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Gender, Social Boundaries and Constructed Bodies in Namita Gokhale's The Blind Matriarch, Paro: Dreams of Passion, and Priya: In Incredible Indyaa

Deeksha Sharma[1], Dr Keshav Nath[2*]

[1]Research Scholar, Department of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, Manipal University Jaipur, India. Email ID: Deeksha.221151008@muj.manipal.edu ORCID ID: 0000-0003-0056-1441
[2*]Associate Professor, Department of Liberal Arts & Social Sciences, University: Manipal University Jaipur, India. Email ID: Keshav.nath@jaipur.manipal.edu ORCID ID: Keshav Nath (0000-0002-6337-6801) – ORCID, Google Scholar Profile Link: keshav nath - Google Scholar
Current Profile position: Associate Professor

Abstract
The research paper presents female corporeality as a crucial platform of social surveillance, cultural representation, feminine strength and subjective resistance in contemporary Indian literature. Three selected novels of Namita Gokhale *The Blind Matriarch* (2021), *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), and *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa* (2013) offers various representation of Indian women whose individualities are structured by patriarchal expectancies, family structures, class, ageing, and varying cultural landscapes of India. The article investigates the structure and image of female bodies in these selected texts, concentrating on the kinship between corporeal embodiment and social identity. The article contends that the corporeality in Gokhale's fiction is not only a biological entity but also a communal made space through which power, exposure, passion, and resistance are negotiated. Ageing and visually impaired corporeality of Matangi Ma reflects the concerns between household dependence and traditional authority. Paro's sexualized corporeality uncovers the paradox of women independence and patriarchal objectification, whereas Priya's sophisticated identity uncovers the competing demands of culture and traditional womanhood. The article adopts qualitative and interpretive approach to investigate the corporeal experiences of protagonists via using feminist literary criticism and the notion of socially constructed corporeality. The analysis establishes that Gokhale interrogates prevailing gender boundaries while recognizing the determined influence of social and cultural expectancies. The research contributes to feminist literary conversations by illustrating how body of a female becomes a platform of both oppression and instrument in varied stages of Indian social transformation.
Keywords: Corporeality, Patriarchy, Feminism, Gender Boundaries, Constructed Bodies

1. Introduction

The human corporeality engages in a foremost place in the construction of subjectivity and social kinship of an individual. Being biological in the physical presence, corporeality holds meanings, which are often judged via cultural values, gender expectancies, social groups and contemporary experiences. According to Pilcher and Whelehan (2004), "the concept of 'the body' now operates to identify the realm of people's bodies as an appropriate topic for philosophy, the humanities and the social sciences" (p.6). Bodies of women are considered week for regulation in Indian patriarchal society because of appearance, sexuality, roles as well as responsibilities. These factors are often demonstrated through settled gender norms. Thus, female corporeality becomes a platform where social authority is applied and challenged.

Feminist literary criticism questions the belief that identity of a woman is naturally considered through their corporeality. Instead, it explores how social establishments and cultural converses generate specific significances of femininity. Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) identify the body as an important concern within feminism and gender studies, particularly in discussions of the control of women's bodies as a means of subordination. This perspective provides a useful foundation for understanding literary representations in which female characters negotiate their physical existence alongside the expectations imposed upon them.

Namita Gokhale is one of the most influential writer. "She has brilliantly portrayed the impulses, dreams, and wants of Indian women through her writing" (Nithya & Sivakumar, 2021, p.1985). The selected novels of Namita Gokhale give substantial opportunities to examine questions. Her depictions of women examine the kinship between family, sexuality, identity, social mobility, and changing cultural values. As Goyal (2018) observes, Gokhale's writing presents the lives and relationships of her protagonists through distinctive narrative details. Similarly, researchers associate her fiction with emerging urban society, contemporary relationships, and the image of the new woman. Female protagonists in the selected texts of Gokhale are neither fully in control of

tradition nor entirely independent from it. Their undergoes disclose the paradoxes inherent in the transforming location of women in Indian society.

This particular article investigates three novels: The Blind Matriarch (2021), Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984), and Priya: In Incredible Indyaa (2013). All three novels present three different narrative settings and characterization. The narratives examine the association between female corporeality and social expectancies. Character of Matangi Ma characterizes aged and disabled corporeality, family dominion and the varying situation of traditional womanhood (2021). Paro incorporates sexual desire and the quest for personal independence while encountering objectification and social judgement (1984). Priya is portrayed as a contemporary woman, who settles on her cosmopolitan purposes, cultural bequest and the stresses of modern community (2013).

The foremost debate of this article is that Gokhale picturizes the female corporeality as a socially constructed and frequently negotiated space. Corporeal identity surfaces through kinship between subjective desire and external expectancies. It includes class, gender, family, modernity, age and sexuality. The article also debates that Gokhale's critique of patriarchal frameworks does not always offer independence as full or understandable, instead, protagonists in her novel shows how agency evolves within social boundaries that stay in power even when questioned.

The research revolves around three questions: How are female bodies constructed through social and cultural expectations in the selected novels of Gokhale? How do gender, class, sexuality, ageing, and modernity influence the protagonists' identities in the selected texts? To what extent do the protagonists in the novels challenge or reproduce the boundaries imposed upon them?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Feminist perspectives on the body

The corporeality has been a crucial area within feminist concept. It combines corporeal experiences with interrogation of identity, authority, sexuality, and social regulation. Feminist criticism examines how notions about femininity are prompted through cultural customs rather than just considered by biological variations. The corporeality consequently becomes a platform through which social sequences are preserved and individualisms are negotiated.

Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) maximize the significance of corporeal regulation in feminist and gender studies. Their conversation provides a conceptual foundation for inspecting how expectancies regarding age, beauty, sexuality, and domesticity effect the experiences of a woman. In literary texts, these expectations become visible through characters. Protagonists in Gokhale's novels, experience their corporeality through their individual desires and recollections as well as via perceptions of others. Their corporeal existence cannot be parted from the cultural intents linked with it. The corporeality therefore act concurrently as a material presence, a communal identity, and a platform of conflict.

2.2 Critical responses to Namita Gokhale's women

According to existing critical studies, Gokhale's fiction combines experiences of women, varying identities, and objection to prevailing social expectancies as an important feature. Nautiyal and Kumar (2017) observe that many of her female characters conflict with conventionality and male-centred standards. Tiwari (2022) similarly emphasizes Gokhale's representation of women who seek freedom from restrictive conventions.

According to Khare and Pandey (2019), with the main theme of feminism, it also gives sub-themes of urban society, emerging image of new woman and also contemporary kinships. Bhagdikar (2008) mention the eminence of women who develop on the far side of traditional expectancies. These viewpoints are pertinent to the present research because they validate a critical context for investigating women's varying individualities in context to the corporeality.

Other arguments stress the distinction of individual protagonists. Shaw (2022), for example, interprets Paro as a modern woman with an independent ideology. Goyal (2018) discusses the social positioning of women in Gokhale's fiction, while Gupta (2008) highlights the representation of women's freedom and independence. Comparable variations provide a foundation for investigating how sexual autonomy and social visibility can produce chances for resistance without necessarily withdrawing patriarchal constraints.

2.3 Matangi Ma, Paro, and Priya in critical perspective

Matangi Ma's physical blindness and ageing provides platform for investigating the relationship between corporeal weakness and social power in Gokhale's text The Blind Matriarch. The novel has potential to question archaic patriarchal understandings of family. Specifically, Matangi Ma's role is crucial because her body can be imagined through visible unfavourable situations inculcating dependency and authority. It also includes bodily limitations and accelerated experiences related to marginalization and influence related to it.

Paro's sexuality in the novel, Paro: Dreams of

Passion, is focal point of debate. Padmanabhan (2002) characterizes the novel as more subversive and complex than some critical assessments have acknowledged. This analysis assists an explanation of the paradoxes between Paro's sexual agency and the objectifying stances through which society illustrates her corporeality. Paro's character can be studied through the lens of Tradition versus modernity and social context (Gobi & Suganthi, 2024).

The novel Priya: In Incredible Indyaa prolongs the conversation towards sophisticated identity and contemporary Indian community. Goyal (2018) discuss aspects of the novel's social world and Priya's changing circumstances. More recent discussions cited in the supplied material associate the novel with the complex roles of Indian women and the tension between modernity and tradition (D & Suganthi, 2025).

Though these debates extends useful viewpoints on representation of women in the novels of Gokhale, but comprehensive and comparative investigation of corporeal construction of all the protagonists lacks exploration. Therefore, the article targets to bridge a gap by putting together the factors of ageing and disability through the lens of feminism. It also explores body of a female, which is platform of social regulation and objection at the same time in various arenas of Indian feminity.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology based on feminist literary analysis. Its primary sources are Namita Gokhale's The Blind Matriarch (2021), Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984), and Priya: In Incredible Indyaa (2013). The purpose of this research is to comparatively analyze the three novels to find patterns concerning female bodies and how social forces help shape female identities.

The theoretical framework makes use of feminist literary criticism and the theory of socially constructed body. Feminist literary criticism is useful when studying the issue of patriarchy, gender roles, body autonomy, and female resistance to stereotypes. Theory of socially constructed body serves to explain the functioning of the body as a social construct.

The analysis of the two novels is based on five criteria: gender and sexuality; aging and disability; family and cultural authority; class and social mobility; modernity and globalization. These dimensions arise from the discussion and constitute the basis for comparing two protagonists without equating their experiences.

The methodology includes close reading and thematic comparison. On the first stage, the two protagonists are analyzed separately according to their bodily experience and their social surroundings. Secondly, their identities are examined. Finally, the novels are compared to reveal the similarities and differences in terms of presentation of agency, oppression, and transformation.

4. Results

4.1 Matangi Ma: Ageing, disability, and embodied authority

Pilcher and Whelehan (2004) mentioned that "Feminist writers and activists, even those who were in existence long before the term feminism came into popular usage, shared the will to imagine a world where women were able to realise their potential as individuals" (p.48). Matangi Ma is one of them. The Blind Matriarch illustrates the dualism between the vulnerability of the body and the power of the personality such as Matangi Ma, whose physical condition influences not only the way she perceives the world around but also the way other members of her family understand her position. The limitations of her body do not deprive her of her position of authority in the family since the individual identity of the character is constructed using her history, experience, relationships with family members, and her role of the family leader who is acknowledged and respected by her family. Bhuvaneshwari and Densingh (2021) mentioned that Matangi Ma was not able to see, but "her act of feeling everything around her through the other senses and thought process is crucial in the text for such abilities mark the extremely high respect the family members possess for her" (p. 2221)

Another important point about interpretation is the difference between the physical blindness and the metaphorical blindness. The impaired vision of Matangi Ma could be contrasted to the disinterest and incapacity of other family members to mention her needs, experiences, and influence that she has. This means that dichotomy between the real physical limitations and imaginary ones embedded in social constructions is under scrutiny.

Ageing becomes another factor of complicating her situation. Some older women may be respected due to their experiences, however, they are still considered socially dependent people without any authority.

The role of family system is crucial for the development of those meanings. Although Matangi Ma has real authority through the family, it restricts her as well. The contradiction proves that even if one has authority in the patriarchal family, it does not mean that he or she has full independence. A woman may be at the heart of the family symbolically, but her needs and preferences

might depend on the choice of other people.

Matangi Ma challenges the belief that physical weakness hints at social unimportance. Besides, she reveals the limitations of family power, which does not acknowledge the agency of aging women.

4.2 Paro: Sexualization, desire, and patriarchal regulation

In the film "Paro: Dreams of Passion," the femininity of the character is directly linked to aspects of sensuality, such as sexual desires and notions of being in the public eye, as well as the social judgments associated with having desires. Paro's female identity implies a desire for independence, as the main female character of the film refuses to conform entirely to the requirements of the society around her, which makes her sexuality diverge from common notions of femininity, modesty, and social status.

Nevertheless, being visible does not lead to accepting such freedom. This is due to the fact that social perceptions of Paro's identity depend on judgments made by others. Rather than being independent, Paro's sexuality is subjected to the influence of men and the society of the time. Therefore, in spite of her intentions to cope with the complexity of her situation, Paro's emerging identity is not fully controlled by her understanding of sexuality.

Class has another effect on this social structure. Paro's forays into the upper-class settings bring about the complexity of the relationship between sexual liberation and social advancement. Being in the privileged spaces does not automatically lead to the removal of the gender inequality. On the contrary, social mobility can come with the same perception of people's looks and attractiveness.

Consequently, Paro's resistance is essential but half-hearted. By making choices, she is able to push the limits of the norms, yet the implications of the decisions show that patriarchy is still strong in the society.

4.3 Priya: Cosmopolitan identity and the modern female body

The changing social and cultural realities of India influence how the female body in the novel Priya: In Incredible Indyaa is understood. Priya's experience depicts the tension between traditional beliefs regarding gender roles and modern cosmopolitan aspirations. This modern identity is formed in a societal environment which has been shaped by economic changes and the notion of consumerism, public visibility, and changing attitudes towards women's independence.

Priya's body is not shown as a stable notion. Rather, her identity is created through a series of tensions between personal ambitions and cultural traditions she inherited. She wants to engage in contemporary life while at the same time coping with family responsibilities and expectations.

The role of modernity in relation to the body is crucial at this point. Consumerism and global standards of beauty open new avenues for women's visibility and self-expression, but at the same time create additional standards of beauty and social prestige.

Priya's situation exemplifies the ambivalence of contemporary empowerment. Enhanced social mobility increases the opportunities of women, but does not eliminate the constraints of gender stereotypes. A woman in today's world is expected to be ambitious and independent but is also required to fulfill traditional family obligations.

Priya's identity is therefore a process of negotiation instead of a simple change from tradition to modernity. Her experience illustrates how globalization and developments in social circumstances change the concept of femininity while continuing to preserve the patriarchal context.

4.4 Comparative findings

By comparing the three novels, the important conclusion is that the concept of embodiment is illustrated in different ways by Gokhale. The embodiment of Matangi Ma is determined by characteristics such as aging, disability, memory, and power of family. Paro's embodiment is determined by sexuality and attempts to resist traditional morals. In addition, Priya's embodiment shows what identity is associated with cosmopolitanism and consumerism.

All three protagonists illustrate that their bodies are formed under the influence of personal experience and social forces. The bodies of characters are more than physical entities, since they carry meanings of gender, respectability, power, and belonging.

Additionally, the novels show different variations of agency. Matangi Ma's agency is demonstrated through her authority and experience, while Paro resists sexual and social restrictions. Furthermore, Priya's agency is represented through the process of balancing between modern challenges and traditions.

One of the main findings is that the representation of women in Gokhale's novels disproves the idea that there can be one female experience. Different aspects such as age, disability, etc., contribute to the embodiment of characters. However, patriarchy still works as a factor influencing the possibilities and identity of characters.

5. Discussion

The results reveal that the idea of the constructed feminine physicality offers the opportunity to explore the connection between personal identity and social power in Gokhale's works. The narrative

of the main characters illustrates that the body acquires significance in particular cultural and social contexts. The bodily features assume social value due to their interpretation through the notions of femininity, age, sexuality, family obligations, and social status.

Matangi Ma complicates the body discussion by expanding the implications beyond sexuality and appearance. Her old age and blindness highlight the role of age and disability in gaining social recognition. Being a matriarch reinforces the ambiguity of connections between physical ability and power.

Matangi Ma's life displays a lot of other factors as well. Women's issues cannot be considered individually from other ones such as the question of age or other disabilities. Therefore, her sufferings cannot be explained only in the light of her being female, just as it is impossible to understand her success only in terms of her belonging to a certain family.

The question of sexuality comes into the focus in the reflections of Paro. Her character makes it clear that women cannot be expected to be modest and obedient. At the same time, her activeness leads to the situation when the distinction between the expression of sexuality and the acceptance of society is hard to notice.

Paro's experience shows that resistance may be welcomed, permitted or prohibited by the system it works against. A woman can exercise her right to select a sexual partner but still remain bound by the gaze of society which sees her through her beauty and sexuality. The notion of liberation, therefore, coexists with apprehension. The importance of the novel lies in the fact that it presents the liberation of women in a way that emphasizes the contradictions between liberation and independence. Therefore Paro's character "is considered as a character caught up in the dilemma between her ambitions to cross the rules of patriarchy and to fulfil the dreams of her passions" (Zagade, 2021, p.272).

Priya's experiences reveal another conflict. Modernity and globalization open up more opportunities for women but may also impose new forms of femininity on women. A modern woman is expected to remain visible, successful, flexible, and independent, while being considerate about family obligations. This mixture creates a new kind of empowerment in which traditional responsibilities go together with modern ambitions.

In this way, Priya's experience challenges the idea that social mobility always leads to control. Experience, economic activity and presence matter, but women can still be held to gendered expectations. Her character shows that there is a need to separate the appearance of empowerment from the structural conditions granting true independence.

Seen together, these three novels provide a cohesive account of the female body across different social positions. Matangi Ma shows the gravity of the older body situated within the family, Paro illustrates the sexualized body under patriarchal control and Priya tells the story of the body caught between modernity and consumerism. Gokhale's approach to designed bodies is not purely oppositional. The main characters in her novels rebel against existing boundaries yet remain tied to cultural systems of identity. This inconsistency is crucial since it keeps the narrative of the novels away from being interpreted as a straightforward story about liberation or oppression. Instead, the characters in the novels deal with power through the action that can be empowering in one situation and limiting in another one.

This research also points out the importance of linking feminist literary analysis to an intersectional approach. Such a method allows scholars to see how gender interacts with class, age, disability, sexuality, and change. In addition, it shows the limits of treating the body of a woman as a universal phenomenon.

6. Conclusion

The paper analyzed the portrayal of women's bodies in the novels The Blind Matriarch, Paro: Dreams of Passion, and Priya: In Incredible Indyaa, by Namita Gokhale. This paper shows that in these novels, the body is portrayed as more than a biological entity since it signifies the intersection between individual dreams, culture, gender power dynamics, and other factors.

Matangi Ma's dating and blind body exhibits the contrast between physical frailty and authority within the family. Paro's sexualized body shows the conflict between individual needs and social expectations based on patriarchy. In turn, Priya's global persona exemplifies how progress and globalization allow for new opportunities while maintaining old responsibilities and customs.

From the analysis, it could be concluded that Gokhale does not see women as completely powerless nor does she reduce empowerment to the capability of people to act on their behalf. The women in her novels find different ways of empowering themselves and dealing with the restrictions imposed on them.

This research work has been presented in feminist literary criticism by juxtaposing the ideas of aging and disability, sexuality, class, and modernity within the same parameters for discussion of the female body, showing that bodily autonomy arises not only from an internal choice, but also from the

degree to which society accepts the choices made by women.

Future studies may broaden the area of this analysis by applying an intersectional approach to the works of Gokhale and other Indian female writers. The use of gender theories and theories of embodiment should be fruitful in an analysis of changing depictions of women's identity and their struggles in literature.

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