

The Portrayal of Subjective Anguish, Forfeiture, Veracity, Affection and Conviction in Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*

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Abstract

Namita Gokhale is a distinguished short story writer and suffragette novelists in Indian Writing in English. She was born at Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh in the year 1956. She completed her education in English Literature from Jesus College and Mary College, Delhi. Gokhale surpasses her characters to bridge a gap between Indian writing in English and provincial languages. She has written nineteen books which consists of short stories, fictions and non-fictions. Being a feminist writer, she delineates women's pain of seclusion, corporal disorder, conceptual heaviness, discomforts, sentiments, moods and perceptions. She reflects the excruciating life for a woman, her painful experiences and her quest for survival. The foremost purpose of this research paper is to showcase the personal grief and loss, veracity, affection and conviction in Namita Gokhale's well-known novel *The Book of Shadows*. She portrays herself as a protagonist, an acid attack survivor, loser of her love and an alienated entity. Rachita, the protagonist of the novel, serves as a replica of Namita Gokhale. Rachita suffers all the oddities and being an emancipated woman, she finds solitude in the Himalayan hills as she spends her childhood there. She searches to fill the void in order to find true comfort.

Keywords: *Veracity, affection, conviction, personal grief, loss, mental pain, loneliness, self-identity.*

Namita Gokhale is the significant name in Indian English Feminine Literature. She has bagged several awards in the field of literature. She is the pioneer of Yatra Books and Jaipur Literature Festival which were founded in January 2005 and 2006 respectively. Each of her books maintained the nature of a subjective quest, a voyage of self-identity. Gokhale espouses the skill of recounting a works of fiction. She demonstrates the woman's domain with great meditative strength and legitimacy. She exposes a journey within to discover the secluded realization of her women character. She unveils the blatant veracity of the modern society. She

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explores the nature of genuineness, affection and conviction. She gives a flamboyant and vibrant voice to the enduring chronicle of manipulation and exploitation of women. She presents herself as a male-conceived woman. She reflects the suffering and pain of women who dares to contravene the prearranged codes of conduct. She has straggled the evolution and growth of her protagonist's right from their childhood. Her peculiar understandings have fashioned her works. Her noteworthy literary works are as follows:

Paro: Dreams of Passion, (1984), *Gods Graves and Grandmother* (1994), *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996), *The Book of Shadows* (1999), *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* (2005), *Priya: In Incredible Indyya*' (2011)

The Habit of Love (2012), *Things to Leave Behind* (2016), *Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusions*, (2017), *Betrayed by Hope: A Play on the Life of Michael Madhusdan Dutt* (2020) and *The Blind Matriarch* (2021)

About the Novel

Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows* (1999) explores the nature of genuineness, affection and conviction. It describes the story of audacious Rachita Tiwari who is a dynamic University Professor in Delhi, whose fiancé Anand, has slaughtered himself, and in retribution, his sister threw acid on her, which has left her perpetually stained. She is anguished by this battering. The psychological grievance that she experiences is much more concentrated than corporeal discomfort. Rachita seeks a shelter in a distant and incoherent household in the Himalayan hills which becomes stabbed by the voices that sing from the practicalities of her new home except for the company of a primordial and enigmatic manservant. She is watchful not to look into the mirror and frightens to the world because of acid attack. She has no longer trust on others and paints and re-paints her nails a bright red. She retreats into herself and encounters for her rationality. She lives with an inheritance of a host of captivating feelings.

Aims and Objectives

- i. To portray personal grief and loss, veracity, affection and conviction
- ii. To delineate feminine characters as liberated, emancipated and conqueror

Research Methodology

As far as the research method is concerned, the investigator has used qualitative approach. He prefers close reading of the text which is associated with varied themes of the prescribed novel. This helps to portray the subjective anguish and forfeiture, veracity, affection and conviction in Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*. The said research can be comprehended by reading a text which assists in interpreting the major aspects of the novel. This obviously creates stylistic and statistical indications from texts so that inclusive evidences about hypothetical exploration and its amalgamation with scientific progression can be envisaged and put before the readers extensively. Consequently the researcher has construed the study for attainment of new insights.

Literature Review

Literature review is the considerable feature which examines the earlier investigator's observations on the hypothetical theme. Here the researcher has depicted the peculiar anguish and forfeiture, veracity, affection and conviction in Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*. He interprets Rachita's life before the readers and her spirit of liberation and emancipated woman. He has demonstrated the evidences wherever essential. This literary review is anticipated in the bibliography at the end of the research paper. Researcher has mentioned the following references as a part of literary review.

1. Jung, C.G *Aspects of Feminine*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.

Here researcher has mentioned epitomes in the communal realization of men and women, inner equilibrium, intricacy of women etc.

2. Ghanashyam.G.A. & et.al. *Women Relationships and Rebellion*. New Delhi: Book Enclave, 2013.Print.

In this article, it is clarified that women's roles and individualities are formed by their relations and they rebel against patriarchy with a great bravery.

3. Tiwari, Sandhya. *Transfiguration and Transformation in Namita Gokhale's The Book of Shadows*, Sahityasetu, ISSN: 22492372, Issue-2, March-April 2020

Here the researcher explains the mystical and emotional alteration of Rachita Tiwari. It also depicts narrative transformation in Rachita's life.

4. Rani. U. & et.al. Images of Women in Namita Gokhale's Works. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 2018, p.480-484

Namita Gokhale has projected her feminine characters as a rebellion, uncontrolled, contemporary, robust, searching their own distinctiveness, their supernatural change, as a healer and guardian of custom etc.

5. Priyadarshini. Women towards the Corporal Illness: Feminism Based Study on Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*, *Bodhi International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts and Science*, Vol-3, Issue-2, January 2019

The researcher has delineated an appearance of psychosomatic, demonstrative and unworldly struggle of a woman. Her sense of self, internal disorder, evolution, psychological rejoinder is revealed methodically.

6. R. Sarathkumar & et.al. Feminism in Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*, *Changing Paradigms in Cultural Context of Literature*, Nov 2023

The researcher speaks about the emotional complexity, masculinity and mystical authorization of women.

Explanation of Index Terms

In order to comprehend the details of the prescribed research, it is essential to get acquainted with the index terms of the research.

Veracity

Veracity means faithfulness, accuracy, correctness, and trustworthiness of evidences presented in a story. It is essential for structuring reader engagement and making a story genuine. The description is reliable with certainty and creates a sense of believability and commitment for the reader. The characters appearance seems truth and real. In a chronological novel, the characters and events line up with ancient chronicles and recognized milieu match with historicity. In an imagined novel, the behaviour of characters is authentic and unswerving. In realistic fiction, characters and their actions are as per the social context.

Affection

Affection refers to a constructive sensation and emotion of fondness, love, or attachment for someone. It is basically used to investigate several aspects of social associations, including household, idealistic love and acquaintance. Familial regard deals with adoration and precaution between paternities and offspring. Idealistic warmth is magnetism between individuals in a quixotic relations. Temperateness and partiality is witnessed in a companionship love. Affection is described through words, monologues, symbols, gestures, actions, body language etc. It reveals through thoughtful construction individuals and nature.

Conviction

It refers to a character's resilient confidence or estimation that stimuli their activities and choices. It can also be an ethical attitude that forms their conduct. It is an ultimate component in character enlargement which drives a plot and central idea. It indicates a firmly held faith or judgment, intensely entrenched in a character's temperament. A character's verdicts can edict their selections, enthusiasms, and overall demeanor. They can be imbedded in a character's moral code, persuading their conclusions regarding right and wrong. Convictions can be exposed through discussion, engagements, and communications with other characters.

Discussion

Physical and Mental Instability of Rachita

The Book of Shadows is an autobiographical work which replicates the novelist's lifespan intensely. It is about individual anguish and forfeiture. Gokhale was analyzed with cancer in her late thirties and she her husband too. She showcases her anxiety and discomfort in the novel. Gokhale delineates the portrait of the protagonist Rachita Tiwari, a Professor of English Literature at Jesus College and Mary College, Delhi. (TBS: 31) She falls in love with Anand. Later they got married with one another. Although they love each other yet they have recurrent arguments without any ostensible motive and without any attention. Conventionally women were not indorsed to instruct themselves because the conformist Indians thought that the understanding of books will lead the woman onto the path of devastation. Rachita once could not control her emotions and had a sexual discourse with a person. When Anand realizes this debauched and extramarital behaviour of Rachita, he became panic and frustrated. He was incapable to exonerate her. Therefore he decides to end his life. Ultimately he finishes his life by committing suicide. After Anand's death, his sister got furious and out of revenge, she threw an acid on Rachita's face. Rachita desired to wash her face but she didn't find water. She

tolerated the discomfort mutely. Now Rachita, being an acid attack victim became a woman with physical and mental instability.

Rachita's Reaction after Acid Attack

Rachita estranges herself from her acquainted environments in the city of Delhi after an acid attack and transfers to the Himalayan hills in order to restore, to hide and to disremember. (TBS: 6) She prefers to live in a state of isolation, a phase of colossal discomfort and solitude. She says, "After I was discharged from the hospital, Delhi appeared a wilderness of heartbreak and pain." (Aspects of Feminine)

After acid attack, she dares not to look in the mirror for couple of days. She has been engulfed with ridiculousness and intellection. She asserts,

Even my fingers do not identify the altered delineations of my nerves, of the incapacitated epithelium. The face is the mark of identification and it gives us uniqueness in this creation. For women, their face is the most significant mark of distinctiveness and splendour. To live with a scratched face is like living without identity. (The Book of Shadows)

Gokhale reveals the reality:

In India, we respect woman as a goddess. It's very pitiable that some people make her dupe of their voracity or distrust. The sufferers of acid attack face a discernment from society and they become isolated. They are disgraced that people may glare or giggle at them. Because of this, they vacillate to leave their households dreading an adversative response from the outside world. (Women Relationships and Rebellion)

The same thing happened with the protagonist Rachita. In a fragmented state, she senses that all affection and contentment are no more than hallucination. Man can squeeze dissatisfaction, depression and conquest effortlessly but for women taking up merriment is unproductive and useless. After acid attack, Rachita decided not to accept a job and to cater her needs. She became the object of loneliness and barrenness. Here Gokhale shows the moods of sadness, seclusion and depression of Rachita. Thus she loses the love of her life.

Gokhale shares the experience of Rachita after her acid attack. When she comes out of the house, she uses to hide her face so that no one can see her acid attacked face. Later she realized and changed her inner mindset. She succeeds in managing her life successfully. She learns to enjoy her life without considering others concern. She did not allow others to interfere in her life.

She tries to forget her painful experiences. She always use to make up her face before acid attack. Later, she takes shelter in painting her nails. Every day she changes the colour of her nails. (TBS:62)

She only focuses on her appearance and not to her face. She doesn't consider about her face and future. Rachita started listen to her own mind rather than others. Even though she faced loneliness but didn't lose her hope. She finds her own way and makes her life optimistic. Rachita became the feminine entity who solved all the complicated problems in her life with creative solutions. She rise up once again after the great acid attack. She finds an opportunity in adversity and makes her life bright. Thus she furnishes her best part in life. She faces the phobia courageously. The encouraging words by her father soothes her scars on mind. Rachita thus achieves her goals in her life without considering social obstacles.

Question of Survival

The novelist, projects the question of survival of her protagonist Rachita. Rachita's lover Anand was younger than her by seven years. He commits suicide in his room and kept a suicide note nearby his bed. There is roughly uncommon between Rachita and Anand. He was not happy with the relationship with Rachita. He thinks that Rachita has abused his trust. He compares Rachita with faithless Delilah as mentioned in the Bible. Ultimately due to frustration and grief, he finished his life for no reason. This news reached at the every corner. The press reporters noted this and published her acid attack face in every newspaper. Reality of acid attack made known to all. Anand's lenient, malevolent and stupid act of self-destruction, weakness and sensitivity made her calamitous. His demise ended contentment of Rachita. She frequently tried to survive with the genuineness. "With a spirit of retribution, Anand's sister attacks Rachita with acid. Thus somatic falsification and psychological torture surpass her concurrently. She does not dare to see in mirror." (TBS 3)

She disentangles the fabricated thought processes and begins to construct a world of her own. She voyages far inaccessible into the world of phantasms. It advocates the sub-conscious cravings of her inner-self.

Rachita as A Victim of Mental Torture

Rachita's likes and dislikes sets her free from past memories but not from the pain. She boldly struggles with acid attacked face. Her loneliness makes her to suffer everything. She gets

separated from her friends and relatives. Thus she becomes the victim of mental torture. In her oddities, her father encourages and supports her, tells her to behave boldly and to face with this inhumane society with audacity. She strengthens herself to face with the world. She attempts to forget her miseries, sorrows and physical illness. She and her servant feels lonely when they were in journey. She narrates, “We are identical individuals in a very bus, towards the completion of the very elongated journey, we sense and recognize our distinct terminus and yet the expedition which had terrified us together has interwoven a sagacity of affection between us.” (TBS: 68)

Rachita takes a Refuge in Kumaon for Mental Peace

Finally Rachita finds mental peace, solace and solitude and filled the emptiness by taking refuge in the hilly area of Kumaon, Ranikhet. Thus Rachita, the female character, in the novel is the emblem of love, lust and death. Rachita describes her purpose to come at Ranikhet, “I have arrived in this area to get mental peace, solitude, healing and to forget the past.” (International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development)

The house was an inherited belongings built during the British time and was passed down to her uncle while they left India after liberation. She hears the sounds of ghosts in the house. She experiences ecstasy and insecurity there. After this occurrence, she keeps distance herself from the society as well as from her family. When she enters Ranikhet, she was welcomed by the cool breeze, the house, the Bhotiya dog, Lady etc. Being estranged and separated from her communal life, Rachita was emotionally distressed and was experiencing delusions in the house. “She initiates to love her isolation. She spends her time by reading the read and unread, listens to house keeper Lohaniju’s anecdotes and walks in the forest. Thus she restores her life.” (TBS: 6-7 18)

In the house, she feels eccentric presences prowling in the obscurities and she attempts to combat the qualms that challenge her both deliberately and involuntarily. The deformity of her face hints her to live a life away from the multitude in the old hill house. In this house she has no one to converse except an eighty year old caretaker of the house. She has been freed from her mortified cognizance.

Her judgments are often dispersed with lines from the poems of Emily Dickinson, Mahashweta Devi and other fictional figures, which instigate to develop on her anxieties. (TBS: 12)

Emotional Restoration

The readers witness the emotional renovation in her. She lives in the world of fancy and develops a world for herself. She begins to dislike her bodily presence. The acid attack that had mutated her face changed her thought. She continuously waited for the dawn in her life every day. She had set a mundane for herself. The darkness left a deep scar on her. She remained happy in her imagination. She sat at the window and gazed at the trees and mountains.

The responsive disturbance, irrationality, perception, intolerable soreness and solitude after the acid attack was excruciating for her. She prevented herself from getting scared by past occurrences. (TBS: 32)

Rachita tried her life to manage up with the certainty and move on towards the future with enough perseverance. Rachita shares her experience, “My predisposition tells me to lie low, to dodge detection, to pause for the return of métier and endurance.” (TBS)

She kept herself busy reading but could not keep herself from the agony, which constantly sinistered her regardless of her substantial beliefs.

Injustice and Oppression of Women

Namita Gokhale's raises her voice against the injustice and oppression of women. She fights for the rights of women. Her novels represents women's pathetic condition and their problems. Her novel *The Book of Shadows* reveals agony, sorrows, injustice and degradation of women as well as their advancement. She portrays the physical harm, self-realization and self-identity of Rachita. Namita represents the prime traits of Rachita as a perfect woman, obedient, self-denying, maternal figure, commendable home maker and woman of the masculine society. She shoulders hall sorts of familial and social responsibilities successfully. Being a protagonist, she is also fluctuates in the obscurities of her life. Through Rachita, Gokhale delineates feminist ideology. She wants women to distinguish themselves and have to develop their life. At the beginning of the novel, Rachita tries to elucidate her hostility to her children at school. She feels very much dejected about her estrangement. First of all, her husband's bereavement makes her alienated and secondly, after her acid attack, she became alienated from her family as well as society.

Celebration of Womanhood

Namita Gokhale celebrates womanhood in her books by obliterating depression and renovating the forte and pliability that only a woman, who is an epitome of Shakti, can exhibit. Through the women characters, Gokhale liberates women from anxiety, insecurity, chaos, pain and anarchy. The protagonist Rachita finally obtains and retains her spirit of womanhood. She employs the tool of therapeutic experience for Rachita in order to wipe out her sadness. Gokhale works as the replica of Rachita. She shares:

I feel if Rachita would go back to the town and have plastic surgery so that she can live healthier life. But this is not imaginable. In the same way, I also favored to live in the psychosomatic world of the feelings which was like a renaissance for me. (TBS)

After acid attack, Rachita was totally disturbed and was suffering from uniqueness. Later she recovers herself and becomes an object of Shakti and power. She breaks the bondages of weakness and her strength deconstructs the spirit of womanhood. She comes out of the devastation with a great resolution on her own and retains will power to live her life as a question of survival. She gives up negative thoughts and thought of committing suicide. On the contrary, she faces the society courageously. Thus she regains her strength and anticipates her future in an optimistic way.

The Role of Nature and Supernatural Elements in Recovering Rachita's Life

The house in which she entered proved broadminded. It welcomed and accepted her without preconceived ideas. It calmed her mindset and psyche. It consoled her tragic feelings. It gave her thorough happiness and carefree life as it gave in her childhood days. It revived her memory and old days. At the end of the novel, the readers perceive Lohaniju speaking about the locality of the house. The validation through Lohaniju's arguments can undoubtedly be the only motive for the bereavement and anguishes of the convicts of the house. Thus nature helps to recover Rachita from her depression. Supernatural elements also played a crucial role in recovering Rachita. Lohaniju gives her a journal in which she finds intrigues about the house and residents. He tells about the British inhabitants and the manners they were penalized for their wrongdoings by Airee, their traditional god. Rachita says about this condition, "All human beings anchorage their specific indicators of the others. In the broadest sense, every phobia is the result of some form of estrangement." (TBS)

There is no discharge from authenticity. It constantly encompasses itself to imaginings. Rachita was under intemperance and indulged in her antibiotics and anxiolytics and there was a

continuous effect of bhang. Lohaniju speaks of two English Officers who were immoral and disrespected the spirits of the foothills. Rachita counts the joists on the roof when she could not sleep in the nights and when her cognizance is congested with folks and reminiscences from her infantile. This computation is carried in the story by the inhabitant ambiance which is postponed in halfway house. At the same time, she relishes Lohaniju's Pahari, because it's her mother tongue and she senses it to be comforting and muzzling. Emily Dickinson follows her in Ranikhet to declare her of the ceremonial sentiment that comes after a great agony. When she tries to mend herself by snooping to Kishore Kumar or Asha, Villain Shakespeare sneaks in. Though she loathes rhymes, she finds herself declaiming lines from literature and it also catches a manner into the shadow stories through Fanny. When she was looking for something to read to confuse her, Mahadevi Verma finds her place. Her former meeting with the rhymester, as a youngster, drew her to read her. She was one of the Chhayavadis, poets of the shadows. Though she dislikes poetry and pleas Plato to protect her, she is drawn towards Mahadevi's emblematic and conjectural language. Though she is in a quandary to receive or to discard her, she finds the versifier keeping her rational defensive from the starving obscurities. She takes her voice, an isolated woman's voice, who had been also in that house, for her resistance. All the characters who were the inhabitant of the house were filled with voluptuous yearnings. Mr. Cromwell is followed by Lali, a Sherpa, on repudiating which she falls down from hill and commits suicide. The inhabitant soul enters Wolcott's physique to mate with Dona Rosa. Later the readers visualize Walcott sleeping with Veera and Donna Rosa with Nicholas Mann. We also discover the duo Marcus and Munro investigating with their fleshly longings with Hill females. The Osborne rapes a Pahari women before he bombards himself. The denizen soul was so passionate with Dona Rosa that he transfers from alternative dimension into the body of Walcott just to relish the Erotic inclinations. Sigmund Freud states, "The intimidated moods of the authenticity ascertain an opening only in hallucinations. Some delusions are essential indicators for rationality while others abolish that elusive equilibrium."

Rachita's Releasing Her Restlessness

Here Rachita was under the encouragement of Cannabis and she was overwhelmed with the stupor of medications. She gives a vent through her charismas. She was so preoccupied with Dona Rosa, that she takes her till the conclusion of the story. Dona Rosa helps her come back to stability. She also brings in Zenobia the most detested scholar of hers and Pashu her fiancé. She outruns her sagacity of culpability and wrongdoing. Rachita finally accomplishes to

discharge the restlessness. When Lohaniju elucidates the purpose for the survival of Airee, the folk God and the methods to gratify it, it was a guarantee of Rachita's fortitude to be back. He seeks métier and valor and an intrepid temperament. Rachita comes back to the reality with three significant aspects after Lohaniju's long speech about Airee.

A call from her sister in Bangalore who communicates with her of a plastic surgeon who could fetch her back to ordinary state. Her sister takes care to send her things and to connect her to the world. She speaks with a plastic surgeon and builds confidence in Rachita that she can reframe her face. By hearing this, she accepts herself, becomes happy and dares to see her face in a mirror. She removed phobia and filled with self-assurance.

She becomes normal when Lohaniju went bizarre to be admitted into a sanatorium. She instigated to appeal the ambulance and send Lohaniju to the military hospital escorted by his daughter. She was audacious enough to face the nurse's gaze. From the beginning she used to hide her face with the scarf in order to discharge the ogling of people. But when she was busy in getting Lohaniju into the ambulance she did not notice her face being unprotected. Rachita comes back to sanity due to the Lady and its pups. Before the delivery, the lady started complaining in discomfort. Then she conceived her first pup and two more pups. The sound of the yelling pups and its adhering to the teats fetched her back to life.

Throughout the story, she accepts Lohaniju, the Protector Cherub of the house. Being a Pahari, he reminds her of her individuality. He provides fondly affection in her childhood and calls her bitiya. He remains a fragment of her infantile reminiscence and contented existences. She overcomes her over-obsession with her sagacity of guiltiness. She thrives in the devolution of her subjective fault and her anguish by the progression of personalizing environment and fabulous fauna.

Conclusion

The present research discuss the portrayal of personal grief and loss, veracity, affection and conviction in Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*. It focuses mainly on physical and mental instability of Rachita, her life after acid attack, question of survival, her refuge in a hill, victim of mental torture, her emotional restoration, her self-destruction and psychosomatic feebleness, how she celebrates the spirit of womanhood and her discharge from restlessness. Thus Namita Gokhale deals with the passionate characteristics of a woman's life. She asserts

that women are usually resilient; dreadful involvements and imprudent assumptions are accountable for the falsifications they face.

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