



## RURAL NARRATIVES IN NAMITA GHOKALE'S *SHAKUNTALA: THE PLAY OF MEMORY* FOSTER WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

**SNEHAL RAHANE**

Ph. D. Scholar  
Dept of English and Languages  
Sandip University  
Nashik (MS) INDIA

**DR. MOHINI R. GURAV**

Associate Professor  
Dept of English and Languages  
Sandip University  
Nashik (MS) INDIA

### ABSTRACT

*India is the largest democratic and agrarian-based country. The village plays an important role in building our nation and society at large. Urban and rural narratives both have shared their own spaces in literature that help the readers to ponder upon the circumstances depicted which may help in finding solutions to the problems that exist in India. Indian rural narratives through literature, art form, cinema, and folklore expose several dimensions of the rural areas. These narratives focus on the village culture, patriarchy, traditions, and the influence of time on village life that has had an indirect impact on women's lives. Rural narratives foster women's empowerment through stories, dramas, street plays, poetry, and novels. Literature is a mirror that reflects the social, cultural, economic, and historical life of human beings. Writers like Namita Ghokale, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, etc, have depicted the life of women surviving in different surroundings and cultures. This paper focuses on the rural narratives and their importance in fostering women's empowerment. Namita Ghokale's *Shakuntala : The Play of Memory*. helps in understanding the struggle of women who reside in rural areas and their quest for identity. Namita reveals the change in the attitude of women and the majority of them are influenced by modernity and urbanization with time. Government schemes and policies for rural development have certainly brought in changes in the mindset of people and have offered women few opportunities to become economically strong and stable. India has to go a long way in developing rural areas and we*

**SNEHAL RAHANE**

**DR. MOHINI R. GURAV**

1 Page



*cannot bask in the glory of few achievements. Literature for sure will help in spreading awareness about the problems and pave the way towards a better future for all.*

**Keywords :** *rural narratives, identity crises, patriarchy, feminism, women empowerment*

## INTRODUCTION

Indian English literature is replete with examples that have rural narratives that help in understanding the social, political, and economic conditions of rural areas. Women writers mainly wrote about rural narratives that focused on female experiences, sexual politics, gender relationships, the status of women in society, and her quest for identity. Development is an ongoing process, which is true in the context of Indian villages. They present the concept of a new woman who is strong, fully awakened, and ready to fight against patriarchal norms. Writers began to treat rural women as legitimate subjects for their novels. In the Indian English novels, the women characters of rural background present the change in their traditional life, and modernity in their search for identity, independence, and fulfillment of their dreams. They are different from the early rural women characters who were illiterate and worked like puppets in the hands of men.

Namita Gokhale is one of the leading Indian English novelists. She has contributed seven novels, two books of short stories, and five books of non-fiction, all are mentioned as remarkable creations of her mind and art. *Shakuntala : The Play of Memory*, was published in 2005 and this novel is an intriguing interplay of myth and history in a rural background. This novel was first published in Hindi edition then later in English. Its plot has not only been borrowed but is also much influenced by the famous ancient Sanskrit play *Abhijanjna Shakuntalam* written by a well-known poet and dramatist Kalidasa in the fourth century. Namita uses Indian myth to develop her thoughts about feminism. She employs Kalidas' classic narrative of love and treachery to illustrate her beliefs about how women have been involved in their slavery and liberation through the picaresque exploits of a turbulent wild girl from the hills named Shakuntala. In the rural narratives, the female protagonist manifests sufficient vigor and courage to question the oppressive role of society, religion, and culture but they avoid the path suggested by the Western feminists.

The fundamental right of every living being is to live and the right to identity makes women fight for. Patriarchy has considered women as secondary and tried its best to keep them dependable on men. Namita Gokhale has been original and heart-rending. *Shakuntala* engrosses in its vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman whose desire is to live on her terms but is frustrated at every turn by the problems and circumstances and more ever it becomes difficult for the age in which she lives. Namita Gokhale combines her extraordinary



gift of narrating a story that includes history, religion, and philosophy using a rural background and ancient setting. This book also raises questions for contemporary feminists and the government about how to improve the conditions of women. The story of contemporary 'Shakuntala' makes us understand the perspectives of traditional educated women and their response to the changing scenario.

Namita Gokhale's novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is regarded as one of her finest works. She has established herself as one of India's most prominent feminist writers. She felt obligated to the renowned poet Kalidasa. Her novel *Shakuntala* is based on the story of the famous play *Abhijnana Shakuntalam* written by Kalidas. In this novel, Namita Gokhale presents the story of a girl named Shakuntala who remembers her past life. The writer has a belief in rebirth and Hindu mythology. According to Hindu mythology, it is considered that the soul never dies as it is immortal. Namita Gokhale shared the beliefs of Wordsworth, Pythagoras, and Plato regarding the transmigration of the soul.

The tale begins with a picture of Kashi, the city of Shiva. The narrator is Shakuntala, who recalls her first encounter with Kashi. She starts dreaming about her past birth. In her dreams, she sees countless visions and begins to consider the meaning of life. Shakuntala adopts the concept that dying in Kashi allows one to break free from the cycle of life and death. But Shakuntala, the destroyer of memory, who died in the city of Shiva in her former life, has not forgotten her past. On Kashi's ghats, a sightless priest guides a young woman through a past existence that links her to the unending cycle of death and rebirth. In the life she remembers, she was Shakuntala vivacious, imaginative, and adventurous, yet, like her fabled namesake, she was doomed to endure 'the samskaras of desertion.'

Shakuntala got married to Srijan. Srijan's known her since she was a child. Srijan was anxious for an heir to burn his funeral pyre, so he chose to undertake the Agnicayana ceremony. Shakuntala believed at the moment that she had failed to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife. Although Srijan was too polite to express his unhappiness with her infertility, the ceremony reminded her of her shortcomings. Srijan once returned from his travels with a gorgeous woman who resembled a crane in flight. As Shakuntala's handmaiden, she had been brought.

Driven by mistrust and jealousy when her husband returns with a handmaiden from his travels, she disguises herself as Yaduri, the fallen lady, and abandons home and duty in favour of the companionship of a Greek traveller she meets by the Ganga. They travel together to Kashi, where Shakuntala surrenders to a world of pleasures, revelling in her long-held desire for complete freedom from norms and bonds. But restlessness soon drives her to abandon this world as well. She adored the woods but yearned to see the world, to roam free like birds and clouds. Her brother Govinda was a man of destiny, and his mission was to restore order and pure Dharma to the world.



Shakuntala wants to travel like a man, but she is helpless because women are still not permitted to travel alone in rural places. of her being female. Females have always faced prejudice in society, with many being viewed as weak and dependent. There has been a favourable shift in the treatment of women in cosmopolitan cities, where women have the flexibility to travel alone for work, shopping, markets, dropping off their children at school, and so on. Women are viewed as holding higher-level positions and successfully carrying out their obligations. Women have reached the moon, yet a few women's successes are insufficient to transform the situation for the entire women's community. One cannot luxuriate in the achievements of a few. She wants to learn religion like her brother. She keeps her ideas to herself since she understands that scripture is forbidden to women.

Through Shakuntala Namita Gokhale's remarks: A man's equal in bed, why could I not desire what men enjoyed: the freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and perhaps find something? (Shakuntala p. 48) Namita has portrayed very boldly the desire of a woman who resides in a rural area where men are given all the opportunities and rights but she has the guts to think or ask for equality

One day she visited the river to worship and saw a man before her. She was captivated by his smile. She said: My life has changed; I feel that I cannot go back to where I have come from. Every limb in my body is alive, and yet I am rested and satiated. Nothing has prepared me for this ecstasy. It defies my life and destiny, disengaging it from the wheel of duty and what should be, throwing it directly into my own hands. (Shakuntala p.110) This statement reflects her urge to live her life the way she desires. Her desire for true love makes her forget that she is a wife and has certain responsibilities. She also compares to men that they can have four to five wives then what makes a woman stop living the life she wishes to. Traditions, customs, religious commandments, and patriarchy setup would never allow a woman to live the way she wants to without any restrictions. This also shows her quest for the identity of herself. Who is she and what is the purpose of life on earth? Why does birth rebirth make a man so very different from herself? Away from inner peace and the bliss of living harmoniously.

When Nearchus asked her name, she replied 'Yaduri'. She no longer cared for her spouse or her home. She wanted to fulfill her desire to travel and so felt very happy now. She said: I took to my changed circumstances with ease. I did not think of the house in the mountains. Yaduri, a young woman, had no history. She lived in the ceaseless present. Only the river travelled with her, its murmur in her lifeblood. (Shakuntala p.129).

The complex variety of the village narratives reconnoiters the interesting juxtaposition of the past and the present through the revolutionary philosophies. Village narratives highlight the evolving role of villages and cities in today's liberalized globalized society. Village-based narratives and novels reflect the complexities of village life, creating a multi-dimensional and timeless story.



## CONCLUSION

By situating the village within a historical framework, they also investigate the shifting of traditions. The novel presents the reflections of contemporary times, when the village with its inherent sense of bonding, close interdependence, traditional values, and kinship among people has been pushed to the margins due to urbanization and technological development. These village narratives have great significance in the early twentieth century in the context of the cultural values and social relationships nurtured in the villages. These villages have continued to change after the 1960s in significant ways in Indian novels. Some novels have tried to spread the need for gender equality through rural narratives. The narratives will range from narratives of oppression and marginalization to narratives that celebrate the rural and the indigenous imagination, to narratives that problematize the rural and depict the various complexities surrounding and existing within it, the presence of a 'united community' and its expulsion processes. Such research work will for sure help to dismantle the binary of the rural and the urban as conventional and modern on the one hand and as idyllic and alien on the other. As a woman, Gokhale empathizes with female characters and understands the complexities of man-woman relationships giving opportunities to women to think and understand their purpose in life.

## REFERENCES

Bhagdikar Vandana. Fiction of Namita Gokhale. New Delhi: Prestige Books International, 2015. Print.

Dicaprio, S. Nicholas. Personality Theories: Guides to Living. Philadelphia: W. B. Saunders Company, 1974.

Ghanashyam.G.A, Manishrai L. Mukta. Women Relationships and Rebellion. New Delhi: Book Enclave, 2013. Print.

Ghosh, Arundhati. "The Impact of Women Authors on Indian Literature." Oxford University Press, 2015

Gokhale, Namita. "Shakuntala: The Play of Memory." Penguin Books, 2014.

Gupta, Jyotsna Agnihotri. "Feminist Utopias – Strategies for Women's Empowerment".

Gender and Literature (ed.) Iqbal Kaur. New Delhi: B.R., 1992.

Erikson, Erik H. "Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers." Norton, 1959

Smith, John. "The Role of Women in Modern Literature." Academic Press, 2005.