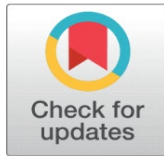


EXPLORING GENDERED SPACES IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S PARO: DREAMS OF PASSION AND PRIYA: IN INCREDIBLE INDYAA

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents gendered space representations in *Paro: Dreams of Passion and Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, written by Namita Gokhale, within the context of feminist literary studies. The paper examines how spatial structures shape gender identity, roles, power hierarchies, and feminine subjectivity in contemporary Indian fiction. Specifically, it focuses on the interplay between urban and rural environments, private and public spaces, and female characters' resistance, negotiation, and compliance to analyze how space affects identity formation and characters' actions. For that purpose, the qualitative textual analysis of Gokhale's works is carried out with a feminist literary perspective and comparison as the key approaches applied. The results demonstrate that urban space allows women some agency; however, it also creates contradictions with established social norms. Rural space, in turn, tends to preserve stereotypes of gender roles and community norms. Moreover, domestic space is revealed to be an important environment where family hierarchies define feminine identity and its functioning.

Keywords: Gender, Space, Feminism, Gender Roles, Gender Spaces

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. CONTRIBUTION/ ORIGINALITY STATEMENT

This study contributes to the extant literature by investigating the motifs of gendered spaces and gender roles. It extends new perception into how urban v/s rural and domestic v/s public spaces are created by varying degrees of gendered spaces and gender roles. It also engages with the experiences of female individuals at physical and social boundaries through interaction with other female individuals. It also provides evidence that Gokhale uses visual elements of the three-dimensional nature of gender-based boundaries to illuminate the gender relations between male and female characters in modern Indian literature.

2. STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

The research article is divided into eight segments. It begins with a background of the study, followed by its significance. The third section explains the theoretical framework underlying the study. The fourth section introduces the methodology. Later, it is followed by a research gap and objectives. Afterward, it discusses gendered space in the context of Namita Gokhale's novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa*. Discussion is followed by the results section. Lastly, the conclusion synthesizes these insights.

3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The concept of gendered spaces emerged in the late 1970's and early 1980's. Gendered spaces can be perceived as physical and social constructions that render surroundings feminine or masculine. These can be physical or social spaces arranged around the divergence between genders, primarily male and female. In literature, one can examine reinforcement of social norms through these spaces. The base manuals of the study were Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Doreen Massey's works, which reviewed women's independence and spaces.

Virginia Woolf introduced the concept of gendered spaces in her work *A Room of One's Own* in the year 1929. She talks about spaces that are encrypted as either feminine or masculine. Woolf's notion itself creates the title of the work, where she writes, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." (Woolf, 1935, p. 5). The line isn't about her literal room, but it's all about her space, privacy, and resources, which are gendered in her society. Besides this, it also talks about women's access to education and the history of women's writing.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her text *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, argues that gendered spaces are socially constructed. She plots the concept of patriarchy as a paradox, where "man" is considered as "subject" and women as "other". Her book "deals with the biological, psychological, economic, and other kinds of discrimination against women" (Nagiah, 2013, p.301). She also highlights how women occupy space within patriarchal norms. The ultimate goal of de Beauvoir was women's liberation. She mentions "one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one" (De Beauvoir, 1949, p.12).

Space, Place and Gender was written by Doreen Massey in 1994. She argues that space is socially constructed. She concludes that the aspect of binary limits women. Places play a crucial role in gender identity. Massey identifies an aptness in relating time to men and space to women. She associates them together to understand the elements of space and time. She argues that space is never neutral; it is constructed through social relations. She also mentions that the division of space for a particular gender limits the opportunities of women, which can be availed, and reinforces inequality economically and socially. According to her, space is built through power, where one gender (men or elites) is authoritative, and the other (women or marginalized) is restricted. Space or place is not static or traditional; it is built through interactions.

The novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa* were written by Namita Gokhale in 1984 and 2013. Indian women writers, like Namita Gokhale, "are pragmatic in the treatment of human behavior and in particular for the women's quest for identity" (Visalam, 2019, p. 13428). She "occupies a significant space in contemporary literary discourse for her nuanced and often subversive representations of women's lives" (Bhatia & Ahuja, 2021, p.1). "She tells stories about urban women, rural women, pampered women, hardscrabble women, educated women" (Roychoudhary et al., 2016, p.39). Divergent factors of female protagonists in her novels are exploitations, inequalities, social boundaries and discrimination (Bhardwaj & Gangwar, 2023, p.176). Selected novels are apt texts for understanding concepts of gendered spaces and gender roles. The concepts are explored through the protagonists, *Paro* and *Priya*, in both novels. Besides gendered space, the novel is also considered through the prospect of gender roles.

There are limited studies on gendered spaces and gender roles in the context of Indian women's writing. Contemporary Indian novels are short of elements of gendered spaces and gender roles.

4. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study significantly fosters the theories of gendered spaces and gender roles in modern Indian literature. There has been limited concentration drawn regarding the collective study of both aspects. Through the characters of *Paro* and

Priya from the novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, the paper investigates the void, evaluating through what medium the convoluted way to female subjectivities is formed within social and cultural groundwork.

By re-conceptualizing gendered spaces and gender roles in the characters of *Paro* and *Priya*, the study accords to gender and feminist literary criticism. Inspecting all aspects adjacent to the novels delivers perceptions into how the spaces and roles of particular genders intersect, illuminating gender relations and the evolution of gendered spaces in modern Indian literature.

5. RESEARCH AIM

The core purpose of this research is to focus on gendered spaces in the novels '*Paro: Dreams of Passion*' and '*Priya: In Incredible Indyya*' written by Namita Gokhale. Besides this, it also examines gendered spaces in contemporary Indian literature.

6. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present research is grounded on the interdisciplinary theoretical approach combining the views of feminist studies, theories of gendered spaces and gender roles. In this case, the focus is made on the examination of women representation, identity formation and cultural negotiations in the chosen novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*. Thus, gendered spaces and gender roles concepts are integrated into the discussion in order to provide insight into the processes of female subjectivity formation and identity shaping influenced by the cultural environment, social structures and specific spatial arrangement.

Unlike many previous approaches in the field, the chosen theoretical framework does not treat such concepts as feminism, gender roles, and gendered spaces separately. The researcher uses those theories as interrelated analytical tools to identify the experiences of females in the patriarchal society. First of all, gendered spaces represent the physical, social, emotional and symbolic spaces created according to the socially defined perceptions of masculinity and femininity. These spaces shape the specific behavioral requirements for males and females and promote some stereotypes about proper behavior of different gender representatives. For instance, according to Pilcher and Whelehan, the spaces have a great impact on individuals' lives determining the types of acceptable activities for certain genders. As Wrede says, gendered spaces are regarded as the mechanisms producing and reproducing the gender hierarchy relations and relations between gender representatives. Das (2026)

Additionally, in accordance with *Space, Place and Gender* written by Doreen Massey, spaces and places reflect and shape gender relations at the same time. The author believes that gendered spatial relations are the sources of meaning for gendered society. Using exclusion, restriction and symbolism in relation to the spaces, people construct the system of patriarchy and maintain their positions in the existing hierarchies. In the present research, the perspective suggested by Massey will be used to analyze the influence of various kinds of spaces on women's lives described in the chosen novels: domestic, public, familial and professional spaces. Finally, the theoretical framework also takes into account the concept of gender roles which distinguish the socially constructed expectations and patterns of male/female behaviors from biological sex difference.

As Pilcher and Whelehan claim, gender roles constitute part of the broader gender order which helps to produce and reproduce significant interaction between men and women. It means that gender roles have a great impact on females' life in relation to the requirements about their appearance, behavior and participation in various spheres of life. In the selected novels, gender roles are considered to be the restrictive cultural devices that limit women's freedom to make decisions about their lives and fulfill their aspirations. In *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, the protagonist faces a great challenge because of her desire to act differently to what is expected from women. Similarly, the second novel depicts urban and social spaces as sites of negotiation in which women may face restrictions and freedoms. Urban spaces usually symbolize the opportunities for the development of female gender roles, while family and domestic spaces promote the traditional perception of femininity.

7. METHODOLOGY

The study is aimed at a qualitative approach. This is an apt method for this investigation, as it interrogates intricate scope of gendered spaces and gender roles entrenched in narrative composition. It requires an interpretive and concept theory-based research instead of quantitative measures.

The novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* were chosen as the primary texts. The texts were chosen for their thematic abundance and applicability to concepts of gendered spaces and gender roles. The primary data for this study is in different forms including passages, scenes, character representations, and narrative descriptions from the texts. These were chosen purposefully, given their significance to the subject matter of gendered spaces and gender roles.

The textual analysis of the study was executed via literary analysis of the novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* by Namita Gokhale. A close reading of the novels involves identifying aspects of spaces and gender roles in Indian society, linking them through the concepts.

8. RESEARCH GAP AND OBJECTIVES

8.1. RESEARCH GAP

Investigation on the novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* primarily focuses on female desires, sexual liberation, and patriarchal constraints, but it lacks collaboration with theories of gendered spaces and gender roles, which helps in analysing through what medium the convoluted path to female subjectivities is formed within social and cultural structures. Further, the cooperation between gendered spaces and gender roles in the structuring female identity has been explored adequately. By investigating the presented gaps facilitate an intensive assessment of combining female subjectivity, gendered spaces, and gender roles.

8.2. OBJECTIVES

- To explore gendered spaces in *Paro* and *Priya*.
- To examine the aspect of gender roles in Indian society.

9. DISCUSSION

There is widespread exploration on the novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*, and on theories of 'Gender Roles' and 'Gendered Spaces'. Even after extensive research, there is very narrow engagement of novels and theories together in milieu of Indian family structure. Distinguished theorists of gendered spaces and gender roles are Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, and Doreen Massey. In the novels, gendered spaces and roles contribute to the exploration of how gender roles and spaces operate in Indian society. Besides the theories of gendered spaces and gender roles, feminism also helped in narrowing the differences in depicting the purpose of various gender spaces and roles in the novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*. The texts "deals with the satire of Delhi's upper class" (Roychoudhary, 2020, p.125). The research locates theories within the Indian socio-cultural and feminist frameworks. It investigates gender roles and spaces through same framework. The multiple ways in which gender is situated within the discourse of contemporary studies point to individual experiences and specific contexts over a generalized view of gendered aspects. (Mehta, 2015)

Gokhale's fiction reflects the idea of gender roles as socially constructed via "showing women unlearning the roles imposed on them and discovering authentic versions of themselves (Sarkhel & Tiwari, 2026, p.180). She portrays her female characters "as the replica of her own experiences, which she has suffered in her life" (Dangwal and Smitha, 2023, p.564). "Most works of Namita Gokhale are motivated by the status of women in the public arena and in a man-centric framework" (Vinitha & Usha, 2018, p.483). The novel's treatment of space and gender roles is reflected through the characters of *Paro* and *Priya*. "The story takes you back to the Mumbai and Delhi of those times. The life of high society and what it revolves around, especially among women, is the key angle of the story" (Goyal, 2018). "Even today, woman is subjected to the material anguish in the middle- class families" (Gaikwad, 2023, p.70). Both the characters belong to the social space, which encompasses patriarchy, where gender borders are created in context with spaces. The spaces can be domestic, social, or public. The theme of space and gender roles in novels employs as a customarily exhibited

structure within Indian society, as Butler writes, “Beauvoir, of course, meant merely to suggest that the category of women is a variable cultural accomplishment, a set of meanings that are taken on or taken up within a cultural field, and that no one is born with a gender- gender is always acquired” (1999, p.142). Through the experiences of Paro and Priya, one can be actively aware of the fact that how Paro challenges traditional notions of restrictions on females, and Priya introspect negotiation of her identity when she was navigating the conflict between gender roles and her individual identity, as Jasbir Jain mentions that Indian feminism is rooted in culture, caste, religion, and history (2011).

The novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* commences in the 1980's and delves into the life of Paro, a young woman navigating the complexities of modern Indian society. “Gokhale is perhaps the first one to portray a woman who leads a lustful life, exploits her lovers and does all that was not ‘ordinary’” (Kaur, 2018, p.491). The gendered space she occupies includes traditional family roles and the flourishing urban environment, where Paro withstands social restrictions and personal desires. Her journey is marked by her struggles against societal norms, which limit her to traditional roles as mentioned “Paro is the main protagonist who boldly searches for her life and also a rebellion of women against the traditions” (Shaw, 2022, p.77). Her experiences imitate the tension between personal ambition and societal expectation. The novel explores her emotional and sexual liberation, highlighting her quest for self-fulfillment against a backdrop of rigid gender roles. Paro's experiences are mainly shaped by the traditional values and modern aspirations (Zaagade, 2021).

In the novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (Gokhale, 1984), gendered spaces are represented in several ways. “In a society deeply entrenched in patriarchal norms, Namita Gokhale's portrayal of the character Paro provides a critical commentary on gender roles, sexual desire, and the impact of class and culture on female identity” (Gobi, 2025, p.125) Patriarchal societies tend to impose strict boundaries on women's expression of desire, particularly in relation to sexuality and autonomy (Balamurugesu & Valliammai, 2026, p.32). Paro's physical space consists of her home and the environment in which she lives. Her home often reflected traditional gender roles. Her domestic space underscores the constraints imposed on her by societal expectations (Zaagade, 2021). Therefore, home becomes a space that symbolizes both safety and confinement, illustrating the physical boundaries set by gender norms. “Gokhale reveals that beneath this surface lies a deeply conservative mindset, especially in terms of gender roles and expectations on women. While men in society may adopt modernity without being judged, women who do the same are often criticized. Namita Gokhale brings this out in the words of Priya in the novel” (Gobi, 2024, p. 4). Priya mentions that, “She had left B.R. only six months before. Everybody was talking about it. She was living in an open adulterous sin with ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur, test cricketer and scion of a princely family” (Gokhale, 1984, pp. 28-29). The novel explores her emotional and sexual liberation, highlighting her quest for self-fulfillment against a backdrop of rigid gender roles. “Beyond B.R., Paro engages in multiple extramarital affairs that allow her to explore her sexuality and assert her individuality” (Gobi, 2024, p.5). Paro's body is commodified and objectified within elite male networks, as Paro had affairs and even extramarital affairs with different men, including Art Master in her school, Bucky Bhandpur, Lenin Suresh, Mr. Shambhu Nath Mishra, and Loukas Leoros, but the “sexual journey of Paro doesn't bring her the desired results” (Anitha & Vani, 2021, p.207). The character of Paro can be seen as a hyper-visible and hyper-sexualized body disrupting conventional moral frameworks of Indian society. Her body can be considered currency, with her physical body exchanged, displayed, and discussed. Paro's experiences are mainly shaped by the traditional values and modern aspirations (Zaagade, 2021). Therefore, Paro's body is primary factor for novel's exploration of female desire, sexuality, and social conformity.

The novel *Priya: In Incredible Indyya* (Gokhale, 2013) is set in the early 2000's and follows Priya, a contemporary Indian woman navigating a more modern, globalized India. The settings include both household and professional spheres, imitating the evolving role of women in a swiftly changing society (Devi & Rao, 2016). In the novel, the writer shifts the lens to explore how identity, culture, and modernity intersect, focusing on a female protagonist caught between traditional values and contemporary aspirations. In the novel, gendered spaces are explored through the protagonist Priya's journey and interactions, which lay out a rich, layered cultural and social terrain. The novel describes various spaces and how characters, based on their gender, steer them.

Priya's development is characterized by her professional success and personal growth. She moves through various gendered spaces, including the corporate world and familial settings, with greater instrumentality and self-awareness equated to Paro. Her journey fosters a more empowered, self-determined approach to gender roles. Priya's experiences in the corporate world and her interaction in domestic spaces feature a shift in gender dynamics, as “she marries the richest person, but she belongs to a middle-class family” (Priyadarshini et al., 2022, p. 397). Unlike Paro, who is primarily constrained by traditional roles, Priya steers both traditional and modern spaces with a sense of empowerment and

autonomy, reflecting broader societal changes. "She was treated as a shifting woman who neither opposes the traditional norms nor accepts the modern society and struggle to adjust for the society" (Devi & Charyulu, 2016, p.231).

When Priya's emotional experiences unfold through the interactions and dynamics of her family, including her internal conflicts over identity, worth, and societal pressures, this demonstrates the breadth of the struggles of adjusting to gendered cultural norms (Chaudhari, 2012). The emotional space within all of Priya's relationships, whether romantic or familial, is a manifestation of the complexities at the intersection of gendered dynamics and the effects of societal expectations on her personal relationships. Additionally, intellectual spaces such as academic institutions and intellectual conversations/doing research show how Priya struggles with gendered expectations and stereotypes. Furthermore, these demonstrate both opportunities for growth and challenges, as well as a gender-based barrier to growth. In Priya's intellectual journey, she demonstrated how to navigate and transcend gendered stereotypes in her search for knowledge and self-realization across these spaces. Through the depiction of all of these gendered spaces, Gokhale demonstrates the complexity of gender roles and their influence on Priya's journey by providing an implicit examination of how various spaces shape and reflect(gendered) dynamics.

10. RESULT

Discussion section above debated, personality of the characters *Paro* and *Priya* in the novels '*Paro: Dreams of Passion*' and '*Priya: In Incredible Indyya*'. The personality of the character is not fixed. The mutual exchange between the theories of gendered spaces and gender roles shapes one's identity.

The spaces that *Paro* occupies demonstrate how gender-based biases impose limitations on women's ability to participate in society and be recognized. *Paro* is on a quest to overcome these barriers and attain validation and recognition for her thoughts and ideas (Zagade, 2021). Through the use of gendered spaces, the novel demonstrates how gendered experiences and intellectual validation are direct reflections of broader socio-cultural trends and gendered individual struggles.

Paro's fight for individuality in a world where there are strict gender expectations shows the tension between personal identity and societal roles. The author shows how *Paro's* views of herself and her desires are affected by, and are very often limited by, the gender role expectations placed upon her. *Paro's* choices, relationships, and career aspirations are all against traditional gender expectations. Her desire to find happiness and independence contrasts with the conventional roles proposed by Indian society for women, illustrating her rejection of those restrictions and her desire to create her own place in the world.

The novel also explores the dynamics of power and control as they relate to gender roles. The novelist examines how gender roles affect relationships, personal autonomy, and career advancement for women through *Paro's* interactions with other characters in the novel. Gokhale uses the character of *Paro* to critique and analyze in the novel.

The character of *Priya*, states that the theory of gender roles can be examined through the experience and daily-life dealings of in the life of *Priya*. As the novel is set in a modern Indian context, this analysis particularly explores how an individual's identity is shaped by Indian societal assumptions about gender and its relationship to the traditional and evolving roles of masculinity and femininity. *Priya*, the protagonist, embarks on a journey through a culture with rigidly defined gender roles for men and women. *Priya* pursues her goals and asserts her independence, going against the established norms for women, as mentioned women of modern age "question the established norms, live lives of their own, experience all sorts of happiness as men do, have extramarital relationship, and want freedom and identity" (Gobi & Suganthi, 2024, p.73). This analysis is carried out using a theory of gender roles, which posits that society prescribes specific behaviors and roles to individuals based on their gender.

As *Priya* encounters different experiences, she has become subject to role conflict; that is, the pursuit of her personal goals will come into conflict with society's prescribed expectations. This exemplified the concept espoused by gender role theory, which states that individuals must work to redefine and renegotiate their gender roles to fit into, or stand in opposition to, the expectations established by society. The development of gender roles is also addressed by the concept of societal modernization in the postmodern era, in which *Priya* lives. *Priya's* experiences living in a rapidly evolving society illustrate that traditional roles and definitions of men and women will continue to be challenged and modified (Chaudhari, 2012). This is consistent with gender role theory, which explores how changing social spaces can create and reshape the traditional gender roles assigned to men and women. *Priya's* interaction with other characters in the novel, relatives, or adults, can be analyzed for reinforcement or challenge to the gender role theory. The expectations placed on

Priya, whether at the family or individual level, provide insight into the dynamics of gender roles. By examining these aspects, one can read the novel Priya from the perspective of gender role theory.

11. CONCLUSION

To conclude, Namita Gokhale's novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya: In Incredible India* provide an in-depth examination of gendered areas in modern-day Indian society. The experiences of *Paro* and *Priya* demonstrate how Gokhale has highlighted the difficulties that women face in a male-dominated society by exploring traditional versus modern gender roles and illustrating how women struggle to liberate themselves and fulfill themselves amid societal restrictions. The novels offer valuable insights into the changing roles of women across a range of areas in India and reflect the current evolution of society through the lens of how gendered interaction occurs in India. Furthermore, both novels have highlighted how gendered interactions continue to change over time in India, reflecting shifting relationships and norms regarding the role of women. Overall, Gokhale's novels make a significant contribution to the discussion of gender dynamics in Indian literature.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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