



Eximia Journal
(ISSN 2784-0735)

Vol. 12

2023

Creating Identity in Women: A Psychoanalytic Reading of Namita Gokhale's *Paro: Dreams of Passions*

Smitha. T.G.¹, Kamlesh Dangwal²

¹Department of Basic Sciences and Humanities, Jawaharlal College of Engineering and Technology, AICTE, New Delhi, ²College of Science and Arts, Muhayil Asir, King Khalid University, Abha, Saudi Arabia

smithasunil2012@gmail.com, kamleshdangwal1@gmail.com

Abstract. This study is based on the theory of psychoanalytic reading, which discusses the identity of a woman in the social structure. Identity is created from the birth of a person and it continues throughout the life of that person. It is a psychological development of each person along with his/her growth. This creation of Identity starts from the relationship with the mother and later with other members of the family and society. The cultural setting also influences the person's identity as the other members are also influenced by society. The creation of female identity is a veritable discursive concept and acquired more importance in the field of literary criticism. Searching for the identity of the female characters of Indian women authors provide an inspiration to the women of India. However, the identity of a person is always changing or adding more to his/her character along with their growth.

Keywords. Identity, culture, psychological development, unconscious mind, feminine

'Identity' of a person is related to one's character or his/her contact with other persons in a society. It is based on one's personal temperament, hence it can be called personhood. The 'identity' is attained from birth along with psychological development. This unconscious process of the formation of identity in a person can be explained through psychoanalysis and the related area of cultural criticism. Nowadays, this veritable discursive concept has been subjected to various searching critiques and has acquired more importance in the field of literary criticism. The Psychoanalytic theory provides different types of tools to analyze behaviour, identity, and cultural individuality in the field of academic practice.

According to Margaret Mead (1901-1978), an American anthropologist, the child's behaviour in society is influenced by the mother's attitude towards the child from birth itself.

The difference between man and woman occurs from how the mother behaves to the child, in

accordance with the culture of the society. She explains the mother-child relationship and its influence on a child's individuality. She contends:

... the mother behaves as if the child were essentially similar to herself, and as if she were responding to the behaviour of the same

type as her own. Or she may treat the child as one who is different from herself, who receives while she gives, with the emphasis upon the difference between the mother's behaviour and that of the child as she cherishes and shelters and above all feeds a weak, dependent creature. (59)

Mead argues that the mother-child relationship is present in every cultural setting. A little boy infant's first identification with his mother/woman, who treat both boy and girl babies alike, is in caring and giving food (milk). Later, this relationship gradually changes and the boy child tries to deviate from his mother's identification to his father's identification. Society's taboos and demands compel him to have masculine behaviour. Therefore, according to Mead, the motherhood and feminine identity are socially constructed rather than biological. She argues:

Boys and girls alike grow up in a world that is hostile and divided against itself. Boys are taught their place in society, their kinship terms, and elaborate sets of kinship prohibitions by their mothers, and girls by their fathers. Both sexes are independent, hostile, and vigorous, and both boys and girls come out with very similar personalities. (92)

Mead's investigation through cultures reveals that in some cultures, women are handicapped by their womanly duties, and men are meant for fighting and other duties. Females are subjected to maternal vulnerability and liability at the same time men are considered as leaders of the family. The girl child leaves the mother-child relationship after her childhood, but later she again experiences it when she becomes a mother. On the other hand, the boy child leaves this relationship forever in his life. Therefore, a woman faces the double identification in her life that a man lacks. This is the difference between male and female identity in Mead's opinion.

Namita Gokhale, a postmodern woman writer, depicts her female characters who have an individuality and struggle to break the traditional chains of Indian culture. She portrays them as the replica of her own experiences, which she has suffered in her life. They are not in the subjugated condition but they are bold, fighting with the existing traditions, and capable of demolishing the stereotypes of female representations in literature. She is very much brave to create such characters in Indian situations. She has faced many rebukes and suffered many pelting stones due to her courageous nature. She depicts the psyche of the women characters; they are tougher and more daring than the male characters in her novels as they are daughters of a strong female author. They show their own identity in their fields as mothers, wives and even in acquiring their fulfillment in life.

The novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passions*, is a satire on the Mumbai and Delhi elite people, and it instigated an uproar due to its candid sexual humour. It ridicules the cult life of social elites in the cities. However, Namita claims that it is not an erotic book and has no intention to arouse passion; she shows her boldness in writing such a novel. In her opinion, writing is a form of neurosis and a process of actualizing the deepest thoughts, deepest fears, and phobias, which the writers really have not come to terms with. It has a therapeutic effect on the human mind. In this novel, Namita's identity is revealed in Priya, the narrator, who comes from a middle-class family of India. Namita is not a confessional writer; she selects the mode of diary writing in her first novel to reveal her own opinions about the sex life of social elites. Priya, the diary writer, is friend to Paro and writes about her sex life secretly along with her own inner struggle and opinion about her. Namita's real identity is reflected not in Paro, but in Priya, the bold

female writer. She writes about the sex life of her friend as a seductress in a diary to be published later.

Namita Gokhale's character, Paro, tempts the greedy menfolk in the cities; and wanders around the world of pleasure and Scotch whisky, where the urban rich enjoy their life. She represents the pleasure-seeking tendency of men and women in this novel; but, if we go deep into the psyche of this character, she has her own intentions to live like this. Melanie Klein argues that the pleasure-seeking tendency, which develops in early childhood, affects an individual's identity. (Klein 215).

Paro is shown as a rebel who revolts against the social and moral codes assigned to a woman. She denies the social codes, traditions, authority, and all those, which force a woman to become a stereotype of her own sex. The character's female identity is revealed here because it is developed from her childhood. Her tale of woes started from her school days, which she described to Priya. Her art master seduced her in the name of love at the boarding school, in her childhood; this incident changed her a lot. She had a strong hatred towards men and trapped them for her luxurious life; she confessed to Priya, her friend. Being discarded by her parents, she led an unprotected life in her childhood. This makes her such an unfeminine woman. Paro is always blamed by society since her school days, as she is against society and traditions. She is presented as an unconventional Indian bride during her marriage with B.R. A bride behaving in such a careless manner and drinking wine is no doubt against the concept of femininity in society. Her experiences in childhood influence her identity in later life. Paro who was discarded by her parents in her childhood became a victim of the lust of male.

Paro seems to have revolted against the social codes and traditions, but through this, she has been able to keep an individuality of her own. Instead of becoming repulsive, she becomes a sort of attraction for others. She comes out of the zones, which are allotted to women and succeeds in making a place for her in the male-dominated society. Paro's behaviour is contrary to the traditional image of a woman, who is forced to remain inside the house where she is expected to do nothing else other than household chores, childbearing, and child-rearing. Priya, the external voyeur, and diarist, always observes her, as she is the center of attraction. The narrator of the story, Priya, is writing about her friend, Paro, and her family. She secretly observes the life of Paro; it can also be called a voyeuristic peep into her life. Being a woman and having the youthful dreams, Priya sees herself in Paro as the author can see herself in her female protagonist.

Priya is working as B. R's secretary, the owner of the company, and she is in love with him as the other female staff in the company. In Priya's opinion, he is a "nymphomaniac" (*Paro1*) and he entertains every woman in the company. The frequent visit of Paro to B. R's room irritates Priya and other female staff in the company because Paro is stunningly beautiful and easily captivated by men. Priya belongs to a lower-middle-class family in Bombay and lives in poor conditions, however, Paro hails from a rich family. The marriage between Paro and B.R. infuriates Priya, because she marries her lover, B.R., who gave her first lessons in lovemaking experiences. Paro mocked all the women in that company by marrying B.R. Priya ruminates, "A month later, he was married to Paro. It took all of us at the office completely by surprise. I have never forgotten, nor forgiven, a hurt. This book, too, is a vindication" (3). These words of Priya unveil her hatred towards Paro, along with the author's opinion about these types of women. The identity of a person is decided by the culture of the country; and through socialization, the person acquires his maturity.

When children are socialized by their parents, they are immersed in a world with which they have nothing to compare; the family

during infancy and beyond serves not as a passive transmitter of culture but rather an active agent in screening in and screening out elements of culture. (Carter 256)

Namita Gokhale reveals the story of Paro, a ‘society lady’, as well as the condition of two prominent metro cities in India. She reveals the grim realities behind these cities and the voluptuous life of youth at the night parties in city life. Through Priya, the inner consciousness of Namita is also revealed. Here, the female author reproduces her own psyche in the female character, Priya. Even though Priya is very much worried about the marriage between B.R. and Paro, she attended the marriage party with a decorated outfit, which is not affordable to her poor condition. Her costly attire surprised her brother and mother, as they did not see her before like a rich woman. Even though Delhi and Mumbai are considered rich, poor people also live in those metro cities. Priya’s description of Paro as the bride reveals her jealousy towards her. Paro is presented as a modern bride of B.R. Priya describes:

This was not how brides behaved in my world. All the brides I had ever encountered kept their sari pallets covered, and their heads so perilously downcast as to appear anatomically endangered. But she stood proud and straight, and led the way, with B.R. and her parents trailing after her. (*Paro* 9)

Paro is a bold character that Namita Gokhale has ever created in her novels. She is not a conventional bride obeying her parents, even though; her parents are polite in their manners. Through Priya’s words, the author describes Paro like this:

She circulated through the room with an assured catlike grace. One mehndied hand carelessly held on to, horror of horrors, a glass of gin! The other was graciously bestowed on B.R., who followed in her wake, a slightly glazed look in his fine eyes. (10)

Paro’s behaviour as an unconventional bride infuriates Priya. She tries to become a friend of Paro to write about her. She wants to write her inner feelings about Paro, she tries to imitate her, and finally, Paro becomes an obsession to her. In the meantime, Priya is appointed as the private secretary to B.R. and thus she gets the opportunity to have a close relationship with his family. Priya always fantasizes about being a girl like Paro, because, she has acquired a prominent position in society, which every girl desires in her life. Paro’s way of dressing is non-traditional and society accepted it. Unlike the traditional Indian woman who is wrapped in a sari, she preferred wearing dresses like “a black sequinned off shoulder kurta, which left one shoulder completely bare, almost naked” (20).

Priya marries Suresh, a lawyer in Delhi and they settle in that metro city in a rented flat, however, Paro and B.R. lead a voluptuous life with night party meetings at hotels, which is suitable to the Bombay city life. Priya tries to imitate Paro by smoking, visiting beauty parlours, and wearing modern dresses. However, Suresh objects to her activities, because he wants to see Priya as a typical Indian woman/wife, dressed up in sarees and obedient to him. Unlike Paro, Priya is treated as an Indian wife and has the identity of an Indian woman. However, Paro represents a liberated woman who is not ready to follow the social codes and Indian culture. While writing this novel Namita Gokhale lives in the cities of Bombay and Delhi and she ridicules the hollowness of city life through this novel.

After a few years, Priya and Suresh get an opportunity to meet Paro and B.R. and they become close friends at Delhi. The experiences in the family life change both women and their

life. Priya now has become a suffering traditional Indian woman; however, Paro shows her liberated self by leaving her husband and starting a life with Bucky Bhandpur. She liberates herself from “marriage and convention”. She leaves her husband and “living in open adulterous sin” with Bucky Bhandpur (*Paro* 25). However, she is not at all ashamed of it. Priya describes Paro’s new role as a woman who has risen even above liberation or emancipation.

Women’s liberation isn’t so chic anymore, it has become a little dated, even irrelevant, like Trade-unionism to Socialism, as Lenin would say. Fashionable Women aren’t liberated anymore; it’s all morchas and placards and sweaty types shouting about dowry and bride-burning. Paro has done it all, she left a husband and a lover, and 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. (24)

Namita Gokhale expresses her own opinion about women of India through this character, coalescing with her experiences in society. Namita’s identity as a bold woman author is illustrated through the words of Priya about Paro. So it is that I am sitting here, many years later, still grappling with these visitations from the past. I am still trying to lay their ghosts, and banish their tyrannical mythologies; it is to be the therapeutic experience, an old-fashioned catharsis, an enema. I shall vomit out my malice and envy and adoration. (23). The experience as a writer of the story, which gives her a cathartic effect, is articulated through the words of Priya and she claims that this book is a “vindication” (3) of the author. Namita Gokhale’s support and encouragement for the women writing also is revealed in this novel, through Priya.

Priya, as the author of the story, presents Paro as a ‘liberated’ woman. Paro’s relationship with Bucky Bhandpur does not last for a longer period. She revolts against the norms of femininity where a woman is supposed to be chaste. Namita Gokhale presents Paro as a non-traditional woman who denies the authority of social and moral codes and finds her place in society. However, the wayward life of Paro is not a solution to her problems. She is destroyed by her own way of life in this novel. Namita reveals her hatred towards such a woman, who leads a wayward life in the metro cities in India, through this character, Paro. Namita was fed up with her experiences in the great metro cities and the hollow life of youngsters; she believed in the values of Indian culture and kept the identity of Indian women.

Suresh handles Paro’s cases including her divorce case, gradually Priya and Paro become close friends and they exchange their personal grief. Priya’s husband is more generous towards Paro, and he becomes an admirer of her beauty and ability. Priya feels no jealousy towards Paro because she now begs for the help of her husband, which makes her victorious before Paro. Priya invites Paro to their home for dinners and lunches and Paro reveals all her childhood experiences to Priya. She explains the incidents that make her a man-hater, and her efforts to dominate men by her sexuality. Her husband B.R. too cheats on her in their married life. Priya understands that Paro’s experiences at boarding school make her a seductress in the city of Bombay. Priya analyses the character of Paro like the author of her biography and enjoys the falling down of her enemy. Priya empathizes with Paro and her sufferings in life make her to write about her.

Within Western culture (and likely in other cultures as well), from early on mothers and daughters are engaged in mutual identification and a mutual reciprocal process of high and evolving levels of responsibility for one another and empathy for one another’s feelings. This relationship serves as a precursor and template for women’s evolving relationships with others while retaining the relationship with the mother and other primary attachment figures. (Shrier et al. 104). Even though Paro is a woman of loose morals, Namita presents her as a victim of a male-dominated society and portrays her war against the menfolk. Paro’s boldness is

highlighted in this novel. She never feels a sense of shame in talking about sex or the taboos of society. Through the depiction of Paro, Namita Gokhale reveals her protest against the male domination of society and their vile nature. The art teacher of Paro tells lies about Paro as a bad girl to the headmistress of the school, and later she is expelled from the school. Paro, being a school student, does not understand the fake love of men in society and is easily entrapped by them. Paro has a relationship with a young boy called Avinendra, who is the son of the industry minister. He considers Paro to be a free woman, a real individual. Paro thus succeeds to come out of the stereotypical image of women where they were believed to be biologically unfit to assume responsibility and hence needed male protection and guidance.

Namita Gokhale ridicules the Bombay social elites through the life of B.R. and Paro as they lead a lustful life by changing husband and wife within six months. Namita says they are playing “marital musical chairs” (*Paro* 32) in their life. The hollowness of relationships in city life and the immoral life of young people at the Bar hotels are depicted in this novel to reveal her condemnation. Paro is portrayed as a seductress in the novel and ends her life prematurely. Namita depicts the tragic end of her life to express her attitude towards such women. However, when this novel was published in 1984, it was considered an anti-novel because the protagonist was a seductress and her experiences were written in the language of sexuality.

Priya recorded her own love and failures along with Paro’s life. She enjoyed her free life only with her former lover, B.R., even though, she knew that he was a womanizer. B.R.’s relationships with other women infuriated Paro and she divorced him. The wayward life of menfolk in the cities is criticized by the author through this character, B.R. Priya’s love towards him was a truthful one as he was her first and last lover, even though he was not faithful to her. Priya returns to Delhi after her meeting with B.R., and Suresh is suspicious about Priya’s meeting with her ex-boss. He warns her that, “I trust you absolutely. But even then, it is not good for women from good families to be talked about” (40-41). Priya knows that Paro is very close to Suresh and he invites Paro with many other friends for a dinner party.

The dual nature of Suresh is revealed here, as he obeys the patriarchal Indian culture. Paro feels as a winner who defeats an enemy, and she becomes a symbol of a “freewoman” and “prototype of emancipation and individuality” (44). Paro declares that “‘I am myself,’ she said theatrically, ‘and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person’” (44). Only Priya reacts against her declaration, as she knows that Paro depends on her ex-husband’s property for her livelihood. The author’s contempt towards such a woman is revealed here through Priya. Paro and Priya again become enemies and they fight with each other at the party. Suresh also questions Priya and hits her for this incident, but later they resolve very quickly as in an ordinary Indian family. Namita portrays Priya as a typical Indian woman who suffers the dishonesty of her husband and sacrifices for the family. The author’s experiences in her family situations are expressed through this character. She loves her family and their culture of sacrificing many things for the family as her mother has done. The attachment to the mother teaches a woman to maintain a family and familial role. The author’s identity as a woman is revealed here in this character.

Paro attempts suicide twice, one in a fight with B.R. and another in rage with Avinendra, her young lover. This shows her immature behaviour while facing difficult situations. On the other hand, Priya is a bold woman and has the capacity to endure painful incidents in her life. Namita Gokhale has faced many hardships in her life, like her illness and the premature death of her husband, however, now she became a well-known writer and publisher in India. According to Margaret Mead, motherhood and feminine identity are

constructed both socially and culturally (92). Namita Gokhale's experiences with her family and mother enable her to acquire these great qualities which help her to be bold before the failures of life. Paro gets attracted to Shambhu Nath Misra, a well-known congress party leader, and she accompanies him to America for three months, without caring for her child and her lover Avinendra. This incident brings out many problems both in the family of Shambu Nath Misra and Paro. Avinendra takes care of her child and he is disappointed by the life with her. It becomes hot news for the newspapers and media. Priya is a silent observer of all these incidents and is surprised by her behaviour. She knows the inner mind of Paro who takes revenge on them for her childhood experience. Priya has a love-hate relationship with Paro as she does not understand her in many matters, but has an adoration towards her.

References

- [1] Carter, Michael. "Gender Socialization and Identity Theory". *Social Sciences*, Vol. 3, 2014, pp. 242-263, doi: 10.3390/socsci3020242.
- [2] Chodorow, Nancy J. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. U of California, 1999.
- [3] ---. *Feminism and Psychoanalytic Theory*. Yale U P, 1989.
- [4] Deutsch, Helene. "The Psychology of Women: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation." *Universal Library*. Grune and Stratton, Vol.1, 1944, www.archive.org/details/psychologyofwome031636mbp.
- [5] Gokhale, Namita. *Paro: Dreams of Passions*. Rupa, 1991.
- [6] Klein, Melanie. "The Psychoanalysis of Children." *Universal Library*, translated by Alix Strachey, Grove, 1960, www.archive.org/details/psychoanalysisof007950mbp.
- [7] Mead, Margaret. *Male and Female*. Perennial, 2001.
- [8] Shrier, Diane, Tompsett, Margaret. and Shrier, Lydia. "Adult Mother- Daughter Relationships: A Review of the Theoretical and Research Literature". *The Journal of the American Academy of Psychoanalysis and Dynamic Psychiatry*, Vol 32, 2004, pp.91-115, doi:10.1521/jaap.32.1.91.28332