



INNOCENCE AND PASSION OF A TEENAGE GIRL IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S "GODS, GRAVES AND GRANDMOTHER"

Peddineni Parvathi

(Lecturer in English, Government Degree College for Women (Autonomous), Guntur, A.P., India.)



ABSTRACT

Namita Gokhale is a notable Indian woman writer whose writings speak about a woman's need for security, affection, friendship and love rather than being considered an object of love. She speaks for the women in India for whom love is not about sexual conquest, but a space to surrender. Namita's writings have been peeling the skin off feminine dramas across centuries in a contemporary voice. In her novel "*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*" she speaks about the peculiar quality of chance in human existence and survival-struggle of socially handicapped women in traditional Indian society. Women in Indian society lay faith on the men whom they love but most of the time are deceived by them and lose their prestige and dignity resulting in suffering. Teenage girls are attracted to the charm and beauty of men but this attraction becomes a sort of passion mixed with innocence. This innocence of teenage girls leads to havoc and destruction of their lives. Their quest for love results in deception and abuse. This is what happens to Gudia's life in the novel "*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*". Gudia's picaresque adventures, innocence and passion cover a cross-section of Indian society. The narration of the events captivates attention in this novel making the book 'unputdownable' as acclaimed by Khushwant Singh.

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Namita Gokhale's "Gods, Graves and Grandmother" is a remarkable novel in the backdrop of semi-urban Delhi where the story moves between the everyday details of poverty, illiteracy, ignorance and innocence. The narrator of the story is Gudiya, a teenage girl whose father is not known. She is from a rich Muslim family who eke a living through prostitution. Her mother was once considered to be very beautiful and her grandmother, a great singer. In her childhood, the family used to live in a haveli with a hundred and thirty rooms attended by twenty-two servants. Her grandmother had brought up mamaji, her own brother, who later committed suicide. Her mother was troubled by the prosecution of a murder case. Due to this, customers stopped coming to their house. Their beautiful house was taken over by policemen, bailiffs, lawyers, grocers and pawnbrokers. Due to the humiliation and agony caused by the court proceedings, her mother became mentally depressed and finally bald. When a harmonium player proposed marriage, her mother consented and eloped with him taking with her all her fine clothes and jewelry. However, he gave her the slip by decamping with her luggage and jewelry.

Having thus been cheated, her mother returned on the third day. After that they left the haveli and changed many houses and towns. At the Jhansi railway station her grandmother befriended an old beggar who advised them to come to Delhi as it was a city where a lot could be done. Dusty, dispirited and desperate, they arrived at Delhi with the old beggar Riyasuddin Rizvi. Riyasuddin Rizvi took them to a lonely road far from the noise and bustle of the city. They rented a hut near a peepal tree which belonged to Sunder Pahalwan. Unfortunately, after a few days, her mother eloped with Riyasudin Rizvi leaving Gudia and grandmother.

Unable to find a proper livelihood, Gudia's grandmother pretended to be a widow of a Brahmin and even erected a small shrine of Gods. Soon worshippers started visiting the shrine and even began donating money to the shrine. The grandmother, who was a good singer, began singing bhajans in the shrine. Soon the number of worshippers frequenting the shrine increased thereby increasing their earnings handsomely.

Shambhu from the tea stall became their trusted lieutenant. Their 'temple' grew in fame and fortune. After Shambhu's death his wife Phoolwati has come into their life in his place. A Brahmin priest, Pandit Kailash Sastry began visiting the temple and soon became a disciple of grandmother. When Gudiya grew to become a teenager, her grandmother died in her sleep. Grandmother's death and burial were reported in the newspaper and a vernacular magazine sent a journalist and a photographer to cover the event.

After the death of her grandmother, Gudiya was comfortable in the company of Phoolwati. As a teenager, she wished to start a new life and even wanted to change her name Shabana or Samina or Sharmila. She started dreaming about her future husband. She once confided to Phoolwati that she would marry a fair, handsome, and rich young man with a motor car and a big dog. Pandit Kailash Sastry supported her and said that fame, fortune, sons, property and prosperity would come to her because of the blessings of the grandmother.

One evening while Gudiya was walking on the road, a white horse clambered up the pavement and Gudiya, jumping aside in panic, fell into the rain-water ditch. She saw a handsome boy on the horse who dismounted with amused smile and easy grace. Holding the white horse by its halter, he walked over to Gudiya and helped her out of the ditch. He was so handsome that Gudiya could feel her insides quiver. She was attracted to his perfectly proportioned nose and noble profile. He looked like a Rajput prince but was shabbily dressed. She wondered who he was and why he was riding a white horse on the streets of Delhi. After his departure, without a word, she waited for him to come again but he did not come. It was dark and she peered into a meat shop where two men are talking. One was saying that time degenerates and the gods degenerate but the god of Kaliyug would come riding on a white horse and save people. Gudiya listened to this transfixed and felt that she was on the verge of a great revelation. She believed that the boy on the white horse was the god of Kaliyug. She even encountered the handsome boy with the princely profile in her dreams.



Gudiya was innocent and was unable to behave with right understanding. When her teacher in school asked her what she wanted to become, she replied that she wanted to become a film star, marry the prime minister's son and travel by aero plane. Later she resolved to change her name, her identity and her very self. She decided to become Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and take a photograph of a noble looking man from a junk shop and decided that he was to be her father. Thus she wanted to forget that she was the daughter of a prostitute who could not reveal the identity of her father. She wanted to put an end to the terrible tale of her parent's star crossed love.

One day while she was walking on the road, a strange sight of a magnificently attired band in a procession greeted her. She noticed the handsome boy with intense eyes and chiseled features, playing the trombone. The impact of the second sight of that boy is recorded as follows:

'He moved the heavy instrument away from his lips to bestow an inhumanly charming smile on me. It was the boy on the horse who had all but trampled over me outside the park. As the band played on, our eyes locked in an intimate, encompassing stare. I stood transfixed, dazzled by his beauty'. (Page 131)

The handsome boy with the princely profile was a player of trombone in the Shiv Mohan Band that had only recently taken up residence down the road. The white horse was not a horse but a mare which was rented out for wedding processions. Gudiya observes the movements of the boy closely.

'The boy walked down the staircase with the effortless ease of a prince. He leapt astride the horse and smiled at me. 'Coming for a ride?' he asked. There was of course no question of my refusing. He gave me a hand and I was hoisted up beside him, viewing the world from a different vantage point altogether.' (Page 131)

Gudiya, as a teenager was very much fascinated by his beauty and charm. His every movement seemed to her graceful and elegant. At

this point of time, Gudiya was innocent, passionate, and unworldly. She did not know anything about him. She was very shy and did not know even his name. The boy left her at a dirty municipal market and went to see whether he had won the lottery. He checked the winning numbers and then his tickets. An ugly scowl contorted his handsome features. This expression revealed his addiction to lottery tickets. He dropped her at the temple and vanished in a cloud of dust. Pandit Kailash Sastry at the temple observed the boy and predicted that he was Kalki, the scourge of the Kalyug. He also gave his observations about Hindu beliefs in the following words:

'When the end of the world approaches, Kalki will come astride a pale horse and put an end to this confusion of sin and pain. Lord Vishnu, it is said by those who know, will appear as Kalki. Handsome and a king among men, he will be armed with a huge axe;a new age will begin, when, once again, virtue and happiness will reign on the earth.' (Page 134)

When Phoolwati wanted Gudiya to get married, Pandit Kailash Sastry examined her horoscope and warned her that there was a secret enemy to her who was trying to harm her but he would smile and act like a friend. Gudiya was not unduly alarmed. In her fascination for Kalki, she even enquired him whether he knew any spells or potions, or any tantric knowledge that could make a person fall in love with another.

When the boy came to see her, she enquired about his name and family. He said he was Kalki and was living on his own without a family. He also said that he was not a person who could stay in one place for long and he would go to Bombay to meet musicians to try his luck in cinemas. Gudiya introduced herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and her father was Thakur Abhimanyu Singh. At that moment she wanted his love and care for her. She expressed her passion for him in the following words;



The next day Kalki came to her and asked her to go with him for a marriage party. Gudiya agreed unhesitatingly and followed the marriage procession. She noticed a manic intensity in his eyes and felt that he looked more handsome than any film star. In the marriage grounds Kalki drank and took her behind the cluster of bushes. Gudiya accepted what he did to her and she lost her virginity. When she arrived home, Phoolwati noticed that something was wrong and after several exhortations on the values of womanly virtue and modesty, she found Kalki with the help of Sundar Pahalwan. Kalki looked lost, abashed and even a little scared. Gudiya and Kalki were engaged that afternoon. Pandit Kailash Sastry did not like her to marry Kalki because he was not a nice person. After the engagement Kalki's behavior changed and he maintained an elaborate distance from her. Though she longed for his touch he continued to maintain an impenetrable façade of gracious and strained dignity.

Gudiya started eliciting information about Kalki from the circle of his acquaintances. She found out that he was a bastard and an orphan. His father was a Nepali and his mother a maidservant. They had lived together until his first wife came back and Kalki's mother died after being discarded. Kalki had never forgiven his parents for abandoning him.

Gudiya was hurt by Kalki's calculated and continued aloofness and decided to look attractive to him by wearing a diamond nose stud. So she got her right nostril pierced. Unfortunately her nose became red and grotesquely swollen. When her grandmother's statue was erected near the temple, Kalki came to see her and requested her to learn the 'mantra' to make money. Gudiya then, understood that he was interested in getting money through magic mantras. She, however, was not concerned about his greed and selfishness. She wanted him to show love to her. She knew well that her grandmother or Pandit Kailash did not know any mantras. In order to control him, she assured him that she could teach that mantra to him if he was nice to her. This aroused great

interest for her in him. He became affectionate, considerate and tried to humour her.

Soon Gudiya came to understand the true nature of Kalki. He was habituated to investing his salary and the tips he got on lottery tickets. He wanted to become a millionaire one day. He had also taken to habitually borrowing money from Gudiya. He owed money to almost the entire number of Shiv Mohan Band. These debts were always being rotated and rescheduled, awaiting the eventual windfall of money. Kalki requested her to ask the pandit for a 'system', a foolproof astrological methodology upon which he could base his investments. Gudiya was not blind to the realities of Kalki's nature and did not forget the lessons of her mother, the inept prostitute, with her pitiable habit of falling in love.

Gudiya wanted to get money for herself by hunting for gold coins hidden in the ground. She hit upon this idea when some coins were found while digging Shamboo's land by Saboo which were buried by her previously. With the help of Phoolwati and Sundar, she got three brief cases of currency notes. Later, she inherited some property from her loving teacher Rexanne who had passed away. She knew well that she was rich, young and beautiful. Some innate wisdom restrained her from telling Kalki about the gold though she suspected that he was aware of the conditions of Rexanne's will. This had excited his affections and he was beginning to talk about marriage with an increasing degree of impatience. However, Gudiya no longer wanted to marry Kalki. She found that she was four months pregnant and as abortion was not possible, she accepted to marry Kalki. Later she was given accommodation in Shiv Mohan's own house. Gudiya was very adaptable to the rhythm of new life with Kalki. She had developed a voracious appetite for sex, though her girlish infatuation for Kalki had subsided.

Gudiya did not tell Kalki about her secret money understanding that he was a fit-for- nothing fellow. The bandwallahs on the other hand, were kind, affectionate, supportive and understanding. They bought her groceries and gave occasional gifts like fruits and sweetmeats brought back from



some extravagant weddings. Kalki also asked her to be the lead singer in the musical troupe. Gudiya felt that she had inherited her mother's propensity that landed her in trouble and unfortunate situations. She managed to maintain a brave and cheerful face in the face of the indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties of Kalki.

Gudiya asked Kalki to go to Bombay and try his luck there. She offered him money to go to Bombay by selling her gold necklace, earrings and bangles. When Kalki got into the train, a provocative and pretty girl was seated next to Kalki and was shooting interested glances at him. When the train left the platform, she did not go to Shiv Mohan's house but to Phoolwati's house.

After the departure of Kalki, Gudiya felt that she missed him physically. She, however, accepted his departure with resignation and relief as he was not there to trouble or torment her with the authority that their marriage conferred. She questioned herself why she had been so afraid of him and why she had allowed him to beat, harass and abuse her. She began to forget how exactly he looked. She had no father or grandfather as models of masculinity to teach her the lessons of dependence as a woman. She had acceded immediately and inevitably to the conditionings of womanhood. Time went by and she gave birth to Mallika and continued to live with Phoolwati after the death of Sunder Pahlwan. Kalki did not write to her from Bombay. She never heard of him again. Whenever she went through the photographs of her marriage, it all seemed far away and unreal to her. She realized that when enough time passed and the dust settled on those troubled memories, she should be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Thus Gudiya's innocence and passion in her teenage for Kalki ended up with her becoming a victim of dismay and distress.

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