



Physical and Emotional Trauma of women presented by Namita Gokhale in *the Book of Shadows*

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Abstract

One of the famous Indian writers, Namita Gokhale has sieved different emotions and presented this beautiful concoction of feelings of women from the perspective of a woman. The protagonist, an acid attack survivor, who has lost the love of her life, feels the pain intimidating and as a solace, she finds her childhood home in the hills soothing to the core. Either one has to bear the pain and live through without a sigh, or find a replacement to fill in the void, and transfer oneself into different realm. The novelist, in this book, has given the answer to the question of survival, which is full of illusions distanced thoroughly from reality. This particular paper is an analysis of those painful events, which have rendered nothing but an agonising life to a woman.

Key Words: Trauma, Hills, Illusion, Emotions, and life.

Introduction

Namita Gokhale was born in the year 1956 on January 26th in Lucknow. The Indian born writer spent her childhood in Delhi and in the foothills of Himalaya, Nainital. She is Kumaoni by birth and her native touch reflects in her works as well. *The Book of Shadows*, also is an autobiographical work reflecting the novelist's life profoundly.

She has authored eighteen books which include a series of fiction and non-fiction works. Her debut work is the novel named *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, published in the year 1984. The first work became controversial due to the direct sexual humor on the elite class of Delhi and Bombay. Gokhale was diagnosed of cancer in her late thirties and during that period she lost her husband too. The trauma and pain she underwent could be seen reflecting in the works *A Himalayan Love Story*, *the Book of Shadows*, and *Shakuntala, the play of Memory*. The non-fiction collection includes, *Mountain Echoes*, *The Book of Shiva*, *in Search of Sita – Revisiting Mythology*, *Priya: In Incredible Indya*, and *the Mahabharata*.

Review of Literature

Sugandha, Agarwal and Mahesh, Sangeetha (2014) in their article *Namita Gokhale's the Book of Shadows- A Psychoanalytical Analysis*, talk about reality and the life of imaginations. The incidents and experiences push one towards a non-realistic world is what they state. There is a difference in the real and the symbolic and Rachita Tiwari, the protagonist takes a shift from the real to the symbolic. The work, *the Book of Shadow* is an ironic representation of the facts.

Vinitha P. V and Rani, Usha (2018) in their article, *Images of Women in Namita Gokhale's work* have talked of the different vision which Namita Gokhale possesses while portraying her characters. She talks of the physical and mental pain of the protagonist along with discussing all the other women characters whom she had described through her work. According to them, Rachita is a strong character mentally, whereas the incidents and accidents have changed her perspective towards life. While talking about the protagonist and her life the writers have stated;

In the novel, the characters are looking for affection. Rachita, the hero of the novel, has been distorted by a corrosive assault and this physical mischief is less in contrast with the mental injury she experiences. She withdraws to her youth home to get mental peace and comfort. She wishes to be before, in the immaculate days as her present is aggravating. She sets aside an opportunity to grapple with reality. (Vinitha & Rani, 2018)

Away from the Reality

One of the famous Indian writers, Namita Gokhale has sieved different emotions and presented this beautiful concoction of feelings of women from the perspective of a woman. The novelist has given the picture of the protagonist, who seems to remain far beyond the mundane world. "My mother was from mountains, and I knew this house as a child... I already belong to it. It has taken me in, enveloped my hurt. It soothes my hatred, hushes my sorrow." Rachita Tiwari, is an autobiographical portrayal of Namita. She lives in the present overlooking the past, yet the past keeps her cluttered and that leads to her physical and mental instability. The protagonist, an acid attack survivor, who has the lost the love of her life, feels the pain intimidating and as a solace, she finds her childhood home in the hills soothing to the core.

I have come to the hills to heal, to hide, to forget. To forgive, to be forgiven. My friends are resisted my decision... but I knew that I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened. (6)

Either one has to bear the pain and live through without a sigh, or find a replacement to fill in the void, and transfer oneself into different realm. The novelist, in this book, has given the answer to the question of survival, which is full of illusions distanced thoroughly from reality.

Rachita's lover, who was younger to her by nearly seven plus years, found her cheating on him, whether it was the truth or the unknown assumption, he couldn't face either her or the situation and ultimately, he ended his life for no reason. The decision of Anand not only ended his grief but ended the happiness of Rachita too. She was constantly trying to cope up with the reality and that made her move to her childhood home, away from all.

I had been happy here as a child, and I am determined to be that again; to forget Anand's indulgent and wanton act of self-destruction, ignore his stupidity, and restore my life to its own course once again. (7)

It directly indicates, how weak he was and his sensitivity and emotions seem to transfer into the mind of Rachita. Anand's sister with the vengeance attacks Rachita with acid, thus, physical distortion and mental agony overtake her at the same time.

In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I might meet in the mirror is no longer mine. (3)

She has the grit to survive through the pain, and that allows her to take refuge in the hills, the childhood home of hers. She begins to love her loneliness despite the memories thronging in her mind. She being alone begins to spend time reading the read and the unread. "Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar, I said, addressing a sea of guileless faces, or to render the familiar unfamiliar."

Thus, she unravels the fictitious thought processes and begins to create a world of her own. She travels far remote into the world of hallucinations and imaginations, which deeply suggest the sub-conscious desires of her inner self. Psychological transformation occurs in her. She starts to live in the world of imaginations and develops a world for herself. She begins to hate her physical appearance, the acid attack which had morphed her face, had altered her thinking too. She stopped looking at herself in the mirror. She hated herself and what had been happening to her, but she was neither weak as Anand, nor aggressive as Anand's Sister.

She was constantly waiting for the dawn in her life on daily basis. She had set a routine for herself, but eventually she was after the dawn, the darkness had left deep scar in her, and she wanted the light to make her feel better and bright. She was unsure of that, may be that was the reason to frame a world and people of her choice. "There is a young girl in my memories, I saw her again last night when I was unable to keep my eyes open." She was happy amidst her imaginations and those characters did not leave her as Anand had left.

I sit at the window, gazing at the mountains, at the pine and the oak that surround us. Filling up these notebooks, listening to Lohaniju's stories, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. (18)

The emotional trauma after the acid attack was unbearable for her, "the pain, the unbearable pain." The novelist has given all the minute details of her pain of the protagonist and her loneliness. "I have not looked into a mirror for months now, and my face that familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction." She started to relive her childhood days, listening to stories and that prevented her from getting intimidated by past incidents.

The past exercises a tenacious hold over the future, sometimes it tyrannizes the future into repetitive patterns. I came to the hills to obliterate my past, to seek refuge in the immediate present. (32)

Namita Gokhale, through this novel and the protagonist's picture, has given the hint of her own pain. She had been in absolute trauma and pain after losing her husband. It was the lovely bond which had rendered her weak from within, the same was the condition of Rachita, it was her love for Anand which had made her fragile. Personal experiences contribute a lot in sculpting one's life. Rachita had been trying to the fullest to cope up with the reality and move on towards the future with enough grit, "My instinct tells me to lie low, to evade discovery, to wait the return of strength and continuity." She keeps herself busy reading but couldn't keep herself from the pain, which kept on haunting her always despite her sturdy thoughts.

Conclusion

Namita, in this particular novel has dealt with the emotional aspects of a woman's life. Women are generally very strong, rancid experiences and stupid decisions are responsible for the distortions they face. One must learn and unlearn certain lessons from the life of Rachita. Fragility could in no way become the reason to self-destructiveness, psychological weakness also should not creep into the mind as it happened in the case of Rachita.

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