

'DREAM QUEEN' EVITA VISHAVAN: CHARACTER ANALYSIS OF PREETHI NAIR'S GYPSY MASALA

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M. FATHIMA SANJEETHA, M.A., M.Phil.,
Research Scholar, Research Department of English
Sadakathullah Appa College, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Among the contemporary women novelists Preethi Nair holds a special place in Indian English literature. Her novels are the wonderful depiction of the psychology of the ordinary people. Her first novel *Gypsy Masala* is a highly inspirational novel which portrays the mentality of the people who want to set an identity for one self. The characters in the novel can be easily related with the characters of the ordinary people. *Evita Vishavan* is protagonist of the novel around whom the whole novel revolves around. This article scrutinizes the most wonderful character of Preethi Nair, *Evita Vishavan*.

Keywords: Identity crisis, Immigrant experience, Dreams

Preethi Nair is the currently successful Indian born writer living in London. Her writings are highly motivational. She has written three novels - *Gypsy Masala*, *One Hundred Shades of White* and *Beyond Indigo* (also published in the name "*The Color of Love*"). Her novels serve as a tool to present the inner struggles of women and their passion which were remained hidden within themselves for a long-time. Through her novels she discloses the struggles of women in reaching their goals.

Gypsy Masala is the debut novel of Preethi Nair published in 2000. Preethi Nair has faced lot of problems while publishing this novel. It was rejected by several publishers finally it got published by her own publishing company. She has created her alter ego Pru - Menon for promoting her novel. It is a motivational novel written in a highly inspirational narrative. It is divided into three parts which was named after the main characters of the novel. They are *Evita*, *Aunt Sheila*, and *Uncle Bali*. Identity formation is the main focus of the novel. Besides dealing with the concept of identity crisis it also talks about the Immigrant experiences, individual's relationship with society and family issues. It focuses on the past, present, and the future of the characters. This novel is filled with lot of twists and turns. Preethi Nair has wonderful plot narration disclosing secret knots. Another important uniqueness of the novel is its vivid characterization. Dream of an individual is the most important theme of the novel which is personified as an African gypsy dancer.

The famous psychologist Erik Erikson and James Marcia categorized four types of people who are in search of Identity as Identity achieved, identity diffused, and moratorium and foreclosed in respective of their commitment to strive for their identity. People who are high on the commitment and exploration are identity achieved people who are low in commitment are in the category identity diffused, people who is high in exploration and low in commitment belongs to moratorium and people who is high in commitment low in exploration belongs to the foreclosed category. In this perspective *Evita Vishavan* of Preethi Nair's *Gypsy Masala* belongs to the first category that is high in exploration as well as in commitment.

Identity crisis of these three characters is chiefly dealt in the novel. Each part discloses their secrets, passions and dreams of their life. *Uncle Bali* belongs to a poor family they left him in his muthalali's house where he is in love with is muthalali's daughter. They both eloped and they were helped by the muthalai's wife. Her wife gets pregnant in the poor economic condition unfortunately his wife and child dies and he went to America to practice medicine. After few

years he marries Sheila. She gets pregnant and unfortunately it was become a still born baby. He adopted a child of his cousin- in- law Mollu Vishavan whose parents were died in an accident. Sheila without knowing his past she has lived nearly 20 years. When she came to knew about his past. She doesn't want to live with him anymore.

The novel starts with a line "Go away phantom sore throat, untie the muffler and release me so that I may go forth and conquer all that lies before me".(1) Human beings are trapped in an illusionary rope which won't lead them to chase their dreams. It may be their family, society or their own self. Untying those illusionary rope is a great challenge put before every before individual while following their dreams. *Gypsy Masala* subtitled as a 'Story of Dreams' is the story of an Indian girl, Evita Vishavan living in England and her journey towards her dream. It portrays the individual in chasing dreams. It also depicts the life of the protagonist's family members individually. Even though the novel moves around very few central characters the writer employs lot of character to suggest various thought and ideas to the characters as well as readers. Each and every character in the novel plays a significant role in the novel. Every minor character serves as a pictogram in representing unique characteristics. Evita is not just a character in the novel but she also serves as the narrator of the first part of the story.

Evita is the central character of the novel. She calls herself as a 'dream queen'. Evita is the immigrant girl living in London under the care of her foster parents Aunt Sheila and Uncle Bali. She was a child her parents met with an accident and died. She was brought by her grandmother for a short period and then she came to Aunt Sheila's house in age seven. She is a girl filled with lot of dreams to achieve. But she can't follow her dream due to her fear of losing the relationship she has now. She was twenty seven when the novel opens. As a 27 years old adolescent girl she wants to know about her real identity. She has experienced lot of failures, struggles etc in her life and now working in a monotonous job in a publishing company. She is bored of her droning work. Her passion is to become an actress but she can't express his feeling in family or among her relatives. She reminds of her childhood behaviours which are filled with freedom to express that she can't enjoy nowadays. She says: Twenty years later, Evita plays on and the echo of that child resounds deep within me". (3) She want to return back to her childhood days because it will help her to come out of the illusionary set up and start to question about the things around her. She tells: "I want to bring back the crazy impetuous child just for an instant". (3) She always lives with a fear of abandonment as she was a adopted child to Aunt Sheila and uncle Bali.

Preethi Nair through the character of Evita typically depicts the Indian girl consciousness. Indian girls want to get freedom but they are not ready to revolt against the people who are oppressing them. They are more sentimentalized by the family and social set up. Even though it gives safety and serenity they resist them to act according to their wish. They don't want to break the chain which puts them with an illusionary knot but they wait for the chain to break itself. Evita says:

So like one of those little messages, I have managed myself fit into a bottle and have bobbed up and down for a long time now on the crest of other people's expectation. Desperately yearning for the bottle to break but not quite sure I'll do if it does. (5)

They are afraid to act on their wish because they think that their revolutionary spirit will break their family relationship. They are brought in the mindset that it is unethical and immoral to act against the expectation of the family members and society. They don't want to lose their family for chasing their dreams.

Everyone in the world is born with lots of expectations and dreams. Dreams always give alarming call to all. But people rejects it due to their fear in following dream so they get themselves deviated by involving in different activates. They don't have the courage to go behind dreams because it has chance in ending up as a failure. There are two types of dreams fulfilled and unfulfilled. Fulfilled dream gives happiness to the person whereas unfulfilled dream makes

the person languid. Preethi Nair has symbolized the passion in their heart to chase their dreams as a burning coal is ideal. She writes:

I can't quite recollect the whole dream but I remember fragments of it, such as embarking on a journey and seeing different people with what looked like huge coal inside of them. These coals were lit by their dreams, their hopes and expectations and their wyes either glowed or were dull and listless. (5)

Everyone Evita came across in her life insists something about the philosophy of life to her. As the character 'Tilo' in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni *'The Mistress of Spices'* came to know about American life and the life of immigrants in America through her customers Evita realizes the reality of life through the people around her. Everyone she comes across seems to be a part of her. She finds herself in everyone who is living with the coal in their heart. She says: "I studied her even more closely. Her eyes looked like still puddles; I could see myself in them". (6)

Preethi Nair has also personified dreams as an African Gypsy dancer. Whenever Evita lose her hope and want to drop her idea to go towards her dream gypsy dancer appears in front of her and remains of her dreams and kindles her to follow him (her dreams). Dreams have the power of tempting the person to follow it but it also evokes their fear too. Evita is put in a confused situation whether to follow or drop her journey towards the dream of becoming actress. She don't want to confess her dream to her foster parents because she knows very well that Aunt Sheila will surely don't want her to be an actress. And Evita don't want to hurt her. And she also thinks about the blames she has to face in the society. She doesn't to put herself in a problem and she doesn't want to make herself guilty by acting against her foster parents. Preethi Nair has vividly brought out this mental dilemma of Evita on seeing African Dancer as:

And then my eyes half - opened. I caught a glimpse of an African dancer dancing across my room. He jumped out of my bedroom window. 'Come on', follow me he whispered. I know that this is what I hear clearly but feeling insanely. I quickly on the radio and made my way to the shower. (5)

Through the character of Evita, Preethi Nair has brought out the fear of people in making decision. She says: "I am a dreamer; I dream of infinite possibilities because there must be more to life that just this people became incredibly predatory over their space. May be it is because they want to feel safe and secure. Perhaps there is no real security or safety. Things happen out of blue...So it is pointless to control things". (7) The confidence of oneself is the most important thing to take off our journey towards achieving dreams. "It was then I realised that trying to escape from all that I feared was pointless. It was time to grow up and take responsibility - hence the retreat into bed to think about things". (61)

The immigrant experience of a girl living in London was vividly presented by Preethi Nair through the character of Evita. She has foreign consciousness and she is free to expose it among the people. She mocks at the people who hide their foreign consciousness for the people around them. Evita even though adopts to live in the immigrant country she always reminds of her life in the native land.

There on the mountain, mouth filled with food and conversation. Hot chillies gave fire to the blood and propelled words out with vivacity. Elders told stories whilst youngsters sat in their laps. It took me back to my early childhood when my grandfather would tell me stories in an attempt to put me to sleep. (23)

Evita is open to make change. She was born as a Cancerian but when she came to Aunt Sheila's house she changed her birthday date and she became Scorpion. And then Evita doesn't want to be identified in the name of Mollu Vishavan so she changed her name as Evita Vishavan. When she had the spark of her dream in her monotonous job she resigned her job without a second thought. One incident in her life which made her to accept all the changes she come across in her life is her move from her grandmother's house to Aunt Sheila's house. She says:

All I know was that one moment I was living happily with my grandmother on her farm in rural India, Playing with calves, chickens and goats. Then, suddenly, on a flip of a coin, I had to exchange all that for a battered merry - go- round, swings and slides, and this couple called the vishavans whom I had never met before. (16)

Evita is a very strong personality she has the urge inside her heart in chasing her dreams. She is loving, matured and an independent girl. She is suffered due to alienness of living in the host land and living as a host in a family. Once she understood the love of Aunt Sheila and Uncle Bali she expresses her love for them. She respects their feelings. When she came to know about the past life of Uncle Bali she doesn't revealed to aunt Sheila because she didn't revealed it o Aunt Sheila because she is feared to leave Aunt Sheila. She is very bold. She is daring enough to crack the hurdles to acquire her dream. She says: "Yes, I had fears, but they dissipated the moment I believed and when I believed I saw. I had seen the African Dancer. I had already obscured the boundaries between the practical and illogical." (64) At the end of the chapter she says: "When all the excuses that have barricaded fear finally tumble down, there is nothing more to do but go forward and go do whatever you have to do and be whoever you have to be". (67) Preethi Nair in *Gypsy Masala* talks about the four types of people and their terms in following dreams she writes:

He's not as far as people think but few really find him. Some make it their life's work; some come so close but then for reasons that appear mysterious only to others decide to turn back. There are even many who know his exact where about but decide to leave him be, because they know that life can never be the same once they are touched by him. You do know that, don't you? When you follow your dream, your fears will follow you. (29)

He here refers to the African Dancer who is nothing but the personification. Among the following category Evita belongs to the first. She has dream and she decides to follow her dreams and she is ready to ready to face the problems while chasing dreams she is bold enough to demolish the fear within herself on behalf of following going towards dream which can't be predicted. Her boldness and courage helps her in developing her own personality. She is very optimistic in thinking she says "People have a choice in the hand they play. It is all a matter of choices - make your choices with full heart and an open mind and you will never go wrong". (39)

Evita Vishavan is not like a usual character we come across in the literary pieces. She is a symbol of the personality of each and everyone. Like ordinary people her life is filled with lot of expectations and hope. She wants to fly freely like birds. She is courageous but sometimes fearful. Her energy and confidence really inspires whoever reads her. She knows her happiness relies on herself not on theirs when she finds her fiancé having affair with another girl she boldly moves out of that relationship with lot of hope. She had faced lot of emotional break ups in her life. First one is the death of her parents then moving away from her grand ma and living with uncle Bali and Sheila etc. She knows very well that the feeling of fear and the intoxicated state are the first things which will catch us when we decide to follow our dream.

She is a confidante, dynamic, round character. She firmly stands in reality. Even she has emotional, sentimental and mental weakness like a normal human being. She is filled with confidence and hope for future. She believes that: "This is the land of possibility where intentions are set and dreams manifest into reality". (28) She is valiant enough to take risks in her life. The message Evita leave for the people who are filled with dreams is "Have patience and all will be revealed to you when you are ready. Focus hard on your intention and then let go if you do this he (dream) will surrender himself effortlessly". (30) Evita Vishavan is truly a highly inspiring character who has huge impact on the readers who is in dilemma whether to follow or drop their dream. Preethi Nair's character Evita Vishavan is an embodiment faith, hope, and positivity who will inject her personality to the readers. Surely, Evita is magnificent characterization of Preethi Nair who will instigate the happiness of life.

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