

The Fight for the Self and Entanglements of the Body: A Comparative Analysis of Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dream of Passion* and *The Book of Shadows*

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Abstract: Namita Gokhale is regarded as one of the emerging Indian English Writers who is chiefly known for the depiction of the emancipation of the female characters in her novels. The portrayal of the female characters by Gokhale in her novels is a testimony to the rising concerns related to the equality of the females. One of the chief characteristic traits of her writing can be stated to be portrayal of leading female characters who surpass the patriarchal boundaries and emerge themselves as ladies who defy confinements. This particular paper is a humble attempt in order to make a comparative study of the two leading protagonists in two of her notable texts *Paro: Dream of Passion* and *The Book of Shadows*. The two texts are a clear testimony to the changing image of the nature of contemporary Indian English writing which deals with the emergence of the females. By dealing with strong characters like *Paro* and *Ruchita* in the two novels, Gokhale uncovers her inherent goal of showcasing equal characters. Using the method of analysing the texts in a critical manner in the broader quantitative framework, this paper aims at dealing with the pain and sufferings which the two characters have to undergo in their life.

Keywords: equal, female, pain, patriarchy, quantitative

... the term family is not neutral but historically variable and ideologically charged by religion, culture, politics, economics. The family, whatever its form, is also the location for the formation of the individual and for the reproduction of psychologies of gender. Thus social-historical, feminist, literary, and psychoanalytic concerns meet in the concept of family.

---Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson

The fight of an individual in a society or a family for the establishment of the self is always adorned with numerous hurdles. The difficulties which an individual has to overcome for the positioning of the self always call for critical comprehension as these are arduous and strenuous in nature. Fictional pieces, regardless of the geographical land they are written from, are the storehouses of the dimensions of struggle- the struggle of being overcoming the obstacles laid down by the society at large. This appears true in the case of females in general more than

men as different novels dealing with females show the central female protagonist to be getting crushed by the weight of the patriarchal forces. The main protagonists, Ruchita and Paro in *The Book of Shadows* and *Paro: Dream of Passion* respectively is shown as epitomes of strength, of vitality and of vigour who stand tall in order to fight for their own respective positions in the family. The different tussles which are shown in the two novels are significant as they showcase the inner strength of these characters to come to their own. Moreover, different conflicting situations are indispensable in any kind of familial scenario as

Family life is fraught with tension of conflicting emotions precisely because it is based on coalitions and every coalition involves an opponent. Begun with a husband-wife coalition, continued by a mother-child coalition, a family is sustained by the interlocking forces of love and hate in somewhat the same way that buildings are held up by opposing forces of tension and compression. (Caplow 78)

The life of Paro, in *Paro: Dream of Passion* is shown to be one of sheer struggle and torture. However, amidst the struggle of Paro, Gokhale deals with her representation as a modern lady who has had the luck of being the recipient of the Oriental knowledge. Also, the fact that Gokhale showcases her to be expressing her desire to get married to someone called, Avinendra as she is shown to be a widow speaks

volumes regarding the personality of Paro in the novel. The adventurous nature of Paro gets portrayed by Gokhale right from the beginning when she was shown to be involved in an illicit relationship with a teacher called Marcus of her residential school who used to teach her art. Her inner zeal of freedom gets expressed in her following lines, "I am myself, and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person" (Gokhale 48).

The novel also directly deals with the aspect of sexuality of Paro as she has been shown to have umpteen affairs and also relationships with random individuals. Gokhale subtly hints at the very notion that Paro's sexuality as one of the chief regulatory forces in the novel as it is seen that she uses it as one of the vital tools to both entice and lure men. However, if made a proper analysis, it was the sense of comfort and love that Paro always hankered after in the company of men. The character of Paro is shown to be quite authoritative in the novel but the readers could easily sense that her way of life could only meet with death as it becomes explicit in the novel. The fact that Paro faces death in the end is a clear indication of the pathetic position which she has to be a part of right throughout the novel. Thus, her identity of the self gets formed in the novel because "identity is a configuration arising out of, constitutional given," idiosyncratic libidinal needs, effective defenses, successful sublimations and consistent roles" (Erikson 116).

Ruchita, in *The Book of Shadows*, is another notable female character who carves her path of emancipation amidst the thorns which have been laid down in her way. The novel is a miniature tale of Ruchita who, in spite of being a victim of a heinous acid attack, does not lose hope and tries to restructure her life in an imaginary world of happiness. It can very well be said that the self of Ruchita was never stable in the novel in that she was doubted by her fiancé, Anand who committed suicide and she had to become the victim of acid attack by his sister. Gokhale depicts that silently she had to fight the sufferings by leading a life of insecurity as inhibitions engulfed her mind and she was shy to make herself visible publicly. However, the assertiveness of Ruchita becomes evident when she remarks, "Experience is the raw material of life. Life is the sum of meager experiences. After a while, it becomes easier just to drift. Yet anger can at least affirm, while regret redeems nothing" (Gokhale 22).

What is really praiseworthy in the novel is the portrayal of the character of Ruchita in the most precise manner possible without any kind of concealment. It was seen that Ruchita resorted back to spending her days at her childhood home located in Ranikhet as it was an epitome of solace for her. By looking at the surrounding environment, the readers could sense, that Ruchita was able to overcome the troubled past life which rendered her identity insignificant. As she says, "The past exercises a tenacious hold over the future; sometimes it tyrannizes the future into repetitive patterns. I came to the hills to

obliterate my past, to seek refuge in the immediate present (Gokhale 32). The novel can also be explicated as the personal journey of Gokhale herself who had a very troubled life after the demise of her husband and it was her mother's home which acted as a consolatory object to sooth her from the pain. Ruchita, as Gokhale shows in the novel also suffers the same fate as she was also having a cordial bond with Anand and his death destroyed the position of the self to the very core.

It can be observed in relation to the character of Ruchita that she becomes the sheer product of numerous external factors which tried to deteriorate her both physically and mentally. Her very identity, thus, become the amalgamated result of a lot of factors and are substantiated

by a wide variety of authority figures and institutions . . . led to believe that we have the freedom and ability to create and re-create our "selves" at will, . . . but at the same time are presented with a suspiciously narrow range of options that will allow us to fit comfortably into society . . . (Hall 1)

Paro: Dream of Passion and *The Book of Shadows*, all told, easily become the tales of assertions and individuality of the central female characters who have been shown to rise out of the troubles in their lives. Both Paro and Ruchita, as the readers can observe, dismantle the prevailing patriarchal boundaries and establish

themselves as ambitious, powerful individuals.

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