



Research Paper

Using Body as a Bunker: Understanding Indira (Mamoni) Goswami's resisting women in her writings with special reference to the short story "the Offspring".

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ABSTRACT: *If literature mirrors life then the reflections of women seen around is -- as a mere commodity and servant who must tend to all of man's needs – his house, his personal well-being and even his lineage. There are ample references in the texts and literature around the world of which the present mentioned text of Indira Goswami's "the Offspring" a short story is just an another addition to the list. That shows the eternal marginalisation of women. In other words, in a patriarchal set-up, women bear the responsibility for men's failures, though not for their successes. It is not only 'disreputable' and transgressive women who are the victims of a patriarchal order. 'Good' women or 'bad', there is a pervasive culture of devaluation of the female sex rampant everywhere. In Goswami's "the Offspring" the young protagonist Damayanti takes her body as a bunker both to offend and defend simultaneously. In peace time she allows her body to make love and be loved in return while in anger aborts (induces abortion) the same love which is no more acceptable to her and her situation.*

KEY WORDS: *Violence, Resistance, Transgression, Body etc.*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Indira Goswami is one of the most celebrated authors of Assamese literature, perhaps second only to LakhinathBezbaruah. Born in an upper-class Assamese Brahmin family, Indira Goswami is popularly known as MamoniRaisomGoswami to her readers and friends. Apart from being a brilliant novelist she is a prolific and a competent short story writer and has more than three hundred stories to her credit. All her works delve deeply into the issues of women, patriarchy, gender and caste. To Goswami, literature is a tool for social change. She is also the initiator and mediator of the peace process between the banned ULFA militants of Assam and the central government of India, facilitating talks and discussions with the purpose of ending the almost three-decades-old bloodshed in Assam. Her contribution and involvement has given the insurgency problem an adequate focus and a peace committee has come into existence in the name of People's Consultative Group to get the cause going.

She writes about what she has directly observed and has felt on her pulse. It is the wide ambit of her personal experience that she draws on in her writings. Her autobiography, *An Unfinished Autobiography* (1990), is testimony to this fact. The pain and agony she has suffered, as reflected in the autobiography, has not ended in bitterness but has been transmuted into sympathy. Her bitter experiences and suffering at the hands of society and its traditions could not divert her fidelity to humanitarian concerns. Her bitterest and sweetest experiences are depicted in a simple and unadorned language which creates the impression that everything is happening before our very eyes. Be it in her novels or short stories, the narrative progression of events is so finely controlled and so acutely firm that it almost makes the reader squirm. Yet never does she lose her simplicity or grace of expression. This article focuses on Goswami's complex treatment of sexuality, violence and women's resistance where she turns her vulnerable body as a bunker to counter every attacks that is targeted at her body to tarnish her image first and to break her mental equilibrium.

"The Offspring" is a very powerful story through which Goswami challenges some of the most hallowed institutions of society – the caste system, patriarchy, philanthropic organizations, traditional commerce, class inequity and organised religion. This is the story of a young Brahmin widow called Damayanti. She tries to make a living through hard work but is unable to make both ends meet with her two young daughters to feed. Finding herself at the end of her tether, in sheer desperation she turns to selling her body as a means of livelihood.

Pitambar Mahajan, a rich but non-Brahmin man from the same village, lives in the hope that one day he may beget a son, but he is disappointed by both his wives. The first one dies leaving him issueless while the surviving one takes to bed with a major illness after having dashed his hopes for a progeny. At last Pitambar's thoughts turn to the young widow who has taken to prostitution. He is persistently encouraged by the village priest who offers his own services to negotiate with Damayanti and convince her to accept the alliance. Pitambar thinks that if he marries her it will not only put an end to her problems but that she may be able to give him a son in the bargain. Under the cover of darkness, he hesitantly goes to meet her with the idea of eventually making her accept his proposal. He avoids going to her in the daytime to save his own reputation. Yet he musters courage to visit her at night, driven by the hope that if she accepts his offer he will have the courage to defy social strictures and people's condemnation.

Damayanti listens patiently to his offer. She even accepts the gift he has brought for her. But instead of marrying him she offers him her body. Pitambar is convinced that now it is only a matter of time before she accepts his offer of marriage. To please her, he agrees to spend the night with her and starts visiting her regularly every night. By financially providing for her he makes sure that she does not entertain any other visitor.

At last Damayanti becomes pregnant by this man. This is the happiest moment of Pitambar Mahajan's life. His heart is filled with gratitude for this woman for she is the only one who is capable of blessing him with a son. He starts day dreaming and building castles in the air thinking about the son to be born. He begins to imagine the different stages of his son's growth and development. While he is busy fantasizing, the village priest Krishnakanta brings him the news that Damayanti has lost the child. Pitambar's pleasant fantasy turns into a terrifying nightmare. Suddenly he imagines that his young son who is walking along the Dhaneswari slips and falls into the river. Pitambar thinks that Damayanti must have suffered a natural abortion, for she surely could have had no hand in inducing it.

But to his utter surprise she makes a candid confession to him. When questioned she seems galvanized and passionately declares, "I have myself induced this abortion. It did not happen of its own accord. It is enjoined upon me to earn a living even if I have to sell my body for it. But I belong to a high caste which is superior to yours. I can sleep with a man of a lower caste than mine. But I can't marry him to give him a child". When Pitambar Mahajan digs the land to confirm his dead buried fetus in Damayanti's backyard she shouts furiously: "What will you get there? Yes, I have buried it! It was a boy! But he is just a lump of flesh, blood and mud! Stop it! Stop it!" (Goswami, 2001: 30).

It is not only in "The Offspring" but in almost all her writings that Goswami focuses on and problematizes the gendered roles that men and women play out. Woman is seen as a mere commodity and a servant who must tend to all of man's needs – his house, his personal well-being and even his lineage. There are ample references in the text which show the marginalized and gendered role of women. For instance, the story begins with the description of Pitambar Mahajan whose shoes are covered with a thick layer of mud, and in the later pages we see that the handsome and the robust man of the past has gone grey and decrepit. There is a description of his unhealthy and wrinkled body, his clothes that look unattended and worn out, and his mud-covered shoes (17). The sole cause of this, it is made clear, is the chronic illness of his bed-ridden wife who is unable to attend to his physical needs. Further, his emotional distress seems to result from his wife's inability to give him a son. Goswami, thus, cleverly exposes the masculinist assumption that a man's physical and material inadequacies and emotional anxieties are caused by the failure of women. In other words, in a patriarchal set-up, women bear the responsibility for men's failures, though not for their successes.

Towards the early part of the story Goswami tells of a how the young Brahmin widow, Damayanti, is watched by the two men as she passes by. Her rain-soaked clothes that cling to her body invite the unwanted attention and titillate the prurient obscene imagination of the village priest Krishnakanta and Pitambar Mahajan, both of them old enough to be her father's age. To quote from the text:

Damayanti did not reply, but bent down to squeeze out the water from the wet folds of her mekhela. Her blouse had stretched tight and was pulled up, revealing the white flesh which to the two men looked as tempting as the meat dressed and hung up on iron hooks in a butcher's shop! (15)

The sexualizing and eroticizing gaze of the two 'respectable' men is very clearly being critiqued here by Goswami. Interestingly, it is not only 'disreputable' and transgressive women who are the victims of a patriarchal order. 'Good' women or 'bad', there is a pervasive culture of devaluation of the female sex. For instance, it is revealed that Pitambar's first wife died due to slow-poisoning by her husband. Though it was cold

blooded murder, a means of getting rid of an inconvenient wife, the action is justified by Krishnakanta, who as the priest is the spiritual and religious authority in the community. He declares that an extremely quarrelsome and nagging wife who was barren in the bargain deserved nothing less than death. Pitambar's second wife is submissive and docile, but she too is useless owing to her inability to bear Pitambar's child. She is bedridden most of the time due to rheumatism and panic attacks. Among all these three women Damayanti is coveted and valued by Pitambar, both for her physical beauty and her fertile womb. This underscores the patriarchal ideology that women are to be viewed only as sexual objects or as mothers. To Pitambar, Damayanti is potentially a good combination of both. He is delighted when the Krishnakanta whispers in his ear, "Just listen! I have dug up information. Right now her womb is empty. It is not even one month since she has buried the evil fruit of her last pregnancy" (21). The tremendous valorising of the reproductive role of women is also captured in Pitambar's castigation of his ailing wife – "You barren bitch! Why are you staring at me like that?" (26).

Critiquing patriarchy's control of motherhood Lucelrigaray argues that it is the outcome of a society which is founded on cultural matricide and which has taught us to consume the body of the mother. Irigaray argues that the maternal/feminine is seen as an unacknowledged resource, the *sang rouge*, of discursive practices, so women as mothers are seen to be the infrastructure of the social world. Continuing her argument Irigaray says that if exchange (as social relation) in the masculine economy requires a currency, then woman as object of exchange is that currency (Cited in Mary Eden, 2004:107). In her book, *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution* (1995), Adrienne Rich has also theorised the manner in which patriarchal culture 'institutionalizes' motherhood, thus disempowering women and their control over their own bodies and their reproductive processes, and prevents them from forging genuine bonds with their children. Western Radical feminists have collectively mounted a scathing critique of men's appropriation of women's bodies, sexualities and reproductive processes.

To return to Goswami's narrative, KrishnakantaBhagwati, despite being a Brahmin priest, agrees to act as a pimp for Pitambar. His venality and hypocrisy are revealed in the manner in which even while secretly negotiating with her he publicly targets Damayanti and condemns her for her shameful living. He even threatens her with panchayati and social sanctions to punish her for her despicable profession. But this is done only to force her to accept Pitambar's proposition. He gossips freely about her character: "This girl has brought disgrace to Bangra Brahmins. She has thrown to the winds all restraints and rituals prescribed for widows" (49). It is significant that his denunciation is caused by the fact that Damayanti is a Brahmin widow. Sexual transgression by upper-caste women is seen as especially condemnable as it endangers the 'purity' and identity of the entire caste. He remembers the rituals prescribed for Brahmin widows, but has forgotten his own priestly duties and dignity. Also, he has no word of criticism for Damayanti's lover – a college student who visits her to satisfy his lust, and spends all his college money on gifts for her. No one talks about or mentions him even once. Despite his association with Damayanti he gets away without any punishment or even chastisement.

An interesting feature of almost all of Goswami's works is her constant allusion to and revision of scriptures and epics. All her protagonists in "The Offspring" bear mythical names, but tellingly lack the values and characteristics customarily associated with their mythical counterparts. The story ironically references ideal pairs from myth – Nala-Damayanti, Ram-Sita, Savitri-Satyavan, and Dhurtarashtra-Gandhari. It seems that Goswami has chosen the names of her protagonists and characters very consciously with an intention to break the images and ethos from the mythologies that have been imbibed by the Indian psyche and have become naturalised as normative gender ideologies. In her attempt to deconstruct these mythical names Goswami appears as an iconoclast and radical feminist voice.

The mythical Damayanti in the Mahabharata is a woman known for her unparalleled chastity and profound devotion to her husband Nala. Even after they are separated by a curse Damayanti stays steadfast and waits for her husband with love and unfailing trust. But Goswami's Damayanti has no husband to wait for. Goswami does not talk of her suffering in only abstract or emotional terms, but materializes her struggle, thus exposing the deeply economic aspect of women's vulnerability. Unlike the mythical Damayanti, this Brahmin widow has to feed her two young daughters and run her house without any financial support. She lives hand to mouth and picks up any odd job that provides her some resource. Her only source of income, through the orders to make sacred threads and puffed rice for prayer rituals, is stopped because she is considered to be impure and contaminated. And even the tenants from her land start taking advantage of her position as a widow and stop giving her any share of the paddy. Under such tough circumstances this impoverished widow has no choice but to resort to trading her body for survival.

Her life is already difficult enough, and with the intervention of these two men, Krishnakanta and Pitambar who are like Kali and Dwapar of the Mahabharata, it only becomes worse. Goswami's radical representation of Damayanti seems to be an attempt to dismantle the values and meanings that are traditionally associated with mythical Indian feminine ideals and their names. As significant is the name 'Pitambar' – literally, 'the one wears who a yellow robe'. The mythological figure who comes very close to this attribution is the Hindu god Vishnu who stands second in terms of the hierarchy within the trinity of Bramha, Vishnu and

Mahesh. He is the God associated with preservation. He preserves mankind and every little species existing in the cosmos. But Goswami's Pitambar is a man who has destroyed his wives and cannot save his own progeny. His child dies in Damayanti's womb before seeing the light of the day. Goswami, thus, not only problematizes mythical femininities, but also mythical masculinities. The patriarchal valorising of the male as the locus of power and as the provider and the protector of women and children is thrown into crisis in Goswami's story.

Krishnakanta ironically recalls the god Krishna whose role in the Mahabharata is that of spiritual guide, teacher, mediator and the protector of Draupadi from the indignity of the *vastraharan*. As the village priest, the Brahmin Krishnakanta is unlike the mythical Krishna. Indira Goswami's Krishna is a weak, greedy and degenerate man to whom pimping appears to be a more lucrative business than his priestly occupation. He is a typical village buffoon by nature who keeps an account of others' affairs, and gossips and whispers in people's ear for his own selfish ends. Unlike the protector Krishna who is the saviour of the poor, helpless and distressed, this Krishnakanta is the predator who identifies his targets and victimises them. He acts as Pitambar's agent and negotiates his proposal to the helpless widow, threatening her with dire consequences in case she turns down his offer. It is he who incites Pitambar to give his surviving wife a dose of opium if she stares too much and interferes. From his talk it seems Pitambar's first wife died through slow poisoning and the prime instigator and culprit is none other than Krishnakanta, the old priest.

"The Offspring" effectively exposes how patriarchy is far from being a monolithic entity, but is instead interlinked with and interdependent on other social systems like caste and class. In other words, the story unpacks the complex nexus of caste, patriarchy and gender. The reoccurrence of the issues related to caste, patriarchy and gender makes it impossible to study gender oppression in the story in isolation. The world of the widow Damayanti is the world of men. It is the male who is both the norm and the enforcer of the normative. Such a world is run by the men like Krishnakanta and Pitambar. One seduces by words and arguments and the other with his money and wealth. The story presents a moving picture of a helpless woman chased by two men compelling her to do the things they want.

The story raises issues of women's subordination in a patriarchal society where a woman is just an object with multiple but set roles and uses. The following are only some of the functions the woman must perform within a patriarchal structure: she is an object of desire; her body is for comforting man and satisfying his physical needs; and her womb is both the coveted prize as well as the subject of control, because it is her womb which continues man's lineage and thus keeps him alive.

But Goswami's Damayanti stands up to the social sanctions and the possible punishment of excommunication from the village and her community. She is a controversial figure in Assamese literature who has drawn censure from many a critic. Writer, scholar and critic Janananand Sharma Pathak critiques and condemns Damayanti in the following words:

I am afraid I cannot and can never appreciate the unwomanly character of Damayanti in Mamoni's much appreciated story "Sanskara" (The Offspring). This Damayanti appears to me as a terribly lusty, sex-crazy, ravenous female – for I do not want to describe her as a woman but would like to term her as an entity in female human form of a ghastly gourmand – a ravenous rotten individual who is only interested in coital pleasure – totally devoid of the prime maternal instinct which exist even in the animal world (Pathak, 1996:108).

Not only this, Pathak also quotes Homen Borgohain's observations articulated in *Subalatha* that "a prostitute is neither a human being, nor an animal" (Cited in Pathak, 1996:108). The sexist bias of a scholar of the stature of Pathak is startling to say the least. It is this kind of androcentric criticism of literature that gave birth to gynocriticism that militates against the hegemony of pedantic masculinist critics who claim to be more knowledgeable about women than women themselves.

The strong reactions of critics such as Pathak is testimony to the threatening and radical character of Damayanti who, through her decision to abort her foetus, is claiming her right to choice and to her own body. Damayanti's submission to Pitambar's covetousness early in the story may seem as a conventional example of female subjugation. But her final decision to abort can be read as a refusal of the legislations of her immediate community, as well as a larger rejection of the very institution of motherhood. It must be remembered, though, that Damayanti is already a mother. She has two young daughters. In this light, perhaps her refusal to bear Pitambar's child is not so much her refusal of motherhood per se but as the rejection of enforced motherhood. Above all, it represents her rejection of the man rather than of the unborn child. However, there is also a troubling aspect to the shape her resistance takes. While she may be valorised in narrowly feminist terms, she endorses the hierarchy of caste. As a Brahmin widow she refuses Pitambar's child because she does not want a non-Brahmin child in her womb. Damayanti's 'resistance' can thus be read more problematically as her desire to keep her Brahmin status and caste superiority intact by killing the unborn foetus. How does one then reconcile this with the feminist expression of her individual will related to the right to her own body, sexuality and reproductive freedom?

This complex node in the story underlines the fact that resistances, including gendered resistance, are complex, troubled and often compromised by the fact that women are embedded within social structures and

may, in specific circumstances, be both resistant and complicit subjects. Also, specific forms of resistance are shaped within the determinate contexts of individual women's lives, contexts that both enable and delimit women's resistant possibilities. Given her state of absolute gender subalternity, Damayanti draws upon the only resource she has, her caste identity. Owing to her utter helplessness and poverty she has accepted Pitambar's proposal. Then she proceeds to use her body, her sexuality and her womb to ensure her own survival and that of her daughters. Basing her argument on Marx's critique of commodity, Luce Irigaray argues that in a "masculine economy" of social relations, woman as a virgin represents pure exchange value, a mother has use value and a prostitute has both use and exchange value (Cited in Mary Eden, 2004:107-108). Damayanti strategically conflates the separate roles of mother and prostitute – as Pitambar's "whore" she exploits the exchange value of her body as sexual object to earn the resource to bestow motherly care and protection on her little daughters. And by rejecting Pitambar's child she appropriates the right to choice regarding the men whose progeny she will birth and whose she will not. While her caste bias is troubling, yet it opens up a strange and new dimension to her character giving scope for more nuanced feminist theorising of the imbrications of gender, caste and class hierarchies. Goswami's genius lies in making both her text and the character complex and contradicted as indeed women's lives are. While Damayanti seems like a complicit caste subject, one cannot ignore the fact that she is also a resistant gendered subject who uses her womb as her most powerful weapon against patriarchal injunctions.

All the women in Goswami's writings appear to be constantly at war with themselves and with the world where they are suppressed, exploited and made the easy and common victims of male atrocities. Goswami's short stories, novels or even her autobiography give recurrent and powerful expression to women's pitiable plight, their precarious life and uncertain future that seems always in the hands of powerful men. There is a pervasive and terrifying sense of women's vulnerability, a sense of constant danger in even the most banal or mundane aspects of their lives. They are looted, molested, exploited and even murdered for meagre amounts and petty reasons. However, Goswami's representation of women ranges from those who have surrendered to patriarchy and are actively complicit in its workings, to those who have been tamed and domesticated, and some who continue to rebel despite all odds. What is common to all these women is that complicit or resistant, almost all of them meet unhappy, even tragic ends.

Durga and the elder Mrs. Goswami in *The Saga of Kamrup*, Mrinalini, Sashiprabha and Saudamini in *Nilakanthi Braja*, Nimai Rabhain *The Beasts*, and other women in Goswami's long and short fiction are seen to willingly surrender themselves to the injunctions of patriarchy, blind to the fact that while aligning with the oppressor might win them benefits, in the long run it only disempowers them and keeps them in a state of subjugation. Tellingly, despite their complicity, they too meet with unhappy and tragic ends.

Characters like Saru Gossainee in *The Saga of Kamrup*, Manohar's sister in "The Journey", Taradoin "Empty Chest" and Phuleswari in "To break a Begging Bowl" are women who are not willing subjects of patriarchy but have been tamed by the system's expropriation of their economic resources and personal autonomy, by the imposition of rituals and rigid codes of gender conduct, and even by the imposition of harsh physical and social punishments.

The third type of woman in Goswami's fiction is headstrong, rebellious and transgressive. In this category fall women like Damayanti and Giribala, as well as Narayani (*Rusted Sword*), Padmapriya ("Under the Shadow of Kamakhya") and Bhuvaneshwari ("To Break a Begging Bowl"). Damayanti is the victim of the male dominated society where men like Krishnakanta and Pitambar seek to appropriate her sexual subjecthood and possess her womb for their use. Giribala (in *Saga of South Kamrup*) is the victim of the callous feudal patriarchs who, driven by both greed and custom, deprive her of her share in the property, her right to decent livelihood and the last vestiges of her self-respect. Narayani (in *Rusted Sword*) on the other hand is the threefold victim of her own low caste, her gender and the lust of a powerful upper caste man. A very beautiful young harijan girl, she has a romantic liaison with a young engineer. On the banks of the Sai, in the midst of thorny bushes, she spends many a lovely evening revelling in the fulfilment of her desire. But one fine day she is deserted by her upper-caste lover. She then marries a harijan sweeper who subjects her to physical violence and squanders all her earnings on alcohol. Her only source of survival is to satisfy her boss's lust who in return gives her money. She eventually becomes a prostitute. From a young, beautiful girl aflame with dreams and aspirations she becomes bitter and harsh, but rebellious to the end.

In the short story "Under the Shadow of Kamakhya", Padmapriya is deserted by her husband Bhuvaneshwar and his family owing to a small spot of leucoderma on her back which they fear is white leprosy. Forsaken by her husband within a very short time of her marriage she secludes herself completely in a small enclosure in her utter helplessness and frustration. From the day she is abandoned by her husband, her own parents' love and sympathy is replaced by rejection reflected in the new harshness in their tone when they speak to her. She feels unwanted and burdensome. Even her father's guests and the community talk insensitively about her, while her own childhood companions hesitate to visit her or make any personal contact. She finds a new meaning in life through her new-found passion for gardening. It is during one of her searches for the white

kunda flower/jasmine saplings that she forms a relationship with Sambhudev, the priest in charge of the ritual sacrifices. Padmapriya, a docile, helpless and forsaken girl who has so far been unaware of her own body, of its potential use and power, now suddenly becomes aware of her sexuality. She develops a physical proximity with Sambhudeva and it results in her getting pregnant. She is now faced with the seriousness of her plight and further social ostracisation should her secret get out. She fashions a strategy for survival as well as revenge. Armed with her friend Lavonya's plan she meets her husband Bhuvaneshwar alone in a secret enclosure in the middle of the night at the wedding of one of her friends. For the first time she makes her body speak on her behalf. Her intoxicating and now fully-developed and luscious body becomes both the method and the medium of communication, and as a result Bhuvaneshwar is not only bewitched by her touch and fragrance but is also immediately tamed. Bhuvaneshwar's rediscovered love for Padmapriya is followed by his frequent visits to her and her family, resulting in a physical union. He even goes to the extent of declaring the expected child in Padmapriya's womb to be his own. The story takes a very surprising twist at the end when Padmapriya retaliates against her earlier desertion and abandonment by her husband. She avenges all the agony that she has been subjected to for two whole years for no fault of hers. It is her pregnancy (which she proudly flaunts) that she uses as a tool of vengeance against Bhuvaneshwar. Her pregnancy in fact provides her an opportunity and a weapon to avenge all the mental and emotional assaults that she had suffered simply for being a young female, her gender subalternity compounded by her vulnerable age. She confronts Bhuvaneshwar and confesses boldly that the child in her womb is not his but the fruit of an unlawful liaison with Sambhudev. In one stroke she deconstructs the sanctity of the institution of marriage, valorised within patriarchy as an indissoluble and sacramental contract, and in addition claims her right to autonomous desire outside of the mandated marital bond. Though Indira Goswami has often resisted the label of a feminist writer, her treatment of proscribed subjects such as sexuality and women's claims to sexual subjecthood makes her work strongly feminist.

Similarly, Bhuvaneshwari, the young but unflinching protagonist of the story, "To Break a Begging Bowl", resists the imperatives of patriarchy despite her tender age. In this work, two generations of women – the mother Phuleswari and her two daughters Annabala and Bhuvaneshwari – become the victims of male lust, treachery and atrocities. The moving story of Phuleswari and her two daughters is told in a very cinematographic fashion. The story begins with the aged Phuleswari standing on the bank of the Jagalia on a stormy night and recalling the tragedy that had ravaged her some forty-eight years before. In a flashback, we are told of a similar stormy night when a soldier had knocked on her door, barged inside and stripped himself of his clothes. Before she could understand what was happening, a melee of villagers accompanied by soldiers had gathered just outside her house. She was unnecessarily charged and tortured for no fault of her. Her character was blemished and she was branded as a whore for the rest of her life. As long as her husband had been alive, her life had passed uneasily.

Her first daughter Annabala is married off to a man who turns out to be a drunkard and impotent too. Within a few years of marriage, he dies of liver damage and Annabala returns to her mother for good. Phuleswari has hardly spent a few days in peace when another calamity befalls her in the form of Annabala's madness. The Choudhary's son from the village seduces Annabala, subsequently deserting her and duping her of her land. Betrayed by her lover who has not only abandoned her but also cheated her of her land, Annabala goes insane. Despite losing her senses, she continues to love him even in her insanity. Phuleswari's younger daughter Bhuvaneshwari is also entangled in the net of a contractor's lust. She is the only female among the three who despite going through a tough time and miserable circumstances does not lose her spirit of resistance. She is a strong-headed rebel who confronts the lecherous young men from the village and their lewd comments boldly. She agrees to work for the contractor away from home even though she is aware of his dark intentions. Despite her exploitation by the contractor, she continues to hold on to her fiery spirit. She is the only one who confronts the Choudhary's son at his place demanding that he return Annabala's land that she had mortgaged for a very meagre amount in her semi-conscious state.

She also decides to bring up her own illegitimate child all by herself despite the stigma that she would have to bear as a young unmarried mother. When she shares her plans with her mother, the latter explodes in anger, "You bitch! What will you say when people ask who the father is?" (Goswami, 2001: 191). At this Bhuvaneshwari responds by spitting on the ground and hissing, "I don't care for anybody! And a father's name? I have no need of it!" (191). The story has a tragic end with Phuleswari's only son Haiber being gunned down by the police. But what finally stands out in the reader's mind is the irrepressible and feisty spirit of the young Bhuvaneshwari even in the face of overwhelming odds as a young and vulnerable woman without male protection.

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