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## The Xavier's Research Journal

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## Interconnectedness versus Fissures in a Relationship in Shivani's 'Bhairavi' and Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother'

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### Abstract

COVID-19 has brought the world closer as a family but simultaneously, one could witness the increasing incidences of domestic violence because of global lockdown and work from home. Women are always given a secondary place since time immemorial due to the patriarchal set up and that is reflected in literature too. If one reviews the literature of any age, country or culture, men were the chief characters because they were creators. As women were not allowed to get education earlier, women started fighting for their rights which resulted in their education first and expressions later on. Thus, the fiction in all languages by Indian women writers expresses their unlimited mental agonies and existential sufferings. Namita Gokhale and Shivani have dealt with marital disharmony, parental apathy, illicit affairs and child abuse in the backdrop of conflict between tradition and modernity, the tension between individualistic urges and social expectations. These aspects highlight the individual's and/or society's import in rooting out the complications of the existential struggles of females. In light of the above observations, this article tries to study interconnectedness versus fissures in relationships, as portrayed in Shivani's 'Bhairavi' and Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' from psycho-feminist point of view

**Keywords:** Dependence, identity, oppression, prejudices, self

### Introduction:

Shivani's 'Bhairavi' is story of three generations of female characters - Chandan, Rajrajeshwari and her mother and is set in India, with the background being life in Kumauon and Delhi i.e., Northern India. The protagonist of the novel, Chandan jumps out of a train when she is travelling with her husband Vikram from Delhi to Calcutta because she is physically violated (gang raped) by four army officers, who are actually considered the protectors of the motherland. She is ultimately saved by an aghori tantric (necromancer). She spends one year in his ashram. But she soon realizes that her guru, although physically chaste is psychologically corrupt, polluted and unable to get rid of biological (carnal) desires despite meditation and yoga. She runs away and meets

one of her acquaintances Gurubahan Vishnupriya but is denied shelter in her ashram as Chandan is very beautiful. She reaches her matrimonial home. By chance, she meets her husband Vikram and gets to know from the conversation between him and his mother about his remarriage. She hides herself and returns from there and thinks - where do I go?

Similarly, Namita Gokhale's novel 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' (1994) is a story of three generations of female characters - Gudiya, her mother and her grandmother Ammi besides Phoolwati. It is also located in India. The story revolves around Uttar Pradesh and the street life in Delhi. Her grandmother and mother used to be prostitutes. Gudiya feels lonely when she is deserted by her mother who elopes with a musician



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beggar. Ammi's brother commits suicide and she starts losing her fortune as a kothewali. Her Ammi, after arriving in Delhi, at once changes her religion and becomes a Hindu spiritual leader for earning her livelihood. After her grandmother's death, Gudiya is taken care of by her grandmother's companions in the temple. She starts having relations with a bandwallah Kalki and becomes pregnant before marriage. Kalki, on being pressurized by Phoolwati and Sundar, marries her but behaves violently after marriage. Gudiya sends him to Bombay for a good career in films, but he doesn't return at all. She gives birth to a girl child when she starts living with Phoolwati, who expresses that Gudiya is better off without him. Initially, she misses Kalki physically. Gudiya suffers from alienation and depression and understands that the existential trauma of the world is not going to end at all.

#### **Aims and Objectives:**

1. To reason out the role of social, cultural, religious, political and psychological factors in creating a patriarchal society and fissures in relationships.
2. To understand the woman's struggle for her rights, empowerment and entrepreneurship and for being connected to the self and society.

#### **Literature Review:**

'Women Relationships and Rebellion: A Study of Namita Gokhale's Fiction' (2013) by Ghanshyam and Mukta indicates that novels of Namita Gokhale reveal her keen concern for the welfare of women. Her women protagonists grapple with meaninglessness and loss of identity due to lack of interconnectedness in interpersonal relations including 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother'. 'The Elements of Feminism in the Novels of Namita Gokhale' (2014) by Agnihotri, Saini and Vora is a study of novels of Namita Gokhale where the theme of women's quest for self and identity has

been underlined owing to fissures in relationships due to patriarchal society as reflected in 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' too.

'Shivani Ke Upanyason Mein Naari Vimarsh' by Krishna Joon (2011) has depicted both diversity of women and diversity within women in the backdrop of socio-cultural factors. It deals with a variety of problems faced by women at various levels caused by loss of connectedness and strained human relations as portrayed in 'Bhairavi' also.

#### **Methodology:**

I will apply the descriptive analysis approach, psycho-feminist, reader response and comparative theories to comment on and explicate Shivani's 'Bhairavi' and Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother'.

#### **Discussion and Analysis:**

Unhealthy marital and mother-daughter relations are points of commonality and parallelism in the two novels which shows that at times, not only men but also women play a vital role in their own subordination up to some extent.

In 'Bhairavi', Chandan's mother Rajrajeshwari suffers in her marriage as it was a mismatch. Her husband is a fifty year old widower while she is quite young. The reason for her mismatch was Rajeshwari's love for Kundan and their attempt to run away from their homes. She accepts the marriage as a repentance for her act while her husband always doubts her chastity and insults her by asking if Chandan is his daughter, although Rajeshwari is always imprisoned in a room before he goes out. Thus, Rajeshwari has also been physically violated in her marriage because the marriage here was not a union of two souls as it was devoid of mutual trust and love. Rajrajeshwari – Chandan, Rajrajeshwari's mother – Rajrajeshwari, Mayadi – Charan in 'Bhairavi' are

explicitly expressive of it, whether daughters are married or unmarried. Besides, the mother also thinks that marriage provides security. Although she herself suffers in her marriage, she always expects something better for her daughter. In 'Bhairavi', Shivani has nowhere shown a successful love marriage. In the case of Rajrajeshwari, her father runs after his daughter and her lover Kundan and the marriage does not materialize. In the case of Chandan, Vikram loves Chandan but she is very childlike. Although the marriage materializes, the unexpected turn of event in Chandan's life leads to their separation. In case of Mayadi and the aghori Gosai (Swami), although they love each other even in the guise of meditation, as soon as Chandan reaches the ashram, Swami's mind changes and later on Mayadi is bitten by a snake reared by Swami within one year of Chandan's stay and she dies. Only Chandan's friend (ashram sakhi) Charan's love marriage with Gopal, the chandal is materialized in the course of the novel 'Bhairavi' by Shivani. Vikram's second marriage with Sonia is not a love marriage as initially, only Sonia loves Vikram and Vikram doesn't love Sonia. Secondly, it takes place as a compromise because Chandan jumps off the train after her physical violation.

In 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' also, Gudiya's mother's marital relation is not successful as she is deserted by the man from whom she conceived and gave birth to Gudiya. Later, she elopes with a harmonium player who proposes marriage to her as they are both afraid of Ammi. The musician beggar also betrays her as he runs away with her luggage, money and jewellery from the railway station. She waits for him for two days in the Ladies' Waiting Room but he doesn't return so she goes back to her mother's place. Later, they meet an old beggar Riyasuddin Rizvi at the Jhansi railway station and the grandmother befriends him and he advises them to come to Delhi for a good future. Gudiya's mother runs away with the beggar

and Gudiya and her grandmother are left to fend for themselves. Gudiya's mother's absence causes a void in her life. She craves for her mother's love. After Ammi becomes priest in the temple, she doesn't spend much quality time with Gudiya so she goes astray. Gudiya, though she takes permission from her Ammi to go on an educational tour to Shimla, Pundit Kailash Shastri stops her from going as it was Amavasya that day. Gudiya has no healthy childhood as she is deprived of parental proximity. Kalki is a drunkard and gambler. Gudiya starts adjusting to the negligent behavior of Kalki and not only her infatuation for him subsides but her natural resilience also disappeared altogether. Gudiya sells her jewellery for Kalki's good career but he doesn't reciprocate at all. Resultantly, with the passage of time, she accepts the change "with resignation, and even a degree of relief." (Gokhale 2001, 223) Thus, in Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother', Gudiya's mother and Gudiya do not experience successful (love) marriages.

Although in the case of Rajeshwari and Chandan, and in the case of Gudiya too, nowhere have Shivani and Namita Gokhale used the words 'rape' or balatkar explicitly in the novels, it is very clear from the context and usage of words like repentance and stigma. Ammi leaves her own religion behind for her survival. "Her throwing off her burkha is symbolic of her leaving behind her caste, custom and tradition". (Ghanshyam 2013, 88) She becomes a priest of a Hindu temple built by her on an illegal encroachment. She also knows how to protect their self-respect and her money from a goonda pahalwan like Sunder who demands hafta "ten rupees a week" or Gudiya or her Grandmother would have to beg. She answers sweetly, "Arre Rama, Rama, Rama, . . . Seize our money, Phalwanji, 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 2001, 12). She has a melodious voice so she attracts a large crowd during satsang and bhajan- kirtan. That Ammi is not an orthodox and religious fanatic is evident from her statements when she compares religion to fashion. She also defends Gudiya by saying that the shastras allow to the child many follies that are forbidden to grown-ups when Gudiya waters Tulsi plant on a Sunday and is slapped by Lila. But the same Ammi treats Gudiya badly when she starts menstruating. She says, "This girl is good for nothing but trouble from now" (Gokhale 2001, 54). Not only this, Phoolwati too instructs her, "And don't forget, you are not to step into the temple compound ... You are impure for a few days and we can't offend the gods". (Gokhale 2001, 55) Gudiya was utterly confused and couldn't understand these restrictions and reactions. Ammi gets her admitted to a school but finds it difficult to bring up Gudiya and suggests that she "become a good cook and marry a respectable man". (Gokhale 2001, 15) She is disliked by her grandmother when she reaches adolescence. All this affects her psyche.

Simone De Beauvoir in her book 'The Second Sex' criticizes Bossuet's words, "Humanity is male, and the man defines woman, not in herself, but in relation to himself: She is not considered an autonomous being" (Iyengar 2019, 102). Clearly Bossuet's belief has been questioned in 'Bhairavi' and 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' due to a reversal of roles – "Pundit (Kailash) Shastry is recognized because of Ammi, not because of himself" (Iyengar 2019, 102). The Shambhu-Phoolwati relationship confirms the reversal of the patriarchal norm of wife beating as she kicks her husband when he gets drunk. Shambhu's murder doesn't evoke traditional wailing from Phoolwati, who is aware of his rakish character. She rather rejoices at his murder and wishes to reward the murderer. After the death of her husband, she handles his old business outside the temple and

expands it single-handedly, thereby raising her earnings. Later, she marries Sunder palhalwan on her conditions when he proposes to her but remains faithful to Gudiya throughout like a mother.

"Camaraderie and community life, based on religion, faith and manipulation are the key for the survival . . . The women characters establish their position in society through female solidarity, as Michael Ryan in his book 'Literary Theory: Practical Introduction' says, "Supporting communities or relationships that can enable either the struggle to make a post-patriarchal world or the attempt to survive within patriarchy". (Iyengar 2019, 99) is also evident in the two novels from the psyche of Rajeshwari, Chandan, Mayadi, Charan in 'Bhairavi' and Ammi, Gudiya, Phoolwati and Lila in 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother'.

Shivani's 'Bhairavi' and Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' are thus women centric novels where women have defied the stereotypes and prejudices prevalent in society to take centre stage. It is about the women from different age groups and different sections of society, be it Rajrajeshwari, Chandan, Mayadi, Charan in 'Bhairavi' or Ammi and her granddaughter Gudiya, Phoolwati and Lila in 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' who struggle till the end to survive in society. They earn their bread self-dependently. The two novelists have succeeded in projecting women as human beings with the same flesh, blood and bones, whose desires, likes and dislikes matter as much as those of their male counterparts and the extent to which the women characters are successful in ordering their lives without male support. Their explicit message is if a woman desires, she can put an end to victimization and oppression. She need not follow the dictates of her ancestors, subjugating herself to her lord and master. Her identity and her 'self' can be kept intact.

Both 'Bhairavi' and 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' refer to the theme of female liberation in the wider context of what liberation might mean for India itself. The novels are dominated by women characters who evolved as the 'New Women' giving secondary status to men. The two novelists are concerned with the theme of crossing cultural frontiers.

Shivani and Namita Gokhale depict both victimization as well as resilience of their women characters. They portray such women who celebrate their sexuality frankly and authoritatively discover the pleasure and beauty of the female body. Chandan and Gudiya are archetypes of female vitality.

Shivani and Gokhale strongly advocate that women have certain hidden potential within themselves. They explore the submissive condition of women in their novels and prove that the problems of women in the patriarchal world cannot be solved without the strength, dignity and determination of women.

In both the novels, the common thread is that no marital relation is perfect, whether a woman is educated or uneducated, career oriented or not, conventional or unconventional, submissive or rebellious because of the patriarchal structure of our society – male mentality, its rigidity and his reproaching the woman, his counterpart, never allowing her the equal space. In 'Bhairavi', Chandan recollects how her mother, maternal grandmother, Mayadi, Charan, her friend in the Ashram, have to submit themselves at various stages of life and so does Gudiya about her own mother, Phoolwati and Lila in 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother'.

Shivani's female characters are rebellious too at times and it has been shown explicitly, for example, Rajrajeshwari's intimate friend Chandrika Visht wears western outfits and even drinks and smokes in front of her friend. Vikram's

mother Rukmini and her sister -in-law (bhabhi) Sunita enjoy a western lifestyle and are in favour of convent education. Similarly, in 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother', it is Roxanne Lamba who runs the missionary school St. Jude's Academy to which Gudiya is admitted at the age of eleven in second grade. Gudiya hates her name as it denotes a doll and wants to change it. She names herself Pooja Abhimanyu Singh to create her own identity but it also proves useless as she is betrayed by Kalki.

Shivani and Namita Gokhale have shown striking similarity in their style and usage of language to an extent. Both of them have made use of poetry as well as poetic prose, have referred to myths and especially women's image as Shakti in Indian society. Shivani has made use of Sanskrit, Bangala and English languages while Gokhale has retained words from Hindi and Sanskrit as per the requirements.

Shivani talks about the lives of ascetics – sadhus and sanyasinis, so she uses Sanskrit and sanskritised Hindi - Mrigadhish charmambar munda mal, the local language of hilly area of Kumauon is used to create realistic surroundings - Jaay paduun pi ke ank/ chahe kalank lage ri! and to describe the culture of that particular region. Shivani has made use of English words and poetry too. She has used English language especially to show the impact of Western culture on the upper strata of society and especially where the Guru (Swaminathan) asks Bhairavi (Chandan) to translate from English into Hindi some books and she tells the English and its Hindi translation to Mayadi, e.g., I am the lord of all my senses.

Namita Gokhale depicts the lives of Muslim prostitutes, Hindu woman priests, astrologers, tea seller-men and women, labourers at construction sites, lepers, beggars, musicians, teachers as well as blind belief in religion and the commercialization of religion. She too has used Hindi, Sanskrit and sanskritized Hindi, for



example, That buddhi or Ekdanti, jungli, Jungle mein Mangal, Kalyug, Jai ho! etc. Shivani's 'Bhairavi' and Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' highlight the normlessness which means the tragic consequences of disharmony and chaos in individual minds. Amid the magic of adventurous exploits, heroic deeds and romance, there is a feeling of estrangement and remorse, of separation and want. It also hints at social isolation which investigates the unfortunate feeling of alienation and a quest for self, constantly fed on the social distinctions, the wide gap between the 'haves' and 'have-nots' on the contempt and disgust. And thirdly, estrangement shows the ill effects of class-consciousness and social prejudices prevailing in society.

Shivani's female characters appear to be submissive while Gokhale's female characters are rebellious. Rajrajeshwari, Chandan, Mayadi and Charan follow the social standards while Ammi, Gudiya, Phoolwati and Lila all oppose society as an authority and ignore their mother's womanly/feminine advice. Both the novels end with questions of fissures in relationships.

Shivani's 'Bhairavi' like this – "Theek vaise hi, anajan bheed bhare chourahe par khadi vah mukt bandini bhi yahi soch rahi thi – vah kahaan jaaye! Kahaan? Shivani 1969 , 163) (Like that only, she, a free prisoner also, standing at an unknown crowded junction was thinking this – where should she go! Where?) (translation mine) and Namita Gokhale's 'Gods, Graves and Grandmother' like this - "I often dream about my mother, but she is elusive even there. Grandmother is dead. Roxanne is dead. Sunder is dead. Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight". (Gokhale 2001, 240)

Both the writers want to say that life is a series of endless questions where struggle and adjustment appear to be the answers to those questions. The main problem in life is existential trauma, still one

needs to overcome it despite gender differences. As literature mirrors society, the marginalization of women is prevalent not only in familial and societal relations, but also in the literary field. So, men were writing, reading and enjoying the portrayal of women from their point of view. Actually, women were not shown as 'women were'. The chief characters were also the men. Thus, women were excluded from literary history, textually abused and harassed by the male writers due to a patriarchal mindset. This is evident if the literature of any age, country or culture before feminism emerged is reviewed. Shivani and Gokhale have given the solution for the existential problems of Chandan and Gudiya through separation. While Shivani has told readers indirectly that Chandan remains 'Bhairavi' throughout her life as she cannot return to her matrimonial home, Gudiya starts living with Phoolwati permanently. Whether it is East or West, North or South, nothing has changed in terms of the mindset even if men are literate, illiterate, educated or religious/spiritual leaders; for them, a woman is still a commodity, not a human being. So they treat women not as their counterpart but as their subordinate. Women also contribute to their subordination and marginalization as they don't oppose it, but rather they accept it passively and therefore, at the end of the day face the question most of the time – where do they belong to?

#### Conclusion:

Shivani and Namita Gokhale, undoubtedly are gynocritical writers and they uncover the female psyche. They underline that woman the fact that women are making a place for herself through self-help. Resultantly, social transition is taking place but the right psycho-social approach is needed to eliminate the hypocrisy of gender and to create a healthy society for women. As man needs a woman for emotional support, be it mother, sister, wife, daughter or girlfriend, so does man also need to support women emotionally without



blackmailing them for being interconnected and to avoid fissures in relationship .

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