



# Unfolding New Selves in New Structures: Study of Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind* and *Paro: Dreams of Passion*.

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**Abstract**— Bound by circumstance and repression of untold miseries every woman fights her silent battle all through her life. Invariably, her battle is with the society, the male-dominated society and its strong conventions. Somewhere during this process, she is caught in a serious conflict within herself. This conflict of hers is so intricate that she feels lost and dejected, feeling an emptiness within. Few women are driven by their eagerness to break free from the shackles of this male-dominant society amidst the many, who choose to suffer silently. Namita Gokhale's women are those selected few who display a strong desire for freedom. Their quest to build a strong identity reverberates through her literary works. Namita foresees women who are free and unbound by any conventionality. This journey towards freedom enables women to unfold their new selves. Both the novels taken for study are set in different social and cultural backgrounds. The characters chosen for study belong to different strata of the society encountering different levels of challenges. They don't settle for anything less. They are unstoppable in their own ways. In *Tilottama*, the protagonist of the novel *Things to Leave Behind*, one can see Namita's decisive and unyielding personality who is ready to leave many things behind, in her fascinating journey towards progress. In *Paro*, the protagonist of the novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, she emerges as a feminist through her non-conformity to any kind of bondage whatsoever.

**Keywords**— *Feminism, Indian Women, Liberation, Patriarchal norms, Social Standards.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Feminism is the awareness of the oppression of women. Writers, across the globe have portrayed women in their literary works as being marginalised for no fault of theirs. They are ill-treated only because they are born as women. Feminism makes an interesting study merely because it is ever-evolving. Feminists never hesitate to raise the different issues faced by women in different times. The trace of feminism can be dated back to the 18th century. Feminist literature in America is an outburst of the pent-up emotion in terms of marital repression, voting restrictions, lack of societal and political freedom. Over the years it has aimed to establish equal economic and

social rights for women. Feminism in African literature has a different story altogether. It brings slavery and racial discrimination to the minds of the readers. The African women are doubly marginalised for being born as women and as blacks.

The Indian society is no exception to its treatment of its women. Right from our mythological 'Sita' till the women of this period, the society has been constantly 'Patriarchal' in its outlook. The word 'patriarchy' was introduced by Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) to refer to male-dominated power structure that forms the basis of our society. Millet pictures this power of Patriarchy. Over the

years, women are socially conditioned to accept their secondary status. (60)

Old Indian stories say that girls were taught to pray for early Death. She has to pray for early death and rebirth to correct her mistake of being born as a girl child. They teach the girl child to be a woman according to the accepted patriarchal values, to be self sacrificing, to worship the husband, to serve the in-laws. She cannot pray for herself. She is trained in every aspect to be selfless and ever-giving. And to ask for nothing in life except the well-being of people around her. She has to derive happiness only from giving and expecting nothing in return.

On the contrary, women in Indian literature are exalted and glorified to a great extent. They are depicted as Shakthi, the all-powerful. They are seen playing the most important role. They are considered indispensable. Families are pictured as desperately being women-centered. Women are thus pictured as embodiments of patience. The Indian society accepts

'Sita' as its role model. She is undoubtedly considered 'iconic' as the ideal wife. This is solely because 'Sita' was depicted as a submissive and voiceless wife. Her uncomplaining nature and her forbearance portrays 'Sita' as an epitome of patience and tolerance. Eventually Sita is presented as weak and oppressed. But everyone knows the inner strength and dignity which Sita possessed. The Indian Patriarchal society never seems to acknowledge this fact. This paper aims to study the women characters Tilottama from the novel *Things to Leave Behind* (2016) in contrast with *Paro* from the novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (2017)

## II. CHARACTER STUDY AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Tilottama is an orphan. She is raised by her uncle. The execution of her paternal uncle, Badri Dutt Uprety by the British during the freedom struggle, leaves a deep scar in the mind of little Tilottama who is barely seven years old. Before he was hanged to death, he murmurs in her ear, "Remember this my little Tillu, never be afraid, and do what you want. Not what you like but what you want." (TTLB,37) The orphan Tilottama had adored her uncle so much that these words of his, had left an indelible mark on her young mind. She builds her life carefully over these words of his.

The second part of the novel delves deeply into Tilottama and her strong personality. This is partly due to her never-ending quest for knowledge. "I'll learn to read and write someday," (TTLB,73) She begins to educate

herself. This love for reading helps her overcome her sense of isolation which she suffers because of her husband who did not love her. He hardly visits her. Tilottama even knows about his extra-marital affair with a Nepali woman. Throughout the novel, there are no traces of her complaining about her husband. She is not seen entering any extra-marital affair. She doesn't even look for a friend or confidante to

lament about her pathetic life. Instead, she empowers herself and builds a strong Mental Health. She starts enjoying this state of being deserted. Her love for reading takes over her boredom and isolation. She chooses to be herself in spite of the innumerable unfavourable circumstances which surrounds her right from her childhood till she becomes a proud grandmother. Tilottama belongs to an upper class Brahminical family. In her world, it was impossible for women to read amidst their household chores. But her love for learning is so intense that she is seen reading tirelessly. She acquires enough knowledge. But Tilottama doesn't fail to do her duty as a mother. She ensures that her daughter Deoki is given enough attention. Deoki too grows up to be an equally independent individual. She is calm, poised and highly tolerant when she enters into her new life. Her husband Jayesh doesn't love her. His love is centered around Rosemary. She goes through very difficult times. She finds solace only in her mother Tilottama. She gets enough moral strength from her mother.

One can see religion deeply rooted in Tilottama. But when it comes to blind beliefs and superstitions, Tilottama never hesitates to question them. She does not stop her daughter and son-in-law when they want to convert to Christianity. When she finds religious ways hanging with time, she resorts to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. She ponders over his

words, "Each soul is potentially divine", "Manifest your divinity by work or worship, Mental discipline or Philosophy- and be free." She is also inspired by Pandita Ramabai and her works. She goes on to become a voracious reader and to great extent she also follows certain ideals as advocated by her religion. When she reaches her forties, she begins to savour solitude and goes on vanaprastha when she reaches sixties. She derives more pleasure from reading. Tilottama displays absolute women empowerment. She doesn't slow down or stop anywhere but progresses with all her energy. She tells herself, "Don't look back

Tillie. Look forward, to things yet to come." (TTLB,301)

Her character is in stark contrast to the character of *Paro* from the novel *Paro: ream of Passion*. All she wants is to raise her social standards. She dares to stoop down to

any depth only to liberate herself from her middle class life. "I would awake disoriented in our small all-purpose hall cum dining room, suffused with shame and contempt for the

poverty and meanness around me. I would vow to rise from that mire: I would dream of grace, of beauty and harmony" (PDP, 10). Paro has the audacity to break the conventions of the society. She divorces her husband and goes on to have sexual relationship with many men. In one of her conversations with Priya, she disapproves of the concept of marriage. She

strongly believes that it can never last.

This sexual journey of Paro doesn't bring her the desired results. It is because she doesn't have a particular reason to take up these amorous activities. She doesn't seem to have any commitment or purpose in life. She has no ideals to stick to. Priya's observations of Paro goes as follows:

This is the Paro who is but recently liberated from marriage and convention: she is

still convinced that she is as young and desirable as she was. Her massive breasts,

like the enlarged pores of her skin, have grown ponderous with age. Even her fingers have become fatter – but this coarsening of body has also somehow catalysed a startling vitality of mind, a vigour that is as crude as it is real. Life has not tired her – she is undiminished, she has grown. She is still obsessed, loudly and clamorously, with questions that the rest of us answered, or decided not to answer, at some period

around adolescence. (PDP 17 - 18)

Paro displays certain masculine qualities like courage, vigour etc. but she is not seen enjoying happiness or contentment anywhere. She does not experience inner peace or tranquility. She is always in search of something which she definitely doesn't know. Veena Singh rightly observes that "Paro seeks her identity in sexual freedom. She symbolises female

will. She is possessed with restlessness. She represents a woman who yearns for completion and who refuses to be consumed by the monstrous schematization of the male-dominated Institution." Liberation from marriage and from social bond does not necessarily bring her the real liberation. This liberation which Paro is in search of, is absolutely the westernised concept of

liberation. This unending quest of Paro brings about unending misery. "To prevent an inner life that has no

useful purpose from sinking into nothingness, to assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being, she must resort to self-expression" (The Second Sex 393). She commits suicide. Death comes to her as an abrupt end to her. She is doomed. Paro's conception and the outlook of life is entirely different. She is a rebel setting her own standards. This is how Paro herself sees her:

I had always considered myself a person of little consequence, and less talent. I

discovered, however, that I had an instinct, a faculty for truth. I saw things as they

were, not as they should have been or people tried to pretend they were. It was this faculty for truth that had haunted me for years, distorting the happiest moments of

my life mocking love, happiness, security. Even amidst the deepest possible flow of

emotions I could never abandon the unmoved voyeur within me, the wary spectator

in the crowd, never participating, only watching. (PDP, 81)

### III. CONCLUSION

Many writers in the past have tried to present the idea of feminism in different ways. They have always portrayed their women as those who boldly broke the so-called Patriarchal norms. They were not bound by any conventional code. But, they never projected them as defying oral standards. They never glorified erotics. Namita presents myriad characters and a variety of social standards and circumstances by which they are bound. One can conclude that women empowerment can be attained as every individual perceives it. Jasbir Jain in her book *Indigenous Roots of Feminism- Culture, Subjectivity and Agency* says that "Women's movement is a social happening, which at a later stage developed into feminism; honed by itsself-consciousness and interlaced with ideology Feminism has deeper roots in the individual consciousness than the basic fact of being a woman."(9).

Paro and Thilottama successfully come out of the stereo- type image of women. Both are independent and have no male protection. They are essentially driven by their desires and dreams. Namita warns the modern woman of the lurking danger behind material life through the life of Paro. Her women characters undoubtedly reveal her feminist ideology. It is to be noted that many women characters of Namita are bestowed with well- defined

personal traits and qualities. Almost all her novels constitute a clear feminist vision.

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