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## Ecofeminism in the Novels of Namita Gokhale

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### ABSTRACT

Feminism is a women's movement fighting for equal rights and status. The purpose of this study concentrates on the reflection of feminism in Namita Gokhale's selected works *The Book of Shadows* (1999), *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* (2011), and *Things to Leave Behind* (2016). The features of feminism strive for equal rights for both men and women, particularly the emancipation of women, fight for their rights, freedom, equal rights, and gender issues. Namita Gokhale is a famous writer, and her notable works are *The Book of Shadows*, *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, and *Things to Leave Behind*. These selected works address the issues of feminism. The major protagonists of these selected works of Namita Gokhale are Rachita, Tilottama and Priya. Each character's life reflects the issues of feminism theory. Some famous feminists are Rachel Speght, Olympe de Gouge, Mary Wollstonecraft, Judith Sargent Murray, Fredrika Bremer, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and so on. The methodology of this study focuses on the feminist theory which is compared with Namita Gokhale's selected works. In discussion, the researchers compare the survey with the other studies for deeper understanding. Future study recommendations are alienation, self-identity, psychoanalysis, self-disorder, and parental care. Gokhale's novels are mostly all about women. Her protagonists, like Paro and Priya of *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, Gods, Graves and Gramother's Gudiya, Parvati in *A Himalayan Love Story*, Rachita of *The Book of Shadows* and Shakuntala in the novel *Shakuntala*, all have followed the course and concerns of her own life: whether as a little child, adult lady, career oriented or as a married woman. As the intricacy in human relationship is an instrument in developing the self of an individual, a woman has to face discrimination, sense of insecurity, sexual harassment, to which she is exposed everywhere in their world.

**KEYWORDS:** Ecofeminism, women, Namita Gokhale, novels, relationship, individual, emancipation, writer.

### Introduction

Liberal feminism abbreviates women's right and their empowerment. The aim of this study highlights liberal feminism in Namita Gokhale's works *The Book of Shadows* (2001), *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* (2011) and *Things to leave Behind* (2016). The features of liberal feminism exhibit the women protagonists' grief and exertion to attain their goal and their responsibilities. Namita Gokhale is a multifarious writer, and her popular works are *The Book of Shadows* (2001), *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* (2011) and *Things to leave Behind* (2016). Indian Fiction in general as well as in Indian English Fiction, both original and in translation (Gupta, 2020). The selected works have the issues of liberal feminism ideas that reflect throughout her writing. In Namita Gokhale's works, the major protagonists that represent liberal feminist attributes are

Rachita, Priya and Tilottama. Each character has the reflection of liberal feminist ideas through their life. The notable thinkers of liberal feminism are John Stuart Mill,[1,2] Mary Wollstonecraft, Betty Friedan, Rosemarie Tong, Susan Moller Okin, Martha Nussbaum and Zillah Eisenstein. Bound by circumstance and repression of untold miseries every woman fights her silent battle all through her life.



### **Namita Gokhale**

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.[3,4] 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. Much has been written on feminism since its rise and it is both attacked and defended, which shows that like a post-colonial text, it is not a 'monolithic' but a polyphonic ideology. Feminism is defended for it being an inherently human programme,[5,6] for its commitment to the philosophy of humanism, which is reflected in its emphasis on treating women first as 'humans' and also for its belief in the advancement of humanity by its own efforts without affecting any revolutionary upheaval. The aim is the creation of a just society in which power and reward are distributed in terms of ability and merit, rather than gender privilege. It is attacked for its overdoing by some feminists, totally misprizing the notion of feminism, deeming it to be synonymous with

unbridled freedom (which is damaging regardless of the gender) and perpetuating the mentality of false victimhood and advocating superiority (retrograde to the same idea they fought against) and impunity based on their gender. The present book purports to examine the novels of the three contemporary Indian women novelist, Namita Gokhale in the context of the above and also the three main fashions; the 'shades' of feminism, the liberal/moderate, the radical and the socialist showing the degree of affinity with and departure from the canon of value as enshrined in their agenda. [7,8]The novels, for their dealing with the moral questions of the feminist concerns such as child-parent relationship, woman education and marriage, sexual morality, the fragility of illusions and the brutality of the outer world, have the power and density of poetry and thus, resonate beyond the confines of time and locale.[9,10]

### Discussion

There are many issues regarding existentialism. But among the various researches, there is no study done with the theory of existentialism in Namita Gokhale's work. The notable theorists of existentialism are Simone de Beauvoir, Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre. The literature is examined in the context of existentialism throughout this area. Kohzadi and Azizmohammadi's article discusses existentialism in the novel *The Castle* written by Franz Kafka. K is the central character of this novel. [11,12]He observes the people who are living around him. Amalia is one of the essential characters who like to live her life as she wants, but her village customs force her to live with the castle. But she finds her own identity for her life. K compares his life with Amalia, but he cannot come out from the castle. Thus, existentialism reflects through the character Amalia. Yusuf and Susilo's study on the work *Cigarette Girl* novel is written by Ratih Kumala. The existentialism theory is applied to the main character through feminism. In the feminist movement, many researchers discuss that women are physically and mentally weak.[43] But existentialism in feminism discusses the awareness of women about their identity to destroy the hierarchy that is harmful for woman's position. The researcher is used Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism theory to analyse existentialism in feminism. Roemaisa is the main woman character, and she lost her husband. After her loss of a husband, she started her new life. But, society did not allow her to choose her life as her wish. Because there is a separate life for widowed women, Roemaisa breaks the rules, she becomes a strong character because women can work and become intellectuals and transcend its boundaries. The study of Yantiningsih's research focuses on existentialism in *Sing Me to Sleep* written by Angela Morrison. This study illustrates an existential situation in which an individual tries hard to make her life meaningful by making existential choices. Also, it explains freedom to choose and suggests that what is good to an individual should also be good. There are many choices in everyone's life, and everyone lives a different lifestyle. [13,14]This study also expresses that individuals have the right to choose their best path for life. The above studies are done with the feministic ideas of existentialism theory. There are only few types of research done with the feministic ideas and none of the research done with Namita Gokhale's texts. This proves the uniqueness of the current research. Also, to know the deep understanding of existentialism theory, the researchers reviewed some studies that are examined with novels and movies. The study of Wilhelm Snyman abbreviates existentialism through Henri Fauconnier's notorious novel *The Soul of Malaya* (Malaisie). Existentialism reflects in the set of the colonial period of Malaya. In this autobiographical novel, the author says about the First World War. The colonial period and world war exaggerated the Malaya people's culture and life. Fauconnier's way of "Being in the World" means coming to grips with the unknowable and, in doing so, finding hope for fulfillment. He is unconcerned with the fact that his methods are unorthodox. The primary notion explored with existentialism is a life open to "Being in the World". The study of Rinna affirms existentialism in work *The Old Man and The Sea* written by Ernest Hemingway. In the study, the researcher focuses on the old man, Santiago.[15,16] The people who live with Santiago say that

Santiago has no strength for fishing like he did at a young age. Santiago did not care about the people and the living in his way. The researcher explores existentialism through Santiago's self-esteem. Existentialism reflects in three ways: aesthetical, ethical, and religious. The study of Rahmonkulova discusses dystopian existentialism in the novel *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding. According to this study, dystopian existentialism represents a human individual's existence in a ruined society and the necessity of his taking specific responsibilities in this society. In this study, the existentialism focused on twelve-year-old Ralph is jubilant at the thought of being marooned in a place where no grown-ups can limit his freedom. And his freedom is always, and necessarily, limited. But Ralph set an identity for his life and did not expect his improvements from other people. Jyoti Bora's article draws Soren Kierkegaard's existentialism theory in Albert Camus's *The Outsider*. The study aims to identify the attribution of existentialism in protagonist Mersault. This research analysis existentialism in social commentary on multiple social situations, including marriage, time, and society. The various stages of Mersault's life show the meaningless life. Mersault accepts life or death without looking for a more profound significance. At last, Mersault realises his value of life and considers his true life. Huang's study discusses existentialism through the novel *Fortress Besieged* written by Qian Zhongshu. [17] The protagonist, Fang Hongjian, returns from Europe after his studies. He returned from his hometown during the world war and observed the people's lifestyle. The people want to break the chain of struggle and escape. But at present, people are given crucial choices in life. Fang Hongjian breaks off his arranged engagement with Miss Zhou and marries Zhao Xinmei. [41,42] He chooses his life as he likes. Also, he withdraws his weak protest when his father threatens to cut off financial support. The study of Whipple and Tucker affirms existentialism in both film and novel. In this study, the researchers discuss existentialism from four applications. The four divisions are responsibility, freedom, existential isolation, meaninglessness, and death, which are associated with characters in the novel and film. The main character Josef from the novel *When Nietzsche Wept: A Novel of Obsession* pursues to quiet the worries of death, purposelessness, loneliness, and liberty by allowing life to "choose him." These concepts also reflect Joel's character in the movie *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. Ulfa's research is different from the above-discussed studies. Because this research affirms existentialism from the antagonist character in *How to Train Your Dragon 2* Movie. The antagonist character Drago Bludvist covered with existentialism's six characteristics, including humanity, contingency, subjectivity, conscious being in the world, faith, and anti-materialism. Drago Bludvist has different ideas for training the dragon. But the protagonist and the people oppose Drago Bludvist's views. But he has a strong belief in his thoughts, and in the end, he wins his life by living in his way. [18] From the literature review discussion, the researchers found only a few researches done with feminist existentialism. Mostly, the past studies are done with existentialism with novels and movies, but there is no research done with Namita Gokhale's texts. This encourages the current researcher to study Namita Gokhale's select texts with feministic ideas of existentialism. Mashhood Anjum et al.'s study reveals existentialist feminism in Toni Morrison's *A Sula*. This study highlights the patriarchal life of women with the ideas of existentialist feminism. The current study examines how female entities battle throughout their existence in a male-dominated culture, either following or opposing established norms and set structures to gain societal acceptability or assert their sovereign individual selves. This is also reflected in Namita Gokhale's text *Things to Leave Behind*. The protagonist Tilottama has the domination by her marriage life. She tackled everything to achieve her dream. In the same way, the domination of women reflects in the text *Priya: In Incredible Indya*. „You know, Maa, I respect you for being a very normal sort of woman,“ he said. „It's weird, but are you are extraordinary because you are so ordinary“ . Priya's son likes his mother because his mother is normal, ordinary, and soft. [19,20] This explores the mentality of men about women. The women are like by others when they are dominated people, obedient, silent, and so on. Another study conducted

existentialism theory in *Nausea* written by Jean-Paul Sartre and *The Immoralist* by Andre Gide. This study investigates the main characters Roquentin and Michel and their existence. These two characters have no motif for their life. Roquentin and Michel lead their life as their wish without giving attention to others commends. This reflects in Namita Gokhale's text *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* that emphasises the character Priya. She leads her life without following others' way. Instead, she makes her way to live her life. Yantiningsih's research focuses on the issue of existentialism in Angela Morrison's novel *Sing Me to Sleep*. This research depicts an existential predicament in which a person attempts to make her life meaningful through existential choices. It further clarifies the concept of freedom of choice, implying that what is beneficial for one person should also be good for others. Everyone's life is of options, and everyone lives differently. According to this study, individuals have the right to pick their greatest life path. [21,22] Like in Namita Gokhale's work *The Book of Shadows*, the protagonist Rachita leads her life as she likes. She decides that she needs to live a prosperous life. She had no intention of relying on anybody else after her acid assault because she realises that there was nothing in the world to believe except herself. Another study of Yusuf and Susilo's is one of the existentialist feminism. This theory is analysed with the protagonist's characteristics of the novel *Cigarette Girl*. Existentialism in feminism discusses the awareness of women about their identity to destroy the hierarchy that is harmful for woman's position. The researcher has used Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist feminism theory to analysis existentialism in feminism. [39,40] Roemaisa is the main woman character, and she lost her husband. After the loss of her husband, she started her new life, but society did not allow her to choose her life as her wish. Because there is a separate life for widowed women. But Roemaisa breaks the rules, and she becomes a strong character by women who can work, become intellectuals, and transcend its boundaries. This reflects in Namita Gokhale's selected work *Thing to Leave Behind*. In work, protagonist Rachita loses her husband, and then she is attacked by acid on her face. Both incidents ruined her life very hard. But she didn't lose her hope, and she continued to live in front of teasing society. The following study of Viny Alvian Dhani portrays the theory of existentialism in Jojo Moye's *Me Before You* (2012). This research is focused on depression, self-esteem, losing self-identity and so on. The found problems are discussed with the theory of existentialism. Will is the main character, a hard worker who chooses things as he likes. But his parents have restricted his freedom. The restriction makes him to on depression and losing self-identity [23,24]

## Results

Namita Gokhale, so taking into account the complexity of life, different histories, cultures, and different structures of values, the woman's question, despite basic solidarity, needs, to be tackled about the socio-cultural situation. Women under the patriarchal pressure and control are subjected to too much more burns and social ostracism. They are more discriminated against and are biased instead of their sex. The lives women live and struggle under the oppressive mechanism of a closed society are reflected in the writings of Namita Gokhale. We see the budding of new women in Namita Gokhale's heroines, who do not want to be rubber dolls for others to move as they will? Defying patriarchal notions that enforce women towards domesticity, they assert their individuality and hope self-reliance through education. They nurture the desire to be independent and lead lives of their own. They want to shoulder responsibilities that go beyond a husband and children. [25,26] They are not silent rebels but are bold, outspoken, determined, and action-oriented. The picture of lady is notable as a dutiful, unprotesting, agreeable, generous animal of the man centric social set up the world over. She has been socially modified to be a perfect spouse, a mother and a great homemaker with assorted jobs in the family. [37,38] The ladies have been depicted as the encapsulation of immaculateness and otherworldly force and regarded as authentic creatures from one viewpoint and on the other, saw as being

basically feeble animals continually requiring the security of man as their ruler and ace. Expanding number of ladies is turning out to substantiate themselves. The sex equity is the main apparatus to make a friendly change for people both. A large number of the Indian ladies writers center around ladies' issues; they have a ladies' point of view on the world. In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* one finds the blend of the plausible and the doubtful components. The epic depicts the ideas of the birth-cycle are portrayed through the duration of *Shakuntala*, the hero of the novel. *Shakuntala* is an incredible character and the most peculiar thing about *Shakuntala* is that it could be today. The topic of uniformity of ladies with men has been raised here. It is focused on a lady's vision of opportunity. [27,28] Things haven't changed even today. A large number of years back things were not far various as they are presently. It shows mission of a lady who needs to think about Hindu sacred writings. Every one of these ladies reflects a social universe that never again exists, that has broken down in the standard of modernization and urbanization of majority rules system, instruction and liberation. The book mirrors the most profound and most private convolutions, a culture and society in fast change through the recollected history of four ladies, every one of them uncommon for their insight and introduction to occasions. Gokhale speaks to new profound quality, as indicated by which lady isn't to be taken as an insignificant toy, an object of desire and transient delight, however man's equivalent and regarded accomplice. Her ladies characters without a doubt uncover her women's activist belief system. Namita Gokhale needs ladies to perceive themselves [29,30]

### Conclusions

Realization of this fictional nature of women's inferiority has given a ray of hope to feminists by providing a premise that what is constructed might be deconstructed and reconstructed. In this agenda feminist writers have been making substantial efforts by using the double edged power of word or literature which means portraying the prevailing images as well as subversive images. Hence, they not only make the gender difference visible but also try to place qualities traditionally associated with male in an androgynous perspective, which means blurring the gender difference to favour the cause of women. [31,32] So, by challenging and subverting gender roles and norms assigned by society and culture through their constructed images and narratives, these writers are acting as gender benders. It is in the light of above arguments that the present paper undertakes to analyse portrayal of women in Namita Gokhale's second novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (written in 1992 and first published in 1994). [33,34] The novel might be read as a gender-bender for the narrative and characters therein not only challenge and blur differences between the sexes by creating a women's world, but also call for sisterhood among women as one of the potent means to empower women. In the novel, almost all women (Ammi, Gudiya, Phoolwati and Lila) are shown face to face with some crisis, but their hostile circumstances neither crush them nor make them indulge in self-pity and despair like stereotyped images of woman. [35,36] Charting their own survival, they successfully build a realm outside the male-dominant culture. In this process, they not only destabilize various illusions and taboos surrounding women, but also emphasize the need of female bonding or what Michael Ryan calls "supporting communities or relationships that can enable either the struggle to make a post-patriarchal world or the attempt to survive within patriarchy" [44]

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