

## ‘Marriage: Freedom or Subjugation’: A Case Study of Paro’s Dreams by Namita Gokhale

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The present paper searches to present a modest study of the novel of Namita Gokhale. It can be truly said that Namita Gokhale introduced herself to the world of English Literature through the novel *Paro: dreams of passion* and got recognition and appreciation as the best seller, as she realistically projected the elite class of Delhi. Her novel made her the talk of the town. It also aims at the exploration of the versatile personality of the author. Namita Gokhale is a world renowned Indian author and novelist known for her works in English language. She is a founder-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival along with the author, William Dalrymple, which started in 2006. Her writings often show a mixture of cultures expressed through the use of various languages. She has received numerous awards for her works. She is the author of several acclaimed novels like *Paro - Dreams of Passion*, *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa*, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, *A Himalayan Love Story* and *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. Her works of non-fiction include *Mountain Echoes* and *The Book of Shiva*. Her writings are unique and contributed a lot to Indian writing in English. The novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, created a stir by its frankness in the early 80s, and pioneered the sexually frank genre, which made her famous. It deals with the satire of Delhi’s upper class. Gokhale through her bold women characters talks about such society where

woman is not free to lead her life in her own style. She depicts the double standard treatment for male and female, upper and lower class and the hypocrisy of the society. Therefore, Gokhale is known as woman activist and feminine writer. Her novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* also deals with the same issues as it talks about the discriminations and identity crisis faced by women in society. She believes in frank narration of incidents and open heartedness. Particularly, the novel has portrayed the urge, necessity and consequences of freedom if not taken care. In a nutshell the novel is about women's dream, emancipation and their struggle for existence.

After Independence, Indian women got the constitutional rights that changed their attitude towards family and society. Yet, today they find themselves in conflict with traditional and modern society that makes them alienated from self and society.

Gokhale wants to convey her readers that culture and society don't leave anybody however hardly one may try and aspire to leave them. Paro a born modern, can be thought as product of west, because of her convent education and not by birth, still she can't ignore the culture of the place she belongs and specially the attitude of men and women in the society. She is living for instance her relationship with Avinendra, whom she wanted to marry, shows her modernity yet was unable to persuade his mother to accept her as 'bahu' (daughter-in-law). Avinendra's mother is not ready to accept Paro because Paro is in a 'Live-in relation' with her son. It proves that although people talk about modernization but can't accept it in real. Gokhale portrays the psychological depression of the Indians to consider themselves Indians or westerners after independence. The author also desires to demonstrate the double standards of society in treatment, set for men and women. B.R. keeps illicit relations before and after marriage with other women. Society doesn't object man to involve with many women but the rules are different for women. It is a sin for a woman to love or have relations with other men. Her novel *Paro* reveals the elite class culture of the society and has gone

through lots of criticism thereafter. The novel stresses mainly the internal conflicts of Priya, the female protagonist with self and society. Social issues and responsibilities have always been the important part of Gokhale's fictional works. The novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, also gives vent to Gokhale's anguish over social injustice.

The existentialism philosophy runs through the novel. The female protagonists are tangled in hostile situations in their lives. The modern society, with its ups and downs, doesn't care for emotions and sensibility of women. Gokhale's protagonist Paro is quite similar to Bharti Mukherjee's protagonist Jasmine and Daniel Defoe's protagonist Moll from the famous novel *Moll Flanders*. We may assume that Gokhale is inspired by the character Moll and sketched the character Paro, who like Moll and Jasmine changed husbands to upgrade and to find happiness in life. The story of the novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is told in second person as a narrative. Priya narrates the story of her best friend as well as enemy Paro, and is presented as a truthful account. It is not only an extremely entertaining and action-packed story, but also gives a valuable and lively pictures of modern society. Although Paro is an exceptional character because of her ingenuity and extraordinary life, the problems that Paro faces are firmly rooted in her society. The Story of the novel entirely revolves around their life (Paro & Priya), their relations, their conflicts, their admiration, and how their life styles affect each other. They are friends as well as enemy at times. Both become friends at times due to feeling of same sufferings in life. Because of a chance remark, two separate lives are brought together in a bizarre arrangement that threatens to destabilize everything they took for granted about themselves. Throughout the story both can be found engaged in identifying their identity as an individual. Husbands don't give attention to wives emotions, feelings, likes and dislikes. Paro was no more living with her husband whereas Priya and Suresh's relation was given an offbeat, thus confirms that husbands are insensitive to their wives. Husband and wife though very intimate still couldn't relate each other in terms of

feeling or understanding. Many married women may find many instances similar in their everyday lives. Priya is in pain and so is Paro. It depicts female traumatic experiences, and articulates the complex relation between trauma, gender and signification.

Paro's death and Priya's dilemma in life shows that though women have been empowered with equal rights and privileges from constitution even though women have no escape from male dominated society and power politics. They ultimately choose the life of menial slave losing their identity. Paro is left alone and suffers mental trauma. Isolation operates at two levels - physical and mental. Physical isolation may be within the four walls of home and mental isolation occurs when one feels all alone and no one cares for. Both Paro and Priya experienced the trauma of isolation.

Elite class culture is the backdrop for this powerful novel, narrated by Namita Gokhale whose female characters do not accept the low secondary status in a male-dominated Indian society that is conservative. The central theme, in the novel *Paro Dreams of Passion*, is the emergence of 'new woman' in the fast changing social milieu.

Gokhale's novel reveals her protest against the image of woman as an auxiliary. She destroys this distorted image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful than men. As depicted by Subhash Chandra in *Female Subjectivity and Female Empowerment in the Fiction of Namita Gokhale*:

*Namita Gokhale has succeeded in projecting women as people whose desires, likes and dislikes matter as much as those of their counterparts and the extent to which the women characters are successful in ordering their lives without male support* <sup>[1]</sup>

Paro and Priya in the novel are given equal importance and thus people remember them after completing the novel. Paro is in search of love and thus gets involve into

relationships with new men of different age, class and society and finally ends her life in an accident. Priya on the other hand establishes extra-marital relationship with her boss BR; the only person she has loved truly, revolts against her insensitive husband but finally abiding by the rules of society is enforced to live with her husband.

Gokhale explores how freedom for women is like a myth. This chapter tries to appraise the emancipation of both women characters by comparing their characters, situations, reactions towards people and society and compromises they had to carry out to live life of their own choice. The study of the novel finds that the root of Gokhale's feminism is in the sufferings of women which are caused due to conflicts between tradition and modernity. Priya is in continuous impasse in fine-tuning her life whereas Paro is seen modifying her life to attain peace and happiness. Family and profession is yet another cause of women's sufferings. It is reflected in the novel as Priya becomes disturbed when her boss announces his wedding. Later due to her family demands she had to marry and follow the traditional set up of society, Paro on the other hand has always been neglected by her parents and thus became extra modern, ambitious, discourteous and a spoil brat. She is over ambitious and her dominating personality becomes the reason of downfall.

Culture and nature of people in surroundings has also caused pain and sufferings to women world thus restricting women's freedom. The double standard society with different norms for men and women in the name of culture has never allowed freedom to women. It elaborates how Priya suffers due to lack of communication with her husband makes her to revolt but disappointed by her brother and sister in law, she searches for her own identity and in the end her quest reaches to compromise and return to her husband.

Gokhale digs into the female psyche and goes beyond the skin and flesh to explore the predicaments of modern women. Clara Nubile enumerates what it means to be a modern woman in India:

*Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of “being a woman-wife-mother” .....Indian women do not appear to have their independent role in society* <sup>[2]</sup>

The study of the novel reveals how Paro and Priya find their ways of life. In this journey they do not compromise with the society but had always compromised for the happiness and peace of self and family. Thus, through the character of Priya, the author reveals that the happiness of family is the foremost criteria for any woman and can go to any extent for it. She also portrays the image of modern woman through the protagonist Paro who faces void and feels vacuum in her life.

The novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* explores the hardcore realities of the world and the consequences of freedom if not handled properly. The modern woman like Paro always draws attention from men wherever she goes, for whom morals are uninterrogated. Paro is well aware of her beauty. Hence says to Priya, “everyone” is in love with me (Paro). <sup>[3]</sup> Gokhale has described these women with harmony and meticulous interest as she occupies the space in the literary world. Through Priya’s character, Gokhale also highlights the compassion inherent in women’s nature. She falls in love with her boss BR, and cannot refuse to meet him later, though she knows pretty well that love will always remain unfulfilled, because his boss is married as well as insensitive, whose attitude towards her is - to use and throw. Priya hates Paro as she says: “Gradually she (Paro) became an obsession for me. Subconsciously (I) Priya would find myself mouthing her words; phrases that were not mine. For example, I too would throw back my head in a deep throaty laugh, and my eyes would narrow in a pale shadow of her piercing gaze.”<sup>[4]</sup> She always dislikes Paro throughout the novel, yet at the end she is shocked and shaken by her accidental death. She realizes a big loss and emptiness in her life by Paro’s unexpected end.

This novel also highlights Namita Gokhale's literary achievements as a novelist. Her novels have explored a new ethics for woman, challenging the existing traditions and principles of the Indian society which contradicts the helpless status for her. Gokhale also widens her stand daringly about her own whims and imaginations of the changing society order, where the woman is subjected to adjustment to achieve her ambitions. As an extrovert, Gokhale uses her pen sarcastically in order to support the woman's place by defining strange human relationships. Complications of human relationships form an integral part of life and characters.

*“The relationships we have with other people are projections of the relationships we have within ourselves. Our external relationships and our internal relationships are in fact the same relationships”*<sup>[5]</sup>

Most of the women characters in Namita Gokhale's novel violate the norms of society and refuse to accept that marriage bring happiness, as they consider it as a way of subjugation or surrender to man. Their sufferings bring them to conclusion that marriage and any human relationships are just fake and ridiculous. Gokhale's keen surveillance of woman's condition in the post-modern world explores the confused state of women's psyche with identity crisis. Education has no doubt given wings and voice to today's women, but at the same time she finds that educated women in India have changed their beliefs in lifestyle therefore creating inner and outer conflicts and more dilemmas affecting their psychic conditions. She always fights against the social norms which restrain her freedom and Gokhale has done justice to the protagonists by giving them the freedom they fought and desired. Thus Namita Gokhale in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* visualizes the whole cultural scenario from locus of oppression, suppression, isolation, depression, domination, amalgamation, frustration and emancipation of women characters.

### Notes

1. Chandra, Subhash. "Female Subjectivity and Female Empowerment in the Fiction of Namita Gokhale". *The Literary Voice*, No. 3, Feb.(1996), p- 53-58
2. Nubile, Clara. *The Danger of Gender*. New Delhi: Sarup & sons, 2003, p-12
3. Paro: dreams of passion, p-59
4. Paro: dreams of passion, p-13
5. Pavlina, Steve. "Understanding Human Relationships". *Personal Development for Smart people*.

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