

# A FEMINIST STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S "PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION"

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## Abstract

*Feminism is an interdisciplinary approach to issues of equality and equity based on gender. This paper presents an attempt to study the female characters portrayed by Namita Gokhale's debut novel Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984). In novel Priya and Paro are major female characters. Priya attempts to emancipate herself from marriage by manipulating men but falls short of Paro's level of freedom. Paro is the narrative of the social butterfly who has been reduced to social shambles. She enslaves men with her beauty and seduces every man she meets in search of love. Namita occupies a distinction place with realism, liberation, fantasy, self quest, sexual autonomy and human relation. Both the female characters Priya and Paro have a different perspective about their life but both have dreams of passion, which cannot materialize. The novel ends with the death of both Priya and Paro. It is the work of fiction that challenges us to consider the feminist elements of Gokhale.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Dream, Love, Passion, Sexuality, Suffering, Liberation.*

Namita Gokhale's writing has been revolutionary. She is also the co-founder of Jaipur Literature Festival and the member secretary of Indian Literature Abroad (ILA). She has written twelve books including several works of fiction. Her debut novel, 'Paro: Dreams of Passion' which created a state of intense excitement with its candid sexual humour celebrates its thirteenth anniversary edition in 2014. Other novels include 'A Himalayan Lovestory', 'The Book of Shadows', 'Shakuntala: The Play of the Memory'. Gokhale has worked extensively with Indian myth. She has written 'The Book of Shiva' and retold the Mahabharata for young readers.

Namita Gokhale, who received reputation as an Indian woman writer in English with her novel Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984). She creates a sensation with her open projection and treated as bold for its use of erotic language and depiction of extreme sensuality. It is a satirical writing on social and cultural structure of India especially urban areas like Delhi. This novel concentrates with gender and class dynamics in dealing with the issues of Indian women. Her characters always present a message through their lively presentation in the novel. Her character Paro stand as a figure of lust with her extreme liberation and individuality. She is closely watched by the narrator Priya, who lost heart to the owner of Sita sewing Machine company, B.R. and then B.R to Paro. She has seduced many Lenin, the Marxist, son of a cabinet Minister; the fat and sinister Sambhu Nath Mishra, Congress Party eminence grise and very nearly Suresh, the lawyer on the make whom Priya has married. Priya fantasizes about impudent Paro and aspires of the seductress charm of Paro she is symbolic of social mobility. Priya's first sight of Paro starts in the book with the description of Paro's charm at her marriage celebrations with B.R. It also reflects the social life of upper class nature. It shows when Priya says,

*"I saw B.R. and Paro walk into the room. Rai Bahadur rushed to receive them. She was wearing a silver tissue sari, and was positively glittering with diamonds."*

Sometimes the narrator, Priya describes her fantasies of appropriating the sexuality of the other. The below statement is clear that there is a similarities between Paro and Priya, it distinct between reality and dream. At certain situations we can treat Priya character as a shadow of Paro.

*“ I did not fantasise, but sometimes I became Paro, and sometimes I was myself.”*

Paro confesses herself as a beautiful woman and investing a lot of time and money in maintaining physical attractiveness. As she begins to age and put on weight, Paro tries various things like salads and Yoga to maintain her figure as the body is integral to herself image. Paro belongs to the elite class and her modern society allows her to take advantages and use men for her personal benefits and try to find her true love and is very self centered and ambitious. Paro is the product of her own circumstances. Her only fault is that, she fails to rise an appropriate occasion, and give way under the impact of factors beyond her control. She attracted towards the glamorous world outside like B.R., Marcus, Suresh, Lenin, Shambhu Nath Mishra, Loukas Leoros. She always got attention and appreciation for her good looks and she achieved all her dreams too, at the end she left alone without saying anything before her death. Finally, Paro’s death gives a shape to the story. It projects as a mystery. Paro exploited all her lovers without any affection. This is a controversial point in the story. Paro’s death leaves the readers in shock and even those who hated her for her frankness and carefree style of living must have certainly felt sad by her unexpected death. Priya is full of remorse and sorrow on Paro’s death. Many memories relates to Paro’s days gone by Paro remembered for its sexual explicitness.

*“ Paro was dead, I could not imagine a world without her. I sat and thought for a long time, but no thoughts came.”*

Priya, the protagonist, who conquer her lower middle class struggle by the end of the novel. She maintains self respect and individuality. Priya is the only character which shows major development in the novel. She depicts the story as she is a major character as well as the eye witness to the situations. Priya can be compared with the role of the author that is described in the very first line of the novel i.e,

*“ I am writing about them because I saw myself in her.”*

She starts with an infatuation of her boss the great Mr. B.R, owner of Sita Sewing Machines. The first time she went to his home and fascinated by the affluence and the quietness. She describes as it was the place of heaven in the land and compared herself as a princess and she forgets her surroundings and starts enjoying with her boss. She got surprised when she became to know he married Paro, daughter of a retired Brigadier. She distressed with that news and decided not to go for marriage but she develops eagerness with the tales of her colleagues about Paro’s beauty. She attended marriage celebrations and describe Paro’s personality and charm. She was attracted by Paro’s self confidence and her audacity nature. Priya lost her confidence and accepted Paro as a symbol of affluence. She observed upper middle class social style and their polite vacant smiles. These lines describes the feeling of Priya about the nature of upper class social and cultural style:

*“ Both had polite vacant smiles fixed uneasily to their faces, and they appeared in every way too mundane and ordinary to have bred so exotic a creature as the shimmering bride before them.”*

After that Priya married Suresh who is very sociable. They enjoyed together in their two-bedroom rented flat. She shifted from lower middle class to middle class enjoyments with her marriage. Priya states in the novel about her marriage with suresh,

*“ 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.”*

Priya has another brief experience with her boss B.R. she spent her days with him again in Bombay. She meets B.R almost every evening and has dinner and wine with him with candle light to convert a romantic environment. At that moment she forget to return to Suresh. And this extramarital affair with B.R. damages her relation with Suresh. The struggle of Priya's character clearly exhibited throughout the novel. This situation provides a drastic change in the attitudes of Paro and Priya. Paro enters into the personal life of Priya and also tries to change the mind of Suresh. This situation helps us to understand the real nature of these characters. When Priya received from Delhi she received an unusual welcome from Suresh with the interference of Paro in between them. Suresh is very practical and a man with complete understanding of his wife. He tries to warn his wife when he heard about her extramarital affair. Suresh says,

*“ I trust you absolutely. But even then it is not good for women from good families to be talked about.....”.*

In *“ Paro: Dreams of Passion”* Namita Gokhale portrays the substances of the life of Delhi and Bombay and how two women are desirous of each other. In the novel there are two women, Paro and Priya, Paro is dependably herself yet another level, she is somewhat emotional and she is not exceptionally keen. Therefore she meets her miserable end. Priya was a kind of lady who holds her family together. Paro is unafraid of her sexual behavior because she believes that women have equal rights in all spheres of life, regardless of whether our culture accepts them. All of her energies are directed toward acquiring a new lover on a regular basis. As she confesses a man is a puppet in her hands. She is almost a patient of nymphomania. Priya was unable to accept Paro's techniques because everything seemed repulsive to Lenin, Suresh, and even to her.

This novel is primarily the narrative of the same-named irresistible and passionate, if outlandish, woman. Gokhale appears to have chosen characters like her for their psychological plausibility and intrigue. Then there are compelling causes for these personalities' evolution. Paro is introduced in the story as haughty, brazen, and self confident woman with an assured cat-like grace. So many people enter Paro's life, and she disregards Indian tradition, continuing to sacrifice them one by one. It is remarkable how an Indian woman can lose sight of the concept of virginity and devotion. As previously stated, she begins having sex with her catholic school art teacher. Then she returns to Mr. B.R. repeatedly for financial assistance and sexual pleasure. Even B.R. is aware of her interests, hopes and ambitions and doesnot except her to be sincere. She believes she is youthful, despite the fact that she is losing her lusture on a regular basis. She is receptive to life only when she has a new catch in her net. A straw is used to maintain a sinking boat, and the same is true for Paro. With her, life is never dull. It is true that fate surrounds her with a variety of people. She decides to give audition for a role play and is overjoyed to play Clymenstra at the Hindustani Theature Festival. There is nothing outstanding about Paro's performance in this part. However, she marries Greek citizen Loubas Leros, who is a staunch supporter of homosexuality. Paro's behaviour and even Priya's behaviour, exemplify a form of female liberation.

It is true that Priya begins writing a diary in which she chronicles the daily events of her life. Priya and Suresh read them and are perplexed by Priya's attitude. Suresh struggles to acclimate to such a tense environment and requests Priya to live alone for a few months. He is willing to pay her on a monthly basis for this, since she mentions maintenance allowance. When Priya arrives in Bombay, she becomes aware of her new obligations. Finally her brother and brother's wife invite her to relocate to her mother's house. Now Priya understands what family life is and how children enrich life. She begins living

independently once more in the Andheri neighbourhood of Bombay. Priya realizes “I am an Indian woman and for me my husband is my God”.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Gokhale instils readers with feelings of pity and terror for Paro. Similarly when Suresh rejects Priya, the pitiful circumstance exemplifies female subjugation. Gokhale on the other hand is a realist and describes the sexuality of large cities such as Delhi and Bombay. Priya earns little money in the starting of the novel while working for B.R. As she visits his mansion her ambitions expand and she got caught in the music of mansion. When he offers her a glass of wine she accepts and went to his bedroom, she is nearly unprepared for the joy that awaits. Born in an ordinary family, she feels - she is “special somehow”. She reappears in B.R.’s life once more when Suresh is required to contest a legal dispute in Bombay.

Namita Gokhale vividly depicts the complicated spectrum of the feminine quest for individuality against the backdrop of current educated Indian society. She successfully explores the conventional female novelist themes. A woman does not wish to live among conventional people. She does not wish to be occupied solely with washing, preserving, family foundations and in between the four walls. It is okay that some educated women lead pleasant lives and are truly intelligent. Thus in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Gokhale delves in to the passions and expectations of middle-class women such as Paro and Priya as they navigate their difficulties of life.

## CONCLUSION

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* concludes with the death of Paro and Priya, and Lenin is taken aback by her demise. The irony is that Gokhale fails to elicit readers’ feelings of pity and terror. Here she peers into her characters’ minds while also describing their exterior environment. As a result, she had the audacity to write novels that broke with tradition and appeared to elevate the female voice.

To sum up, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, a multifaceted narrative fiction which describes the passions and jealousies of a group of middle-class Indian women, particularly through the experiences of life of Priya and Paro. Their story of life vividly depicts the world of modern women in metropolitan cities. Thus this novel is a work of fiction that challenges us to consider the feminist elements of Gokhale.

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