



## QUEST FOR SELF- IDENTITY IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S *GODS, GRAVES AND GRANDMOTHER*

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Namita Gokhale has made great and important contribution to the Indian English fiction and it cannot be marginalized. Obviously, to be the best novel in true sense, the novel should be true to life. The novelist should try to explore the conscious and subconscious of his characters. The novelist should provide the readers a slice of life so that they can realize themselves with the characters and understand the real meaning of life. In this regard, Namita Gokhale deserves laurels for contribution to Indian English literature in the field of fiction. She has achieved a prominent place in Indian English fiction for pioneering the sexually frank genre in her writings, which made Shabha De famous. Namita Gokhale has portrayed female characters in most of her novels. Being a woman novelist, she has understood and unfolded the inner feelings with masterly strokes of women. She has given a good exposure to the female side and caused the readers to realize that, to look at life from the point of view of a woman, is also important. Feminism is a basic element of Gokhale's fiction and she defines many types of women in her several novels to show the real condition, and pathetic situation for woman in the society.

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a fine texture for examining the inner feeling of woman character in Namita Gokhale's fiction. This novel has been written in the year 1994, after a short break of her writings and consists of love, hate, religious, superstitious and simultaneously, sexual elements.

Gudiya, the protagonist of the novel, lived with her grandmother. Gudiya is told that they were very rich once as her mother and grandmother were prostitutes but from those great heights of life Gudiya's world plunges into the depth of almost complete penury. On her arrival to Delhi with her old grandmother, it seemed to them, that all had lost, but her grandmother kept a slab of green marble stolen from a building site, five rounded pebbles and flowers from a Sahib's green garden and then, she transformed the place beneath the holy people into a worshiping place and also added her sweet singing voice. Gudiya reminded her past of her mother, her grandmother and her mamaji, who hang himself. And in that case, they lost everything and had to leave their haveli.

Namita Gokhale is richly endowed with the gift of seeing common characters from within and revealing them on their own plane. She has a keen eye for the common things, which lie around us, choosing them to impart some random truths. To find happiness and pleasure in simple things is a returning feather of existence and it is the hallmark of her novels. Her art core lies in her singular gift to present any simplest thing, which comes her way, as beautiful and valuable. It is the greatest asset of her works. Through her art of characterization, Namita Gokhale presents Gudiya, one of those characters, who are always shrouded in the pale of gloom looking at life from a distance, where life seems quite out of their reach. She feels the same kind of uneasiness' sometimes as she longs for breaking the shackles out she tries in an uncomfortable way to come out her carapace that is hindering her view of life. Her quest for something more real and substantial is so sentimental, regarding her husband Kalki, that it lacks the power to push her towards the enlightenment. Regarding self-identity, in "Off the Beaten Track, Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women," Madhu Kishwar remarks:

Every hit man being is the product of many crosscutting, multi-layered identities. For instance, a vital part of my identity is defined by gender. But I am also (among other things) a daughter, a sister, a college teacher, a writer, a Punjabi, a Hindu, a resident of a particular neighborhood, and citizen of India. Most identities (Eg. those based on nationality, religion, language) are acquired or mutable. A few are fixed and immutable, such as biological parentage. Identity based on native land, village or locale where a person is born and reared is also fixed. (250)

But in Gudiya's case, she doesn't know her native place, village and identity based on her surname due to which, she decided to change her name, her identity and her very self. She wants to become a creature of possibilities, inferred by her past and also she wants to involve in the process of becoming totally. Hence, she names herself



Pooja Abhimanyu Singh to get a new and separate identity.

Her quest for self- identity is an unending process, which has both physical and emotional aspect but both are not accomplished in her relation to her husband. After separating from her husband, she learns, not only to broaden her experiences, but also to protest effectively. Like the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale's novels, she also experiences loneliness and unfriendly treatment sometimes and she also under goes such phases of depression. But in those circumstances, Phoolwati is just like a balm, which clutches her for emotional sustenance. She gives her psychological support, fully empathies with her plight and she always utters the words of encouragement, which she badly needs at her condition. The words of Phoolwati give her enough confidence to emerge from the emotional trauma and face the world as it comes to her.

Her existence after marriage itself seems vague to her, for it seems to her that she is completely deprived of the involvement in the affairs of life by her cruel and egoist husband. She suffers because she is supposedly bound to lead a life with such a person, who seems to her ignorant of the fine feelings so normal and common to women. Besides being tortured physically and mentally by Kalki, she suffers for the sake of woman nature:

On the whole, I managed to maintain a brave front, and Phoolwati glimpsed very little of the agony I was undergoing. I was determinedly\* cheerful, but, inside, there was a deep, unutterable fear that this was how my whole life might pass- in indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties. (217)

The story explains, how the protagonist under goes various stages from innocence to big and great experience of life. The novelist skillfully presents a vision of life, which is earthly but filled with spiritual possibilities and symbolic suggestions. As a little girl in the lap of her grandmother, Gudiya dreams of a bright future as Pandit Kailash Shastry predicts her but coming out of her innocent age, her experience reveals the difficulties of life with Kalki in a great deal. Even her mother did not stay with her to show the bright and dark aspects and sides of life. She has no parents but a guardian, Phoolwati after the death of her grandmother. Even after losing she nears and dears, she does not lose her courage. For, her life is not a waste but it is a progression towards the higher consciousness. That is why; she faces all ups and downs of life very bravely. In fact, the soul of a person, her/his true self, is hidden behind her/his own life. Hence, at the end of the novel the protagonist is able to find out her true self by her outer experiences. The search for identity of Gudiya, in a true sense, presents the reader's search for awareness and possibilities to overcome sufferings in one's life. She is one of those characters, who has existential pangs and who is on a spree to find out the way of self-realization and reach at some sort of her identity to complete her cycle of search of her life.

It is suitable to the other female character i.e. Gudiya's grandmother. Through her character, the novelist tries to give a spiritual touch to the novel. Although, she has no man in her life, which could help her to find her self-identification, she is capable to get spirituality and immortality on the bases of her own ability and inner-self. Besides being a prostitute initially, the circumstances make her leave her work as a prostitute and her inner self and ability comes forward as a spiritual mortal. She changes, not only her religion from Muslim to a widow of a Brahmin, and identity outer and mentally to recover from her past, but also gets a great deal of spirituality, which makes her immortal even after her death through the character of Lila. Perhaps, this change is her true self and that is why, she could manage everything. And that is the result of her devotion to her duty that her prediction is spontaneous and true.

In the same way, somehow, the grandmother is convinced of the need of having spirituality in life. Namita Gokhale tactfully leads her character to acquire spiritual experience. To liberate one's life from the egoistic self and get perfection in life, it is necessary that one should embrace a spiritual life otherwise there is no escape from human ego. In the same way, the grandmother learns to go deep into her own self more and more.

Most of the novels of Namita Gokhale deal with alienation and identification of human being with the forces of isolation. In sociology, alienation is presented as the individual's estrangement from traditional community of



society and others in general. The atomism of modern society means that individuals have the shallower relationships in the society than they would in a traditional community in true sense, which leads to difficulties to understand and to adapt to the uniqueness of each other. Namita Gokhale tries to give the picture of female characters cut out from the roots. They are not adjusting easily. It is the main reason of their being alienated. Gudiya, the protagonist of *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, is also having a sense of alienation. In her childhood, her mother ran away with a beggar, hence, she touches alienation. Gudiya's isolation and alienation is spontaneous, instinctive and natural due to the elopement of her mother, her grandmother's death and also the departure of her husband. Alienated from all these, sometimes, she begins to listen or feel the spirits of her mother, Riyazuddin, Shambhu and Magoo on the peepul tree.

Namita Gokhale feels, that a lack of understanding of a situation, leads a character towards alienation. On the contrary, a better understanding of people and the optimistic and right way, chosen by the people, results in a psychological development and it will provide the ways to a healthy relationship whether, it is of husband and wife, mother or daughter, sister and brother or, happiness for a character. Life is not for the sake of life only. It is also meant for God. In fact, the life of a man is meant for self-fulfillment but the real self, i.e. soul of a man is hidden behind his intelligence. Such an idea touches the novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. Spirituality and supernaturalism are also the main elements of this novel. By presenting a contrast in the novel between spiritual and worldly life, Namita Gokhale focuses on the vision of a better society, which is based on spiritual knowledge and experience. Hence, the writer uses the novel as a medium of spiritual growth of a person.

Love and hate go ahead together in the novel. Human is based on or strongly mixed with ego. There is a hope of return always, desire of benefit or advantage of some kind of certain gratifications or pleasures. Gudiya's sense of gratitude to darkness makes clear her inner desire for Kalki's love. She falls in a willing prey to his trap. As attachment towards the fairer sex is irresistible, they both come very close to each other. Kalki is the first man in Gudiya's life to establish a personal rapport with her. It is easier on her part to come close to him because she seeks for true friend and love. After her marriage to Kalki, she tries her best to rescue him from frustration, loneliness and despondency through her consolation and inspiration. To bring love, prosperity and bliss to him, she goes to the extent of sacrificing her own joys and comforts. She tries to be transforming agent in her love by her grand power of love and to play a significant role in the manifestation of love in his life.

Gudiya has a brief and unhappy married life, which was unethically shattered by the cruel and egoistic nature of her husband from the first day of her marriage. Her love can be considered as a true scarifying love, while Kalki's was only to, fulfill his physical need and his ambition of life of having money. That is why; he leaves Gudiya forever, when he gets sufficient money to begin his new life and for the settlement of life. Gudiya is one of the victims of human cruelty, perpetrated by her husband. In the life of Phoolwati and Gudiya, love in union and separation, the moods of joy, ecstasy, disappointment, dejection and frustration all are presented in realistic and detailed language.

This novel is remarkable in two respects. Firstly, for its searching scan of life in the down worldly mobile class of the Indian metropolises and secondly, for its structure of a modern fable held aloft by the gauziest of irony. The novelist exposes the humorous underbelly of merchandized religiosity.

In the novel, the language is understood. It is implicated in systems of power and knowledge, and gives an indication of a connection, rather than a separation between literature and history, ideas and material realities. The language has an emancipator potential, which contains the possibility of a disrupting reified structures of social, gendered and cultural difference. Sometimes, its language emerges as an ambivalent concept. Gokhale's fiction enacts the possibility of using hybridity through the characters of Phoolwati. Hybridity emerges variously as a psychological condition and most significantly, as a model for creative self-empowerment through the strategic use of language. The intermeshing of language and literatures often takes the form of self-conscious. Sometimes, the novelist has used the stream of consciousness technique of Virginia Wolff. Gudiya, an unhappily married woman, suffering a lot cruelty of her husband, is narrated as her own interior monologue sometimes and difference between her private thoughts and the realities of the everyday world outside.



In true sense, the art of the novelist has the power to transmute the most ordinary, common place, every day experience into everlasting expression of artistic form and value in this novel. She portrays the various shades of human nature with deftness, reigning true to life, making her readers loud her works.

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