ABSTRACT

The present Ph.D thesis entitled “Perspectives on Culture and Identity in the Novels of Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale” examines the novels of Roy and Gokhale. Not to speak of Indian Perspectives on culture and identity in Roy and Gokhale’s fiction are much relevant for our times. The first chapter, if it begins with a survey of Indian English literature, it ends with the section “The Growth of Cultural Studies in India.” Here a concerted attempt is made on the growth of cultural studies in India. As we know, this is a modern discipline relatively. Here an effort is made to study things like ideology, class, caste, creed, politics, media and consumption.

The first chapter presents a brief account of cultural studies in India. Well, Indian cultural studies focus on class, though this is an importation of western ideology. Class struggle is an old problem in human societies. There are many kinds of class struggles in the name of wealth, position and power. It is differentiation among men. The classes like the rich and poor, the upper and lower, the highbrow (elite) and low-brow, can be seen with clarity in Indian society, as much as it is reflected in Indian literature. The novels of Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale reflect all this vividly. The west truly
believes that Indian society is based on religion and caste system.

India cannot improve so easily though its civilization is very old, because it has its defects inside. One -- its religion is unscientific, unhealthy and not consolative. It is pessimistic. Two—its caste system is its bane, dividing Indians for ever. If there is a perpetual division of the country and its people, from where comes strength for it? Caste the blot on Hinduism and the greatest nagator of unity, rationality and the emerging growth and change, is its real destroyer. G. L. Dickinson in his essay “An Essay on the Civilizations of India, China and Japan” with E. M. Forster’s foreword, writes, “I will say first that I conceive the dominant note of India to be religion; of China, humanity; and of Japan chivalry.”

Politics is really a key factor in our society. Culture politics is a big thing. As Cornel West assumes it is a culture politics of difference. Culture politics hinges on aspects like racism, sexism and non-culturalism. Indian politics is really mind-bogling. It hinges upon the diversity of religion, languages, geography, and finally culture.

Then mass media is a dominant cultural issue. Mass media includes newspapers, journals, TV, radio, internet, mobile, and many more things. Media plays an important role in the birth and growth of popular culture.

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There are mass media and there is culture. Mass media changes from place to place and from time to time, depending upon the advancement of civilization.

Culture critics think that Indian culture is something difficult to understand. It is rather complex and misleading, for the Indian cultures are diverse and they have evolved their own mode of existence. The dialogue between different sub-cultures is specific of socio-political and economical perspectives. However, culture is a means of establishing legitimacy as well as social control. The Indian culture is always in conflict with sub-continental states and societies. Spatial location and the affinities of language have been the most important defining features in sub-continental diversities. But within each space and linguistic grouping a complex set of social relations provides the individual with additional sources of identification.

Indian aspect of culture and identity most depend on religion, language, geographical entities, of course mass media. When it comes to literature, language plays a vital point. Again our local color literature, folklore, our customs and attitudes are considerable. The concept of globalization is subsumed in all this. All this is discussed in the first chapter.

The second chapter is a study of identity and cultural perspectives in the fiction of Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale. In that case, it is both desirable
and necessary to resort to biographical criticism. So an attempt is made to understand the life and works of Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale in the second chapter.

Arundhati Roy (born 24 November 1961) is an Indian writer who writes in English and an activist who focuses on issues related to social aspects and economic discriminations. She won the Booker Prize in 1997 for her first novel, *The God of Small Things*, and has written two screenplays and some collections of essays. For her work as an activist Roy received the Cultural Freedom Prize awarded by the Lannan Foundation in 2002.

Early in her career, Roy worked for television and movies. She wrote the screenplays for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* (1989), a movie based on her experience as a student of architecture, directed by her current husband, and *Electric Moon* (1992); she also appeared as a performer in the first. Roy attracted attention in 1994, when she criticised Shekhar Kapur’s film *Bandit Queen*, based on the life of Phoolan Devi. In her film review titled, ‘The Great Indian Rape Trick’ she questioned the right to restage the rape of a living woman without her permission, and charged Kapur with exploiting Devi and misrepresenting both her life and its meaning.

The writer Namita Gokhale was born in Lucknow, India in 1956 and spent her childhood between New Delhi and Nainital, in the foothills of the Himalayas. A Kumaoni by birth she married to Rajiv Gokhale when she was eighteen. Gokhale dropped out of college after a conflict over the bias against Indian literatures in the curriculum. She then published the enormously successful film magazine “Super” from Bombay in the late seventies.

Gokhale has written five novels and two works of non-fiction, all in English. Her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), a satire upon the Mumbai and Delhi elite caused uproar due to its candid sexual humour. *Gods Graves and Grandmother* - an ironic fable about street life in Delhi was adapted into a musical play. Gokhale was diagnosed with cancer when she was just thirty-five and her husband died a few years later. The experience of illness and loss has informed her later books, *A Himalayan Love Story, The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntala, The Play of Memory*. Gokhale has written
two books of non-fiction. *Mountain Echoes* which deals with the Kumaoni way of life through the eyes of four highly talented and individualistic women. *The Book of Shiva* is an introduction to Shaivite philosophy and mythology. She has retold the Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*, in an illustrated version for the young and first time readers. Her most recent publication *In Search of Sita – Revisiting Mythology*, co-edited with Dr Malashri Lal, presents fresh interpretations of this enigmatic goddess and her indelible impact on the lives of Indian women.

The third chapter “Perspectives on Culture and Identity in Arundhati Roy’s *God of Small Things*” deals with the questions of man’s identity, the factors like religion, caste, language, taste, temperament, attitudinal difference that lead to it, are discussed.

The publication of *The God of Small Things* catapulted Roy to instant international fame. The perspectives as appear in Roy’s novel are of feminist and the subaltern, apart from politics. Tanushree Singh thinks “the novel projects various images of women.” The novel also deals with the subaltern perspective and identity crisis. Therefore, worth mentioning here is Updike’s remark that “The long socio-cosmic ball throughout the novel.”

Namita Gokhale’s first novel *Paro, Dreams of Passion* presents the story of an uninhibited, outgoing, irresistibly harming woman who knows her assets and calculatedly makes full use of them for enslaving the males. Paro’s sexual encounters with men become both a means of asserting the power of her femaleness and an exercise in defining herself. She is driven by a subconscious urge to be herself, to discard the constraints that a patriarchal cultural set up imposes on woman to conform to the image constructed and perpetuated by the male. A characteristic feature of the typically male society is a casual attitude towards adultery by the male but a strict censoriousness for the females who lead a promiscuous life. Adultery in woman is unpardonable and an adulterous woman is treated as a moral blot on society. S. N. Sharma thinks,
“Gokhale’s Paro is a woman’s evocative interpretation on the subarite decadence of the Indian upper middle class.

The novel gives stress on concrete individual existence and consequently on subjectivity, individual freedom and choice.” Gokhale’s second novel Gods, Graves and Grandmother has a similar theme. The novel deals with what we can call feminist perspective. In this novel, not only does Mrs Gokhale present a gyno-centric view of the world, but also makes women characters self-dependent and empowers them to grapple with the hostile social reality. The Himalayan Love Story is about the passion of love. A young girl yearns to fulfill her sexual desires, only to find that the source of her childhood affections is not really the person with whom she will spend the rest of her life. Neither does she finally end up marrying somebody that she fancies. But then life carries on and Parvati, the protagonist faces a near ruin. This is a book of reminiscences of Kumaoni women of celebrity. As India celebrates fifty years of Independence, Roli Books decided to focus on works of historical and contemporary relevance on perspectives that have hitherto remained neglected. These micro studies would not be confined to the scholarly community. Mountain Echoes is an evocative recollection of life in the Kumaon hills, through the eyes of four talented and highly individualistic
women, all in or approaching their eighties. Gokhale’s works are full of passion and description. Her uninhibited self is projected in her entire writings.

The fifth and the last chapter “Perspectives on Culture and Identity in the Novel of Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale” is an important part of the thesis. This is more so because it is a comparative study of their fiction in so far the Perspectives on culture and identity go hand in hand.

The major thematic concerns in Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*, apart from depiction of family life are: criticism of tradition, society and marginality (both untouchability and woman’s suppression), criticism on politics. At the same time the novel speaks of marginality of caste and sex, and speaks of incest and the obscene. The novel provides diasporic experience: dislocation and identity crisis. The novel is a technical tour de force. It is known for feminist English and linguistic inventiveness.

Likewise, Namita Gokhale’s fiction has several of these issues dwelt with in her novels *Paro, Gods, Graves and Grandmother, A Himalayan Love Story, The Book of Shados* and *Shakuntala*. *Paro* presents the story of an uninhibited, outgoing, irresistibly harming woman who knows her assets and calculatedly makes full use of them for enslaving the males.
This is a feminist perspective. Paro’s sexual encounters with men become both a means of asserting the power of her femaleness and an exercise in defining herself. Adultery in woman is unpardonable and an adulterous woman is treated as a moral blot on society. It is this hypocrisy and these double standards which Gokhale seems to be attacking by making Paro travel from man to man as a seductive temptress. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* deals with what we can call radical feminism. In this novel, not only does Mrs Gokhale present a gyno-centric view of the world, but also makes women characters self-dependent and empowers them to grapple with hostile social reality. They eminently succeed in carving a niche for themselves in the male-dominated society, and prove that what man can do woman can do. *A Himalayan Love Story* depicts Parvati’s sufferings. *The Book of Shadows* is a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile.

The thesis ends with a conclusion and select bibliography.