

REPRESENTATION OF GEN Y IN NAMITA GOKHALE'S *PRIYA IN INCREDIBLE INDYAA*

Dr. Payel Dutta Chowdhury
Professor & Course Coordinator
Department of Languages
Garden City College
Bangalore – 560049

Abstract

Namita Gokhale's *Priya in Incredible Indyya*, among many contemporary issues, presents a vivid description of the Gen Y – characters drawn from varied strata of the society who authentically present a new face of India. Through the narrative voice of Priya, a mother of two young boys, the writer focuses on the free-spirited, determined and daring youths of the contemporary period. Be it their physical appearances or their attire, their choice of careers or their lifestyles – these youngsters come across as unique individuals ready to experiment with life and lead an uncompromising life. Gokhale's focus has also been on the views and attitudes of these youngsters to marriage, commitments and relationships through which we understand them better. Many issues which hitherto have not usually been discussed comfortably by Indian parents with their children, like homosexuality, also find place in the book. The true representation of the Gen Y has not only been by their attitudes and behaviours, but also by the language that they use – a new 'lingo' which juxtaposes the vernacular with English, 'sms language', and acronyms – that leave the traditional older generation frustrated and confused. Most importantly, *Priya* is about a hopeful and welcome bonding of the Gen Y with the older generation for a better shared experience.

Keywords:- Contemporary, elites, free-spirited, determined, aspirations, tradition, modernity, homosexuality, relationships, marriage, sms language.

Namita Gokhale's works focus on the changing society, the new woman, modern day relationships, and many more contemporary issues. In both her novels *Paro: Dreams of Passion* and *Priya in Incredible Indyya*, Gokhale touches upon the lives of the upper middle class elites and their shallow world. These politicians, arms dealers, social wannabes, Bollywood-has-beens, numerologists and many more ruthless gold diggers portray the rapid changes which characterize today's society. The vivid descriptions of these characters and their equation with love, relationships, careers and money is the central focus of Gokhale's fictional world. In *Priya*, the writer picks up the threads of some of the important characters of her much criticised book, *Paro* and presents them in a new context. Gokhale's primary idea in her recent book is to portray the

different concerns of the growing middle class Indians to establish themselves among the social elites. The novel portrays the roller coaster life of Priya, a girl from a lower middle class background, who works her way up through social and professional ranks to fit as the wife of a lawyer-turned-politician, Suresh Kaushal. In narrating Priya's story, Gokhale touches upon the lives of many other characters, and through their unique characterizations, the readers are given a glimpse of the changing Indian society.

Priya in Incredible Indyya, among many other contemporary issues, vividly portrays the younger generation – characters who are drawn from different strata of the society. These young individuals are unique in their own ways and represent a different face of the modern India. Priya's twin sons, Luv and Kush, characterize the youth of today's times, but are completely different from each other. Every young individual portrayed by Gokhale in this book, whether the daughter of NRI parents or the daughter of a dhobi, is a unique person representing the changed new world. Each one of them – Luv, Kush, Paromita, Monalisa, Suzi, Suki, and many more – represent a definite view of life. They come across as determined individuals who have an ultimate say in their own lives. The physical appearances of these young people are as unique as their behaviours. Whereas Luv adorns safety pins on his left brow and lower lip and wears long hair to portray his style statement, his twin brother Kush – a politician in the making – prefers only white starched kurta pajamas as befitting his position. Paromita, a journalist and the daughter of a Chief Minister, comes across as a determined girl in the way she mixes and matches her outfit – “crinkled cotton skirt with gold khari work motifs, and a white cotton man's shirt with rolled-up sleeves.” (*Priya* 80) Luv's ex-girlfriend, Monalisa Das Mann, a Bengali Sikh settled in USA, is the daughter of academicians and is again a girl with loads of determination and daring. Gokhale's representation of the young generation, whether it is from the cream of the society or the lowest in the social ladder, is done with extreme care in order to project the contemporary lifestyle of Indians. If on one side, Gokhale has portrayed the straight-out-of-Bollywood girls, Suzi and Suki, daughters of leading industrialist, there is also Dayavati, the Dhobi's daughter “studying Fashion Technology” (*Priya* 84) and a designer in the making. These young people, not only come across as assertive and determined characters through their physical appearances, but also project their daring in their choice of careers. Luv demonstrates his free spirit in declaring his love for art, whereas, his brother Kush joins his father's league in becoming a politician; Paromita is a journalist, whereas, Monalisa makes her mark as a writer and publishes her novel “The Unsuitable Bride”, dedicating it to “Aunty Priya: The Desi Mom-in-Law from Hell I never had, and the living inspiration for this book”. (*Priya* 191) This kind of free spirit, frankness and daring can be demonstrated only by the Gen Y and Gokhale projects it authentically through these young men and women.

These free spirited youngsters of the modern India can be better understood as we see them playing the roles of sons or daughters, friends, brothers or sisters, and life partners. It is in their relationships with their family and friends that their real individuality is projected. We see all these characters through the eyes of the protagonist, Priya, the mother of Luv and Kush, who makes these youngsters come alive with her vivid descriptions. Gifted with the power of minute observation and an individualism of her own, Priya is a good homemaker, a caring and understanding mother, a good friend, and a woman with a conscience of her own. As much as she makes herself comfortable with the younger generation by the virtue of having two young sons, these youngsters also feel at ease with her and interactions are much easier between them. She keeps in tune with her young sons, their aspirations and expectations, and even learns to manipulate them with a rare mix of traditional values and modern thinking. In her interactions

with her sons and her personal musings, we get glimpses of the real characters of her sons as well as the other young people. The generation gap is no doubt authentically presented by Gokhale in the clear line of demarcation that these youngsters profoundly advocate between things which can and cannot be discussed with family. They value their privacy and do not hesitate to bluntly demand their own space. Even though Priya is considered as an ideal mother coping up with the whims and fancies of her young sons, she too knows where to draw her line. She is the epitome of motherly love and care and is sought by her sons continuously for their daily needs. Whereas Kush depends on his mother to keep his room clean and arrange his clothes, Luv takes his mother's help to sort out his broken relationship. These determined and outspoken boys need their mother's support whether it is for arranging their marriages or getting family sanction in a homosexual relationship.

Gokhale's presentation of the attitude of the younger generation to commitments and more importantly, marriage, makes the reader aware of the changes which have taken place in the mind set of contemporary Indians. Luv, a free-spirited artist, shows his individuality in his hippie appearance as well as his attitude towards life; however, when it comes to facing his ex-girlfriend, it has to be his mother who needs to cook up a Bollywood-inspired story of his childhood engagement to a family friend's daughter to save his face. Later, the same determined and daring Luv needs his mother to formally propose Paromita and arrange his marriage. Shobhaa De rightly says about the growing trend of young people taking their elders' help in decisions related to marriage: "A lot of kids today are entrusting this all-important decision to their folks – parents, relatives, even well-meaning friends. Of course, the new 'arrangement' is more open-ended and better structured. Devoid of the old 'rules', which prescribed the ghastly 'Dekho' session, the social meetings orchestrated by middle men or women these days work in a more acceptable session." (De) This shift in attitude and values in the new, globalised world is also reflected in the institution of marriage and these are changing and redefining its scope and relevance. The young, beautiful and dynamic Paromita, does not wait for her parents – hopelessly busy in their own worlds – to find a match for her. Rather, she is bold enough to approach the mother of the boy with her own marriage proposal, armed with her own horoscope and detailed bio-data. The 'American-born desi' Monalisa, another daring girl, similarly does not hesitate to approach Priya whom she blames for the breakup of her relationship with Luv. Emancipated, empowered and liberated youth confronted with many trends and choices often rethink on the relevance of this institution and its traditional aspect as Luv does; nevertheless, the frankness with which these young people speak about their relationships and their minds reflect the changing face of marriage in present day India.

Gokhale's *Priya in Incredible Indya* raises many contemporary issues and presents it from the point of view of Priya, the observant narrator. It is through her eyes that we get the younger generation's view on marriage, commitments and relationships. She is gifted with the power of accepting individuals as they are. If she has learned to keep herself in tune with Luv's free-spirited attitude, she is equally magnanimous in accepting Kush's confession of being a homosexual. Gokhale's Gen Y may be independent decision-makers, but when it comes to social sanctions, they do seek the support of their parents. Kush, the new-age politician in the making, confesses to his mother about his relationship with a man and also expresses his desire to marry him. The treatment of different sexual preference is not only brought about by the author in Kush's story, but also hinted in the stories of other minor characters like the handsome cricketer, Gaurav Negi and the President of the Indian Cricket Board, Dhruv Desai. Gokhale authentically presents a new India through the youngsters of today who are bold enough to be open and frank

about their physical relationships and sexual choice to their mothers. At the same time, these youngsters come across as responsible human beings – there is Kush who uses all his energy to find out the missing son of the driver, and Paromita who proves herself to be a caring daughter to her father. The changed face of today’s India is presented by Gokhale not only in the social and political scenario, but also through the new ‘lingo’ used by the younger generation. The conversation of the younger people is peppered with a lot of Hindi words. Commenting on this language so comfortably used by her characters, Gokhale says, “I try to avoid using Hindi as a device but if the word comes naturally, I write it....My primary audience is the Indian reader.” (The Telegraph) Also commonly noticed is the ‘sms language’ which the narrator, Priya, mentions as the “Delhi Acronym Syndrome” (Priya 14) and rightly acknowledges that “...you can’t survive if you don’t know the code.” (Priya 14) As much as parents get infuriated with these cryptic messages – “BK SN....FLT DTL5 FLW” (Priya 15) or “DNT TLL PPA PLZ” (Priya 82) – they have also gradually fallen in line with the new mode of communication. Gokhale amuses her readers with the language of the youngsters which varies according to their whims and fancies – a sudden liking to formal addresses as “Pitaji” and “Mataji” or switching over to such cryptic ones that the traditional parents are left guessing the meaning! However, the youngsters in the book mostly come across as people with great communication skills given the social context of a country where “language and idiom constantly redefine and rearrange each other.” (Davis)

If Namita Gokhale’s *Priya* is considered a satire – “a voyeuristic peep into the shallowness of Delhi’s big-shots” (Mazumdar) – it is indeed a witty novel portraying the changed face of India through the narrative voice of a woman who has a foot each on tradition and modernity. It is through this sympathetic and understanding voice that we see the younger generation placed in a shallow world which poses varied threats and challenges to them. The socio-political environment, the absence of the real family, corruption, money-mindedness, and the many-faceted competition go to explain the real lifestyles and the attitudes of these youngsters. Gokhale juxtaposes the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ in the world of these youths and presents them in a new light, set against the older generation. Ultimately, however, worth noticing is the fact that the older generation (as represented by the narrator) is able to understand and accept the different viewpoint of the youngsters. In this bonding and acceptance, lies the strength of a hopeful and better tomorrow.

Notes:

1. Davis, Anisa. “Paro”. Times Literary Supplement, March 16, 1984.
<http://namitagokhale.com/paro-library.html>
2. De, Shobha. “Love v/s Arranged: *Pyar Kiya to Darna Kya*” in *Spouse – The Truth about Marriage*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2005. <http://www.shaaditimes.com/love/gender-relations/love-vs-arranged-050222>
3. Gokhale, Namita. *Priya in Incredible Indyya*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2011.
4. Mazumdar, Jayeeta. “*Priya in Incredible Indyya* reminds of sexy Paro”. Book Review in DNA – Daily News and Analysis, September 9, 2011.
http://www.dnaindia.com/lifestyle/review_book-review-priya-in-incredible-indyya-reminds-of-sexy-paro_1585054
5. The Telegraph, August 22, 2011.
http://www.telegraphindia.com/1110822/jsp/entertainment/story_14406684.jsp