

SUBVERTING HEGEMONY THROUGH WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION

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Abstract: In spite of the advancement in science, technology, life-style and living of people, the evil of gender discrimination can be easily noticed at any corner of the world whether it may be a developed or a developing country. In a developing country like India, people in the metro-cities have turned introvert and they have a hedonistic approach towards their life. Men hold the reins of all the main activities of the social, political or economic arenas. In some countries the rules are very strict for women but some countries have given much liberation to women and they are not far behind than men; so far as Indian context is described, the positions of women have improved a lot but it cannot be called that women are sitting at the equal platform with men. That's why many Indian women writers have narrated the predicaments of women in their works and in the modern age, due to women empowerment women are easily seen breaking the social coded and subverting the so-called patriarchal hegemony. Namita Gokhale is not an exception and she has depicted the women characters subverting the rules devised by the patriarchal society so that they may live independently. Namita Gokhale's novel *Paro: The Dreams of Passion* narrates an esoteric situation of a middle class and an upper middle class life through two characters Priya and Paro. Present paper explores the issues related to women and beautifully reveals the need of the women empowerment in the patriarchal society.

Key-Words: Women, Marginalization, Hegemony, Women Empowerment, Sexuality, Identity.

Introduction: Many Indian women novelists have depicted marginalized positions of women and some of them have depicted bold characters in their novels. Kamala Markandaya, Shobha De, Shashi Deshpande also have the same themes in her novels and their female characters also don't care for the rules made by the society. Namita Gokhale is one of those women novelists whose characters are very audacious and bold to jump to any action. Talluri Mathew Bhaskar writes, "As a novelist of the forefront, Gokhale stands head and shoulder with Kamala Markandaya, Jhabwala, Anita Desai, De and Manju Kapur." (Bhaskar 2) Namita Gokhale is a versatile Indian writer who was born on 6th January 1956 at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. She has been at Delhi and Nainital during her childhood. When she was eighteen-year-old, she was married with Rajiv Gokhale. She dropped her college and published a film magazine *Super* from Bombay. She has written many themes related with women in her fictional and non-fictional works. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) is her maiden novel that deals with the sexual leanings of the modern girls. Her second novel *Gods Graves and Grandmother* is an ironic fable. Her other novels are *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996), *The Book of Shadows* (1999), *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* (2005). *The Book of Shiva* narrates Shaivite philosophy and Indian mythology. She has special interest in Indian mythologies that's why she has rewritten famous Indian epic entitled *The Mahabharata* and her anthology *In Search of Sita-Revisiting Mythology* has been edited in collaboration with Dr. Malashri Lal, presents fresh interpretations of this enigmatic goddess and her indelible impact on the lives of Indian women.

Gokhale's recent *Priya: In Incredible Indya*, resurrected some characters from her debut novel *Paro*. A collection of short stories, *The Habit of Love*, was published in January 2012.

Analysis: Namita Gokhale has depicted women in her novels which are not submissive and they know their rights and exercise their rights. She has depicted her dissatisfaction regarding the position of women in the Indian society and she has also depicted the free-style living of women in the metro-cities such as Delhi and Mumbai. These women don't care for the rules made by the patriarchal hegemony. She has depicted women's problems and predicaments, their dreams, desires and aspirations, their struggle for their liberation and career. Such themes are found in her novels which become the strength for the women empowerment. She has not depicted the marginalization of women and their sufferings; she has depicted the joy, relief and liberation of women beyond any boundary. Namita Gokhale tells about the novel.

...As for writing, I always wrote, bad poetry, pretentious short stories and then, in *Paro*, I found the right voice. The book I wrote...very quickly. (Bannerjee, qtd. in Bhaskar. 1)

Namita Gokhale has taken her characters from the society she has seen around in the cities i.e. Kumaun, Delhi or Mumbai. Her novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* deals with the frank treatment of sex. This novel criticizes how every hateful act is accepted in the society in the blind race of modernization where there is no place for the moral or ethical values. This novel was accepted by the upper class but it was also criticized due to the objectionable language and that

also from a woman writer. This was the initial trend by a woman writer who has used such words in her novel and that's why people criticized this novel.

This novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984) is a beautiful work that deals with a different world of women where they are not bound with the kitchen work, home and children. It gives a frank treatment of lustful activities of women. The novel depicts the life of two women Paro and Priya. The latter one entangles the elite class people in her vicious and lustful activities, enjoys her time with them and exploits them. These nefarious and condemnable activities make her bold but she meets a tragic death in the end

People generally learn from their society and this society gives us very good and bad experiences in our life also. When Paro was living her carefree and independent life, she becomes an inspiration for another woman, Priya but Priya was much different from Paro. She has learnt many things from her life and she gave partial importance to the society also. She respects her husband, Suresh and wants to be with him forever. Priya's mentality can be described in these words, "I am an Indian woman,' I told myself, 'and for me my husband is my God.'telephone to call Delhi." (Gokhale125) But she is a hypocritical woman and her outer world is different from her inner world. Though ostensibly she shows her love and dedication to her husband but she establishes sexual relationships with her boss and lover B.R.

Paro is the central female protagonist in this novel. She is the only daughter of a retired Brigadier, "I was a brother in their well-ordered lives. Besides, they were in the army, and kept getting transferred and things. I spent my whole life in a boarding school in the hills." (Gokhale 27) Paro's mother is a simple member of the upper middle class. She is an ambitious girl and she does not want to follow the rules made for women. She is a beautiful, tall and sexy socialite and she lives in the glittering world of Delhi and Bombay. She does everything for pleasure. She is a nymphomaniac and always lives in her dream world. She does not have a very good childhood as when she was studying a boarding school. She lived in a hostel there. She was raped by her art teacher in the grove of a pine trees behind the chapel. She depicts this incidence in these words, "He raped me in a grove of pine-trees,' she said, tears in her eyes. He sodomised me in the woods behind the chapel.(27) Though it was an act of rape but she enjoys every moment of it, "Funny thing is that I wasn't raped, I loved every moment of it." (29) She was expelled from her school for it. When she entered college for further studies, she met Babu (B.R.). Due to her beauty B.R. falls in love with her at the first sight. B.R. runs his own business and he is owner of Sita Sewing Machines. B.R.'s father sends marriage proposal and

this family did not know that Paro had been a rape-victim in her school days, "Then, in a college, I met Bubu . . . Man, did he fall for me like a ton of bricks! His father sent a proposal. Apparently they hadn't heard about my rape-scene (29) and thus the marriage takes place. But marriage is not a simple path for a woman. She has to depend on her destiny after her marriage. Simone de Beauvoir aptly observes in this context:

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married or have been or plan to be or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious or even indifferent in regard to that institution. (Beauvoir 445)

Paro is not satisfied with the behavior of her husband and she establishes her relationships with many men such as Suresh, B.R., Bucky Bhandpur, Loukas and ShambuNath without caring for the society and devises her own rules to enjoy her life. These are reputed men but all of them become the victim of Paro's lust. She takes pride in sharing her vicious act with Priya without any sense of guilt or shame. Priya, a narrator of the novel describes it, "She did not perceive the shame and furtiveness of sex....She told me the length of each of her lovers' organs." (Gokhale30) Paro is a beautiful woman and not only men but women also fall in love to see her. She is different mother and is very careful to her body. Even Priya also considers Paro as her ideal and seems falling in love with her, "She was flattered by my curiosity and attention....I think I was in love with her." (Gokhale30) Priya also wants to imitate Paro so that she may become like her and always wants her company, "I was wary about having dinner with Paro..." (Gokhale41) Paro's attitude and self confidence cast a deep impact on the psyche of Priya "Her audacity and self confidence took my breath away....brides behaved in my world." (Gokhale 09) Priya does not love her husband and her husband also is not in love with her. Their love is artificial. Priya falls in love with her boss and her husband, Suresh becomes the victim of Paro. Such kind of life can become just tensions in the domestic life, "When we returned home, Suresh was furious. For the first time in our marriage, he hit me....how dare you behave like that with my friends?" (Gokhale45)

Paro follows the fast lifestyle of the metro-cities and does not hesitate to drink gin. Her lustful story is narrated by her fan and friend, Priya who is the narrator of this novel. Paro has a modern thinking and she thinks that being a woman, she also has her own dreams and aspirations and she has full right to give vent to her emotions. That's why she uses men's body as a medium of fulfilling her desires. She uses her

beauty as a weapon to lure men but she uses them just for enjoyment. She starts this vicious act when she notices her husband B.R.'s sexual act with a girl from her neighbourhood; she is filled with rage but her husband pays no attention to her. Her husband neglects her and it hurts her. She wants to hit him back in the same way and that's why she has her physical relationships with a boy of very young age, Avinendra and he understands her predicaments that's why he says, "She is not a kept woman; she is free. That is why I love her." (43) Paro now takes a path that is against the rules of the safety of wedlock. She does not look back in her relationships and now wants to sleep with any man he wants. She wants that equality should be in that house and she has rights to live her life the way her husband lives. She reveals her sexual relationships to Priya for her own contentment and real self:

'Oh, I'm doing it in an attempt to, you know, find myself. I mean, I've spent the last umpteen years fucking the men in my life, and getting fucked myself in the process.' (Gokhale 99)

The next man who becomes her sexual prey is Bucky Bhandpur. She then lures Priya's husband, Suresh also. Paro, in this way has her relationships with many men and she does not spare a boy who could be in the age of her own son. She gets married to B.R. but she is not satisfied with this marriage and she finds her love outside her wedlock. She has her relationships with Bucky Bhandpur, Avinendra and Shambhu Nath Mishra. She does not think what the other people of the society will think about her. She just has a narcissistic attitude. She thinks that sex is substitute for happiness for her and she comes to realize in the end that artificial life with wine, jewellery, sex and fast food without loyalty in relationships won't give her much satisfaction. She breaks her relationships with her husband B.R. but later she accepts him. She commits suicide in her second attempt to get rid of her life. In this way, Paro breaks all the rules set by the society to live her life but all this does not go in the long run and she has to pay for it by losing her life.

People learn most of her life from other people they see and meet in their lives. Their habits and attitude become a part for some people when these people apply the rules on their own lives. Priya is such a character who blindly imitates the life of Paro and tries to be like her. She is another female character of the novel who belongs to a middle-class family. She works as a secretary for B.R. There are other middle-class girls also who work there but Priya is closer to her boss because she is his personal secretary. She crosses the boundary of boss-servant relationships and develops physical relationships with her boss. In fact, falls in love with him. The opening of

the novel is with Priya's narration as a secretary to B.R.:

I was B.R.'s secretary at that time; all of us at the office thought he was a real dreamboat. He looked straight into our eyes – he knew all our firstnames – he was a compulsive nymphomaniac. The dictionary says that a male nymphomaniac is properly described as a victim of satyriasis, but I think that he was a nymphomaniac... (Gokhale 1)

Priya knows her reality but she dreams to marry B.R. in the hope that he will marry her and considers herself lucky as B.R. is not liked by her alone, he is liked by other girls also who work in his office such as Anita, Ivy and Mary. That's why Priya is not worried about the loss of her virginity.

Priya gets a shock when B.R. does not marry Priya and breaks her heart by marrying Paro. In fact, B.R. could not marry Priya due to her middle-class status. He throws a party to his employees to celebrate his marriage with Paro and this incidence acts as a shock to Priya.

Tallas she was.... On the highest stiletto heels.... this was not how brides behaved in my world. All the brides.... sari pallavs covered.... she circulated through the room with an assured catlike grace.... They came to the corner where I stood.... At the sight of B.R. my heart, my stomach, my legs, all turned to unset jelly. He was sweating profusely and a lock of hair was plastered at an odd angle across his forehead. His eyes had strange expression, glassy yet triumphant, like a hunter displaying an unusually fine skill. (Gokhale 9-10)

After B.R.'s marriage with Paro, Priya feels much disappointed. She gets married to Suresh who works as a lawyer in Delhi. Her marriage was a simple marriage and many people were not invited in this marriage. B.R. and Paro do not attend this marriage as this time they were celebrating their holidays in Europe but they send a personal gift at the occasion of her marriage.

My marriage was a middle-class one, much as any other. We did not have many relatives, and so it was uneventful, even a little boring. My husband was a virgin, and did not seem to notice that I was not. B.R. accepted my resignation with equanimity. They could not attend the wedding, which was in May, as they were holidaying in Europe that summer. I received a Sita Sewing Machine as an official wedding gift, and B.R. and Paro sent a cut-glass vase as a personal present. (Gokhale 19)

Suresh and Priya go to Nainital to for their honeymoon but Priya is not happy with this marriage as she was not satisfied with her middle-class life and she is unable to forget the moments she had enjoyed with B.R. she gets influenced by Paro and she starts going to beauty parlour so that she may attract her lover B.R. Priya is not bold enough like Paro. She is

financially dependent on her husband Suresh and she is dependent on B.R. for her dreams of life. Their married life gets disturbed when she murmurs “Babudarling” in her sleep and when Suresh gets astonished. He comes to know the truth through Priya’s diary:

‘And if you think,’ I said, turning my attention to Suresh, “if you think I ever had, or could have had, any sentiment except . . . no, not hatred, you’re not even worthy of that . . . if you think I could have had any sentiment for you except ridicule—then you are just an egotistical fool; I’ve lived with you like a whore, because you paid for it. Immediately, I felt sorry for my outburst. Suresh’s face fell; he seemed genuinely hurt and shocked. (113-114)

Suresh is not happy with Priya’s habits of smoking and her obscene dress style. Priya is also not happy with her husband Suresh and both find the way of separation. Priya also makes her temperament like Paro. In this way, both the characters, Paro and Priya want to shake off the shackles of the traditional and conventional rules set by the society. Paro is a bold character and she liberates herself from all the bondages of the family and society but Priya is unable to shed off the morality of her middle-class life. She somehow harmonizes with the society and family.

Conclusion: Namita Gokhale has added a new flavour by her novel *Paro: Passions of Passion*. After this novel many other women novelists also started writing on the frank treatment of sex. This novel is a

critique on the modern women who have hedonistic approaches to life and don’t care for the other people of the society. Gokhale has attacked on the sexual hungers of the women as well as the corruption prevalent in the society. The novel sheds light how boss molests his secretary and how a teacher makes his own student the victim of his lust. The novel deals with the sexual overtones of two girls. The novel delineates the precarious conditions of women and how men want to dominate over them but modern women don’t accept male supremacy and they don’t hesitate to break the rules of the society for their pleasure and independent status. The novel makes the readers remember the two characters Saroja and Lalitha from Kamala Markandaya’s novel *Two Virgins*. In this novel also Lalitha is a highly ambitious girl and wants to make her career as a heroine but Mr. Gupta, a cunning director, not only sexually exploits her but makes her pregnant also. Lalitha does not face this humiliation and she also wants to commit suicide. In the novel *Two Virgins* Aunt Alamelu criticizes the modern generation in these words, “I know what is going on these days, these days young people think they know best, they have no respect for their elders, they have no respect for anything except their own willful ways...” (Markandaya 62) In the light of all these issues, Namita Gokhale also has depicted the whims of the young modern girls who want to live their lives at their own conditions and disparage the social conventions.

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