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**Emergence of a New Society in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

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**Abstract**

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a satirical portrayal of India's upper-class society, offering an incisive critique of its hypocrisies, moral contradictions, and evolving values. The novel sheds light on the emergence of a new society shaped by urbanization, materialism, and the complexities of gender roles. Through the characters of Paro and Priya, Gokhale navigates themes of self-perception, liberation, and societal expectations, painting a vivid picture of a society in flux. This paper critically examines how *Paro* reflects the formation of a new social order characterized by identities and shifting power dynamics. A 'new society' in the contemporary context refers to a shift from traditional, hierarchical structures to a more fluid and individualistic social order. Literature captures these transitions, offering insights into the aspirations, contradictions, and struggles of emerging social paradigms. Through the use of humor and sarcasm, Namita Gokhale examines the evolving nature of Indian culture in her literary work *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, which delves into these subjects. Indian-American writer Namita Gokhale has made a name for herself by boldly tackling gender, race, and social concerns in her works. As a contemporary writer, she combines humor and irony to critique societal norms while addressing themes of identity, liberation, and the female experience. Gokhale's works often delve into the complexities of urban life, offering sharp observations of modern relationships and the challenges faced by women in evolving societies.

**Keywords:** New Society, Culture, Values, Relationships, Social Hierarchy, Gender Issues

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## **Introduction**

The word 'society' originates from the Latin term *societas*, which means fellowship, association, or companionship, derived from *socius*, meaning ally or companion. Over time, the term has evolved to encompass various meanings related to human interaction and organization.

According to Cambridge Dictionary: "a big group of people who live together in an organized way, making decisions about how to do things and sharing the work that needs to be done." Oxford English Dictionary describes it as Being "a group of people who live together in a community and share the same customs, laws, etc." Similarly, according to Merriam-Webster, a society is "an enduring and cooperating social group whose members have developed organized patterns of relationships through interaction with one another." These definitions reflect the complex and interconnected nature of human communities.

Celebrated for her bold examination of gender, identity, and the intricacies of city life, Namita Gokhale is a contemporary Indian English writer. A co-founder of the Jaipur Literature Festival, Gokhale has significantly contributed to contemporary Indian literature by creating a platform for diverse voices while crafting her unique narratives. Her debut novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, marked her as a bold and innovative writer who blends humor and irony to critique societal norms. Gokhale's works often reflect the struggles and aspirations of Indian women, offering nuanced portrayals of their lives in a society caught between tradition and modernity.

Gokhale's themes often revolve around gender dynamics, identity, and the interplay between custom and modernity. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, she juxtaposes the lives of Paro, a bold and larger-than-life character, with Priya, an insecure and reflective narrator, to explore ideas of liberation, desire, and societal judgment. The novel underscores the contradictions of a society in transition, one that outwardly embraces modernity while clinging to patriarchal values. Gokhale's characters, rich in their complexities, embody the struggles of individuals caught between conformity and self-expression.

The novel's setting, largely in the high-society circles of Bombay and Delhi, serves as a backdrop for Gokhale's incisive exploration of the existences of the rich and powerful. Gokhale uses vivid descriptions and sharp dialogue to portray the excesses of this world, where appearances and social status often take precedence over genuine connections. Paro's journey, from her passionate love affairs to her eventual decline, reflects the transient nature of force and opportunity in a world governed by superficial

values. Gokhale's critique of this society is evident in the way she juxtaposes Paro's flamboyance with Priya's quiet resignation, highlighting the various ways ladies explore cultural norms.

The writing style of the novel is another notable aspect of its critical impact. Gokhale employs humor and irony with precision, making her commentary on societal norms both engaging and thought-provoking. The narrative structure, with Priya's observations interspersed with vivid descriptions of Paro's escapades, creates a dynamic and multifaceted portrayal of the characters and their world. This approach allows Gokhale to delve deeply into the internal and external conflicts faced by her characters, offering a nuanced exploration of their lives.

While *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a satire, it is also a deeply empathetic work that acknowledges the struggles and vulnerabilities of its characters. Gokhale does not judge her protagonists but instead presents them as products of their environment, shaped by the contradictions and complexities of their society. This balance between critique and empathy makes the novel a strong critique of the emergence of a new social order in contemporary India.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a masterful exploration of the changing dynamics of Indian society, offering a sharp critique of its hypocrisies while celebrating the resilience and complexity of its characters. Namita Gokhale's incisive writing and keen observations make the novel a significant contribution to contemporary Indian English literature, resonating with readers across generations.

### **Literature Review**

**Nigam and Tandon (2019)** explained how the works of Gokhle progress feminist politics within the narratives that feature assertive and resourceful female protagonists challenging the patriarchal environments. The author further argues that Gokhle's literature not only captures the complexity of femininity but, instead, with a critical gaze, also subverts social norms and traditional gender norms. The analysis illustrates Gokhle's construction of her multifaceted, well-rounded female characters that refuse to accept subordination and endorse individuality by providing examples from within the novels. Nigam and Tandon also talk about the intersectionality of Gokhle's work, covering everything from caste to class exploitation and cultural identity.

**T. G. and Dangwal (2023)** analyzed the formation of female identity by employing psychoanalytical theory. The researchers have studied the character development in the novel by critically analyzing the image of the protagonist as a 'woman identity' through her religious, social, and cultural worlds. The writers contend that one's

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identity develops from the time of birth and throughout life as a result of one's interactions with one's family, community, and culture. This research, by applying Margaret Mead's theories, argues that the formation of a child's identity significantly depends on the mother's behavior.

**Wanjari, Anita P. (2015)** claimed that all nations and states had domestic violence against women. Although it has always been personal, it is now a tragedy of public matter. Traditional gender roles undermine women's human rights in many nations. The society's heritage and culture include several damaging practices. There is a common misconception that Indian women are nothing more than a husband's property.

**Rahman, M. Kalieel (2022)** analyzed that for a long time, ladies have been kept from having justice in social, economic, political, and constitutional spheres and largely ignored as the 'Weaker Sex.' The twentieth century has seen a new awareness about women's marginalized status, resulting in the birth of the Women's Liberation Movement. Literature, being the mirror of society, does not reflect the pathetic condition of women but explores women's questions extensively and vociferously.

### **Research Methodology**

**The present paper is based on critical analysis of the original text and secondary information has been collected from research journals, articles, Newspapers, magazines and reference books.**

### **Portrayal of New Society in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* vividly captures the transformation of Indian society in the late 20th century, reflecting the emergence of a new social order characterized by urbanization, materialism, and changing gender dynamics. This "new society" contrasts sharply with traditional values, blending a superficial embrace of modernity with deeply ingrained cultural hypocrisies. Through her satirical narrative, Gokhale critiques this evolving social landscape, exposing the contradictions in its traditions, culture, and values.

The new society portrayed in the novel is driven by wealth, ambition, and appearances, often at the expense of authenticity and moral integrity. The exclusive class portrayed in the story is obsessed with power dynamics, where relationships are transactional, and emotions are secondary to social status. This culture, epitomized by Paro's audacious yet tragic character, values superficial success over meaningful connections.

In this new society, continuity and innovation are tendencies in which practices rooted in culture are reconciled to provide for contemporary needs and desires. Culture

as an institution comprises aspects such as marriage, family, feasts, and related ceremonies; however, such values are devalued into mere opportunities for status. For example, the weddings in the novel are not spiritual and genuine unification. Instead, they are forms of power and wealth manifestations. Thus, the rituals, while conforming to realistic traditional forms, are emptied of meaning in this setting, symbolizing how cultural forms have become commodified into the performance.

Sex roles also form an essential part of determining the values of this changing society. The new social order provides women like Paro with the potential to taste freedom and get power, but at the same time, they are judged by society. Paro's rebellion against patriarchal norms, her unapologetic relationships, and her defiance of societal expectations mark her as both a symbol of empowerment and a victim of her society's double standards. In contrast, Priya's more subdued journey reflects the challenges of navigating these expectations while maintaining a semblance of personal integrity.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is right in the middle of tradition and modernity where cultures are enforced but at the same time violated. Namita Gokhale's sharp satire and nuanced characterizations highlight the contradictions and complexities of this transformation. The novel serves as a mirror to the evolving Indian urban elite, critiquing its values while offering a compelling exploration of its cultural and emotional terrain.

### **Influence of New Society on the Characters**

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the influence of the emerging new society profoundly shapes the lives and decisions of its characters, particularly Paro and Priya. Paro embodies the spirit of rebellion and liberation characteristic of this society. Her bold choices and unapologetic pursuit of personal desires reflect the loose grip of traditional norms, especially on women's behavior. Paro thrives in the high-society circles of Bombay and Delhi, using her charm and confidence to navigate relationships and assert her independence. However, the superficial values of this new society are centered around appearances and power that leave her vulnerable and eventually decline. As Paro's life unfolds, it becomes clear that the society that allowed her freedom also imposed unspoken judgments and limitations, illustrating the paradox of modern liberation.

Priya, on the other hand, offers a contrasting perspective on the influence of this new society. As an observer, she internalizes the contradictions of modern life, struggling with sensations of jealousy and deficiency in a world fixated on status and achievement. The strain to adjust to societal expectations shapes Priya's insecurities, as she compares her quiet, conventional existence with Paro's flamboyant lifestyle. Yet, Priya's reflections also reveal the emptiness of a society driven by materialism and hollow relationships. Her

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journey highlights the emotional toll of navigating a world where traditional roles and modern aspirations clash, leaving individuals like Priya torn between conformity and self-expression. Through these characters, Gokhale explores the profound and often conflicting impact of a rapidly evolving society on individual personality and agency through these characters.

### **The New Social Norms in *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

The new social norms depicted in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* emphasize individual freedom, material success, and a redefinition of relationships, directly challenging traditional values and ethics. The pursuit of pleasure and personal ambition dominates this emerging society, side-lining communal responsibilities and moral codes that once held families and communities together. Traditional notions of loyalty, modesty, and marital fidelity are re-examined, with characters like Paro embracing fluidity in their relationships and rejecting societal expectations. This shift often creates moral ambiguity, as ethical decisions are driven more by personal gain than by collective well-being. For instance, the transactional nature of relationships and the emphasis on appearances expose the fragility of trust and authenticity in a society that prioritises status and power over integrity. This dynamic highlights the tension between the promises of modernity and the ethical dilemmas it introduces, ultimately forcing individuals to navigate a complex and often contradictory social landscape.

### **Concluding Remarks**

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Namita Gokhale presents a vivid portrayal of a society undergoing a profound transformation, navigating the tensions between traditional values and modern aspirations. The novel offers a critical lens into the social norms and values of India's urban elite, where materialism and status dominate interactions. Traditional ideas of family, loyalty, and community are redefined within a framework that emphasizes individuality and ambition. Culture and heritage remain important but are often commodified, serving as backdrops to a lifestyle focused on appearances and power. The juxtaposition of old and new is a recurring theme, highlighting both the opportunities and the emptiness inherent in societal evolution.

Gokhale's nuanced portrayal of gender underscores the shifting role of women in this new society. Paro's boldness and defiance challenge patriarchal expectations, positioning her as a symbol of liberation, albeit one fraught with vulnerabilities. Priya, in contrast, reflects the quieter struggles of conformity and introspection, representing the complexities faced by modern women navigating traditional expectations and emerging freedoms. Through these contrasting characters, Gokhale captures the duality of a society

where women seek autonomy yet remain tethered to societal judgment. In this multifaceted exploration, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* becomes a strong discourse on the evolving roles, aspirations, and challenges faced by individuals, particularly women, in a rapidly changing world.

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