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**Title of the Book:** *The Dark Abode*  
**Odia title:** *Gambhiri Ghara*  
**Author:** Dr. Sarojini Sahoo  
**Trns. By:** Mahendra Kumar Dash  
**Publisher:** Vadodara, Gujarat: Indian AGE Communication.  
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Dr. Sarojini Sahoo, a renowned South Asian novelist and trendsetter of feminism in the contemporary Odia literature is well known for her frankness while dealing with topics related to females or feminity. Although popularly known as a feminist writer for the type of theme she deals with, there is a humanitarian touch in her works. In the words of Linda Lowen, an eminent American journalist, “Sarojini Sahoo has written extensively as an Indian feminist about the interior lives of women and how their burgeoning sexuality is seen as a threat to traditional patriarchal societies” (Wikipedia). She feels the true pulse of a woman and pens that down in her novels. Originally written in Odia as *Gambhiri Ghara* by Dr. Sahoo and translated into English by a software professional Mr. Mahendra Kumar Dash, the novel pictures the contemporary virtual life and sexuality focusing on the binary role that her protagonist Kuki plays.

Exploitation of women in various aspects has been pertinently portrayed by the author in the narration of virtual love story of her protagonist Kuki. Kuki is overpowered with the basic male instinct of women subjugation in her domestic life with Aniket (her husband) as well as in her love life with Safiq (a Pakistani painter and her lover). Aniket blames Kuki for everything that happens in their family and at the same time Safiq too exploits her with his dream of a utopian world where there would be none other than these two lovebirds. But latter, he shatters her dream by admitting about his polygamy and adultery.

To show the virtual love story of Kuki and Safiq, the author has employed a contemporary technique to start and develop relationship. Like any other people, Kuki and Safiq exchange emails and their personal information with each other. Since both of them are married, have children and lead their individual domestic life, their love for each other could be considered illicit for any ordinary person. But they have never tried to cross their social and cultural boundary and meet with each other, rather they prefer to wait for the proper time to come. Being far away from each other, their emotion and feelings are reciprocal. Although, both of them belong to two different nations, political boundaries could not create any obstruction for their love.

The concept of marriage is presented as a burden, which is true for most of the people. The pious relationship that is created and strengthened through marriage, at times

becomes a yoke for the couple to carry on till death. The conjugal relationship between Kuki and Aniket is presented as a contract that cannot be defied. Kuki expresses her notion about marriage as, “ Marriage is boring, true! A contract to be honoured till death. An institution that fetters one into slavery and formality. But the moment you disregard the norms of married life, you realize how your existence itself is questioned and how you become helpless and isolated” (Sahoo 2008: 61). But the fact is, to question on someone’s existence is applicable only for women. Men rarely become helpless and isolated; rather they are excused by their family and spouse and accepted unconditionally. A bright example of such disparity has been presented by Dr. Sahoo in the form of Kuki and Safiq, although she has not let Kuki’s secret affair to be exposed before her family or society. It may be because she is well aware of the Indian patriarchal family and how it treats women folk if they commit something erroneous.

Dr. Sahoo being more a humanist than a feminist has appositely portrayed the compromising nature of women as well as their sorry state in various aspects. Although married, Kuki is debarred of experiencing the bliss of connubial life. No doubt she has physical relation with her husband but each time while copulating, she feels as if being raped. Kuki as a representative of Indian women, expresses that she has not experienced what orgasm is. Moreover, she has not been kissed by her husband for long 14 years. The book also shows, how a woman is treated by her husband in most of the Indian contexts. Kuki is not the better half of her husband but a need for him. He does not want her but need her in taking care of his wardrobes, home and children. She is presented as a bridge between her children and their father and other members of the family, which is one of the primary duties of Indian women.

The typical Indian concept that the husbands are the masters of their wives, has been presented brilliantly. The authority of such a master called husband is shown in the inhuman act of Aniket when he slaps Kuki for drinking water from a roadside stall. For some men like Aniket, wives are not human beings with their own pleasure and pain. Rather they are inanimate objects or properties of their husbands who can use them in whatever way they like. The author has portrayed the possessiveness of man over his wife in the form of Aniket and Kuki; as for Aniket, “Kuki was his property; he would scold her, beat her, love her, adorn her with sarees and jewellery and Kuki would accompany him like his shadow at parties and picnics he went to” (Sahoo 2008: 48).

Another such instance could be traced where Safiq, the lover too speaks to Kuki as if she is a mere showpiece of a house.

“I will put you in the glass showcase and polish you everyday. Keep you glittering and will honour you, squeeze you and hold you tight all night. I will let you carry me on your pillow right by your side, kiss you good night and hold you all through the night” (Sahoo 2008: 87).

Through this novel, the author has also depicted the wretched condition of some Indian women who feel themselves caged, not inside the iron bars but within the restrictions of their society and culture. The protagonist Kuki, who is an epitome of such women, admits of her caged life before Safiq. “You know Safiq, there is hardly any difference between you and me. Both are caged and both are tortured” (Sahoo 2008: 144).

Although from the superficial level, the novel appears to be a love story of two married people, it has some serious themes and topics like terrorism, politics, jurisdiction, etc. It also shows cultural diversities between two countries, when the lovers discuss about their respective religion, Gods and Goddesses, attitude towards life and society. Dr. Sahoo with her vast knowledge in various fields shows the inter relationship of the state and individual. "I still believe a nation is nothing more than an individual. The whole nation is administered by an individual's moods and wishes if not whims and fancies. And the ruler is just a human being. Whatever the USA is doing is little more than the personal agenda of George Bush. So, too, isn't Pakistan a puppet of Musharraf? Internal conflicts or problems are actually conflicts between individuals or their ideologies" (Sahoo 2008: 172).

The impact of terrorism over an individual and state has aptly been written. Terrorism, like hydra, goes on spreading its tentacles to allover the world and also devours the individuals as a deadly epidemic. It has no longer been restricted to only a few nations that can be rooted out easily. Its impact on the individual can be witnessed through the state of Safiq who has been victimized and imprisoned due to a false allegation against him regarding his connection with some terrorist activities. "He had lost his job, his self-respect; he was a vagabond today. Perhaps he had retreated to a corner of his room like a defeated soldier" (Sahoo 2008: 155).

Along with the story line, the novel presents 23 nude female sketches by an American poet painter Ed Baker. Perhaps, the novelist has included those sketches to show that females are not objects to be used, reused or enjoyed. Rather they are also the human beings with flesh, blood and other biological organs.

Like Kamala Das, Dr. Sahoo has been very bold enough to project everyday's conjugal affair of a family. Kuki is the embodiment of an educated homemaker who cannot go out of her home to work due to some objections from her husband or family but everyday she is insulted and blamed that she does nothing significant and rests at home. Dr. Sahoo has given a vent to the unspoken emotion of the middle class housewives. Domestic incidents that cannot come to the limelight due to some social inhibitions have been pictured in a lucid manner. Kuki leads an isolated life in the midst of her family. She does not have any friends to share her feelings and ultimately she diverts towards social networks to express herself where she meets with Safiq.

In most of the Indian families, every decision is taken by the patriarch, as Indian society is patriarchal. The concept of Ardhanārīshwara (half male and half female) is found only in the scriptures. It has not yet properly attested in the families. In most of the times, a female member of the family has to sacrifice or compromise with her dream, aspiration, body, soul or desire. As depicted by Dr. Sahoo, a pillow stands as a barrier between Aniket and Kuki once his sensual hunger is satisfied. Kuki too like any other common woman expresses, "I am no goddess: I possess no divine powers. I hunger, I thirst, I crave for sex. I have my own aspirations and ambitions" (Sahoo 2008: 54). But unfortunately she cannot express herself before anyone, as expression becomes a taboo for her.

At times people come to cross roads and unable to choose a definite path for themselves. Similarly, Kuki gets entangled in the clash between her emotion and consciousness. Although, she is with her young age lover and husband Aniket, she is still lured by the

alluring words of Safiq. At the same time, she is also driven by her consciousness of being a wife, a mother and a daughter in law, which restricts her to openly enunciate her love for Safiq.

Quite a good number of love poems can also be found in the novel while the two lovers exchange their mails with each other. Although written by Safiq, who understands only sex, these poems present what love actually means without the description of any physical desire.

The magical power of love can be traced in the novel. It shows, how a butterfly like person be changed into an ideal and dedicated lover by the magical charm of love. Safiq, who was involved into polygamy as well as adultery with around 52 females, turns into an ideal lover who always proves to be a protective blanket for his beloved and does not want her to fall into any kind of hitch. “It was Safiq – “My sweet angel, Rokshana.” But why had he used a fake name? Perhaps to avoid being detected by the military junta? Perhaps in order to avoid landing Kuki in trouble” (Sahoo 2008: 171).

In a nutshell, this is a piece of work presenting the miserable condition of an educated housewife of a middle class family and how she gets entangled in her duties and responsibilities towards her family. It would not be a blunder to mention that, every woman, may it be a teenage girl or an experienced homemaker, everyone can empathize with the protagonist. The title of the novel *The Dark Abode* has rightly been attested with the life of Kuki.