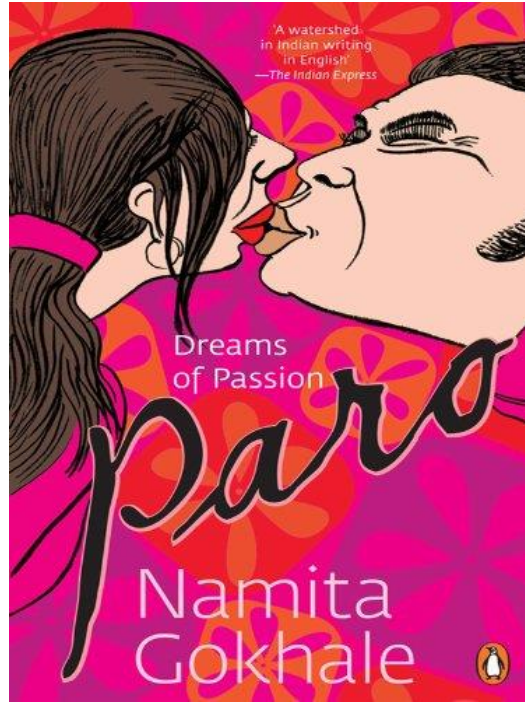


Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's
Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother

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Abstract

Namita Gokhale has seen human life in her novels from the perspective of a woman. She has tried to redefine the feminine role in society. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the protagonist Paro is a representative of an aristocratic class, where everything is acceptable in the name of modernization. She has used the feminine power for earning money, status and goodwill of the various men she comes across in her life. Through the narrator Priya, the author condemns Paro's immoral deeds. Paro has intuitively realized the truth which many women are able to only after a consummate life-long struggle. Finally, Paro commits suicide. Her intention is merely to present herself as a liberated woman but the liberation she chose for herself was hollow and false. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, the protagonist Gudiya suffers from repression of emotions and desires. She is also under great psychological stress and nervous tension, and feels the burden of loneliness and confusion weigh down upon her

without any proper support and guidance from her grandmother. Apart from that Gudiya suffers as her husband Kalki drinks and beat her up. Gudiya has no one with whom she could share her problems. But Gudiya carries the fighting spirit of her grandmother Ammi within her and she becomes more confident and self-assured individual. She leaves her past and looks forward to the bright future of her daughter. Namita Gokhale is the champion of feminine psychology. She very boldly depicts the psychological effects caused by external agencies or factors upon the protagonists Paro in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. Women struggle to get their freedom while living along with other members of society. They are not directed by others. They themselves struggle hard to lead a life of their own and they are conscious of their self. This consciousness leads them towards the realization of their autonomous selves.

Key words:

Namita Gokhale's Novels



Namita Gokhale

Courtesy: <http://www.penguinbooksindia.com/en/node/351.html>

Namita Gokhale is a leading Indian novelist. The novels of Namita Gokhale reveal her keen concern for welfare of women. Women in her novels make an attempt to shake off the shackles of social convention. Gokhale's characters are sourced from all walks of life. Namita Gokhale projects the image of a new woman with a difference. Her female

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R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

protagonists refuse to remain shadowy beings, and utilize their sexuality, gender identities and their inner strength to come out of the man's shadow and achieve identity of their own.

Paro: Dreams of Passion

In Namita Gokhale's novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Paro is an educated and economically independent woman, in search of her identity. Her struggle leads her to discover the hidden strength in her 'self' as well as in other human beings. Paro is presented as a proud, audacious and self-confident, ambitious woman. While in a boarding school, Paro had an affair with the art master Marcus and was consequently expelled from the school. In college at Delhi, Paro meets B.R., who is unaware of her affair with the art master. He fell in love with Paro and they have a love-cum-arranged marriage. These two incidents changed the very course of Paro's life. The character Paro goes to any height in fulfilling her desire and finally fell in to the deepest depths. This way she succumbs to death. Her freak-outs lead her to a trap. From the beginning, Paro has been presented as a proud, audacious and self-confident, ambitious woman. Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatization.

A Heroic Temptress

The Protagonist Paro is a heroic temptress, alluring and rapacious, the stuff of legend. Wandering through the world of privilege and Scotch whiskey that the rich inhabit, she is observed constantly by the narrator Priya, eternal voyeur and diarist, who identifies strongly with the heroine of her favorite novel, Rebecca, and vicariously follows the melodrama of Paro's life. Priya herself is in love with her boss, the irresistible BR, sewing-machine magnate and the Housewife's Friend. Paro inevitably marries him, to Priya's fury. But B.R. is merely one among a whole string of admirers. Paro has seduced many.

Interplay of Reality and Fantasy

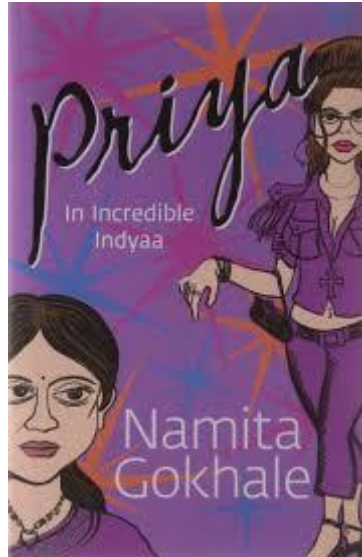
Here the novelist Namita Gokhale tries to tell that the modern life is a life of anxiety and it is the outcome of their way of life. There is an interplay of reality and fantasy; there lies its strength. The marriage of B.R and Paro does not last long. After their separation both Paro and B.R. engage in different affairs.

Priya and Suresh

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:11 November 2015

R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*



Being hurt to see the marriage of B.R. and Paro, Priya wants to change her life style. She consciously observes Paro and behaves like her. This leads Priya to become an important role in Paro's life throughout the novel. Priya marries Suresh. She does not like him but due to societal norms continues with him. But after her miscarriage due to Paro's revengeful behaviour that Paro had gifted Priya and Suresh with an art picture, her life became deserted. The gift was scary, and on seeing the picture Priya aborted and says,

I lost my baby. Never before, and never after, have I known such pain. I am referring not to the physical pain, which was negligible, but to the desolation, the sudden emptying out of reason and beauty and hope from life. In fact, even today, I can hardly bear even to write about it. The sheets of our sturdy double bed were stained red with murderous congealed blood; I went in a rickety ambulance, dark as the night, to the noisy nursing home, where the bored doctor on duty aborted me. (PDP 68)

After the incident, Priya's husband Suresh is very nice to her outwardly. The unspoken feelings of Suresh related to the loss of their baby hurts Priya. This situation worsens as Suresh engrosses himself in his work to become busier, leaving Priya alone with her grief. Suresh by involving himself in his work tries to forget the loss. Mandlebaum says "a person's family is a major focus of his life expectations and activities. Children are one's chief source of lasting pleasure and prime goal of affection; they are the means of attaining respected status, the avenue for creativity and achievement (23).

Suresh's great expectation fails to materialize in the form of the child and hence he moves away from Priya. He moves not only away from Priya but from himself too. Priya and Suresh are alienated from each other. They have their separate aloofness. The love and attachment gradually disappear from their life. The warmth between them turns into cold feelings and the harmony develops into discord.

Confessional Diary and the Story of Relations

Suresh's work keeps him away from Priya for longer hours and he reaches home late at night. Priya feels that her married life is getting upset. She changes her attitude towards Suresh and her marital life. She tries to find a solution to her loneliness by taking up a part time job in a book shop. The job at the book shop could provide no comfort to Priya. Suresh persuaded Priya to abandon writing a confessional diary in which she had been expressing every aspect of her life and about the people around her. That diary contains matters related to Paro and her illicit relations, Suresh and his personality, B.R. and Priya's sexual relations.

Priya tries to hide her relationship with B.R. from her husband but is unable to hide her longing for B.R.'s company from him. Priya continuously indulges in a double strategy and tries to keep both the men enwrapped in a relationship with her. For materialistic prosperity she needs Suresh and for her sexual satisfaction she needs B.R. But when Suresh reads Priya's diary, the truth is revealed to him. Priya accepts that she has never loved Suresh. In desperation Priya tries to move away from wedlock but again returns.

Paro's Life after Divorce - From One Man to Another as Liberation

The protagonist Paro is not afraid of the life that she will have after the divorce. She is not ready to maintain silence over the sexual affairs of her husband in order to maintain the social prestige of the family. She leaves B.R. and as a part of her divorce settlement takes money and property from him. She defies moral orthodoxy of patriarchal social system and redefines the predicament of a single woman by challenging the conventional values and codes. She decides to pay back B.R. in his own way.

Paro also chooses the path of faithlessness. Paro had many suitors namely B.R., (her ex-husband) Lenin, Avinendra, Sambhunath Mishra and so on. Paro is not the kind of woman who shall remain in the wedlock just for the sake of home, food and social status. She demands equality in her relationship. She believes in herself and is not ready to accept the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:11 November 2015

R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

ways of her husband or allow him to dominate her. She never longs for security and emotional attachment from her husband. Paro thinks that B.R. is fully responsible for shattering her dreams of happiness in marriage and sets herself free from the loveless trap. She moves from one man to another and forms illicit relationship with many men. She tries to overthrow B.R.'s authority upon her by her various illicit relationships and considers it as her liberation.

Paro's eyes narrowed even more in an attempt to conceal and suppress her triumph at this declaration of love. Mockery and self-satisfaction clashed in their green depths. Then, suddenly, she switched roles. She was now the free woman, symbol and prototype of emancipation and individuality. 'I am myself,' she said theatrically, 'and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person. (PDP 48)

Yearning to Find True Self

Paro yearns to find her true self, and in her quest she moves towards theatre. She is going to play the role of Clymnestra in a play. She compares her life with the life of Clymnestra, and realizes that this male dominated social network has degenerated her.

Fulfilment of Spirit

The narrator Priya realizes that only sensual love is not the ultimate love but fulfilment in spirit is also must. Priya's return to her husband's home is the realization of herself in the form of the ideal Indian married woman. Priya says "I am an Indian woman, I told myself, and for me my husband is my God" (PDP 129). Paro has intuitively realized the truth which many women are able to only after consummate life-long struggles.

Paro Commits Suicide

Finally, Paro commits suicide. Her intention is merely to present herself as a liberated woman but the liberation she chose for herself was hollow and false. Paro realizes her mistakes and repents the part she had played throughout her entire life. Later, she changes, and welcomes her ex-husband B.R. The quest for identity, however, does not end on a positive note for Paro; she commits suicide. Her death is a plea to society to think positively about a new kind of existence for its women by bringing reforms that would liberate the women from the clutches of tyrannical conventions. Paro dies during her struggle for existence.

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R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

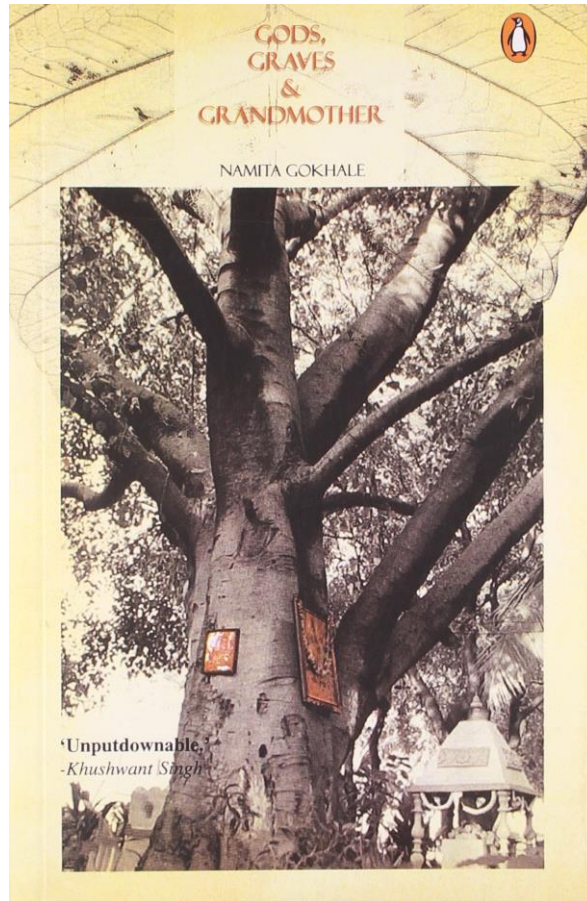
At last, Paro realizes that a world earned through sex, glamour, wine, jewels, and food is not the real world. The world that she had created for herself is a world of senses and illusions. Her urge to assert her 'self' finds the wrong path for it is self-deprecating. To escape the binding tentacles of the male dominated patriarchal society she in fact plays to its very tune; she objectifies herself in the same mould that she intended to break. Though she declares herself to be independent and her own person, yet her attempts at self-mutilation that is her suicide attempts indicate her vulnerability and dependence on male acceptance; and indication of the emptiness she carries within her 'self'.

Paro and Priya - Struggle, Exploitation and Compromise

Paro and Priya put up with struggle, exploitation and compromise to assert their choices, but are unable to execute them effectively. In order to realize their ultimate goal of liberated self-hood women often employ strategies, to overcome their insecurities, ineptness, and fears, they often employ their sex; yet find it impossible to defy the traditional conditioning and constraint.

“To prevent an inner life that has no useful purpose from sinking into nothingness, to assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being, she must resort to self-expression”. (qtd in Gaur Rashmi 110)

Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*



The protagonist Gudiya in Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is left by her mother. Gudiya and her grandmother are all alone. Gudiya is denied parental affection and love even from her grandmother. Gudiya suffers from repression of emotions and desires. She is also under great psychological stress and nervous tension, and feels the burden of loneliness and confusion weigh down upon her without any proper support and guidance from her grandmother. Apart from that Gudiya suffers as her husband Kalki drinks and beat her up. Kalki does not change his behaviour. Gudiya has no one with whom she could share her problems. This state of bitterness with confusion leads Gudiya to realise her own self.

Gudiya's Grandmother Ammi

Gudiya's grandmother Ammi is a Muslim courtesan converts herself into a Hindu saint. Previously a rich kothewali, Ammi entertained nawabs and Englishmen, and earned money through prostitution. Her family consisted of her brother, her daughter and the child of her daughter, Gudiya. A turn of fate rendered the family poor and destitute with tragic consequences. Gudiya's mother ran away with Riyasuddin Rizvi, Ammi's brother committed

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R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

suicide, and Ammi was left alone with Gudiya. The involvement of Ammi and Gudiya's mother in prostitution ends in the escape of Gudiya's mother with a beggar.

Ammi's Influence

Ammi's profession of courtesan inspires her daughter to link herself with the profession of prostitution. The lack of emotional bond brings to the forefront the conflict inherent in the mother-daughter relationship. So Gudiya is left without her mother, and the grandmother acts as the surrogate mother to Gudiya. Ammi is a resourceful and very practical woman. Being without money she utilizes and manipulates the situation in order to survive.

To Survive - A Semblance of Virtue

Gudiya and Ammi are without money and live in Delhi slums. She steals a marble slab and places it beneath the peepal tree along with five rounded river stones and a few marigold flowers, to complete the hurriedly improvised shrine. In one simple gesture, she bids farewell to that part of her life when she enjoyed a rich status as a kothawali singer. Her instinct tells her that in order to manipulate the system she must present a semblance of virtue and in her case, virtue means obliterating her past altogether. As the owner of the newly created shrine, she becomes an entirely new person. She abandons her burqua and consigns it to her trunk along with the sequined ghararas and beaded reticules. Her personality changed as a god woman. Ammi forms a relationship of authority and reverence with the people in the neighbourhood as well as the people who come to visit her temple.

Ammi's Shrine

Ammi hides her identity as a Muslim woman because purdah is essential for a Muslim woman. Ammi through her practical knowledge manipulates the notion of God. It is also the fact that if Ammi discloses her true identity as a Muslim prostitute to the people around her, then people would never allow her to run the Hindu temple. Ammi's temple is illegally built and in the name of God, she gets other facilities illegally from the government employees. The natural incidents take the form that it was the curse of God. When the man from the municipal corporation came with a demolition order for the pucca cement structure, he finds a Durga temple in its place. He begs forgiveness from Ammi for his blasphemy and says, "What does the department know of the ways of God?" (GGG 13) and leaves a fifty rupees note in the donation box.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 15:11 November 2015

R. Kanimozhi, M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil.

Theme of Self-realisation in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

The shrine serves as a place of shelter, protection and money to many people. Many lepers and beggars make their living because of the temple. The lepers are generous enough to contribute a sum of five thousand and one rupees for the grand ceremony of grandmother's statue installation. Lila, the ardent devotee of Ammi leaves her son and family and takes shelter in the shrine. It provides income and life to Phoolwati, Pandit Khailash Shastry, Sundar Pahalwan, Gudiya and many others.

Slow Detachment from Granddaughter

Grandmother devotes herself for the development of the shrine. In this pursuit, she even detaches herself slowly from Gudiya. She spends more time and effort in the shrine. Some miracles also happen in the premises of the temple. People who come to demolish the house are punished. Electricity was taken illegally, from the street pole. It burst on the head of the departmental chief. A scorpion bites a man who spits to dishonour the temple, while Phoolwati's husband Shambhu finds a wallet full of money outside his tea stall. This way, it seems, God curses the ones who oppose the temple while those who respect are kept his benign care. Sainthood has some restrictions also, which affects the relationship between the grandmother and grand-daughter. Ammi keeps a distance from Gudiya.

Gudiya's Loneliness

Abandoned by her mother, Gudiya hardly finds any solace in the detached relationship with her grandmother. Ammi and Gudiya face communication gap. The grim reality compels Gudiya to reassess her relationship with Phoolwati, the widow of Shambhu who owns a flower shop at the gate of the temple. Phoolwati plays the role of Gudiya's mother. She forms affectionate and cordial relationship with Gudiya and is exceptionally careful about Gudiya's well-being.

Gudiya knows nothing about her father and speculates that her pale-gold skin was a legacy of some Afghan or Phirangi customer. She thinks of her unknown father and refers to her mother as her wicked waylaid mother. This parental distance and deprivation has a deep impact on Gudiya's persona.

After the death of grandmother, Gudiya feels depressed, lonely and sick. Gudiya sheds more tears at Ammi's death than she did when her mother abandoned her. Roxanne, the principal of St. Jude's Academy, where Gudiya studies, takes her home and provides all comforts. Though Gudiya is sophisticated, she is not happy there and comes back to Phoolwati's house and decides not to get back again.

Husband's Exploitation

Gudiya's relationship with her husband Kalki is one of exploitation. He used her sexually without any kind of emotional attachment. Kalki lost interest in Gudiya after exploiting her sexually. It is only under the pressure of Sundar Pahalwan that Kalki marries Gudiya, but even after marriage their relationship is hardly compatible. He treats her badly, which leaves Gudiya feeling tired and depressed. Kalki's callous behavior, harshness and complete disregard of her feelings ultimately wear Gudiya down to the extent that she completely loses her confidence and her strength to resist his abuse. Kalki's habit of gambling and drinking became a great problem for Gudiya and she finds herself unable to adjust to the situation. Miss Barot comments about marital adjustment between couples: "the emotional components of the marital relationship, which satisfy emotional needs of affection, belongingness, security and adequacy ranked very high as sources of satisfaction, the cognitive and economic aspects of marriage and relationship... accorded to a lower degree of importance"(64).

Phoolwati advises Gudiya after the marriage that she should consider her husband as a disposable being and not to waste her time on him as the child has the legitimate father. Gudiya is symbolic of her confidence in herself. She is ready to accept the challenges of life alone without any male support.

The Fighting Spirit of Her Grand Mother to the Rescue

Gudiya carries the fighting spirit of Ammi within her and became a more confident and self-assured individual. Gudiya says,

Sometimes I go through the photographs of my marriage – the assembled band and Kalki in his dark suit. It all seems far away and unreal. In actual fact, I have all but forgotten him. When enough time passes, and the dust settles on

those troubled memories, perhaps I shall be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Rendering the past acceptable, if not accountable, is a talent I inherited from my Ammi (GGG 239-240)

Overcoming her weakness and immaturities she evolves into a strong, confident woman who does not cling to her man of survival. She leaves her past and looks forward to the bright future of her daughter.

The Internal Problems That Torment Characters From Within

Namita Gokhale writes much about the internal problems that torment her characters from within. She does not try to strike a balance between the tradition and commitment. She very boldly depicts the psychological effects caused by some external agencies or factors upon the protagonists Paro in *Paro: Dreams of Passions* and Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. The protagonists Paro in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* are epitome of sensuousness and female vitality. It is the women protagonists who govern the plot and are presented as central figures. They refuse to accept the narrow and conventional role assigned to them. They establish authoritative defiance and retard men in their own terms, without caring for its effects. Namita Gokhale's women are always in search of their righteous place in the family and society right from their childhood. They do not hesitate to raise their voice against the age-old traditions and customs oppressive in nature, which built the patriarchal society where man is considered to be of prime importance. Women struggle to get their freedom while living along with other members of society. They are not directed by others and are conscious of their self. The protagonists Paro, Priya, and Gudiya are conscious of atrocities and humiliation imposed on them. This consciousness leads them towards the realization of their autonomous selves. Through the protagonists Paro, Priya, and Gudiya, Namita Gokhale has dealt this theme of self-realization in her novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, and *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*.

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