



Theme of alienation in the novels of Namita Gokhale

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Abstract

The issue of alienation in modern society and literature is a widely accepted reality. In this research paper the focus is on an individual's problems in adjusting to society and human relationships. Modern era has seen, faced, and are still suffering from the pangs which are the result of the clash between man's self-centered activities and nature's continuous effort to teach him a lesson. Modern people have made a mess of his life by running after the physical voluptuousness and thrown himself on the verge of emotional, moral, and psychological bankruptcy. Literature, being a faithful mirror of life, thoughtfully replicates this gloomy situation. The central theme of Namita Gokhale's novels is the existential dilemma of woman as an individual. An attempt has been made in this paper to talk about the emotional delineation of her female characters, expressly in relation to alienation in married life in her novels.

Keywords: alienation, loneliness, conjugal life, trauma

Introduction

The concept of alienation is a modern phenomenon and an outcome of social change. It may safely be counted as one of the gloomy aspects of human development. It reflects the emotional quotient of an individual. The availability of food, clothes and shelter are not enough for an individual's health and happiness. His mental health also needs to be taken care of. Modern people are prone to feel loneliness and alienation due to modern lifestyle. Modern people are destined to suffer the depressing impact of alienation. He is bound to suffer from confusion, disappointment, disintegration, disenchantment, and alienation. The theme of alienation is a recurring subject matter in modern novels. Namita Gokhale probes deeper into moral and spiritual crises of contemporary Indian society. Her novels express the sufferings and problems of sensitive individuals. Her novels deal with their departure from society and the concomitant restlessness and drift as well as their desperate attempts to find ways out of the intricate labyrinth of contemporary life. The theme of alienation finds ample expression in the novels of Namita Gokhale.

In *Paro: Dream of Passion* the element of alienation is witnessed in all the major characters. Her characters are swayed by their mental condition which results in discontent, departure from social life and desolation. These conditions lead the characters to their alienation.

Priya, the narrator, is a traditional girl. She is in love with her boss B.R. but he marries Paro. Though Priya gets promotion in the office, she feels restless, sleepless, and lonely as she could not marry B.R. She gets married to a Delhi-based lawyer, Suresh. She always wanted to get married but only with B.R. She is unable to suppress her passion for B.R. After sometime she goes to Bombay and meets B.R., and she again feels attracted towards B.R. and starts an extramarital affair with him. Suresh is a workaholic person and has little time for Priya. He is all the time busy in taking interest in his clients and their affairs. Priya is upset at Suresh's increasingly unconcerned attitude towards her. She is very much disenchanted and dejected. She feels

alienated in her own house. Her loneliness drives her to indulge in an illicit relationship with B.R.

The news about Priya's immoral activities reaches to her husband. After sometime she gets pregnant but unfortunately faces miscarriage. Suresh is upset about all this and as a result the distance between them increases. Her husband's knowledge of her affair with her former boss and her abortion further deepens her desolation and loneliness. These two incidents are responsible for her alienation. Here Priya laments in the following lines:

That the two factors which were chiefly responsible for night it happened. I lost my baby. Never, and never after, have I known such pain. I am referring not to the physical pain, which was negligible, but to the desolation, the sudden emptying out of reason and beauty and hope from life^[1].

The relations between Priya and Suresh slowly, became unsympathetic. Now they were two different people living under one roof. They have only their silence to share. There are leading unproductive and loveless life. Priya has no one to share her unexpressed loneliness. She expresses her predicament in the following lines:

The separate rhythms of all our lives no longer had any real meeting-ground. Suresh kept getting busier and busier. He was frequently out of town. I rarely accompanied him^[2].

Namita Gokhale wonderfully expresses the alienation felt by her characters even if they are with a lot of people. Paro marries B.R. but leaves him due to his extramarital affair. After leaving B.R. she has many affairs. But she feels lonely and secluded. Namita Gokhale has depicted the painful state of Paro with mastery. Paro is surrounded with a lot of men but deep within her heart she feels the pangs of alienation.

In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Parvati is the central character. She is an unfortunate woman whose fate brings suffering and alienation in her life. She does not receive the love of her father when she was a child. Her mother fails to understand the dreams of Parvati. As a result, she feels isolated. She narrates her alienation in the following lines:

When I was a child, I would look at other faces, at their ordinary expressions of laughter and sadness and tears and wonder at the ease with which they juggled these masks

about. All I ever felt was a constant festering sense and circumstances, and for this reason I began at a very early age to avoid people^[3].

After the death of her mother, she goes to live with her uncle Hira Nand Joshi. She starts receiving education there and there she meets her history teacher, Salman. She was fascinated by him. He seduces her and Parvati enters physical relationship with him. But after some time, Salman leaves and after his departure she feels alone.

Now she falls in love with Mukul Ninawa at first sight. But Hira Nand Joshi chooses Lalit Joshi due to caste considerations. She does not feel excited about her marriage with Lalit but knows well that she is helpless and dependent and hence feels alienated.

Her marriage does not go well as Lalit is stubborn in nature. He is a homosexual and is unable to give Parvati physical pleasure. She is tense all the time and suffers from constipation. She feels alienated in her own house. When Raju, Lalit's younger brother visits there, she indulges in illicit relation with him. Parvati does not feel guilty for this immoral act. After sometime Raju leaves and Parvati again becomes lonely.

Parvati's relation with Lalit improves a bit but he suffers from T.B. and dies after some time. The death of Lalit and Raju's wedding depresses her, and she loses her peace of mind. Her uncle Hira Nand Joshi is unable to help her. He informs Mukul about Parvati's predicament and urges him for help. But Mukul is married to Adeleine, a Burmese girl. He returns to Nainital because he has been given the responsibility of managing Wee Nooke after the demise of Masterji.

Mukul is aware that Parvati is in dire condition and has been left alone to suffer by her relatives. She and her daughter are treated as a burden. Parvati's suffering culminates and she turns insane. As a result, she is sent to a lunatic asylum. Her alienation has its effect on her mind, and she is unable to take it more. After some time, Mukul becomes tired as he is unable to help Parvati. He goes back to Hong Kong, and this seals Parvati's destiny forever. Parvati was full of vigor in her youth, but her suffering and alienation destroys all her zeal to live. She surrenders before her fate. Her insanity symbolises the worst impact of human suffering and forced alienation. She was left alone when she was badly in need of help and company.

Rachita Tiwari in *The Book of Shadows* experiences loneliness and loss of identity. She is a young lecturer in Jesus and Saint Mary College, Delhi teaching English Literature. She is engaged with the brother of her colleague who teaches Chemistry in the same college. Suddenly and unexpectedly, Anand, her fiancée, commits suicide leaving behind him a suicide-note. Anand's sister holds Rachita responsible for her brother's suicide and to take revenge on her, throws acid on her face. Rachita is severely injured. She partly recovers and soon she leaves Delhi and moves to rainhat, where a 100-year-old house of her maternal uncle has been lying vacant.

Rachita's disfigured face creates serious identity crisis for her. Acid attacks have a catastrophic effect on the physical body, but it also causes mental stress, panic, disquiet, and anxiety. It has its effect on self-esteem and creates problems in relationships. An acid attack radically changes human life. In most of the cases it is found that the survivors cannot complete their education or follow their occupation and other important activities of their lives. The acid attack has

its impact on Rachita's life also. She feels alienated from her self-confidence. Rachita finds it difficult to go back to her normal social life. She stops going to her college.

She never thought that she would have to face such a destructive consequence of her feelings. She desires to be forgiven for her guilt. Away from the society, she recollects her bygone days during moments of solitude and loneliness. She asks a question- who am I? Now the shadows are her companions. As Rachita expresses in the following lines:

Who am I? This essentially philosophical question has suddenly assumed a tangible immediacy. We define ourselves by the people that we know, by the face we see in the mirror. In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I might meet in the mirror is no longer mine^[4].

Rachita does not have the courage to face people with her disfigured face. She is afraid of facing herself in the mirror. She knows that alienation is her fate. She remembers the scene of her classroom where she was discussing alienation: 'Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar,' I said, addressing a sea of guileless faces, 'or to render the familiar unfamiliar'^[5].

Hence, Rachita has come to the quiet and peaceful surrounding of hills to cure her wounded self. She wants to hide herself. It is her self-imposed alienation. She says:

I have come to the hills to heal, to hide, to forget. To forgive, to be forgiven. My friends all resisted my decision. My sister even insisted on

accompanying me here, but I knew that I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened. The acid had worked on the bone cartilage, and the surgeon has been cautious in his restorations. I have not looked into a mirror for months now, and my face, that familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction^[6].

Alienation is what Rachita wants when she leaves Delhi. She wants to alienate herself from the catastrophe that happened to her. Therefore, her feelings and her actions are a manifestation of her alienated self. She seeks a way of escaping from reality by diverting her mind by the stories told by Lohan as well as the folk tales prevalent of the hills and the old house.

Living in alienation for a long time Rachita feels monotony and melancholy. She feels horrified and starts suffering from hallucination. Her isolated house begins to talk to her without a sound. She is sometimes busy in her soliloquies. She cannot focus on anything. She passes her time in looking at the cold and snow-covered Himalayas. Gradually she realises her inner self. Rachita has vindicated her stand to stay alone. She resolves to move ahead in the positive direction. After the death of Lohaniju, she lives alone and as a lonely person in the lonely house therefore, she must take her decision at her own.

At last, Rachita is seen to some extent in a sad mood perhaps because of the death of Lohan. She is left all alone in the house but ultimately; she keeps heart and very beautifully inscribes an optimistic and factual statement:

The world outside is full of change, and I do not know if these memories can endure. This hillside will remain, as will the snow mountains that watch over us, even if nothing else does. The garden will bloom again, the roses by the veranda, the weeds and forget-me-nots by the gravel path. I think I know that I will remain^[7].

In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, Namita Gokhale describes the agony and alienation through her female characters. After losing their fortune, Gudiya and Ammi (Grandmother) come to live in old Delhi and find shelter beneath a papal tree. The grandmother, who was earlier a prostitute, has a wonderful voice. She settles up a make-shift temple and sings bhajans there. The temple attracts a suitable number of devotees and soon the grandmother becomes very busy in managing the temple. But her being busy with the temple has its impact on the life of Gudiya. She is in a perplexed state as she has lost her mother in her tender age, and it was only Ammi to look after her. The grandmother does everything to secure Gudiya's future, but Gudiya is not happy as her caring grandmother has adopted an indifferent attitude towards her. As Gudiya describes her pain in the following words:

As for me, my grandmother's neglect hurt me deeply. I felt fundamentally betrayed and was actually jealous of those impostors, those new-found gods and goddesses, who had stolen my grandmother from me ^[8].

Gudiya feels alienated at this unfamiliar place. Without her grandmother's love and care, she feels lonely and wanders here and there. She aptly remarks:

Outside all was dark, strange and lonely. The leaves rustled in the strong February breeze, and, although the day had been warm, the evening was distinctly chilly. I had no idea where I was, but it seemed to be a government colony, the kind of middle-class area where clerks and their families lived ^[9].

She is badly in need of a company. One day she comes across Kalki, a worthless fellow. But Gudiya falls in love with him at the very first sight. She is ready to go to any extent for him. She does not listen to what Phoolwati counsels her. Kalki is not a suitable boy for Gudiya to get married, but Gudiya trusts her heart only and marries him. But her married life does not go well. Kalki's unrefined ways wipes out Gudiya's dreams and desires completely. Sometimes he comes drunk and beats Gudiya. She feels lonely even after her marriage. She marries Kalki because she felt alienated. Her marriage does not bring happiness in her life, and she feels further alienated. She is a woman with broken heart. When she realises that she cannot tolerate Kalki's behaviour anymore, she sends him to Bombay.

Namita Gokhale goes on to establish that a comprehensive and meaningful understanding among the individuals is necessary to have interpersonal relationships. When two people come together through their marriage, some problems are bound to be there. But a proper understanding of each other, a sense of wisdom and love for each other can make their marital lives successful. The theme of alienation in married life and marital disharmony gains depth and meaning in this novel.

Namita Gokhale's novels present a whole series of characters who are lonely, alienated, and anxious. They suffer from this strange disease of modern life called alienation. Alienated life is worse than death. The terrible aspect of alienated lives is that the characters do not see any remedy in near future and the present scene keeps worsening. The dynamism shown by Namita Gokhale in her exploration of her alienated characters is certainly commendable and undeniably this has established her as a distinguished writer of the contemporary era.

References

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6. *Ibid* 6-7
7. *Ibid* 232
8. Gokhale Namita *Gods. Graves & Grandmother*, New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2001, 27-28.
9. *Ibid* 113