

Emancipation and Empowerment: A Study of Namita Gokhale's Protagonists

Harshita Chhikara¹

Randeep Rana²

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 on and discontent with the predicaments and uncertain state an Indian women is relentlessly positioned in. In her works the women characters appear prone and victim to the male domination. However, Gokhale incorporates furthermore the rise of womanhood plus the surfacing of an emancipated and empowered woman. Her works divulge in 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 and empower themselves and establishing their own identity.

Introduction

Indian woman novelist Namita Gokhale frames her works with a different kind of perception. Her works deal with the place of woman 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 to 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 for any sort of recommendations. They are autonomous in making their choices and possess the capability to change the world with their individualistic deliberations. They fight to lead their lives in their terms, they fight against what they don't like thus presenting before the reader a picture of

¹ Harshita Chhikara (Assistant Professor in English, Sh. L. N. Hindu College, Rohtak, Haryana. Ph. 9467405198, Email – harshita.hc18@gmail.com)

² Randeep Rana (Professor, Department of English and Foreign Languages, Maharishi Dayanand University, Rohtak, Haryana. Ph. 8168452544, Email – profrandeeprana@gmail.com)

emancipated and empowered women who do not give up on circumstances rather fight against odds and resist with all their might.

Analysis

The picture of women which is acceptable is that which is driven at the will of a man. Allowing women to do a certain thing is also manifestation of male chauvinism as they are putting themselves in the position of authority or the decision making/taking faculty. The position of women has now been altered to impeccable companion from the traditional role of an immaculate housekeeper with diversified roles in the familial structure. On one hand women have portrayed as extraordinary, unblemished and perfect beings and on the other they are considered as weak, which always require support of man to lead a good and happy life. They are portrayed as beings which always require affirmation from men as they are not thought to be capable enough to distinguish between right and wrong, putting men in the position of a ruler or an expert.

A huge number of Indian women writers creation revolve around the issues related to women presenting the perspective of women to the world. Namita Gokhale in her works tries to break the glass in which the stereotypical women is casted. Her women characters are individualistic women who are powerful, authoritative and extraordinary. Namita Gokhale talks about the condition of women in the country as

...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 to fitting into a shape, not being your identity. That is the thing that I discover, I think, some place every one of my books attempt to push women subliminally to simply be regular, unconstrained and themselves.

Namita Gokhale has portrayed stupendous women characters in her works. Besides from 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

...Namita Gokhale emerges as a committed feminist author. She has successfully portrayed the insensitive fatality of options, which the 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 therein lies the success of the novel.

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 being herself throughout the novel and she isn't strangely anxious and meets a miserable end. Priya is a kind of a 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 the society. She entices and entangles them one after the other, leads a lustful life, enjoys their company and exploits them and ultimately meets her tragic end. The novel is in the form of a memoir diary which Priya wrote. She thinks she is gifted with some sort of a power through which she could see things as they really are, just like what Matthew Arnold suggested "to see the object as it itself really 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 really about," he said.

"Liberation," I hazarded. (Paro 135)

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

The title of the novel *A Himalayan Love Story* is a mere deception. The novel is about hardships with regards to sexual appetite, suffocation of a confined cold arranged marriage, distress of not discovering love after rehashing endeavors and the depression which stalks the protagonist Parvati. Her life is pathetic and lamentable. She is denied affection and adoration throughout her life. She couldn't marry the man she liked and is married to a gay who is unable to fulfill 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 deepest 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, even oppressed, and kept a stubborn, watchful distance from me. (AHLS 32-33)

Shakuntala: The Play of Memory portrays the ideas about the birth-burn are depicted through the term of Shakuntala the protagonist of the novel. 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 she comes to terms with it accordingly. As is the subtitle of the novel, it deals with reiterating theme of memory and desire. This novel has been compared to Herman Hesse's *Siddhartha* by many critics. Shakuntala recalls, she was spirited, adventurous and imaginative but was destined to suffer at the hands of "the samskaras of abandonment." She is skeptical and envious regarding adherence of her husband, Srijan. Subsequently he brings in another woman in the garb of a house-help to assist her. Shakuntala feigns the identity of Yaduri, fallen woman, deserts her home and her obligations for the companionship of a Greek traveler who she meets on the banks of Ganga. Together they enjoy their journey to Kashi and there she indulges herself in pleasure. She is pregnant but she

enjoys her freedom. Eventually agitation and exasperation forces her to abandon this world. The Telegraph comments about the novel as

Original and heart-rending, *Shakuntala* enthralls in its vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman whose desire to live on her own 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, grandmother, is the most grounded character in the novel as she knows how to shape and maneuver things to work. She settles along a lone roadside corner in the suburban area of Delhi and eventually establishes a temple in spite of being a Muslim and became a famous Bhajan singer initially and then as popular saint of the mandir, Mataji. The story circulates around the life of Gudiya. She renames herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh, symbolic of an elaborate background and establishing her own identity. She exhibits her genuine qualities after Kalki, her husband, left her. In fact she herself 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 the imperceptibly, his hold on me lessened.” (GGG 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 which she experiences is much more intensive than physical pain. She withdraws herself to her childhood home in Ranikhet to get some mental peace and comfort. While staying amidst the beautiful, cool, picaresque, bounty of nature, she has to witness numerous exciting incidents that occurred in that house. After going through a lot of physical and mental trauma, Rachita finally comes out of the shadow i.e. the sorrow which is temporary and confronts the 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. (TBOS 232)

Priya: In Incredible Indyya is a novel in which Namita Gokhale brings back some characters from *Paro*. The novel is narrated again by Priya who has now climbed the social ladder; her husband is Minister of State now. 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 dreams and desires of her sons, she realizes well where to set an end point. Priya is sanguine that she is encouraging towards her husband, regardless of the fact that their perspectives are contradictory. She stills likes to have her sexual adventures with B.R., even though she had reached menopause, she likes to wear deep neck blouses with 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 as 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 an novel regarding the struggle of females against their subservience on 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 protagonist of the novel, is a fascinating and amicable character. It is revealed in the novel 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 to discovering her own daughter as drab. When her husband leaves for his expeditions, she stays behind by herself in the house, decks herself up in his clothes, sketches moustache and side burns 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 own daughter in order to read novels. Through the character of Tilottama,

Namita Gokhale symbolizes a woman's quest for knowledge, her resistance against the set norms of the society and the path which takes her towards emancipation and empowerment.

Tilottama had little time for the child. She found her boring and suspected her of being dull. 'Enough of babies,' she told herself...Her relatives were left speechless by Tilottama's irresponsibility...Now she hired a tutor, a liberal pundit, to teach her to read and write. He charged her fifteen rupees a month and visited her twice a week. Very soon she had progressed from Hindi to Sanskrit and also begun on the English alphabet...Tille's tutor, moved by her hunger to read, overcame his scruples and bought a second-hand bayaan of *Chandrakanta* for her from the English and Vernacular Bookshop in Almora's main market. The grubby pamphlet transported her to a completely different world. (TTLS 80-81)

Conclusion

Namita Gokhale's fiction describes women with a view to protect her 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 which suggests that they wish to wipe out recollections and seek after 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 the women to perceive and discover themselves.

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