



Projection of Human Passions in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion*

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Abstract: Namita Gokhale is one of the leading Indian novelists. Through her fictional works, she has illustrated the agony and pain that befall any woman who defies socially prescribed norms of behavior. She has followed the maturation and growth of her protagonists since they were young children. In literature written by women, women are portrayed in a variety of ways. Gokhale's novels reveal her deep concern for the welfare of women. At the same time, these novels highlight numerous human passions through the life of Gokhale's central characters. It is observed that Gokhale's female characters make an attempt to shake off the shackles of social convention. Her characters are sourced from all walks of life. The present novelist projects the image of a new woman with a difference. Her female protagonists defy to remain shadowy beings and utilize their inner strength to come out of the man's shadow. They choose to follow their passions at the place of following the rules imposed upon them and finally achieve an identity of their own. Namita Gokhale's work appears to be shaped by love and passion, illness and death. The conflict of love and the mad pursuit of passions between various characters like Paro and Marcus, between Paro and B.R., between Paro and Shambhunath Mishrai etc. bring to light numerous human emotions in the novel.

Keywords: Human, Passion, love, conflict, loneliness, identity.

Indian women novelists have devoted their attention to the world of women with a surprising intensity of introspection. They have started down the path of measuring and investigating the inner lives of their female characters. Namita Gokhale is one female author who has spoken out forcefully against the unending tragedy of women's exploitation and abuse. Through her fictional works, she has illustrated the agony and pain that befall any woman who defies socially prescribed norms of behavior. She has followed the maturation and growth of her protagonists since they were young children. In literature written by women, women are portrayed in a variety of ways.

Born in Lucknow, in 1956, Namita Gokhale spent a larger part of her childhood in New Delhi. She also lived in Nainital and areas around it. It is perhaps because of her stay in the hills that the hills and natural beauty have had an everlasting influence on her works. She came into limelight after the publication of her novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* in 1984. In this commendable novel, the central character, Paro, remains on a quest for pleasure. She keeps living her life following her passions. Gokhale is perhaps the first one to portray a woman who leads a lustful life, exploits her lovers and does all that was not "ordinary". This fiction appears to be a satire upon a certain class of people living in and around New Delhi and Mumbai. This novel was admired by the elite class. In this book, Paro is depicted as pursuing pleasure via entwining wealthy people with society. She seduces and traps them one after the other while living a lusty life,



enjoying their companionship and taking advantage of them. In the end, she experiences a horrible ending. However, as a result of her evil deeds, Priya loses her spouse and starts living like Paro. Many people praised the book because they enjoy reading about the raw truths of life with curiosity and affection. Vinay Kripal aptly remarks:

Namita Gokhale exhibits an ideology of a sub-culture of North Indian upper middle-class women, those who need to kill time in dinner parties, gossip about the shared secrecy of sexual escapades look at woman's world with a vacillation between the woman's authoritarian world view (feminine) and being an object of man's world. Unlike Shourie Daniels, she uses a fictional device to exalt woman's ideological world view.... authority in the Edward Said context, transforming it, however, in terms of the feminine point of view. The author's voice of authority is embodied in the protagonist character. Paro and the voice of molestation is embodied in the narrator's voice who is not completely adsorbed of the male-oriented socio-economic world view.

Namita Gokhale attempts to portray a different definition of feminine role in the society. She depicts human sensibilities like treachery, jealousy, self-conceit, distorted love, adulterous relationships and so on through her protagonists. The present novel's protagonist, Paro, is a typical of upper middle class woman who uses the womanly power in order to get money and status in life. Paro is a gin-drinking temptress whose story is narrated by the observant Priya. The narrator records not only the love but also failures of love between her friends. At the time of its first appearance, Paro was adjudged by "The Times" as a "refreshing" and "highly-flavoured tale of passions and jealousies of a group of middle-class Indians." The author has criticized the unethical deeds, such as flirting with countless men, of Paro in the novel. However, the protagonist of Gokhale's present novel mentions: "I saw things as they were, not as they should have been or people tried to pretend they were. It was this faculty of truth that had haunted me for years, distorting the happy moments of my life, mocking love, happiness, security" (114).

The present novel is altogether different from the novels which are believed to be traditional. The conversation between B.R. and Priya highlights "Is it a love story" He asked teasingly. No. I (Priya) said. what it is about. Then? Passion, boredom, and vanity and jealousy, I said firmly. come, love, tell me what it's really about, he said. Liberation. I hazaeded(117). the present paper attempts to present the passions depicted by various characters in the novel. one such passion is that of love, or might be called lust in the context of Paro. Paro brings to light various human emotions or passions and one such emotion is that of love. Love is a mixture of emotions and experiences related to a sense of strong affection or profound oneness. People, throughout history, have considered phenomena such as "love at first sight" or "instant friendships" to be the result of an uncontrollable force of attraction or affinity. The protagonist in the present novel enjoys various relationships in the novel which appear to be deprived of love. This love conflict is highlighted through the character of Paro in the novel. In Paro: Dreams of passion, one can easily trace conflict of love between Paro and Marcus, between Paro and B.R., between Paro and Suresh,



between Paro and Bucky Bhandpur, between Paro and Lenin and between Paro and Shambhunath Nath Mishra. The novel is primarily the story of Paro, who is presented as:

A real individual; she has the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman; she is free. She becomes the “symbol of and prototype of emancipation and individuality. She declares, I am myself, I depend on nobody. I am my own person.

Paro, the protagonist of the novel, considers money to be really important in life. She is an economically independent woman whose search for love as well as for self raises many questions in the novel. The central character of the novel, Paro, had deep appreciation for art and painting. Her art teacher, Marcus, raped Paro somewhere in a solitary place during Dussehra holidays. However, Paro does not consider it rape and the romantic activity continued off and on. As a result of this, she was expelled from the school and her romance got a mention in the newspaper. Ironically, Paro accepts that she enjoyed her art teacher’s sexual advance and refuses to term it as a rape. Paro admits:

But we had this art master - Marcus something. I loved painting, you know. I was good at it. I suppose I was very sexy-looking for a schoolgirl.... Anyway, he tells me, “You look like a wood nymph”....After a while I liked it. I liked it one hell of a lot. (01)

It would not be wrong to state that Paro behaves like Cleopatra at times and becomes the symbol of lust. She does not understand the difference between unlawful sex and luxury. It is lust that controls her mind and heart and ultimately ruins her. Priya analyzes her conduct and justly remarks: “Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatisation. I sometimes wondered what she would be like, alone in an empty room; ... She loved her body and cried like a baby at the slightest physical hurt” (16).

After breaking up her relationship with B.R., Paro starts living with test cricketer Bucky Bhandpur. Her relationships with men are all for the purpose of achieving money and success, not for emotional gratification. Independent, free-spirited, and rebellious Paro states that she lives her own life free from obligations and societal and moral norms. She has started to wonder because of her need for self-awareness, self-expression, and self-fulfillment. She rejects customs that dilute her uniqueness. The sexual exploitation Paro experienced as a teenager is what gave rise to her reactionary feminism. According to Gokhale, such psychological oppression is much worse than the circumstances of economic exploitation that middle class, uneducated women in India suffer.

Paro is sometimes considered a product of male supremacy. It is because of her self-awareness and self-reliance that she attains liberation through protest. She finally projects herself as a woman and an individual in her own right. She considers and believes that in every relationship codified by men -women have only sex as their weapon to gain power. Paro has affairs with a series of men including Bubu (B.R.), Bucky Bhandpur, the test cricketer, Lenin, who is a son of a Marxist Cabinet Minister, Shambu Nath Mishra, a fat and ugly creature, Loukas Leoros, a homosexual and Suresh, the husband of Priya and she commits suicide in the end. Paro's death suggests that immense freedom, when not managed for meaningful purpose and wasted in



unbridled passion, can lead to destruction. The novel depicts the value of equivalence of power. The novelist clearly exposes the cruelty and ugliness of all the relationships that Paro had with various men. These relationships lead her to mess as Paro turns self-destructive.

Additionally, the present novel can also be regarded as a working-class girl's ambition to liberate her from the shoddy and tedious middle-class suburban existence. The novelist has placed attentive and subdued Priya, as both the story's narrator and parallel protagonist, beside Paro to underline the character's defining characteristics. We learn enough about the narrator's personality despite her reluctance and discomfort in recounting her own loves and failures. She is from a middle-class family. She calls them "prudish eyes" which are typical of people from middle-class cultural backgrounds where there are many rules of dos and don'ts. She is madly in love with B.R, the sewing-machine magnate, as she herself reminisces, "For days I lay swooning in a lush romantic haze. My insides would bump against my heart every time I even thought of him. My life changed completely. I cannot really remember those days, except that every second was bathed in grace" (36). Like many other girls, Priya opts for arranged marriage as it is the only institution which can provide a semblance of socio-economic and emotional security to a mediocre woman within the bounds of a traditional society. Simone de Beauvoir has very rightly commented:

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.

Priya's attempt to ensure stability, position, and luxury through her marriage to Delhi-based lawyer Suresh falls miserably as she claims that the automobile was predetermined for her. She and her husband are destined to live a loveless, sterile life together. But her affection for B.R. endures unabated. He is greatly missed by her, and when he is around, she feels safe, loved, treasured, and complete in some way. The fact that B.R. returns her affection is particularly noteworthy. She is overcome with gratitude as a result of his extreme compassion. She is honest when she informs Paro that B.R. has loved her for a long time and did so before he ever knew Paro. Priya is the one who suffers from loneliness the most out of anyone. When B.R. was around, she was content. However, she was made quite miserable by her marriage to Suresh, who was also a very lonesome man, as well as later circumstances. Her lawyer-husband had his own aspirations that kept him busy. Priya always found him "calculating, forwards, backwards, and sideways, at the exact value of the sum, in terms of cases, air fares, property prices, and every other conceivable means of exchange".

In the social class to which Priya belongs, morality is equated with virginity, and all brides are expected to give their virginity to their husbands as a wedding gift. However, Priya had already lost her virginity when she became engaged. She was unconcerned that her spouse may learn about this information, though. She describes how she was able to subvert the male-dominated society's value structure in her own words. She mentions:



My marriage was middle-class one, much as any other. My husband was a virgin, and did not seem to notice that I was not. B. R accepted my resignation with equanimity... Suresh unburdened his ambitions, his hopes and dreams to me. He wanted to prove himself to make it.

Priya's aspirations to become a society woman early in her marriage to Suresh are not supported by Suresh. He allows her to visit the salon "to get her hair set," but he forbids her from starting to smoke and even attempts to stop her from donning anything other than saris. Priya temporarily withdraws "into her Indian wife persona" but she soon emerges with a new trick in her sleeve. Although Priya uses Suresh in order to get what she desires yet she confesses, "I realised that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends".

Again, the "one-man-for-one-woman" standard does not appear to exist in the kind of community Priya desires to be a part of. Extramarital relationships and casual "flings" are not viewed as extraordinary in this context. Priya visits Bombay and meets her ex-boss, B.R. The earlier liaison is again established and Priya seems to be enjoying every moment of it without any tinge of guilt. When Priya returns to Delhi, Suresh very hesitatingly tells Priya that during her absence he had heard some 'gossip' about her and B.R. He trusts her fully but feels that 'it is not good for women from good families to be talked about.' Priya refuses point blank of any such relationship between her and B. R. Towards the end of the novel, Suresh finds out about the relationship of his wife and B. R. but Priya does not feel repentant at all. She honestly tells Suresh that she never had any real sentiment for him: "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 5hatred, you're not even worth of that ... if you think I could have any sentiment for you except ridicule — then you are an egotistical fool; I've lived with you like a whore, because you paid for it". And Priya's husband's so-called acceptance of her does not constitute any act of generosity on his part. Suresh's suggestion to Priya that they can try their marriage again suggests that he accepts her in the same way an estranged husband would return to his wife and home without feeling guilty. Priya can be referred as an emancipated modern woman who has let go of some of the inhibitions placed on a woman in the male-dominated society because of what she does in her marriage life. She shares Paro's desire to search for something more than what she has been able to achieve through the stimulation of her senses, even if she is experiencing life as an emancipated being. She starts "reading" while working in a bookshop after having a miscarriage. But because this is unrelated to her basic personality, it is merely a passing interest that she quickly gives up.

Paro and Priya differ significantly in that Priya never gets to marry her hero and instead is his sporadic mistress, whereas Paro is still very much there, in ample flesh as well as in spirit. Priya is a voyeur, a sly watcher who documents what they see, even if it conflicts with their dreams. Priya feels small in Paro's presence. She recalls how Paro's existence itself made her own seem less interesting. The idea that every man who enters her life is a slave to Paro forever disturbs her the most. Priya, every now and then, attempts to be modern—goes once a week to the beauty



parlor, tries to take up smoking and so on,—but things do not significantly change. She tells us in the very beginning of the novel: “I have never forgotten, nor forgiven, a hurt. This book, too, is a vindication”.

Yet another character in the novel who is a slave of his passions is B.R. He is the owner of Sita sewing machine and a son of a Raibhadur during British period. He owns a grand office which is attended by several female employees whom he treats really well. His office is “like the temple of Pallas Athens” for his women workers. B.R. has a romantic, passionate, overpowering and captivating personality. He romances with Priya then with Anita. B.R. promotes Priya as his office secretary after he marries Paro. He enjoys life in Europe during summer months. However, Priya asserts remembering him: “I was mesmerised by his presence and the music” (18) . One fails to understand the liberation Priya seeks in life! It is true that Hardy’s Tess gives birth to a child before marriage. The fact remains that she never plans any seduction with Alec and hence Hardy regards her as ‘a pure woman’. B.R. gets married to Bubbles after parting his ways with Paro. She proves to be an antidote to Paro's excessive greedy vitality. She is an elegant woman who has some sort of vacant expression of her face. Bubbles is neither loved nor hated by B.R. Thus, through Priya the artist remarks: “Sex had become, to him, more than a sport...it was with sex that he shut out thought, emotion and feeling. Women could, perhaps, sense his immense sexual generosity, and come to him for succor and healing. And he allowed himself to be used as lamp post, or as a letterbox for women to send messages to their husbands”.

The main characters' experiences and lifestyles have been used by the author to try to make a point about something. She seems to be saying that the answer to life's problems is not a life of unrestrained sexual hedonism. One could say that B.R., a satyriasis patient who experiences intense sexual urges, has a "male mother-complex". With the aid of an inherited collective image of women in his unconscious, he makes an effort to find his sexual counterpart. Sex excess serves as his escape from the reality of cognition, emotion, and feeling. The tragic commentary on the central problem of sexual freedom in society is also found in Paro's drive for sexual variety. She has been dubbed the "Madonna of the rubbish heaps," rather fittingly. She is unable to comprehend that having sex cannot make you happy and that overindulging in it has nothing but a coarsening and devitalizing effect. She is living in open adultery with Bucky Bhandpur because she lacks morality. She even argued with him when her alluring attempt to wed the Marxist son of a cabinet minister fell through. Even more unexpected is her complete loss of aesthetic judgement. She is eager to get into bed with anyone, even the ugliest people like Congressman Shambhu Nath Mishra, who was as dark as the night and as the carpet and had a belly that protruded inexplicably from his chest like a huge, rotten pear. Her sexual exploits are viewed as manifestations of the free woman, a model for liberation and individuality, and an expression of her freedom. But in reality, it was her mental illness that pushed her to such horrific lengths as seeking satisfaction through carnal relations.

The author also emphasises the genuine nature of hedonism and shows how it simultaneously elicits a powerful attraction and aversion. Evidently, living a life of unrestrained



hedonism affects both sexes equally (guys grow intellectually and physically chubby, while women become completely vapid). For middle-class people like Priya, this kind of lifestyle is even more destructive. Finally, she comes to the painful realization that “I am an Indian Woman” and “for me my husband is my God”. She considers the “Modern Art” responsible for her miscarriage. At the end of the novel, she receives “benediction” when her sari gets “burnt” on account of the incineration of Paro’s body. The novel reaffirms the value of much-despised middle-class morals and the sanctity of the institution of marriage, even though it does represent the novelist’s ambiguous view.

Thus, it would not be wrong to assert that *Paro* is a book about human passions and the fallout from them. There are certain experiences or mishaps in life of the major characters in the novel which are responsible for the emergence of human passions. Most people feel like the narrator: “weary, and sick, and disgusted, and defeated. Those who can sublimate their passions achieve mental calmness” (p.103). yet, the fact remains that there may be more to passions than that meets the eye. This idea is illustrated by the personalities of Paro and B.R. For a reason, Paro has spent her entire life acting out the character she gave herself.

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