CHAPTER-IV

Feminism in the Novels of Namita Gokhale
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NAMITA GOKHALE

In an interview, Anita Desai said that “writing is an effort to discover, and then to underline, and finally to convey the true significance of things” (The Times of India). What Desai said about her own writings applies more pertinently to the works of Namita Gokhale who depicts the Indian woman’s search for identity in a society still dominated by tradition, which tends to treat a woman as a subordinate to her lord and protector-be it the father, brother, husband or son. The Indian women depicted by contemporary women writers deconstruct these images and emerge as individuals challenging socio-cultural ethos. Today it is not easy to make a distinction between the sexes in terms of physical and emotional strength. Both sexes have to constantly prove themselves in this dynamic environment. Therefore, it is absurd for any kind of writing to be entrapped with male dominated issues. The changes being effected are leaving women gloriously free to live as uninhabited human beings.

The woman of today has the courage to express her essentially feminine sensibility, honestly and sincerely. There are certain questions the chief arguments of woman striving to have ‘a room of her own,’ the position of ‘the lonely woman’. “Is woman born or made?” She is striving for a gender justice. Is she a slave? The ‘women experience, ‘the space’ is expanding. The women writers are voicing the pangs, problems and fears of weaker sex. The inner psyche, the gloomy depression, the bruised and broken heart breaks the melancholy loneliness and isolation, the social boycott, the angry agitation, the struggle all have been loudly pronounced. The modern Indian woman has protested against the patriarchal masculine dominion. She is standing on a ‘burning lake’ like Satan of Paradise lost
exclaiming: “What though the field be lost, All is not lost”. (Milton 110). She moves out or rather is thrown out of her Eden Garden, her blissful ‘paradise’, her ‘home’ because she has tasted the mortal fruit, ‘the forbidden fruit of knowledge’ or wisdom. Yet she tries to build a Pandemonium of her own because she understands, “Better to reign in hell than to serve in heaven”. (Milton 118) She emerges out of her trauma. She is free, liberated and assertive. Namita Gokhale’s novels show her deep concern for the emancipation of women. She wants them to become aware of their existence as individuals. Namita Gokhale has deconstructed femininity in nearly all her novels. Although, most of her women characters are portrayed as wives, daughters, sisters and mothers, her views regarding feminism find illustration through these characters.

Gokhale’s first novel Paro: Dreams of Passion written in 1984 was highly acclaimed. It created a stir by its frankness in the early eighties, and pioneered the sexually frank genre which made Shobha De famous. This novel is a fine texture of quest for self-awareness and deconstructing femininity, especially regarding the characters of Paro and Priya, and for its fast moving narratives, controlled purpose, and a style of keen observation, arrival of new characters and quick changes of scenes in the story. The novel presents an agonizing search of a woman for her true-self in a society which is still largely traditional and swayed by cultural and societal prototypes. This novel is a compulsive reading which causes its readers to read it continuously in a sequence of time. It is the first Indian novel in English that accurately captures and depicts the speech of metropolitan, westernized Indians. It is a confessional record of the felt experiences of the narrator Priya. It begins as “a sort of confessional, a diary which eventually became this thing, this novel” (114).
As it portrays the world of modern women in metropolitan cities like Delhi and Bombay, it invites a feminist reading. The following dialogue between B.R. and Priya is worth citing in this context:

“Is it a love story?” he asked teasingly.

“No”, I (Priya) said.

“What is it about, then?”

“Passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy,” I said finally….

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

“Liberation,” I hazarded”. (135)

The book is mainly centered around Paro who has a rebellious attitude. Although she asserts her femininity, she does not behave in a masculine way at that time. She has her own vision of freedom. Through the character of Paro, Namita Gokhale has deconstructed the concept of femininity, which aimed at woman to be docile, submissive, modest, and chaste also. She has irresistible charms, is tall, and sexy, green-eyed, passionate, magical in her physical looks. She is attractive, distinctive and mesmerizing. She unashamedly uses her charm as a weapon to win favours from anyone with whom she comes in contact with. On the contrary, Priya is a conventional, traditional girl. She is kind, considerate and caring for others. Paro is presented as a proud, audacious and self-confident, ambitious woman “With an assured cat-like grace” (14). She is the daughter of a retired Brigadier and grows very soon into “so exotic creature” (13) endowed with ravishing sensual looks. She is the only child of middle-aged parents and became “a bother in their well-ordered lives” (31). While in boarding school she had a scandal with an art-teacher and was consequently expelled from the school. When she was in college, she met B.R. who fell for her “like a ton of bricks”(33). B.R., the owner of the company of famous Sita
Sewing Machines and associated with household goods, is a compulsive nymphomaniac. In his office, mostly all the girl employees, as Ivy, Mary and Priya herself, were in love with B.R. Paro’s presence in the office is always hateful for Ivy, Mary and Priya as her eyes marked them and their devotion to B.R. Priya devoted herself to him not only physically but also mentally. But a month later, he got married to Paro, which was a great shock for the girls of the office, especially for Priya as she mentioned: “A month later, he was, married to Paro. It took all of us at the office completely by surprise. I have never forgotten, not forgiven, a hurt. This book, too, is a vindication”(7).

In the book Priya and Paro have been developed as foils to each other. In fact, Paro is Priya’s alter ego. Priya is on her quest for self-identity and desires to have the reflection of Paro in her personality. She dreamt of grace, beauty and harmony. She tries to find fulfillment by adopting the Aristotelian morality of the golden mean, the well beaten path of a mediocre. She marries a person named, Suresh, without love, yet secretly admires and cherishes Paro’s unbridled buoyant eccentricity. As Priya, writes in the beginning of the novel that she was writing about Paro as “I saw myself in her” (5).

In the course of the novel, Priya is obsessed with Paro, and shares a kind of love hate relationship with her. She attended neither the wedding nor the reception therefore. But hearing about her beauty she attended the party in the office. Priya gives a self-confident behaviour and a bold picture of Paro at the marriage party of Paro and B.R., as she did not behave or look like a conventional bride:- “Hi, Daddyji; She said throatily, planting a kiss smack on Rai Bahadur’s forehead” (13). This behaviour of Paro at the very first meeting took Priya’s breath away. Paro was a different bride. Instead of covering her head with a pallav, she stood proud and led
the way with B.R. and his parents trailing after her, besides she was drinking gin, and even winked at B.R. mischievously. Thus Paro revolted against the accepted social norms and tried to get an individuality of her own. Paro’s way of dressing was also unconventional. Unlike a traditional Indian woman who draped a saree, she preferred wearing provocative dresses like “a black sequinned off shoulder Kurta, which left one shoulder completely bare, almost naked”(24). Paro was everything that middle-class girl like Priya wanted to become, thus she was taken as a role model. Priya followed Paro and took up smoking and visiting beauty parlours, but after marriage she had to face the objection of Suresh, her husband and she came back to her role as a domesticated Indian bride. “I realized that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh, and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends”(26).

But Paro came out of the traditional areas within which a woman is supposed to be confined and succeeded in carving a niche for her in a male dominated society. Thus she fulfilled the concept of a new woman and deconstructed the concept of a ‘bhartiya nari’.

Priya comes from a middle class background. Her marriage with Suresh, a Delhi based lawyer, was arranged. His car in the photograph sent to her decided it for her, even before she met him. He had his own aspirations to keep him busy and had no time for Priya. Her love for B.R. remained unabated, thus she was doomed for a loveless sterile life with Suresh. In this way she tried to assert herself and to make herself complete by receiving love from B.R. what she is not getting from Suresh. That is why, somehow, she also becomes the example of deconstructed femininity. B.R. also reciprocated her love, because like his mother she was very
real. In this extramarital affair Priya received a lot of love and tenderness and is overwhelmed with gratitude.

In Bombay Priya got a chance to see Paro “leaning for support on the arm of a very handsome young man” (24). Later, Priya came to know that Paro had left her husband B.R and her lover was Bucky Bhandpur, a test-cricketer and scion of a princely family and she had a small son from Bucky. Paro was facing many legal problems, against her tenants, landlords, and her father’s will, her divorce etc. Hence she consulted Suresh. After some time when Priya got a chance to meet Paro she noticed: “Life has not tired her-she is undiminished, she has grown” (28). Paro handled a matter of accident so bravely and commandingly that Suresh was filled with admiration: “What a woman, he exclaimed, in sincere admiration” (30).

Paro told Priya about her past and her first sexual encounter with Marcus – her art master. She disclosed her feelings about her rape: “Funny thing is that I wasn’t raped, I loved every moment of it” (33). She was very ambitious. It was clear when she told Priya: “I was good. You know, I was the head girl in my final year. Man, I wanted to be P.M. of India, you know” (31). Further, she told about her marriage, that after her disgrace of her rape her daddy was glad to get Bubu as his son-in-law. “You know, I read somewhere that most women marry the best provider they can stomach. That wasn’t my scene at all” (33).

Paro married B.R. but the marriage was an unsuccessful one. Once she caught B.R., a hunter of beautiful women, with a girl in his bed room and this event changed the very course of her life. She became rebellious. She tells Priya, that “After that, I decided I would pay him back in his own coin. I mean….everyone was in love with me and who do you think could ever love that guy?” (58) This shows her grit and determination. Thus Paro is liberated from marriage and convention. She is
presented as “a real individual”. She has the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman. She is free. She becomes the ‘Symbol of and prototype of emancipation and individuality’. She would say theatrically and asserts: “I am myself and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person”(48). She is egocentric so much so that “She loved her body and cried like a baby at the slightest physical hurt”(34) and “she would talk on, compulsively, about herself, always herself” (31). Two other factors which made her what she was, are: her frightening irreverence, and her excessive greedy vitality. She was given to showmanship. The narrator pertinently tells us:

Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatization. I sometimes wondered what she would be like, alone in an empty room; whether she would simply go limp and collapse, or posture and practice for her next encounter.(34)

One evening when Priya and B.R. went for dinner in a restaurant they met Paro. Having returned to Delhi, Priya had to face many questions of Suresh regarding her meeting with B.R., as Paro already had told him everything. Being an understanding husband, Suresh didn’t over react but only tried to make Priya understand; “I trust you absolutely. But even then it is not good for women from good families to be talked about” (44-45). Priya and Suresh were leading a happy life and their happiness assumed a special shape, when they came to know about Priya’s pregnancy for distant relatives wrote to her again. It is the irony of this society that a woman gets importance and happiness only when she is pregnant, and is expected to deliver a boy. But their happiness was very short; Priya got a miscarriage and had to lose her child. The two factors which were chiefly responsible for Priya’s estrangements from her husband are: the miscarriage of her
child, and her husband’s knowledge of her relation with B.R. The bond between her
and her husband having severed now they were “two separate people” who “shared
only their silences”(90). Priya’s lonely masquerading passion served a deeper
purpose in her life of self-discovery. She began to write her memoirs on papers,
which consisted of her relationship with B.R., Paro and Suresh. She vomited all her
present and past feelings to have a light heart and to discover her self-individuality.
So her boredom and loneliness converted into a form of this book. But one day, Paro
came to consult some case to Suresh, and searched for a towel and by chance she got
those papers in a drawer and discovered the realities of Priya’s heart. She caused
them Suresh to see, by which he realized his place and B.R’s place in the life of his
wife. That was the end of the foundation of their marriage, which is ‘Belief’ for
every couple. Initially, she couldn’t tolerate their comments and their intimacy, so
she decided to leave the house. Priya decided to go to her bhaiya. Her quest for
being a personality like Paro in B.R’s life, and her fate brought her away from the
husband and home. She was completely broken hearted. It was very clear from this
narration;

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 or
something would miraculously intervene to save me from this living
death. I was engulfed by insecurity and terror. (130)

She was so disturbed in her life that she tried to commit suicide twice but
escaped and fate once again brought her to B.R. He told her about his remarriage to
Maryann Ruthers. She was filled with remorse by thinking about her actual identity
that “I am an Indian woman,… for me my husband is my God”(129). The next day
Priya comes to know through magazine about Paro’s wedding with Laukas Leoras, a
homosexual Greek film director. Priya was surprised at Paro’s daring and unpredictable act of marriage. She telephoned Suresh to have a permission to go back to him. Suresh also wanted to give it a try again.

Once again Paro returned in the life of everyone like Bucky, Junior, Lenin and his pregnant wife etc. In this meeting B.R. and his wife were also there. In the presence of B.R. Paro ignored everyone and B.R. did not pay attention to his wife. Everyone was very much shocked at their behaviour and Lenin saw them in the bedroom. She told B.R:- “I feel like a cat on a hot tin roof; I’m in heat; I need a man! And Loukas, as we all know, is a woman” (145). On a slight objection by Lenin she replied boldly and frankly: “Why, can’t a woman feel horny?” (146). Priya took Paro for a drive, suddenly they met an accident in which Priya was safe but Paro was injured badly almost deadly. She had broken some teeth and jaw and Paro’s one leg was plastered. She could not tolerate such pitiable condition. Then she made her ultimate attempt of suicide by trying to cut her wrists with the fruit knife. Her life that of a fairy tale cannot be perpetuated forever. Disgusted and disillusioned she put an end to her life. A woman was always supposed to keep herself beautiful so that she could be a desirable object for her lord.

In the traditional patriarchal set up, women are desirable and beautiful only if they are mild, submissive, un-protesting and self-sacrificing. Child bearing and rearing and keeping house for her husband were the unquestionable tasks a woman had to perform. Failure in these leads to rebuke and even rejection. This was also due to clever manipulation of roles by males who ensured that women were kept in subordination. With the surge of feminism in the sixties emerged the “New Woman”, radically different from her predecessor, the traditional woman. This New Woman is resourceful, aggressive, confident, dynamic, and assured, re-defining
herself and her identity, and dealing with the world on her own terms. Namita Gokhale in her novels too has sketched women characters who present the concept of New Women. Paro denies authority, traditions, social codes and all those things which force a woman to live a life of subordination.

Paro is neither chaste nor submissive, and since deconstructionists allow all conventions to be arbitrary and not final, the concepts of femininity having been assigned by male dominated society, this concept can be deconstructed. In the character of Paro a new woman can be seen, as she has the conviction to defy all social and moral codes and live life on her own terms. She has a power to draw man with “the magnetisms of her moonlike body”(54). She can twist “everybody around her little finger”(61). In the wide orbit of Paro, not only B.R., but there is a long list of admirers; Bucky Bhandpur, test cricketer and a son of a princely family, Lenin, Marxist, son of a Cabinet Minister, the fat and sinister Shambhu Nath Mishra, the member of Congress party; Loukas Leoras, homosexual Greek film director, even very nearly, Suresh, a distinguished lawyer husband of the narrator. As a rebellious lady she uses her vital physical assets to entrap the men she comes in contact in her life and wrap them “as completely as a banana skin”(145). Even after her death her character compels the other characters to miss her and love her so much. There was a void in Priya’s life without her and she herself couldn’t imagine a world without Paro. Everyone was moved by her sudden death. Suresh answered Priya straightforwardly when Priya asked: “‘Suresh, where exactly was Paro’s body burnt?’ ‘In the raised pyre, the V.I.P one’, he replied matter-of-factly”(160).

Paro, the victim of circumstances becomes strong, dominating, un-subdued, irresistible enchantress casting her charms over all who come in her contact. Even in her death she is victorious-the same free, daring, going on her own way and
powerful. From the beginning to the end she is defiant, free and un-subdued before circumstances. Paro’s dominating personality, her free and frank confessions, her daring and bold behaviour and actions, her bewitching beauty and magnetism overpower even the narrator. Paro exercises an irresistible attraction for Priya. In the presence of Paro she feels herself dwarf. The thought that every male coming in her contact is in external bondage to Paro, hurts her. So consistent is Paro’s charm on her that she feels herself Paro, imitating her words and gestures unconsciously. Priya herself admits-

Gradually she (Paro) became an obsession for me. Subconsciously I would find myself mouthing her words; phrases that were not mine would spell unsuspecting from my lips; gestures that were hers would enact themselves involuntary mine. For example, I would throw back my head in a deep throaty laugh and my eyes would narrow in a pale shadow of her piercing gaze. (16)

Priya suffers from the intense desire to be as assertive and independent as Paro, the fine, polished and powerful lady who was not meant only to cook food and look after the family. She even joins as “encounter group” which proposes to give dramatic performances. In that play she is given the role of Clytemnestra which she delightfully accepts because in that role she completely feels herself fit and identifies herself with that woman. She tells Priya:

This Clytemnestra is a passionate and strong woman with this creepy husband. So she kills him, so her son kills her. It’s because of the social frame work. You know, all the fucking freedom of men, and none for women; so she has no other outlet for her frustrated intelligence. She’s a very enigmatic character just like me. (105)
She tells, Priya about her “search” most eloquently:

And so, one day I was all alone in the flat, I looked at myself in the mirror. ‘Who are you, Paro?’; I asked myself. And I knew I didn’t know. So I started looking for myself again, deciding to follow wherever my search took me. (103-04)

Paro identifies herself with Clytemnestra simply to realize her potential, her true self and sort out “all the contradictions in my own life” (105).

This is the feminist consciousness of Namita Gokhale. Paro is the prototype of her image of an emancipated woman manipulating the patriarchal rules to her advantage and asserting her individuality to wield power on men. Paro is a complete social comedy with its stunningly beautiful heroine trying to ride over society with the sheer power of her sexuality. Men run after her and she dominates and enslaves them. The following conversation between her and Priya when the latter asks her how she is surviving shows her self confidence as well as her attitude towards men:

‘Stocks, shares, family property – the occasional sale of some jewellery’. She replied airily. ‘And, of course Babu settled some property on me after our marriage. The rent is enough for my simple needs’.

‘But is that right? I mean, you left him, don’t you feel funny using his money?’ I would persist.

‘Look, sweetie’, she would say, her eyes darkening, ‘they made the rules.’ (35)

Paro knew the power that she wielded on men and went ahead to dominate them. One after another from the powerful circle fell victim to her charms. Paro tells Priya that she has cultivated her personality in such a manner that everyman feels a
sense of pride while serving her and that she does not require to say “Thank You.” It was just emotional blackmail I said:

‘Oh, No!’ ‘She replied ‘it is a part of being a beautiful woman. It’s a full time occupation.’ ‘And much harder work than it seems but nodding sagely it has its rewards I confess, I wished I was the kind of woman who could say things like that. (61)

Paro has been playing a self-assigned role throughout her life not uselessly. Her passion means to lead her to self-discovery. She herself says-“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”(103). Thus it is very clear that Paro has a different attitude to things and situations. She revolts against the moral and social codes which have the purpose of identification of a woman in the society. She rebels, rejects and seeks freedom from traditional norms and the way of life.

The new woman as portrayed by Namita Gokhale in the character of Paro has the grit to have a child whose father is unknown, leaves a husband and stays in an open adulterous relationship and then leaves her lover to stay with another man Lenin. Lenin is much younger to her. Feminine and societal norms thus stand flaunted. Paro may be called a loose woman by conventional standards but deconstruction does not permit this as there is no final meaning in anything. According to psychologists, the kind of unbridled sexual behaviour as displayed by Paro is a sign of wanting to castigate men folk. She wanted to pay back men in their own coin. No doubt she was victimized in her rape but she said that she loved every moment of it. Rape is a ghastly act, which destroys a person mentally as well as emotionally, but the fact that she enjoyed it, on the one hand shows that she is a
woman with loose morals who has no sense of shame in admitting that she enjoyed it. On the other hand, the fact that she enjoyed it shows that the notion of rape stands deconstructed. However, *Paro; Dreams of Passion*, does not attempt to turn the value-system of male-dominated society upside down. Though in this novel Namita Gokhale satirizes the preoccupation with women’s bodies as objects; but at the same time they celebrate those bodies.

Namita Gokhale, in her novels, has tried to illustrate how a woman can use her power to create a space for her existence. In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994), Namita Gokhle creates a world which is dominated by women characters, where men play as supporters and performers of secondary roles. This novel was written in the year 1994, after a short break of her writings, and consists of superstition, religion, love, hatred and sex.

Gudiya, the protagonist and the narrator of the story tells it in the first person with frankness and candour and often in a brutally straightforward manner reflecting her insecurities as her life changes constantly. Gudiya is told that they were very rich once as her mother and grandmother were prostitutes but from those great heights of life Gudiya’s world plunges into the depth of almost complete penury. Gudiya’s pale-gold skin had been endowed to her by some Afghan forbear or phirangi customer of her mother’s, she often thought of the Englishman who might have been her father. She did not even know who her father was, and neither for a fact, did her mother or grandmother. Gudiya, her mother and grandmother fled from small town scandal and disgrace. As Gudiya’s mother later ran away with Riyasuddin Rizvi, a beggar, she has been left in the company of Ammi, her grandmother. On their arrival to Delhi, it seemed that all had been lost, but her grandmother kept a slab of green marble stolen from the building site, five rounded pebbles and flowers from a
Sahib’s green garden and then, she transformed the place beneath the holy peepal into a worshiping place and also added her sweet singing voice and at last she changed her identity.

Ammi tackled Sundar Pahalwan with ease, who claimed his territorial rights over the stretch of pavement which was being used by Ammi for her jhuggi. Ammi rebuked Sundar Pahalwan: “I am the widow of Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman’s curses may follow you!” (12). Sundar again came the following week to take his cash. But he was surprised to find Ammi singing a bhajan in front of “a statue of Durga astride a tiger under a glittering canopy”(12) with a band of worshippers assembled around the shrine. The result was that Sundar was completely overpowered by Ammi’s religious aura and realized that it would be mutually beneficial if he joined hands with her. Thus he shared in the prosperity of the temple from that day. It is clear that in order to attain sainthood, Ammi very cleverly manipulated the social machinery for her own profit.

Now she was the owner of the new shrine, so she changed her identity completely. As such, she abandoned her burqua and placed it in her trunk along-with sequined ghararas and beaded reticules. She never took to bhajan - singing but managed to give a new texture to her “honeyed voice”(12) as she uttered “Arre Rama, Rama Rama”, without difficulty. Soon people passing by stopped there and offered coins to the deity. And it increased day by day. They had no neighbours there except Shambhu from the tea stall, and slumlord, Sundar Pahalwan.

Gudiya got admission in the St. Jude’s Academy for the socially handicapped, which was considered ‘as good as a mission school’. Shambhu was very eager and felt proud of increasing Gudiya’s knowledge but on the contrary her grandmother considered it a wastage of time and money, as a girl should be a good
cook and the ultimate goal of her life is to marry a respectable man. Magoo, one of the younger women in the site, was attracted towards Shambhu’s charms. But when her husband Saboo came to know their relationship, he hacked off her head with an axe and then smashed a rock upon Shambhu’s head and killed him too. He clarified reason of killing is his self-respect; “Once upon a time we were mighty warriors. Now they call us criminals. But we can still kill for our honour!” (19). It is a simple truth that if man is having an affair woman has to surrender all her weapons and tolerate her husband’s behaviour silently but if woman has an affair she will be killed by her husband or in other way she has to suffer whole life.

On the grave of Shambhu, Gudiya and her grandmother got thirty two gold sovereigns, heavy, shining and weighted with the power of wealth. Ammi handled men in such a tactful way that she soothed and calmed Saboo easily after he had murdered Shambhu. Master at the art of survival she trusted some retribution had overtaken her when she found herself on the wrong side of law. Her finger prints were found on the axe with which Saboo killed Shambhu, so she was arrested. However, at least a hundred people rallied in support of the spiritual lady Ammi, while Ammi sat “silently with her prayer beads, her ferocious scowl igniting her whole being into a Kali like picture of wrath” (24-25).

Saboo’s violent remorse forced him to make an emotional long confession that her grandmother was a most holy woman. Ammi’s skill is further evident when a man from the Municipal Corporation arrived with the demolition order for the pucca cement structure which housed Ammi and Gudiya. Seeing the aura of a spiritual lady Ammi he fell at her feet begging her for forgiveness for his blasphemy. It was whispered that she was hundred years old, that she knew magical spells that could change the sex of an unborn child. The man who spat in the direction of the
temple was bitten by a scorpion. Shambhu the tea-stall owner, found a wallet full of cash in the bench outside his tea stall, where Ammi and Gudiya had their first cup of tea on setting foot in Delhi. Everyone knew that the will of the God was on their side. All people linked with Ammi and the temple felt overwhelmed and gave credit for their good fortune to Ammi.

Whomever Ammi showered her blessings and set her benign eyes on, prospered. Thus we see that Ammi despite her age and being a Muslim defies social codes and becomes a Hindu God mother under whom the temple thrived and progressed and gained in stature. Had it not been for Ammi’s tact, Gudiya and she would have starved, after Gudiya’s mother who was the only earning member in the family, had decamped with Riyasuddin Rizvi, a beggar. Thus the new women in Ammi had the skill and courage to survive by crossing religious boundaries. In this way religious boundaries stand deconstructed and so do the limits of woman’s power and constraints of age. Afterwards, Grandmother began to ignore Gudiya in the process of seeking spirituality:

My grandmother began to believe in God. She took to fasting four days a week. Even when she was not fasting, she would eat just fruits and nuts and sometimes a little yogurt. She took a vow of silence, and remained completely mute for a month, crouched silently in a corner of the temple, stubborn eyes resisting any question or answers or any kind of communication with anyone.(27)

Thus we see that Ammi at her age behaved as a religious woman. Though she was originally only playing a role for economic reasons. Besides Ammi shows her skills as a manager, as she administered the temple with an iron hand. Everything had to be perfect. The band of believers, who had surrendered
themselves to Ammi’s wisdom, had specific chores that constituted the daily life of the temple assigned to them. Phoolwati, the widow of Shambhu, began to handle the cash of the temple. Lila, an old lady, who was the centre of hatred to Phoolwati accepted the major burden of the temple workload with full devotion. Every morning Phoolwati “escorted an assortment of accident victims, convalescents, and chronic hypochondriacs” (47). Ammi had to resort to morning darshans. Legend spread that: Ammi could heal with a look. The more vigorously Ammi rebutted and disclaimed her healing powers the more the people believed they were in the right hands. Such were Ammi’s skills. Even Pandit Kailash Shastry, the scholarly person, well versed in rituals, met Ammi only once but held the view that Ammi was an extraordinary woman with remarkable siddhis. He believed that if the dust from her mind settled on an ordinary mortal like him, he would become a better and cleverer man. Ammi achieved this miracle by resorting to silence and vague generalizations. Only Lila, who was privy to Ammi’s long silence and had some knowledge of Hindu rituals, managed to retain communication with Ammi. Ammi elicited dog like devotion from Lila. By the passage of time Ammi became a saint and the embodiment of Shakti. Pandit Kailash Shastry was asked about the Kundli of Ammi, but he replied that great souls like Ammi had no past or future, so it would be sacrilege of his part to talk about her past, as she was a saint and the embodiment of Shakti.

With Phoolwati, Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Shastry on her side, the temple prospered and Ammi achieved her desired objective, i.e. to turn the temple into a commercially viable venture. After having achieved her aim she increased her abstractions, silence, detachment and inexplicable remoteness thereby lending a mystical charm and aura to her personality. This may have been an astute way to
hide her own lack of knowledge of the Hinduism and to attract a large number of devotees to her, which further enhanced the popularity of the temple. Ammi knew that any slip on her part would destroy all that she had built. Ammi was fully aware that without Pundit and Sundar on her side it would be not easy for her to survive in this male dominated society. Ammi’s remarkable powers must have influenced them too thus they most certainly would have realized that being associated with her and the temple would be a profitable venture. Ammi had perceived this weakness of the Pandit only due to her deep insight into human nature as a result of her vast experience in dealing with humanity. Ammi single handedly turned a mere shrine into a thriving temple complex with twelve hundred yards of constructed land. Thus Ammi used her acquired virtue and silence to successfully manipulate a male dominated society.

On Ammi’s death there was a stampede. The police had to be called in to control the mob. It seemed these people had come not out of curiosity but genuine sorrow. Ammi’s death and burial were reported in the Evening News and a vernacular magazine sent a journalist and a photographer to cover the event. In order to increase the earnings of the temple Panditji declared her a saintly woman. Gudiya clarified about the death of her grandmother that:

The public, who were by now thronging the temple precincts, informed that my grandmother had not died, which was something mere mortals did. She had attained maha-samadhi, by voluntarily relinquishing her consciousness to the larger universe. (74)

Since Ammi had attained maha - samadhi it was decided that she would be buried in the temple premises in a lotus position, as was usual in such a case. About Ammi, Phoolwati stated that she had lost her guru. The fanatic fervour of Lila’s
grief unnerved everyone. She broke away from the mob and rushed to the side of the pit in which Ammi was to be buried. Lila’s family made a half hearted attempt to persuade her but after she threw her gold chain and bangles into Ammi’s grave they lost interest in her. This is the experience of many old people in our society today. Lila, in a state of extreme shock remained immobile for the entire period of formal mourning. Ammi was buried as a saint and this added to the sanctity of the temple. With Ammi’s rise, all people connected with her also gained in status and wealth, such was the business acumen of Ammi.

Another woman character of the novel that exhibits the traits of a new woman and sets to deconstruct the traditional concept of femininity is Phoolwati. Phoolwati, the widow of the murdered tea-shop owner Shambhu, had a commanding personality and better business sense than her husband. She very shrewdly set-up another stall just outside the temple having items like incense, marigold garlands, coconuts and little brass amulets. She got some photographs of Ammi clicked and for just two rupees each coloured postcards of Ammi with Om printed on it were for sale outside the temple. Phoolwati’s farsightedness and business sense can also be seen by the fact that she managed to procure a loud-speaker to broadcast evening bhajans of Ammi. She had very intelligently taped audio-cassettes of Ammi’s bhajans which were played when Ammi was feeling eccentric and inward and refused to sing. Later, after the death of Ammi, these proved to be invaluable in keeping the regular congregation from falling. Again she displayed tremendous business acumen when the offerings of flowers and coconut that piled up in the temple were taken back to her shop and recycled them to the next batch of devotees, thus increasing her profit many folds. She even appropriated a basketful of coconuts, which were offered as oblations on the death of grandmother, to be sold as relics.
She negotiated a heavy discount with Shiv Mohan band for the ceremony of placing Ammi’s statue. It was equally due to her skills that the temple soon thrived.

In Phoolwati’s calm confidence there was something so unyielding that everyone fell in line with her certainly and did not question her further. She was loyal towards grandmother and temple as all aspects of temple administration, including funds were under her charge. She found Bhuroo, the leper establishing quite a following under the mango tree by playing his flute; she flew into panic and declared astutely that she herself would lead the evening bhajans. On her debut when she picked up the mike she was a star. “Her infectious smile, her energy, her spontaneity, all communicated themselves to her audience. The off scale notes did not seem to matter. It was a miracle of sorts”. (122)

Phoolwati very tactfully handled Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Kailash Shastry. Her ingenuity and wit was abundantly apparent when she asked Panditji to dig up behind the peepal tree to recover the treasure, which Saboo had inadvertently dug up and which grandmother had hidden. She engineered a dream in which she said that Ammi told her that she wanted Sundar to build a shrine dedicated to Lord Shiva. She said this very convincingly in a waverly and garbled voice that resembled Ammi’s just to make him believe. She again stated that Ammi had ordered her to make Sundar start digging as soon as possible. It was the sense of adventure that drove her to the frenzied and incessant planning than the financial consideration. It was not without reason that Ammi called her an incarnation of Durga for she was not afraid of anything. Pandit Kailash Shastry told her that her Kundali was too strong to accommodate any man therefore she would not even have a son. Even when her husband Shambhu tried to beat her after getting drunk she beat him instead and taught him some manners. This marks the reversal of the patriarchal norm of
wife-beating. Shambhu’s murder does not evoke the traditional wailing from Phoolwati.

Sundar had become her ardent admirer and partner in her various enterprises. The peremptory way she dealt with Sundar was praiseworthy. She very boldly used the art of deceiving the deceiver and dictated her terms and conditions when Sundar proposed marriage to her. After Shambhu’s death she realized that to carry on her business, she must have a husband and that in a mercantile society marriage market was heavily biased in favour of men. A widowed woman running a tea-stall might have sent the signal that she was a weak woman who could be prevailed upon easily. So, she practically entered into a contract marriage with Sundar. Her first condition was that Sundar had to build a pucca house for her, the ownership of which would irrevocably be hers. Second, he had to allow her to continue her running her business as before. Third, he had to treat Gudiya as their adopted daughter. In this way she secured her future after marriage.

The demands placed by Phoolwati for marriage make it clear that she is in the true sense of the word a new woman, who knows what she is entering into and she does not let emotions dominate her judgment. The terms and conditions normally come from men, but Phoolwati reverses the norms of society. Thus we see that Namita Gokhale though not an avowed feminist does bring about a reversal of roles by displaying Phoolwati’s domineering stature. In their marital relationship Phoolwati dominates her husband. However one day Sundar in a bad mood snapped at Phoolwati but she did not protest. This way Namita Gokhale seems to suggest that all men tend to treat women as their belongings and all women accept this treatment as Phoolwati did, in spite of her fiercely independent nature.
At her early age of thirteen only, Gudiya got her womanhood. Her grandmother was very upset at that incidence and she started behaving with her in a strange manner. In fact, from that time the irrepressible Phoolwati became an unlikely guardian for Gudiya. Her dignity, perseverance, wisdom and goodness gave stability to Gudiya’s quest for self-identity as a woman. Truly, Gudiya regained all her mother’s and grandmother’s love in abundant measure in Phoolwati’s love and warm embraces. With the physical growth, Gudiya’s quest for her real-identity also developed. She wanted to change even her name as she was not at all a doll. She ultimately named herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh. After the death of grandmother it was Phoolwati who brought Gudiya with her old tin trunk. Gudiya felt herself very comfortable and secure with Phoolwati and also she had an improved and positive attitude for herself because Phoolwati provided every possible facility for her to improve her personality. This was also perhaps due to the fact that Phoolwati herself had no family and was childless and her instinct of motherhood was satisfied by looking after Gudiya. Roxanne, the principal of the missionary school, was the only good person Gudiya had encountered, she had encouraged Gudiya to trust in herself. But in her company too, Gudiya felt the absence of Phoolwati’s real love and warmth.

Once, Gudiya crept out of the hut and went to the edge of an unknown park. A handsome boy, but good for nothing, with white horse helped her to come out of that dusty park. By chance, Gudiya again got an opportunity to meet that very handsome boy with white horse and he hoisted up her beside him on the horse left her on the temple gate. This very handsome boy Kalki had stolen Gudiya’s heart. Pandit Kailash Shastry defined Kalki, the scourge of the Kalyug. One day, Kalki himself came to Phoolwati’s house and brought Gudiya to a marriage party as he
was in a band group. Gudiya instantly agreed to go, where Kalki established physical relations with her. Being an intelligent woman, Phoolwati understood the whole situation, when Gudiya returned late at night with her torn kurta. Gudiya got so infatuated by him that she got pregnant. She was also a member of the inner-circle of those who ran the temple. With an illegitimate child she could have damaged the respectability of everyone. At this point Phoolwati’s knowledge of how reputation and moral values operate in the mercantile society came to Gudiya’s rescue. Since it was considered essential that the unborn child must have the name of a father, Phoolwati, with the help of Sundar Pahalwan forced Kalki into marrying Gudiya. In order to save the child from the stigma of illegitimacy, they were engaged the next day in the temple compound. In the meanwhile Phoolwati also married Sundar Pahalwan, who proved himself a great husband.

After marriage Kalki’s behaviour had changed into subdued decorous. He was in the habit of borrowing money from her. Gudiya discovered about Kalki that he was an orphan and his parents had lived together without benefit of matrimony and that his mother had died. In spite of knowing everything about his life, Gudiya hoped that one day they would get some sort of harmony with each other. But she soon got tired and depressed by Kalki’s coarse nature. In the conjugal life of Gudiya, she is a sufferer of male-dominated society, where men shout, criticize, abuse, bully and hurt, and the women listen and tolerate his misconduct to make her marital life better. Gudiya wanted to revolt as she remarked, “but my spirit, by some inexplicable alchemy of nature, was restored. I resolved to find a way out of the intolerable situation”(217). Finally, he abandoned her and her daughter to make a life for himself in the world of films. Phoolwati brought Gudiya out of it but the damage had already been done and she was jilted by her husband.
Gudiya considered herself beautiful and the thought exhilarated her. She wanted to enter the world of glamour and marry the Prime Minister’s son and become the richest woman in the world. In her dissatisfaction with her environment and ambition to become rich and famous she becomes insecure and finally was left to lead her life alone. She is a rebel, but she does not have the patience to study how the social system works in order to manipulate it to her advantage. This was also because in her teens no one was there to guide her except grandmother who in her battle of survival in a society dominated by religious and gender biases distanced herself from the world as well as Gudiya. All these factors combined to shape Guidya’s destiny. Gudiya did not realize that in a male-dominated mercantile society, over ambitious women are destined to face doom unless they master the business laws which govern such a society. Her quest for self-identity is an unending process, which has both physical and emotional aspect. The search for identity of Gudiya, actually represents the reader’s search for awareness and possibilities to overcome sufferings in one’s life. After the departure of Kalki, she was on the stage of having a quest for her real and self-actualization. She remarked, “Why had I been so afraid of Kalki? Why had I let him beat and abuse me as I had done?” (224)

This novel gives the picture of the marginalization of Indian women at the hands of their husbands. In the case of Gudiya and Kalki, there is no understanding between the two. It seems that Gudiya has just a formal relationship with Kalki. Due to the cruel and egoistic attitude of Kalki, intimacy between the husband and wife is lacking. Kalki treats her as a matter, a mere object subjected to his own will. Besides being an obedient wife of Kalki, Gudiya has independent thoughts and she wants to choose her own ways of life.
Gudiya proves herself that she is a survivor and the novelist ends the story with an optimistic attitude of the protagonist. Even Gudiya is left by everyone as her grandmother, her mother, Sundar Pahalwan, Roxanne, her teacher and also her husband Kalki, but she realizes that: “the end of the world is nowhere in sight” (240). She thought:

When enough time passes, and the dust settles on those troubled memories, perhaps I shall be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Rendering the past acceptable, if not accountable, is a talent I inherited from my Ammi. (239-40)

Like the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale’s novels, Gudiya also learns, not only to broaden her experiences, but also to protest powerfully. After the death of grandmother she loses all her near and dear ones, but she does not lose courage. For, her life is not a waste but it is a progression towards the higher consciousness. Finally, at the end of the novel Gudiya is able to find out her true self by her hard and cruel experiences. It is suitable to the other female characters also i.e. grandmother, Phoolwati etc. as Phoolwati also remains alone when Sunder Pahalwan died but she faces the hardship of life bravely. Grandmother, who besides being a prostitute initially and having no man to help her, is capable enough to survive in this highly competitive world and to reach to the heights of spirituality on the bases of her own ability and inner-self. Lord Krishna exhorts Arjun in the Bhagvada Gita:

Know then yourself, know your true self to be God and one with the self of all others; know your soul to be portion of God. Live in what you know; live in the self, live in your supreme spiritual nature, be united with God and Godlike. (qotd. in Aurobindo 101-02)
In the novel, the complexity of relationship between feminism, materialism and existentialism are revealed and also there is resolution of some difficulties, suffered by an individual female protagonist, which is somewhat, a tentative and unconvincing attempt. The novel is a fine example of the assertion and courage of women to exist in a hostile world which, at every step, tries to smother the identity of women. Joan Rockwell was right when he said: “fiction is not only a representation of social, but also a necessary functional part of social control, and also paradoxically, an important element in social change” (4).

Being a Kumauni by birth Namita Gokhale spent her early childhood in Nainital. Her personality as a woman or as a Kumauni Brahmin girl seems to be reflecting in most of her novels. In *A Himalayan Love Story* (1996), the protagonist Parvati is a Brahmin girl of Himalayan area. This novel has been divided into two parts. The first part *Parvati: The Dance of The Honeybee* signifies Kumauni culture where the male bees are short-lived and never collect pollen and who have no other responsibilities in connection with providing for their children. Female bees do all the work of nest making and provisioning. The second part *Mukul: Dreams of Reason* is related to Mukul Nainwal and his reminiscences.

The story begins with the sense of emptiness, uncertainties, privations, agonies, cruelties and frustration in the life of Parvati from her childhood itself. Parvati’s mother had been married at the age of thirteen. Her father had been from a well-to-do family of Almorah. Very soon he spent all his money and property on gambling and other addictions. So when he needed money for his treatment of tuberculosis he failed to collect it and died without treatment. Now Parvati’s and her mother’s only living relative was her mother’s stepbrother, who was the principal of a school in Nainital and a humourless and mean man. He despised them and they
returned the feeling. Though he gave them no reason for hatred and had been unfailing in execution of his duties by providing them the house to live and also allow them to collect rent from the Kirana shop for their living. Parvati’s uncle Hirananda Joshi wanted her to get educated, but like the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale she is also a victim of narrow mentality of the society, regarding the existence of a woman. Her illiterate mother considered her education as wastage of money. Her attitude is evident from these lines by Parvati: “She would complain bitterly about the cost of books and uniforms, although the actual school fees were of course heavily subsidized”(6).

For her mother it would have been different had Parvati been a boy, as then she would be able to provide for her in old age. Her attitude towards her daughter shows to what extent daughters are considered as mere responsibilities that have to be borne. Perhaps Parvati’s mother was an optimistic one which is clear from her words:

Perhaps masterji is right Parvati, she said “your education might turn out to be of some use after all. Look at the post master’s daughter; She’ll get into service soon. You could become a teacher.(10)

This statement defines her quest for her self identity through her daughter. Hirananda Joshi did not take care of his step sister so the two of them were taking care of each other at the time of difficulty when a tiger was on prowl. The tiger can be taken as a symbol of danger posed by outside forces, against which women protected women. This is further substantiated by the vocation of bee-keeping, which the hill folk indulged in, in order to sustain themselves. In that process Parvati’s mother realized the importance of education for Parvati and Parvati got a lot of knowledge of female bees, social bees and solitary bees. The title of the very first section The Dance
of the Honey – Bee is loaded with multiple meanings. It is indicative of the freedom of sexual choice that Parvati’s mother yearns for. The author is able to draw a very interesting parallel between Parvati’s mother and the queen honey-bee in terms of sexual rendezvous. As narrated in the following lines:

Bees interested me, particularly the segregation of the sexes and the clear demarcation of their roles. I could make sense of it and relate it to my surroundings. Our Pahari men were always crowding around the local tea shops, playing cards or purposefully spitting out tobacco. They were the drones who gratefully left the labour to their women, the thin, hardy ghasyarans who balanced incredible heights of fodder and fuelwood on their heads. (10-11)

By force of circumstances, and to quench her physical thrust as well as to maintain a better life style her mother moved into a physical relationship with Shrikrishnji, their tenant, the kirana store owner. Like the honey bee, she also wants to explore her identity by the relentless use of Shrikrishnji’s masculinity, bereft of any love and attachment. Parvati’s mother was in fact a new woman, who had the gumption to have an illicit relationship, to satisfy her needs. Parvati was shocked when she watched them together:

They seemed very happy and intimate together. There was a lot of tickling and giggling and laughter. The shopkeeper extracted a liquor bottle from his coat pocked and glugged a good part of it down. Then, only half-jokingly, he offered it to mother. To my absolute horror, she took it, and, giggling like a school girl, actually put it to her lips and drank. (16)
With Shrikrishanji in her life many changes took place in her mother’s attitude and in her looks. She discarded her usual frugality, her skin regained the sheen and wrinkles around her eyes vanished and her gait changed. As a widow her mother was struggling with her sexuality. What had been a beautiful part of married life was not present in her life now. Widowed women tend to become almost obsessed with thoughts of sex. Desperately missing a husband’s companionship, a woman feels certain emptiness and tends to indulge in self pity. Having no way out, the source of struggle is self pity. So Parvati’s mother failed to be happy in her life and to flow positive and cheerful attitude in her daughter’s life too. Further tyrannical cultural and society antiquated norms did decide Parvati’s destiny. As a child she was a victim of want and deprivation. Facing hardships in every way and being illiterate her mother neglected Parvati. Parvati had to do the chores which her mother herself did not do as she was a Brahmin and not a ghasyaran and her brother was an educated man, the Principal of a school. She however did not mind if her daughter did the same. In addition to this she watched her mother with Shrikrishnji in a very questionable position. All these factors pushed her further and further into schizophrenia. When Shrikrishnji went to Bombay sudden changes took place in her mother’s outer appearance. She seemed older and thinner:

My mother was looking feverish, she was coughing, there was a wheezy edge to her voice when she spoke. She looked nervous and unsure of herself… when the doctor returned from Haldwani it was diagnosed that she had tuberculosis. (20)

She had T.B. that indicated her departure from this world to another. Parvati like Gudiya was at the age of puberty when her life changed as a result of her mother’s death. Then Parvati moved to Nainital to her bachelor uncle’s cottage, who
merely took her as a responsibility he had to take care of. There she continued her studies. Parvati on the pretext of taking history tuitions had an affair with her tutor, Salman Siddiqui.

Here we find author Namita Gokhale deconstruct feminism – a man desires a woman for physical charm and a woman wants a man for financial and social security which has been effectively rebutted. Reversing the pattern, Parvati appreciates his sensuality “I first saw Salman and I was dazzled by his beauty” (23).

The author’s use of the word “beauty” clearly reflects the writer’s desire to appreciate the aesthetic and sensual aspect of unadulterated male beauty devoid of any social construction of ‘masculine charm’. Money and power make a man desirable, not his physical attributes. She refuses to assign the traditional role of a provider to Salman, and quite uncharacteristically views him solely as a sexual partner. Parvati aptly remarks:

Salman attacked my sari blouse and began pulling at the hooks with urgency so total that my blouse fell open almost of its own accord. By now my entire body was afire, all discretion had abandoned me. I clung desperately to him. The searing look in his eyes cleft all the way into my soul. (24)

The point that a very important attribute of ‘feminine sexuality; that is, unabashed adulation of sensuality is not a male prerogative alone, has been, successfully charted out here. It bears a close resemblance with a controversial scene in *Women in Love*, where women are seen appreciating the sensuality of a nude sculpture of a black man. This reversal of stereotype negates the so called biological programming and it deconstructs feminism. Parvati says that she never imagined that the human body could be an instrument of such delight.
According to Nancy Chodorow, “Heterosexual fantasy and desire also have an individual component, a private heterosexual eroticism that contrasts with specifies further, the cultural norm”. (772). This is called ‘personal myth’ by Ernst Kris. It is this ‘personal myth’ or ‘individual component’ that impels Parvati to lust for a young Muslim without being intimidated by the social constructs of feminine behaviour. Driven with desire, she loses her virginity to him without having any so called ennobling emotion of love or commitment to marriage. She does not feel the pangs of puritan guilt. Salman’s departure leaves no dents in her being. As Parvati aptly remarks: “I was stoic, even relieved, about his departure…. My encounters with Salman had quelled some silent hunger within me” (31).

Thus, the ‘predominance of ‘personal myth’ over ‘cultural norm’ in Parvati exhibits her sexually liberated self. She admits; “We were playing a shadow game, and the most precious ingredient of our passion was that both of us sensed that it was not permanent” (29).

After Salman’s departure she came to know of his affair with an Anglo-Indian nurse at the Ramsay hospital and he left for Bombay and then to America forever. However, Namita Gokhle’s statement that Parvati feels a “belated shame “and a sense of rejection after the departure of Salman is intriguing because the emotion of ‘shame’ and ‘rejection’ should be alien to a truly sexually liberated woman. Now she passed her life in a very light and happy mood. She met Lalit Joshi and Mukul Nainwal, the private students of Hiranand Joshi. “I enjoyed flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul” (31).

Hiranand Joshi decided to marry Parvati to Lalit and not Mukul who she was in love with. She was not in a position to oppose her uncle on his decision. The basic
requirement that Lalit was a Brahmin like her and their horoscopes matched was the main cause in fixing their marriage. She failed to get any physical and emotional gratification from her homosexual husband Lalit. Parvati lamented: “After the sexual bliss I had known with Salman, my wedding night with Lalit sent us both into the deepest depression” (32).

Lalit was equally subjugated due to the false cultural and social codes that define heterosexuals as ‘normal’, ‘common’ and ‘masculine’ and homosexuals as ‘pervert’ ‘effeminate’ and ‘abnormal’. No wonder, Lalit had to hide his homosexual orientation and was forced to marry a woman and consequently he ruined his life as well as Parvati’s. Parvati who had enjoyed a passionate physical relationship with Salman, found it all the more claustrophobic to live in a sexually starved marriage.

Had Parvati married according to her wishes, perhaps her fate may have been different. It is a curse of society that a majority of women do not have a say in the choice of their life partners. Their choices are made for them on the basis of religion and caste, irrespective of whether the groom is actually suitable on the basis of sexual preferences, or whether the couple is suited mentally, financially, emotionally or on the basis of educational backgrounds. All these have a great bearing on any relationship, and these have an unquestionable impact on marital relationships. The tragedy of Parvati becomes even graver, as Masterji was aware of Lalit’s secret vice, his homosexuality. In a letter to Mukul he wrote, “I am aware of, and can even condone, your secret vice, you were boys, Lalit and you, it was all a long time ago” (54).

Further, the arrival of their mutual friend accentuated the gulf between them. Mukul’s whole-hearted acceptance was a balm to Parvati’s wounds caused by Lalit’s rejection. We find the main characters trapped in a very intriguing situation. Lalit felt
jealous of Parvati, because Mukul (whom Lalit fantasies about) was attracted towards her, Parvati was horrified at his disclosure. Parvati narrated in the following lines:

If there was one moment in my life I consider axial, on which all its other movements and motions hinge, it was this one, when I encountered my husband, Lalit look at Mukul with hunger in his eyes.

(36)

The double marginalization of Parvati—marriage with a gay husband and the marital status that hampers her from reciprocating to the advances of Mukul—and the hapless situation of Lalit reveals that in the realm of sexuality there is a small common sphere where both man and woman are victims of patriarchy. The whole incident reveals multiple levels of sexual oppression and their inter-connections. At one level, there is a depiction of the plight of a married woman who has known the pleasure of physical intimacy and has to live in a state of sexual denial due to the unethical behavior of her gay husband. Despite the full awareness of his sexual orientation, he intentionally marries Parvati in order to protect his stereotyped image of normal, powerful and socially accepted heterosexual male. However, on the other level the reader is compelled to feel sympathetic towards Lalit who is also at the margin due to the hegemony of heterosexuals over homosexuals. This complex situation presents a very intricate overlapping of gay and gender politics. The positions of victims are interchangeable depending upon whether ‘queer’ or ‘feminist’ perspectives are applied.

Parvati has a couple of Paro like torrid affairs, is also married Paro-like, briefly and unhappily to a homosexual husband Lalit. All marriages face challenges of various proportions. In the society the homosexual issue may be an insurmountable challenge for the majority of husbands, wives, and families affected by it. The shame
that a heterosexual spouse of a homosexual feels is damaging emotionally and physically. Especially in a country like India where women prefer to keep quiet rather than talk about the misery they are suffering from a known person who is a homosexual.

They both lived together just like strangers. However, it is quite paradoxical that at times it is these compulsions that force a woman to recognize her sexual desires all the more explicitly. In a true sense, a person who is interested in other things also is compelled to do always the same kind of work; this makes an adverse effect on his mentality. When the traditional panacea fails to cure the frustrations caused by sexual starvation, she realizes that the over-glorification of motherhood and tutored pleasure of managing the house and cooking are nothing but oppressive tools to regulate and control the all-consuming feminine sexuality. Speaking of the eclectic nature of the forces that try to curb the sexuality of a woman, Jeffrey Weeks aptly remarks in *Sexuality*:

Female sexuality has been limited by economic and social dependence, by the power of men to define sexuality by the limitations of marriage, by the burdens of reproduction and by the endemic fact of male violence against women. At the same time, these contradictory definitions have as often provided the opportunity for women to define their own needs and desires (39).

Parvati turned towards cooking and indulged herself in preparing food. Cooking food and feeding the husband as a substitute for sex, and viewing the kitchen as a substitute for the bedroom and hence a tool for empowerment, find their manifestations in the works of many female writers, such as in *Difficult Daughters*: A novel by Manju Kapoor. In *Difficult Daughters* the first wife is forced to vacate the
bedroom for the second wife but refuses to leave her hold on the kitchen and tries to eliminate partially the second wife by not allowing her to cook for the husband and hence exert her right on him. So different ways of attaining empowerment through food are explored by many women writers and Namita Gokhale also tries to show the futile effort of Parvati to claim at least some part of her husband’s body (stomach) through cooking: It accorded her “some power over his corpulent body, some part in the dreamy dominion of her home” (39). Cooking as a metaphor for sexual acceptance finds its expression in the elaborate dinner prepared by Parvati:

Sometimes when the fresh gajaras of fresh young chameli flowers in my hair, the warm summer smells of earth and water and night, aroused me to a fever of expectation and desire, but I did not give in, I cooked and smiled and wore my new frozen face to such perfection that I understood resignedly that it had been made to measure and that I was condemned to wear it for a very long time, perhaps forever. (38)

However Parvati got weary of leading a life of mere an incomplete and the traditional housewife, who would uphold moral values at the cost of strangulating her desires. As a result, the starved body and rejected soul get fulfillment in an incestuous relationship with her brother-in-law, which is illegal and neither acceptable nor expected from an Indian wife. Naturally his going away gave no pangs of dissatisfaction or guilt and this feeling was quite similar to the initial feelings she had felt after the departure of Salman. They both serve merely as an instrument (again, the male honey bee pattern can be traced) for sexual rejuvenation. This relationship with her brother-in-law, Raju, has given her a strange assurance and she has ‘learnt to love her husband. This cultivated habit of loving her husband is again a reflection of the conventional mindset of Indian society. The author beautifully portrays the dual
image of the patient wife and of the woman who defies the cultural code by delving into sensual pleasure. The socially accepted notion that a sexually passive woman is the ideal prototype of femininity breeds a lot of self-doubts and gives birth to identity crisis in both Parvati and her mother. Parvati finds duplicity in her mirror image and her mother has been seen as an ‘evil twin’ by her. These two conflicting forces tear her apart in opposite directions and create an identity crisis in Parvati. Apparently, these two contradictory spheres are unable to negotiate to bring reconciliation and the subsequent formation of a unique third space. Thus, Namita Gokhale is the champion of feminine sexuality.

Parvati did find the strength to stage an inner revolt, for she had physical relation with her brother-in-law Raju. Lalit died and Parvati lost her sanity, but not before she gave birth to Raju’s daughter Irra. The first part of the novel is narrated by Parvati and the rest is narrated by Mukul, who had settled in Hong Kong with a Burmese widow Adeliene and her daughter Marie. Then Mukul came to know that after the death of Lalit, Parvati was abandoned by everybody and was in a very miserable condition. Nobody bothered to have anything to do with her sufferings and pains, which is very common in male-dominated society. A widow and her child were financial burden on her in-laws and hence they also dispatched her to the asylum at Bareilly. In all, her condition was very pathetic as no one was there to look after a single woman after her husband's death. Her life seemed doomed to an eternity of unrelieved, silent suffering. In the novel Parvati suffers at the hands of her homosexual husband and society. Constant sexual denial and social indifference leads her ultimately to madness.

Thus we see that Namita Gokhale tries to show the struggle of women to break the culturally imposed identity by asserting their sexual needs. Namita Gokhale's
portrayal of the insanity of Parvati, the tragic end of her mother, Adelene's and Pasang Rampa's use of their sexual powers merely as a tool to find a provider and the exhibition of homosexuality as a means to put a heterosexual woman in the margin makes her fictional works a one-dimensional study of femininity and show that the pattern of male privilege has not been completely broken. Though the female desire is crucial to our social fabric, yet it is recast and reformulated by men, and the depiction of a truly sexually liberated woman is still a tantalizing dream.

*The Book of Shadows* (1999) is a fine texture of the felt experiences of loneliness and loss of identity of the protagonist, Rachita Tiwari. The heroine Rachita Tiwari is a young English lecturer in Jesus and Saint Mary College in Delhi. She is engaged with Anand who is the brother of another lecturer in Chemistry Department in the same college. Hanging himself with a rope attached to the ceiling fan of a room, Anand commits suicide and leaves a suicide note bidding good-bye to this cruel world. Rachita's best friend and Anand's sister takes revenge by throwing a beaker-full hydrochloric acid at her face, from behind surreptitiously, for she feels responsibility of Anand's suicide is on Rachita being his fiancée. Rachita says: "No regret at Anand’s Death - I hadn't killed him, of that I was sure - and not even anger at his sister's revenge" (20).

Rachita is severely injured by this acid attack so she is hospitalized with the help of the college staff. In course of time when she partly recovers and is discharged she moves from Delhi to Ranikhet, where her maternal uncle has a 100 years old house lying vacant. The suicide of Rachita's fiancé over her infidelity and subsequent revenge by his sister suddenly transforms Rachita from a smug, vain lecturer into a confused recluse. At the sight of Anand's suicide itself Rachita realizes:
Who was this swaying on a rope before me? This was not my lover, the stroker of my brow. It was an unbearable excess of all that was possible and bearable. There was defeat here, and a loss of dignity. This travesty of not life was not how death was to be faced: of this I was sure. (5)

As a result, scarred by her lover's suicide and with a permanent ill-figured face, she left that crowded relentless city and recuperates in remote house built by a missionary over a century ago, in the Himalayan foothills. She admitted: "It belongs to me, as I belong to this house" (3).

The disfiguring of the face signifies the identity crises that Rachita goes through after the acid attack. The novel begins with a very philosophical question regarding the real identity of the protagonist viz. Rachita when she asks: "Who am I?" (3), she further says:

We define ourselves by the people that we know, by the face we see in the mirror. In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I might meet in the mirror is no longer mine. (3)

Acid attacks have a catastrophic effect, not only on human flesh, they manifest themselves in a wide range of symptoms, including post-traumatic stress disorders like fear, anxiety, and behaviour problems. These problems include depression, anxiety, phobias, low self-esteem and difficulties with relationships. An acid attack drastically changes human life. In many cases survivors of an acid attack are forced to give up their education, their occupation and other important activities in their lives. This is because recovering from the trauma takes up most of their time and because
the disfigurement they have to bear debilitates and handicaps them in every conceivable way.

Women who have survived acid attacks have great difficulty in finding work and if unmarried, as many victims tend to be, they have very little chance of ever getting married. In case the acid victim survives, it will only be as a grotesque disfigured person, who lives with mangled flesh and suffers a fate worse than death. It punishes the victim more harshly than the perpetrator. (web)

Rachita herself says: "The avengers of my vanity have broken me, humbled me with these small depredations of skin and bone and tissue, leaving me less than I was"(7). Victims of acid attack are most often faced with social isolation that further damages their self-esteem, self-confidence and seriously undermines their professional and personal future. Now, Rachita tries to find herself. She also feels alienated in the process of finding out her self-identity. Initially she herself defines alienation in the class: "Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar,' I said, addressing a sea of guileless faces,' or to render the familiar unfamiliar"(4). Zenobia Desai, an intelligent student of the class also defines: "That the stamp of alienation is the loss of identity" (4).

Rachita suffers many stages of alienation i.e. the loss of identity like she suffers from normalessness, the lack of commitment and shared social prescriptions for behavior, cultural estrangement, the removal from the established values in the society and social isolation as well, which is a sense of loneliness in social relation. And she experiences all these incidences of her life due to her own fiancé. Due to the adverse circumstances of her life, she is able to define alienation very well:
Words like alienation belong to the context of psychopathology. All human beings harbour their particular and individual manifestations of the other. In the widest sense, every neurosis is the outcome of some form of alienation. (63)

Rachita passes her time by reading the old journals and books and diaries left by the former inmates in the house but sometimes she is upset and is sorrowful, confused and disenchanted from the natural beauty of Himalayas around. She lives there along with an ancient and mysterious manservant, Lohaniju, the care-taker of the house. To keep her sanity she performs the drill of painting and repainting her nails a bright red, at the same time careful not to look into the mirror. She feels: "Sanity is like nail polish, it chips easily, it has to be restored and renewed" (19). She usually reminds her past and can never sleep properly at night from that unbearable incidence of her life. She is afraid of both dreams of the night and realities of the day interlap. She finds solace in Lohaniju's company and in the interesting stories he narrates to her. Only a cat named Lady gives her company, the last link with the living world that keeps her from falling apart. Lohaniju only looks after her meals and other comforts in the house as and when required still she has no peace within or calm around, and a type of remorse has gripped her most of the time. Apart from Lady it is Lohaniju's comforting company that prevents her for going completely mad. In her situation it is not difficult to fall into physical and emotional despair, but she resolves not to let that happen to her.

Rachita has been happy in her childhood in the house in which she is recuperating, and she is determined to be that again to find inner happiness. She does not have any wrong intentions as she wants to forget Anand's wanton act of self destruction and restore her life to its course once again. Anand and her quarrels had
all been without reason and it was after one such quarrel that he committed suicide blaming her for his death. Rachita feels that he has been gracious enough to remove himself from the corrupted world to some nobler place, while she is left to live with tarnished emotions which may never totally heal.

Apart from physical injury, there is also internal struggle in her mind and she suffers from unlimited mental agony. People who are exposed to physical violence are driven into exile from their body. Rachita watches all her action closely:

I am keeping a close watch on my own sanity. I'm constantly alert to signs of collapse. Perhaps I have become too self-conscious in the process. I find I am scrutinizing myself all the time.(63)

Rachita comes to know about a witch whose husband ill-treated her. She is hated men so every man of the village well-treated her, after the incidence of her husband, when her eyes flashed fire and her husband stood transformed into a buffalo. In one point Rachita gets reflection of herself in that woman, as some in balance in strength, some distortion of gender. She suffers from multiple personality disorder. Rachita considers her body as the house she lives and the numerous dwellers of the house, whose life she chronicles, can in this sense be taken as the insecurities she is infested with as a result of the trauma of having her face injured. People who suffer from depression tend to fantasize and deny admitting reality. Rachita's relationship to reality passes through three stages, her college time as a lecturer, her life in the house with its stories and finally, when she becomes successful in gaining her real identity.

Rachita feels horrified and suffers hallucination in the lonely house. She sees herself as a little girl behind a curtain of her parents’ bedroom. But at the same time she notices someone else watching them besides her. She does not know whose this presence is, but it has a calming, comforting effect. Rachita while hallucinating is
actually being comforted by her own soul, for the presence is her inner-self, her consciousness which is consoling and soothing her.

She sometimes experiences ghostly presence in the house which disturbs her solitary life: "Someone, something... this house-it has begun to speak to me. I do want to listen to its stories, they are malicious and convoluted" (61).

This novel consists of two parallel narratives one of Rachita Tiwari and the other by a ghost which has haunted the house for over a hundred years watching and chronicling its history. The ghost is the second narrator of the novel who is also, on the stage of discovering his own identity. Rumina Sethi remarks:

Rachita is the protagonist of Namita 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 (web)

Different people stayed within her cottage at different times she becomes contemplative and focuses her attention on their activities. Rachita remarks: "I hide in corners. I lurk in shadows" (79).

There is the worthless fool, Captain Wolcott, and his tragically sensuous mistress, Dona Rosa. Rachita decides to watch or follow Dona Rosa's way of life because she was failure in her relationship with Anand. Rachita is afraid of male persons because it is easy to excite and incite them but after that woman gets trapped and she has to follow her partner throughout her life. The other occupants of the house are William Cockrell who built the house and his frail wife Fanny, the doomed lovers Marcus and Munro, who were disciples of Aleister Crowley, an infamous dabbler in
black magic; Father Benedictus, is the seeker of knowledge, and is at peace with himself and his God; and the all knowing sage crows. Above all is the disembodied resident of the house - ghost, who gives effortless utterances to thoughts compiled with great difficulty and understanding gleaned from the priest Father Benedictus. Only Father Benedictus who was an ex-military man and now an expert of theology could feel the presence of the ghost and the ghost learnt a lot form him. After a century of silence, something compels the ghost to speak. The ghost narrates his own identity in this world in the words of Father Benedictus:

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. Much deceit and dissimulation hides behind the flowing robes of my cassock. I am, after all, a human, perhaps not a very wise one. Once, as a young man, when I was in the military, I fancied myself a soldier of the body, eager to combat evil with sword and gun. Of course, I discovered soon enough that the real evil lay within, but in those days when I first donned the tight-fitting uniform of the soldier, I can assure you that I felt quite differently. Quite assuredly, clothes make the body that constitutes the man, and you, dear spirit, are blessed beyond belief not to be burdened with these mill - stones.(131-132)

The ghost speaks the word that injured woman Rachita, inhabiting the house will hear and the words, which will give her back to herself. Rachita now finds the human body "a gross and ineffectual machine"(158). For the human race it was “the body above all is the instrument of all suffering”(159). Rachita fails to come out of confusion instantly. She asks herself does she exist? Or has she ceased to exist at all?
One night a face without a face, a suggestion of a face, familiar yet mocking floats before her in her dreams. She becomes a neurotic wreck trying to ransack her mind in the early hours of the morning to figure out who it was. In the morning she avoids her face in the mirror as he normally did “…but there was a new dimension to my horror and repugnance, for it had struck me that the face I saw in my dreams last night was really my own”(24). It shows that the difficulties in her way merely strengthened her resolve. She is slowly but steadily regaining her lost identity, for previously she says, "My face had been banished from my memory"(21). The words spoken by the ghost helped Rachita to regain her lost identity, and hence she gave her back to herself. She remarks:

Proprioception is the science of the sense of self. My centre, my identity, my selfhood had for a while abandoned the confines of skin and bone, abandoned my cage and run away to cower in dusty corner of other abandoned memories and perceptions. Dona Rosa and the rest are not real, they do not belong any longer to this clear and unquestioning morning, and they are emanations of the past, insubstantial, evasive, and ambiguous. I am alive, a skin - encapsulated being who belongs inalienably the world of the living. I feel as though a scab has fallen from an old sore. In the shadow world between the living and the un-living, even sickness is an indication of a possible restoration to health. (213)

Now, Rachita starts analyzing the positive values of life. The loneliness of the house of shadows has given a lot of intellectual strength to her. Her past is over. What is to happen, happens. What was to happen had happened already. Now she concentrates on the future. She determines,
...I had the right to exist, as though I was a part of creation, of the dawn chorus, of the healing sunlight that was showing up in shy dappled patches in the garden. I was a glob of consciousness, of reactions and conditioning, enveloped in skin (damaged skin, but nevertheless). I was defined in time and space and dimension, I had the right to exist. (213)

Rachita comes to terms with life as a continuous process of making and re-making herself. Now she learns what she must hold on to and what she must discard. When she starts moving towards a positive value of life with sufficient courage and determination then only her importance is established. She now understands that:

It is not my body which has betrayed me; it is I who have betrayed this body. My abandonment of courage has been no less treacherous than Anand's. Courage is not simply a virtue - it is the testing point of all virtues at the highest conflux of reality. I will not fail this test of courage. I will venture unafraid into the future, with my body, with my mind, with my spirit. (219)

At the end of the story, her student Zenobia comes to meet Rachita to the house along with her boyfriend Pashu. They witness and perhaps are instrument of Rachita's return to the sane world. Rachita becomes optimistic and accepts life and its actions. She asks herself, why not to enjoy life as Zenobia does? This novel is about people trying to flee from pain and ending in greater pain.

Namita Gokhale's new novel is an exploration of, and an attempt to resolve pain, both in its physical and psychological manifestations, in the gross and subtle forms. In the process, she seems to posit a new
Law of Conservation of Pain; it can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form to another.

It is believed that males are known for knowledge, power, consciousness, strong action, while females are considered for their feeling touch, weak action, domestic intimacy. Some of these characteristics are not absolutely correct in the case of Rachita. She is distinct from others. She is a woman of separate personality and identity and she must not be a 'man's shadow-self, 'an auxiliary' and 'the unwanted and neglected other'. Viola Klein observes:

Being in the position of outsider, intruding into a finished system, and restricted by a century old history of submissions, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority women's chief claim in their struggle was as natural result, to prove that in all respects they were just as good as men. (34)

Through this novel Namita Gokhale seems to be celebrating womanhood, the strength and resilience that only a woman, who is an embodiment of Shakti, can display, for she says: "I have to erase this morbidity from my mind, I had to recondition myself"(30). Rachita had been able to exorcise the ghosts of her insecurities for her world had been "undermined; taken apart, reduced to anarchy and chaos; but then mysteriously, inexplicably, beatifically, it had regenerated into something more than the sum of its parts"(230). After the acid attack, she was suffering from identity crisis, but the woman being an embodiment of Shakti, bounces back slowly but surely. This is the strength of a new woman, who deconstructs the concept of womanhood who was conventionally known as a weaker sex. Rachita has the courage to come out of the catastrophe on her own and her determination to survive is immeasurable because unable to face shame and ostracism from society,
most women survivors of an acid attack commit suicide. Through the sense of self awareness of Rachita, the novel develops in a positive direction towards the existence of a woman in the world.

The development of Feminist thought has brought about a considerable change in our outlook towards women. A new perspective has dawned on the Indian social horizon with feminine psyche, trying to redefine the role of a woman in the society and also to re-assert her self-identity. The story presents Rachita's search for selfhood by asserting her femininity through self-discovery and self-realization. She herself says: "I think I know that I will remain" (232).

_Shakuntala: The Play of Memory_ (2005) has been described as the plight of the oppressed woman, by Manjulika Rahman. It is an original and heart-rending tale that brings back memories of the feminist 1960's. _Shakuntala_ enthralls in the vivid portrayal of the tragic life of a woman, whose dare to live life on her own terms is thwarted at every turn by circumstances and the age in which she lives. It is an engrossing diary of any and every woman in search of her identity in a man's world. Namita Gokhale studied the plays of Kalidas for writing this tragic novel based on Hindu mythology. The very name Shakuntala stands for despair, dejection and desperateness. She has to suffer the sanskaras of abandonment like her legendary namesake, the heroine of Kalidasa's _Abhigyanam Shakuntalam_.

Shakuntala lost her father when she was only five years old. She did not have a healthy relationship with her mother as she thought her a trouble: "you wicked, heartless girl!" she shrieks, "Were you born only to trouble and torment me?" (6). She even discouraged her from learning the scriptures as it was forbidden for women when her brother's tutor taught him. On the contrary she only worried about the education of her son and ensured that he got the maximum opportunities.
Later, when her brother became a Guresvara, Shakuntala and her mother were both affected due to the absence of a man in the lives of them. Shakuntala was relieved to have Guresvara's tutor around as he was a man and she thought he would protect them from terrible things. But he turned out to have ulterior motives. He told her of the Gandharva marriage of Kalidasa's Shakuntala with King Dushyant. Hearing such stories Shakuntala thought herself:

…ready for love, eager for the exquisite sting of Kamadeva's arrows. King Dushyanta would surely arrive to claim me, his horses panting from the hunt. He would take me to distant lands beyond our unchanging hills. (24)

Shakuntala was restless to feel the freedom of birds and clouds. However her mother deterred her restlessness by reminding her that birds return to their nests at night but clouds must weep their tears unseen in distant lands. On starting her menstruation, Shakuntala was possessed with panic but instead of assuaging her fears and guiding her properly her mother blamed her for not having any decency as there was a holy man in the house, her visiting brother. As in A Himalayan Love Story the tragedy of being a woman dawned on Shakuntala also. She wanted to scream as to burst her lungs. The first time Shakuntala ran away from her home and found shelter in a cave with rock-demons who taught her a valuable lesson about the many faces of the mother goddess who takes many forms, but is always "Swamini, mistress of herself". Time passed and she was married to a mahasamant named Srijan, whose two wives had died without giving him any child. As a bride she had been instructed to look at the earth, to keep her gaze down and appear modest. Shakuntala realized the importance of guarding her virtue only after she got married when Srijan her husband
mastered her with courteous ease. Thus Namita Gokhale by emphasizing this seems to be advocating restraint in matters of pre-marital sex.

After getting married Shakuntala enjoyed her liberty as there was no one to restrict her. A liberated woman in Shakuntala desired to experience all the objects of the world freely without any boundations; she wished:

If I were a kite I could have fluttered in the wind and viewed all the lands below. I would have seen the sacred river that flows by out hills, until it meets the rocks, and the plains that stretch on and on until the end of the world. (38-39)

But Shakuntala was not happy as she was hungry for further experience. She felt dejected when she thought about the norms of society where men could travel and see the world, but it was inappropriate and unusual for women to do so. She questioned the inequality which prevailing in society. If she was a man's equal in bed, why could not she desire what men enjoyed? "The freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and to perhaps find something"(48). Shakuntala was not an illiterate hill woman and she never bothered for ornaments and jewellery like other ordinary women. The only thing she was hungry for knowledge and to see the elephant which is the symbol of God Ganesha, the God of success and wisdom, the things she wanted to achieve in her life.

Thus we see that Shakuntala was no ordinary woman, she was only enchained by force of circumstances. Had she been born in another era and an enlightened society she would have probably beaten the constraints and shone as a learned woman. On their wedding night Srijan showed Shakuntala the star of Arundhati, which according to Hindu Mythology was the star of fidelity. This ritual proved the tyranny of one-sided chastity in which only a woman has to follow all the percepts
and remain faithful to her husband while a man is free to live his life as Srijan brought back a handmaiden named Kamalini from his travels. She felt betrayed and humiliated but she had to bear her misfortune silently as the hypocritical societal norms allowed him many women as he was a man. In the male dominated society a woman is expected to live happily her life with her husband, it matters little whether the woman is emotionally content or not. True to the code of Manu the society of her time, as in fact society till date, believes, in the words of the priest in the novel that:

   Men are masters of women. Your father protects you in childhood, your husband protects you in youth, and your son protects you in old age, a woman is never fit for independence that is not the way of the world. You are fortunate to be a rich young woman, without cares or worries. Never forget your good fortune. It is not auspicious. (103-104)

Kamalini made Shakuntala feel uneasy and uncomfortable in her own house. Her marriage was disturbed with the intervention of the handmaiden and also because she could not be able to give an heir to her husband, for which he was eagerly waiting. Facing neglect from her husband Shakuntala assumed the identity of Yaduri, the fallen woman and eloped with Nearchus, a Greek traveller, she met by the Ganga. She felt ecstasy:

   My life has changed; I felt that I cannot go back to where I have come from. Every limb in my body is alive and yet I am rested and satiated. Nothing has prepared me for this ecstasy. It defies my life and destiny, disengaging it from the wheel of duty and dharma and what should be, throwing it directly into my own hands. (110)

She further thought:
Two voices rise within. One is guiding me to return home, away from this violation, this absolute mockery of the matrimonial promises of love. The other buzzing about my ears like a bhramari, a lascivious bee, urges me to flee, run away as far as fast as I can, before Kamalini and the palanquin bearers, intruders from another life, come in search of me. (111)

Shakuntala and Nearchus travelled together to Kashi, and there Shakuntala surrendered to a world of pleasures. She accepted this man and enjoyed sex freely without considering her pregnancy. She was a new woman in every sense who had the courage to deconstruct feminism. The world excited her for adventures and she wanted to be a liberated woman. Nearchus had been to many places and countries of the world so he described his experiences to her: "...The world was a wild and wondrous place, and I was glad to be free and alone and traveling its surface with this Yavana who had seen and known so much"(134). But gradually she realized that her presence was a burden for Nearchus. She felt her existence in this world useless: "I am nobody: I am a body. A Traveler picked me up as he might pluck a fruit from a tree, and now he is impatient to throw the core away"(161). The attitude of men, who considered woman as possessions, to be used and discarded, was explicitly stated by Nearchus. He admitted that he had also forgotten many women though he had enjoyed sex with them. Now, tormented by his misconduct Shakuntala realized her folly: "Even in the moment of her disgrace, Kalidasa's Shakuntala had the sanctity of a secret marriage. But I had betrayed everything"(150). Shakuntala may have been condemned by the society and culture in which she lived, but the new woman in her remained determined as ever to live life and die on her own terms. A charging bull
attacked her and she surrendered herself. The world had abandoned her and perhaps it was time she abandoned it and now her feet were not weighted with silver anklets.

*Shakuntala* is the story of a woman whose desire to live on her own terms is thwarted at every step by circumstance and the age in which she lives. Namita Gokhale combines her extraordinary gift for storytelling with history, religion and philosophy to craft a timeless tale that transcends its ancient setting. Kalidasa's Shakuntala, dynamic girl, willing to question the injustice done to her, transformed into a submissive weeping woman, who will put up with all that the patriarchal set up heaps on her head. The image of woman in modern literature differs, not only in her realization of her individual dignity and sense of equality with man, but also in her recognition of her physical as well as psychological needs. Shakuntala is a woman establishing her identity and her individuality. This new path of self-discovery is like the experience of chrysalis, emerging out of a cocoon but often branded in a male-dominated society. Somehow, she also suffers man's domination. This story is hauntingly told, the mystic tale from the medieval times and it throws open questions that are pertinent even to today's women.

*Priya In Incredible Indyaa* (2011) is a sequel addition to Paro’s liberal legacy and shares the same blithe, amusing world view that the first book i.e. *Paro: Dreams of Passion* has. Paro is now dead (in fact she died in the first book) and her obsessive observer, Priya Kaushal the mother of twins, is in her fifties. By now she has grown into a middle-aged woman, and her husband, Suresh, has bagged a minister of state portfolio. As we see Priya struggling with Delhi’s high society, her approaching menopause and finding a suitable wife each for her twins, who happen to be as alike as the proverbial sun and moon, we realize how much not only Priya, but India too has changed. We are thrown into the political cut and thrust of Delhi, full of
numerologists, fashionists, cricketers, power brokers, and extra-marital affairs, as seen by a very bored housewife. It is a world of lal batti cars, and Lutyens’ bungalows, where Priya deals with her two sons, their girlfriends as well as her husband and her suspicions about his affairs.

In the novel we find Paro, a powerful character no matter she has died now but still she reigns supreme in the heart of all who know her as Suresh, BR, Lenin and Bucky. Suresh says about Paro’s premature death: “Those whom the Gods love die young” (21). The protagonist Priya herself admires Paro:

It was Paro who showed me how the other side lived. Paro and BR, my boss, the sewing-machine magnate. Paro was BR’s wife. She was an amazon, an addiction. She was also selfish, cruel and consistently unkind. But something in Paro- her self possession, her sheer gall, sparked a matching resistance in me. She taught me that life’s rules can be bent by those who dare.(5-6)

Paro’s character was so impressive that Priya always wanted to be like her. Priya is excruciatingly aware that she could never be Paro. She at the same time laments: “Paro-sexy, beautiful, destructive. All that I’m not, then and now. Me- I’m just an ordinary housewife” (6).

In the beginning of the book we see Priya has flashback moments when she was twelve years old. In those days they were so poor that when her aunt brought imported cheese there was no bread in the house so they took it with stale chapatis: “one each for me, my mother, my aunt. Two for my brother, when he returned: he was a boy, the man of the house” (5). On another occasion we could see the same partition line between the two genders was drawn by the society’s low mentality. Priya remembered: “My widowed mother had never allowed me to even have a birthday
party, although Atul bhaiyya’s janamdin celebrations always deserved laddoos, once even a cake” (144).

In the male dominated society it is male who is considered the head of the house and can bask in his supremacy. It is he who has given all the importance neglecting the females. This partiality can be seen in every house of India. It is a boon to be born as a boy in male dominated society like India. Shruti writes:

I am scared to be a girl in the Indian society. Wherever I go, people are after my flesh, after my smile, my freedom, my existence itself. My question is what is my crime? Because I am born a female, why am I always on the paying and receiving side? (web)

Aniruddha, who was born of Paro’s rebellious affair with Bucky Bhandpur, is now turned a youth and is getting married. He is the second handsomest cricket hero in India. And the first reigning heart – throb of the game is stocky Gaurav Negi. Ani’s fiancée, supermodel Sujata Sethia (Suzi) is the elder daughter of arms dealer Manoviraj Sethia. In the wedding we are introduced to Pooonam who is the Director in Sethia’s company and tries to be friendly to Priya. She is the mistress of Manoviraj Sethia. She dumps Mrs. Sethia and is trying to play hostess right under Mrs. Sethia’s nose.

We find very rich and high profile elite society in the ceremonies and the parties of the novel. In the marriage party of Ani a very stylish woman in purple backless choli lunges through the crowd of socialites and flings herself at Gaurav Negi. She is frank enough to let out an elegant whoop and lends him a kiss full on the lips. People around there observe the scene with polite detachment, as though this is normal behaviour for women guests at Indian weddings. In another celebration i.e. in Hen Night very frank and bold ladies are described. Hen Night is the function of
ladies only. About the function Pooonam giggles: “it is going to be a daring evening. I’m not afraid of having fun! We have to show these men who’s on top, don’t we?”(167)

All the women were dressed up and raring to go in the function. Many of them were a bit drunk already. The atmosphere of the party was pervaded by drunkard women; who had glasses in their hands and the sound of CHEERS! was echoed there. A nude man appeared only a narrow gold cummerbund wrapped tight around his groin. He was confused and looked terrified. In Namita Gokhale’s world men seem afraid of women who deconstructed feminism as they all were whistling and cheering. Nobody looked surprised and shocked. On his refusing to dance in the party Pooonam took the young man by the shoulders and shook him violently. She screamed: “Return the money! Cough up the ten thousand rupee advance I’ve paid you, saala! Now, this minute” (169).

Pooonam’s father was a well-to-do Gujarati man and her mother a Punjabi lioness. She had an elder sister having a real sati savitri nature. But Poonam’s parents got divorced. Her elder sister was engaged with Harendra who fell in love with Poonam. Her parents never spoke to her afterwards because she moved to London with Harendra. But later she came to know that:

Harendra had a roving eye. He cheated on me. We got a divorce and I returned home to India. My mom-in-law was loaded. She gave me a golden handshake. Then I join Manoviraj Sethia’s company. And then, a repeat of the earlier script…as I said before, life is a bitch! (126)

Pooonam is a new woman with modern thinking, glamorous and seductive. She is always telling the prices and the brands of all the accessories she uses. She is a very high profile woman. She loves her feet very much. She informed Priya:
What I wear on my feet is as important to me as sex. I have a Jean Paul Gaultier, and an Alberta Ferretti, and an Alberta Ferretti, and a Valentino’ she confided. ‘and of course some Manolo Blahnik and ferragamo shoes. And Preda, for daily wear’. (76)

Poonam tried to persuade Priya to accept Suki as her daughter-in-law: “We’re planning a Botox brunch next Sunday; Poonam called after me. Do come, it will be good for your marriage. And learn to keep your husband waiting sometimes”(86).

She had a lot of tricks to get hold on men. She disclosed “an empire waist and a bit of frilly-front boob show and poof! – the man is mine!”(77). According to her “men are such fools” (128). Priya too agreed about this and shook her head. Poonam said: “We women have to stick together. Men are such bastards and such liars… Never, never, but never believe anything a man tells you!”(124). Priya too herself believed this statement and never believed Suresh as her loyal life partner. By the end of the novel it was also proved that Suresh had a crush on Poonam when Priya received a packet in which a poem was written by Suresh to Poonam. It was a kind of love confession. As Priya had always doubted Suresh’s faithfulness she was mentally prepared for such kind of information about Suresh. She was devastated not so much from Suresh’s infidelity as from his writing a stupid poem for someone else, not for her. Many times Priya tried to talk to Suresh clearly: “I could confront him. Ask who she was. Suresh would present a convincing defense and leave me looking feeling, foolish” (42).

It is evident that in the modern era women should be prepared for such kind of infidelity from their husbands. So they can be able to endure such heartbreaking news. An ideal Indian housewife has to train herself not to fly into jealous rages. This is a
new modern era in which everyone wants full enjoyment as much as one can whether it is inside the house or outside the walls. Husband and wife both want to do what they like. If man can go outside the house in search of sex why can’t a woman? Namita Gokhale’s women also move out of the four walls and go to their lovers.

Priya herself is a woman full of desire. She does not hesitate to check into a hotel with her former lover, Paro’s first husband and the first love of Priya. She always called BR whenever she was in Mumbai and called that very day as “Independence Day!”(48). Forgetting everything she passed her one of the happiest moments in his company. She admitted:

All I can remember is that we were in my room, in a clinch, and then I was naked and he was too, and the ivory cane leaned against the mattress as I surrendered to love and sex and re-seduction. (47)

The loss of BR disturbed Priya a lot and she was in constant grief. “There is no one with whom I can share this loss. He is gone, this man who was once my boss” (173). Priya now understand that there is no plot in housewives’ tale.

The hidden harmony of a housewife’s tale is structured, day after day, by simply carrying on. In the storyboard, the drama and heroism lie in the everyday aggravations, the small triumphs of daily life. And the happy endings – they tiptoe in so stealthily that you may already have left the multiplex by the time they show up on the screen. (193)

Namita Gokhale’s women are no weak females weeping inside the house under the pillow. Priya is a modern woman who wants to lead life as she wants. She fulfills her desire for love in BR’s company which she was not getting from Suresh. In Gokhale’s women the very word ‘housewife’ creates anxiety. It does not make them happy. Priya feels the word ‘housewife’ as “something snapped inside me, the
‘Housewife’, like a taut too-tight bra-strap” (34). On the other side we see Priya as a dutiful wife and a loving mother who all the times worry about Lov and Kush. She considered: “It is my job to worry about them” (35). She is confidant of her sons. Lov told everything about Monalisa Das Mann and Kush felt relaxed when he opened his heart for his boyfriend Akshay in front of his mummy. As she replied: “I’d love to meet him” (186). Small appreciations from them make her happy easily: “that made my day. How we doting mothers just need a few kind words!” (41) Priya received one of the awards given to 8GR8 Indian women held by RSSMS for upholding and propagating the values of Hindu Culture.

Monalisa Das Mann is another powerful woman character in the novel. Lov was almost threatened by her. Lov liked the character of his mother but “Monalisa is the opposite. She’s too hyper, much too intelligent, too well read. It’s all that Virginia Woolf stuff she was brought up on. She really is extraordinary”(51). Monalisa was so beautiful and sharp that Lov felt himself belittled to be her husband. Lov admitted:

She is a looker. Very pretty, very intense-big and small at `the same time. You know what I mean? Great tubes! So what is wrong? That’s what I ask myself, maa! what’s wrong? May be she’s just too bright for me. (51)

Monalisa was a modern girl who may smoke and drink and hang out with the guys, but somewhere she’s been conditioned to seek an Indian bridegroom. Provider, protector, sex supplier. She wanted to marry Lov and for this very reason she came to Delhi chasing Lov and till last she had never given up the idea. She wrote a book about Lov and her relationship and sent it to Priya.

Paromita was equally an emancipated and straightforward girl of Gokhale’s novel. She very boldly brought her marriage proposal for Lov by herself. On Priya’s
amazement she came to her and uttered: “I think I love him. And so I thought – why not take my own rishta to his family? And then, I am sort of traditional, so I thought why not go about it the old fashioned way?” (81)

Not only Paromita put her marriage proposal but she also succeeded in winning the heart of Priya. By profession she was a reporter and on her father’s death she performed all the responsibilities of a son. We can see that in this novel all the women folk are shown more powerful than males as Priya, Pooonam, Paromita, Geeta-a woman of power savvy politico, Monalisa, Banwari, Nnutasha, Suzi & Suki etc. Even in a protesting march it was the women who were leading. Men are generally weak and run away leaving all their responsibilities to females as Lenin, Lov, Suresh, Kush etc. At the broadest level, men and women are drawn to each other in a generic way, where each sex sees in the other a compliment of its own personality. Men are naturally pleased with the gracefulness, emotional sensitivity, quiet beauty and warm tenderness of women. Women are attracted by the courage, strength, energy and calm deliberation. Simultaneously, it is important to study the women’s characters portrayed by Namita Gokhale to evaluate the corpus of fictional ability of hers because she has realized with her female characters and unfolded their inner selves and feeling with masterly strokes.

When critics discussed her novels in various seminars, naturally they analyzed her art of narration, her understanding of human nature, her portrayal of contemporary society, her language, her literary background and her faith in the future. She has shown two ways to empower her women. One is through female bonding and another is by using her sexuality. She has tried her best not only to cause the people to realize the importance of looking at life from the point of view of a woman but also gives a
good exposure to the female side. Dr. Rashmi Gaur aptly remarks about Namita Gokhale:

……. Namita Gokhale emerges as a committed feminist author. She has successfully portrayed the insensitive fatality of options, which the society has cringingly given to its women. Even though she is unable to develop a decisive stand on these issues, she has successfully recorded and documented the hopes and fears, the concerns and tensions of the contemporary educated woman and therein lies the success of the novel.(110)
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