilience over hierarchy and orthodoxy. This research demonstrates the enduring relevance of Goswami's work, positioning it as a vital commentary on the interplay between tradition, transition, and the human spirit in the face of tragedy. By delving into the layered dimensions of her novel, this paper underscores its status as a masterpiece that transcends its regional roots to offer profound insights into the universal dilemmas of progress and change.

REFERENCES

[1] Baruah, M. (2007). *Indira Goswami: A Compilation on Her Life, Works, and Achievements*.

[2] Fanon, F. (1952). *Black skin, white masks*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB11785653

[3] Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the Earth*. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/20048263

[4] Gohain, Prof. H. (n.d.). Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) & her Fictional World: The Search for the Sea. In *The Worm-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker* (pp. 44–53). B.R. Publishing Corporation.

[5] Goswami, M. R. (2002). *Indira Goswami (Mamoni Raisom Goswami) & her fictional world: The Search for the Sea*.

[6] Goswami, M. R. (2004). The moth-eaten howdah of the tusker. In *Rupa & Co. eBooks*. http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA90238637

[7] Guha, Amalendu. (1982). *Medieval and Colonial Assam: Society, Polity, Economy*. K. K. Publication.

[8] Jha, Abhijit. (2021). "Widowhood: Reflection on Oppression and Societal Dilemma as Illustrated in Indira Goswami's Text." *International Journal of Creative Research Thoughts*, 9(4), 1184-1188.

[9] Misra, T. (2011). Indira Goswami: Brave, gentle and bold. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29–31. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23065632

[10] Pujari, Tapash. (2022). "Nationalism and Communism: A case study of Assam." *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(1), 1-12.

[11] Sarma, S. (1963). Assamese literature. *Indian Literature*, *6*(2), 58–64. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23329407

[12] Sharma, M. (2015). Indranath and Giribala - The young adult dystopian characters in The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker. *I-manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, *5*(2), 19–27. https://doi.org/10.26634/jelt.5.2.3399

[13] Spivak, G. C. (2003). Can the Subaltern Speak? *Die Philosophin*, *14*(27), 42–58. https://doi.org/10.5840/philosophin200314275

[14] Tinsukia, Binita Bora. "Ecology, Culture and Postcolonialism: An Eco-critical Reading of Indira Goswami's 'The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker." *Drishti – The Sight*, 9(1), 22-29.