

## IDEOLOGICAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMANHOOD – A STUDY ON NAMITA GOKHALE'S GODS, GRAVES, AND GRANDMOTHER

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### Abstract

An important feature of the Indian English literature after Independence has been the emergence of women novelists who have brought a fresh breath of life to it. In the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a new crop of women novelists came that revolutionized Indian English fiction. Namita Gokhale started writing in the final decades of the twentieth century and today she is one among the foremost women novelists of India. Namita Gokhale has taken up a wider range of themes in her novels which reveal her keen concern for the welfare of women. She has portrayed some tremendous women characters who are always at war with the worldliness. Her second novel Gods, Graves, and Grandmother is an explicit example of the novelist's concern for, and priority to, women characters. Women occupy a central position in this novel, where the male characters are side-tracked. It is the story of Gudiya and her 'saintly' grandmother Ammi. From the great heights of glory and wealth, Gudiya's world plunges into the depths of almost complete penury and pain when she arrives in Delhi with her grandmother. The novel depicts Gudiya's growth from a weak girl to a woman of self-realization and individuality. The present paper focusses on how the protagonist in the novel refuses to remain shadowy beings and utilize their inner strength and gender identities to come out of the man's shadow and achieves self-dignity of her own.

Keywords: *emergence, decade, gender, priority, saintly, self-realization, self-dignity*

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Indian Woman Novelists have turned towards the woman's world with great introspective intensity and authenticity. They have launched a voyage within to explore the private consciousness of their women characters and to measure them. One woman writer who has given a loud and clear voice to the ongoing Saga of exploitation and abuse of women is Namita Gokhale. She is a renowned contemporary novelist of Indian English Literature, born in the year 1956 in Lucknow, India. She spent most of her childhood in Nainital in the lap of

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nature and the Himalayas and New Delhi. She depicts characters, especially women, whom she is familiar with, giving equal importance to their negative and positive attributes.

Namita projects the image of a new woman with a difference. Women in her novels make an attempt to shake off the shackles of social convention. The protagonists in her novel refuse to remain shadowy beings and utilize their sexuality, gender identities, and their inner strength to come out of Man's shadow and achieve an identity of their own. Her novels proclaim the emergence of liberated women of modern India. She portrays her female characters act with more courage and freedom instead of demanding for rights in the society.

Namita Gokhale presented an altogether different world in her second novel which came after a gap of nine years. The background of *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother* is Delhi but not the Delhi of power and glamour. However, the feminist concerns of the novelist are the same in this novel also. The novel presents the story of a woman's courage and determined effort to surmount all obstacles in life and make her own path in life. Here the woman of courage and grit is not a young, educated and smart woman but a grandmother, Ammi, a former prostitute who has to take care of her granddaughter, Gudiya, whose father is unknown and whose mother has run away with a man. Both come to Delhi and start their life on the pavement. Namita Gokhale shows the ingenuity of a woman to turn the tide in her favor by her intelligence and courage through the encounter of Ammi with Sundar Pahalwan, the ruffian who rules the pavement. She exploits his superstitious fear to establish herself there. Ammi exploits the sentiments of the superstitious, lower and lower-middle-class people who live in that area not only to survive but to gain strength. She emerges as a spiritual person and the temple that she establishes gives her prestige and financial prosperity. Another woman who displays the will to survive and prosper in life is Phoolwati who after the death of her husband does not break down but starts life afresh. She associates herself with Ammi and her temple. After Ammi's death, she takes care of her time as well as Gudiya.

Gudiya was innocent and was unable to behave with right understanding. When her teacher in school asked her what she wanted to become, she replied that she wanted to become a film star, marry the prime minister's son and travel by airplane. Later she resolved to change her name, her identity, and her very self. She decided to become Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and take a photograph of a noble looking man from a junk shop and decided that he was to be her father. Thus she wanted to forget that she was the daughter of a prostitute who could not reveal the identity of her father.

One day while she was walking on the road, a strange sight of a magnificently attired band in a procession greeted her. She noticed the handsome boy with intense eyes and chiseled features, playing the trombone. The handsome boy with the princely profile was a player of the trombone in the Shiv Mohan Band that had only recently taken up residence down the road.

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Gudiya, as a teenager, was very much fascinated by his beauty and charm. His every movement seemed to her graceful and elegant. At this point in time, Gudiya was innocent, passionate, and unworldly... Pandit Kailash Sastry at the time observed the boy and predicted that he was Kalki, the scourge of the Kalyug. He also gave his observations about Hindu beliefs in the following words: ‘When the end of the world approaches, Kalki will come astride a pale horse and put an end to this confusion of sin and pain. Lord Vishnu, it is said by those who know, will appear as Kalki.

"Handsome and a king among men, he will be armed with a huge ax; .....a new age will begin, when, once again, virtue and happiness will reign on the earth"(Page 134)

When Phoolwati wanted Gudiya to get married, Pandit Kailash Sastry examined her horoscope and warned her that there was a secret enemy to her who was trying to harm her but he would smile and act like a friend. When the boy came to see her, she enquired about his name and family. He said he was Kalki and was living on his own without a family. She found out that he was a bastard and an orphan. Gudiya introduced herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and her father was Thakur Abhimanyu Singh. At that moment she wanted his love and care for her. She expressed her passion for him in the following words;

“His face was very close to mine. His eyes were so intense I was sure they could see all the way through to my soul. My insides were all a flutter. I could hardly breathe. I thought that he would kiss me. But he could not” (Page 149)

When her grandmother’s statue was erected near the temple, Kalki came to see her and requested her to learn the ‘mantra’ to make money. Gudiya then, understood that he was interested in getting money through magic mantras. She, however, was not concerned about his greed and selfishness. She was not blind to the realities of Kalki’s nature and did not forget the lessons of her mother, the inept prostitute, with her pitiable habit of falling in love. Gudiya wanted to get money for herself by hunting for gold coins hidden in the ground. She hit upon this idea when some coins were found while digging Shampoo's land by Saboo which were buried by her previously. With the help of Phoolwati and Sundar, she got three briefcases of currency notes. Later, she inherited some property from her loving teacher Roxanne who had passed away. She knew well that she was rich, young and beautiful. Some innate wisdom restrained her from telling Kalki about the gold though she suspected that he was aware of the conditions of Roxanne’s will. This had excited his affections and he was beginning to talk about marriage with an increasing degree of impatience. However, Gudiya no longer wanted to marry Kalki. She found that she was four months pregnant and as abortion was not possible, she accepted to marry Kalki. Later she was given accommodation in Shiv Mohan’s own house. Gudiya was very adaptable to the rhythm of new life with Kalki.

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Gudiya felt that she had inherited her mother's propensity that landed her in trouble and unfortunate situations. She managed to maintain a brave and cheerful face in the face of the indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties of Kalki. Gudiya asked Kalki to go to Bombay and try his luck there. She offered him money to go to Bombay by selling her gold necklace, earrings, and bangles. When Kalki got into the train, a provocative and pretty girl was seated next to Kalki and was shooting interested glances at him. When the train left the platform, she did not go to Shiv Mohan's house but to Phoolwati's house. After the departure of Kalki, Gudiya felt that she missed him physically. She, however, accepted his departure with resignation and relief as he was not there to trouble or torment her with the authority that their marriage conferred. She questioned herself why she had been so afraid of him and why she had allowed him to beat, harass and abuse her. She began to forget how exactly he looked. She had no father or grandfather as models of masculinity to teach her the lessons of dependence as a woman. She had acceded immediately and inevitably to the conditionings of womanhood. Time went by and she gave birth to Mallika and continued to live with Phoolwati after the death of Sunder Pahlwan. Kalki did not write to her from Bombay. She never heard of him again. Whenever she went through the photographs of her marriage, it all seemed far away and unreal to her. She realized that when enough time passed and the dust settled on those troubled memories, she should be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Thus Gudiya's innocence and passion in her teenage for Kalki ended up with her becoming a victim of dismay and distress.

Thus Namita Gokhale represents a woman's quest for liberation which is not something new or unique to India. She has the courage to express her women's essentially feminine sensibility, honesty, and sincerity. She has voiced the pangs, problems, and fears of the weaker sex. Through her novels, she gives voice to the sufferings, to agony and pain of women within their social norms and conventions.

Namita Gokhale feels strongly about female exploitation and male sarcasm towards the issue of women's identity crisis. She demands social justice and freedom for women. Gokhale represents new morality, according to which women are not to be taken as a mere toy, an object of lust and momentary pleasure, but Man's equal and honored partner. Her women characters undoubtedly represent her feminist ideology. Namita Gokhale wants women to recognize themselves.

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