



‘Women’s Voices and Identity’ in the Novel ‘The Illuminated’ by Anindita Ghosh

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Abstract:

This paper discusses women’s identities in the novel “The Illuminated” by Anindita Ghosh and how they articulate their ideas about themselves through writing. It argues that Ghosh perceives the concept of ‘woman’ as a duality—one who can speak up, yet not make themselves visible. woman’s identity can be understood through this two-sided view of a woman’s existence; her identity exists between two opposing poles: Tradition / Modernism and Individual Identity / Societal Expectations to act in certain ways. Through examining the author’s choice of narrative perspective, portrayal of characters, and uniformity of imagery and theme throughout the text, this project will identify how women(s) express their identities in an aggressive / non-aggressive manner, challenge the patriarchal system limits to their level of identity and define themselves outside of their patriarchal constraints

This paper utilizes feminist and postcolonial theory to place Anindita Ghosh within the modern Indian women's literary canon and reads modern identity.

Keywords: Women’s Voice, Gender Identity, grief, Tradition, Modernism politics, and personal freedom.

The Illuminated is a modern novel set in India. The central characters of Illuminated are a mother and her daughter. A strong connection exists between the mother and daughter. Their relationship primarily has to do with death/funeral, gender identity, political systems, and an individual's right to free will. The novel is a character-driven story and the women's stories represent the themes of individual grief, autonomy, power, and so on within contemporary India. The women of this novel have very distinct lifestyles, class backgrounds and challenges and these challenges create their complex inner worlds which are explored in this writing. The author presents a picture of the multiple lives of women through the various characters within this book. The many issues addressed by Anindita Ghosh, such as love, lust and marriage, allow the

reader insight into not only the characters, but also, an unfamiliar and foreign culture

The author portrays Shashi, Anindita Ghosh, as someone who is growing, developing, and thinking. Anindita focuses on Shashi's development through the themes of self-discovery, emotional struggle, and the search for purpose and meaning in a complicated world. Rather than focusing on Shashi’s heroic qualities as most people do, the author focuses on Shashi's internal struggle, contemplation, and gradual development.

Shashi undergoes transformations through self-discovery, emotional turmoil and a desire for meaning in an ever-changing world. Shashi's character is not portrayed as a heroic figure but rather depicts someone who faces internal struggles and gains confidence gradually through

the journey of self-exploration, self-introspection, acceptance of all things in life and emotional development. In the beginning, Shashi is portrayed to be a reflective person who constantly considers his or her relationships with others. Shashi is a very emotionally vulnerable person as his or her own personal desires or wants are often opposed to what her family and society expect from her. Because of this emotional vulnerability, Shashi is able to identify closely with many individuals in today's world. Shashi's reaction to situations usually alludes to an ability to evaluate his or her feelings first before making a quick decision. Unlike many characters portrayed in fiction or movies, Shashi is a very reflective person who will take his time to question and evaluate decisions made prior to reacting. The character's reactions typically come from his or her natural instincts and emotions rather than impulsive responses or many other factors associated with everyday life. Shashi is characterized by a high degree of emotional intelligence and awareness. Relationships and experiences have a profound effect on Shashi and create confusion, turmoil and inner conflict. Shashi struggles to create balance between his or her own personal identity and the influence of family and society. In terms of emotional support, Shashi's family provides Shashi with support on what is best for Shashi without having the ability to take action on what is best for Shashi. Even when Shashi feels intellectually constrained and unfulfilled, she has always chosen to remain silent rather than express her true feelings. Shashi's outward acceptance offers the reader an understanding of the realities of the imbalance between the expectations imposed upon Shashi by family and her own personal experiences.

Shashi illustrates the modern individual's quest to find meaning in their life. To be continually confused by the lack of information in life on the way forward provides the basis for an

increasing feeling of confusion when pursuing the traditional path. The imagery of light throughout the book is indicative of Shashi's desire to find meaning, and that she is seeking emotional and/or spiritual fulfilment rather than just material success. Anindita Ghosh also states that modern society encourages people to look inward for their own meaning; because the external meaningfulness has failed them, they are no longer able to find their own meaning through belief systems created by outsiders. Shashi's desire for going inward into self-examination shows that she does not currently find emotional fulfilment in the traditional ways of life (for example, through positive family approval or social acceptance). Shashi is trying to find out what she truly desires within herself while the world has become spiritually barren. Sojourning within herself, while simultaneously withdrawing from relationships (and therefore having an emotional distance), is a result of her desire to explore her internal desires for a more realized life. Shashi's withdrawal into solitude demonstrates her struggles to overcome her doubts, conflicts between her emotions and logic, and the gradual development of her self-awareness—characteristics shared by many modern individuals trying to find purpose within themselves. With the character of Shashi, Anindita Ghosh looks to create awareness that personal growth results from life experiences.

As Shashi's daughter, Tara is simultaneously grappling with her own conflict, including how to understand herself as a modern, progressive woman while managing a challenging dating relationship and the pressure of her job. Tara shows her internal conflict through her feelings of being restless, uncertain and emotionally distanced from everyone around her and also from herself. Overall, Tara often feels like "I was caught in between what people were expecting of me and what I wanted to be." This

indicates that Tara is unable to identify very clearly what she is feeling or what her desires are, thus representing a common difficulty experienced by many young people in today's chaotic, changing society. At one point, Tara describes a feeling of being disconnected from her surroundings: "Everything around me doesn't feel permanent or dependable." The transition from a secure feeling of being grounded to an insecurity of being grounded creates an additional layer of anxiety for Tara and illustrates the extent to which she cannot place trust in the traditional ideas or strict identities of the past. In contrast to her mother who would deal with her own conflicts in silence, Tara deals with her internal conflict by experimenting with and moving toward what feels good and exciting to her, as opposed to standing still. The thought that "the idea of being still scared me more than uncertainty" indicates Tara's willingness to act quickly and keep changing her behavior, even when that change has no clear direction. Tara's relationship with Shashi serves as another example of the internal conflict Tara is experiencing. Whereas Tara senses that "there are things my mother is thinking and saying but I don't understand them," in *Illuminated* Tara's struggle between adhering to a more traditional concept of femininity and wanting to be more independent from those ideas, is further portrayed through her relationship with Shashi.

In Tara's story, we see how emerging women's voices are being formed today. Unlike her mother, Shashi, who remained silent and internalised everything, Tara looks for ways to express herself and will no longer allow herself to be stifled emotionally. For Tara, her mother's (Shashi's) inability to communicate or express herself leads her to believe that she must also suppress her emotions. Because of this, she believes voicing her confusion, pain and frustration would be unnecessary or unacceptable.

In Tara's view, her voice is often dismissed, showing us again that women's voices are constrained by social constraints. Tara is caught between following a traditional model of womanhood and wanting to become independent; both ideas create inner turmoil but also help her find out who she really is. Tara's awareness of her need to be able to speak her truth imperfectly represents the change from simply enduring to articulating one's experience. Through Tara, Ghose is providing an evolving description of women's identities; Tara is challenging what it means to be a woman and pushing towards her own sense of self. While Tara is struggling to achieve her own choices, she is also looking for movement and change; she wants to be able to express herself and says no to the notion that a woman's life should be about servitude and compliance. Because of being distanced from her family, coupled with the desire to expand her horizon, she desires a more independent lifestyle.

Among the many characters in *Anindita's* book, Poornima is represented as both the strongest and most empowered woman. She is also Poron - one of the novel's most interesting and truly grounded female characters. Adivasi uneducated woman from the Sundarbans, Poornima has worked for many years as housekeeping staff for Shashi's family against her social and economic disadvantageous position (arising from). Poornima comes from a lower socio-economic class, lacks education, possessed no social capital or has very low financial resources - the majority of which are available only to females in India; however, it is also paradoxical that Poornima has shown more individual agency and strength from within herself than many of the other female characters, who have far greater resources and the security of having higher education or greater social status. Although Poornima's background is humble and constraining, she demonstrates resilience,

adaptability, and even humour, dignity, and self-confidence in the same household she worked in many times before. Because of this, Poornima does not have a passive role: she has always had a meaningful relationship with her employer as someone who knows all about the insecurities of being of a different class or background than the majority of people who hold more wealth, status, and prestige than she does. The reader concludes, through Her story, that she may not be materially privileged, but she maintains a sense of self that deserves our respect through her life experiences.

Noor, one of the main characters in *Illuminated*, serves as an example of the influence privilege and feminist identity have on each other. She's also a Muslim, identified as both a feminist and a lesbian. Because Noor sees herself through multiple lenses of identity (as female, a gay person, and religious), her experiences as a Muslim will be much different than other characters in the book. Noor, in fact, represents a greater level of awareness and political involvement within feminism than the majority of characters in *Illuminated*. Unlike Tara's experience in the novel (which was shaped by her experiences with men), Noor's sense of self was derived from her commitment to her beliefs and actions. By presenting this mirror image of feminism through Noor, one can see the voices of the oppressed (through the experience of a minority) and the LGBTQ communities that have typically been left out of mainstream society. Thus, through this metaphor of light, Noor's character represents the inner light of an individual who defines themselves through the actions and beliefs, rather than by the reflections of society's approval

“Another character in the book, KC Meenakshi, exists in a realm of political vision and shared feminist dreams. A woman who is also a politician, KC Meenakshi creates a fictional country that is led by women—a political option

that challenges patriarchy head-on. KC Meenakshi represents an opportunity for change at the level of systems. In contrast to the other characters in the story, who are operating within current social structures, KC Meenakshi creates an alternate system of government. The character of KC Meenakshi reflects back to the book's overall metaphor of light—not just as the moment when one wakes up, but also as the moment when many wake up together. Besides that, KC Meenakshi demonstrates that women will have the power to deconstruct patriarchy at both an individual level and at the political level as well through their participation in governing and restructuring society.”

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