

Liberation and Empowerment of New Women: A Critical Study of Namita Gokhale's Protagonists

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Abstract

Namita Gokhale is acknowledged as one of those Indian English writers who have explored the finest of their artistic flairs to fictionally put on documentation their conflict and discontent with the predicaments and uncertain state an Indian woman is relentlessly positioned in. In her works, the women characters appear prone and victim to male domination. However, Gokhale incorporates furthermore the rise of womanhood plus the surfacing of an emancipated and empowered woman. Her works divulge an intense disagreement, interrogating, questing, developing proclamation and commemorating their identity as an individual. The paper analyses how the protagonists in the novels of Namita Gokhale use resistance as a powerful tool to emancipate, empower themselves, and establish their own identity.

Key Words: Liberation, Empowerment, Emancipated, Womanhood

Introduction

Indian woman novelist Namita Gokhale frames her works with a different kind of perception. Her works deal with the place of women in the Indian social structure. Gokhale portrays her female characters with much more substance and opportunities contrasted with that of the society or what claims are made. Her depiction provides a new and different perception of the existing feministic writings. Her women characters are authoritative, can take their decisions by themselves and don't need a male companion for their support or recommendations. They are autonomous in their choices and can change the world with their individualistic deliberations. They fight to lead their lives on their terms and against what they don't like, thus presenting a picture of emancipated and empowered women who do not give up on circumstances but rather fight against odds and resist with all their might.

Discussion

A man's will drives the acceptable picture of women. Allowing women to do a sure thing also manifests male chauvinism as they put themselves in the position of authority or the decision-making/taking faculty. Women's work has now been altered to impeccable companions from the traditional role of an immaculate housekeeper with diversified functions in the familial structure. On the one hand, women are portrayed as extraordinary, unblemished and perfect beings; on the other, they are considered weak and always require the support of men

to lead a good and happy life. They are portrayed as beings who always need affirmation from men as they are not thought capable enough to distinguish between right and wrong, putting men in the position of a ruler or an expert.

Many Indian women writers' creations revolve around the issues related to women presenting the perspective of women to the world. In her works, Namita Gokhale tries to break the glass in which the stereotypical woman is cast. Her women characters are individualistic women who are powerful, authoritative and extraordinary. Namita Gokhale talks about the condition of women in the country:

...things haven't changed. Prior women used to attempt to be pleasant customary spouse material...Girls from great families were made to convey one major towel in their packs so they would dependably twist as it shouldn't regard stand straight. They were advised to have a somewhat bowed stance...these days, you assume to look thin and glitzy constantly. What an exercise in futility to do everything the time. I am not hostile to that but rather the entire thing of fitting into a shape, not being your identity. That is the thing that I discover, I think, someplace every one of my books attempts to push women subliminally to be regular, unconstrained, and simple.

Namita Gokhale has portrayed stupendous women characters in her works. Besides Indianess, there is documentation of perspectives of women in her works. Names like Paro, Parvati and Sakuntala are recorded as courageous names. Gokhale has genuinely exhibited the reality of life. Her women characters are always in a place to discover themselves and be themselves. Dr Rashmi Gaur correctly remarks:

...NamitaGokhale emerges as a committed feminist author. She has successfully portrayed the insensitive fatality of options, which society has cringingly given to its women...she has successfully recorded and documented the hopes and fears, the concerns and tensions of the contemporary educated woman and lies in the novel's success.

Paro: Dreams of Passion portrays the realities of life in Bombay and Delhi and how the two women, Priya and Paro, are desirous of each other. Paro is unapologetically herself throughout the novel, isn't strangely anxious, and meets a miserable end. Priya is the kind of woman who holds her family together. A perfect woman is somewhere between them both. They both act as foils to each other. The portrayal of the character of Paro and Priya is exceptionally critical. Paro is seen hunting for pleasure by entangling affluent persons in society. She entices and involves them one after the other, leads a lustful life, enjoys their company, exploits them, and ultimately meets her tragic end. The novel is in the form of a memoir diary which Priya wrote. She thinks she has the power to see things as they are, just like Matthew Arnold suggested, "to see the object as it is." When she is asked by B. R. what this diary is all about, she remarks:

"Is it a love story?" he asked teasingly.

"No," I(Priya) said.

"What is it about, then?"

"Passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy," I said finally...

"Come, Love, tell me what it's about," he said.

"Liberation," I hazarded. (Paro 135)

The burning of the edge of the pallu of Priya's saree from Paro's funeral pyre is suggestive and is a warning for Priya and readers as well that the path which Paro followed leads to a dead end and thus should not be followed, although she was an authoritative, autonomous, bold and independent woman.

The title of the novel *A Himalayan Love Story* is a mere deception. The book is about hardships regarding sexual appetite, suffocation of a confined, cold arranged marriage, distress of not discovering love after rehashing endeavours and the depression which stalks the protagonist Parvati. Her life is pathetic and lamentable. She has been denied affection and adoration throughout her life. She couldn't marry the man she liked and is married to a gay who cannot fulfil her physically and emotionally. She is constantly reminded of her sexual adventures with her history tutor, Salman, which renders her life more miserable.

After the sexual bliss I had known with Salman, my wedding night with Lalit sent us both into the most profound depression. The decorum of the occasion demanded languishing looks, a tender appraisal of the bride by the eager bridegroom, and then, hopefully, down to business...I had tasted real passion, and I could feel nothing but scorn for this farce. My young husband looked puzzled and oppressed, keeping a stubborn, watchful distance from me. (Gokhale 32-33)

Shakuntala: The Play of Memory portrays the ideas about the birth-burn depicted through the term of Shakuntala, the novel's protagonist. The plot is inspired by Kalidasa's *Abhigyanam Shakuntalam*. This is a narrative of a young woman named Shakuntala who learns through the blind priest about the mystery of her former life and comes to terms with it accordingly. As is the novel's subtitle, it deals with reiterating the theme of memory and desire. This novel has been compared to Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* by many critics. Shakuntala recalls that she was spirited, adventurous and imaginative but destined to suffer at the hands of "the samskaras of abandonment." She is sceptical and envious regarding the adherence of her husband, Srijan. Subsequently, he brings in another woman in the garb of a house to help assist her. Shakuntala feigns the identity of Yaduri, a fallen woman who deserts her home and her obligations for the companionship of a Greek

traveller she meets on the banks of the Ganga. Together they enjoy their journey to Kashi, and she indulges in pleasure. She is pregnant, but she wants her freedom. Eventually, agitation and exasperation force her to abandon this world. The Telegraph comments about the novel as

Original and heart-rending, Shakuntala enthrals in its vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman whose desire to live on her terms is thwarted at every turn by circumstance and the age in which she lives. Namita Gokhale combines her extraordinary gift for storytelling with history, religion and philosophy to craft a timeless tale that transcends its ancient setting.

The novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* has a well-thought-out structure. Ammi, the grandmother, is the most grounded character in the novel, as she knows how to shape and manoeuvre things to work. She settles along a lone roadside corner in the suburban area of Delhi and eventually establishes a temple despite being a Muslim and becomes a famous Bhajan singer initially and then a popular saint of the mandir, Mataji. The story circulates the life of Gudiya. She renames herself Pooja Abhimanyu Singh, symbolic of an elaborate background and establishing her identity. She exhibited her genuine qualities after Kalki, her husband, left her. She sends her husband away with her own money and "stridhan."

There had been no models of masculinity to teach me the lessons of dependence as a woman... his(Kalki) absence is an opportunity for growth, for escape...love is not life, and gradually, his hold on me lessened." (Gokhale 224-225)

The Book of Shadows is a self-portraying novel. The novel narrates the story of courageous Rachita, whose fiancé, Anand, has killed himself, and in retaliation, his sister threw acid on her. She is distorted and tormented by this assault. The mental injury that she experiences is much more intensive than physical pain. She withdraws to her childhood home in Ranikhet for mental peace and comfort. While amidst nature's beautiful, incredible, picaresque bounty, she has to witness numerous exciting incidents in that house. After going through a lot of physical and mental trauma, Rachita finally emerges from the shadow, i.e., the temporary sorrow confronting reality.

The world outside is full of change, and I do not know if these memories can endure. This hillside will remain, as will the snow mountains that watch over us, even if nothing else does. The garden will bloom again, the roses by the veranda, the weeds and the forget-me-nots by the gravel path. I think I know that I will remain. (Gokhale 232)

Priya: In Incredible Indyaais, a novel in which NamitaGokhale brings back some characters from *Paro*. The story is narrated again by Priya, who has now climbed the social ladder; her husband is the Minister of State directly. But she still remembers her beginnings in Bombay. She is now mother to two young twin sons, Luv and Kush. Although Priya is the ultimate mother dealing with her son's dreams and desires, she knows well where to set an endpoint. Priya is sanguine that she is encouraging towards her husband, even though their

perspectives are contradictory. She still likes to have her sexual adventures with B.R., even though she has reached menopause; she wants to wear deep-neck blouses with a saree, loves getting ready and is equally fond of her Gucci shades and Dior handbags. She succeeds in building herself a niche and her unique identity.

How do I explain that there is no plot? There never is. The hidden harmony of a housewife's tale is structured, day after day, by simply carrying on. In the storyboard, the drama and heroism lie in the everyday aggravations, the small triumphs of daily life. And the happy endings – they tiptoe in so stealthily that you may already have left the multiplex by the time they show up on the screen. (Priya 193)

Things to Leave Behind, in the first place, is a novel regarding the struggle of females against their subservience to males and by what means this whole thing formulates the individuality or the self-identity of a woman confined within the framework of the man keeping her under his authority. Tilottama, the novel's protagonist, is a fascinating and amicable character. It is revealed in the book that her husband, Nain Chand Joshi, is also intimidated by her and feels miserable due to her domineering disposition. Tilottama is one such singular character who acknowledges discovering her daughter as drab. When her husband leaves for his expeditions, she stays behind in the house, decks herself up in his clothes, sketches moustache and sideburns and smokes cheroots. She also employs a teacher to give her lessons in numbers and Sanskrit and has extended dialogues with herself in made-up English. She abandons her daughter to read novels. Through the character of Tilottama, Namita Gokhale symbolizes a woman's quest for knowledge, her resistance against the set norms of society and the path which takes her towards emancipation and empowerment.

Conclusion

Namita Gokhale's fiction describes women protecting their pride and dignity. Her female protagonists are depicted as intense and capable characters. Her women characters paint their nails, henna their hair or look after themselves, suggesting that they wish to wipe out recollections and seek a better and brighter tomorrow. She has the strength to express her women characters basically with female sensibility genuinely and earnestly. Nowhere in any of her novels do they lose their feminine essence. She requests social equity for women, her attention being on the opportunity. Gokhale speaks to new profound quality, as indicated by which a woman isn't to be taken as an insignificant toy, a protest of desire and transient delight, yet man's equivalent and respected accomplice. Namita Gokhale needs women to perceive and discover themselves.

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