

## **FEMININE CONSCIOUSNESS (NEW SELVES IN NEW STRUCTURES)**

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Shakuntala is an experience of feminine consciousness in literature world. A courageous woman who has capacity to protest against the restricted society. She is strong enough to stand for rights of women. Milieu created in the novel is a keen reflection of the fact that having been named SHAKUNTALA, after Kalidas's heroine, she carried within herself the Sanskaras of abandonment. The female protagonist who has past memories, who begins to think of the purpose of life has desire to change the world. We find the meaning of eternity of soul with her past recognitions. Cycle of death and birth, one dies again takes birth to find true meaning of life, to attain the true position. We find a different definition of womanhood in this novel that is experiencing joy of motherhood and nurturing children are the only rights of women. There should not have such boundary for women in any community society, rather women should have equal rights. Eventually, She seeks redemption.

The novel talks of Love, Freedom and The Freedom of Love. It talks that all human beings seek alternative identity, find themselves or the persons. If women stray away from what is expected of them, they are bound to face failure. Indian society has always given a complicated state to women, People worship GODDESS (Female God) but on the other side disrespect women who is the centre of their life (As a Wife, Mother, daughter, Any Form). Namita Gokhle has given voice to women's vision and her idea of independence. Gokhle's protagonist has created questions to the society, what should be the true value of women in this world? At some areas women are considered "Equal to Men" and at some areas they are still the "Maids of family". The novel is the paramount source to spread the message of providing independency, equality and freedom that are the true rights of every woman.

Exploring feminine consciousness is a fascinating experience in literature. The female protagonist in modern novels permits us to share the operation of her consciousness. The woman of today has courage to express her feminine sensibility honestly and sincerely and the women writers are voicing a protest against the legal, economic and social restrictions on the basic rights of women. Namita Gokhle has touched the pulse of the society by eulogizing fiercely, strong, fiery and assertive individualistic women who are cultural icons with intense sense of loyalty to the clan and community. Her works voice a protest, and attempt to construct "New selves in New Structures". She gives voice to women's vision and her idea of independence. Her women protagonists are somewhere there in journey to become themselves.

The novel stresses on the fact that having been named Shakuntala, after Kalidas's heroine, she carried within herself the sanskaras of abandonment. Here we meet a woman who has always seen herself aloof from her life. As a girl, she is restless to see the world, to wander with the freedom of birds and clouds. She saw no error in disorder. It seemed to be the natural condition of life. Her marriage is added when she discovers that she can not conceive and by the appearance of a handmaiden, her intense awareness of freedom grows and she calls herself a Yaduri and moves away with a Greek traveller. From wife, she is now little more than a whore. Shakuntala is eternal outsider. She is the girl who seeks knowledge. She is the wife who does not belong. She is the whore who is ruled by shame. Eventually, she seeks redemption. The good story degenerates into a morality tale. Self is elusive and it eludes her in the world as well as in home.

Namita Gokhle's style is richly sensuous. It has a distinct flow. The images are telling. Descriptions are long. The tragic end is, however, disappointing as if to point out that if women stray away from what is expected of them, they are bound to face failure. It would have been a sure success of womanhood's spirit if she had lived on and would have experienced the joy of motherhood and nurtured her children with her values that she thought was right, learnt the hard way from her own experience. It is really disappointing that she did not hand down her experiences and leave it for people who lived after her. It is also strange that she begets a twin son is left alive to be nurtured by monks. Overall the book is well written – a tale of a woman who wants to get out and see the world but is restricted by social norms.

A detailed analysis of the book would help us to put the book in right perspective. In Patriarchal culture, it is the woman who is ordained to be the preserver and the carrier of culture and tradition, the upholder of honour and pride but nobody notices the pain, anguish and struggle that engulf a woman who dares to transgress the pre-determined codes of conduct. The novel came out in 2005. The writer here has used Kalidas's immortal tale of love and betrayal to explore her ideas of how women have engaged in their own enslavement and liberation with the picaresque adventures of a tempestuous wild girl from the hills. The story is based on Abhijnana Shakuntalam of Kalidas.

The novel opens with the picture of Kashi the city of Shiva. The narrator is Shakuntala who remembers her first sight of Kashi and begins to dream of her previous birth, sees multiple images and begins to think of the purpose of life.

“What is death? What is the mystery of life? What do we live for? Why do I die?

Can one run away from the self? Does the appetite for life become its own meal?

Can the thirst of the river ever slake its waters?”

She asks the priest on the Ghat,

“Why do these memories persist?”

Can one escape the cycle of birth and death? Why has she not forgotten her past? Why has not Lord Shiva, the destroyer of memory wiped her memory? She remembers that Shakuntala was the daughter of a Vaidya, a doctor of medicinal plants. Her father died when she was five years old. Shakuntala had a keen desire to know her inner self. She grew up in mountains like the Shakuntala of the epic. She was married to Srijan whose two wives had died without an issue. Srijan was chief of fourteen villages. Married life was good with all the comforts. She had failed to deliver a son and so Srijan brought a beautiful woman Kamalini a handmaiden of Shakuntala. Whose mind boiled with disturbing questions at the presence? She was attracted towards a Yavana named Nearchus and went away with him to quench her roving propensity. She had named Yaduri. Gradually she realized that she had betrayed her husband so she came back to

Kashi where she was hit by a charging bull and died. So it is a touchy feely tale that brings back memories of the feminist. 1960s and the fervor of mystic India. It is fittingly subtitled “The Play of memory”. it draws together religious, myths, philosophy, faith, fears and rich details of customs and rituals of ancient India. It is comparable to Hesse’s Siddharth. It is rooted in Romantic tradition with a strong desire for wandering a poetic sensibility towards nature and looming tryst with death. We find a curious mixture of history, mythology and Philosophy. The invasion of memories connects her with an earlier life when she was a rustic belle in a hill forest. Memory is strong enough to outplay the tricks of time. She recalls the life wherein she was Shakuntala, spirited, imaginative and adventurous but was destined to suffer the Sanskaras of abandonment. The duties and expectations imposed on Indian women, their Sanskaras of self-sacrifice are the mimetic and psychic patterns which connect Shakuntala’s story with the living tradition of pain most Indian women sustain.

The novel talks of love and freedom and the freedom of love. All human beings have an urge to escape from situation, our life scripts, to seek alternative identity, exercise choice, find ourselves or the persons. We might have been. Gokhle’s Shakuntala questions the rules and customs of society and when the opportunity arrives, she goes out into the unknown to satisfy her adventurous spirit, to change her life, to have a liberated life. Mother’s symbolic words prove right in the end

“ Remember, Shakuntala , Birds returns  
to their nests at dusk but clouds must  
weep their tears unseen in distant lands.”

Is there no other choice? can a woman be either a bird or a cloud? One remembers what Celia said in **AS YOU LIKE IT**

“ we don’t walk on trodden ways,  
our petticoats will catch the  
burs with which our work  
a day world is full.”

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