



## **Unconventional Love and Sexual Liberation: A Feminist Study of Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion***

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### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to explore the causes and consequences of love and sexual liberation in the women of Indian scenario in Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984). In the novel, Priya attempts to emancipate herself from marriage by manipulating the opposite sex but falls short of Paro's level of freedom. She alternates between portraying an Indian wife and an adulteress. Paro's is the narrative of a social butterfly who has been reduced to social shambles. The occurrences of her life demonstrate a reversal of man's sexual freedom. She enslaves men with her beauty and sexuality and seduces every man she meets in her search for love. Excessive sexual liberation reaches a point when it is resisted. Her riches devolve into misfortune. Gokhale herself, Priya and Paro, all have dreams of passion, which cannot materialize.

**Keywords:** *Woman, Sexuality, Dream, Love, Passion, Freedom.*

## **1. Introduction**

Namita Gokhale is one of India's influential female writers in the twenty-first century. She has brilliantly portrayed the impulses, dreams, and wants of Indian women through her writings. She has shown women as autonomous individuals in the current environment. She has made contemporary Indian women the protagonists of her novels and has successfully and deftly captured the Indian ethos through her writing.

As a feminist, Gokhale became popular with the publication of her novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. One cannot fail to understand Paro's vision of freedom. The questionnaires - How is she a rebel? She does not accept the social code of conduct as prescribed for women by Hindu Shastras. Can she be called a pure woman? Can she be compared with Shakuntala of Kalidasa? As a liberated woman who wishes to live her life free of social constraints, Paro informs Priya that her passions were sparked by her convent school teacher. She had no prior knowledge of sex. She was the only occupant of the hostel. She harbours lofty dreams but does little to pursue them. The irony is that she curses Marcus, her art master, for liberating her. If she had been sincere, she would have protested to the head mistress following the initial meeting. On the contrary, she begins to adore the entire situation. Gokhale appears

to be arguing that women cannot be free from male dominance until nature endows them with certain faculties for physical fulfilment. Males will continue to arouse females, as Paro did.

As a champion of women's rights, Gokhale appears to argue that if a guy may eat dung with a group of women, why can not a woman? Paro felt no remorse and even wrote him a letter. The outcome was catastrophic. She was discovered in a compromising scenario with Marcus in her room. If she is ejected from the convent, it is her fault. No religion or social law permits such behaviour at a hostel. After all, she rebels against the school's ethical standards, and the media is not to fault for publishing the story in the newspaper. The entire family was made to suffer as a result of this. She meets Babu at college and has no remorse for her past. She is constantly thinking of prosperity in order to achieve independence as a woman.

In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Paro is unafraid of her sexual behaviour 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: "I feel like a cat on a hot tin roof; I am in heat; I need a man" (126). She is almost a patient of nymphomania. In "Paro: Dreams of Passion or Passion of Dreams?" R.S.Pathak duly avers:

Paro is thus a novel about human passions and their aftermath. Human passions owe their inception to certain incidents or accidents in life. Those who are able to sublimate their passions attain calm of mind, but most of them came to feel ... However, passions may have a deeper purpose in life: they may be in some cases mode of self-discovery. The characters of Paro and B.R. are illustrative of this point. (178)

B.R., who lacks moral compass, is the embodiment of male-domination. Paro is restless solely to satiate her baser cravings. She epitomises lusty Epicureanism and gluttony. She is worse than Menaka, who had come to disturb Vishwamitra's meditation. She considers her physical requirements, and satisfying her desires is significant to her. Her beauty is also her downfall. Given that Gokhale's lead character is a woman and the narrative is largely concerned with what she observes, feels, and experiences, we could be inclined to believe that the novel's primary goal is to project or support a feminist stance. However, the central premise of Paro is none other than human predictability. It would be more accurate to view it as a woman's excruciating search for her genuine self in a society that is still predominantly conventional and influenced by cultural and societal norms.

Paro attended a convent school and undoubtedly read about the value of virtue as espoused by numerous scholars. Regrettably, she is unaware that she is a victim of bloodthirsty passion and continues to fly on the trusting wings of false desire. While Paro's objection appears to be untrue, it cannot be refuted that she is not a member of the Women Liberation Movement. It is true that Gokhale reflects the romantic and passionate experiences of the scientific era. Women do not wish to stay a man's puppet. They wish to escape the confines of the house's four walls. However, they cannot be permitted to behave in the manner in which Paro does.

*Paro: Dream of Passion* 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 a haughty, brazen, and self-confident woman with an assured cat-like grace. Priya, like Paro, wishes to be free of poverty. 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 does not expect her to be sincere. One is unable of comprehending her preferences, dislikes, and obsessions. She believes she is youthful, despite the fact that she is losing her lustre on a regular basis. She is receptive to life only when she has a new catch in her net. The only time she feels liberated is when she divorces her husband, as Priya observes:

Paro has done it all, she's left a husband and a lover, she has a small son of ambiguous parentage. She is a conversation piece at dinner parties, and it is considered daring and chic to know her. And she is, or thinks she is, my best friend. (26)

After receiving a son from Bucky, she quickly grows tired of him. She now lives with Avinendra, also known as Lenin, from Ramnagar, Uttar Pradesh. Even her servants refer to her cynically as a 'Asly Memsahib.' While it is true that Paro possesses vitality, it is an entirely negative kind of vitality, a 'over hungry vigour.' She has no reservations about borrowing money from Suresh. She is aware that Lenin is impoverished but enjoys a nice lifestyle at his expense. She was primarily interested in Lenin's political relations and desired to create contacts with politicians through him. Lenin discussed Karl Marx, corruption, politics, industry, and administration, among other subjects. Paro overlooked all of these issues because she desired independence from the life of a dutiful wife. She is pleased of her deceptions, despite Priya has no reason to criticise her character. Paro is well-prepared to defend herself if she is referred to as a 'bitch' or a 'whore.' If someone is financially helpful to her, she is extremely modest toward him and will offer anything to win his favour.

Priya was unable to accept of Paro's techniques because everything seemed repulsive to Lenin, Suresh, and even to her. Suresh was unimpressed by her pragmatic, tactical victories. Fascism was being staged, as was a sado-masochistic psychodrama. Lenin and Junior stood terrified, helpless, immobile, and secretly enthralled, like children at a massacre. Suresh was initially overjoyed at the idea of another such urgent and significant interaction. To his dismay, he quickly understood that she was too captivated to consider immediate and practical tactical gains.

Shambhu Nath Mishra was only occasionally likeable to her. Otherwise, she would address him as "Kala Kutta," "Kala Bhooth," or "even Yamadoota" (88). Paro was unconcerned about Lenin's anxieties. After all, feudal classes are superfluous in modern India. Paro was unconcerned about B.R. because she was aware that her last husband was aware of her antics and devious character. Paro is not pleased to learn of Lenin's marriage at Ramnagar. The most noteworthy aspect of her character is that she spares no one, including Suresh, who handles her legal matters. When Priya discovers Paro kissing Suresh, she becomes enraged. Priya is perpetually envious of Paro.

A straw is used to sustain 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 audition for a role in a play and is overjoyed to play Clytemnestra at the Hindustani Theatre 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. If all women flee their homes, the entire social order collapses. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, B.R.says:

Women's liberation? My author friend, can you in your book liberate me from the onerous responsibility of making love to every attractive or unattractive woman who uses me like a dildo to make her husband jealous? Can you liberate me from the financial burdens of alimony? Can you free me from the jealous possessiveness of the one woman I love? Can you bring up my children for me? (144)

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 that Priya 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" (137).

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. She has demonstrated the disparity between the rich and the poor in this instance. Priya earns little money in the beginning of the novel while working for B.R. As she visits B.R.'s opulent mansion, her ambitions expand and she becomes caught in the music of his mansion. When he offers her a glass of wine, she accepts. When he leads her to his bedroom, she is nearly completely unprepared for the joy that awaits. Born in an ordinary family, she feels - she is "special somehow" (9). She reappears in B.R.'s life once more when Suresh is required to contest a legal dispute in Bombay.

As Gokhale is well versed in the method of stream of consciousness fiction, she delves into the psychology of Paro, Priya, and B.R., among others. Priya is not interested in escaping poverty through equitable means. Even in the bookstall, she is drawn to pornographic images. Priya considers B.R. to be an astute businessman and strict professional. When she is with B.R., she is unaware of her obligation to Suresh. Priya even enjoys conversing with Paro about sex. When B.R. encouraged her to come directly to his place, her delight knew no bounds.

Ardent Critic, Rashmi Gaur made various comments in her article "Paro: A Tale of Two Ladies" about Priya and Paro. Sheavers:

Namita Gokhale's first novel Paro is a woman's evocative commentary on the sybarite decadence of the Indian upper middle class. The novel lays bare its charm and banality, its privileges and cynicism, its schisms and intrigues before the reader through the sensitive portrayal of two women characters - Paro and Priya - who have been developed as foils to each other. (176)

One is left perplexed as to how Paro protests against a society that has always implicitly supported initiatives to eradicate women.

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 gatherings, restrooms, drawing rooms, and hallways. It is okay that some educated women lead pleasant lives and are truly intelligent.

Priya uses an analogy to describe Paro, comparing her to a small, sharp scorpion. Priya's error is to believe that she is incapable of facing life and the world without Paro. Priya has no reason to be jealous of Paro, who lacks genuine charisma and vitality. The conflict between the two is unjustified, given Priya had ample opportunity to pursue her own path. One cannot comprehend Paro's constant sense of victory. In her quest for self-identity, she begins mutilating and manipulating the men she meets, denying them their truths and values and undermining their superiority.

As a lonely woman with an inner void, Paro's unsettled life can be interpreted as an impatient and poignant protest by a woman who was terribly alone and refused to pilfer her identity in a man-made world, a woman whose luminous screen of non-conformist gesture concealed an inner void that she could not fill despite numerous relationships, a woman who ended up jeopardising her life itself in the process. This is a world created by humans. However, everyone, man or woman, has tasks to fulfil. Paro is purely emotional and sexual in nature. In this culture, educated women like her find every form of security. Not all marriages end in frustration.

Thus, in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Gokhale delves into the passions and expectations of middle-class women such as Paro and Priya as they navigate life's difficulties. Second, Priya finds solace in writing her own biography, and Gokhale illustrates through this activity that the distinction between biography and narration is rapidly diminishing. Priya is the one who recounts the events of Paro, B.R., Bucky

Bhandpur, Lenin, Shambhu Nath Mishra, Lukas Lerous, and Suresh's lives. Priya has no reason to brag about her ethical ideals when she continues to have sex freely with B.R. after marriage. By chance, she ends up in the life of Suresh, an awakened man.

Gokhale satirises persons like Avinendra, his father, and Shambhu Nath Mishra in *Paro: Dreams of Passion*. Gokhale makes a harsh remark through Shambhu Nath Mishra's wife: "Desh Me Bus Ab Rundi Raj Chalta Hai" (86). Even Lenin acknowledges the country's corruption but takes no action against the corrupt. As a journalist, Gokhale is aware of the flaws in India's democratic system, which continues to oppress women.

## 2. Conclusion

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* concludes with the deaths 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 odyssey through the passions and jealousies of a group of middle-class Indian women, particularly through the narrator Priya's and her friend Paro's experiences, vividly depicts the world of modern women in metropolitan centres. Thus, this novel is a work of fiction that challenges us to consider the feminist elements of Gokhale.

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