

2008 Principal Prince Claus Award to Indian writer, Indira Goswami



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mamoni_raisom_goswami_553267690.jpgIndira Goswami (b. 1942,

Guwahati, Assam) is an outstanding writer who reveals the lived experience of ordinary people. Her powerful graphic descriptions and haunting images bring to light the centrality of the body in human affairs and the codification of political, religious and cultural systems through the body: the bodily processes of life, the impact of gender and age, and the physicality of poverty, norms and conflicts.

Writing in her Assamese mother-tongue, Goswami highlights the diverse cultural context of this remote region. She depicts contemporary political and social dimensions, avoiding romanticism and anthropological tendencies. Her intimate knowledge of community realities is closely woven into strong narratives that tackle controversial subjects such as the plight of widows (*The Blue-Necked Braja*, 1976) and the experience of Sikhs in the anti-Sikh riots (*Pages Stained with Blood*, 1994), as well as examining the impact of the caste system, prostitution and ethnic strife on the human body and psyche. Her *Unfinished Autobiography* (1988) is remarkable for its utter frankness. An important voice for the marginalised, she also writes about Madhya Pradesh, Kashmir and Vrindavan, bringing local issues to the fore.

Indira Goswami is a scholar of Assamese and Ramayana literature, a former professor and Head of Modern Indian Languages and Literature at Delhi University. She works together with others to translate her works into English, to make English literature available in Assamese and vice versa. She plays a significant role in local literature at a time when much Indian writing is mediated by the West.

A courageous public intellectual, Goswami speaks in defence of disadvantaged and minority groups, and recently, through her mediation of peace talks in Assam, she has worked hard in trying reducing conflict that has caused 10,000 deaths.

A woman of remarkable insight and conviction, Indira Goswami is honoured for the unique quality of her writing, for identifying and expressing the inscription of cultural norms in the body, and for her influential social and cultural activism through literature.

editor

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