

# Tracing Intersectionality from Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*

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## **Abstract**

Intersectionality is a conceptual model that investigates the intersecting oppressive mechanisms that operate inside society's institutionalised behaviours to cause prejudice or disparity. Indira Goswami's technique of depicting the underprivileged and oppressed in her fiction is congruent with intersectionality as a lens through which to view the synchronicity of subjugation. The writing of Northeast Indian women, particularly Naga and Assamese authors, is influenced by several intersecting elements, including physiological, linguistic, mental, and, most importantly, cultural factors. This article examines how Goswami presents the interconnected layers of her setting in *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* to critique oppressive authoritarian, political, and socio-cultural structures. The story analyses the intersecting character of Indian Hindu widows in a conservative culture where powerful regimes retain and impose hegemonic structures. It shows how power dynamics can change cultural norms and how religion can be used as a powerful tool to control and dominate underprivileged widows. Goswami employs the framework of Intersectionality in her novel to reveal how oppressive systems intersect with another.

**Keywords:** intersectionality, feminism, patriarchy, religious intolerance, power structures

## **Introduction**

This article identifies and analyzes the intersectionality present in Indira Goswami's literary work, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of Tusker*.<sup>1</sup> The work is a significant contribution to the understanding of the lived experiences of women who are marginalized in society. It discusses the multifaceted nature of identity as well as power dynamics, shedding light on the complexities that underlie these phenomena. Human history shows that each event suggests a unique combination of causes for discrimination. The widespread belief in social justice and equity is a well-established discourse. However, the underlying systems that ensure justice and equity for all groups are rarely discussed in detail. In the current social and political situation, hierarchies have been created to guide the formulation of policies about frameworks of discrimination and power.

The development of Intersectionality as a theoretical framework reflects power conflicts that aim to end several forms of oppression. Sirma Bilge focuses on the notion of Intersectionality as "a theory and praxis, an analytical and political tool elaborated by less powerful social factors

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<sup>1</sup> Indira Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of Tusker* (Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2004).

facing multiple minoritization...”<sup>2</sup> One’s social, cultural, and political life is organized along numerous axes, and the structure of dominance forms or coerces these structures, which can disrupt a specified scenario. Intersectionality recognizes various viewpoints in daily life in response to the rising awareness of gender disparities. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term ‘Intersectionality’ in 1989 to emphasize Black women’s issues. It addresses the interdependence of different forms of marginalization by putting social hierarchies at the forefront of all of these interactions.

In contemporary society, the field of women’s studies has expanded beyond its traditional emphasis on gender as its focal point. It now involves a diverse range of identities, factors contributing to exclusion, as well as experiences of oppression. Intersectionality, despite its theoretical complexity, holds considerable importance within the realm of feminist study. According to Kathy Davis, the popularity of Intersectionality in feminist philosophy is because of its “focus on a pervasive and fundamental concern in feminist theory, its provision of novelty...for further critique and elaboration.”<sup>3</sup> The issue of gender inequality has been discussed in two ways in the context of feminism. Intersectionality’s paradigm addresses these issues by emphasizing many forms of oppression that indicate women’s marginalization. The first strand of European feminist research focuses on ethnicity, class, and sexual identity as they influence black women inside white hegemony and women’s employment struggle. On the other hand, the second strand focuses on power dynamics or social hierarchies in contemporary social life where ethnicity, class, and sexual identity intersect. These dimensions or categories are interconnected, highlighting the need to understand differences and multicultural challenges.

Intersectionality research as an interpretive framework is not a recent concept. One famous instance from nineteenth-century imperial India is Savitribai Phule’s (1831-1897) released online article. Bilge refers to Phule: “...she got intersectionality. Phule’s vision of social equality included fighting against the subjugation of women...”<sup>4</sup> She is considered the first contemporary feminist from India who opposed societal inequalities such as caste, race, theology, and gender. Her initiatives included protests against the shaving of the heads of Indian widows. She fought for widow remarriage and established a hospice for deserted pregnant widows. As a result, individuals from various origins use intersectionality as a hermeneutic framework in a variety of contexts to address a wide range of societal problems. South Asian writers including Bapsi Sidhwa, Jhumpa Lahiri, Mitra Phukan, Bharati Mukherji, Temsula Ao, Arundhati Roy and Indira Goswami, consistently attempt to depict and expose women’s experiences in their works creating resentment among these marginalized communities. Indira Goswami is observant of her environment and used her works to voice for people who can no longer describe their sorrows, and for some whose views had not yet been addressed or were suppressed. Her works, filled with empathy and understanding for the vulnerable and underprivileged, convey the stories of the wretched, the helpless, and the women subjugated by societal customs, gender, religion, prejudice, bigotry, and inequality.

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<sup>2</sup> Sirma Bilge, “Intersectionality Undone: Saving Intersectionality from Feminist Intersectionality Studies,” *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2013), p. 410.

<sup>3</sup> Kathy Davis, “Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful,” *Feminist Theory*, vol. 9, no. 1 (2008), p. 169.

<sup>4</sup> Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016), p. 4.

This article examines the various intersections that influence women's lives in different communities. It illustrates how strong authoritarianism, firmly embedded societal traditions, and theological conservatism govern, victimise, and subjugate women. Malashri Lal claims that:

The common thread in Indira Goswami's immensely diverse and rich oeuvre is the concern for women. In her person and her work, this is echoed multifariously. Despite the complex interstices, I see no contradictions – only a holistic expression of India's many challenges to women's empowerment and a gifted writer moulding them into creative forms.<sup>5</sup>

*The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* depicts very sensitive stories of the terrible anguish women endure as widows, shedding light on the overlapping identities of Hindu widows living in India's patriarchal society, where several domains of power maintain and enforce rigid social orders. It demonstrates how dominant groups can use cultural norms and religion to keep those in their place of subjugation and silence. It also explores the ways in which some women defy, and question religious restrictions, in order to gain agency and effect positive social change.

### **Goswami and Intersectionality**

The academic study of the oppression of women is a lively field. Sanghamitra De examines how women understand their physical environments, how they interact with them daily, and how these spaces develop and articulate with, or resist, sociocultural norms.<sup>6</sup> Tanushree Kulshreshtha and Zain Mohammad Sulaiman shed light on the issue of gender inequality as portrayed in the literary works of North-East India.<sup>7</sup> Daisy Gohain examines the complexity of 'voice' as a form of resistance, examining how people and organisations have used this instrument to challenge repression and establish their agency.<sup>8</sup> Papari Das finds that Giribala and Saudamini are two characters who represent the development of a new woman, claiming that Goswami's stories show women's oppression in a patriarchal Brahmin society.<sup>9</sup> Other research focuses on women's plight in a typical patriarchal society; and applying intersectionality theory to Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* is a lacuna this article will fill.

Women, particularly widows, and their hardships are beautifully portrayed in *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*; they are captives of institutional structures and victims of societal injustices exhibited via traditions and/or rituals. The emphasis is on three widows in the same

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<sup>5</sup> Malashri Lal, "Indira Goswami and Women's Empowerment," *Indira Goswami: Passion and the Pain*, ed. Uddipana Goswami (Guwahati: Spectrum Publications, 2012), p. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Sanghamitra De, "Of Spaces and Margins: Reading Gender and Domesticity in *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*," in *Indira Goswami: Margins and Beyond*, eds Namrata Pathak and Dibyajyoti Sarma (New Delhi: Routledge India, 2022), pp. 143-148.

<sup>7</sup> Tanushree Kulshreshtha and Zain Mohammad Sulaiman, "Revealing Gender Inequality in North-East Indian Fiction: Insights from Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*," *Barak Education Society* (2022), p. 37.

<sup>8</sup> Daisy Gohain, "Am I heard? Redefining the voice of a subaltern: A Postcolonial Study of 'the other' in Indira Goswami's *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*," *ACADEMICA: An International Multidisciplinary Research Journal*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2022), pp. 1-9.

<sup>9</sup> Papari Das, "Germination of New Woman in the Fiction of Indira Goswami: A Study of the Characters of Giribala and Saudamini," *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2014). At: <https://oaji.net/articles/2014/1115-1417595760.pdf>.

household and the distinctive agony that results from their widowhood. These three widows are all protagonists: Giribala is the family's young, widowed daughter, Durga is Giribala's father's widowed sister, and the third widow, Saru Gossainee, is Giribala's paternal uncle's wife. Chandra Talpade Mohanty quotes Beverly Lindsay: "linguistic and cultural differences exist between Vietnamese and Black American women, but both groups are the victim of race, sex, and class."<sup>10</sup> Thus, the notion of intersectionality reveals the range of circumstances and categories that render these women 'marginalised.' Zia Ahmed argues that "third World Women, like Western women, are produced as subjects in historically and culturally specific ways by the societies in which they live and act as agents."<sup>11</sup> In this situation, the lives of South Asian, particularly North-East Indian, underprivileged women clearly show distinctive positions of authority and power systems accountable for their marginalization and exploitation. Women are placed inside a systematized matrix of power structures in any situation, which leads to discrimination and conflict. This article focuses on interpersonal, institutional, societal, and structural power dimensions that utilize intersectionality as an interpretive framework in research related to feminism.

### **The Interpersonal Realm of Power**

To evaluate social hierarchies in a specific context, recognition and comprehension of historical intricacies, as well as cultural and ideological understanding, are required. Family structures typically place men as fathers, brothers, or husbands in a superior position to handle women's lives as their spouses, mothers, aunts, or daughters. Goswami highlights the plight of women in the conservative Brahmin community. Early marriage of girls was a common practice, as they were supposed to be occupied with home matters and were deprived of education. The men would remark "what's the use of intelligence in a girl? It will bring nothing but blemish to the family's name. Women's education is of no use."<sup>12</sup> Giribala's mother, Gossainee, observes early on that "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."<sup>13</sup> The story begins with a portrayal of a conventional hierarchical framework inside the family, in which her father likewise strives hard to keep his daughter under control as he wants her aunt, who is blindly conforming to widowhood, to be her shadow. "He wanted me to be her shadow. In the dead of night, I often saw her get up from her bed, pick up her dead husband's sandals and then go back to bed again."<sup>14</sup>

Additionally, the men subjected their wives to unimaginable cruelty, these unlucky women, who were quite often brutally beaten to death or died by suicide because they could not bear the brutal torture from men:

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<sup>10</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses," *Boundary*, vol. 2 (1984), p. 339.

<sup>11</sup> Zia Ahmed, "Pakistani Feminist Fiction and the Empowerment of Women," *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2009), p. 92.

<sup>12</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 286.

<sup>13</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 199.

there was an unused well near Matia Pahar that was considered haunted...they hauled out many skeletons of women.<sup>15</sup>

Bamdeo Maujadar's wife suffered a similar fate when her husband had a relationship with a nurse. Patriarchal society remained silent on the matter of unfaithful men, but it criticized the woman who did this act after her husband passed away. A man may have a relationship with a low-class woman, but a woman was never permitted to even dream about it. They had to go through particular purifying ceremonies if they did. Giribala marries young as well, and she experiences her "first menses after marriage"<sup>16</sup> with her aunt, Durga, being in favour of these customs of early marriage. But her mother and Giribala did not want that marriage. It is an institution that confines women's bodies to the control of their husbands. Simone de Beauvoir opined that in patriarchal societies "marriage is a destiny traditionally offered to women by society."<sup>17</sup>

According to prevalent societal norms, a woman is typically viewed as a subordinate participant in the institution of marriage, when a woman enters into a marriage, she gives up her right to freedom, independence, and the pursuit of her own happiness. J. S. Mill states "no slave is a slave to the same length and in so full in a sense of words, as a wife is."<sup>18</sup> Traditional gender roles in marriage have often been characterised by the man being the taker and the woman being the giver. Giribala's encounters illustrate the regulatory force of marriage form at its earliest stage, she recounts her first contact with her husband, Latu Gossain, who informs her that "since we are already married, you better know one thing...you will have to tolerate some of my habits."<sup>19</sup> Women are enmeshed and domesticated by the disciplined administration of marriage, which enforces male supremacy in the guise of husband and gives little opportunity for women to do anything except 'accept'; if a man likes 'women' and 'their company', his wife must 'accept' it.

Marriage never prohibits a man from making sexual advances to another woman, but it does close every feasible window of liberty for a woman by limiting her body or individuality to her husband and her social experiences to his relatives; her availability features through the imperceptible authority of the male agency. In many spheres of power, the location of women in the household and communities is persuasive and revealing. Yakaiah Kathy observes, "For men in general and the peerage in particular, might be right and immorality overlooked. For women, subjugation by men and society was deemed fit and immorality was a lifelong punishable offence. The desideratum of attaining positions of privilege was paramount as was the value placed on virtue for women."<sup>20</sup> These familial patterns indicate power dynamics that influence individuals' lives, determining the advantages and disadvantages experienced within interpersonal and familial power dynamics. Therefore, women who occupy roles within the domestic structure, regardless of

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<sup>15</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 214.

<sup>16</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 34.

<sup>17</sup> Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), p. 445.

<sup>18</sup> J. S. Mill, "The Subjugation of Women," in *The Feminist Papers: From Adams to Beauvoir*, ed. Alice S. Ross (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 140.

<sup>20</sup> Yakaiah Kathy, "Entrenched Patriarchal Victorian Society in Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance*," *Literature & Aesthetics*, vol. 31, no. 1 (2021), p. 49.

their status as wives, daughters, or mothers, experience marginalisation. Traditional practices that portray the disputed and miserable condition of widows across India in 1935 are indicative of patriarchal power structures. Women's positions in the home and society offer intriguing clues about how power is distributed in different spheres.

### **Disciplinary Realm of Power**

People experience various roles and treatment in the system of power and its operation. In this never-ending depiction of anguish and misery, the feminine image appears to be enslaved by the paradigm of male dominance and female subjugation. Practices and customs in Sattras have tight regulations for women, leaving them with no alternative but to live according to them. The all-encompassing philosophy of Brahmanical society, which has a strong power over the people, encompasses the laws and beliefs of a Sattras. In such pressures, as men and women of both castes, i.e. upper and lower, struggle with their dilemmas, the story shows how authoritarian powers may overpower women and men's resistance. In the realm of power dynamics and organisational operations, individuals often confront diverse roles and experiences. In the context of Sattras, power dynamics are observed through the presence of a binary framework that includes both domination and exploitation. Giribala's mother attempts to subjugate her to the common habit of widowhood. Her father urges her to imitate her aunt, who firmly observes widowhood; yet, her mother entirely controls her. She forbids herself from having cooked meals, and when she does, she is violently abused by her mother, who "pulled her hair, punched her and clawed at her."<sup>21</sup> Durga, her aunt, asserts her submission; she feels that only rigorous commitment to widowhood can earn respect from her husband's family. Although Durga suffers under these religious rites and rituals, it is she who serves as Giribala's moral guardian and assures that Giribala walks in her footsteps. She is the one who commands her into the rites of widowhood forever.

The patriarchal lines are followed under Durga's tight supervision and invigilation. Paradoxically, a woman who herself is a miserable victim who has suffered a great deal in her life separates herself by inflicting torment on other widows. Her father, indeed, puts her in the little dark room to confine her space in her widowhood, but her mother also increases her misery by lecturing her about religious morality. As a result, this book has revealed the different side of the story that depicts women's subjugation by women, by inflicting their hardships or subjugating other females around them. Goswami portrays the various ways females suffer in unique situations via the agony of Durga, Saru, and Giribala. Collins and Bilge, two eminent researchers, believe that "Power is better conceptualized as a relationship...than as a static entity. Power is not a thing to be gained or lost...it constitutes a relationship."<sup>22</sup> As a result, Giribala's mother and her aunt appear to constitute a different type of power dynamics within a society of widows. It provides a comprehensive perspective of a disciplinary realm of authority.

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<sup>21</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 145.

<sup>22</sup> Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, p. 28.

## A Cultural Realm of Power

The novel shows how a group of Hindu women are rendered helpless and marginalised due to cultural, religious, and ideological differences. In the Sattrā, Goswami's females are captives on two grounds: first, they are female, and second, they are widows. This indicates how folk norms, rituals, and ceremonies develop as malicious agencies, assuring deplorable living environments for females by destroying their basic rights, personal choice, and even autonomy and privacy. These forced rituals and customs have an impact on women's psyche, dignity, individual autonomy, mobility, and even survival. Suppression and discrimination against women are conducted at various stages. Patriarchy serves as a tyrant, prescribing a code of behaviour and honour based on established permissions and prohibitions designed specifically for women. Child marriages were popular in the past, and if a husband died, the wife was regarded as an ill sign and sent to her parent's home. She was not accepted there, so she was sent to 'Ashrams or Sattras'. She was forced to live under strict rules, such as constant fasting and a special dietary regimen where she refrained from cooked meals and subsisted on raw vegetables for weeks. Sleeping on a hardwood bed, donning the bark of an edible walnut tree as shoes, washing and enduring further purification ceremonies if she was even affected by the shadows of a low-class man, and so forth.

Widows, like outcasts and sinners, are banned from social boundaries; as soon as Giribala enters, she is made aware of her restriction, "Don't touch her! Don't touch her! You women with sindoor. She is a widow now."<sup>23</sup> Her existence is irrevocably changed, and she is degraded to an unwanted and unfavoured woman; her feet, formerly thought to be those of the deity, have been consigned to her own. She has been excluded from her regular life and now only wears a voile. Her body enters a specific domain of geographical space, enabling rigorous imprisonment that needs rigid cognitive compliance versus unconscious integration; she is forced to a life of asceticism, relying just on mashed rice and sugar, locked in a dismal chamber, and restricted to the sandal room, where she would pray in front of her forefathers' and husband's slipper. Until they die, bereaved widows are expected to idolize their husbands' footwear as a sign of faithfulness. Goswami has comprehensively depicted and explained religious practices to depict the real predicament of women, particularly widows.

Another practice is Mesa-daha or fire purification. When Giribala goes to visit the missionary Mark in his cottage on a stormy night with a Sanchi scripture, she is captured in her wet attire by the unscrupulous local priest, Purushottam Bhagwati, and his men, who bring Giribala out of the cottage to 'purify her'. Giribala must go through a rigorous purification regimen to re-enter the Goswami home. Giribala's purification takes place at the sacrificing cottage. According to the priest's arrangement, immediately after he completes his purifying ritual with her, Giribala will emerge, and the impure cottage will be set ablaze. However, at Giribala's insistence, the village men burned down the sacrificing hut made with banana leaf roofs. Giribala does not answer as the priest concludes his prayer and asks her to come out. Everyone outside urges her to step out, but she wants to stay inside and die in a tragic sati re-enactment. A virtuous wife's self-immolation is not a sign of devotion and affection. In reality, it is the polar opposite: a

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<sup>23</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 27.

widow's defiant and unapologetic repudiation of the customs and beliefs of the society. By Giribala's self-immolation, Goswami undermines the efficacy of purification ceremonies intended exclusively for women, whereas males are excluded from the same practice and portray how certain cultural, theological, and intellectual differences are to blame for the marginalization and oppression of a community of Hindu widows.

This analysis emphasises the interdependence of social inequality, power, and a given social setting. The orthodox Indian society adheres to religious principles that enforce and uphold gender-specific regulations and practices primarily towards women. According to Collins and Bilge, "fairness is elusive in unequal societies where the rule may seem fair, yet differentially enforced through discriminatory practices."<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the conventional, superstitious Indian society is built on religious practice, which creates and enforces inhumane practices and behaviours against women. Widows in Hindu culture have few opportunities. In the colonial era, the British prohibited one of the worst sati rituals, burning a widow with her deceased husband. Ironically, even when sati was repealed, women's oppression persisted, though in a unique form. The narrative reveals that the strict observance of religious scriptures leads to the deterioration of these females. It widens the cultural and ideological realm of power. Hence, "social inequalities that are fairly produced are socially just."<sup>25</sup> It highlights the cultural milieu of dominance, which is generated by religious propaganda. Even when recognizing the Sattras' horrible conditions and severance of inmates from society, family members forced their daughters and sisters to go there.

### **Structural Realm of Power**

Within the educational and institutional contexts, intersectional research demonstrates that the Black women's revolution addressed the institutions that generate inequality. They concentrated on the function of power structures inside certain institutions and organizations that are accountable for ostracizing women on multiple levels. In one of her essays, Crenshaw states, "the overlapping structures of subordination revealed how certain groups of women were made particularly vulnerable to abuse."<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, the novel exposes the profound inadequacy of the religious institution, specifically the Sattras, which perpetuates the societal norm of excluding Hindu widows. The concept of 'structural intersectionality' appears to address the pervasive and unregulated authority that supports unfair forms of domination.

One of the poignant narratives of Durga portrays instances of persistent violence. She firmly believed in Sattras ceremonies and spent her life correspondingly. She was feeble and powerless, and her sole purpose was to scatter her husband's embers in the water of Orissa's Puri. She assumed that by performing these rituals, she would obtain moksha and her husband's soul would be comforted. Her in-laws deported her to her paternal home, seizing all of her land and properties. Feudal norms victimized not just impoverished labourers but also women. Certain women had property, but they had been duped by certain nefarious employers. This was the status

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<sup>24</sup> Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> Collins and Bilge, *Intersectionality*, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup>Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2013), p. 797.

of widows in colonial India, but the problem is that it has not yet changed, and only the old forms of harassment have been substituted for the existing ones. In Sattrā, Durga attempted to follow all of them in futility, thinking it was a typical pattern that a widow had to go through since this was her destiny, and yet she had to lead a virtuous life as recommended by the shastras. But then, she became tired of all the routines. Durga's in-laws blamed her for her son's demise. There was a sneaking suspicion that Durga's star sign contained multiple papa-grahas that made her unlucky. The charges penetrated her psyche to the point that she accepted them too. Her in-laws never asked about her well-being, leaving the poor widow powerless.

The Brahmin philosophy is restricted to the formation and application of restrictions solely to women. Such ideologies appear to be ethical, as corruption is monitored by higher authorities and organizations. It also implies the ashram's structural framework represents vicious subjugation. Durga, therefore, remains a victim of the character she is compelled to play. Despite her skilled administration of her property and skillful manipulation of her subordinates, Saru Gossainee does not think of going on the estate but solves problems with her followers. As upper-caste females are obliged to maintain their chastity by staying unexposed to the filthy world, they are confined within their houses, which serve as both refuge and dungeon. Durga's existentialist situation highlights the widows' deteriorating condition. Restless and tormented by incessant stress, she says, "Her mind has become a graveyard. Day after day, it is a torturous task for her to find something tangible to hold on to, to hold on to her sanity."<sup>27</sup>

Tormented by fears, she embodies the fragility of females who surrender to the demands of caste supremacy and caste discrimination, accepting their destiny with no attempt to overcome the religiously imposed duty of widowhood. Subverted to her caste's benefits yet being victimized by its restricting role, she stays in quiet submission to hegemonic masculinity, simply accepting its standards that maintain females like her in a state of deliberate victimization. An insecure woman, her economically and underprivileged situation makes her reliant on others. Therefore, the Brahmin perspective is restricted to the formulation and enforcement of norms specifically for women. These beliefs appear to possess legal protections, as corruption is subject to scrutiny by laws or regulations. It also implies the empowerment of the Sattrā's structural system serves as a manifestation of the oppressive conditions they have endured. In property ownership, in managing and monitoring women, the Sattrā-adhikar's prestige and dignity are judged according to how one's estate and women are guarded and nurtured. The three young widows' existences are strictly governed in this constricted society, with their thoughts and feelings suppressed and their sensuality denied. Each woman endures the agony of having her ambitions and desires crushed, the strain of multiple oppression reflecting the terrible exploitation of women trapped in an awful situation by community and customs.

## Conclusion

The analysis of the intersectional approach as a theoretical framework and its extension beyond its initial confines has shown a complex understanding of societal processes. Nira Yuval-Davis's

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<sup>27</sup> Goswami, *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, p. 11.

stance on intersectionality, viewed as an expansion of feminist standpoint theory, emphasises the significance of this notion in understanding the real-life experiences of people within intricate social contexts. As Collins and Bilge point out, there is a need for a holistic approach because social inequality is not caused by a single reason. Intersectionality tells us that different groups face different problems, but feminist writings all over the world have shown how women are used and left out. This means that when we talk about women's issues, we need to be more open-minded, and take into account that their problems vary depending on where they live and what race they are. Ethnicity, religion, gender, the economy, and country are all socially constructed and linked factors that make social inequality more complicated.

The idea of religion holds a significant influence in defining cultural norms and values. It also highlights the ongoing oppression faced by women due to rigid religious and social regulations, underscoring the pervasive influence of societal norms in dictating their lives. *The Moth-Eaten Howdah of the Tusker* by Goswami reflects the complexities of society by bringing to light how religious beliefs interact with structural, disciplinary, and occupational hierarchies. Using intersectionality as a theoretical lens, we can see the myriad ways in which religion is used to control women's lives. A more comprehensive understanding of women's experiences can be achieved by evaluating the complex relationship between several aspects, including race, gender, religion, and social structures. By adopting the framework of intersectionality, individuals and societies may effectively negotiate the complex interplay of various elements that contribute to social injustice. This approach enables us to strive towards the creation of a more equitable as well as inclusive society that benefits all members.