CHAPTER – IV

PERSPECTIVES
ON
CULTURE AND IDENTITY
IN
NAMITA GOKHALE’S FICTION
Dr. B. K. Sharma in his thought-provoking article on Namita Gokhale’s first and best novel *Paro* analyses the novel in terms of modern critical theories like deconstruction. He thinks deconstructionists challenge the conventional order by shifting the so-called centre all the time. In deconstruction, skepticism stares at face every conventional concept or authority. There has been a dramatic and decisive shift in the old relations to authority. The western mind has gradually learned to accept authority (the centre) only by investigating to find its underlying authority and then to find its underlying authority of that authority and so on. Such dichotomies like goodness, truth, purity are uncertain and arbitrary. Similar is the case with gender dichotomies. All these codes of behaviour like masculinity or femininity are willful and open to deconstruction. Iqbal Gaur observes, “The concept of femininity has been enunciated by proponents of patriarchy - a social system rooted in conventional history. It too is arbitrary, tentative and open to deconstruction. Patriarchy has always painted ideal womanhood associated with weakness, helplessness, dependence, passivity, docility, subservience and complacence. Whereas masculinity has always been associated with power, independence, self-assertion, activity, domination, etc.”¹
Subhash Chandra says, “One of the ubiquitous features of the patriarchal cultures the world over has been to treat woman as the Object or the other in relation to the male who constitutes the Subject. Woman is desired, adored, and petted. She remains the passive recipient of the male’s exuberant and passionate energy. She functions as the speculum of her male counterpart who narcissistically treats her as his own reflection, in complete and callous disregard of her feelings, and thoughts.”

Indian society not to speak of the western society has been treating woman unfairly. The woman does not exist; she constitutes the absence while the male has presence on her. The dominant male strain in the society successfully puts woman under erasure and, consequently, she is not allowed to foreground her ideas, joys and sorrows. She has been continuously and steadily suppressed and exploited by her man, the master, who is the transcendent centre of power.

However, the aggressive rise of feminist movement from sixties onwards succeeded in subverting some of the entrenched male attitudes and practices, giving women a chance to acquire solidity and specificity, and in the process letting they bring to the centre stage their aspirations, their dreams and most importantly their joissance. Female joissance came to be regarded by the feminists as the cardinal principle in determining whether
women in a society were regarded as individual entities with personalities of their own. The present chapter examines the extent to which Namita Gokhale has succeeded in projecting women as people whose desires, likes and dislikes matter as much as those of their male counterparts and the extent to which the women characters are successful in ordering their lives, without male support. Gokhale’s Perspectives on Indian culture and woman’s identities are explicit here.

Namita Gokhale’s first novel, Paro: Dreams of Passion created a stir by its frankness in the early 80’s and pioneered the sexually frank genre which made Shobha De famous. The novel’s steamy parts were serialized in Illustrated Weekly by Khushwant Singh when it was released and was considered a watered down version of Debonair in those days. Rashmi Gaur thinks even in her first novel Gokhale has been able to project a woman’s vision of freedom and independence. Paro explains the subversive role of tradition in perpetuating the secondary or supportive role of women and the need of discrediting its legacies if women have to emerge as emancipated beings.

It is a befitting way to start a discussion on Gokhale’s debut novel Paro because her critics are in perfect resonance with its contents. They seem to agree that Paro is the only book of class of its own-the current and
force of which seems absent in her other works. Though Namita Gokhale disagrees with her critics on this count, she claims that she never stopped writing uninhibitedly about love and lust after *Para*. She also feels that she was evolved as a writer now. While not entirely disowning the success of *Para* she confesses that the book was forced and it was her debut novel and she was in her mid twenties when it was released.

It is said, “*Paro* is a significant novel that doesn’t get the attention it deserves. It was written in the early 80’s well before ‘English August’ etc. and it may well be the first Indian novel in English that accurately, unfussily describes and captures the speech of metropolitan, westernized Indians. Whatever the reasons Gokhale chose to go in different directions after this she remains a very fluent writer and a very idiosyncratic one.”

The novel *Paro* begins with the portrayal of Paro’s character in very unflattering terms by the narrator Priya. The picture of Paro emerges as very unfeminine. Priya, the narrator of *Paro* narrates Paro’s story, because she says, ‘I saw myself in her’

Priya was B.R.’s secretary at that time. Then this BR is a business tycoon. He looked straight into women’s eyes-he knew all their first names-he was a compulsive nymphomaniac. The dictionary says that a male
nymphomaniac is properly described as a victim of satyriasis and that he was a nymphomaniac.

This BR was short, but he had not begun to go bald—and he was Priya’s boss. Ivy, Mary and Priya loved him madly; and all of these ladies hated Paro, now BR’s wife. The situation reminds us Thomas Hardy’s novel Tess of the D’Urbervilles where all the ladies love Angel Clare. She would breeze into the office every now and then, and appraise the ladies through narrowed green-grey eyes. Her eyes mocked them and they mocked their devotion to B.R.

B.R. had decorated the office himself. It was like the temple of Pallas Athene for these belles. B.R.’s company manufactured the famous Sita Sewing Machines, and associated household goods. B.R. is prematurely grey at forty-six. His voice, so musical then, sounds a little fruity. Priya says, ‘And I think of the sea at Marine Drive, the first time that he kissed me—vast, ugly and compulsive.’ I remember the touch of his hands, and his suddenly gentle tongue, and the overpowering smell of his cologne, and the hardness between his legs, and the murmured words of love. Still B.R.’s hands continued, tender, yet insistent, in their proficient ministrations to my breasts, and eternity lay before us” (PR, 2-3). A month later, BR was married to Paro. It took all of the ladies at the office completely by surprise. Priya
does not forget it. This book, too, is a vindication of it. Priya’s favourite author, when Priya was nineteen, was Daphn du Maurier. Her favourite novel was, of course *Rebecca*. Priya reminds us the theme of *Rebecca*.

B.R. had been making frequent business trips to New Delhi. None of the ladies suspected anything out of the ordinary.

Ivy, Mary and Anita were all heartbroken. Priya listened coldly to all as their excited chatter about the continuing search for the Right Gift. The staff, were to give them a joint present. They pooled together with a contribution of Rs 25 each. Priya did not know what they bought because Priya did not go to the wedding or to the reception either. Because she felt hurt by B.R.’s rejection.

Priya’s mother is an old woman. She has no father. Atul is her brother. Theirs is a middle class family. Family circumstances had more or less forced Priya to take up a secretarial course rather than complete college; all her family savings went into making her brother a doctor. As there was no prospect of their being able to shell out any dowry for Priya, she had a bleak spinsterhood. Now Priya was the only earning member of the family.

Priya actually loved BR and wanted to marry him. But he married a strange and typical Rajasthani woman called Paro. Priya even did not like to attend BR’s marriage. Paro’s father was a brigadier (retd), and her mother
too looked an average member of the upper middle class. The workers from B.R.’s factory came late, as B.R. did not hold with corporate productivity suffering for parties and private celebrations.

Priya talks of her routine in Bombay. She writes, “I clattered home on the lonely suburban train. Dadar ... Mahim ... Vile Parle ... Each station seemed like an incantation against love, hope, faith. Finally, the train reached Andheri, and I got off, tired, hungry and miserable” (PR, 36). Gradually Priya is obsessed with Paro in her life.

Then Anita, B.R.’s secretary, became engaged to be married. It was an arranged match and her husband did not want her to continue working. B.R. elected Priya from the typist’s pool to become his secretary. So Priya bade goodbye to Mary and Ivy and became one of the twice-born. She had to do the flowers in his office and she had to answer his calls. She would telephone him every fifteen minutes on any possible pretext, and often B.R. would instruct her to tell Paro he was not in, or that he was busy in a meeting. Those would be her fleeting moments of golden revenge; she would picture her, thwarted and vexed, and bask in her power.

‘You’re a North Indian, aren’t you?’ once Paro enquired Priya. ‘You’re Priya Sharma,’ this almost accusingly.

‘My father was from Rajasthan, but we’ve always lived in Bombay…’
‘Oh,’ she said indifferently. I could not tell if she approved or otherwise of Rajasthan, or for that matter of Bombay” (PR, 17).

Since Priya really had nothing much to say to BR, she handed over the papers and left for home. All the way to Andheri, past Dadar, Mahim and Vile Parle, she sat brooding on nothing. Slowly it dawned upon Priya. She had received an offer of marriage.

Priya was quite incoherent with excitement, and it was some time before she could extract even the basic facts from her. Apparently, her sister in Meerut had written to ask if Priya was agreeable to meeting her (her sister’s) husband’s nephew, who was a lawyer in Delhi, and from a prosperous and decent family.

When Priya told them at the office, they all asked excitedly, “Is it an arranged or love marriage?” (PR, 20). When Priya told them it was arranged they all looked a little disappointed.

Priya’s marriage was a middle-class one, much as any other. She did not have many relatives, and so it was uneventful, even a little boring. Her husband was a virgin, and did not seem to notice that she was not. B.R. accepted her resignation with equanimity. Priya and her husband went to Nainital for honeymoon. Suresh unburdened all his ambitions, his hopes and dreams to her.
Suresh had a two-bedroom flat rented in Delhi; he was very sociable and entertained others regularly. Priya waded laboriously through cookbooks while he sat reading his briefs, and soon mastered the basic rudiments and skills of Continental, Mughlai and Chinese cooking. At night, they would grapple with sexual appetite.

Suresh took Priya with him to Bombay once. He had a case there and Priya was to stay at her mother’s for a while. New Delhi seemed like a heaven after that week of maternal recriminations.

Priya tried to take up smoking but, Suresh would have none of it, and even tried to restrain her from wearing anything but saris. Priya quickly retreated back into her Indian wife image.

Priya remembers how, one evening, at a pot-luck party, she and her husband got to discussing the jet-set-Bombay’s rich-whom they pretended to despise or at least be indifferent to. A journalist’s wife, whose parents were from Bombay, told them of a party she had been to.

‘‘You can’t imagine,’ she insisted, her eyes big as saucers, ‘what these types behave like! There’s this guy-I’ve forgotten his name but his wife is this dame Paro. They’re stinking rich and she’s really beautiful. They have these wild parties where everybody-but everybody-who is anybody is invited. Bunny, of course, is a good friend of theirs. Well, he’s really very
charming, but I think she’s a bitch! You must meet them sometime. Suresh’s interest was aroused” (PR, 25). So Priya came across Paro’s case once again and for worse.

The reader can guess the fact that Paro has divorced B.R. now. She is ruined now.

B. K. Sharma observes, “Paro hardly fits in the role of feminine virtue. Her revolt does not stop here. She takes a big leap and crosses the ‘Lakshman Rekha’ of chastity. In the eyes of Priya, Paro is nothing short of a prostitute. But this term too has no final meaning. Paro snatches for her a unique and enviable place up the social ladder playing a rebel against established social and moral order.”

The shocking thing is that this is the Paro who is but recently liberated from marriage and convention.

Paro has done it all, she’s left a husband and a lover, she has a small son of ambiguous parentage. She is a conversation piece at dinner parties, and it is considered daring and chic to know her. And she is, or thinks she is, Priya’s best friend. It was at a dinner party at the ‘Tabela’ that Priya and Paro met one day. ‘I used to work in your husband’s office’ (PR, 27), Priya said formally; then realized that B.R. was not her husband any more. Paro said ‘He used to be my husband’ (PR, 27).
So Priya had left B.R. only six months before. Everybody was talking about it. She was living in open adulterous sin with ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur, test cricketer and scion of a princely family.

Soon after that, Paro left ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur. She was facing a number of legal problems. There were cases filed against her by her landlord, by her against her tenants, some problems regarding her father’s will and death duties, about her divorce her alimony.

The lawyer Suresh gallantly entered the fray, and, most uncharacteristically for him, offered to do all her cases free. Priya felt a certain complacent pleasure at the thought that it was now Paro who needed her husband. Priya exulted in her kindness, and would constantly and insistently call her over for lunches and dinners.

One day Paro confessed: ‘He raped me in a grove of pine-trees’ (PR, 29), Paro said, tears in her eyes. ‘He sodomised me in the woods.’ This was about Bhandpur’s intrusion in Paro’s life. Priya listened agape. Differentiating between fact and fiction was always a problem with Paro. But there were tears in her eyes. ‘I was the only child of middle-aged parents,’ Paro continued (PR, 30).

She did not perceive the shame or furtiveness of sex. She talked of mating her bitch and the complexities of her own sexual life with the same
directness and with the same degree of involvement. Matter-of-factly, she told Priya the length of each of her lovers’ organs made her laugh. Paro dismissed B.R.’s new wife (he had just re-married) with a languid ‘That Ayah! What yaar!’ Of her father-in-law, the Rai Bahadur: ‘That old leech! Thank God he’s dead’ (PR, 33). Paro and Priya’s life moved in a parallel manner.

Paro was flattered by Priya’s curiosity and attention. Paro would mock her gently, with overtones of friendship. Priya in turn was flattered by Paro’s laughter. Paro’s fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatisation.

B.R. had married a lady called Bubbles on the rebound just six months after Paro left him, and already he was flaunting his mistresses through Bombay’s cloistered social circles.

BR called Priya for dinner soon after. Suresh was already back in New Delhi. Priya told Bhaiyya that she was meeting some of her old office friends, which was after all true in a way. B.R. asked her to come directly to his flat. Bubbles had gone to Poona, to her parents.

B.R. was waiting for Priya when she arrived. She sat awkwardly while he poured her a drink. There was silence. ‘Priya, my love,’ he said finally, ‘you are looking as beautiful as ever. Marriage seems to suit you.’ He sighed; ‘I’ve missed you, you know’ (PR, 36). Priya’s petticoat was already
wet with anticipation. But he didn’t touch her. He was not looking so debonair any more; his eyes were troubled; he kept pouring himself drink after drink. ‘I really missed you,’ he said again. My sherry didn’t taste so heady any more. (PR, 36). The two were sitting in his bedroom.

‘That was me,’ he said unnecessarily. ‘When I was up at Oxford.’ He shuffled through the photographs. ‘And that was my girlfriend. She taught me a lot. But she died in a car-crash’ (PR, 37). Priya speaks of her extramarital affair with B.R. ‘We moved to the bed, and he entered me. He lavished so much tenderness upon me that I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I wouldn’t have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss.’

‘B.R..,’ I said,’ I don’t ever want to leave you.’ I clung to him. His skin was as soft and tender as a boiled egg after it has been peeled (PR, 37-38).

I told Suresh I wanted to spend another month in Bombay with Dolly Bhabhi, who was expecting her first child. Bhaiyya lived in a large flat now, gifted to him by his parents-in-law. I would meet B.R. almost every evening, and have dinner with him, with wine, candlelight, roses and all the other trappings of a covert romance.

We were to meet at his house one evening. Bubbles was still in Poona, with her parents. Upon my arrival I found a disheveled looking B.R. seated
in uneasy conversation with a beautiful female. She looked very tense, on the edge of hysteria, in fact. I fixed unblinking stare on B.R., hoping to shame him into confession. Suddenly there was a faint buzzing in my ears, and I sensed rather than felt a presence at the other end of the room. It was Paro. She was dressed in a black gown and in the dark of the restaurant. She looked very like the Paro of long ago, though summoned from a dream.

‘Well, this is a surprise,’ she said. ‘My husband and his secretary are at it again. Only, I thought, Priya that you were my friend.’ Then she looked at B.R. straight in the eye, the glittering lashes coated with gold and black and venom, and spat, with force and accuracy, into his startled face. B.R. was devastated.’

He didn’t make love to me again. I returned to New Delhi’ (p. 44).

When Priya returned to New Delhi, Suresh met her at the railway station. His stiff, awkward welcome alerted her; she too kept a guarded silence. Only the next day, at breakfast, shuffling his newspaper and wiping the yellow yolk from his face, did he broach the subject. ‘I heard something, some gossip, about you and B.R.,’ he said portentously. Then, almost apologetically, ‘He was your ex-boss, you know, and it is very easy for people to talk.’
‘I want to take them out for dinner,’ he said importantly (PR, 44-45). That left Priya stumped. Suresh was too mean to ever take anybody out for dinner unless they rated an A+ on his contact list. Paro, as a non-paying client, was valuable as a conversation piece at dinner-parties at home. However, Priya kept silent. She knew better than to go asking for trouble.

Priya gave Suresh a quick impulsive kiss on his cheek. ‘So, love, how you are?’ she asked him peppily, holding on affectionately to his hands. He smiled-no, smirked-and asked, ‘Where exactly does Avinendra live, Paro?’

‘Eight Willingdon Crescent,’ she replied (PR, 46). As they sped on, Priya was still totally in the dark as to who Avinendra was. They arrived at a large house, with a sentry at the gate. He would not let them in, at first. Avinendra sahib, she said in her usual imperious fashion. He only nodded sceptically and disappeared. He reappeared to open the front gate, and the outsiders parked the car at the end of the drive. They waited in the car until Avinendra materialised; he was that same slight youth who had been with her in Bombay.

Avinendra’s father is the Minister of State for Industry. Once at the dinner table, Avinendra declared that he was a Marxist. He talked of corruption, politics, and corruption. ‘No this lady …’ he would say, looking at Paro with an intensity which Priya thought was almost manic ‘... is a real
individual. She has the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman; she is free. That is why I love her.’

‘I am myself,’ Paro said theatrically, ‘and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person.’

For perhaps the first time in Priya’s life she got provoked and said, ‘But, Paro,’ I said logically, ‘you are not your own person. You live off B.R.’s divorce settlement and by selling the jewellery he gave you. You don’t-you can’t-even earn your own living’ (PR, 48).

There was a stunned silence.

When Priya returned home, Suresh was furious. For the first time in their marriage, he hit her.

Priya was always very careful with Suresh after that.

Avinendra had, in the meanwhile, become something of a permanent fixture in their house.

Suresh also managed, through effort, innuendo and application, to get on close terms with Avinendra’s father’s private secretary in New Delhi.

Paro had become an important woman, and Priya was wondering how to mend fences with her. The insidious web of friends, and contacts was coming into operation. Suresh’s family too, had introduced several friends to Avinendra, who had helped them out with various little problems. These
friends, in turn, helped Suresh out in numerous little ways, and soon Suresh had his own little house built in Greater Kailash.

‘That bastard,’ Paro told Priya once (referring to Avinendra’s father), ‘is even more horny for me than Daddy was’ (PR, 51), Daddy, of course, being Rai Bahadur, B.R.’s father.’ She hated the politician’s family.

So, affectionately, Priya began to call Avinendra as Lenin. He was quite pleased with the nickname. ‘John or Vladimir Ilyich?’ (PR, 53) he asked. ‘Both revolutionaries, in their ways,’ but she called him Lenin.

Lenin would confide in Priya about Paro’s increasingly irrational behaviour.

One night they had a massive fight.

‘I want this female out of my life,’ Lenin said.

‘See what this prick has done to me!’ she shrieked, throwing her breasts open for all to see and beating on frenziedly. ‘Do you want to see my cunt as well? He thinks I’m a whore-I’ll show you what a whore’s cunt looks like!’ (PR, 54).

Suresh looked absolutely horrified, and Priya did her best to calm Paro.

When Priya returned from the hospital almost six hours later, it was morning. The telephone rang again, and Suresh was there to take it. Lenin’s
father was on the line. This was a suicide attempt on Paro’s side. Lenin’s father had apparently requested Suresh to take over at the hospital end, so that no breath of scandal would attach to Lenin or his father over Paro’s unsuccessful but dramatic suicide bid. Suresh was in a hurry to get to the court on time. A policeman appeared after about half an hour to take Paro’s statement.

After Suresh left, Priya was alone in tender vigil over Paro.

‘I did this once before, you know,’ Paro continued conversationally. ‘It was when I was married to Babu’ (PR, 59). That means Paro had married such a man before.

Now Priya falls in a fantasy: “I went and curled up in bed, my fingers groping for the warm secure place between my thighs. I napped lightly for a while, and then I began to masturbate. I did not fantasise, but sometimes I became Paro, and sometimes I was myself. Sometimes I was B.R. devouring Paro and then B.R. tenderly loving Priya, and then I became Suresh who was ravishing Paro, and then Paro with Suresh in slavish possession, and intermittently Suresh copulating with Priya who was actually Paro. I was all these people” (PR, 60).

Namita Gokhale describes how the two woman Paro and Priya wayward and indulge in sexual orgies more as a mark of empowerment.
They seem to have been possessed of sex as a deadly passion. Paro soon bounced back to normal. Her hold over Lenin had become even more vice-like, more gripping. It was just emotional blackmail, however.

‘Oh, no!’ she replied. ‘It’s part of being a beautiful woman. It’s a fulltime occupation. And much harder work than it seems. But-nodding sagely—‘it has its rewards, I confess,’ Paro used to defend her (PR, 62).

A guest called Arif was spouting extravagant Urdu shairi about her being like a zephyr, a spring breeze, a monsoon shower and things like that. This man was just another to catch hold of Paro.

Naturally, Suresh was famished by the time they got home. ‘That was a rather inadequate lunch, Priya,’ he said chidingly.

Priya almost threw a tantrum. ‘I thought your Paro was too good at everything’ (PR, 66).

Those were happy days for all of these people. Priya’s happiness assumed a special shape, for, after all these years, she found herself pregnant at last. But she aborted.

Lenin’s father was no longer a minister—he fell out of favour, and was reshuffled. And then, in the by-election, he did not even get a renomination. Lenin shifted into Paro’s house, for he just could not bring himself to return to his home town in Madhya Pradesh.
Paro was a child of privilege. Priya couldn’t remember her ever passionately wanting anything; she took the luxury and adulation that surrounded her for granted, as part of the perks. But now, with a despondent Lenin by her side, she had her first experience of deprivation, of the indignities of need. She didn’t know about queues, and ration cards, and bus routes; and she even tried to learn; she only shut out that world, slugging down gin after gin and surviving in stubborn hope.

Priya could see that Suresh wanted desperately to drop Lenin and Paro, for they had become something of a social embarrassment.

And yet they hated each other and would bicker constantly, and Priya’s practised feminine eye observed that Paro was on the lookout for a saviour to get her out of this mess. And then, one day, the unthinkable happened. Lenin won a lottery. At first Priya thought it was some kind of a joke.

‘He’s won a fucking lottery,’ Paro amplified.

He had won five lakhs of rupees’ (PR, 75).

They spent almost a lakh just on redecorating their flat. They gave a little party, a second housewarming, for their friends. Suresh was horrified at the extravagance.
Lenin’s sister, who was married to an I.A.S. officer in New Delhi came for a visit. Priya wondered if she was the family, or the Middle Class Intellectual Elite. Priya was quite nice. One Mr Shambunath Misra attracted Paro’s attention greatly. She said him by way of self-introduction: ‘I am Paro, and this is my party. And who may you be?’ she asked him in chaste Hindustani (as against her Memsahib Hindi reserved for servants and panwallahs). She was direct, even curt, and by now not in the least embarrassed. Paro could really be very rude when she wanted to be.

‘My party is the Congress party-and I have come here to see Avinendra, to congratulate him upon his good fortune, upon his many good fortunes,’ he leered, not in the least put out. ‘Myself Shambhu Nath Mishra— you might have seen my name in papers sometimes’ (pp. 80-81).

The enigma of the disproportionate power emanating from this strange personality suddenly cleared. Shambhu Nath Mishra was one of the most controversial politicians of the day, an eminence grise, a sinister minister. For the rest of the evening, he and Paro were inseparable. They even had a sexual orgy.

Paro’s affair with Mishra became one of the hottest scandals of the year. She rose swiftly and surely in social prominence, a sort of hetaira, a madonna of the garbage heaps. The lowlier papers, and Hindi magazines like
Maya and Manohar, delighted in lampooning her. The Greek word ‘lampooning’ implies satire.

Paro would telephone Misra incessantly, trying always to dodge the phalanx of secretaries and officials surrounding him, trying constantly only to be with him. He would come to her flat, and they would conveniently send Lenin away, to take Junior for an ice cream or on any such obvious excuse. This junior is an orphaned boy with them. There was more than just sexuality at play.

One day, Suresh managed to persuade Mishraji to come for dinner. Paro was, of course, invited; there was much debate about whether or not to invite Lenin. Priya was adamant that Lenin come, for she wanted an ally, and besides, she was curious.

The three sat in confused silence over the dinner. Suresh, of course, still managed to polish off a large meal, but Paro was close to tears, and wouldn’t eat anything. When Priya returned from the kitchen with the kheer Priya caught Suresh kissing Paro passionately on her tear-stained cheeks, presumably in an effort to cheer her up. This is to say Suresh also fell in love with Paro. Priya was, by now, a mature woman, and knew how to handle difficult situations tactfully.
One morning, Mrs Shambhu Nath Mishra descended upon their flat. Priya asked for Paro; and—according to their maid, who told their driver, who in turn, with a little prodding, disgorged the story to Priya—pounced upon her, literally and physically, telling her to leave her husband alone. Soon the story was all over the cocktail circuit, and Paro was once more the butt of various suggestive, sniggering jokes.

Then summer came, and Shambhu Nath Mishra was to go to America for a World Conference on something or the other. Paro cajoled and hustled the money out of Lenin and Suresh to buy herself a ticket as well, for she was determined to accompany him to the USA. She accompanied him but returned soon after.

Lenin had been playing the surrogate father to Aniruddha during Paro’s little jaunt of the States. Some legal problems and disputes about custody of the poor child seemed to have surfaced. ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur, forgotten ghost from the past, wanted to send him to Doon for his further education. This scene lurks like a shadow from the past.

Paro had been seeing less and less of Shanbhu Nath Mishra lately; he had become like a fading echo in life.

‘Did you say you were getting married, Lenin?’ Priya asked, panicking at the idea of development (PR, 91).
'Of course I’m getting married,’ he replied indignantly. ‘I am marrying a sane normal reasonable girl from a sane normal respectable family and getting out of this obscene mess,’ Lenin said. He wanted to get rid of Paro (PR, 91). Paro’s smile shattered for a fraction of a second, her lips trembled and a sort of uncertainty descended on her face.

Upon further prodding Lenin even produced a photograph of his fiancée-a full-length portrait of a tall slim girl with an intelligent, slightly obstinate expression. She was the daughter of a former chief minister, and her family and Lenin’s had known each other very well for many years.

Lenin’s family was naturally thrilled at the prospect of their beloved Vinnie finally settling down. A fairy tale ending, really, a most convenient ending to a high-spirited and carefree youth. Paro took this new development in her stride.

Lenin’s parents and family came to New Delhi for the shopping and things like that. They were pondering where to have the wedding. Perhaps the Prime Minister could be persuaded to attend in New Delhi, but then, Paro might not be persuaded not to. They were horrified to find Lenin still as enslaved by her as ever, and they decided to have the ceremonies in their home town. So Priya was dispatched to Ramnagar, in the heart of eastern U.P., to represent them at the wedding.
Lenin’s wife was very beautiful. Fair, clean-looking, her hair reaching
till her knees, shyly radiant in hymenal red, she looked every inch a bride.

Priya remembered what a defiant, different sort of bride Paro had been, and
felt old for the first time in her life.

Paro sent a telegram; but her ghost was nowhere present in the garish
happiness in the wedding.

When Priya returned to New Delhi after the wedding, covered with
mosquito bites, life seemed dull and blank. Paro was again without a man in
her life; there were stillness, a lull, and stagnation.

A friend of Priya had a small bookshop in Oberoi Hotel. She asked
her if she wanted a part-time job, and Priya agreed eagerly. Priya grew to
love that little bookshop. She revelled in its beige-carpeted highbrow
atmosphere, and in its absence of malice. Suresh was very upset at her taking
up a job. But Priya was unmoved, for that job represented escape from her
empty home. What we notice is Priya’s empowerment now. One day B.R.
met Priya in the hotel. What transpired between them is this?

‘‘Why, Priya, what a wonderful surprise,’ he exclaimed in his
immaculate Oxford accent, his face beaming with genuine pleasure.

‘I can’t leave the shop until four,’ I stammered unasked, then blushed
at my gaffe.
'Oh, marvellous,’ he replied, ‘I shall be in my room after that. I’m leaving by the evening flight. You must come up for some coffee.

Priya was silent, speechless.

‘You will, won’t you, darling Priya,’ he pleaded, and Priya could not but relent (PR, 102-103).

Priya left the shop on the dot of four. B.R. was talking on the telephone when she entered. ‘O, boss, how’s the sex life?’ Priya asked saucily, breezing into the room. ‘Ell, I intended it to sound pert, and funny; but as the words left my Kiss ‘n’ Tell lipsticked lips they sort of collapsed, and I ended up sounding sarcastic, defensive, even bitter’ (PR,103 ).

B.R. had just returned from Europe. ‘And how’s Paro?’ he asked. ‘I heard that Lenin character has run off and got married? So she’s alone again, is she?’ (PR, 104). There was too much complacency and self-satisfaction in his voice for any spite.

‘Do you love me, B.R.?’ I asked timidly.

‘Not only do I love you, but I also like you, my dear,’ she said indulgently.

‘And how is Suresh?’ he asked. Perhaps he enquired only conversationally, but it was so rare for anyone to really talk to me that I
burst out with a detailed critique of Suresh and our sterile, loveless life together” (PR, 105).

Life went on. Priya hardly ever met Paro. In fact, she hardly ever met anyone, except on weekends, for Suresh had more work than he could cope with. He had several juniors working with him in his chambers now.

Lenin’s wedding was, in many ways, a watershed in the lives.

Priya had certain shrewd suspicions about Uma, Suresh’s sexy-looking junior, who accompanied him sometimes, ostensibly to help him with his briefs.

Lenin’s wedding, and the passage of years, was beginning to show upon Paro as well. So Paro once remembered Greek tragedy.

‘Aeschylus,’ she elucidated. ‘The trilogy. It’s in translation, for the Hindustani theatre festival. I play Clytemnestra. The heroine,’ she added unnecessarily.

‘Tell me about the play,’ I said, cursing Paro for never allowing me the privilege of pity.

‘Oh, I’m doing it in an attempt to, you know, find myself. I mean, I’ve spent the last umpteen years fucking the men in my life, and getting fucked me in the process.’
‘I wondered if she meant it literally or figuratively.’ Now she broached on their affair (PR, 108).

All prima donnas with problems, who could afford to bleed at the pocket for this chic psychiatrist. Every night, somebody would be asking me out for dinner, or propositioning me without ever the preliminaries. Even the bloody psychiatrist. And if there’s one thing I’m certainly not on to these days,’ she shuddered theatrically, ‘it’s men. That’s one scene I don’t need, thank you very much.’

‘You were telling me about the play,’ I said patiently.

‘Aah, that. There’s this guy-he’s a queer, don’t worry, a brilliant young director called Krishen Narain Singh” (PR, 110).

Paro’s Keralite ayah, Maryamma, who had brought Junior up, adored her uncompromisingly. In fact, Maryamma refused to leave Paro even after her arranged marriage to a prosperous chauffeur in Dubai.

‘All finished, Madam, all finished,’ she cried one day however. But the brother had disappeared and Paro could extract nothing further from Maryamma, who couldn’t stop her tears and kept repeating, ‘All finished, Madam, all finished’ (PR113).

What we could piece together, finally, was that Raju who had married Paro had been involved in some kind of lafda with his mistress. Paro
energetically if somewhat haphazardly undertook to trace the missing Raju. She accosted Suresh and demanded he file a case.

Priya wanted to go too, but he giggled and told her that going to Bangkok ‘with a wife was like taking sandwiches to a restaurant.’ Suresh made a trip to Bangkok. One day Priya received a letter from the past; Mary wrote to her saying that her youngest brother had become a lawyer and was thinking of practicing in New Delhi.

That letter probably saved her from a nervous breakdown. Priya wrote and rewrote torrents of letters, and, predictably, posted none. But she started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel. Namita Gokhale’s novels spring up like this. The heroine herself confesses that she writes a novel. This is rather autobiographical. So is the other novel *The Book of Shadows*.

One day Paro met her and lambasted: ‘Yeh leech,’ she screamed, ‘you neuter, you lifeless zombie, you peeping pisspot, why don’t you shed your own blood for a change!’ Suresh appeared, alarmed by all the shouting, and posted himself uncertainly at the door. ‘Read this,’ she said, hammering at his chest, ‘the stupid bitch is trying to write about me!’ Suresh got hurt.

‘My dear Priya, this is a very serious matter,’ he said, in his deliberate lawyer’s voice. The lurking hysteria finally overpowered Priya (PR, 123).
‘Writing about us like this is something, which, to my mind, no Hindu housewife would ever do. And I must say, you don’t seem to like us overmuch. In fact you have made fun of me. And as for your relationship with B.R.-he coughed embarrassedly-‘is it ... uh’-he looked to Paro for support-‘is it, fictional or, uh, factual?’ (PR, 124).

Paro settled a long passionate kiss upon Suresh; he was passive, transfixed. Then she undid her hair, and settled her cheek next to his.

Priya felt tired, and nauseated, and disgusted, and defeated. ‘I’m leaving,’ I said (PR, 126).

Priya walked out of her home all right, but she didn’t know anywhere she could go to. She hadn’t met B.R. for ages; her mother was dead; her brother’s wife didn’t like her; she didn’t have any other friends, relatives or lovers.

Next morning she found him snoring gently on the drawing-room sofa. He looked clumsy and vulnerable, and a strange affection overcame her. Suresh was a bumbling bully, but he was her husband.

‘Have you really had a liaison with B.R.?’ Suresh asked her. ‘No, of course not,’ Priya shuffled. ‘Do you have any intention of trying to get that thing published?’ he asked next (PR, 128). That caught Priya unawares. She had not even considered the possibility.
‘In that case I think we would be best advised to live apart, at least for a while,’ Suresh said, and his voice had the ring of finality (PR, 129).

The next morning Priya telephoned Mrs Maira, who owned the bookshop, and was her proprietress, so to speak and told her she was going on a few months’ leave for pressing personal reasons. Priya then went in the same grumbling taxi to the airlines office and bought herself a one-way ticket to Bombay. As she walked towards the lavatory, she found a familiar figure seated in the front row. It was Shambhu Nath Mishra, in full ministerial regalia.

Priya’s sister-in-law, Dolly, was at the airport in Bombay to receive her. She was flanked by three children and a chauffeur. By the next morning Bhaiyya (Prem) was back. He was very affectionate.

‘Daddy talks a lot about you,’ Prem lisped, ‘he says you were always very clever.’ Dolly sniffed (PR, 134). Perhaps they were as starved for love as everyone else in the family.

Priya discovered a cache of old books in a glass bookcase. There was her mother’s collection of popular Hindi fiction. And then there was that beloved novel of her youth, Rebecca, with her maiden name inscribed in bright blue on the flyleaf.
‘Once again Priya abandoned herself to the fantasies of her youth! Only, rereading it now, Priya felt betrayed, utterly betrayed. Rebecca had after all, done nothing wrong; the dazzlers in the new pulp paperbacks committed adultery almost as a rite of passage. Rebecca’s only fault was that she was strong, stronger than Max! Out of curiosity, and partly as a reaction, Priya started reading her mother’s still intact library of Hindi romance.

‘I am an Indian woman,’ Priya told myself, ‘and for my husband is my God.’ So I got down to telephoning him (PR,137). Resignedly, she walked over to the post office, and booked a call.

Priya is in a crisis. She is in death trap. She regrets and she repents. ‘I didn’t eat for two days after that. I just lay in bed, doing nothing, waiting for the doorbell to ring. I was sure that somebody would miraculously intervene to save me from this living death.’ ‘B.R. Sahib,’ I whispered, and pushed his startled figure aside and made for B.R.’s room.

He was lolling on a settee with his reading glasses on; a magazine dangled in his hands. ‘Priya,’ he said, a little taken aback by her unexpected and dishevelled visitation. ‘What a delightful surprise! Why, is something the matter, love?’ (PR, 142). ‘B.R.! Bubu!’ The words fell like marbles from Priya’s crazed lips. She burst: ‘I think a jellyfish has bitten me.’
Immediately, he took control of the situation. ‘I’ve left them all,’ I said light-heartedly. ‘I’ve left Suresh and I’ve left Paro as well.’

‘That lady, although she was my wife, is definitely one of the crudest, most castrating, selfish women I have ever encountered,’ he continued.

‘Is it a love story?’ he asked teasingly.

‘No,’ I said.

‘What is it about, then?’

I thought for a while. I thought of the dark sea, and the sharp, sure sting of the jellyfish, and of the sad stench of the ebb tide.

‘Passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy,’ I said finally, feeling a little pompous enunciating such long words.

‘Come, love, tell me what it’s really about,’ he said.

‘Liberation.’ I hazarded.

‘Priya, do you think I’m too old to get married again?’ he asked me. It was a bolt from the blue.

‘Are you asking me?’ I said, startled and delighted.

‘Gentle reader, I married him. And we lived, as in a fairy tale, happily ever after.’
I wondered what B.R. would have to say. It was quite possible that he had known already. It would surely be irritating to his vanity to have Paro in the arms of yet another lover.

Her need to live was so total, greedy and heedless, that she would doubtless have exhausted anyone in the sexual fray’ (PR, 150).

Priya returned home. Life soon resumed a timorous momentum. She had a new domestic servant, for Ratan Singh had gone home to his village for something or the other. Suresh had had the house painted, and everything seemed efficient and well managed. Suresh took great pains to be nice to her.

Then Priya seldom discussed Paro, or the past, with each other. Suresh and Priya seriously considered adopting a child though they could not and settled for a pet instead.

However, Paro comes in the picture again. Her appearance into Priya’s life was, as ever, heralded by dramatic coincidence. Half an hour found Priya outside her suite in the Taj. Her met. We found B.R. and his young new Australian wife.

‘So, wife of my youth, what brings you to these distant waters?’ B.R. intoned melodiously (PR, 156).
Paro smiled a little tremulously. Later the tragedy of Paro’s death emerges. Paro dies. Priya watched her die. Lenin had nothing to do with it at all. Yet Priya could not imagine a world without Paro.

So Priya had her dinner, and was sitting over the newspapers, which were full of the tragedy, when Lenin came in, looking completely shattered. ‘Geeta has had a miscarriage,’ he said, ‘and it was a boy’ (PR, 168). He made it sound as though that made it a little more tragic.

‘Paro’s dead, Lenin,’ Priya remonstrated, ‘and we have to forget the past and leave the dead in peace’ (PR, 169). Thus Paro’s life or her tragedy comes to an end. Her rebellion for empowerment ends badly. Savitri Tripathi writes, “The hallowed concept of woman being chaste, a sati savitri also stands deconstructed. In the novel she has no compunctions in discussing sex matters publicly— a feminine taboo. She enters into physical relationship with a boy much lower in age who is a minister’s son.” In an assertive and confident manner Paro continues, “I am myself and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person’ (PR, 48). Paro, thus, succeeds in breaking free from the mould of typical Indian woman being dependent creatures who need a male escort from sixteen to sixty to discharge their assigned tasks. She is free woman, a truly liberated individual.
Priya, the narrator in the novel, leads a surrogate life. She tried to find fulfillment by adopting the Aristotelian morality of the golden mean, the well-beaten path of a mediocre.

The relationship of Paro and Priya at one level symbolizes the envy and hatred which a plain-looking girl unconsciously and universally has for a girl who possesses a natural charm and vivacity - the battle of haves and have-nots which the centuries of indoctrination have cemented in the feminine psyche. Priya never forgives Paro for marrying B.R. the man whom she had idolized and deified in her fancies.

Paro indulges in whimsical social extremes. Even during intimate moments she is capable of dramatizing her experience to gain a point. A child of middle-aged parents, who is rather a ‘bother in their well-ordered lives,’ she spends her childhood in the hostel of a remote public school. She is sexually abused by a school teacher while in her teens, and this experience leaves an indelible scar on her psyche. In every encounter with a new male she lets herself go for a conquest and relentlessly uses the tactical advantage of her sex to obtain a victory, which often proves to be pyrrhic. Priya is shattered by this attitude and resignedly watches the phenomena of having every male in her life ‘in eternal bondage to Paro.’
Critics think Paro is a product of this social indoctrination. Her life-in-relationship with Bucky Bhandpur was an assertion of her individual independence, her romantic affection for Lenin was a conquest for her attention-seeking and emotion-starved self, but her servile infatuation with Shambhu Nath Mishra has to be read as a loud testimony to the psychological bondage of women.

Paro lives with Lenin, flirts with Suresh, marries Leoros, the gay film director, has an accident, is saved and then commits suicide. She had attained almost a celebrity status and was looked up to as a prototype of a liberated woman. But her ultimate rejection of the viable option to live raises several doubts about the authenticity of her public image, and makes her flights from one extreme to the other less genuine.

R. Rajendra Karmarkar observes, “Hindu society is not braced to face women like Paro as it can withstand unfettered men like B.R. and hypocrite women like the narrator Priya Sharma, her rival, who hides her passionate unbridled affair with B.R. and is considered a good wife and wins the respect from the public.” Paro’s unsettled life can be interpreted as an impatient and poignant protest of a woman who was terribly alone and did not want to pilfer her identity in a man-made world.
Rashmi Gaur thinks Paro’s foil Priya presents a different aspect of a woman’s voyage to self identification. Priya’s house-keeping after her marriage to Suresh is a deliberate imitation of whatever little she could glimpse of Paro.

Marriage fails to provide her the promised happiness. It has mutilated her psyche and doomed Priya to a repetetive routine. The diary she starts to write about passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy provides an escape route to her. It is her confession, as well as her catharsis. In the end she comes back to her husband and marriage, as other options are closed for her. Her marriage might have alleviated her toil and economic hardship, but has also fixed her design for living - ennui, waiting, monotony and disappointment.

Paro presents the obsessive passion of women to lead a life of their own choice. Paro and Priya put up with struggle, exploitation and compromise to assert their choices, but are unable to execute them effectively. The novel, among other things, can be read as a case history of exploited womanhood in a patriarchal society.

Thus we see that in *Paro* Namita Gokhale emerges as a committed feminist author. She has successfully portrayed the insensitive fatality of options which the society has cringly given to its women.
It is said, “In any careless or desultory reading of the novel Paro comes out to be a bad woman—a woman of loose morals. However deconstructive approach prevents us from arising at such half-baked decisions. Deconstruction does not accept any labels at their face value. It brings to light hitherto fore hidden meaning waiting to be discovered. Thus Paro viewed from this angle is a free and liberated woman who wants to follow the dictates of her own soul rather than had a subhuman life by obeying the dictates of a male dominated patriarchal society.”

Through the depiction of her female protagonist Paro Namita Gokhale seeks to deconstruct the conventional concept of womanhood. Paro is a rebel who flouts all the social and moral restrictions imposed on woman in the society. She, unlike a typical Indian woman is a perfectly liberated soul far from being a prisoner of her own sex. Her conduct and behaviour appears to be shocking and immoral, viewed from a male dominated patriarchal view of womanhood. However from modern deconstructionist point of view all roles assigned to woman are arbitrary and fashioned by male psyche. Femininity has no such fixed and certain meaning and is open to deconstruction.
Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994) is her second novel. Unlike *Paro* this is not an obscene novel. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* begins with a good deal of information and gives rise to curiosity. The beginning paragraph ends with the information that their shrine was complete. Gudiya is the narrator and tells the story in the first person with frankness and often in a brutally straightforward manner. She knew how her mother ran away with Riyasuddin Rizvi. She thinks of the Englishman who might have been her father. She says, ‘In fact, I did not even know who my father was, and neither for a fact, did my mother or grandmother.’

As a great writer Gokhale takes us straight into the story and we know that the temple has already been founded, and Gudiya, her mother and grandmother have fled from ‘a small town scandal and disgrace.’ As Gudiya’s mother later ran away with Rizvi, Gudiya is left in the company of Ammi, her grandmother, under a peepal tree and in utter penury. Peepal tree has been repeatedly mentioned as if a symbol.

In Ghulam Abbas’s famous short story ‘Anandi’ the prostitutes are asked by the municipality to leave the town and settle outside. When the story ends a new town has come up around the new settlement of the
prostitutes and the municipality of the town is seen discussing the issue of
the prostitutes once again - that they should be asked to vacate the town and
settle outside. The gradual process of springing up of new town around the
prostitutes’ quarters is presented diligently and with feeling and intensity.
The growth in fame and fortune of ‘Mataji Ka Mandir’ in Gokhale’s novel
and a thriving temple complex around the new temple is described in almost
a like manner. The government Janata flats are constructed closeby and the
labourers from central India swarm and are proving a godsend to the
burgeoning temple finances. Even a colony of beggars mushroomed outside
the temple. This is how a series of drastic events begin to take place in Gods,
Graves and Grandmother.

The characters Gudiya and her grandmother are ignorant of God or
divinity and are strangers to the paraphernalia of religion. As for the poverty,
Gudiya has to catch her reflection in a polished steel thali. From the bus
Gudiya finds the city of Delhi ‘like a dying animal.’ We should remember
that not very long ago a controversy was raged whether the city of Calcutta
was dying. Some situations have been presented in such a fashion here too.
When Sundar digs for gold, Gudiya feels an electric shiver in her spine as
the vision of the dead Shambhu had appeared – his face lit up by the
petromax in Phoolwati’s hands, starting at Sundar and Phoolwati with most
extreme ire. A little later, Sundar goes on digging with manic strength and an unnerving vigor even though the gold is found. There must be more of it. It should be natural to remember here Tolstoy’s famous story in which the man goes on and on as he desires more and more land.

We get instances of Emphatic Communion when grandmother calls the lepers ‘pimp dalals,’ when Lila tells the devotees about ‘heaven, swarga’ and when Panditji is unduly perturbed, he says, ‘Theek hai.’ Like many other Indian English writers, Gokhale repeats and the repetition, in most cases, heightens artistic effect. The mourners come with garlands as offerings and soon the air is sticky and sweet and turgid with the smells of sweet and marigold. We cannot help thinking of Dylan Thomas’s ‘a grief ago’ when Gokhale writes ‘two pastries latter.’ She uses archaic expressions.

Gudiya’s grandmother is perhaps the most important and resourceful character. She establishes the temple almost single-handedly and commands a great deal of reverence and respect among the people though she is never well-versed in the higher tenets of Hinduism. A slab of green marble, purloined from a nearby budding site, and five rounded pebbles pilfered from a sahib’s garden, are miraculously transformed by the power of grandmother’s singing voice into an invaluable place of worship. Gudiya is puzzled to make sense of the unfamiliar tableau as the flickering lamp cast
new shadows on grandmother’s trusted face. This sums up the grandmother’s personality. She is liberal, large-hearted and secular. She makes Gudiya take a solemn oath never to yawn under the Peepal tree. All kinds of fantastic stories begin circulating about the grandmother after the establishment of the temple. She is called ‘Amini’ and she wears burqa and gharara and exclaims ‘Hai Allah.’ She tells Gudiya, “‘Arre, Gudiya, these religions, what should I tell you, they are a type of fashion. In the old havelis, the fashion was for Moghul beauties from Persia, Samarkand. And so being a fashionable lady, she switched to burquas. Here, now, under this Peepal tree, perhaps this is better. In foreign countries, England, America, Christ is the fashion, as these phirangi women, they wear skirts. Don’t trouble yourself about all this or your hair will begin to fall like your mother’s” (GGG, 13).

When she tries to calm Saboo, the enraged husband of Magoo, she talks to him soothingly of maya and illusion and how the world is just a dream within a dream. By the time Saboo left he too is caught up in the beautiful world of non-importance, of nothing matters, God’s will and Allah’s inayat. Marx’s opinion about religion - that it is the opiate of the masses is true. Gudiya remembers her grandmother and her views: “... the world is just an illusion, something to be tolerated, something easy that
passes like a hot June afternoon before the cool of midnight’ (GGG,15). At one place, she is presented as ‘Kali-like picture of wrath.’ Later, one gets the impression that she has become a deeply religious person. She tells the narrator that when she was of her (Gudiya’s) age she wanted to be a film star like Zubeida or Jayashree. The events have taken much unexpected turns. She has little knowledge of the mortuary rites though, it is interesting to note, the Brahmin priest entertains a very high opinion of her. Panditji thinks that she is a saint, an embodiment of Shakti. She answers all questions with her usual vague generalisation.

When the grandmother dies, her last rites are made a very big occasion as if for an important person. The public is informed that ‘she has attained maha-samadhi. There is a stampede and the police has to be called into to contain mobs. The people file past the hastily executed cordons. The grandmother is buried in the temple. Her death leaves Gudiya defeated and lonely.

Gudiya remembers her amma. When Gudiya is in Roxanne Madam’s house she thinks of the gold coins and then she dreams of grandmother. The old woman asks Gudiya not to leave her gold lying around. The belly dancers perform their dance and one of the dancers is Gudiya’s mother interestingly. The dream has been described vividly and it has a symbolic
significance. Later, Panditji exhorts the devotees at the temple to generously contribute to the setting up of a fitting memorial to Mataji.

Gokhale’s narrative continues. Gudiya falls in love with a young, handsome, orphan, bastard bandwallah - a member of the Shive Mohan Band party. Pandit Kailash Shastry gives this young man the name ‘Kalki,’ the scourge of the Kalyug. Panditji later clarifies that the name Kalki is only a metaphor. Gudiya’s first sex experience that she has with Kalki behind the bushes is presented with curiosity. Sundar Pahalwan thrashes Kalki and, thereafter, in a function, Kalki and Gudiya are engaged. One feels at a loss as to why they are not married right away. Gudiya passes through various kinds of experiences and that brings about modification in her personality. In the Beauty Parlour, she looks into many mirrors that crowd the room, she recognises herself and imagines she saw many faces staring back.

Phoolwati is the tea-shop owner Shambhu’s widow. She appears on the scene after Shambhu’s murder and later marries Sundar Pahalwan. To many Phoolwati’s character appears most interesting. She is a fine blend of various hues and finds readers’ sympathy. Her breasts have been mentioned again and again. When required she could take the mike and engage the audience at the temple with her disco-bhajans. An important aspect of her character is her affectionate and cordial relationship with Gudiya. However,
it should be noted that Gudiya feels hurt when Kalki remarks that he thought Phoolwati was Gudiya’s mother. One of the conditions of Phoolwati’s marriage with Sundar is that he is to treat Gudiya as their ‘adoptive’ daughter. This condition, however, touched and horrified Gudiya. The fact remains, however, that otherwise the relationship between the two is good. Phoolwati informs Gudiya that Gudiya’s child would be born and brought up in a style worthy of Gudiya’s background.

Phoolwati writes to Sundar Pahalwan about love letters (dictated to Gudiya) and he would reciprocate by sending her audio-cassettes of Hindi films. The description of the conditionnalities of Sundar Pahalwan’s proposed marriage to Phoolwati looks like an official document. Sundar is full of praise for Phoolwati: “No one in the whole of India can match my Phoolwati for brains. M.A, B.A, Ph.D. - she is cleverer than all that... If they made my Phoolwati the Prime Minister of India, she could solve all the problems of this country” (GGG, 191).

Namita Gokhale talks of the third eye and the inward communication in the story. The grandmother has been described as possessing eyes ‘in the back of her head. At a later stage, we are told that Phoolwati, like grandmother, has developed eyes ‘at the back of her head.’ We think here of the third eye of Lord Shiva. The Peepal tree is described. It rebukes Gudiya
by shrieking at her. Every night as Gudiya feels asleep, the Peepal tree begins its seductive song. For Gudiya the swish of the Peepal tree’s large beautifully shaped leaves carries the suggestions of a million slumbering presences. Characters in the novel often feel inward and retreat into private reverie. Gudiya talks of Ammi’s preoccupation with some elusive inward journey. Gokhale has described death scenes several times. The novel contains several detailed eschatological references - the last stage, the end time, the discovery of the fact that somebody is dead, the reaction and the effect.

Gudiya finds her grandmother lying in bed in an unnatural position one day. Pandit Kailash Shastry observes later that her arm is raised in blessing. The raised hand as though warding off attack has metaphoric significance here. Gudiya reacts: “I had never seen a dead person before, yet without touching her or feeling her pulse I knew that she was indeed dead, that the unknown assailant was Lord Yama” (GGG, 58). Gudiya is unable to understand what she is pleading for. The grandmother’s disciple Lila goes stiff with shock, and collapses. Phoolwati slaps Lila tightly across her cheeks to revive her. Gudiya turns to Cyrus in horror who is staring at her. They shake her and try to rouse her, but she makes no response. The dogs are baying outside as if they know what has happened. The servant has sensed a
disaster. When Gudiya is left alone with Roxanne she examines her face, gentle and kind in repose.

After the sharp retort of a machine gun rings out, shattering the morning calm, Gudiya runs out of the house and sees Sundar Pahalwan stagger a few steps and then he slumps down. Still the unknown sniper does not stop. Sundar is inescapably dead. His head rests on a chewed-up banana. Phoolwati quietly, and with great dignity, slowly drags Sundar’s body back into the house. Sundar’s funeral is attended by many politicians. That brings to the fore the problem of criminalisation of politics, a much discussed issue all these days.

The novel Gods, Graves and Grandmother has much surreal humour. Gokhale looks for humour in serious situations. When soon after founding the rudimentary temple, the grandmother prostrates herself before the pebbles and the marigolds on the green marble slab, lays down so still and silent and for so long that Gudiya is afraid she might be dead or in a coma. Shambhu coaxes from his large luminous conch-shell an awesome and angry wail. Soon after the founding of the temple, Gudiya sees a man in a helmet clutching a brief case in his folded hands. The young woman, Magoo, succumbs to Shambhu’s charms. Some people in the temple complex
presume upon grandmother’s otherworldliness and try to fiddle with the accounts or things. These situations are full of humour.

There is much politics in the temple, the central metaphor in the novel. This is a typical Indian situation where we often come across politics in small things. Phoolwati begins working assiduously on the incident, giving it, in retrospect, the dramatic integrity which it lacks. Her gas problem has been described with ridiculous and exaggerated details - Phoolwati suffers from gas. She would contort her substantial figure to improbable postures to ease its passage, coax it out through bump or belch. But an eternal spring of ‘vayu’ seems to reside in her innards, and her life becomes an increasing torrent of internal turmoil. When Ammi dies, Gudiya weeps – “I shed more tears than I had when mother left, or when the Simla trip was cancelled. On grandmother’s death the devotees pile up flowers and coconuts which have to be continuously removed and are taken back to Phoolwati’s shop, from where she recycles them to the next batch of visitors. In the course of grandmother’s pinddan, Panditji distributes gold, clothes, grains and cows to Brahmans rumoured by some malcontents to be Pandit’s relatives (GGG, 66).

A sensible reader gathers the impression from the novel that Gokhale is a keen observer and has an eye for minute details. Sundar Pahalwan
sharpens the edge of his moustache and his eyebrows arch in innuendo, and an incongruous, utterly charming dimple appears under the thick stubble. Gudiya has a sensitive nose and talks of decaying marigold smells. Gokhale records various facial expressions. She takes a close look at eyes and describes them meticulously. Roxanne Madam’s mother, Mrs. Dubash’s eyes bored into her as she spoke – they were old eyes, ringed with wrinkles, glazed over with yellow film, and yet they had a look of humour and cunning and alertness about them. Gokhale is able to present the details of both human and animal eyes effectively. In Gokhale’s novel we get a large number of Hindustani words. Phoolwali makes morphological modifications in her anger and mentions Pandit Shastry as ‘Panditua’ and poses herself as a learned ‘Panditain.’ When we gather them we could prepare a list of fifty words. The presence of these words does not appear just contrived. Some interesting words of this type are: kothewali, peek-dan, tamasha, izzat, chikna, choolha, halva-puri, asli ghee, and stridhan. Gokhale has used many hybridized forms like tea-shop wallah, chaiwallah, bandwallah, mehndi wali, footpath wallah and electrical bhakta. The wallah expressions are interest-arousing. Gokhale is not able to avoid overused, stereotyped expressions and we find in her novel a fair sprinkling of the words and expressions which are anything but original and fresh. For example, she uses ‘crack of down,’
‘needless to say,’ ‘with an iron hand,’ and others. It should be pointed out, however, that Gokhale’s vocabulary is not at all simple and she uses words which are difficult ones as they are not in common use. Gokhale’s diction has variety. This recalls Arundhati Roy’s experiment with language. Gokhale is fond of imagery, particularly of animalification. The grandmother after Shambhu’s murder is still and sentient as a hooded snake. Whereas the famwestncken men in Bhabani Bhattacharya’s So Many Hungers! Looked like dehydrated sticks of humanity the grandmother in Gokhale’s novel has become ‘thin as a stick.’ In Raja Rao’s Kanthapura names ascribed have been often descriptive. In Gokhale’s novel Phoolwati calls Lila ‘Ekdanti’ in honour of her single protruding tooth. Gokhale’s approach towards vocabulary is liberal and the language of the novel, though not without limitation, immaturities and blemishes, is attractive and effective because of experimentation and innovations.

It is, thus, to be noticed that women in Gods, Graves and Grandmother (i) are endowed with well-defined identities, (ii) possess stronger personalities than Paro, (iii) have tremendous innate resources to grapple with the crises of life unlike Paro and, (iv) succeed in establishing an alternative mode of life, as against Paro’s failure to do so. Gokhale goes further in her later novel inasmuch as she comes up with a bolder
perspective on the possibilities for women, their gender constraints not withstanding. *Women in Gods, Graves and Grandmother* are an extension of Paro, and become Paros who are successful and satisfied and affirmative in their attitude to life. The two novels together constitute a broad, encompassing feminist vision, which visualizes a female space in the patriarchal society. In this space women can foreground their subjectivity and are self-sufficient for living with dignity and self-respect.

The novel has a strong cultural perspective. The feminist approach is predominating. The whole novel is about women and about woman’s emancipation and empowerment.

Unrequited love is the classic theme in *The Himalayan Love Story* as the magazine *Cosmopolitan* quotes. It tells a rather unusual story. A young girl yearns to fulfill her sexual desires, only to find that the source of her childhood affections is not really the person with whom she will spend the rest of her life. Neither does she finally end up marrying somebody that she fancies. But then life carries on and Parvati, the heroine, seems defeated. Finally her life takes a turn, when her husband dies and she is left with the task of bringing up her daughter. An old flame revisits her hill village. Mukul Nainwal, the only local boy to have broken out of the shackles of a rural upbringing and having made it good, finds that he cannot absolve
himself from some of the responsibility that his bonds with Parvati tie him down to. Even as he tries to help her daughter, he is torn between his loyalties. What follows is, on the whole, a pleasant surprise.

*A Himalayan Love Story* is told in two parts. Parvati, the heroine tells about her deprived childhood in a reasonably civilized part of the Himalayan foothills. Her father dies young; her mother becomes weak and dies. Unlike her other novels like *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* where the heroine Gudiya survives—a positive note; while Parvati lends herself up in an asylum but of course she survives in her daughter Irra. The novel is not having an effective story, it deals with lust but writer Gokhale’s description of her characters makes them come alive. The first chapter has been narrated by Parvati and it is rightly titled as ‘the dance of the honey bees’—as the bees dance in a haphazard manner as they catch their prey so also Parvati’s life is running in a clumsy manner. Parvati succumbs to destiny, falls prey in the hands of destiny. Gokhale portrays her stark reality.

*India Today* observes, “Gokhale’s characterization is so powerful and real.”

The character of Parvati has been portrayed in such a manner that it acquires readers’ sympathy. A girl without a father, an uncle as a male support and the mother not very understanding towards the girl’s feelings, this is Parvati’s fate. Parvati is young, full of aspirations but without
resources. She has to create her own space. But she fails to do so effectively and lands in crisis. The novel begins, “I have always recognized that I carry emptiness inside me, although I did not at first understand it” (HLS, 3).

The statement reveals Parvati’s existential crisis. Gokhale’s characters suffer from uncertainty and fall prey to wrong decisions taken during crucial circumstances. It is said, “The novel opens with a sentence from the heroine Parvati. The sentence immediately tells one, if the title has not already done so, that the story to follow will involve a failed romance and will be what some reviewers describe as sensitively told.”

This reminds us fragmentation in modern life. The post-modern society has emptiness, vacuum within itself. It is a shallow society and chaotic.

Parvati says, “‘Let me keep one of them,’ I begged, just one! but mother was adamant; we could not afford it. Then let me try them on,’ I said, just to see how they feel. The request was indignantly turned down, although she did soften, and promised to knit me a tasseled scarf after the Shahji’s wife had paid for”(HLS, 4).

The girl heroine is not having a father figure and the mother is not very supportive; moreover they suffer from financial crisis. Parvati comments when they could not afford a soft woolen sweater. Such was their
plight; the girl was brought up under such circumstance, which had an impact on her psyche.

The novel depicts the lives of Parvati and Mukul, both grow up together in the Himalayan town of Nainital. One becomes trapped in an unhappy arranged marriage and finally ends up in a mental asylum, while the other flees the restrictive and conservative hill tribe to live in Hong Kong, returning in middle age to fulfill the last wishes of his former teacher, and to search for an unrequited teenage love. It is a wistful tale. Though Parvati had become a motif for Mukul, he could not accept her haggard and shabby appearance.

The heroine’s mother throws her venom thus: “It would be different if you were a boy, she would say angrily, and then you could earn and provide for me in my old age. But all you are going to do is get married to some no-good, and take my gold champ kali necklace off with you as dowry. It’s double curse, to be first born a woman, then get straddled with another female to provide for!” (HLS,7).

Parvati is not appreciated for studying. Gokhale has portrayed the story within the backdrop of Kumoan hills. But the mother and the daughter share a bond, the blood relation as seen when the daughter appreciates her mother’s culinary skill.
Moreover Gokhale has highlighted their simple ways of life in the hills as compared to the life in the cities. It emphasizes the need for food and how it plays an important place in one’s life. The importance of food is once again highlighted in Parvati’s life; she with her culinary skills could occupy an important place at her in-laws place and even in her husband’s heart. They are interested in bee keeping and Parvati has learnt a lot about it, the subtitle of the first part of the novel is pertaining to honeybees. She explains: “Male bees are usually short-lived, they never collect pollen, nor have they any other responsibilities in connection with providing for their young. Female bees do all the work of nest-keeping and provisioning” (HLS, 40).

This statement from a small girl suggests their fate. Gokhale employs sexual overtones in describing her characters; and she displays a language pertaining to double meanings. She is obsessed with lust is evident in many of her descriptions. It demarcates the role of men and women and this trend continued for a long time and now it has changed somewhat even in the middle class of the society. This small girl is full of aspirations and her thought processes are explicit in the assertion below: “A sharpened pencil gave me an immense sense of satisfaction, and I used to collect the pencil shavings in a cardboard box, certain that I would someday find practical use for them. “I am going to build a palace, a palace of pine cones. We can even
live there. It will be warm and cozy in winter, and if I paint the cones golden, everyone will think we are rich” (HLS, 13).

Such are Parvati’s views and dreams. The statement throws light on the nature of women as they are basically meant to provide beauty and comfort. These views suggest that the girl aspires for richness, she dreams of being rich and living a comfortable life. Sigmund Freud’s views on dreams come true as we go through the necessities. Once while collecting pine-cones she comes across an old lady. The old lady addressing the girl said: “You silly girl, you’re young and pretty just now, but remember, soon, very soon, you’ll become just like me! I am a tree” (HLS, 15).

The statement suggests the importance of beauty for women. It signifies the concept of naturalism. The girl witnesses the things between man and woman, which leave her awestruck; and she exclaims: “My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks. My mother and our tenant stood before me in flesh, their true nature unmasked” (HLS, 17).

This incident has a strong impact on the life of Parvati. Soon her mother dies of tuberculosis and she is shifted to her uncle’s house at Wee Nooke. She shoulders the responsibility of the house as it happens to be a bachelor’s house.
Parvati’s life at her uncle’s house is worse than she had expected. A slice of her misery runs thus, “I blotted my lips with geranium petals to make them red and myself an eyebrow pencil to augment my scanty brows. I even tried to induce a beauty spot on my right cheek, using a combination of black ink and eyebrow pencil, but my terror of Masterji prevailed and I washed it off before the world could witness the transformation” (HLS, 22).

This signifies that a small girl is maturing into a woman; she has become conscious of her physical self. This is the beginning of her getting physically attracted. It was during this time she has got attracted to a young teacher, who taught her history. Salman, the male teacher and Parvati are left alone in a vulnerable situation. She remembers the incident: “I was caught completely unawares by the devastating bliss. Eating a sweet squelchy gulab-jamun, biting into a fresh fragrant apple, clambering up a khumani tree, with the blue sky above and the hard pliant branch beneath my legs pretending I was riding a horse- nothing in my meager experience of physical pleasures had ever predicted such ecstasy. Together we explored the past in some unspecified future” (HLS, 24).

These thoughts from Parvati lead us to think on man-woman relationship, pleasures of a physical union and its repercussion in future life. Parvati’s sojourn with Salman comes to an end and the other men who come
in her life are Mukul and Lalit Joshi. She considers Salman as a mere shadow in her life and Mukul takes his place. Parvati speaks of the latter: “I enjoyed flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul” (HLS, 31).

Such was the state of Parvati’s mind and she is married, not to the person of her choice but a Brahmin Lalit Joshi, to make complications worse. Mukul and Lalit are friends. Parvati narrates her experience of a bride: “After the sexual bliss I had known with Salman, my wedding night with Lalit sent us both into the deepest depression. The decorum of the occasion demanded languishing look, a tender appraisal of the bride by the eager bridegroom, and then, hopefully down to business” (HLS, 32-33).

Once again life takes a topsy-turvy turn for Parvati and she and her brother-in-law Raju experience physical proximity. Such is her state of mind after experiencing the elixir of life, and her husband Lalit is a homosexual who could not satisfy her primal instincts. Parvati is more a prey to circumstance now. We were both lonely, our needs possessed us and we made uncompromising, and uncomplicated love. The new Parvati, this confident and happy woman had mysteriously become, could even cope with Lalit. She says, “We did not mock or question it, but timidly went along with
the tide of happiness. He earned for me, I cooked for him; we had been friends in our childhood. We could be lovers, confidantes and allies” (HLS, 44).

But life has something else in store for Parvati and soon Lalit passes away after being diagnosed for tuberculosis. Then life at Wee Nooke is altogether different. She is carrying and she can experience. The character of Parvati as viewed by others does not hold much significance except that of Mukul. In the first chapter, “The Dance of the Honeybee,” Parvati is the narrator of the story. Gokhale has used the technique of a columnist in her writing, as she happens to be a newspaper columnist and editor. None of the women characters is more impressively portrayed than Parvati’s; some of them acquire reader’s sympathy. When Mukul visits Nainital, after he is assigned the responsibility of handling Wee Nooke after the death of the headmaster, he visits Parvati’s place. He becomes quite nostalgic; he remembers his former days with Parvati and observes, “Then I saw the beloved tree of my youth, under whose branches I had briefly known the textures of Parvati’s hair, and the smell of her skin, which was the smell of magnolias ...” (HLS, 95).

This way Mukul was totally lost in the past and reminisces his life with Parvati in Nainital. He sees Parvati in her daughter Irra; he can find
many similarities in appearance and even manners. Mukul remembers her life with Parvati and how his mother took things casually. He says, “My mother never questioned me about it. It was a wound, which I nursed with devotion, a hurt that was to mingle in time with another rejection, my alienation from home and India. It never ceased to trouble me that I made good not here but elsewhere, until my love for Parvati and for my homeland combined into a single dull pain, the constant grieving pain of jealous and jilted lovers” (p. 106).

Mukul’s first impression of Parvati is this: “I would look with jealous eyes at the orange marigolds, for they were not the colour of her sari, and search with tender devotion for the yellow variety. This ecstasy continued until the next time I met her. She was in a green sari now, and what with the green of the lake, and the green of the trees, and the omnipresent green paint on the doors and roofs and flowerpots of Nainital I shifted the focus of my love to her skin, which I decided anew, was the exact shade and texture of a young magnolia bloom” (HLS, 132).

Mukul is totally allured by Parvati’s beauty. He likes her; he further has to say about her when while touching her tongue, she bites him and is totally allured by this elusive love and imagines to be with her, they go for a movie and such freak outs attract him all the more towards her, he dreams of
her. Of and on he makes references with nature (magnolia tree). Nature plays a prominent role in the lives of the people of the hills.

Parvati has become a motif for Mukul and even everybody else; at such a time her presence back from the asylum is not accepted positively, she is his past and not his present. Mukul still has affection for Parvati, when she comes to her once again he observes: “Her face was battered and blue and bruised, yet a smile played upon her lips, a smile of mysterious interaction with sorrow and acceptance. She was my Durga, my Kali, and my Saraswati” (HLS, 197).

The character of Parvati is portrayed in a way, which creates sympathy for her pathetic situation, and her helplessness leads her to an asylum. This is the most tragic situation in the novel. The only hope is that Parvati survives through her daughter Irra.

The novel has other women characters. Adeliene, another woman character is a foreigner, with a Burmese father and an English mother -- daughter of a colonel, and wife of Mukul Nainwal. Adeleine, according to Mukul, is a woman without emotions especially towards him as he says this: “Adeleine is a very level headed woman, with a strong sense of order and propriety. She taught me the merits of dull comfort over passion, and gradually I was able to forget Parvati” (HLS, 136).
Adeiliene does not play a prominent role in the novel but her presence has made a difference as she has married Mukul. She is portrayed to be a materialistic woman. Mukul is her second husband. Marie is the daughter of Adeliene and now Mukul happens to be her father as he has married Adeliene. She is Mukul’s step daughter.

The lass Irra is Parvati’s daughter. She reveals her feelings to Mukul on questioning; otherwise she is calm and poised like her mother. She exclaims: “I wish to be a doctor; I don’t care where I live as long as I join the medical line. Perhaps I could go to America. I have been to Lucknow twice” (HLS, 110). Irra appears to be quite caring; as when Mukul has a fall she is quite nursing sort and applies some leaves on his bruised body. The action overttakes Mukul with the emotion of a father. Irra has a sense of hospitality; as when Mukul comes to their residence she asks him politely though she is engrossed in watching with her binoculars.

Sheela is the big doll of Irra. It is a walkie-talkie with blonde hair and countenance. Munnibee is the Muslim servant staying at Wee Nooke.

Pasang Rampa is a sales girl and Tibetan by origin and in whose contact Mukul comes in his second visit, and is allured by her charms. Neera, happens to be the wife of Poora. She is a raw looking woman and her
ways are not appealing. Abha Pushpendra, Masterji’s nephew’s wife is attractive.

The novel *A Himalayan Love Story* has many other women characters. They are not prominent, and the story revolves around Parvati. The mother and the daughter do not share a strong bond but however there is some affection as when Parvati doubts her mother, she reproaches herself and so also Irra has affection for her mother and takes care of her. But motherhood is not glorified. The novel does not portray healthy man-woman relationship. It portrays the septics of the society. Both Parvati and Mukul do not have fond memories of their parents, both are deprived of father’s love—one’s father had departed from the world and the other’s departed himself. Mukul’s father had left his mother to become a sanyasi and never returned. Both did not have a positive impression of the mother figure in their lives. Parvati’s mother was caring but being alone had an affair with the shopkeeper and Parvati was a witness at a young and impressionable age, to their romantic sprees. Similarly Mukul’s mother did not have an impact on his life; otherwise a boy is naturally inclined towards the mother but here the situation is different. The novel has a frank depiction. Finally Mukul returns back to Adeleine leaving behind Parvati and Irra. Mukul, Parvati and Irra all are in search of elusive love but none of them acquires their dream, and
Parvati is worst hit of them all. She lands in an asylum. Mukul is unable to do much for Parwati and her daughter Irra, though he wishes to. Finally he returns to Hong Kong, to his emotionless wife Adeleine.

A work of startling originality *The Book of Shadows* is an ambitious book investigates the nature of reality, love and faith. Scarred by her lover’s suicide and an acid attack that has left her permanently disfigured, Rachita Tiwari, the heroine has sought refuge in a remote house in the Himalayan foothills. In this rambling house, built by a foolhardy missionary over a hundred years ago, she lives alone, painting and repainting her nails a bright red, careful not to look into mirrors. As she retreats into herself, battling for her sanity and fearful of a world she no longer trusts, a different dimension claims her and the tremendous history of the house is played out before her.

Dr. Seema Gide observes, “It is hard to know what to make of Namita Gokhale’s *Book of Shadows*. Reminded frequently of Isabel Allende’s acclaimed *House of Spirits*, the tale is of a similar ethereal ilk. Bitya, a young university lecturer from Delhi has been left permanently disfigured from an acid attack by her former lover’s sister. Veiled to hide her disfigurement, she retreats to her childhood home in the Kumaon hills at the foot of the Himalayas to reflect on her life. She lets the house soothe her soul and her housekeeper Lohaniju entertains her with stories. A spirit who
also narrates chapters filled with the salacious details of the former owner’s lives haunts the house.”

Namita Gokhale starts *The Book of Shadows* with a description of nature which is revealing. The tall oaks lean against each other, their groping limbs invading the territories of other trees. They draw strange screeching sounds as bark brushes sap, and the shadows of the forest start speaking in the dark. In the evenings the tortured pines sigh as though with one voice. The poets Thomas Hardy and Robert Frost record this conflict in the woods.

*The Book of Shadows* is about the heroine Ruchita Tiwari. Ruchita writes, “This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house. I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. This house, which knew me as a child, has taken me in again.

Who am I? This essentially philosophical question has suddenly assumed a tangible immediacy.

In those long-ago days when I taught English literature at Jesus and Mary College, when I was myself an earnest overgrown student masquerading as an academic, I tried to explain the concert of alienation to my students.

Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar here” (BS,4).

The concepts ‘house’ and ‘alienation’ haunt her.
Ruchita happens to be an English professor once. She is well-read in western literature. Even she can write a novel later as Priya did in Paro. Zenobia Desai, once her student, was an oversized girl. She stood up and spoke her piece, ‘Excuse me, Madam, I was discussing this with my boyfriend, and we agreed that the stamp of alienation is the loss of identity’ (BS,5). Ruchita did not like poetry, which her student Desai wrote and showed it to her. The irony is that Ruchita’s later life is full of tragic poetry. In fact, the novel abounds in poetry. As Cleanth Brooks says irony leads to meaning, and the novel employs that.

Ruchita loved a man called Anand. This Anand was a gentleman. Both had pre-marital sex and decided to marry. Unfortunately Anand committed suicide one day and his sister, out of social jealousy threw acid to Ruchita’s face. Ruchita was put in a hospital. Once she comes out safe, she stays in her uncle’s house in a Himalayan village.

There was a long suicide note, written in Anand’s sloping italic hand, which went something like this: ‘Goodbye, cruel world! I bid thee farewell! You have tried me sorely, you have abused my trust! My tryst with time is over! Tell the faithless one, the Delilah that her betrayal will cost her dear . . .’ And so on” (BS, 5).
It seems Ruchita had betrayed Anand. She had yielded to passion, as he put it, to the not so subtle persuasion of his best friend’s husband. Unreality gets compounded by confusion. Ruchita’s best friend’s husband had slithered off somewhere, but her fiancé’s sister, as unstable a specimen as her sibling, had thrown a beakerful of acid on Ruchita’s face the day after the inquest.

Anand’s sister taught chemistry at the same college where Ruchita tried to perpetuate the study of English literature. Insanity obviously ran in their family, as also the tendency to take recourse to extreme action upon the slightest provocation.

Ruchita has come to the hills to heal, to hide, to forget and to forgive and to be forgiven. She falls into introspection: “Where am I? My mother was from these mountains, and I knew this house as a child, spent many happy summers here. It belongs to my mother’s brother, my mamaji. He lives in Bangalore now (my parents are both dead) and since he has no children the house will one day probably belong to us, to my sister and to me” (BS,7).

Once Ruchita begins her stay in the place Ranikhet far from the madding crowd a procession of people come out from all directions to meet her. Just then Lohaniju comes loping out of the house. Ruchita comforts: “I
am on medication, antibiotics and anxiolytics. I have Lohaniju to look after me, our old servant Lohaniju, in his eighties now, still tall and strong and garrulous in the extreme. Lohaniju loves the house; he has lived here all his life. He has never been to Nainital, never been to Almora” (BS, 11).

The hill people speak Pahari and it is Ruchita’s mother tongue. N. D. R. Chandraputra comments, “Rachita seeks refuge in the language of her birth just like her creator, who has an inclination towards her Pahari dialect.” Lohaniju is a Scheherzade in his own right, his stories end invariably with a glass of warm milk sweetened with jaggery. Lohaniju is good with Ruchita. Once Lohaniju tells her a story: “There was an English sahib-two of them really, the sahib and his friend. They were bad people, Bitiya-very bad people! They insulted the spirits of these mountains”(BS, 24). There is another of his stories Ruchita loves listening to, the one about Airee, the folk god of the hills, whose armour and bows and arrows lie scattered in temples across Kumaon, whose palanquin is carried by monstrous ghouls and is followed by a procession of dogs. Lord Airee figures prominently in Lohaniju’s repertoire, and in the course of all his Airee tales his left ear maintains a stoic stillness.

Ruchita reads books and she has plenty of them at the old house. She is often worried about her past, particularly her affair with Anand. She says,
“I remember that quarrel. It was a wine and candlelight evening. I was wearing a red sari, a deep red sari. I had invited him to my flat in Delhi, I had engineered the atmospherics to charm the soon-to-flower genius I had fallen in love with. Anand was younger than me, twenty-six to my thirty-three. It wasn’t only the arithmetic that was wrong.

Somewhere along the way the evening had turned sour, rancid. He threw a glass of white wine at me.

He placed the drop of blood upon my forehead, between my eyebrows, just below my bindi. I could feel his fingers. I could feel them, here, now, in Ranikhet, in this house.

“And then suddenly Led Zeppelin returns to the force field, and Anand is reconsigned to limbo, to the special hell reserved for successful suicides. Perhaps, they read their awful adolescent poetry out loud to each other there in the hell reserved for successful suicides” (BS, 32).

Ruchita lives in her uncle’s house. This is an old building. Nearby is an old building built by Mr. Cockerell, a British officer in the Raj times. The author Gokhale recounts it, however too elaborate.

Kumaon is a sub-Himalayan region, 5000 to 9000 feet above the sea level. The climate is delightful, warm, but not oppressively so, in the summer, with the winters not as severely cold as in the land.
Ruchita thinks ‘the memories of that house and the time I spent there haunt me to this day. I shall go there again, I shall return to Ranee-khet, to that same spot in the mountains, and confront the past. There is no other way’ (BS, 56).

Ruchita is unhappy over her stay even, because the business called life has cheated her. The incessant rain is also troublesome, forcing her to find refuge in painting. The scenes of snow are a relief for her.

Her servant Lohaniju is described with his personal life.

Ruchita struggles for sanity and repents on her past. Ruchita say, “Perhaps I’m just trying too hard to be normal. It really is one of the stupidest things one can do. I tried too hard to love Anand, much too hard-if I hadn’t tried so desperately to love him, none of this would have happened. I have to let go, before I can return to myself” (BS, 63).

Words like alienation harbour their particular psychopathology on her psyche.

She says, “No, I’m talking about myself, Rachita Tiwari, touching, thirty-four, forgotten as a person by the world, remembered only as a sensational story. Even Lohaniju knows me only as Bitiya. Although he is kind to me in the way the strong are always kind to the weak, I won’t deny that there is a degree of humiliation involved in receiving his love. The
nights are unbearable. This house is crowded. The procession of horrors that invades my consciousness with monotonous regularity is wearing me down” (BS, 67).

The snakes have been rained out of their burrows, and Lohaniju cautioned Ruchita from venturing out alone. The snake, as well as the crow later, serves as a symbol of natural relief. They have their own sorry tales.

Ruchita reads Mahadevi Verma’s poetry for relief. It is romantic. It is also the shadows from the past. Ruchita thinks her poetry is beautiful, mystical, though perhaps a little abstruse.

Ruchita speaks of pain as precondition to life, a prelude to joy. It is a teacher, not a tormenter. Lack of stimulation leads only to a lack of sensation. Better, then, the pain. She sings,

Pain sticks to my mind
like a damp cloth;
as though drowning, these wet sighs
come crowding to my lips (BS, 72).

The poet Mahadevi Verma is a sort of camera obscura.

Synesthesia is a physical condition of the cerebral cortex that leads to a fusion of the mental and emotional world, of the abstract and the concrete in our perceptions. Many artists and writers, notably Rimbaud, pave
‘suffered,’ if that is the term for it, from synestheti c visions of sound and colour-they have ‘felt’ numbers, ‘seen’ the colours of emotions, ‘heard’ flowers. Synesthesia is, literally, a crossing over of the senses, a demolition of the internal boundaries and constraints that demarcate the territories of experience. Ruchita has heard and read about synesthesia, perhaps she is now suffering it.

Ruchita’s house had been empty for a long time, though a few people had come and gone. Dona Rosa sat at the bay window, watching the sun set over the Himalayas. She had the most serpentine mind Ruchita has ever encountered.

Dona Rosa’s sexuality had a sort of static, and it moved Ruchita tremendously. Ruchita knew of her being, but her history, the particular truth of her past, could only be understood and reconstructed from scattered thought impulses and shards and splinters of memory.

Dona Rosa was born under the star of travel and change. Her earliest memory of herself was in a cathedral-the Dom in Berlin, replete with cherubs and angels and gold everywhere. She actually hailed from Moscow.

Another puzzling woman character is Laura, and Ruchita can see her in the eager curiosity with which Dona Rosa accosts her world, in the unsettling challenge of her beauty.
Namita Gokhale’s novel *The Book of Shadows* brings us the wealth from the past. Like ‘History House’ in Arundhati Roy’s *The God of the Small Things* incidents about Capt Wolcot’s building is a haunting shadow here.

Ruchita tells “This man-ah, I had better start telling the story better-this man was Captain Wolcott, a friend and student of the magician Aleister Crowley, the great beast so reverenced by Munro and Marcus. Wolcott was a stupid, simpering sort of man with a body of anger inside him, and this anger gave him heat and sexuality and made him attractive to women: Dona Rosa had met him on the ship to India, on a moonlit night, on the decks of the P. & O. Steamer where she sat watching for mermaids and falling stars. She had imagined that they fell in love, but of course it was nothing like that, it was just karma, and her destiny, which drew her as a string pulls a kite, to this house, high on the mountains, where I was waiting, bored, restless and uncertain” (BS, 86). This Capt. Walcott happens to be Dona Rosa’s husband.

Walcot was an adventurer, a gambler, constantly cowering under the consequences of his own stupidities. Yet he considered himself a magician, a Master of the Universe. He had published a slim volume of poetry, after the Greek style, when he was eighteen. It had been plagiarized from his sister
and was well received. He had never been in the army, of course. That went
without saying. Ruchita wondered why he had remained a captain.

It was Wolcott’s looks that had led Dona Rosa to love him; that and
her destiny. Why had Wolcott made this journey to the East? He had
travelled to Ceylon, where he first encountered his mentor, Crowley.
Aleister Crowley of Trinity College, Cambridge, had taken pity upon him
and adopted him as a pet. He lived with Crowley in Paris briefly. Walcot
read the poetry of Ernest Dowson and Oscar Wilde. He despised Yeasts.

Laura, who by then had become Dona Rosa for reasons far too private
to share with others, was on the Fishing Fleet to India. Wolcott was himself
on the run from his past. So his story is also a shadow here.

Moreover, it had been used for magical and mystical purposes by mad
Munro, a student and disciple of the occult, and his friend Marcus. Both
Munro and Marcus were silly dilettantes with an appetite for pain and
sadism. Munro fancied himself as a hunter, and every weekend he and his
cronies would get the locals to scour the surrounding forests of oak and
deodar for young panthers, which they caught in cleverly laid traps and
brought to the big house.
The colonel’s wife—Rita that was her name—invariably got involved in arcane discussions about what the blood they were drinking really symbolized.

The search for freedom that had led Marcus and Munro to the occult had already degenerated into an escape from boredom. Their Anglo-Saxon upbringing did not give them the strength to sustain the guilts and inner tensions of their conditions.

The author speaks of animal sacrifice conducted by Marcus and Munro. This is because of their hunting. The Himalayan people believed in sacrifice. This is based on superstition. The whites also indulged in it. When humans die, their psychic residues spill over to our world, to other worlds. Their collapsing energies emanate almighty helplessness, clogging up consciousness, making it difficult to comprehend or switch over to other spheres. Ruchita knew at that moment that someone had died.

Now that a male infant had been slaughtered, now that they had participated in the mystery of its flesh, nobody seemed to know quite what to do with it.

Namita Gokhale brings in wealth of folklore. In one incident she speaks of two folks who love each other but the man deserts her finally. The sad story is this: “That pleased her, it made her happy, and she yielded him
her many treasures. But when she talked of marriage the young sepoy could think only of his father, that fierce upholder of dharma, to whom nothing in the world was as abhorrent as the intermingling of the castes, the confusion of bloodlines” (BS, 111). This washerwoman returned to her washing, her tight behind wiggling with venom at man’s perfidy.

Even mad Munro had feelings, he could not bear to be the instrument of his beloved Marcus’s death, and he promptly shot himself in the temple in an excess of grief. Ruchita meant no mischief, the act and the incitement was theirs alone. And so these sorry journeyers to the East as well as their counterparts here came to an ugly end, their delusions of omnipotence over a willing universe destroyed by stupidity and boredom.

Of other whites Kennedy was drowned at sea just a little way out of Bombay Harbour—some thought he had committed suicide. Dunbar became a man of the cloth and later immigrated to Australia. Forbear became a general and a man of great substance.

The colonel of the regiment, a man called Osborne, moved into the big house now.

Ruchita is disturbed often. She says, “‘I have learnt from bitter experience that there is no solace in philosophizing—it only exacerbates the wounds of my fractured experience” (BS, 124). She recounts a sad event: “I
did not know then, on that cold February evening, that soon afterwards
Osborne would pick up his gun from its perch in the panelled study wall and
venture into the blustery twilight, successfully shoot at a rabbit, raped a hill
woman returning from the forest with a bale of grass and fodder balanced
upon her head, and, after taking his satisfaction of her, shoot himself through
the temple and die” (BS, 125).

Such passages always cause Ruchita pain. Osborne’s wife and his
young daughter who had died at sixteen came forth to greet him. After
Osborne, not a soul ventured nears the house. Even the servants stayed
away, impelled by neither curiosity nor habit. And then Benedictus, the
father (priest) came here, to this house that contains Ruchita for reasons she
cannot recall.

The Father was a man given to long rambling walks. He collected
butterflies, and folklore, and was garnering material for a book upon the folk
tales of Kumaon and Nepal.

Life as the butterfly knows it is a fearful quest for nectar. All these
characters including Ruchita are in quest for fulfillment. The range of
education Ruchita received from Father Benedictus was encyclopaedic.

Sometimes Ruchita thinks that perhaps this house is her body. Once,
when Ruchita was protesting the miserable fate that left her without visible
proof of her existence, the Father gave her this rejoinder: ‘The body, like the clothes we wear, are only emblems of identity, to mark the wearer as such-and-such; these outward accoutrements often serve to conceal more than they reveal” (BS,131). He told her of a man he was in correspondence with, a doctor of the mind called Sigmund Freud, and another, a student of the first, one Carl Jung.

Father Benedictus was a seeker of knowledge and a skilled interrogator. Although he had taught Ruchita about the glyphs of language, Benedictus and Ruchita did not communicate through the medium of words, or imagery, or symbols. They participated instead in a sort of osmosis, where they permeated each other’s consciousness and experienced a complete and uncomplicated understanding. One day Benedictus’s death orphanised Ruchita.

Ruchita befriends Dona Rosa and talks of her most intimately: “My muse, the object of my meditations, is Dona Rosa, she of the rose-red lips, her of the wandering heart, her of the beguiling eyes and bewitching smile. Oh, Dona Rosa, as you sit before the window in the glowering sunset, as the advancing shadows redefine the planes of your beautiful face, my heart stops as I sight you and I beseech the fates that the moment halt against the tides
of time. In an agony of remembrance I relive my hours with you, in the memory which is the prerogative of words” (BS,195).

Rosa was beautiful beyond belief. There was a force field of energy around her that was uniquely her own-a compound of certainty and shyness which penetrated Ruchita’s actions. In short, she was magical. Beauty is a form of intelligence and grace, and Rosa’s magic lay sheerly in her beauty.

Both Rosa and Wolcott were fond of drinking. They consumed great quantities of alcohol regularly. Ruchita loved to watch her drink, observe the loosening of her inhibitions, the unleashing of her intuitions. When Rosa and Wolcott had drunk too much liquor, their consciousness became querulous, cloudy, and granular.

Ruchita begins to display the sentimentality so fatal to lovers. Love, like magic, is an illusion, but at least it is that. Reality is a shoddy hoax. When, like them, one can see the spaces between things, the inconsequences between actions and events, the human belief in reality is at best laughable. Reality is an imposed superstructure, a construct of the internal imagination as defined by immediate circumstance. So we see Ruchita’s philosophizing very attractive.

The history house events continue. Nicolas Krutz, the German, entered the garden, past the outhouse and the clump of bamboo that framed
the triangular snow-peak of Nanda Devi. At that moment Nicholas Mann (a traveler) came down from his bedroom, past the veranda into the garden. Instantly and simultaneously they fell in love with Rosa. They both shared the same name, Nicolas Krutz and Nicholas Mann, and they were both in retreat from different things, both running away from different fears. They too lived in the shadow of the past.

Dona Rosa introduced herself and led them up the stairs to their rooms—the two Germans and the lady who was with them, the Indian princess. Only she was neither Indian nor a princess. Veera was an Armenian from Calcutta whose sister was the mistress of a famous ruler from Rajasthan. The sister lived in a flat in Bombay with the prince. Veera talked of her sister’s flat in Bombay, which she described as her own. Her recitation of her wealth only fanned Wolcott’s lust.

Nicholas Mann, who had noticed the other Nicolas kiss Rosa, who had watched helplessly as he observed the sparkle in her eyes and the invitation in her lips, was feeling miserable. Ruchita felt nauseated by this company. She says, “Krust was dead. In the house, Nicholas Mann and Dona Rosa, Veera and Wolcott were still consumed by their madness” (BS, 180).
Now Ruchita was in retreat from Wolcott, from Rosa, from the others. She could at that moment say with perfect honesty and truth that everything human was repugnant to her. Marcus and Munro and the grand scales of their evil repulsed her.

We shall omit what happened next, for it is not a part of Ruchita’s story in the novel. To add to the consternation, Veera’s diamonds were lost; they had been stolen by one of the servants as she lay asleep before the fire. Already distraught by the loss, she collapsed completely. As her hopes crumbled, her face became a pitiful swollen mass, her lips flaccid with defeat.

Father Benedictus once told Ruchita that every tragedy contains in its resolution a moral. Each of them is, ultimately, trapped in place or dimension, nobody is ever free.

Namita Gokhale provides us nature’s descriptions now and anon. she speaks of how cannabis flourishes everywhere in Himalayan hills. The sacred hemp plant, the bhang, is only planted in the dark of a moonless amavasya night to fully realize its potential as window to other worlds and realities. Ruchita had bhang once by accident as a child, she had it on Holi in a fried pakora that was not meant to find its way to her. Her mind floated away and
for hours she was delirious with the joy of discovery. We learn that bhang is a way of life in the Himalayas.

One day a woman walked towards Ruchita’s house. She was naked. She was a follower of Baba Gorakhnath. Some people called her a madwoman, and a sorceress. Women who are troubled by an excess of strength sought her out in the forest. Her eyes flashed fire. Lohaniju said she created a miracle when her husband turned into a buffalo, after debasing her. ‘This Mai is a scourge of male spirits’ (p. 196), Lohiniju said. Ruchita recognized something of herself in her.

This event is very suggestible, and an immense sadness overtook Ruchita, a cosmic sadness, if Ruchita may use the word without sounding comical. Only the distant Himalayas continued to reassure her in spite of their pink-and-grey postcard prettiness.

Ruchita’s life, as we can see, is a series of conditioned responses, and as usual she had found a suitable literary handle to hang on to, an echo that dismissed the need for primary and original reaction.

Well, the two of them, Ruchita and her servant, went into a trance.

If at the end of our journey

There is no final

Resting place,
Then we need not fear
Losing our way (BS, 202).

Lohaniju was not well one day. “My time has come,” he said, ‘I’m afraid, Bitiya, that my time has come at last.’

‘I belong to this house, and this house belongs to me,’ he said dreamily.

Ruchita’s sister telephoned again that week. She came up with another of her optimistic long-distance solutions. ‘Why don’t you write a novel?’ she said” (BS, 207 -208).

Ruchita toyed with the idea awhile before rejecting it. The concept is quite autobiographical. N. D. R. Chandra thinks, “Gokhale admits that writing a novel was a therapeutic experience and may be this novel helped her ease the grief and anger she felt after Rajiv’s death. She compares Rachita’s situation to that of her own.”¹⁵ This is how Gokhale’s heroines become vocal and assertive.

Lohaniju began to keep to himself. He was running a temperature for a week, his daughter was living with him, she prepared meals, she was not as good a cook as he. Ruchita was getting near the end of her resources. It was as though her field of vision was narrowing.
One day Ruchita distinctly heard an inner voice speak. It whispered from the debris of clamorous emptiness that was her centre. It said to her, ‘Hang on. Just hang on, okay?’ (BS, 212).

In the past days when Ruchita still taught in college, when Ruchita was a popular teacher and a desirable young woman engaged to an aspiring genius, she had taught a paper on the novel. The novel introduced order into disorder, it culled selectively from random and diverse sources, it conspired with the author’s consciousness to play dice. The novel was a lying, deceitful mechanism, it led its readers into an unnatural addiction for order and resolution and other such compulsive fictionalizing.

Sometimes, in life (unlike in fiction) the search for order falsifies. Dissociation is as important as association. This reminds us T. S. Eliot’s views on tradition.

Ruchita got another call from her sister. Their uncle in Bangalore, the one who owned this house, had telephoned her, which was an event in itself. He was a hermetic man, a recluse; he could even be called eccentric. He had received an offer of sale for the house, an offer so fantastic and astronomical that it left all dumbstruck.

One day Zenobia meets her ex-teacher Ruchita. Zenobia was with her lover. The two were kissing each other as if there was no tomorrow. The
noel ends with Zenobia’s romance as a happy note. The whole thing means that compromise is part of life.

Rachita is the protagonist of Gokhale’s *The Book of Shadows*, a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile, of forbidden passions and family histories told in a sensual, descriptive style, which lends energy to her tense psychological drama with all its intimacy, and haunting elusiveness. It is an original and ambitious piece of work and wide-ranging with a laudable cosmopolitan edge. Seema Gide thinks Rachita longs to escape from her present state of mind into her childhood when their garrulous servant Lohaniju used to tell them interminable stories. She wants to forget the alien language and seek refuge in the servant’s soft and consonated Pahari. Like the house, he too has taken her in to become a solace to her sorrows. She spends her days in the mountains reading poetry, drowning her in the childhood pleasures of comics but takes care to paint her nails so as to not fall into ‘physical and emotional disrepair.’

Gokhale uses mysticism quite liberally. Using the magic of the Himalayas as the backdrop, the book vibrates with the spirits of the hill folk, black panthers, three dead Sherpas allowed to die by Allister Crowley, mentor of Captain Wolcott and the spirit of a young girl killed before the house were built, among others! At times it seems Gokhale has given free
reign to her imagination. Gokhale has a masterful grasp of English language and a vivid imagination that lets her spare no one in the story. Not even the benign Catholic priest Father Benedictine. He takes up residence at the haunted house, befriending the spirit who lives behind the curtain with whom he shares many thoughts and experiences. The reader is never told who the ghost might be. The ghost describes itself as suspended in time and space, without a body, without a context, ignorant of the reasons and circumstance that have led to this strange exile, this cruel isolation.

Sushmita Sen observes, “What saddened me most about this book is Gokhale’s ability to see the macabre in everything. She beautifully describes butterflies as being unresolved spirits and in them in the next instant their unheard screams as they are pierced with pins for mounting into display cases. Unlike Isabel Allende who can maintain the floating ethereal sensation that her prose evokes, Gokhale sends her readers’ feelings crashing down at every turn. Where Allende provides sweetness, Gokhale relishes the grotesque. Her writing is like a sharp pencil etching out each character and briefly highlighting each shadow in turn. I couldn’t help but wonder, though, if it is time for the author to exorcise her own ghosts and move out of the shadows into the light now.”16 Humra Qureishi quotes Gokhale’s view, “This is a book about a core of past-life memories, which I have
fictionalized. I don’t want to talk about it, as I have not really let go of the book yet, I’m still working on it, or perhaps it’s still working on me.”

Gokhale’s latest novel *Shakuntaka* is a feminist saga. The novel centres on the heroine Shakuntala. The narrative has a cultural deminision reminding U. R. Ananthamurthi’s trend-setting novel *Samskara*. On the ghats of Kashi, the most ancient of cities, a woman confronts memories that have pursued her through birth and rebirth. In the life she recalls, she is Shakuntala of the northern mountains – spirited, imaginative, but destined like her legendary namesake to suffer the samskaras of abandonment. Stifled by social custom, hungry for experience, Shakuntala deserts home and family for the company of a Greek horse merchant she meets by the Ganga. Together, they travel far and wide and surrender to unbridled pleasure, as Shakuntala assumes the identity of Yaduri, the fallen woman as Gokhale’s other heroines Paro and Priya did it. But an old restlessness compels her to forsake this life as well. Finally she meets with tragedy.

*Tehelka* observed, “Gokhale’s new novel chronicles the life of Mother India, Daughter India and everywoman in most of India, a timeless tale … ambient with history and cross-hatched with lucid, spare prose.” *India Today* said, “Gokhale’s *Shakuntala* is the female counterpart of Hesse’s *Siddhartha*, a seeker who must follow the trail of her destiny without
looking back … Gokhale is drunk with the sound of words and that itself makes for a hypnotic read … This is Shakuntala for the 21st century.”¹⁹

According to *Telegraph*, “An intriguing interplay of history and myth, suffused with profound metaphysical queries about the self … Gokhale’s gripping and nuanced narrative offers a colourful template of ancient Indian life … her style is richly sensuous.”²⁰

: References:


4. All the textual references are from Namita Gokhale’s Paro, Penguin, New Delhi, 1984.


8. All the textual references are from Namita Gokhale’s Gods, Graves and Grandmother, Penguin, New Delhi, 1994.


13. All the textual references are from Namita Gokhale’s The Book of Shadows, Penguin, New Delhi, 1999.


19. *India Today*, Ibid.