CHAPTER – V

PERSPECTIVES ON

CULTURE AND IDENTITY

IN

THE NOVELS OF ARUNDHATI ROY AND

NAMITA GOKHALE: A COMPARATIVE

STUDY
Many modern Indian women writers have written fiction which is new, experimental and anti-establishment. Writers like Anita Desai, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Namita Gokhale and Sunita Joshi are just a few whose fiction is full of feminist protest against man’s domination and suppression of the fair sex from time immemorial.

Amongst them all, Arundhati Roy is a hardcore writer as ever before. She is an educated, empowered woman. Even she had two marriages. Apart from writing the novel *The God of Small Things* for which she got the Booker Prize in 1997, she emerged as a political activist, social worker and finally environmentalist.

Since *The God of Small Things* Roy has devoted herself mainly to nonfiction and politics, publishing many collections of essays, as well as working for social causes. She is a spokesperson of the anti-globalization/alter-globalization movement and a vehement critic of neo-imperialism and of the global policies of the United States. She also criticizes India’s nuclear weapon policies and the approach to industrialization and rapid development as currently being practiced in India, including the Narmada Dam project and the power company Enron’s activities in India.
In an interview with *Times of India* published in August 2008, Roy expressed her support for the independence of Kashmir from India. Roy disputes U.S. claims of being a peaceful and freedom-loving nation, listing China and nineteen third world countries that America has been at war with – and bombed – since the second World War, as well as previous U.S. support for the Taliban movement and support for the Northern Alliance (whose track record is not very different from the Taliban’s). She does not spare the Taliban: “Now, as adults and rulers, the Taliban beat, stone, rape and brutalise women, they don’t seem to know what else to do with them.”

In an opinion piece, once again in *The Guardian* (April 1, 2009), Roy made a plea for international attention to what she called a possible government-sponsored genocide of Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Roy has campaigned along with activist Medha Patkar against the Narmada dam project, saying that the dam will displace half a million people, with little or no compensation, and will not provide the projected irrigation, drinking water and other benefits.

In a 2001 opinion piece in the British newspaper *The Guardian*, Roy responded to the US military invasion of Afghanistan, finding fault with the argument that this war would be a retaliation for the September 11 attacks: “The bombing of Afghanistan is not revenge for New York and Washington.
It is yet another act of terror against the people of the world.”7 According to her, U.S. President George Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair were guilty of a Big Brother-kind of doublethink.

In 2003, the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, a social movement for adivasi land rights in Kerala, organized a major land occupation of a piece of land of a former eucalyptus plantation in the Muthanga Wildlife Reserve, on the border of Kerala and Karnataka. After 48 days, a police force was sent into the area to evict the occupants—one participant of the movement and a policeman were killed, and the leaders of the movement were arrested. Roy travelled to the area, visited the movement’s leaders in jail, and wrote an open letter to the then Chief Minister of Kerala, A.K. Antony now India’s Defence Minister, saying ‘You have blood on your hands.’

Roy has criticized Government’s armed actions against the Naxalite-Maoist insurgents in India, calling it ‘war on the poorest people in the country.’ According to her, the Government launched the offensive in Naxals to aid the corporations with whom it has signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). While she has received support from various quarters for her views, her description of the Maoists as ‘Gandhians’ raised a controversy.
Likewise, Namita Gokhale is a fine modern Indian English novelist. She is an emancipated and empowered woman writer. As a feminist, she is known for her candid expression of sex and lust. In short, she reminds us Arundhati Roy as well as Shodha De. Her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* (1984), a satire upon the Mumbai and Delhi elite caused an uproar due to its candid sexual humour. Is it not like Roy’s depiction of Ammu and her daughter Rahel’s sexual life, which is naturally outspoken and a derring-do action?

In that sense, Gokhale’s perspective of feminism, and treatment of sex is similar to that of Roy’s in *The God of Small Things*. We need to remember the fact that Roy has written only one noel. On the other hand, Gokhale has written half a dozen of them. Of course, Roy’s single novel yet has many cultural perspectives, as one can notice so many of them in Gokhale’s novels. We need to remember that both Roy and Gokhale worked in television and film directly or indirectly.

Early in her career, Roy worked for television and movies. She wrote the screenplays for *In Which Annie Gives It Those Ones* (1989), a movie based on her experience as a student of architecture, directed by her current husband, and *Electric Moon* (1992); she also appeared as a performer in the first. Roy attracted attention in 1994, when she criticised Shekhar Kapur’s
film *Bandit Queen*, based on the life of Phoolan Devi. In her film review titled, ‘The Great Indian Rape Trick’ she questioned the right to ‘restage the rape of a living woman without her permission,’ and charged Kapur with exploiting Devi and misrepresenting both her life and its meaning. Similarly Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, an ironic fable about street life in New Delhi was adapted into a musical play.

Both Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale have identical kind of family experience and identity crises. Roy, also from Bengal experience, married architect Gerard da Cunha. Unfortunately the couple could not live together for long. She met her second husband, filmmaker Pradip Krishnen in 1984.

Namita Gokhale married when young. She got cancer when thirty-five, and a few years later, her husband died. This experience of illness and loss has informed her later books *A Himalayan Love Story, The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntala*.

Namita Gokhale conceptualised the famous International Festival of Indian Literature, Neemrana 2002, and also The Africa Asia Literary Conference, 2006. She has worked on groundbreaking seminars on *Translating Bharat*, and *Textile Narratives* with the literary consultancy
Siyahi. She is a founder-director of the Jaipur Literature Festival along with the author, William Dalrymple.

Both Roy and Gokhale are fine writers of fiction and public figures. So far their image as public figures is seen. The following pages are about the similarities in the fiction of Roy and Gokhale. Bot writers are feminists, public figures, sensitive writers, depicting modern Indian life.

The thematic concerns in the fiction of Roy and Gokhale are woman’s studies, woman’s identity crises, feminist perspectives, cultural aspects, politics, economy, globalization and language issues. The point is that both Roy and Gokhale write about modern life from woman’s standpoints. This standpoint is a criticism of tradition, society and the issues of marginalization.

The major thematic concerns in Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*, apart from depiction of family life are,

Ammu’s (author’s) criticism of tradition, society and marginality (both untouchability and woman’s suppression), the novel speaks of politics. It criticizes communist government in Kerala, the novel speaks of marginality of caste and sex, and speaks of incest and the obscene, and the novel provides diasporic experience: dislocation and identity crisis, the novel is a technical tour de force. It is known for feminist English and linguistic inventiveness.
Likewise, Namita Gokhale’s fiction has several of these issues dwelt with in her novels *Paro, Gods, Graves and Grandmother, A Himalayan Love Story, The Book of Shados* and *Shakuntala*. *Paro* presents the story of an uninhibited, outgoing, irresistibly harming woman who knows her assets and calculatedly makes full use of them for enslaving the males. Paro’s sexual encounters with men become both a means of asserting the power of her femaleness and an exercise in defining herself. Adultery in woman is unpardonable and an adulterous woman is treated as a moral blot on society. It is this hypocrisy and these double standards which Gokhale seems to be attacking by making Paro travel from man to man as a seductive temptress. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* deals with what we can call radical feminism. In this novel, not only does Mrs Gokhale present a gyno-centric view of the world, but also makes women characters self-dependent and empowers them to grapple with the hostile social reality. They eminently succeed in carving a niche for themselves in the male-dominated society, and prove that what man can do woman can do. *A Himalayan Love Story* depicts Parvati’s sufferings. *The Book of Shadows* is a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile.

Arundhati Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things* is a harsh criticism of traditional Indian life, its society and politics. Rama Kundu writes, “In this
last decade of the century, some remarkable young women writers in the Indian subcontinent appear to have registered their realization that tradition could but prove a dubious heritage for the oppressed; while it seemed sustaining in some ways, an ancient tradition with its entrenched orthodoxies might as well prove crippling and even dangerous for the backward and the downtrodden."

The God of Small Things is characterized by an unmistakable and unhesitant ‘Indianness.’ (One might recall Roy’s proud claim: ‘We write our story,’ Time.). This is noticeable in the basic theme, the tradition-ridden social backdrop with its segregating mechanical ‘Love Laws,’ the ethnic element, the sense of place (one of the major features of postcolonial literature in English). A South Indian village with its river, its houses, dusty dirt-roads, mud and squalor, trees, birds, the bright blue sky, the deserted house across the river, the changes wrought about with time, and things that do not change the sound of rain, the smell of water,-all these together contribute to make the spatial element vividly living.

Likewise Gokhale is a modernist. Dr. B. K. Sharma in his thought-provoking article on Gokhale’s first 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 story reads as if anti-traditional. Priya, B.R.’s secretary is loved by B.R. But B.R. marries Paro. Priya marries Suresh of New Delhi. A few years later, Paro divorces B.R. and turns a sort of public property. 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. She lives with Bhandpur, a former cricketer. Paro and Priya’s life moves in a parallel manner. Paro then falls in love with Avinendra, a minister’s son. 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).

Gokhale describes how the two woman Paro and Priya wayward and indulge in sexual orgies more as a mark of empowerment. Toni Morrison’s Sula has similar kind of theme and characterization. It is said, “Sula and Nel are two young black girls, clever and poor, and they grow up together sharing their secrets, dreams and happiness. Then Sula breaks free from their small-town community in the uplands of Ohio to roam the cities of America. When she returns ten years later much has changed, including Nel, who now has a husband and three children. The friendship between the two women becomes strained and the whole town grows wary as Sula continues in her wayward, vagabond and uncompromising ways.”

Paro and Priya seem to have been possessed of sex as a deadly passion. Paro has an affair with Shambunath Misra, a minister. She also loved Suresh. Later two things happen: one she visits America and Avinendra marries Vinnie, not Paro. Priya takes up a small job in Hotel Oberoy, as a mark of empowerment. Once Paro admits her sex life: ‘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 myself in the process’ (PR, 109). Later Paro loves Krishen Singh. Paro marries Raju and migrates to Dubai.
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.

This act of writing a confessional book about their nasty life provokes Suresh. The two separate for a couple of months. One must admire Priya’s boldness now. 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.

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.

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.

Thus Paro’s life or her tragedy comes to an end. Her rebellion for empowerment ends badly. Savitri Tripathi thinks 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. Priya, the narrator in the noval, leads a surrogate life. She tried to find fulfilment 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.
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.”11 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.
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.

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.

Gokhale’s second novel is also anti-establishment narrative. Gods, Graves and Grandmother depicts Gudiya, a new woman. She is emancipated and empowered. She is different from Paro and Priya as she lives lonely and heroically. Economic freedom is what matters here.

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 has mushroomed outside the temple’ (GGG, 66). This is how a series of drastic events begin to take place in Gods, Graves and Grandmother.

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. She is liberal, large-hearted and secular. 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, América, 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 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. This is like re-writing (or establishing) of woman’s tradition.

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 experience 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.

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.

Gokhale’s third novel *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 novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* where the heroine Gudiya survives—a positive note; 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 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.”¹² 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).

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

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, and then get straddled with another female to provide for!” (GGG, 7).
Parvati is not appreciated for studying. Gokhale has portrayed the story within the backdrop of Kumoan hills.

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.

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.

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).

*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 society.
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* as 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 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.”

Gokhale’s novel The Book of Shadows is about (woman’s) alienation as a major modern psychological issue. 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.
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,66-67).

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).

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. 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.

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 Rosa accosts her world, in the unsettling challenge of her beauty.

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, an incident 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.

This world is torn apart because of man-made discrimination. If racism ravages the west, it is caste and tribal categories that spoil life in the east. Ganghi himself said that untouchability is a blot on Hinduism. Both Roy and Gokhale deal with the issue of marginality in their fiction. This is explicit in Roy’s novel The God of Small Things. In a way, the bulk of postcolonial New English literature being written across the globe--from Australia to Africa, West Indies to Asia --since the last few decades, have been generally preoccupied with the problems of the marginalized and the underdog. In India the focus naturally falls on dalits and women who
represent the case of the underdog in this still largely tradition-abiding society, among whom, again, the untouchable epitomises the worst form of marginalization.

One of the dominant socio-political concerns in Roy’s novel is the rigid caste-structure to be seen in India. This caste-oriented rigidity sometimes plays havoc with the innumerable innocent lives. The ‘bigness’ of ‘big things’ and ‘big people’ should be read in their generous and compassionate understanding of ‘small things’ and ‘small people.’ Unfortunately, in the present-day Indian society, this is not to be, and the inevitable consequence is tragic and claustrophobic. The weaker sections of our society—like the paravans, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, the dalits and the have-nots inescapably suffer a good deal in the process of caste-stratifications.

Subsequently, as we learn from the novel, Ammu and Velutha turn deep lovers of each other, throwing away all scruples of caste, creed and community. Ammu being a great dreamer, even in daytime, dreams of ‘a cheerful man with one arm’ (GST, 215) who leaves ‘no footprints in sand, no ripples in water, no image in mirrors’ (GST, 216). In fact, this is the fate of all the untouchables in the dark alleys of History. Gokhale’s Book of
Shadows has a character called Lohaniju, a lower class man in Ruchita Tiwari’s home. Gokhale speaks of him as marginalized.

Roy also takes up the cause of the oppressed women for a sharp focus. Though Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, and Margaret are all sufferers in the drama of life, it is Ammukutty who suffers worst and through whom Roy raises her banner of revolt against a male-dominated, patriarchal society.

The novel is about Ammu, a separatee, a Christian, a Keralite who is helpless in her life. She is sexually unhappy and she brakes love laws and suffers. The novel registers Ammu’s helplessness as a woman. For example, her father did not find a good husband for her and disappointment became unbearable when her husband suspended from job for alcoholism, sought to bargain by procuring his beautiful wife for his boss, Mr. Hollick, the English manager of the tea estate. Mr. Hollick suggested that he go on leave and ‘Ammu be sent to his bungalow to be ‘looked after’ (GST, 42). Ammu’s refusal only aggravated her physical and mental torture. Her husband ‘grew uncomfortable and then infuriated by her silence. Suddenly he lunged at her, grabbed her hair and then passed out from that effort’ (GST, 42). Ammu also hit back as hard as she could. But when ‘his bouts of violence began to include children” (GST, 42), Ammu had no alternative but to break off and
come back with her twins. Estha and Rahel-to the very same place from where she had tried to run away.

Ammu had been humiliated and cornered by her father, ill-treated and betrayed by her husband, insulted by the police and rendered destitute by her brother. Each of them voiced the patriarchal ideology which commanded that she should have no right anywhere as daughter, wife, sister and citizen. She was no individual to her society but just an object, a role necessarily submissive.

Mohit Ray observes, “However, it is not the malefolk alone that help to perpetrate Ammu’s tragedy. It is worth considering how women act as agents of this society to undo another woman. Even women, who have been deprived in their life, cannot disturb the society in the least, but rather choose to come down with all the unspent force of their frustration on another helpless woman.”

The novel presents three generations of women: 1) Baby Kochamma and Mammachi, 2) Ammu, and 3) Rahel, and all are unhappy in their own ways. This reminds one of the famous opening sentences of Anna Karenina. ‘All happy families are alike, but an unhappy family is unhappy after its own fashion.’
Seen from the feminist perspective, the novel records a progress, albeit slow, in feminism, offers some rays of hope and seems to suggest a distinct possibility of redemption.

*The God of Small Things* is pre-eminently a novel by a woman seen through the eyes of a woman. So, while the texture of the novel is suffused with feminine sensibility, the structure of the novel is also, by and large, feminine in the sense in which Luce Irigaray uses it. Irigaray, it is well-known, tries to link feminine discourse with the structure of the female genitals and treats morphological differences between the sexual organs as the source of masculine and feminine characteristics of a discourse.

Mohit Ray observes, “A careful look at the narrative structure of *The God of small Things* shows that the narrative keeps on drifting, not in the sense in which a stream of consciousness narrative drifts but in the sense in which it corresponds to the manifestations of the unconscious in women, which is so different from men.”

Viewed from the angles of the gynocritics, the narrative of *The God of Small Things* is authentically a feminine narrative. The linguistic feature of the novel in regard to the phonological, morphological, syntactic structures, and the liberty with spelling reinforce the feminist quality of the novel.
Post-Independence Indian English fiction constitutes an important part of world literature today, and quite a few women novelists have made significant contributions to it. R. P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai. Bharati Mukhejee, for example, just to name a few, have presented their stories from a feminist point of view. All the novels of Anita Desai, a major novelist by any standard, record a female quest for identity. Roy’s *The God of Small Things* is the latest and most valuable addition to the long list of feminist novels.

Likewise, 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.
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.

In Gokhale’s *A Himalayan Love Story*, the heroine Parvati suffers because she is a woman. Once, 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, and then get straddled with another female to provide for!” (LS, 7).

In her novel *The Book of Shadows*, Gokhale depicts Ruchita Tiwari’s alienation, a kind of female marginalization. Ruchita, in an incident, alludes to man’s domination over woman. 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).
As we can understand education and job are a sort of woman’s emancipation and empowerment. Even the art of writing is a means for this as we can see this in Gokhale’s novel *The Book of Shadows* as well as *Paro*. 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, 211).

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.”\(^{16}\)

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.

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.

Obscenity is a modern phenomenon. Most of the Indian writers, particularly Shobha De, Arundhati Roy and Namita Gokhale have written making use of sex and the obscene. Look at what Roy’s novel deals with in the following page:

Chapter 4 in Roy’s novel *The God of Small Things*, shows the novelist breaking literary tradition by describing in detail the pissing and excretion of Ammu and family in Abhilash Talkies and Estha’s impulsive singing landing him into the adventure with the Lemondrink man, one of the shaggiest in book of literature. A. N. Dwivedi adds, “Elsewhere too, Arundhati Roy shows her expertise in depicting erotic and passionate scenes, as in the last Chapter titled ‘The Cost of Living’ where man-woman relationship reaches full consummation.”

For example, Roy describes shabby things like pissing. Look at the following: “Rahel giggled. Ammu giggled. Baby Kochamma giggled. When the trickle started they adjusted her aerial position. Rahel was unembarrassed. She finished and Ammu had the toilet paper.

Rahel liked all this. Holding the handbag. Everyone pissing in front of everyone” (GST, 95).
The next obscene description pertains to the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s masterbation at Abhilash Talkies. Roy writes, “‘Now if you’ll kindly hold this for me,’ the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man said, handing Estha his penis through his soft white muslin dhoti, ‘I’ll get you your drink. Orange? Lemon?’

Estha held it because he had to.

‘Orange? Lemon?’ the Man said. ‘Lemonorange?’

‘Lemon, please,’ Estha said politely.

He got a cold bottle and a straw. So he held a bottle in one hand and a penis in the other. Hard, hot, veiny. Not a moonbeam.

The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man’s hand closed over Estha’s. His thumbnail was long like a woman’s. He moved Estha’s hand up and down. First slowly. Then fastly.

The lemondrink was cold and sweet. The penis hot and hard” (GST, 103).

Ranjan Harish as well as C. D. Narasimhiah has criticized this aptly. The former thinks this is a bad culture. He writes, “Similarly, the entire fourth Chapter titled “Abhilash Talkies” is like a cancer in the body of the novel. It is completely useless and purposeless, and does not add in any way to the progression of the plot. After reading this Chapter, it is evident that the
writer has set her eye either on swelling the size of the novel or on catching the attention of foreign readers. The Chapter renders one tired and bored. The behaviour of the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man towards an innocent boy like Estha at the Refreshment Counter during the film-interval is unquestionably unethical and objectionable. But it is in the nature of Arundhati Roy to exult in lewd and lecherous scenes.”

Critics alleged that Gokhale’s first novel Paro is full of obscenity. It 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.

Apart from what we have observed above, there is yet another social evil-that of child-abuse and child-negligence-prevalent in India which has been highlighted in The God of Small Things. Anyone reading Chapter 4 of the novel is at first simply revulsed and shockingly disturbed by the
encounter of Estha with the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man, but suddenly one realizes, on a second thought, that this Chapter (‘Abhilash Talkies’) is written with a different purpose in view to bring to the fore the question of child-abuse and child-negligence.

_The God of Small Things_ also focuses on politics. Comrade Pillai is introduced in the very first Chapter of the novel. His printing press-Lucky Press-was once the Ayemenem office of the Communist Party, where midnight study meetings were held and pamphlets of the party were printed and distributed. Pillai is depicted as ‘essentially a political man’ and as ‘a professional omeletteer.’ And further: ‘He walked through the world like a chameleon. Never revealing himself, never appearing not to emerging through chaos unscathed’ (GST, 14). Pillai is not repentant, as he was not responsible, for what had happened to Velutha and Ammu, though he vividly recalls their tragic end. In Chapter 4, Pillai’s political ambitions come out clearly and he aspires to fight the Kottayam by-elections to the Legislative Assembly. To remain in the limelight, he incites the workers of the factory to demand yearly bonus, provident fund, and accident insurance, knowing fully well that the factory is running into a heavy debt. But he never comes out openly against Chacko, the factory-manager. Similarly, he is jealous of Velutha for his being the only card-holder of the Communist
Party, but he does not vent his feelings in public. Pillai wants to organise the factory workers into a labour union. In short, Pillai is portrayed as a suspicious and scheming man, who always looks to his personal gains and advances in life.

Roy attacks Comrade Namboodiripad. He is the owner of the History House—a five-star hotel chain—across the river which is spacious enough, with its air-tight and panelled storeroom, to feed an army for a year. This is his ancestral home, and here he is introduced to the visitors as ‘Kearla’s Mao Tse Tung.’ In Chapter 2, the novelist tries to explain as to why Communism is so successful in Kerala, perhaps in Bengal too. The main reasons suggested by her are: (1) it has something to do with the large population of Christians in Kerala, and Marxism is a simple substitute for Christianity: ‘Replace God with Marx, Satan with the bourgeoisie, Heaven with a classless society, the Church with the Party, and the form and purpose of the journey remained similar’ (GST, 66) and (2) it has to do something with the comparatively high level of literacy in the State. The novelist, however, hastens to add that the second reason is not due to the Communist movement, and that Communism crept into Kerala insidiously. As a reformist movement, it never overtly questioned the traditional values of a caste-ridden, extremely traditional community. According to her, the
Marxists “‘worked from within the communal divides, never challenging them, never appearing not to’” (GST, 67).

It is said, “Arundhati Roy has raised certain raging social and political problems of our times in her novel. Her preoccupations with the socio-political concerns of modern India render her a powerful writer rooted in ground reality.”¹⁹

The characters described as Communists in the novel range from a former Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, to a common party worker Velutha. Namboodiripad who is the only historical character in the novel was the Chief Minister of Kerala twice, first from 1957 to 1959 A.D. and second in the late sixties from 1967 to 1969. The narrator in The God of Small Things reports that Namboodiripad’s ancestral home has been made a part of the hotel ‘Heritage’ and is being used as the hotel’s dining room, and old Communists worked as fawning bearers in colourful ethnic clothes in it. Since Namboodiripad is described by the ‘Hotel People’ as ‘Kerala’s Mao Tse-Tung,’ it is evident that he is a Communist.

The novel abounds in instances of Namboodiripad’s unfair/undemocratic administrative practices. For example, ‘That instead of neutralizing the police he had started using them as his tools to achieve his goals.’ That signifies Roy’s suggesting that Namboodiripad’s political views
were based on an unsound understanding of life and so they deserved rejection. Another weakness of the Communist rulers of Kerala mentioned in the passage above is that though they stood for fomenting a revolution, which means asking people to take law in their own hands and defy the government authorities, they were also rulers and had, by implication taken upon themselves the responsibility of protecting people from those who took law in their own hands. The implication is that these rulers either did not want to foment a revolution or did not want to govern and did not want to prevent people from taking law in their own hands. In either case, the implication is, they were not telling people the truth about their intentions.

The other Communist characters in the novel are not free from weaknesses even if they are the weaknesses of different sorts. One of these characters is Chacko. This man, as the narrator reports, has a Marxist mind, no doubt, but he is also a man with ‘feudal libido.’ Roy charges them with being hypocrites, who preach one thing and practise another.

Gokhale in her novels particularly The Book of Shadows speaks of politics which is based on race/colour.
Ruchita Tiwari’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.

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 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 Rosa to love him 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 Rosa for reasons far too private to share with others, was on the Fishing Fleet to India. Walcott 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 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. 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 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 as in Roy’s God of Small Things 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 learnt that Krutz died and the others were in frenzy. 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.

Both Roy and Gokhale write about their surroundings. They think that man must protect his environment or he has to perish. The novel *The God of Small Things* speaks of countryside as a healthy environ and the urban jungle as polluted. Likewise, Gokhale, born and bred in the Himalayas, speaks of the significance of environment.

In 2003, the Adivasi Gothra Maha Sabha, a social movement for adivasi land rights in Kerala, organized a major land occupation of a piece of land of a former eucalyptus plantation in the Muthanga Wildlife Reserve, on the border of Kerala and Karnataka. After 48 days, a police force was sent into the area to evict the occupants—one participant of the movement and a policeman were killed, and the leaders of the movement were arrested. Roy travelled to the area, visited the movement’s leaders in jail, and wrote an open letter to the then Chief Minister of Kerala, A.K. Antony now India’s Defence Minister, saying ‘You have blood on your hands.’

Gokhale has, likewise, highlighted peoples’ 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 in *A Himalayan Love Story*; 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). *A Himalayan Love Story* has similar scenes where the environmental issue crops up.

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* has this: 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 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.

Modern fiction has the quality of magic realism or what we can call surrealism. M. H. Abrahams observes, “These writers weave, in an ever-shifting pattern, a sharply etched realism in representing ordinary events and details together with fantastic and dreamlike elements as well as with materials derived from myth and fairy tales.”

Roy as well as Gokhale makes use of magic realism in their fiction for fantastic purposes. The following is an incident of magic realism in Gokhale’s *The Book of Shadows*. 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,’ Lohiniju said. Ruchita recognized something of herself in her.

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, 201).

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’s latest novel Shakuntaka is a feminist saga. The novel centres on the heroine Shakuntala. The narrative has a cultural demision
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 women as Gokhale’s other heroines Paro and Priya. 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.”  

Many feminist beginning with Virginia Woolf, Julie Kristeva and others ask woman to empower herself. One of the ways for this is to demystify the language. That means the woman must remove all the male-oriented linguistic signs from the language. Elaine Showalter in her famous essay “Towards Feminist Poetics” speaks of a separate language for woman for the sake of establishing their own tradition. She writes, “The task of
feminist critics is to find a new language, a new way of reading that can integrate our intelligence and our experience, our reason and our suffering, our skepticism and our vision.”

John Berger can be accepted when he remarks “Never again will a single story be told as though it’s the only one” in regard to Roy’s The God of Small Things. What bothers us is not the story of the novel but the way Roy tells it. No doubt, the story of the two lives that love each other and die loving is worthy of narration. Human strife ever since the dawn of man’s rise has been nothing but a ‘hideous grief,’ for the commonest reason ‘love is a sweet poison.’ This is applicable to the main characters of the novel here. A. N. Dwivedi observes, “Artistically speaking, Roy employs crisp and racy language in this novel, and her similes and metaphors are very accurate and arresting.” Roy has made an experiment in language. The God of Small Things is full of new lines so far as the language is concerned. Some descriptions, in part due to the lively words, phrases and expressions, are splendid: “May in Ayemenem is a hot, brooding month. The days are long and humid. The river shrinks and black crows gorge on bright mangoes in still, dustgreen trees. Red bananas ripen. Jackfruits burst. Dissolute blue bottles hum vacuously in the fruity air. Then they stun themselves against clear window panes and die, fatly baffled in the sun (GST, 1).
Prof. O. P. Budholia comments, “As a matter of fact, Roy succeeds in patterning a new mode of language. Her linguistic pattern proves innovatory, paving the way to be fully developed.”

The novel abounds in poetic usages. See the poem itself:

Who was he?
Who would he have been?
The God of Loss.
The God of Small Things.
The God of Goose Bumps and Sudden Smiles.
He could do only one thing at a time.
If he touched her, he couldn’t talk to her,
If he loved her, he couldn’t leave, if he spoke he couldn’t listen, if he fought he couldn’t win.
Ammu longed for him. Ached for him with the whole of her biology (GST, 330).

Arundhati Roy makes the inanimate things talk and act the way she desires. She tells, ‘The silence was unsure of this compromise’ (GST, 152) and ‘Night’s elbows rested on the water and watched them’ (GST, 335). Music too bursts out like magic and drives the attention of us. Symbols like woman as earth, History as the rigid social code, Ayemenem House as the
root of the Syrian Christian family and ‘Anything’- as an indication of everlasting uncertainty are enough to assess Roy’s maturity of thoughts. The concepts of Marxism, History, hideous grief and the sad white music of life are clearly expanded.

Shortest sentences made of one word or two like ‘Dum – dum’ (GST, 119), ‘A log.’ ‘A serene crocodile’ (GST, 329). ‘Her ashes,’ ‘The grit from her bones,’ ‘the teeth from her smile,’ ‘Receipt No. Q 498673’ (GST, 163) etc, do not hurt our sense of propriety. As a diadem to all these are the songs interspersed in the description, some horizontally and others vertically, throughout the novel.

However, demerits go, with the merits of Roy’s treatment of theme. Eccentric and unacceptable things are as abundant as those of the acceptable ones. Every para, every page, and every chapter points out the linguistic as well as grammatical absurdities any ideal reader can dislike. No matter how grand the theme is and the novel has got a Booker prize, *The God of Small Things* has unpardonable linguistic peculiarities such as typical words, phrases and sentences which are unacceptable.

The errors listed above can be seen thus: clubbed words (‘Thiswayandthat’); reverse words (The serutnevda of eisus lerruqs’ (GST,60); typical imagery (‘Rice-Christians,’ ‘redsteps’); repetition (‘Estha
washed her face and hands and face and hands’); coinages (‘Amayrica’);
cliche (‘beige and pointy shoes’); ungrammatical sentences (‘no, we can’t
not go to school’); lack of punctuations (‘In Amayrica now, isn’t it’ (?);
needless contracts (Further east in a small country with similar landscapes
(jungles, rivers, rice-fields, communists), vague abstractions (‘Plymouth,’
‘Little Elvis the pelvis’); obscure words and expressions (‘Wash ‘n’ ever, No
Locusts stand I); distorted words (stoppit, porketmunny, Thang God, Never,
The Less nevertheless); Indian words (namaste naale etc.,); hyphanated
words (an honest-to-goodness Genuine Bourgeoise, trying-not-to-cry
mouth); absurd songs; senseless sounds (verrry, Enee vee ee aar): typical
wordy sentences (Is. That. Clear’?); half- sentences (Like old roses in a
breeze); needless italics (certain, inside (GST, 13); needless capitals
(LayTer, Hopes, Inbreeding, and others.

Mallikarjun Patil thinks, “However grand the tale is, or might be, its
errors in terms of language and style, another aspect of the novel, namely its
complexion, is an admixture of cookery guide (GST, 195), a guide book and
a travel-account, influenced by its author’s architectural language.”26 Certain
linguistic experiment the way the story is narrated and interspersed with
inconsistency of all-is striking enough to say ‘Anything may get prize.’ J. B.
Tripathy comments, “The novel also gives the impression of Yellow literature.”

Likewise, Gokhale experiments with the use of English. The following may be said of her second novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*: 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’ (GGG, 77). 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’ (GGG, 149). 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 electricial 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’ (GGG, 167). 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 (GGG, 25). 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.

: References:

5. Toni Morrison’s Sula, Picador, 1973, Cover page.


