

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**Emergence of Modern Women in Namita Gokhale's Gods, Grave and Grandmother: A Perspective**

---

**Soumya Tiwari Ph.D.**

Research Scholar, Department of English

School of Language, Literature, and Arts,

Sanchi University of Buddhist-Indic Studies, Academic Campus Barla, Raisen,

M.P

---

**Abstract**

One of the important characteristics of the Post-Independent Indian English Literature is the emergence of women novelists. They gave a fresh breath of life to the literature. The women novelist has made far-reaching changes in the field of Indian English Novels. Started writing in the final decades of the twentieth century, Namita Gokhale is one famous novelist in the galaxy of Indian English Literature. Her selection of themes in her novels reveals her keen concern for the welfare of women. Women occupy a central position in her mostly novels. Namita Gokhale as a conscious person has observed human life, social structure and grown along with the changing paradigm. This paper explores the journey of the emergence of new women in the novel Gods, Graves, and Grandmother by Namita Gokhale.

**Keywords:** Society, Marginalization, Identity, Oppression

In views of Anita Ghosh - "India is a museum of languages and literature and Indian writing is an expression of its people, their culture, their tradition, their mores and ways of life. The distinct quality of this literature rests on multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-racial ethos of the people living here. The intercourse of this literature with other Indian Languages dialects and literature on the one hand, and western cultures, literature, tradition and aesthetics on the other hand enriches its treasure immensely."

The rise and development of Indian English Novel was felicitated by the impact of English education, national awakening and the influence of European models. In terms of themes, techniques and human values English novels have emerged as a product of Indian soil.

Rabindranath Tagore (*ChokerBali*) depicts women struggle in male-dominated society and her desire to resist resent and change the norms. The flowering season of Indian English novels is generally regarded

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

with the arrival of the trio – Mulk Raj Anand (*Untouchable, Coolie, Village*), R.K.Narayana (*Swami and Friends, The Dark Room, The English Teacher*) and Raja Rao (*Kanthapura, Serpent and the Rope*). The main themes of Indian English novels during this period are viz – the struggle for freedom, East-West encounter, communal tension, the plight of poor and women etc. After this trio, the notable novelists are Bhabani Bhattacharya, Kamala Markandaya, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh, R.P. Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Bharti Mukherjee, Shobha Dey, Arundhati Roy, who wrote on different aspects related to India and they highlighted poverty, caste system, religion, and tradition.

Thus, the novels before independence were mainly concerned with social, political and historical issues and after independence; they focused on contemporary issues like as political events which are represented in the works of Khushwant Singh. The human personality and inner realities of life found expression in the works of Arun Joshi, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai. “The prose writing-both fiction and non-fiction-created [in contemporary India] by Indian writers writing in English is proving to be a stronger and more important body of work than most of what has been produced in the eighteen ‘recognized’ languages of India during the same time; and indeed, this new

and still burgeoning, ‘Indo-Anglian’ literature represents perhaps the most valuable contribution India has yet made to the world of books.” (Rushdie)

Post-Independence Women novelist has focused on the suppressed and marginalized section of society. The novelist through their tremendous output tried to portray the different kinds of domination prevailing in the Indian society. The Women Novelists “not only exhorted an expression of the patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive tendencies towards feminist growth and expression, but also envisioned ways of counteracting those attitudes.” as remarked by Anita Ghosh.

Women novelists like Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Githa Hariharan, Namita Gokhale, Gita Mehta, Shashi Deshpande talk about dehumanizing treatment of the downtrodden, the patriarchal brutality inflicting suffering of different women, marginality of all types. Simone de Beauvoir discusses about subjectivity- our sense of self- through existence philosophy. Existentialism proposes that one exists first, and through one’s acts, one becomes something. “One is not born a female; one becomes this” (Beauvoir, 301).

“She reasoned that an individual has absolute control over their fate, and neither society nor organized religion

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

should limit our freedom to live authentically. But since men have claimed the category of self, of subject, for themselves, women are relegated to the status of other. Consequently, the category of women has no substance as an extension of male fantasy and fears. And since all cultural representations of the world around us have been produced by men, women must ‘dream through the dream of men’. (Beauvoir, 48).

Indian women in the society have been a subject of great discussion over the time. The history of women in India is noteworthy. A social and religious status is enjoyed by women in ancient times. Considered equal to their male counterparts in every sphere of life. Unfortunately, women status has been gendered with the influence of invaders on the Indian culture and thus, man has always considered woman dependent on him. Always has to live in dependency whether on father, brother, husband or on society. The “New Women” arises as women starts freeing herself from the suppression of man and society. This new woman are very well portrayed by women novelists in their writings with thematic concerns ranging from feminism, identity crisis, and marginalization and so on.

The new woman has cross-examined her conventional roles in the traditional society. Now, she has a desire surpass the forbidden territory. Such New Women are given exposure in the novels of Namita Gokhale and women novelist like Bharati Mukherjee Anita Desai, Shoba De.

“Their writings reveal the problem in the relationships between urban and educated men and women in modern Indian society where freedom has given women a chance to fulfil their desires, but due to several conscripting attitudes of the society this newly gained freedom causes terrible pain in their lives. Men women in the Indian Society do not have the same kind of freedom to express themselves. Women are still greatly dominated by men and the society in general.” (Ghosh, 21)

According to Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy “Feminism is grounded in the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine or as implying as agreed political program”

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The radical movement has got the mark of radical due to its demand for drastic changes in the society. Radical feminists believe that, the male domination should be abolished. They revolt against the distribution of power based on of gender which becomes the main reason for the oppression of women. They want to disrupt the existing political and social organizations which are inherently tied to patriarchy. So, they are generally skeptical of political action within the present system; rather it focuses on cultural change. Radical Feminists are more antagonistic in their approach, as the name suggests, radical means getting to the roots. Radical feminists do not want to harm man but they want to destroy patriarchy. Some eminent radical feminists include Mary Daly, Andrea Firestone, Germaine Greer, Carol Hanisch, Robin Morgan, and Monique Wittig,

Ernestine an American radical feminist, theologian, academic, and philosopher. in his 1851 address, "Second National Convention" refers to this predicament: "Like man, woman comes involuntarily into existence; like him, she possesses physical and mental and moral powers, on the proper cultivation of which depends her happiness; like him she is subject to all vicissitudes of life; like him she has to pay the penalty for disobeying nature's laws, and far greater penalties has

she to suffer from ignorance of her more complicated nature; like him she enjoys or suffers with her country. Yet she is not recognized as his equal."

As per Talcott Parsons – "A traditional society is marked by 'particularistic' values as opposed to 'universalistic' values which characterize a modern society. Family and kinship ties are very strong. Inadequate development of transport facilities tends to limit spatial mobility which, in its turn, restricts marriage and all other kinds of social relationships within a narrow circle. **A society is traditional if behaviour is governed by custom and if ways of behavior continue with little change from generation to generation**".

**Namita Gokhale: A Novelist with Different Perspective**

As per Jayaprabha- "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"

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

The novelist depicts women with, giving equal importance to their negative and positive attributes. She presents the image of a new woman with a different perspective.

Women in her novels build a shot to shake off the shackles of social convention. The women in her novel refuse to stay shadowy beings and utilize their gender identities, and their inner strength to emerge out of Man's shadow and come through an identity of their own. Her novels proclaim the emergence of women of modern India. She portrays women characters with courage and freedom rather than demanding rights in the society.

**Gods Grave and Grandmother: A Saga of Emergence of New Women**

'The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women, within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid, economic and social foundation'. (De Beauvoir Introduction, 30)

Gods, Graves, and Grandmother Talks about radical feminism. In the novel, Gokhale presents a world with a gyno-

centric view. She makes women characters self-dependent. She empowers the women characters to tussle with the hostile social reality. Women cover the centre stage in the novel. The most significant fact is that the women in the novel are not frightened by the wily, devious, and domineering males they come into contact with. Eminently, they succeed in carving a niche for themselves in the male-dominated society, and prove that what men can do women can do. They turn themselves into subjects performing acts and desiring men and things.

The cover page of the novel records that, "The novel is a gripping and enthralling book that wears its many complexities lightly. It will continue to haunt its readers long after they have put it down." Starts in a meditative tone and makes a kind of vacuums. She quotes: "When my mother went away, my grandmother and I were left to fend for ourselves" (Gokhale, 1).

The character that comes first is Ammi. She is a Muslim courtesan. She was a rich *Kothewali* previously. In her family there was her brother, her daughter and the child of her daughter (Gudiya). There were enjoying a rich life. She lives in a big mansion. But fate changes and the family became poor and destitute with tragic consequences. The daughter of Ammi (Gudiya's mother) ran away with a man of low reputation. On the hand Ammi 's

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

brother committed Suicide. So, Ammi and Gudiya were left alone in the family. One day when Ammi was in the train, she met with a man who told her to move to City in order to survive. Ammi moves to city; and leaves behind her past. She arrives at the city and manipulates the situation to survive in the city as shown in the lines-

“We would indeed have starved had not my resourceful grandmother stolen a marble slab ...she placed beneath the holy peepul tree ...then she found five rounded river stones, purloined them, really, from a sahib’s rockery, and arranged them on the marble altar. Marigold flower from the sahib’s garden, and the third stainless steel thali which we didn’t need, now that mother had gone, and our shrine was complete.”(Gokhale,1)

Started forming relationships in the neighborhood, to people who came to visit her temple. Ammi makes a good step by making good relations with the authority.

As Gudiya says- “IT was the shrine beneath the peepul tree that kept us fed and clothed, although we were of course not as riches we had once been, very long ago. Money poured in; eight annas, five-rupee coins...fifty rupees note. The miracle were not yet manifest, but we were already rich beyond our wildest dreams.” (Gokhale, 4)

The second part of novel deals with Gudiya’s childhood and her adolescence.

“Early physical maturity but lack of emotional support may lead to crisis in adolescence. There is a link between brain and psychological conditions and it may produce somatic symptoms. Physical maturity and low intelligence lead to delinquencies. The granddaughter and grandmother relationship undergoes added conflict and strain in the adolescent years because of Ammi’s role as a saint and teacher of religion”. Want for love and attention is expressed in the lines – “Gudiya says, I began to hate her with a desperate longing. I needed to provoke and anger her, and yet when I confronted her and met the calm sanity of that wrinkled face I withdrew even further into confusion and hurt” (Gokhale, 69).

Rejected by her mother, Gudiya hardly finds any solace in the detached relationship with her grandmother. “In fact, broken homes and families, lack of parental affection and security, absence of a loving mother in the childhood, lack of family ties, parental irresponsibility and a steep rate in divorce are all contributing factors to delinquency”.

The natural process of manses is very troublesome for Gudiya. As express in the lines-“Thirteen is confusing age for a

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

girl; there is turmoil and agitation in the body and the mind and even the environment. When I began my menses, I knew nothing what to expect... I asked, and was quite unprepared for the stinging slap my query provoked. Another slap, and I was consigned to room, with orders not to emerge until instructed.” (Gokhale, 54)

The small girl (Gudiya) was under psychological stress. She feels the burden of loneliness and confusion weigh down her without any proper support and guidance from her grandmother. As she became a god woman she has less or no time for her Gudiya.

With better financial condition Ammi and Gudiya now faces communication gap. Gudiya reassess her relationship with Phoolwati. Phoolwati is the widow of Shambhu who owns a flower shop at the gate of the temple. Phoolwati plays the role of Gudiya’s mother. She forms affectionate and cordial with Phoolwati. Gudiya made a new affection centre. Phoolwati is also strong character in the novel. She was widow of Shambu, who has a flower shop near the temple. Phoolwati was like mother to Gudiya’s forms affectionate relationship with Gudiya. She was always careful about Gudiya’s happiness.

As a traditional mother, Ammi was worried of Gudiya’s youth. In country like

India, a growing girl is taken as a big problem. “The social structural codes dictate that a young girl should be kept in strict discipline and away from male company till her marriage. Ammi keeps a watchful eye on Gudiya. The personal loss of Ammi’s affection makes her misunderstand Ammi. She even starts hating her own name because she does not think of herself, ‘like a doll’. (Gokhale, 69).

Gudiya falls for a boy. He was a member of the Shiv Mahan Band Party. The name Kalki was given to him by Pandit Kailash Shastry. After exploiting Gudiya sexually Kalki lost interest in her. Their marriage was arranged quickly. As Gudiya was found to be four months pregnant. The social system never accepts the birth of a child before marriage. It is considered unacceptable by the society. Due to pressure of Sundar Pahalwan, Kalki marries Gudiya. After marriage their relationship was hardly compatible. Kalki treats her badly. Due to his habit of gambling and drinking Gudiya was unhappy and depressed.

Phoolwati suggested Gudiya after the marriage that she should consider her husband as a disposable being and not to waste her time on him as the child has a legitimate father. Kalki d hatred for Gudiya increase as he thought that it was Gudiya who had disclosed about their relationship, which led to his humiliation by Phoolwati and Sundar Pahalwan.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Kalki does not change his attitude. He was not concerned about the coming child also does he ever bother to look after his pregnant wife. Gudiya once again was left with no one with whom she could share her problems. She realizes that her husband Kalki is not a permanent or life-long support for her. She understood the fact that he is attached to her just for physical pleasure and her wealth. Then she suggested Kalki that he should leave her and try his luck in Bombay. This proposal of Gudiya is seen as reversal of the patriarchal norm where a husband usually decides to leave his wife. Gudiya allows her husband to leave her.

She says to him, “Why don’t you try your luck in Bombay again, Kalki?” But when Kalki says “I don’t have the funds”, she immediately takes off the thick gold necklace and other gold ornaments and gives them to him saying, “I’ll sell my Stridhan for you” (Gokhale, 219).

The firmness shown by Gudiya in supporting her husband. She arranges everything for the welfare of her husband. Acquires greater confidence and a clear perception of life Gudiya realizes that Kalki merely a shadow and this shadow will serve her no propose in life. The only reason behind this marriage was just to give a name to her child as it is important in the Indian society. After the purpose is fulfilled, she does not need the presence of

a husband who has never cared for his wife and child.

The absence of Kalki never bothered Gudiya. She feels at ease after Kalki was gone. Though she loves him, she is glad to be alone after Kalki leaves. From staring she has no father or any other male to strongly influence her life, and after Kalki was gone she is totally alien to the idea of depending on a man throughout her life. She says, Kalki was gone, but I could still not admit not even to myself, that I was glad to be alone again. My mother had never had a husband. Neither, as far as I knew, I had my grandmother. I had never known a father. There had been no models of masculinity to teach me the lessons of dependence as a woman” (Gokhale,224).

She expresses the departure of Kalki as – “I missed him, but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss, I loved Kalki, but love is not life”. (Gokhale,224)

Grandmother as a character holds a place in the title of the novel, as she is depicted as a woman of ability and courage. She didn’t sink to the troublesome conditions however with her foresightedness carves a home for herself and her granddaughter-Gudiya. As expressed in the lines by Gudiya - “We would indeed have starved had not my



**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

resourceful grandmother stolen a marble slab ...she placed beneath the holy peepul tree ...then she found five rounded river stones, purloined them, really, from a sahib's rockery, and arranged them on the marble altar. Marigold flower from the sahib's garden, and the third stainless steel thali which we didn't need, now that mother had gone, and our shrine was complete." (Gokhale,1)

"Grandma is very brave, vivacious, ambitious, capable, yet it is a distortion of the `new woman` Her first analysis occurred when she needed to handle Sunder Pahelwan. She with her inborn cleverness managed him and become friendly in the process. She quotes to him: "Seize our money Pahalawanji, but spare our self-respect. I am the widow of a Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman's curses may follow you (Gokhale, 12). This way she could handle the circumstance as she had the art to talk convincingly to the people."

The character of Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is presented as a rebellious bend right from her adolescence. Love for new identity is a mark of transgression in the modern youth. The urge to define themselves is strong in them. Bearing a label fastened on them by their parents would seem to be yet another sign of slavery imposed on them. Some girls do

not find any sense in being known by a name allotted by someone else even if it happens to be them own parents. They want to acquire a name that would give them a new identity and a new status to them in the social hierarchy. Accordingly, Gudiya too decides to change her name. Gudiya swears to herself that she would make herself a strong and skilled woman and take revenge on those who have humiliated her for her low status. As shown in the lines, "Grandmother had inculcated in me a fierce sense of my own worth. I resolved that someday, somehow, somewhere, I would get even with all of them"(Gokhale,130).

Nirmala Kumari and Sunalini Kondapally remark about women in the novels of Namita okhale- "The women eulogized by Namita Gokhale are fiercely strong, assertive, and individualistic. They are cultural icons, with intense sense of loyalty to the clan and community. Her works are a protest, an attempt to construct a new woman in new society. She has chiseled heroic women characters. They seek affirmation of womanhood by reversal of roles and by out doing their male counterparts. They have courage to rise above the mundane and ordinary life. Though they could not completely defy the moral and dogmatic cantankerous standards but these women seek release. Namita Gokhale has deconstructed femininity among those traumatized by physical and

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

psychological violence and driven into exile from their body and identity.”

“Namita Gokhale has created a matrilineal society which sees women 'as strong people engaged in all kinds of activities”. (Gupta, 40).

“Namita Gokhale has succeeded in projecting women as people whose desires, likes and dislikes matter as much as those of their male counterparts and the extent to which women characters are successful in ordering their lives without male support.” (Chandra, 53-580)

References

Beauvoir, Simone de. “*The Second Sex*”. Vintage Random House, 1949.

Devi, Kalpana. and V.V. Subha Rao. “The Image of Modern Women in Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*.” (IJELLH), volume IV, Issue X, (2016): pp-363-358.

Ghosh, Anita. “Contemporary Indian Writing In English: Critical perception”, Edited by N.D.R.Chandra, Sarup and Sons, 2005

Gokhale, Namita. “*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* “Penguin Books, 2001.

Jayaprabha, S. “Ideological Representation of Womanhood: A Study on Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*.” (RJOE), volume 4, Issue 1(2019): pp-271-275.

Kanimozhi,R. “Theme of Self-Realisation in Namita Gokhale’s *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Gods, Graves and Grandmother*.”(Language in India), Volume 15, (2015):pp-59-71.

[plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-philosophy/](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminist-philosophy/) accessed on 9/3/21

Sumalatha,M. and Dr. K.K. Sunalini “Liberated Women In Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*.” (RJELAL), volume 5, Issue 3 (2017): pp -565-571.

[timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/writeindiaaccess](http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/writeindiaaccess) ed on 9/3/21

Velpula,Kumari, Nirmala. and Dr.K.K. Sunalini. “Woman’s Exclutory love in Namita Gokhale's "The Book of Shadows" and "A Himalayan Love Story.” (Arts and Education International Research Journal) volume 4.

**RESEARCH ARTICLE**

[web.mit.edu/~shaslang/papers/feminintro.html](http://web.mit.edu/~shaslang/papers/feminintro.html) accessed on 9/3/21

[wpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/speech-at-the-national-womens-rights-convention/](http://wpc.cattcenter.iastate.edu/2017/03/21/speech-at-the-national-womens-rights-convention/) accessed on 9/3/21

[www.rep.routledge.com/articles/the-matic/feminism](http://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/the-matic/feminism) accessed on 9/3/21

[www.sociologydiscussion.com/society/7-main-features-of-a-traditional-society](http://www.sociologydiscussion.com/society/7-main-features-of-a-traditional-society) accessed on 9/3/21