

Psychoanalytical Perspective and Psychological Expression of Characters in Mamoni Raisom Goswami's Novels

Mitali Saikia

Assamese Department, Tezpur college

Abstract

This paper examines the psychological depth in the novels of Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami (Indira Goswami) through the lens of Freudian psychoanalysis. Positioned as a pioneer of 'Psychological Realism' in 20th-century Assamese literature, Goswami's works transcend traditional social documentation to explore the intricate inner worlds of her characters—focusing on internal conflict, repressed desires, existential despair, and the clash between the conscious and unconscious mind. Using *Dantal Hatir Uye Khowa Howda (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker)* and *Neelkanthi Braja (Shadow of Dark God)* as core texts, this study analyzes the tragic psychological complexity of female characters like Durga and Saudamini. Durga's life exemplifies the violent conflict between her natural 'Id'—youthful desire and physical attraction to Giridhari—and the oppressive 'Super-Ego' of patriarchal Sattriya widow codes, leading to an internalized guilt complex, hysteria, and chemical escapism through opium. Similarly, Saudamini's sexual dissatisfaction and religious guilt reveal a fractured conscious-subconscious balance. The study also addresses how socio-economic deprivation and rigid ritualistic frameworks in *Chinnamastar Manuhuto* and *Mamore Dhara Tarowal* breed unconscious resentment and existential crises, and how 'Sublimation' allows characters like Shashi to channel personal pain into spiritual devotion or humanitarian service. Ultimately, Mamoni Raisom Goswami emerges as a profound doctor of the human mind, whose flawless depiction of the grey, turbulent inner psyche through Freudian frameworks gives her novels a timeless, universal dimension that extends far beyond their immediate socio-cultural context.

Keywords: *freudian psychoanalysis, repressed desire, guilt complex, sublimation.*

1. Introduction

The evolution of the 20th-century Assamese novel is marked by a significant shift from external social romanticism and historical chronicling toward an exploration of internal human subjectivity. Among the literary luminaries who catalyzed this transformation, Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami (Indira Goswami) holds a monumental position. Her novels are not merely passive mirrors reflecting external social realities or anthropological documents of marginalized communities; instead, they function as dynamic, diagnostic lenses directed at the deepest, most obscured regions of the human mind. The foundational architectural pillar of her

*Corresponding Author Email: sbarnali51@gmail.com

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literature is "Psychological Realism." Goswami consistently prioritizes the internal landscape of her characters—their psychological friction, suppressed instinctual urges, existential dread, and the ceaseless struggle between the conscious and unconscious mind—over the mere sequence of linear plot events.

Before Goswami's intervention, a large body of Assamese fiction focused heavily on the mechanics of social reform, regional topography, or class struggles observed from an objective distance. While Goswami retains a fierce commitment to exposing institutional oppression, systemic poverty, and religious fanaticism, her unique contribution lies in her ability to internalize these external systems. She demonstrates how macro-structures of social violence inflict micro-traumas upon the individual psyche. Her characters do not suffer merely in terms of material lack or social ostracization; they suffer through psychic fragmentation, emotional neuroses, and cognitive dissonance.

To fully comprehend the depth of Goswami's characters, it is highly productive to step outside purely sociological critical frameworks and employ the tools of psychoanalysis. By examining her works through the foundational theories established by Sigmund Freud, one can decode the hidden meanings behind her characters' behavioral aberrations, somatic complaints, and ultimate self-destruction. This research paper offers a comprehensive psychoanalytic reading of selected major novels by Mamoni Raisom Goswami, exploring how her narrative art systematically maps the geography of human desire, guilt, and psychic survival.

2. Objectives of the Study

To execute a structured, rigorous textual analysis, this study frames its investigation around the following specific research objectives:

1. To identify, isolate, and analyze the operations of the Freudian psychic apparatus—specifically the structural concepts of the Id, Ego, and Super-Ego—as they manifest within the behavior and choices of Goswami's characters.
2. To critique the socio-cultural mechanics of the repression of desire, particularly within traditional patriarchal structures, institutionalized widowhood, and the conservative Sattriya social hierarchy of Assam, evaluating the resultant psychological pathologies inflicted on the female mind.
3. To investigate the psychic trajectories of characters experiencing extreme mental agony, tracking how their unresolved unconscious conflicts inevitably culminate in covert rebellion, substance-based escapism, or tragic self-destruction.
4. To evaluate the role of mature psychic defense mechanisms, primarily Sublimation, in providing characters with an alternative path to channel their traumatized emotional or sexual energy into creative, spiritual, or humanitarian avenues.

3. Theoretical Framework: Freudian Psychoanalysis and Literature

To analyze the internal realities of Goswami's characters, we must ground our reading in the foundational principles of psychoanalytic theory formulated by Sigmund Freud. Freud revolutionized the understanding of human subjectivity by asserting that the human mind is not a unified, fully conscious entity driven purely by rational logic. Instead, he conceptualized the

psyche as a fractured, tripartite structure composed of the Id, the Ego, and the Super-Ego, all operating across varying levels of consciousness (the Conscious, Preconscious, and Unconscious).

The Id represents the entirely unconscious, primitive, and instinctual component of the personality. It operates strictly on the "Pleasure Principle," demanding immediate gratification of basic biological drives, sexual energy (libido), and aggressive impulses. It recognizes no social laws, logic, morals, or consequences. In direct opposition to the Id, the Super-Ego represents the internalized moral standards, ethical values, and prohibitions of society, religion, and parental figures. It operates as an aggressive, often hyper-critical internal conscience, enforcing compliance through feelings of guilt, shame, and fear of spiritual or social damnation. Caught between these two diametrically opposed forces is the Ego, which operates on the "Reality Principle." The Ego acts as the rational, conscious mediator, attempting to satisfy the instinctual demands of the Id in ways that are socially acceptable and safe within the boundaries enforced by the Super-Ego.

When the Ego fails to successfully mediate the intense friction between the primal drives of the Id and the punishing restrictions of the Super-Ego, the psychic equilibrium is shattered. If the Super-Ego achieves absolute dominance, it forces the conscious mind to completely suppress the instinctual drives of the Id, pushing them down into the dark reservoir of the Unconscious. However, Freud notes that repressed desires do not simply vanish; they remain highly active within the unconscious mind, exerting a continuous pressure on the individual. This psychic pressure frequently manifests outwardly in the form of psychological defense mechanisms, somatization, anxiety neuroses, emotional volatility, and behavioral conditions historically referred to as "hysteria." In the realm of literary criticism, applying a Freudian framework allows us to look past the surface actions of characters and read their symptoms as a coded language. In the case of Mamoni Raisom Goswami's fiction, her characters' internal struggles can be understood as a direct literary dramatization of this profound psychic warfare.

4. Core Discussion and Analysis

A) The Tragic Battleground of the Psyche: Durga in Dantal Hatir Uye Khowa Howda

In what is widely regarded as Goswami's magnum opus, *Dantal Hatir Uye Khowa Howda (The Moth-Eaten Howdah of a Tusker)*, the author provides her most sophisticated and devastating psychoanalytic portrait through the character of Durga. Set within the conservative, decaying feudal ecosystem of the Aamranga Satra (a Vaishnavite monastery land), the novel charts the absolute destruction of a young woman's mind and body under the weight of institutionalized religious bigotry. From a Freudian perspective, Durga's psychological trajectory is a classic case study of an individual psyche completely crushed by an all-powerful, unyielding Super-Ego.

1. The Radical Friction Between Id and Super-Ego: Durga, having lost her husband during early childhood, undergoes the natural, inevitable biological transformation into young womanhood. Her psyche experiences the awakening of what Freud termed the libido—the essential energy of life, romantic longing, and the desire for human companionship. Her profound attraction toward the young, modern merchant, Giridhari of Dibrugarh, is a pure,

unadulterated manifestation of her natural Id. Her Id seeks the validation of love, touch, and mutual validation.

However, the socio-religious framework of the Aamranga Satra acts as an absolute, aggressive manifestation of the institutional Super-Ego. The Satra enforces a draconian code of conduct upon high-caste Brahmin widows. They are subjected to severe dietary restrictions, stripped of colorful attire, prohibited from participating in celebratory life events, and viewed as inherently inauspicious or cursed entities. The societal panopticon ensures that every movement Durga makes is watched and judged. This absolute polarization between the biological drives of her Id and the punitive morals of her community's Super-Ego leaves Durga's Ego entirely paralyzed. She deeply loves Giridhari and recognizes the possibility of an alternative, dignified life with him. Yet, her internalized fear of societal condemnation and spiritual exile prevents her from openly claiming that love. The wall constructed by social rules and family pride proves too tall for her fragile Ego to scale.

2. Institutional Repression and its Hysterical Manifestations: The Sattriya society does not merely discourage Durga's desires; it systematically and forcefully represses them. This repression extends to her physical biology: she is denied basic sensory comforts, forced to fast, and systematically isolated from human warmth. According to psychoanalytic principles, when basic human desires are subjected to long-term, violent suppression, they inevitably manifest as acute psychological disorders. In Durga's case, this unresolved psychic conflict results in severe anxiety, emotional volatility, and symptoms closely aligned with the classical clinical concept of hysteria.

Because her conscious mind cannot openly acknowledge her sexual and romantic desires without experiencing terrifying guilt, her repressed energy translates into somatic and behavioral disruptions. She frequently suffers from intense mood swings, bouts of unpredictable anger, and a pervasive sense of mental inferiority. She becomes highly irritable and lashes out at her immediate surroundings, a defense mechanism that channels her deep internal dissatisfaction outward into her daily relationships.

3. The Development of a Karmic Guilt Complex: A major factor in Durga's psychological deterioration is her profound Guilt Complex. The patriarchal religious machinery of her environment conditions her from infancy to believe that her early widowhood is not a random biological tragedy, but a direct consequence of sins she committed in a past life. The external community constantly reinforces this narrative, convincing her that her very existence is structurally flawed and sinful.

Consequently, whenever natural thoughts of romance, pleasure, or physical longing for Giridhari enter her mind, her internalized Super-Ego instantly weaponizes those thoughts against her. She experiences these standard human desires as terrifying moral transgressions. To cleanse herself of this perceived sinfulness and maintain an arbitrary standard of ritual purity, she subjects her own physical body to intense ascetic torment. This structural dynamic creates a fractured identity: she cannot completely destroy the biological woman within her soul, yet she cannot tolerate her existence either. This constant self-flagellation renders her emotionally fragile and shatters her psychic core.

4. Opium and Chemical Escapism: As the psychic tension between her Id and Super-Ego reaches an unsustainable peak, Durga's Ego searches for an emergency defense mechanism to avoid total collapse. Finding no valid resolution within her objective reality, she turns to chemical escapism by developing a dependency on kani (opium).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Durga's opium consumption is an attempt to achieve absolute sensory dampening and psychological escapism. The drug serves as a temporary chemical shield against the harsh cruelty of her social environment, her crushing loneliness, and the unquenchable internal fire of her repressed youth. When her mental endurance is crossed, the intoxication of opium provides a temporary space where the demanding voice of her hyper-critical Super-Ego is silenced, and the agonies of reality are temporarily held at bay. Ultimately, this chemical escape highlights the total failure of her social environment to offer a healthy, human path for psychic survival.

B) Sexual Dissatisfaction and Fractured Consciousness: Saudamini in Neelkanthi Braja

In her deeply atmospheric novel *Neelkanthi Braja (Shadow of Dark God)*, Goswami shifts her geographic and psychological focus to the holy city of Vrindavan. Against this backdrop of religious devotion, she explores the lives of abandoned women, systemic exploitation, and institutional hypocrisy. The character of Saudamini serves as another brilliant vehicle for Goswami's clinical exploration of the female unconscious, focusing specifically on the trauma of sexual dissatisfaction and the disintegration of conscious psychic control.

Unlike Durga, who has known only the sterile constraints of the Satra since childhood, Saudamini enters widowhood after having experienced the psychological warmth of romantic love and emotional attachment. When her lover dies, she is uprooted from a secular life and thrust into the rigid, ascetic, and often predatory environment of Vrindavan, where she is expected to spend her remaining days in spiritual penance.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Saudamini's internal crisis stems from a complete breakdown of the boundary between her conscious and subconscious mind. Saudamini is trapped in a profound state of melancholia and unresolved grief. Her unconscious mind remains anchored to the intense libidinal memory of her deceased partner, while her conscious reality demands that she completely sever all ties to physical desire and adapt to the sterile life of an ascetic.

The friction generated by this psychic split proves too intense. Because she cannot find a way to reconcile her authentic sexual and emotional needs with the performance of piety demanded by her family and society, the balance of her mind collapses. She experiences a profound existential crisis, viewing the religious rituals around her not as sources of comfort, but as grotesque mechanisms designed to deny her basic humanity. Her psychological distress escalates until her internal defense mechanisms fail completely, driving her toward a tragic, absolute rejection of reality that culminates in her self-destruction. Through Saudamini, Goswami illustrates how the denial of a woman's sexual and emotional autonomy causes severe, irreversible psychic fracturing.

C) Unconscious Resentment, Exploitation, and Existential Crisis: Chinnamastar Manuhuto and Mamore Dhara Tarowal

While Goswami's exploration of psychoanalysis is most evident in her depictions of individual female trauma, she expands this framework to examine collective psychology, class consciousness, and systemic socio-economic exploitation in her novels *Chinnamastar Manuhuto* (*The Man from Chinnamasta*) and *Mamore Dhara Tarowal* (*The Rusted Sword*). In these works, the author demonstrates a deep understanding of how macro-level social oppression alters the unconscious mind of an entire collective, transforming systemic lack into psychological pathology.

In *Chinnamastar Manuhuto*, set against the backdrop of the ancient Kamakhya Temple, Goswami explores the dark anxieties generated by religious superstition and animal sacrifice. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the intense rituals and bloody sacrifices function as a socially sanctioned release for the community's primitive, aggressive impulses—drives that Freud associated with the death instinct, or Thanatos. The characters find themselves caught in a profound conflict between evolving ethical humanism and the terrifying pull of ancestral, primitive impulses. The pervasive atmosphere of blood and sacrifice induces a deep existential anxiety, driving sensitive characters toward profound psychological crises as they struggle to maintain their moral equilibrium in an environment dominated by ritualized violence.

In *Mamore Dhara Tarowal*, Goswami shifts her focus to a labor strike at a massive construction site. Here, she offers an accurate portrayal of the psychology of oppression. Chronic economic deprivation and systematic humiliation do not simply harm laborers financially; they deeply alter their unconscious minds. The characters suppress a volatile mix of rage, shame, and helplessness on a daily basis. This long-term suppression of aggression inevitably ferments into an unconscious collective resentment against the dominant social order. When the labor movement provides a catalyst, these repressed emotions break through into conscious action, manifesting as an intense desire for structural revenge. Through these narratives, Goswami demonstrates that systemic socioeconomic exploitation inflicts deep, lasting trauma upon the human psyche, often transforming unresolved internal pain into explosive external conflict.

D) Sublimation as a Psychic Defense Mechanism: Shashi in Neelkanthi Braja

In complete contrast to the trajectories of self-destruction and behavioral disintegration observed in Durga and Saudamini, Goswami uses her fiction to explore healthier psychological pathways for survival. The most important of these is Sublimation. In Freudian theory, sublimation is considered an exceptionally mature defense mechanism. It occurs when an individual successfully intercepts primitive, socially unacceptable impulses or overwhelming psychological pain and redirects that energy into creative, intellectual, or socially valued channels.

Within *Neelkanthi Braja*, this adaptive psychic process is exemplified by the character of Shashi. Like her contemporaries, Shashi faces profound emotional emptiness, existential isolation, and the restrictive boundaries of a patriarchal society. However, instead of allowing her internal pain to collapse into hysteria or turn inward as self-destructive despair, Shashi actively re-allocates her psychic energy. She channels her profound personal pain and unmet

emotional needs into an absolute devotion to God and selfless humanitarian service to the marginalized, abandoned women of Vrindavan. By dedicating her life to alleviating the suffering of others, Shashi constructs an alternative narrative structure for her identity. Her personal pain is transformed into empathy, and her isolation becomes a catalyst for community solidarity.

It is highly illuminating to extend this psychoanalytic reading of sublimation to the life of Mamoni Raisom Goswami herself. The author's biography is marked by profound personal tragedy, including the sudden loss of her husband within eighteen months of marriage—an event that plunged her into a prolonged battle with clinical depression and existential despair. Goswami openly acknowledged that she turned to literature as an alternative to suicide. From a psychoanalytic perspective, her entire literary corpus represents a massive act of psychic sublimation. By channeling her intense personal grief, unresolved trauma, and deep empathy for marginalized women into her creative work, she did not merely survive her losses; she transformed her private pain into a universal critique of human oppression. Her novels are the physical evidence of this creative survival strategy.

5. Conclusion

Through a thorough psychoanalytic reading of her major novels, Dr. Mamoni Raisom Goswami emerges as much more than a socially conscious regional writer; she stands out as an extraordinary, clinical doctor of the human mind. Her novels demonstrate a profound understanding of psychological realism, showing that the internal landscapes of her characters are often far more active and real than their external social behaviors.

By applying Freudian psychoanalytic concepts, Goswami provides a sophisticated map of the human mind under pressure. She illustrates the tragic friction between the instinctual Id and the punitive Super-Ego, details the severe behavioral disorders caused by long-term social repression, and traces the protective mechanisms of chemical escapism and emotional sublimation. Her characters—such as the agonized Durga, the fractured Saudamini, and the resilient Shashi—are brilliant literary portraits of human subjectivity navigating institutionalized violence.

Goswami's unique achievement lies in her ability to expose the silent cries, hidden neuroses, and desperate rebellions of the female mind caught within the restrictions of religious fanaticism and patriarchal structures. By framing these localized struggles within universal psychological dynamics, she elevates her work far beyond simple regional commentary. Her deep understanding of the human condition ensures that her novels possess a timeless, cross-cultural resonance, securing her a permanent place as a true pioneer of psychological realism in world literature.

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