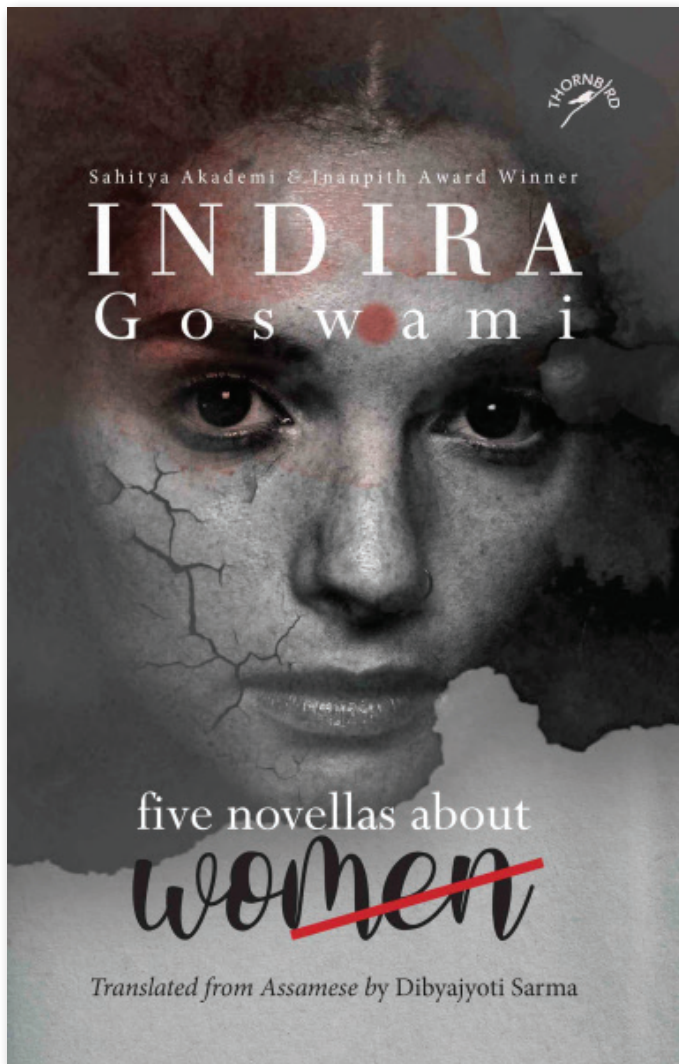


These five novellas cover a range of Indira Goswami's writing, highlighting the role of women in varying situations.

The impactful narratives of memorable characters, depict the grace and courage of women under trying circumstances.

An Introduction, Translator's Note and Author's Timeline add value to the book by discussing the nuances of the translation process as well as contextualising the author's life and work.



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Five Novellas about Women

Indira Goswami

Translated by Dibyajyoti Sarma

Impactful portraits of the Indian women

Indira Goswami is a great literary writer of her generation and a feminist icon. Most of her major works have been translated from Assamese into English; however some of her works are yet to be discovered by a larger audience. These five novellas represent a cross-section of her writing, with a special focus on women.

Sensitively translated, with detailed notes on the translation, these stories bring to light the human condition that Indira Goswami portrayed in her writing. The lives of the rural poor, the situation of widows, the plight of the urban underclass and various social constraints under which people are forced to live are depicted in these impactful narratives.

The deft use of language, striking imagery and strong characters are a hallmark of Indira Goswami's writing. The stories in this selection exhibit these unique characteristics of her work in abundance. These nuanced translations bring the literary creations of one of the great writers of our times to new life and a wider audience.

Indira Goswami (14 November 1942–29 November 2011), who wrote as Mamoni Raisom Goswami in Assamese, popularly known as Mamoni Baideo, was an award-winning author and an icon of feminist writing, who wrote about people rarely represented in Indian writing—women, the marginalised, the powerless, the unfortunate. Winner of India's highest literary award, the Jnanpith (2001), as well as the Sahitya Akademi Award (1983), and the Principal Prince Claus Laureate (2008), Goswami was also an editor, poet, professor, and scholar, best known for her novels such as *The Moth Eaten Howdah of the Tusker*, *Pages Stained with Blood* and *The Man from Chinnamasta*. She was also known for her attempts to structure social change, both through her writings and through her role as mediator between the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) and the government of India, through the People's Consultative Group, a peace committee

Writer and editor **Dibyajyoti Sarma** has published three volumes of poetry (the last being *Book of Prayers for the Nonbeliever*, 2018), two books of translations of Assamese poets— Sananta Tanty and Kamal Kumar Tanti—and an academic book, besides numerous writing credits in edited volumes, journals and websites. He was born in Assam and now lives in Delhi, where he works as a journalist and runs the independent publishing outfit Red River.



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Extract from the book

The year was 1930. On the foothills of the KamakhyaDhamlived AghorDevBhagawati with his family. It was the rainy season. On the giant boulders on the way up to Devipeeth, there were thick layers of moss. When the sun came up after the rain, they looked like half-peeled shingari fruit. Youngsters on the way to Devipeeth would try to climb the boulders and slip. There were several roads upwards to the hill, but the children did not care about them. They liked this road filled with bhatara, thorny bushes and jetuli poka.

Opening the window, Padmapriya could see the pilgrims climbing up. Look at the party. They must have arrived from Koch Behar. The sound of their chatter and the rustle of their clothes could be heard from far away. There were three old men and two old women. There were two kids. The kids were healthy.

Whenever they ran towards the boulders, the elderly would scream. But the kids were not bothered by the screams. They kept pushing forward. Everyone in the group of the elderly walked with a stoop, as if they were a bunch of hargila birds, walking haltingly.

Once the party vanished from sight, Padmapriya noticed, from her window, a pair of newlyweds walk up the road towards the temple. The vermilion mark on the bride's forehead shone from afar, as if someone had boiled the red sun and turned it into a line on the woman's head. Next to a boulder on the way, look, the groom was trying to hold her hand. Intimidated, she was trying to hide her hands inside her clothes. She stopped herself from slipping by holding onto a bush. Looking at the mekhela with flowery patterns on it and chador made of paat silk, Padmapriya surmised that the bride was the daughter-in-law of some important officer from up North. It did not look like she was from Koch Behar or Gaur. The high-caste women from those places wore saris with red borders. On their feet, they drew lines of alta.

Suddenly, a cranky voice surprised her. 'What do you keep looking at through the window? Do some work. Do some work!'

Alert at the voice of her father, she left the room in a huff and came outside. Slowly, she had come to realise that on her father's voice nowadays, there was a smell of irritation. The empathy she received after the Shastri family left her here, that empathy was long gone. Now, she was becoming a burden on her family. She knew it.

Padma noticed that the two men who had come to consult horoscopes with her father were standing outside his prayer room. Both were old Jajman (patrons). Both wore dhotis. One of them was old. He wore his dhoti loose and tucked the end of the garment in the pocket of his blue shirt. He wore his hair with a distinct parting on the middle of his head and combed his hair closely. The other man was short. He was young, really a teenager. Even he had a parting in the middle of his head, but he did not comb his hair closely.

Hurriedly, Padmapriya carried two murhas from the courtyard and placed them in front of the visitors. Taking a murha from her, the older man asked politely, 'Aai, weren't you the daughter-in-law of Rauta? Hari, Hari, we heard that the Shastri family left you here...'