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Unveiling the Power of Liberal Feminism in Namita Gokhale's Selected Works: A Journey Towards Gender Inclusivity

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Abstract—Liberal feminism serves as a crucial theory that ignites equality between men and women. The aim of this study is to introduce liberal feminist concepts into Namita Gokhale's selected works. The author of these works delves into women's lives and the reinforcement of men, reflecting the principles of liberal feminism. What sets liberal feminism apart from other theories is its support for men while advocating against male discrimination. Notably, Roman Payne, among numerous liberal feminist thinkers, emphasizes the significance of liberal feminism in his book Hope and Despair. Payne's work conveys the idea that "A woman must prioritize her liberty over a man in order to attain happiness" (Payne, 2008). This notion underscores women's pursuit of freedom and equality. Consequently, this study concentrates on women's lives depicted in Namita Gokhale's works, drawing comparisons to the ideals of liberal feminism.

Index Terms—empowerment, gender equality, liberal feminism, gender roles, equality, discrimination, self-identity

I. INTRODUCTION

Among the various strands of feminism, liberal feminism stands out as both distinct and crucial. It actively advocates for women's rights and fights against discrimination. However, what sets liberal feminism apart from broader feminism is its emphasis on addressing both women's and men's equality and discrimination. The objective of this study is to explore the supportive stance of men towards women and also delve into men's rights. Gokhale's writings portray the multifaceted experiences of women, including their roles as mothers, housewives, working professionals, physically disabled individuals, and even mothers-in-law. Similarly, her works shed light on the experiences of men as working individuals, brothers, fathers, and husbands. By adopting an egalitarian perspective, Namita Gokhale's writings provide a basis for comparison with the principles of liberal feminism. Liberal feminism suggests that society should provide equal opportunities for women while discouraging discrimination against men. This is because both women and men can face discrimination from their own gender, not just from the opposite gender. For instance, a worker (regardless of gender) may face domination by a boss (regardless of gender). This perspective motivated the development of this study in conjunction with the ideas presented in Namita Gokhale's works.

For this study, three prominent works by Namita Gokhale have been selected, namely *The Book of Shadows*, *Priya: In Incredible Indiyaa*, and *Things to Leave Behind*. These literary pieces by Gokhale exhibit elements that embody the principles of liberal feminism. The study itself is organized into various sections, which include a literature review, analysis of results, discussion, and a concluding section.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is a crucial component of any research as it can demonstrate that this study is distinct from all previous studies. Several studies have explored the suffering experienced by women. For instance, Nirmala's article focuses on whether educated middle-class women prioritize the development and assertion of their identities, along with their aspirations for an equal partnership with men. By embracing a balanced view of Indian feminist ideals, Indian women can also anticipate improved cooperation from men, the development of their own identities, and equal partnerships within society (Nirmala, 2010).

Jonathan Crowe's study delves into the perspective of men regarding women, exploring their viewpoints and insights. The researcher has meticulously divided the study into three distinct parts, categorizing them based on whether participants support or do not support feminism. Additionally, the study delves into the primary psychological viewpoint, shedding light on the complexities of human perception. One crucial aspect of the discussion centers around the experience of guilt among certain men who hold themselves accountable for their perceived lack of success. In response to this phenomenon, feminists argue against solely blaming men for such circumstances. Moreover, the

research, from a feminist standpoint, demonstrates that failure and success are universal experiences that apply to all individuals. By drawing upon the Connell theory, this study provides valuable insights into the role of males within the context of feminism (Crowe, 2011).

Another significant study, conducted by Nikodemus Yudho Sulistyo, focuses on men's active participation in feminism. This research highlights the important fact that men also respond to women's issues and actively advocate for freedom and equality. By comparing Kiberd's perspective on feminism, which emphasizes the pursuit of genderless equality (Kiberd, 1985), this study contributes to the broader discourse surrounding gender dynamics. Additionally, Sulistyo's study uncovers how the character Krishna embodies male feminism within the narrative of The Palace of Illusions (Sulistyo, 2021). Through these studies, we gain a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender relationships and the evolving role of men in feminist movements.

Prajjal Saha, in their article "Are women genetically designed to be multi-skilled and multi-talented?" asserts that women assume numerous roles in their lives, including those of a wife, mother, and daughter, and are capable of even more. This article examines the issue of women's multifaceted talents and skills, while also exploring the different stages of women's lives (Saha, 2015).

In another study, Pittman discusses the involvement of men in feminism. The research analyzes Mc Gorry's ideas of feminism to gain insights into the study. Mc Gorry is praised for their feminist viewpoint, suggesting that it is relatively easier for men to embrace feminism. This is because women feminists often have to articulate their perspectives extensively to make society understand, whereas male feminists primarily need to support females in their pursuit of freedom and identity (Pittman, 2016). Honig's study scrutinizes the role of fathers as caregivers and educators for children. It explores how men can undertake tasks traditionally associated with women in their own lives. Men engage with children through various relationships, such as being a father, stepfather, or grandfather. The study aims to compare the different stages of men's lives with those of women, leading to the conclusion that men can perform tasks traditionally ascribed to women (Honig, 2008). A similar study has been done by Kumar (2020) and Jabeen et al. (2022) (Kumar et al., 2022).

The study conducted by Cornish critically examines the statement made by male thinker Soobug regarding the role of men in feminism. It highlights the perspective of certain men who consider it essential to support females and actively participate in collective mobilization alongside women. Additionally, this study delves into the intricate dynamics of women and men within the context of the family unit (Cornish, 1999).

Gardiner's research centers around the analysis of Ursula K. Le Guin's novel "The Dispossessed" and specifically explores the thought-provoking quote, "A person chooses work according to interest, talent, strength—what has the sex to do with that?" (Gardiner, 2005). By employing Friedan's feminist theory, this study dives into the realm of men's feminism, showcasing how feminist approaches have evolved in response to the changing societal roles of women. These theories have demonstrated their efficacy in transforming the consciousness and circumstances of both men and women (Gardiner, 2005; Kumar, 2021).

It is worth noting that there is a notable dearth of studies examining the ideas and perspectives of men in feminism. This scarcity offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to explore the current study within the context of Namita Gokhale's works. A thorough literature review reveals that the selected studies have not yet encompassed the results and ideas put forth by Namita Gokhale, thereby highlighting the distinctiveness and originality of the current study.

In the article "Women's Rights in India," the primary focus revolves around the lives of women. It acknowledges that each country has its own set of regulations and requirements, with specific laws designed exclusively for the betterment of women. Furthermore, the article sheds light on laws that promote the liberal lives of both men and women, such as provisions for free education and fundamental rights (Wilani & Mehdi, 2014).

Through these diverse studies and articles, a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of gender dynamics, feminism, and the pursuit of equality emerges. By analyzing different perspectives and exploring unique contexts, scholars contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender and social progress.

Furthermore, in her article, Emma Bjert én-Günther explores the significance of women and addresses the need to discuss "women's issues". Initially, the article inadvertently referred to "men" instead of "women," reflecting society's prevailing practice of considering men as the norm and women as exceptions. This article identifies and examines various challenges faced by women, including sexual and reproductive health, child-care leave, domestic violence, equal pay, martial law, welfare politics, and education (Bjert én-Günther, 2018). Women are not only fighting for their lives but also for their rights and complete freedom. Through careful observations, this article uncovers the root causes of these issues without undermining men. Its aim is to promote equal rights for all.

Seeken's study delves into the lives of both men and women, acknowledging that society often primarily focuses on the challenges faced by women. The research analyzes factors such as understanding, respect, and strength. It recognizes that in marriage, both partners encounter issues similar to the two sides of a coin (Seeken, 2018). Shreya Suresh Kumar discusses the dynamics of the husband-wife relationship, emphasizing the importance of honesty, both mentally and physically, on the part of the husband. The article encourages open communication, independent decision-making by women, and unwavering support from the husband. These aspects form the core of Shreya Suresh Kumar's discussion.

Powell's study, "Women and Men in Management," explores the experiences of men and women in the workplace. The researchers provide a comprehensive account of workplace issues such as payment disparities, harassment, and strategies for fostering inclusive cultures. This article incorporates Gary N. Powell's recent survey and review, shedding light on new challenges while drawing comparisons to past problems (Powell, 2018).

In Tannen's study, "You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation," the daily and psychological challenges faced by women are explored. The study delves into the complexities of communication between men and women, highlighting societal double standards. While women's work at home is accepted, men engaging in similar domestic responsibilities face societal resistance. Nowadays, both husbands and wives often work outside the home, yet women continue to shoulder cooking and cleaning responsibilities, while men's contribution in these areas remains scarce (Tannen, 1991).

The subsequent article, "Women, Men, and Power," examines theories regarding the existing disparity between men and women. Power dynamics between the genders are discussed, with women being treated less favorably in various spheres, including work, home, and society. Additionally, this article offers insights into understanding interpersonal relationships (Lips, 1991). Eagly's study, "The Science and Politics of Comparing Women and Men," focuses on gender stereotypes. Utilizing a quantitative approach, the research compares the behavior of women and men, with the aim of elevating the status of women (Eagly, 1995).

The literature review clearly demonstrates that no research has been conducted analyzing Namita Gokhale's novels from the perspective of liberal feminist theories. Consequently, this research applies the concepts of liberal feminism to explore the dynamics between men and women within the selected works of Namita Gokhale.

III. DISCUSSION AND RESULT

The current research contains ideas about liberal feminism that can be understood by a discussion with perspectives of liberal feminism theory and Namita Gokhale's selected works. In many places, the researchers found that liberal feminism theory is a more interrelated theory to discover notions between men and women. From the selected works of Namita Gokhale, the researchers found that there are some interrelated correlations between women and men. This makes the researcher to compare the ideas of liberal feminism theory. For instance, in *The Book of Shadows*, the protagonist Rachita is story about exile, strangeness, and forbidden passions, as well as family history. Her character shifts between several levels of consciousness that are yet to be explored. After Rachita's husband death, she led her life unhopeful. She says that,

My best friend's husband had slithered off somewhere, but my fiancé's sister, as unstable a specimen as her sibling, had thrown a beaker full of acid on my face the day after the inquest. (Gokhale, 2001, p. 5)

You have tried me sorely, you have abused my trust! My tryst with time is over! Tell the faithless one, the Dililah, that her betrayal will cost her dear... (Gokhale, 2001, p. 5)

But Rachita didn't continue her unhopeful life. Because she believes that life has multiple ways to live. Moreover, Rachita realises her life has more unhappy movements than happy ones. So she started to live her life without her husband. After her husband's death, she witnessed an acid attack incident by her husband's very own sister. Rachita couldn't control her acid pain, and she thought the acid had been splashed by a woman (husband's sister). Her non-stop thinking is about 'woman taking revenge on another woman'. This point of view reflects in the concepts of Mill's theory, "Add to this the fact that to understand one woman is not necessary to understand any other woman; that even if a man studies many women of one social level or one country, that won't enable him to understand women at other levels or in other countries" (Mill, 1869).

After the acid attack, she decided to live in a different place where no one could disturb her. So she decided her childhood place, Ranikhet. While traveling to the hills, she didn't fear for anything. But her driver had doubts about continuing to Ranikhet. He arranged something for her to stay in the safe hotel. This place looks absolutely jungle memsahib,' he said, a note of concern in his voice. "There must be wild animals around here, not to speak of thieves and robbers. Do you want to go on? We found a nice hotel in Ranikhet" (Gokhale, 2001, p. 8). The taxi driver was getting more and more alarmed. 'Maybe we should turn back now.' he said timidly,' I don't think this road leads anywhere' (Gokhale, 2001, p. 9). In this discussion, the researchers found that as a man, the driver having concerned about Rachita. He provides numerous options for her protection and is also concerned about her stay. Likewise, in reality, many women and men are concerned about their opposite gender. Many people feel at ease with friends who are the opposite gender. They truly understand how to improve their lives in many different ways, such as by making sound financial decisions, selecting the right partners for them in life, and improving their life in general. They are not just friends.

To prove this, Lohanju is an important character in *The Book of Shadows* who always takes care of Rachita. She feels comfortable with Lohanju because he is not bothered about her face and always tells her motivational words. Lohanju gives solace words to Rachita. He doesn't know whether she feels comfortable, but he provides encouraging words to Rachita. She decided to listen to her mind when she lost her face by an acid attack. She is not worried about her past. For Rachita, even the sounds of the animals are familiar but not the society. Every day she meets different people with different combinations. So, she feels every woman and the men are strangers in her everyday life. She did not feel comfortable with the people in society. Lohanju is also a strange person, but he is comfortable. Rachita expressed her

opinion about Lohanju that "He has forgotten how old I am, how old he is. It is as though I am a child again, sitting huddled by the fireplace..." (Gokhale, 2001, p. 12). Lohanju is her motivational partner even though he is a man. This shows gender is not a big problem because anyone can motivate others. The entire words of Lohanju give her strength, which helps her come out from the problem. She tells about Lohanju that, "I have always found his fiction irresistible, I have never doubted any word he has ever spoken. Like this house, he too has taken me in, to hush my sorrow. He was born here, in this house..." (Gokhale, 2001, p. 16).

To discuss the bond between male and female, there is an important discussion to understand the mother and son relationship. In Namita Gokhale's *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa* relationship between mother and son is essential to discuss. Because whenever Luv calls Priya, researchers can identify the true bond between mother and son. In reality, many children do not understand their parents. Parents are the best motivators because they always show their children love. However, some children don't understand their parents and adopt the wrong lifestyle. When they understand that children and mothers are becoming stronger, life in a family will become more stable and happy. "Oh Maa, I need you! I miss you so much –" (Gokhale, 2011, p. 65). Mill says that "All processes are equally good, and all persons are equally qualified for every task or trade; but rather: Freedom of individual choice is the only thing that leads to the adoption of the best processes and puts each operation into the hands of those who are best qualified for it" (Mill, 1869). This idea of Mill is reflected in *Priya: In Incredible Indyaa*. Priya works for her twin son, husband, and her home. So Priya is the highest and more valuable person in the family.

In the novel, *Priya:* In Incredible Indyaa, Priya's husband is natural and doesn't hide anything in his mind. He always gives respect to Priya and her work. After coming to know about the 'sati,' he was confused. He told Priya that "I want to tell you something,' he said, his voice laden with tenderness. 'If something should happen to me, if I were to suddenly die, I would want you to continue living, to be happy'" (Gokhale, 2011). Everyone has their individual life to live. There is no need to lose their life for others. "I didn't want to change the course of my life" (Gokhale, 2011). The changes in everyone's life may change their atmosphere and behavior. At the same time, changes should improve their lives and enhance their path to success.

Luv always likes his mother, and he expresses all the things and he accepts any corrections from his mother. He tells his mother that he admires her for her straightforwardness, smile, and candour. When Priya sees the girls with the entire artificial appearance, she believes they are wealthy and live luxurious lives. But now that she had heard their story, she felt strong, beautiful, and simple because of them. By this, it is clear that Priya wants encouraging and motivational words about her. Not only Priya, but everyone in real life desires for some words of encouragement about them.

There are many customs and traditions involved in marriage that becomes a business. The people follow the same methods for marriage. She displayed no anxiety and shed no tears but kept her head modesty downcast, as Suruli had suggested. The night before the wedding, women of the family and friends, and neighbors gathered to sing and dance (Gokhale, 2016).

After marriage, every woman has to face many situations. And they should be ready to manage all work. Tilottama is the protagonist of the novel Things to Leave Behind. Namita Gokhale correctly points out her condition after the marriage, "She had new and not travelled out of Naineetal before. She drank in all the new and strange sights form under her lowered veil. A vista of hills and valleys swathed in cloud and mist unfolded" (Gokhale, 2016, p. 47).

Women should also be prepared to make money and jewelry from their parental home because they have a tradition that requires dowry in order to lead their family. Namita Gokhale implies this in her novel, "Her mother's jewelry and some of suruli's gold bangles and rings were stitched into a belt around her waist-her, which belongs to her and her alone" (Gokhale, 2016, p. 47). During Tilottama's marriage, her husband refused to take dowry because he stated that he already had enough furniture and money. But his parents and Tilottama's parents didn't get Tilottama's husband's point as necessary (Priyadharshini et al., 2021).

Many women are doing work like men and proving that they can do anything like men. Women are said to be stronger than men by many experts. But many women do not know the exact steps to take in order to advance in their lives. In order to succeed and lead happy lives, women therefore claim their own lives (Kumar et al., 2022). Tilottama is also doing her excellent work at her husband's home. She was perfect as a wife, mother, daughter, daughter-in-law, and caretaker. But her dream diminished by doing perfectly household work. When she realized her unsuccessful life, she started to plan her life. Also, her husband and uncle helped her achieve in her life (Priyadharshini et al., 2021).

Also, in Namita Gokhale's *Things to Leave Behind*, the protagonist's life is portrayed as an emotional and depressed person. The protagonist Tilottama fights for her rights in her family because society always has restrictions on women's life. But Tilottama didn't like to follow other people's opinions. She became emotional and depressed when Tilottama was not allowed to study (Gokhale, 2011). And her family expressed that women are born to take care of their family and children. But Tilottama decides to break others' opinions and planned to study English and Mathematics to improve her knowledge. But her mother-in-law didn't allow her to study. Tilottama didn't expect any help from her family even though her husband and uncle helped her pay her education fees. Also, she encouraged her girl baby to get an education, and she gave more importance to education because she realised that education is the basis for every work. Though many people looked at her as a stranger, she didn't stop her plan to get an education.

From the above analysis of Namita Gokhale's works, the researchers can tell that there is a deep connection between men and women in selected works for this research. In the discussion, it is clear that men are more concerned about their family members. Women are given more importance and are not involved in different roles assigned by the society such as caretaker, wife, mother and so on. These opinions are exact concepts of liberal feminism theory.

IV. CONCLUSION

Women and men are simply different in terms of gender, and while they may hold opposing viewpoints, they may also hold similar viewpoints at times. It is obvious from the discussion that Namita Gokhale stated that the relationship between men and women is a strong one. It's also notable to witness that women were not just for the family, the husband, and the children. Men's concern about women understands this, giving equal respect to their wives, mothers and so on. Liberal feminism is also proclaiming that the prejudice between men and women is plummeting. When women are given opportunities, men are also improving their lives, but their lives are not always without improvement. The future recommendation will encourage and give interest to other researchers to study Namita Gokhale's work. This research focuses on comparing and bridging men's and women's lives. Also, the researcher has found some different spaces for research: psychological discussion, feminism, alienation, loss of self-identity, and rights of women.

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