

## **Minority Voices and Environmental Disparities: An Ecofeminist Critique of Indira Goswami's *The Blue-Necked God***

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**Abstract:** This research paper explores the ecological imbalances shown in *The Blue-Necked God* by Indira Goswami. It investigates the complex interrelation between gender-related concerns and the deterioration of the natural environment. It effectively depicts a society characterized by the brutal exploitation of resources of the environment, water pollution, and widespread deforestation, all justified under the guise of advancement and economic expansion. Against this contextual backdrop, it explores the subtle connection between patriarchal power systems and the oppression of women, as it relates to the narrative of environmental degradation. It also explores the portrayal of female characters whose lives are deeply connected to nature. This paper examines how political and economic patriarchal structure perpetuates ecological harm. The Eco-feministic approach highlights the need to acknowledge the inseparable connection between environmental degradation and the oppression of women. This approach ultimately promotes the pursuit of a future that is both fair and sustainable.

**Keywords:** Ecofeminism, Environmental Degradation, Oppression, Women, Nature

### **Introduction**

In the realm of Indian literature, particularly within the Assamese literary arena, Indira Goswami, also known as Mamoni Raisom Goswami, occupies an important position. Indira Goswami is a well-known figure in the field of Indian literature. She received the Jnanpith Award in the year 2000, considered to be the highest literary award in India. She is widely renowned in the literary world. Goswami, born in 1942 in the state of Assam, which is well-known for the cultural and historical value of its territory, was introduced to the world of literature at a young age. The family atmosphere

in which she was raised, which was characterized by a strong participation with intellectual and cultural interests, was a significant component that led to the development of her aptitude for literature. This played a significant role in the development of her skills. An indelible impression has been made on the landscape of Indian writing by Goswami's captivating narrative style. As a result, she has garnered a great deal of attention and appreciation within literary circles.

*The Blue-Necked God* sheds light on the fundamental contradictions that are present within patriarchal Hinduism and how it makes use of religious traditions as a means to explain the subjugation of their female members. *The Blue-Necked God* sheds light on the anguish and distress endured by the Radheshyamias, who are the unfortunate widows of Vrindavan. These Radheshyamias reside in the holy city to find peace and consolation for their damaged minds. Furthermore, it highlights the existence of gender-based discrepancies throughout the entirety of Hindu culture, notably about the different expectations and treatment of men and women. It is possible to interpret the oppression of women as a breach of natural law. When viewed in this light, the natural world and women become synonymous. The selected work investigates the significant debate over the relationship between people and the natural environment. In the novel, the city of Vrindavan is portrayed which is experiencing a considerable decline in its environmental conditions. To illustrate the negative effects of this shift, she draws attention to the fact that the city's cherished woodlands have been transformed into accommodations and religious structures. She gives a thorough examination of the complex relationship that exists between the exploitation of women and the destruction of the environment and highlights the interconnectivity of these two phenomena. Audiences who have a vested interest in the issues that women face, the environment, and the prospects of humanity continue to be influenced by this literary work in a long-lasting way. The progressive stance it takes on environmental issues and the feminist perspective it holds are two of the things that set it apart.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how she establishes the connection between the destruction of the natural world and the subjugation of women. The narrative places particular

emphasis on how it illustrates ecological imbalances and the complex relationship that exists between gender concerns. Within environments, this theory proposes that the exploitation of nature and gender inequality are inextricably linked and mutually reinforce one another.

Françoise d'Eaubonne was a prominent figure in French literature, known for her contributions as a novelist, labour rights advocate, environmentalist, and feminist. In her publication in 1974, titled “Le Féminisme ou la Mort,” she introduced the concept of ecofeminism, intertwining connections between the exploitation of women based on caste, class, gender, and race, as well as the devastation of nature, is what constitutes this phenomenon. From the perspective of Sherry Ortner, an anthropologist, it is generally accepted that women have a stronger connection with the natural world than men do. A significant portion of their life, particularly in more rural places, revolves around it. There is just one reason to consider women and nature to be the same: their capacity for reproduction and raising children. The primary idea behind ecofeminism is the intertwining of women with the natural world. Several women in developing countries live close to the natural environment. It plays a crucial role in a significant portion of their activities, particularly in traditional and rural areas. However, the deterioration of the ecosystem has an impact on them. Tribal people rely on wood for both their means of subsistence and for medicinal needs. This underprivileged segment of society is impacted by deforestation. The study of ecofeminism looks into how humans oppress women and non-human worlds, and how this power imbalance affects both. They believe that patriarchy is the source of all forms of social injustice, including racism, caste, gender, and class, as well as the exploitation of nature.

Ecofeminism is a significant theoretical paradigm that asserts that there is a fundamental connection between the subjugation of women and the destruction of the environment. This draws attention to the intrinsic relationship that exists between the two. This correlation adds validity to the idea that patriarchal cultural systems purposely accentuate both features, which is supported by the fact that this connection exists. The exploitation of the environment and the enslavement of women are interconnected phenomena that manifest themselves as a result of a particular perspective that

emphasises dominance and control, which is typically articulated through hierarchical social customs, according to this theoretical paradigm. According to this, the enslavement of women and the exploitation of the environment are interconnected phenomena. In other words, the perception that men are superior to women is the basic variable contributing to such phenomena. In the course of this investigation, we will investigate the massive quantities of ecofeminist literature that are available. Greta Gaard claims that “ecofeminism’s basic premise is that the ideology which authorises oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (1).

Vandana Shiva, a prominent Indian environmental activist and an advocate for food sovereignty, has gained widespread recognition for her contributions to the field of ecofeminism. It examines the correlation between the exploitation and deterioration of the environment and the subjugation and oppression of women. Shiva’s ecofeminist perspective encompasses a diverse range of concerns, including but not limited to biodiversity, biotechnology, sustainable agriculture, and the empowerment of women, with a special emphasis on the context of developing nations. She argues that contemporary scientific and technological advancements, under the influence of patriarchal and capitalist agendas, not only have detrimental effects on the environment but also perpetuate gender disparities. The focal point of her research lies in highlighting the significance of traditional knowledge and customs, particularly those about rural women in India, in the conservation of biodiversity and maintenance of ecological equilibrium. Through her advocacy for organic farming and opposition to genetically modified foods, Shiva establishes a direct correlation between environmental health and the overall welfare of individuals and communities. She emphasises the significant contribution of women in the fields of agriculture and resource management, underscoring their pivotal role as agents of change in combating environmental degradation. Her perspective presents a compelling analysis of the influence exerted by multinational corporate entities on the environment and gender parity.

The work of Goswami is renowned for its complete description of the complicated connection that exists between societal standards and environmental circumstances. This is a fact that is widely acknowledged. Concerning the overall relevance of the work, it is precisely this relationship that is responsible. Her works of art usually dive into the complexities of Assamese society, shedding light on the struggles and resiliency displayed by the people who live there, with a special emphasis on women, against the backdrop of the natural issues that they face. She does this by putting the spotlight on the people who live there. The fact that women are disproportionately affected by these challenges is brought to the attention of the audience by her. When she played a pioneering role in bringing these issues to the fore, she took the regional environmental concerns of Assam, such as of deforestation, flooding, and soil erosion into the larger arena of literary discourse.

A significant ecological imbalance has occurred within the holy city of Vrindavan, which is located in India. *The Blue-Necked God* provides a powerful critique of this imbalance. Goswami's depiction of the urban environment is marked by a broad degree of pollution, substantial deforestation, and the relentless exploitation of its natural resources. These are the characteristics that define the urban environment. Vrindavan is confronted with many physical and social issues, including the precarious situation of its widows, the destruction of its sacred sites, and the declining animal population. These challenges are direct manifestations of the ecological imbalance that exists in the region. An experience that is traumatic for a widow is the loss of her husband, which leaves a huge gap in her life and causes her to experience a profound sense of loss. Hence, the experience of being a widow for a woman is a shocking occurrence in her life. The situation that millions of widows in India are forced to endure and from which they never fully recover. Trauma can be caused by several significant factors, including the passing of a loved one or the occurrence of an incident. It may be the consequence of a terrible occurrence that has a long-lasting effect on the mental and emotional health of the particular victim. Through the process of deforestation that has taken place in the Braj region, this work provides a significant depiction of the ecological imbalance. As a result of the deforestation that has taken place in the region surrounding Vrindavan to make room for

agricultural activities and development, the city is now susceptible to the effects of environmental variables. Because of this, there has been a visible increase in the amount of soil erosion, the number of instances of floods, and the amount of air pollution. There are so many temples and other religious institutions located within the city of Vrindavan, which contributes greatly to the city's already high level of pollution. Incense and wood are both sources of harmful pollutants that are released into the atmosphere when they are burned at these precise locations. The mistreatment towards Radheshyamis is also evident when the author talks about the extensive destruction of the forests around and within Vrindavan. "The branches and twigs of some of these (trees) had dried up and looked like thin, dry, fish bones" (Goswami 2).

During their everyday activities, widows were forced to engage in street begging as a means of sustaining themselves due to the adverse impacts of pollution, which disproportionately affects widows in the city. "These women were compelled to sing even if they were starving" (Goswami 23). The mismanagement of Vrindavan's natural resources contributes to the worsening of the ecological imbalance that exists there. The Yamuna River, which flows through the metropolitan landscape, is subjected to a substantial amount of pollution due to the discharge of sewage and garbage from industrial processes. As a direct result, the river's water quality has degraded to the point where it is no longer safe for consumption or use in maintaining personal hygiene. There has been a significant decrease in the city's water table as a consequence of the excessive exploitation of groundwater in the town. It impacts the local animal population due to the environmental imbalance in Vrindavan. As a consequence of cutting down trees and polluting the environment, the number of birds that live in the Braj region has decreased. Most of the time, the cows that are revered as sacred creatures are neglected and mistreated. This is a common occurrence. Because they are driven to engage for food within urban areas, they regularly come into contact with an increased risk of catching illnesses.

The Blue-necked God provides a profound ecofeminist perspective by presenting a painful investigation of female characters and their challenging connection with the environment. Their lives are constrained by the rigorous religious practices and societal expectations that are prevalent in the

religious community. In this tough actual world, Goswami successfully blends the characters' contacts with the environment, so weaving a complicated thread of dependency and communal anguish. This is accomplished through the use of the environment. In Vrindavan, the existence of widows is inextricably related to the Yamuna River, which is an essential source of nourishment for the society. Therefore, the river is an integral part of the community. Furthermore, their daily rituals, prayers, and overall survival are inextricably connected with the ebb and flow of the river. Priests ask young widows who live in poor housing to live with them. They solicit sexual favours from these vulnerable widows in return for offering "protection" against other males. At the Biharimohan Kunj temple, Sashiprova was forced to live with the priest Alamgarhi as his mistress. She recounted her humiliation in front of Mrinalini. "One day he asked me to disrobe completely in front of him and I did. He scrutinized my body thoroughly in the light of the lamp" (Goswami 59). However, the river, which was once considered to be a sign of untaintedness and purity, was subjected to contamination and degeneration as a result of human acts. This is a representation of the horrible circumstances that the widows are currently experiencing. The desolation of the river, which is defined by the substitution of its once-active ecosystem with stagnant waters and devastating aromas, acts as a metaphor for the widows' emotional experience of being cut off from others and losing their feeling of dignity.

A woman is considered a man's property in a patriarchal society. Prior to marriage, she relies on her father and subsequently, on her husband, and following his demise, she must depend on either her child or her husband's family. Women and nature both silently endure men's cruelty and mistreatment. Unseasonal precipitation, drying out of the Yamuna River, and reduction in forest size exemplify the degradation of nature caused by humans. "The water was starting to dry up and there was around mass of sand in the middle of the river" (Goswami 26).

Carol Adams brings ecofeminism a fresh perspective by addressing both women's and animals' exploitation. Animals are as integral to Earth as humans are. However, men perceive animals as 'other' and use them to serve their benefit. Goswami empathizes with animals and illustrates their

deplorable treatment by humans. She illustrates how the livestock carts are laden with such weight that it becomes impossible for the bullocks to pull them. The people who own the bullocks become insensitive to the suffering of the animals due to their selfishness, “necks of poor bullocks almost touched the ground under sheer weight” (Goswami 10). Within the natural environment, they receive a glimpse of a realm that is free from the taint of human depravity by observing the stunning greenery, the vibrant colours, and the soothing sounds. These statements provide the impression that there is a significant connection between women and the natural world. This connection evokes a sense of belonging that stands in stark contrast to the fact that women are not by the rules of society. The narrative moreover underlines the bravery of the widows and their potential to locate consolation within the realm of nature. Individuals, despite the challenges they are confronted with, find comfort in the presence of many species of birds, insects, and arboreal critters, thereby forming a strong connection with the plants and animals that are located in their immediate proximity. The existence of these links is indicative of a profound regard for the natural world, which acknowledges the natural world’s inherent value that goes beyond the usefulness of humans. Goswami’s ecofeminist discourse goes beyond only depicting the natural environment in its entirety. The narrative dives into the investigation of the idea of “Mother Earth” as a fundamental entity that offers sustenance, vitality, and a profound spiritual connection to its inhabitants. The prayers and rituals that widows execute, which are typically aimed towards the Yamuna River, are symbolic of a great spiritual connection with the earth. It is a sign that people have realised that the natural environment should not be considered merely a method of exploitation, but rather as a sentient creature that is worthy of admiration and deference.

The ecofeminist ideology of Shiva emphasises the inherent connection that exists between discrimination based on patriarchy and the destruction of the environment. According to this point of view, both problems are linked back to a common mindset that views nature primarily as a method of exploitation, rather than acknowledging the inherent value of nature and the fact that it is worthy of reverence. Goswami wrote *The Blue-necked God*, in which she beautifully exposes the



marginalisation of Vrindavan widows and how they are restricted to different widowhood rituals. To demonstrate Shiva's statement that patriarchal systems and the degradation of the environment are interconnected, the observation that there is a correlation between the marginalisation that widows go through and the pollution of the river serves to highlight the fact that there is a linkage between the two. The concept of maldevelopment articulated by Shiva finds a resemblance to Goswami's portrayal of the metamorphosis of Vrindavan from a renowned urban city into a congested and contaminated destination for religious pilgrims. The unregulated progression and advancement that have resulted in the decline of the river are reflective of the cultural dynamics that have marginalised women, hence confirming the interconnectedness between environmental degradation and gender inequality.

This selected work is consistent with Shiva's emphasis on the value of women's knowledge and traditional practices in fostering ecological balance. The great affinity that the widows have with the natural world, as well as their understanding of the patterns and sequences that it possesses, serves as a contrast to the exploitative practices that have led to the destruction of the ecosystem. They are a perfect example of Shiva's concept of an ecofeminist movement that is founded on traditional ecological knowledge because of their ability to persevere and find solace in the natural world.

The knowledge and practices of women, particularly those of indigenous cultures, are often deeply rooted in an understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. This traditional ecological wisdom offers a valuable counterpoint to the dominant Western worldview, which sees nature as a resource to be exploited. (Shiva 12)

Even when they are in a place that is supposed to be safe, like the river, they are always vulnerable, and the fact that they are aware of the men's potential for abuse highlights the reality that they are susceptible under any circumstances. This particular section from the book is an excellent illustration of the feelings of dread and helplessness that the widows share, "The widows huddled together; their eyes wide with fear. They knew these men, knew their mocking glances and lewd jokes. They knew their hands, rough and calloused, that had a way of straying" (Goswami 13).

In her argument, Shiva contends that the unrestrained influence of capitalism and patriarchal systems leads to maldevelopment, which in turn leads to the deterioration of the environment and the exploitation of groups that are marginalised. As the novel portrays it, the Yamuna River once admired for its purity and vitality, is now severely hampered by pollution and exploitation. This is another example of how the novel demonstrates this aspect. The widows themselves are individuals who have been adversely affected by a system that highlights financial gain at the price of the well-being of the environment and society. Their voices, which represent those who have been silenced and marginalised, highlight the link between the degradation of the environment and the injustices that are committed against individuals. We can justify this, “The river is our mother; she gives us life. But we have forgotten our responsibility towards her. We have polluted her waters and destroyed her banks. Now, she is dying” (Goswami 150).

Shiva highlights the value of women’s traditional knowledge and practices in establishing environment-friendly harmony. This is a reflection of the close connection that the widows have with the natural environment. They possess a profound understanding of the cycles that the river goes through, the delicate equilibrium that exists in existence, and the interconnection of all events.

The widows of Vrindavan, despite their marginalised status, have a profound understanding of the natural world. They know the rhythms of the river, the cycles of the seasons, and the delicate balance of life. Their knowledge and practices are a testament to the enduring wisdom of women. (Goswami 150)

This traditional ecological wisdom serves as a contrasting perspective to the exploitative practices that have caused the deterioration of the river and the marginalisation of the widows. “Women’s traditional knowledge is not just about the practicalities of everyday life; it is also a deep understanding of the natural world and its interconnectedness. This knowledge is essential for building a sustainable future” (Shiva 30).

Considering the challenges they are confronted with; the widows demonstrate a remarkable amount of resilience and independence. They discover comfort in the natural environment, and they

draw strength from the connections they have with the earth. According to Shiva, this is aligned with her advocacy for an ecofeminist movement that is founded on the traditional knowledge of women and their ability to reject and fight systems of oppression and exploitation. In the novel, the harsh words said by the priest prompt the widows to reflect on their position of powerlessness inside the hierarchy of the temple. The fact that they are left imprisoned in a cycle of forced performance and deprivation is brought to light by this action, which reveals the institutionalised character of the exploitation. “But the priest’s voice, sharp and cold, cut through their defiance. ‘Sing! You sing or you starve! This is the temple’s rule, the holy law!’” (Goswami 83) The interconnection of environmental and gender concerns is a reflection of the mistreatment that the Yamuna River and the widows in the novel are subjected to. The underlying patriarchal structures that are responsible for the perpetuation of both forms of oppression are brought to light by this. It can be justified by Shiva, “Patriarchal structures... view nature as a resource to be exploited and women as a cheap source of labour. This view is the root cause of both environmental degradation and gender inequality” (Shiva 12).

In the face of adversity, their unflinching support for one another exemplifies the spirit of solidarity that Shiva’s vision of an ecofeminist movement strives to promote. The rituals that they perform and their relationship to the Yamuna provide a look into development that is founded on ecological consciousness and community support. “The strength of women’s movements lies in their collective voice, their ability to build unity and solidarity across cultural and class divisions” (Shiva 178).

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Indira Goswami’s *The Blue-necked God* is a work of literature that exceeds the time and the place in which it was written. It provides a compelling ecofeminist narrative that has a significant connection to the issues that are occurring in the present day. Through her analysis of the plight of the widows of Vrindavan and their connection to the Yamuna River, Goswami sheds light on the adverse impacts of maldevelopment as well as the vital role that women play in fostering

ecological harmony by highlighting the link between the two. To accomplish this, it refers to Vandana Shiva's Ecofeminist approach. Her entire body of work serves as a timeless reminder of the interconnectedness of all life and the unending necessity of ecofeminist ideas in figuring out how to create a sustainable future for everyone. Her art functions as a reminder of both of these aspects. The views that ecofeminism is an essential component of the entire process are demonstrated by her work, which is a compelling exposition of principles.

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