Chapter II

Novels of Namita Gokhale
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NOVELS OF NAMITA GOKHALE

Paro: Dreams of Passion

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is the debut novel of Namita Gokhale published in 1984. It became sensational and it created a stir at that time and set a new genre of its own. Namita portrays the stark realities of life through this novel. It is a sort of confessional diary of the protagonist Priya. The novel begins with Priya’s statement. She says, “I am writing about them because I saw myself in her”.¹ Priya is one of the protagonists of the novel. She is in love with her boss B.R.. The novel deals with erotic overtures. Priya confesses:

*I would meet B.R. almost every evening and have dinner with him, with wine, candle light, roses and all the other trappings of a covert romance. We would make love in anonymous hotel rooms........ We would copulate with a love that was both an urgent and tender; he would examine every pore and crevice of my body with the wonder of the tender of a treasure that has been washed back from the sea....... It was a second youth, a middle aged revival of dreams. I had indeed never even dreamt of such passion........*²

The novel deals with the theme of human predicament exhibiting the human values and man-woman relationship of contemporary society. Priya is a beautiful unmarried girl living in Mumbai. She has a small family made of her mother and brother. She works as a typist in the office
of B.R. She loves B.R. They have sexual relations too. She visits B.R.’s luxurious flat. She narrates her sexual experiences with B.R.:

Very gently, he stroked my hair. He undid my plait and let it lie loose about my shoulders. His soft white hand caressed my neck. His fingers were long and slim...his hand slid softly down the front of my blouse and began stroking my breast. I pretended to be so lost in the music as not to have noticed........ The feeling spread. He led me back to the bedroom and took me there. ³

B.R. is a lady-killer, a male nymphomaniac. He is the symbol of the shine and style of the rich class. Women become prey to his money. Paro is also one of the protagonists of this novel. She is a woman of guts who has no control over senses. Paro believes in enjoying life fully. She is symbol of the sybarite culture of the upper middle class society of the metros like Delhi and Mumbai. The post colonial life has drastic impact on the middleclass society and that of the metropolitan cities of India-the glimpse of which is clearly manifested in this novel. It is basically a story of two women Paro and Priya. The story is narrated by Priya. Paro and Priya cross the boundaries laid down by the society. They exhibit the concept of free will. The novel is satire on the contemporary upper middle class:

Every weekend there would be a great get-together somewhere; over beer or whisky, cigarette smoke and ghazals, we would try excitedly to keep abreast of changing world. Then we would leave, in our scooters and cars, for our separate homes and houses. Yet it was
not camaraderie that bound us together, only an intense competitiveness.  

At first the evening was a stiff, sullen, silent affair. However, with a steady and dedicated consumption of alcohol (the best Premium Scotch, naturally, with some imported wine as stand by) everyone soon felt quite convivial...... ...a glass of gin in my hand. In fact, Paro got quite drunk.

Priya is jealous of Paro and B.R. She develops hatred and dislike for Paro, the beautiful wife of B.R. Finally she writes this novel as a vindication because she also loved B.R. Anita, the personal secretary of B.R. marries so Priya is given promotion to that post. But Priya also marries to a young aspiring advocate of Delhi, named Suresh. She settles in Delhi and they have a happy married life. One day they accidentally meet Paro at a dinner party. Paro tells them about her divorce with B.R. and now she lives in Delhi. She lives with a test cricketer named Bucky Bhandpur, from a princely family without marriage. Paro is in need of some legal advice so she requests Suresh to help her in that regard. She has some problems regarding the tenants, her landlord, her father’s will and her alimony. Suresh is also impressed and attracted towards Paro. Suresh helps her free of charge, thinking to use her contacts for his business. Priya and Paro become good friends now. Paro often comes to Priya’s home. She tells Priya the story of her past life. Priya comes to Mumbai with Suresh. He has some legal purpose tour. Priya meets B.R. at his flat. Their sexual relations are recharged once again, “We moved to the bed, and he entered me. He lavished so much tenderness upon me that
I was overwhelmed with gratitude. I wouldn’t have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss".

Still Priya has attraction for B.R. B.R., the lady-killer frankly accepts his failure in married life and his sexual relations with many women. Namita portrays him, “I love women; I always have and I always will. But,’ he continued, his voice assuming a certain self righteous timbre,’ I’ve never paid for woman in my life. I’ve never been to a whore or a prostitute! And I’m proud of it!’

B.R. also has not satisfied in conjugal life with his new wife. They meet frequently and try to give happiness to each other. One day Priya and B.R. meet Paro at a hotel accidentally. Paro is very angry to see them together. Paro has come with a young man. After some days Priya comes back to Delhi. Meanwhile Suresh develops a soft corner for Paro. Again Paro has reconciliation with Priya. Paro develops relations with a young man named Avinendra. He is son of a minister. They often go to hotels for dinner. Suresh develops relations with Avinendra keeping in mind his father’s contacts for his business purpose. One day they are at a hotel for dinner. Avinendra declares his love for Paro. But Paro says that she is a free woman and she depends on none. She says, ‘I am myself,’ she said theatrically, ‘and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person.’

Priya opposes her view and they have a quarrel. Paro becomes very angry with Priya. While returning home Suresh is also angry with Priya. He is so furious that he hits Priya. Avinendra is a staunch Marxist in ideology therefore he is also called Lenin. One night Paro and Lenin have a quarrel. Lenin has become completely passionate in his love for Paro.
He is fully under her control. Lenin calls Paro ‘whore’. Paro is very furious and they reach Priya’s flat. In anger Paro attempts to commit suicide by cutting her wrists with a razor. She is immediately taken to hospital and she is saved. Suresh controls the legal side and wins the favour of Lenin’s father. Lenin feels very sorry for his behaviour. Again they have reconciliation. Paro develops her interest in Yoga and salads. There is good news in the life of Suresh and Priya. Priya has become pregnant after many years of their married life. But Priya suffers from an unknown fear of Paro’s presence in the surrounding. One night they have a dinner party at their home on Suresh’s birthday. Priya gives them an emblem of a screaming woman as a birthday gift. Priya has severe pain that night. She is taken to the hospital but she loses her baby. The doctor has to abort her. Gloomy and emptiness is spread in their life. Priya tries to become normal by joining a group of women and Kitty parties.

Lenin still lives with Paro at her flat. His father is no more a minister now. His family has shifted to their home town in Madhya Pradesh. Lenin wins a lottery of five lack rupees. They spend most of the money in enjoying and arranging parties. Paro comes in contact with a minister, named Shambhunath Mishra. They come very closer and have an affair. Their affair becomes a scandal. Suresh also has a special attraction for Paro. She accompanies Shambhunath Mishra, he is going to U.S.A. to attend a world conference. Her son, Junior is looked after by Lenin. But after returning from America Paro’s relations with Shambhunath come to an abrupt end. Now she revives her relationships with Bucky Bhandpur. Lenin is engaged to the daughter of a former chief minister. His marriage takes place in their hometown. Paro is not invited and expected to attend the wedding ceremony. Priya joins a job in a bookshop at Oberoi Hotel. But Suresh is not happy because he is worried
about his social status. Namita points out the hypocrisy of upper middle class man, “Suresh was upset at my taking up a job. ‘Priya, think of my position in society. Why, people will think—doesn’t her husband earn enough for her to take up such a job?’”  

One day B.R. meets Priya at the hotel. They meet in the room of B.R. for an hour and share the matters of their routine life. They simply depart with exchange of kiss. Meanwhile Suresh becomes busier and busier in his work and gains a lot. Paro meets a play director. He observes theatre in all movements of Paro and offers her a role of the heroine in his play. She proves herself a talented actress through a successful stage performance. Junior is sent to Doon school. Paro’s maid servant’s husband has some legal problems so Paro comes to Suresh for some legal help. Priya feels loneliness in her life. She starts writing a diary. And that diary is, present novel. She states, “But I started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel.”

She writes about herself, B.R., Paro and everything in their life. But one day, by chance Paro comes into her bedroom and she finds the diary and she reads it. Suresh is also at home and everything is exposed. Paro becomes very angry with Priya because the diary had real description of Paro’s life and her affairs and sexual relations with other persons. Suresh is also angry and he asks Priya to go away for some days. Priya comes to Mumbai at his brother’s home. She stays with him and after some days she shifts to their old flat at Andheri. It is her inward journey in past. She repents and as an Indian wife she is desirous to go back to her husband. She feels, “I am an Indian woman,’ I told myself, ‘and for me my husband is my God.’ So I got down to telephoning him”.
She tries to contact Suresh telephonically but it is in vain. She regrets and writes letters to Suresh. Depressed and disappointed Priya has an idea to commit suicide. With a view to commit suicide by drowning in the sea she goes to sea beach. But she is bitten by a jellyfish. She has severe pain. She runs for medical aid. On the way, she finds a familiar building, that is the residence of B.R. He is at home and surprised to see Priya there. He handles the situation and applies whisky on the bite. After sometime Priya feels relief. She feels a great happiness in the arms of B.R.. As his wife has been to Pune they enjoy the time:

*I found myself murmuring words of love. His lips sought mine, and the ecstasy of my love for him overtook me. Somewhere along the way I succumbed to the cumulative effect of the tranquilizers, the pain and the whisky; I awoke to find myself still in B.R.’s arms.*

Next day B.R. goes to his office and Priya reads some magazines. She comes to know about Paro’s wedding with a European film director through an article in the magazine. Priya also tries to contact Suresh on telephone. Suresh is ready to welcome her. Soon Priya leaves for Delhi by train. They both reconcile and begin a new life. They plan to adopt a child. They visit an orphanage but give up the idea. One day Paro surprisingly returns from Greece. All friends and relatives are invited by Paro at the Taj Hotel. Lenin comes with his wife Geeta, B.R. is also with his wife, Junior and Bucky Bhandpurand, Suresh and Priya also come there. Paro confesses that she is not happy and contented with Loukas. She declares that her husband Loukas is a homosexual and she has not been contented in sexual life with him. Paro and B.R. are found copulating. Now Paro seems to be abnormal. Priya and Paro go for a car
ride. They meet with an accident, Paro is injured and admitted to the hospital. In the hospital she splashes her wrists with a fruit knife. Consequently, she succumbs to death. There is news that Lenin’s wife has miscarriage. Paro is cremated with Hindu rites. Her son Junior offers fire to her pyre. Lenin and Priya pay the last homage to Paro at the crematory at night. The novel ends with Paro’s death.

**Characterization:**

Paro is the central and most crucial character of the novel. She is one of the protagonists. Paro explains to us the concept of free will and naturalism. Paro is a heroic temptress, alluring and rapacious, the stuff of legend. As she wanders through the world of privilege and Scotch whisky that the urban rich inhabit, she is constantly observed by the acid Priya, eternal voyeur and diarist. So this is a dazzling moral tale, sharp, sexy and funny. Paro is a lady of pomp and show. Namita describes her, “*Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self dramatization. I sometimes wondered what would be like; alone in an empty room; ..... She loved her body and cried like a little baby at the slightest physical hurt.*”  

She is accepted by all men, B.R., Bucky, Lenin, Suresh, Shambh Nath Misra and Loukas. Men accepted whatever she did, she had that convincing ability and cleverness. She is too powerful outwardly for anybody to ignore but in her personal life there is vacuum. Even during intimate moments she has the capacity to dramatize. It can be said that superficiality is a part of her life. Namita narrates, ‘*Oh, no!’ She replied. ‘It’s part of being a Beautiful Woman. It’s a fulltime occupation.. And much harder work than it seems. But’-nodding sagely-‘it has its rewards, I confess. ’*
Paro is a woman who can not continue with one man and marriage is not a permanent bond for Paro. Priya comments:

This is the Paro who is recently liberated from marriage and convention; she is still convinced that she is young and desirable as she was. Her massive breasts, like the enlarged pores of her skin, have grown ponderous with age. Even her fingers have become fatter—but this coarsening of body has also somehow catalyzed a startling vitality of mind, a vigor that is as crude as it is real. Life has not tired her—she is undiminished, she has grown. She is still obsessed, loudly and clamorously...

Paro could not be a good daughter, a good wife, or even a good mother. She never took proper care of her son Aniruddha. He was brought up and nurtured by the maid servant. She had hardly time from her friends and from taking care of her physical self. Her life is totally superficial. Namita portrays, “She was now the free woman, symbol and prototype of emancipation and individuality. ‘I am myself,’ she said theatrically, ‘and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person.’”

In the end, when she has no capacity to attract others by her physical charm, she finds life boring and ends her life by slashing her wrists. Thus Namita has portrayed Paro as a woman aspiring for comfort and luxury. She can even do without her moral ethics and value to acquire the luxuries of life.
Priya is the protagonist of the novel. The novel is a record of her experiences and her observations of Paro’s life. She is a typist in the office of B.R. She represents middle class people of metro cities like Mumbai. She becomes an easy prey to the shine and style of the rich class. She is attracted to B.R. and has sexual relations with him. Priya confesses, ‘We moved to bed, and he entered me. He lavished so much tenderness upon me that I was overwhelmed with gratitude wouldn’t have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss.’  

She marries Suresh, an advocate of Delhi. She lives a happy life with him. Though Priya dislikes Suresh, she is happy and satisfied with him. When she is abandoned for a short while by Suresh, she realizes her error, ‘I am an Indian woman, ‘I told myself, ‘and for me my husband is my God.’ She represents a voyeur and fantasizes in sexual orgies. Her frank confession of her deed of masturbation is a quite unexpected narration from a lady writer in India. She dreams:

I could picture him slowly undressing her; my breath would quicken as he held each firm white breast in his long brutal fingers; I could see the glazed look in his eyes as he sat astride her. Somewhere our roles would be transposed and I would become her, and feel a triumphant power in his climax, and myself at heaven’s gate, to feverish clutch of my index finger.

Sometimes she seems to be a neurotic patient or an abnormal person. Namita has created her character with complete exposure of inner thoughts and feelings of mind. Priya states, “I napped lightly for a while, and then I began to masturbate. I did not fantasise, but sometimes I
became Paro, and sometimes I was myself. Sometimes I was B.R... devouring Paro, and then I became Suresh who was ravishing Paro...

Priya writes the diary as a vindication. She is also obsessed with men and sex like Paro. She marries due to compulsion and not by her own choice. She feels quite lonely in life. She traces, “I sat alone at home....I realized suddenly that I was quite alone in the world. I had nobody, but nobody, who loved me, liked me or even cared for me.”

B.R. is a lady-killer, a male nymphomaniac. He has meticulous personality. He is a true businessman. He has sexual relations with Priya and some other women also. His married life with Paro ends in divorce. He is the symbol of the shine and style of the rich class. Women become prey to his money and charm. Perhaps it is the character of B.R. that has inspired Bharucha to give an opinion. Ferheiz Bharuch is of the opinion, “Namita shows that where sex is a man’s whole life, for a woman, it is only a secondary need- her principal concern being her identity.”

He is so sexual person that sex becomes his obsession. Namita depicts, “Sex had become, to him, more than a sport, it was a duty, a vocation, a calling. I sensed that it was with sex alone that he reached out to the world, and it was with sex that he shut out thought, emotion and feeling.” B.R. enjoys sex with many women. But basically he is a good person. He honestly accepts his weakness for women.

Suresh is Priya’s husband. He represents patriarchy. He is a selfish and a very practical fellow. He is a shrewd lawyer. All time he is worried about his business and his business contacts. He is very a hard working fellow. By gradual progress he earns good amount. He becomes wealthy
man. But all his relations are based on or angled for his business purpose. He also represents contemporary upper middle class man- a neo rich class. He is a hypocrite person. He has a soft corner for Paro. Even in presence of Priya Paro kisses him and tries to flirt with him. But he is not ready to forgive Priya. Suresh says, ‘I trust you absolutely. But even then it is not good for women from good families to be talked about,...’

Though he is a well-educated man, he beats his wife. Namita narrates, “Suresh was furious. For the first time in our marriage, he hit me. Again and again, angrily, relentlessly, he punched out at my face, my breasts, my thighs, and anything and everything he could lay his hands upon.” He is so irresponsible that he does not care to respond Priya’s letters and phone calls. He is a typical husband- a stereotype character.

Avinendra known as Lenin for his Marxist ideology is a young man. He is pursuing his Ph.D. He is son of a minister. He drinks excessively. He also becomes a victim of Paro’s charming spell. His parents don’t like his relations with a woman like Paro. But he is completely under the magical charm of Paro and has an obsession for her. But he is disillusioned and finally marries a girl who is daughter of a former chief minister. He is very loving and caring man. He takes care of Paro’s son. He proves a food friend to Suresh and Priya.

Shambhunath Mishra is a typical politician. He is very shrewd man. His is a stereotype character. He is one of the suitors of Paro. He takes Paro with him to U.S.A. But his relations with Paro have an abrupt end. Some other minor characters are Bucky Bhandpur, Priya’s mother, Atul, Priya’s brother and Dolybhabhi, sister-in-law of Priya.
Setting:

Namita said, “Delhi is basically a small town with large pretensions. In Paro I was making fun of Delhi’s socialites.” Thus Paro has relevance with contemporary society of Delhi. The novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is mainly set in the cities of Mumbai and Delhi. The time of the novel is post Indian Independence period of seventies. The novel opens in Mumbai when Priya, the protagonist begins, in her diary she writes about her virgin life at Mumbai. Then she describes the incidents of her past life in Mumbai and Delhi. Thus the main part of the story takes place in Mumbai and Delhi. Through *Paro* we get the picture of life of the upper middle class of Mumbai and Delhi during 70s and 80s. Various places of Mumbai like Marine Drive, Nariman Point, Andheri, Dadar, Church Gate etc. are referred. The places of Delhi like India Gate, Zakir Hussain Marg and Crematory on the bank of river Yamuna describe Delhi.

Plot:

The novel *Paro* is a sort of confessional diary of Priya, the protagonist. She narrates the incidents of her past life. She also presents the life and character of Paro through her observations and experiences of her own. Priya says, “But I started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel.”

The novel presents the span of more than fifteen years of life of Priya and Paro. It describes the marital life, sexual affairs with other persons, and relations of Paro and Priya. It moves between Mumbai and Delhi.
Narrative Technique:

The novel *Paro* is narrated in first person singular. Priya Sharma, the protagonist of the novel narrates the entire story. The narrative is not chronological but apparently jumbled. The story begins with Priya’s statement: ‘I am writing about them because I saw myself in her.’  

Priya says, “But I started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel.”

It describes Priya’s past life in Mumbai as secretary of B.R. It narrates her sexual affair with B.R., Paro’s marriage, divorce, and her affairs with Bucky Bhandpur, Lenil, Shambhunath Mishra and her remarriage with the foreigner, Loukas. Priya is jealous of Paro, the beautiful and smart wife of B.R.. She writes the novel as a vindication, ‘A month later, he was married to Paro. It took all of us at the office completely by surprise. I have never forgotten, nor forgiven, a hurt. This book, too, is vindication.’

Priya is a voyeur and diarist. The whole novel is nothing but her experiences and her observations of Paro’s life. The complete character of Paro is described by Priya. Priya is an observer. Namita has employed the technique of narrating through newspapers and magazines. Priya is not present at the marriage of Paro with the European director Loukas Leores but the whole episode is narrated through a news article published in a magazine:

*I curled up on the comfortable cane chair; sighed to the listening plants and picked up a magazine.....It was, of*
course, Paro. CELEBRITY WEDDING OF THE YEAR, the headline shrieked. Paro was dressed in a white wedding gown, with a veil and orange blossoms....

Overdose of Sex and Erotic descriptions:

The novel has an overdose of sexual descriptions. Various erotic orgies and sexual intercourses are described by Namita. This novel created a stir for such writing when it was published. But Namita became a pioneer and Shobha De also penned such novels after Namita. Many of the descriptions of sex make the novel erotic, *Her blouse was quite ripped open from the front, and her breasts were completely naked, the nipples two compelling eyes in their blank.*"  

The episode of the night when Paro has a quarrel with Lenin is really erotic one:

See what this prick has done to me!’ she shrieked, throwing her breasts open for all to see and beating them frenziedly. Do you want to see my cunt as well? He thinks I’ am a whore-I shall show you what a whore’s cunt looks like!’

In the end of the novel, Paro invites all her friends to the Hotel and describes her real condition. She has sexual gathering with B.R., Lenin witnesses the event with eyes in tears:

*I saw his hairy thighs around her. He was fucking her......... Lenin said, tears streaming from his eyes.*
Priya’s confession of her relations with B.R. and the descriptions of such meetings make the novel erotic:

I would meet B.R. almost every evening……..We would copulate with a love that was both an urgent and tender; he would examine every pore and crevice of my body with the wonder of the tender of a treasure…….  

We moved to bed, and he entered me. He lavished so much tenderness upon me that I was overwhelmed with gratitude wouldn’t have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss.  

Very gently, he stroked my hair. He undid my plait and let it lie loose about my shoulders… …his hand slid softly down the front of my blouse and began stroking my breast. I pretended to be so lost in the music as not to have noticed…….. The feeling spread. He led me back to the bedroom and took me there.

The novel is a social comedy but it is not, at root, comic. It delineates a woman’s search for identity and creativity. The novel has sexual and psychological over tones. Paro is a nymphomaniac in quest of sexual variety. As she is narcissistic, she is not able to discern that sex is no substitute for happiness that sexual indulgence is coarsening and devitalizing. At this juncture, her sexual exploits are the expression of “the free woman, symbol and prototype of emancipation and individuality.” Thus, a search to establish one’s sexuality is identical with
a search for creativity, to do something new. Therefore the critics find in *Paro* that sex is identical with a search for identity and creativity.

Namita has obsession with love, sex and death in equal measure. The novel has many references of death. Priya is aborted; loss of a child is unbearable event for her. Lenin’s wife Geeta has miscarriage. Paro tries to commit suicide two times, finally she succeeds. In the end of the novel, the narration of the pyres burning at crematory is really awful and ghastly. It reflects as death itself.

**Language:**

In *Paro* Namita uses simple and natural English. It is conversational and almost colloquial with a touch of city life. But though Namita’s language is simple, it goes very well with the background and characters of the narrator and it helps to make her sound authentic. Namita uses some abusive terms in *Paro* to make the character’s level and understanding clear. They look real through the use of such terms. For example, Suresh and Priya visit the orphanage and come across them:

“But we heard them shuffling and shouting ‘Bhenchut’ to each other in the corridor out side the...”

Namita refers some Indian gods and goddesses also i.e. Hanuman, Ramehndraji, Laxmi (wife of a son). She uses Hindi words for Indian foods and sweets. They are pakoda, rasmalai, biryani etc. Namita has used many words that are very erotic such are…. ‘She looked fucked’, penis, phallic, ‘do you want to see my cunt?’, ‘After all he was my fucking husband’. Above this, there are so many descriptions of sexual
activities in the novel. That can be described as the over dose of sex in the novel. Namita uses some appropriate Indian words for some expressions that can never be translated into English i.e. lafda, yamdoota, ‘desh me ab randiraj hain’, palav, dhoti, etc.

As a woman, naturally she is interested in saris and make up. She describes the jewels and various types of saris with their cloth and colours worn by the women characters. She also uses the words, bindi, gajra, bharatiya nari, etc. The description of marriage ceremony of Lenin is wonderful. Namita uses number of Indian - Hindi words and phrases that give the novel a flavor of Indianness. In example…..’ beti ek khushkhabri hain, ‘kitni sundar dulhan banegi’, bhaiya, maf kardo, Jao Jao ab tamasha khatam, apna naseeb, paan, panwallah, aandhi, bahu, agarbatti, sahib, jhumka etc.
Gods, Graves and Grandmother

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is the second novel of Namita Gokhale published in 1994. The novel shows a considerable literary maturity in writing of Namita compared to her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* published a decade before. The veteran Indian writer, Khushwant Singh describes it as ‘Unputdownable’ on the title page of the novel. In this novel, the theme of love and death is prominent whereas in her first novel *Paro* it is physical passion at forefront. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a tale of an old woman with talent and guts, who does not fall prey to the difficult circumstances but with her foresightedness carves a home for herself and her grand daughter-Gudiya. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* follows Namita Gokhale's first novel, *Paro: The Dreams of Passion*. The narrator's grandmother runs a kotha or brothel. As is usual with Kothawalis or courtesans, she becomes implicated in a murder case and is forced to leave her comfortable kotha along with her daughter and granddaughter. This does not deter her. One fine morning she steals a green marble slab and a few pebbles and turns them into a deity and herself into a holy mother. The transformation is effected as smoothly as one changes a shirt. Soon people passing by stop and offer coins to the goddess and make it richer.

If you have run out of luck, lost everything you owned and are reluctant to work for your living, there is a formula for survival in comfort. All you have to do is to find a big *peepal* tree (for good reasons botanists call it *ficus religiosa*) and set up your abode under it. Smear its trunk with saffron paste, put a grey stone against it, and next to that keep a garland or two of marigold flowers and a platter of copper with a few coins in it to encourage others to do the same. Then blow a conch shell and ring bells to announce the advent of a new incarnation of one of the
gods of the Hindu pantheon. You will be in good business: plenty of money in offerings, no accounting for it to anyone, no taxes. And much respect from the community. In Delhi, a new journey begins in Ammi's life, a journey that is not only personal but speaks of all the people as such of changing times. But more than that it is the story of all those who attempt to confront the inexplicable.

This is the theme of Namita Gokhale’s second novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. In her story a family of *kothawalis* (prostitutes) once living in a large *haveli* and patronised by rich *zamindars*, merchants and even the *sahib log* lose all their money and find themselves on the road to destitution. Ammi is too old to be of service to her clients but still has a melodious voice to sing *bhajans*. Her daughter, who has all that a courtesan needs to have, suddenly loses all her hair and elopes with a fellow who does not mind having a bald mistress. Her daughter is still a *gudia* (doll), too young to be deflowered. So the destitute grandmother and grand-daughter arrive in Delhi, find a hospitable *peepal* tree, set up a make-shift temple and a hut to sleep in.

In no time business picks up. Now they have an ample-bosomed flower seller, three leper beggars at a respectable distance, a *shastriji* who can chant appropriate *mantras* in Sanskrit and, most important of all, a *pehalwan* (wrestler) who makes a handsome living collecting *raakhi* (protection money) from shopkeepers and helps landlords to evict recalcitrant tenants and tenants to grab landlords’ property at a big fee. He also has a clout with local politicians. The slab of stone becomes the centerpiece of a huge marble temple. Gudiya describes it in her own words:
We were no longer poor, the few coins rattling in the thali which had been mother’s had magnetized immeasurable amount of wealth to our temple. Devotees and well-wishers vied with each other in piety and generosity.  

When Ammi dies; she is buried as a saint. This adds to the sanctity and income of the temple. Gudiya grows into a beautiful girl. She is not happy studying in a school run by a kind Parsi lady who tries to adopt her as her daughter. She fantasizes becoming a film star and assumes the name Pooja, the daughter of a wealthy zamindar. Then, she falls in love with a handsome but good-for-nothing clarinet player, member of a band leading wedding processions. Decked in a colourful pseudo-military uniform and riding a white horse, he appears to her as Prince Charming, god Kalki of the future. She is more than willing to lose her virginity to him when he takes her behind a cluster of bushes. Instead of Gudiya, alias Pooja, it is Kalki who disappears to try his luck in Bollywood. In the end, Guduya is left with her two years old daughter Mallika to take care of her.

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a satire on present-day India. Because this can happen only in India. Namita Gokhale has skillfully strung different episodes like beads of a rosary to portray the seamier side of Indian life and morality. As we go along the novel touches on many aspects of life - blind faith, corruption, romance and of course human courage.

Thus the novel deals with the theme of love and death. Gudiya falls in love with an ordinary boy named Kalki. She gets married with him. The wedding ceremony is handled by Pandit Kailash Shastri. He explains
the eight forms of marriages described in Sanskrit. They are the Brahma, the Daiva, the Prajapatyā, the Arsa, the Gandharva, the Asura, the Paisacha and Rakshasa. Pandit emphasizes on the best one among them:

*Of these, the Gandharva vivah, choosing of a partner between two individuals for the consideration of love, was the most precious to Kamadeva, the God of Love.....Gandharva vivah is an old-fashioned Sanskrit word which means ‘love marriage’.....*  

Namita sings songs of love and mentions the finest pairs of Hindu gods and goddesses narrated in Sanskrit literature and Hindu mythology. They are Lord Vishnu and Lakshmi; Shiva and Parvati; the Sun and his wife Chhaya; the Moon and his wife Rohini; Indra and Sati; Vashistha and Arundhati; Rama and Sita and Krishna and Rukmini.

Namita is obsessed with love, sex and death in equal measure. Sex is a means to generate the human life. After all love and sex is the part and parcel of life. Phoolwati and Sunda Pahelvan have affections for each other. They also fall in love and marry. Gudiya’s mother also ran away with Riyasuddin Rizvi before many years for love. Thus it is love that binds two hearts and bodies. Even the illiterate grandmother also narrates the male–female balance and harmony of nature as Shiv and Shakti:

*In one of her evening discourses she rambled on about male trees and female trees, masculine bananas and feminine papayas and the balance and harmony of nature, of Shiv and Shakti. She explicated, ‘Such is the nature of life.’*
Gudiya is allured to Kalki and they fall prey to the basic instinct of human body:

_He ripped open my kurta and fondled me with fierce passion. He pummeled my breasts until I cried with pain and then moved his attention downwards. When he entered me I let out a fierce cry of pain._... ④¹

_After I had eaten, he kissed me again, and then fumbled for the drawstring of my pyjamas. This time I experienced the full glory of sex, I shuddered with absolute convulsions of ecstasy, and he had to put his hand to my mouth to stop my moans._... ④²

The novel describes various deaths, Mamaji commits suicide, Saboo murders his wife Magoo and Shambhu, the tea-stall holder, because she has illicit relations with him, then there is sudden death of Ammi, Roxanne dies in a horrible way and finally Sundar Pahelvan is also shot dead. Gudiya witnesses the horrible play of death in her life. She narrates:

_I was alone in the room with a corpse......... Death was no stranger to me. I had seen my Mamaji dangling from the mango tree in the court yard and one-eyed Shambhu sprawled under the peepul tree. And then my grandmother, seated in her grotesque and unnatural Samadhi. Now Roxanne Ma'am too had joined the other world._” ④³
Namita focuses on women and their condition in contemporary society. Even today in the age of information and technology, a female baby is not welcomed with equal joy as a male baby. Still there is a special attraction for a son. Even a mother is rarely happy to give birth to a daughter. Fifteen years back the condition was no better than now. Namita emphasizes on women and her position in society. When Gudiya is of thirteen and she begins her menses, grandmother angrily says, “Nothing but trouble,’ grandmother gabbled, for her teeth had begun to foil her, ‘this girl is good for nothing but trouble from now.’”

Not only this but she is considered impure and closed in a room for two-three days. She is also asked not to enter the temple premises, “You are impure for a few days and we can’t offend the gods.” Gudiya can not understand what is her fault. But her fault is that she is a girl and now she is a woman. Namita focuses on superstitious nature of the people. It is a satire on some age-old superstitious concepts of our society.

Indian society is pestered with false beliefs, superstitions, and anything related to God will attain faith and those who do not respect the holiness are punished. In this novel, Namita emphasizes the innocence of the Indians regarding God; anything irreligious can also occupy a saintly place in the disguise of the name of god or goddess. The author has portrayed all the subtleties with exactness. She has narrated all the trivialities in the novel. As we know there are hundreds of such so called babas, swamis, and mais in Indian religious world. Ammi is a former kothewali but with her tact, dramatic gestures and good voice quality, she becomes ‘Mai’ and achieves abundant prosperity. Namita presents, “It’s all right, Lila, ‘grandmother replied soothingly, without a trace of
irritation. ‘I have many siddhis, and these things do not have the power to affect me.’  

Lila and Pandit Kailash Shastri are the representatives of this superstitious class of Indian milieu. Thus, the novel is a mocking satire on such religiosity of innocent devotees and sarcastic criticism of such fraudulent religious leaders.

**Characterization:**

Grandmother plays a significant role in the novel. She is called Mai or Ammi. She is the most impressive character. She is a woman of talent and guts. She has very good voice quality. It is her sweet bhajans that make the temple a holy place. Riyasuddin Rizvi calls grandmother a lady of knowledge. He tells Gudiya, ‘Your grandmother is a learned lady,’ he said. ‘I hope you grow up the same’. Somehow it is due to her charming personality and knack and some co-incidents that all kind of fantastic stories and rumours began to spread in the surrounding area. People whisper that she was a hundred years old and knew magical spells that could even change the sex of the unborn baby. She propagates on the topics of generalization. When Saboo is very angry, she gives him a glass of warm milk and talks him soothingly that how this world is an illusion and it is just a dream within a dream. Gudiya says, ‘My grandmother had a well-acquired knowledge of how to handle men.’ By chance with her blessings the ill son of a police officer is saved and grandmother becomes a holy woman. The number of her devotees and acolytes is increased. The title of novel is based on grandmother and her temple.
Guduya is the central and most crucial character of the novel. She is the protagonist. The novel is story of her life – that is full of twists and turns. In childhood she lives a rich and luxurious life. But she is thrown from the haveli into a hut. She says:

*Before mother left, in along-time, we had been very rich…….. My grandmother had been a great singer, a kothewali whose voice was more liquid and beautiful than Lata Mangeshkar’s. Eleven nawabs and two Englishmen were besotted with love of her…*  

She has no any idea about her father. Her life had always possessed a haphazard and unreal quality. When felt lonely she wanders in the streets of Delhi. She herself describes: ‘I simply set out, convinced that life would continue to provide new destinations, as it always had.  

Gudiya is not brought up with complete care. When as a part of her sainthood, grandmother takes a vow of silence for one month and remains completely mute, Gudiya feels very annoyed of the gods and goddesses:

*As for me my grandmother’s neglect hurt me deeply. I felt fundamentally betrayed and was actually jealous of those impostors, those new gods and goddesses, who had stolen my grandmother from me…………. Nobody bothered with me, and I was left to fend for my self, which I learnt to do rather well. I went to school as I pleased, ate what was available, observed everything I could.*
Phoolwati is widow of Shambhu, the tea-stall holder, out side the temple. She becomes a devotee of Mai and plays a significant role in the development of the temple. She is kind and loving. She is illiterate but a courageous woman. She is in favour of the opinion that the beggars should be allowed space at the gate of the temple. In the beginning she has been portrayed funny and humorous but later on her character develops. She takes care of Gudiya after Ammi’s death. Sundar Pahelvan deeply loves her. Phoolwati represents the illiterate lower class of slums of suburb of the metropolitan cities like Delhi.

Lila is a staunch devotee of Ammi. She is very religious and superstitious woman. She leaves her family and stays in the temple. She is a real bhakta of Ammi. She sincerely serves grandmother all the time and becomes her assistant. She can not tolerate the physical departure of her ‘Mataji’ from the world and becomes like mad after her death.

Mrs. Roxanne Lamba is principal of St. Jude’s school for socially handicapped. She is a Parsi. She belongs to a very rich family. But she is very loving and kind. She has great affection for Gudiya. She likes Gudiya very much and takes care of her after her Ammi’s death. Her kind words to Gudiya explain her real nature ‘Remember that you can tell me everything. Don’t think you are alone because your grandmother is gone.’ 52 She promotes Gudiya’s confidence. Gudiya narrates it in her own words, ‘She was the only entirely good person I had ever encountered…… She had encouraged me to believe in myself and to trust in myself, and she in turn had always trusted and believed in me’. 53

Pandit Kailash Shastri is a very impressive and important character of the novel. He is an astrologer and a very practical person. He manages
the rituals of the temple with mantras and shlokas. He also administers the matters of the temple. He is very clever and shrewd person. He takes a lot of trouble to install the statue of grandmother. It is due to his religious stunts and art of publicity that the temple gains more and more wealth. But he is also benefited through it. He represents a clever businessman of modern times.

But compared to women characters, the men characters have subordinate roles to play. Ammi’s constant efforts make her ruined life stable and systematic. Though Gudiya is not completely successful in making her life systematic yet she is better with Phoolwati.

Setting:

The novel is set in the backdrop of semi-urban Delhi, it effectively moves between the everyday details of poverty, ignorance and illiteracy and the supernatural realm of the temple which forms the focal point of Gudiya’s life. The journey of Ammi and Gudiya begins from a town of North India and via Lucknow, Bhusaval and Jhansi they reach Delhi. All the events take place at the makeshift temple under the peepul tree. The locations of the streets of Karol Bagh, Chandni Chowk, Lajpat Nagar, Delhi streets, description of Delhi railway station and the mentions of D.T.C. buses, Tihar jail, Red Fort and Old Fort create a visual image and give the novel a realistic touch. As Namita lives in Delhi she describes it beautifully.

Plot:

The plot is simple and straightforward. It grows with the characters. The story of 240 pages is spread into thirty nine chapters.
The narrator's grandmother runs a Kotha or brothel; she becomes implicated in a murder case and is forced to leave her comfortable kotha along with her daughter and granddaughter. This does not deter her. One fine morning she steals a green marble slab and a few pebbles and turns them into a deity and herself into a holy mother. Gudiya is eleven years old, when they arrive to Delhi. But the temple prospers and Ammi, the grandmother becomes a holy saint. Chance plays a crucial role in the novel. After the death of grandmother Pandit Kailash Shastri administers the temple and Gudiya is looked after by Phoolwati. Gudiya becomes Pooja marries Kalki a youngman- good for nothing. In the end, she is left alone to look after her two years old daughter, Mallika. Gudiya’s life has many turns and twists. The story becomes gripping and enthralling.

Language:

In *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* Namita uses simple and natural English. It is conversational and almost colloquial with a touch of locality of suburb area of Delhi. Though Namita’s language is simple, it goes very well with the background and character of the narrator and it helps to make her sound authentic. Namita refers many Indian gods and goddesses. She also uses many Hindi words for Indian foods and sweets. They are samosa, halva, puri, paratha, roti, chapatti, chola, rossogolla, pakoda etc.

Namita uses some appropriate Indian words and expressions that can never be translated into English. As a woman, naturally, Namita is interested in jewellery. Besides, Namita uses a number of Indian - Hindi words and phrases that give the novel a flavour of Indianness.
Some expressions present religious identity of the characters. That is an inseparable trait of Indian people. i.e. ‘Shikasteh, Shikasteh, Shaitan, Ahriman Ahriman gajasteh Karu Kerdar’, ‘Hai Allah’, ‘Allah’s inayat’, ‘Arre Rama Rama Rama’, ‘Jai Ho’, ‘Hari Om’. Some semi philosophical but colloquial expressions are used marvelously to make the character of Ammi very impressive and interesting. They are, ‘It is all Lord Krishna’s Lila’, ‘Sab guddi-gudda ka khel hai!’ . The Phrases like, Chhi Chhi Chhi, meri jaan aur kuchh de dena, give the novel a realistic touch. She also refers to the most popular Hindi movie Sholay and the most popular and memorable role of Hemamalini in this film.

The novel has a plenty of references of Hindu beliefs, legends, and myths. The mention of gods and goddesses make the novel completely Indian simply written into English. They are Shiv-Shakti, Durga, Yama, Devi, the well-known pairs like Vishnu and Lakshmi, Brahma and Sarasvati, Shiva and Parvati, the Sun and Chhaya, the Moon and Rohini, Indra and Sati, Vashistha and Arundhati, Rama and Sita and Krishna and Rukmani.

The appropriate Indian words that have no proper English synonym like Kalyug, Mataji, shakti, sadhu, aarti, bhakta, rudraksha, Ekadashi, Brahmin, bhajan, prasad, muhurtam, kanyadan, pran-pratishtan, sadhaka, bhandara, mantra, dharmanshala, Gangajal, panchdana, shraddha, (the ceremony after death) Poornamashi, Amavasya, samadhi, avataar, gotra, manglashtak, janma-patri, navgraha, mai, samskar, karma, kundali, dasha, gaja-kesari yoga, Rahu, paap, punya, panchang, Vedic, nagpancmi, vastushastra, vaveli, baraat, Thakur, Rajput, etc. beautify the Indianness of the novel.
Narrative Technique:

The novel is narrated in first person singular. Gudiya, the protagonist is the narrator of her life and experiences. The novel begins with Gudiya’s narration of her life, “*When my mother went away, my grandmother and I were left to fend for ourselves. I had always been given to believe that we had once been enormously rich….*”

Her description of temple premises, its rituals, marriage ceremony, shraddha ceremony after death, Samadhi ceremony of Ammi and installation of the statue make the novel an Indian work of art simply written into English. Reference of various types of marriages as described in Sanskrit literatures and Hindu mythology are superb and they show Namita’s acquaintance with Sanskrit literature. Some of the descriptions of night make the novel haunting one. As Namita lives in Delhi, her observation of the city is reflected into the novel:

*I saw the city of Delhi, dusty and desolate, sprawled before me like a dying animal. The muttered obscenities of the bus conductors, the commuter’s apathy, the pall of diesel- everything contributed to the marvelous sense of freedom. I was experiencing ever since I walked out of Pholwati’s hut.*

Sundar Pahelvan’s love for English and his use of English terms for Hindi abusive terms is very humorous and witty. Some of Phoolwati’s remarks also are very humorous and entertaining.
Vision:

No misery or grief is permanent in life. Life runs among all the sufferings and distress. All are deeply grieved at the sudden death of Ammi. Then Lila delivers the above message of Ammi that was communicated to her in dream. She narrates:

*She has told me to remind you—this is her message—everything is transient, everything passes, everybody dies but it makes no difference because life continues. Even after death everything changes, but everything continues....*  

Namita also faced many ups and downs in her life. She was survived of cancer and became widow at early age yet she faced all the assaults of destiny courageously. Pain was a general principle of her life. That’s why she says, “Everything in life proceeded only on the paths ordained by fate, destiny and kismet.” But Namita simply does not believe in fate only (Prarabdhyaa). She also favours hard work (purusharthta). Her vision is exposed through the moral propagation of Ammi. She writes, “After the evening aarti grandmother held forth on the subject. ‘Something for nothing is against the laws of karma.’ She said. ‘We all have to strive, to make an effort......”

As human life is unpredictable, it is full of uncertainties. There are unexpected chances and upsets. Namita is also of the same opinion; Ammi tells Gudiya, ‘When I was your age, Gudiya,’ she said, ‘I wanted to be a film star. There were only silent films in those days......But look
at me now - a holy woman! Truly, no one can understand the ways of God!

A Scene of the play *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* based on Namita Gokhle's novel of the same title presented at Delhi on Friday, August 19, 2005. Teamwork's presentation in Sanjay Roy's direction in a mixture of English and Hindustani is set as a musical with the well-known singer Zila Khan, daughter of the sitar maestro, Ustad Vilayat Khan, in the lead role. The script is a good adaptation by Nicholas Khargaonkar, a young Khasi playwright and director based in Delhi and Shena Gamat, a Delhi-based theatre artiste, the joint script stands on its own legs and an excellent musical that explores the life of an ordinary person who is thrown into extraordinary life by circumstances.
A Himalayan Love Story

Namita Gokhale is herself a Kumaoni by birth. She spent her early childhood in Nainital. *A Himalayan Love Story* was published in 1996. With this haunting novel about romantic loss and fatalism, Namita Gokhale confirms her reputation as one of India’s finest writers, and one with the rare gift of seeing and recording the epic in ordinary lives. Namita delineates the hill people and their simple ways of life. It is story of fierce sexuality and unrequited love. It is story of Parvati, young, beautiful and doomed and Mukul Nainwal, the local boy made good who returns to the Nainital of his youth to search for the only woman he has ever loved. Told in the voices of these two exiles from life, this spare, sensitive novel is a compelling read. Parvati, the protagonist describes it in her own words, “I have always recognized that I carry emptiness inside me, although I did not at first understand it. When I was a child....”

Parvati is a young beautiful girl, full of aspirations. The novel begins with her narration of her own childhood life at Jeolikote, a popular tourist halt on the road to Nainital. As a daughter of a poor mother, whose father has expired, she has to face struggles since childhood. Her mother dies in tuberculosis and she has to stay with her uncle, the step brother of her mother, Mr. Hiranand Joshi, a headmaster in a high school at Nainital. The novel deals with the lives of Parvati and Mukul, who grow up together in the Himalayan town. Parvati has to marry at the wish of her uncle with one of his former students, Lalit Joshi. This unhappy arranged marriage finally ends up in a mental asylum after Lalit’s death. Lalit also becomes victim of the same killer disease tuberculosis like Parvati’s mother. While Mukul flees the restrictive and conservative hills
and lives with his Burmese wife, Adeleine in Hong Kong as an International civil servant in International Relief Organisation at Hong Kong. He returns to Nainital after many years to manage the will of his former favourite teacher, Mr. Hiranand Joshi and to search for an unrequited teenage love. On his way, he comes across many memorable and miserable events and situations of his youth life in this hill town. He becomes just like nostalgic:

Every landmark had a corresponding echo in my memories. Here I had passed, at fourteen, on my first visit to the plains, full of hope. And then, heartbroken after her marriage, I had travelled this same dusty road, in my new official jeep, to meet Parvati and her husband Lalit in Bareilly. I had needed desperately to show off, to display my success, to inform her about the wrong decision she had made. 62

The rocks under Pashan Devi lay exposed, dry and scraggy, like weeks-old chocolate cake. A ridge that ran across the water was coming into view, the hump of disfigured dromedary...... Sulphurous springs gurgled opposite Smugglers Rock. Parvati and I were standing naked on the muddy floor of the lake. Her body was as beautiful as I had always known it would be...Her breasts were not small and hard like Adeleine..........But of course it was only a dream.” 63

But now Parvati is confined to mental asylum in Bareilley and her young daughter Ira lives in Hiranand master’s house with Pooran,
Parvati’s cousin. In Nainital, Mukul stays at the hotel *Relax Inn* owned by his former friends. He visits Hiranand master’s house *We Nooke*, his past pilgrimage. Mukul is again haunted by the thoughts of Parvati. He feels, ‘*My thoughts returned to Irra, and her mother Parvati whom I had once loved to distraction.*’ 64

Mukul was rejected by Parvati and her uncle Hiranand Joshi only because he was a Khasiya Brahmin. Perhaps considering their superiority, Hiranand Joshi did not want miscegenation. Of course this is a satire on contemporary society that does not care for the bond of hearts of two young lovers and still believes in the superiority concepts of sub-castes. Mukul could never forget this bitter experience of his life. Namita delineates the sentiments of Mukul, ‘*We stopped next at the toll station outside Nainital …… ‘Where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile,’ I murmured to my self.’*’ 65 But still Mukul has the same feelings and love for Parvati and her daughter. He reminds of his love, the only woman whom he had loved:

> *Then I saw the beloved magnolia tree of my youth, under whose branches I had briefly known the textures of Parvati’s hair, and the smell of her skin, which was the smell of magnolias. The tree was still there, as was most of the garden…….* 66

Mukul has the same affection and love for Parvati’s daughter, Irra, “*I realized that she was the daughter of the only woman I had ever truly loved, and that I had no option but to be responsible for her.*” 67
Mukul visits various places of the town and meets some of his past friends. This visit also reminds him of the pungent reminiscences of his despondent childhood. He regrets for not having father’s love and protection and his mother’s illiteracy and ignorance:

He had left us when I was four, without even a photograph. He renounced my mother, me and the whole world to become a sadhu. We never saw him again. We always talked about him as though he were already dead. A relative told me when I was twelve that someone had met him at a temple near Badrinath. I did not tell my mother. My mother was tall, broad, slow and stupid. She smelt of cow’s milk, cow dung and hard work. She never discussed the hopes she must have reposed in me. 68

He also contemplates on some of important events in his life at various International cities like Oslo, New York etc. He recollects his first meeting with the widow Adeleine at Oslo. Thus, he is thrown between past and present like a pendulum. Mukul also visits the club, the fair and Naina Devi Temple. Meanwhile Parvati is discharged from the mental institution of Ranchi. Pooran informs Mukul that she is staying with her cousin Pushpendra in Nainital now and he has challenged the will of Hiranand Joshi in the court. The plea is filed in the name of Parvati as the inheritor of the property of late Hiranand Joshi. Mukul meets lunatic Parvati, he is shocked to see her in abnormal condition. He feels horrified, “I felt a primal social revulsion. It was a mistake. She was an impostor. I suspected of her sanity. I had never loved her.” 69
In his wandering at places of Nainital, Mukul comes across a charming Tibetan girl, Pasang Rampa. Their frequent meetings lead them to sexual relations. But none of them feels any regret for it. They take it naturally and lightly. Pushpendra’s wife is no longer ready to keep sane Parvati with them. Mukul is called by her wife to return immediately as her daughter has met with some accident. Mukul decides to settle everything in favour of the Parvati and her daughter keeping in mind their welfare and asks his friend Jeewan Jaundice to manage everything here and prepares for departure. He leaves for Hong Kong next day. Thus, the novel ends with a note of pessimism making a deep impression on the reader’s mind.

Love:

The novel basically deals with the theme of love. Namita has equal attraction for love, marriage and sex. As these are the interrelated things; the novelist has interwoven these threads admirably. She narrates Mukul’s condition:

An unrequited love, long since forgotten was beckoning me home............ That night, I dreamt of Nainital again. I dreamt that Parvati and I were swimming in the lake. We were naked. The green slimy water enveloped our new born bodies, absolving them of lust or regret.... 

I consider you and Parvati my personal responsibility. I shall always be there whenever you need me. Just now I have to go away .............. ‘A failure in love,’ I said to
myself, and took pleasure in the phrase. It had been, in every way, a surrogate life. 71

Women:

Namita realistically throws light on the condition and the role of Pahari women and exposes the male mentality of Pahari men. Parvati reads some books about bee-keeping and finds a similarity between the Pahari men and the male bees:

Our Pahari men were always crowding 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 fuel wood on their heads. 72

I often read the Introduction to Bee-keeping out loud to myself. ‘Male bees are usually short-lived....... ‘They never collect pollen, nor have they any other responsibilities in connection with providing for their young. Female bees do all the work of nest-making and provisioning. 73

The above narration focuses not on the condition of women of particularly hill area only. It describes the condition of women in general. Women are basically meant to provide care and comfort to men. They have work hard. But the same woman is beaten by her Pati Parmrshwara.
She suffers all hardships and tyranny in the name of Sanskaras. Here Parvati also determines to play her role:

*I was a Hindu woman, a married woman. I would tenaciously live out the role, safe in its stern unremitting code.*

*But thirteen months of unfulfilled marriage, when I had lived like a prisoner of war, constantly spying on the habits and inclinations of my captor, had given me an instinctive understanding of my husband.*

As the feminists say that all freedom for man and woman has to observe the social codes and conducts of life, Namita’s feminist perspective is clearly exposed here. A well-read and advanced teacher like Hiranand Joshi also believes in restrictive social dogmas. He favors a woman to be in social circle, *“It is not that I myself subscribe to these antiquated theories, or believe in caste or creed, but it is always wise to remain within the circumscribed circle of social acceptance, especially for a woman.”*

As their economic condition is poor, Parvati’s mother is not happy to bear the cost of her books, uniforms and fees. She complains bitterly:

*It would be different if you were a boy,’ she would say angrily ‘then you could earn and provide for me in my old age. But all you are going to do is get married to some no-good, and take my gold champakali necklace off with you as dowry. It’s double curse, to first be born a woman and then get straddled with another female to provide for!*
Sex:

Parvati, in her teenage, is attracted to a handsome teacher of her school, Mr. Salman Siddiqui. When she is admitted in hospital Salman secretly visits her at night. She also becomes prey to the instinct and surrenders to the shrewd man:

I was still unprepared for the piercing pain of penetration, the reactivation of the womb, the agony of that knowledge. As I succumbed to the rhythm of Salman’s body within mine I knew paradise. I had never imagined that human body could be the instrument of such delights. 78

Salman did not put any pretence of teaching me; he pulled me into his arms and we tumbled into a long, passionate kiss. My whole body seemed to soar into a new, separate plane of being. The texture of Salman’s mouth in mine, the thumping of our two hearts, united for those few minutes into a single, simple beat—.... 79

Conjugal Life:

Healthy man-woman relationship is the foundation to live a happy human life. Namita also endeavours to transmit that the marriages based on gotras and horoscopes only do not necessarily lead to blissful conjugal life, “My young husband looked puzzled, even oppressed, and kept a stubborn watchful distance from me.......It came as something of a disagreeable shock to realize that he was as unenthusiastic about our nuptials as I was.” 80
She also focuses on the narrow and congested environment of big joint families where mismatches have no chance to improve:

*Life within the fabric of a joint family was so tightly enmeshed that the opportunities for us to know or understand each other were limited. My numerous nieces and nephews-in-law, who were always romping around the small house...*  

Their failure in conjugal life leads them to quarrels. Parvati is beaten by Lalit:

*... and his slap sent me hurtling across the small room. I fell over the cheap wooden settee; as I struggled to get up he made for me again. ‘How dare you! He screamed, his eyes dilated with anger and hatred. You prying whore!’*  

But Parvati decides to bear everything to improve the condition, “*I was a Hindu woman, a married woman. I would tenaciously live out the role, safe in its stern unremitting code.*”

**Extra Marital Relations:**

Namita perhaps tries to warn the society that the unfulfilled sexual desires of a married woman lead her to fulfilment from any safe partner. Parvati finds a safe ally in her young, frank brother-in-law, Raju and becomes a prey to her instincts:
An urgency invaded my body; I looked at his tender young face, which was not a mask, he had not then the smell of the other; he was an ally, he was like me, we were both lonely, our needs possessed us, and we made uncompromising, uncomplicated love.  

The writer is a social animal; he is supposed to reflect the social condition in his work of art. The picture of the life of contemporary society is knowingly or unknowingly presented by the writer. Namita also portrays the septic of the society in her novels. The novelist skillfully makes a satire on such things:

I have never understood why, but I was not at all surprised to see my mother in Shrikrishnji’s arms........My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks. These cavorting figures were no better than ghosts- they belonged to a nightmare.

The rich are forgiven in our society. If you have plenty of money, all your malevolence is taken for granted in our society. That’s why Raju wants to become rich any how:

As we grew friendlier, Raju began to confide in me. ‘There is only one thing I want from life,’ he would say ‘and that’s to become rich. In our society a rich man is forgiven anything! ........ I shall become a racketeer or a black-marketer, or a kidnapper.....
Namita Gokhale is herself a Kumaoni by birth. She spent her early childhood in Nainital. She is a Kumaoni Brahmin. In her teen age Namita fell in love with Rajiv Gokhale, the son of Law Minister in Indira Gandhi’s cabinet and married him at the age of eighteen. They had many ups and downs in life. Rajiv had to face financial crisis. He began to drink heavily and became victim of cancer of liver. They struggled a lot but finally he succumbed to death leaving two teenage daughters to take care of for Namita. Moreover Namita was stricken with cancer of the uterus while writing Paro, and barely survived. Thus she faced death very closely in her life. The shadow of death is reproduced in all her novels. It is perhaps the echo of her autobiographical events. Here Lalit, Parvati’s husband dies of tuberculosis, her mother also becomes victim of the same disease and Hiranand Masterji also dies of intestinal cancer.

Another issue is of sub-caste superiority among the Brahmins in hills and Kumaon district. Hiranand Joshi does not allow Parvati to marry Mukul only because he is a Nandhoti Brahmin. Mukul says:

For centuries we Khasiya Brahmins had lived in these hills, ploughing the earth in honest labour, and pursuing our Brahminical duties. We wore short dhotis and were proud to work in the fields, for we loved the soil and the land of our forefathers. Then these Thuldhotes had arrived from the plains, and declared that they, and they only, among the twice-born Brahmins, were entitled to
power and position. These Pants from Maharashtra, these Pandes and Joshis from Kannauj were all courtiers and sycophants by class and occupation. They affected long dhotis to signify their superior intellectual and social status, and scorned the labour of the fields or the tending of the shrines. 87

Characterization:

Parvati is the central and most crucial character of the novel. She is the protagonist. The novel revolves around her. It is story of her life –that is full of twists and unusual happenings. It is portrayed by Namita in such a way that it acquires sympathy of the reader. Parvati is a doomed girl, without father, an uncle-the step brother of her mother, the only male support and the mother is not very understanding towards her. The novel begins with her childhood life and experiences. Her mother dies of tuberculosis and in her adolescent she is shifted to Nainital to stay with her uncle Hirtanand Joshi. She is young and full of aspirations and desires but unfortunately her journey of life leads her to an asylum. In childhood, her unusual encounter with a mad woman in the jungle forecasts the shadows of coming events in her life:

The terror of that afternoon has remained coiled in my heart, and through every action of every hour of my life, I have been aware of it. That was the day I realized I was doomed. I had nothing to gain in life; only to lose. I would become like her. My hair would fall off, and my teeth as well, for her madness had called out to mine. 88
Before she develops any understanding in life, she finds her illiterate but beautiful mother in the arms of their tenant, Mr. Shrikrishnji. This incident has a strong impact on the mind and life of this girl. She can not forget it forever:

My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks. 89

Years later, When I was wheeled in for surgery from the asylum in Bareilley I experienced the same sensation when I went under anaesthesia....... ...I could not confront her with what I had seen....... It was her shadow, her evil twin, that I had glimpsed downstairs. 90

Perhaps it is the result of such impact on her personality and the lack of proper care in her upbringing that leads her to sexual folly in her adolescence. After some years Parvati becomes an easy prey to the handsome, young teacher of History at Nainital. The first experience of sex makes Parvati feel, “I left Wee Nooke a girl, I returned a woman.” 91 She adds, “As I succumbed to the rhythm of Salman’s body within mine I knew paradise. I had never imagined that human body could be the instrument of such delights. 92

But she considers Salman simply a shadow in her life. Yet she is happy to play the game of shadow which she knew is not permanent. She goes for cinema and picnic with Mukul and Lalit and other friends. She feels herself a new Parvati at Nainital. She is attracted towards Mukul Nainwal, one of the favourite students of Hirananad Masterji. She likes Mukul but she is not serious about him. She says, “I enjoyed flirting with
Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and the transparent ploys he employed to be with me were balm to my soul.”  

Parvati has an excellent quality as a girl. She takes all the responsibility of the lonely Hiranand uncle’s house and looks after it nicely. After marriage with Lalit, she performs all her responsibilities sincerely and honestly. But Lalit’s incapacity to satisfy her physical needs leads unfulfilled Parvati to sexual relation with Raju, her brother-in-law. After Lalit’s death she becomes lunatic, “I wept a lot, sometimes I screamed. The doctors came again……. Sometimes I laughed without reason……. I started laughing again. The laughter felt good. It released me….”  

Parvati is fortunate to be loved by such a great lover like Mukul. His love for Parvati knows no bound. Though unrequited, it is his love. Even lunatic Parvati is a goddess for him, ‘I wanted unaccountably to fall at her feet to kiss them, to be her slave, to die for her…..She was my Durga, my Kali, my Saraswati.’  

Mukul, a former I.A.S. officer and now an International Civil Servant in International Relief Organization at Hong Kong, is the doomed man who comes in search of his love to the hills after many years. He is very loving and caring man. He loved Parvati so passionately in his young age that he could never forget her through out her life. He is totally devoted to Parvati in his love. When he meets Irra for the first time, he reminds his unrequited love and his present responsibility to her, “I realized that she was the daughter of the only woman I had ever truly loved, and that I had no option but to be responsible for her.”
Mukul returns to Nainital to manage the property of late Hiranand Masterji as per his will. It shows his regards and respect for his former teacher who loved him like his son. But the same Hiranand Joshi had not allowed her niece to marry Mukul because he was not a Thuldhoti Brahmin. But Mukul has a generous heart. He says:

*I forgave Hiranand Headmaster his letter, but I carried her rejection all my life……. It was a wound which I nursed with devotion, a hurt which was to mingle in time with another rejection, my alienation from home and India. It never ceased to trouble me that I made good not here but elsewhere, until my love for Parvati and for my homeland combined into a single dull pain, the constant grieving pain of jealous and jilted lovers.*

His love for Parvati knows no bound. Even lunatic Parvati is a goddess for him:

*Parvati was sitting on my bed when I returned to my room… Her feet were not well cared for, but they had remained small, fair and pretty. They reminded me of the feet of the goddess Laxmi. I wanted unaccountably to fall at her feet to kiss them, to be her slave, to die for her……….She was my Durga, my Kali, my Saraswati.*

Though Mukul is a very smart and talented person he becomes very nostalgic when he returns to Nainital. Everything in this hill town of his youth reminds him of his happy days he passed with Parvati. Mukul is also reminded of his miserable childhood he spent here. He is unfortunate
to have memorable happy childhood life. His father had renounced and became a recluse when he was four. His mother was illiterate and not very caring one. He spent his childhood in poor condition. But with his hard work and talent he became a successful man. He has travelled from Oslo to New York. Mr. Hiranand Joshi, his Masterji showered a lot of love and care for him. He can not forget Masterji’s contribution in his life. Masterji’s house is a pilgrim place for him. He narrates in his words:

From the age of ten until I was twenty two, Wee Nooke had been my retreat, my heaven, my sanctuary, my passage into the outside world. It had presented all that was desirable and attainable in life. It had contained books, a telephone and a radiogram. It was here that I had been moulded by Hiranand Headmaster’s dreams and ambitions into the man I am today. 99

Mukul tries to handle the situation with utmost care to provide good future to Irra and parvati. But he is unable to do much for them. Finally he has to return to Hong Kong to his wife Adeleine:

I thought of Hong Kong, of Adeleine and her daughter, Marie and my job at International Relief Organization. I thought of myself, of who and what I was, and the self I was leaving behind. I thought of Parvati and Irra,....... There was nothing I could do for them. ‘Country conditions do not permit,’ I noted mentally, as I closed the file. 100
In the true sense, Mukul’s journey back to hills proves no fruitful and it denotes his search for elusive love.

Hiranand Joshi is known as Masterji in Nainital. He is head master of a school. His character is minor yet it is important and impressive. He is a well-read man. Mukul was his favourite student. So he assigns Mukul the job to look after his house, farm house and other property. He dies of cancer. He has immense faith in his disciple, he writes in his letter to Mukul, “My nephew, Pooran, will, perforce, perform the last rites. But it is you, Mukul, who are my true spiritual heir.” Hiranand Joshi is influenced by Swami Vivekanand and many other renowned writers. He is very much fond of the English, especially Macaulay. He used to write to Jawaharlal Nehru and George Bernard Shaw and others. He openly declared that he was a nihilist and atheist. But he was a good human being. His character is minor one but the reader is impressed by him.

Lalit is Parvati’s husband. Though they were good friend in youth, his conjugal life with Parvati is not happy. He is an ordinary person who can not satisfy the sexual hunger of his wife. Yet he has all manly power to beat her for common error of opening a letter written them by their good friend Mukul. Before he can develop an understanding with Parvati he becomes a victim of tuberculosis and dies. His is a stereotype character.

Irra is daughter of Parvati. She is young, aspiring and beautiful. In his first meeting, Mukul recognizes her. She is talkative but very caring girl with a sense of hospitality. She wants to become a doctor. She is completely aware of her situation. She says, “I am alone in the world, you know, so I have learnt to be careful.”
Adeleine is Mukul’s wife. She has a Burmese father and an English mother. She was a widow, with a daughter when she met Mukul in Oslo. They got married. Adeleine is, as called by Mukul, an ‘unemotional woman’. She is a minor character but her presence happens important because Mukul has married her. That connects her with the heroine Parvati. Marie is her daughter.

Raju, Pooran, Pushpendra, Pasang Rampa. Abha, Monnibee, Parvati’s mother are all minor characters. The friends of Mukul’s youth life, Jeewan Jaundice, Mohan Mischief and Sohan Selfish are minor yet very interesting and humorous characters in the novel.

**Plot:**

The plot is not very simple and straight forward. It moves between past and present. The story of 206 pages is spread into two parts; PARVATI: THE DANCE OF THE HONEY BEE and the second part is; MUKUL: DREAMS OF REASON. Part one is narration of Parvati’s life in her own voice. Part two is description of memory and reminisces of Mukul in his own words. He comes back to the town of his youth—that is the beautiful Himalayan Town of Nainital. The description is haunting and picturesque.

The story begins with Prvati’s childhood life since age of seven, at Jeolikote, a hill village on the road to Nainital. It is famous Himalayan tourists spot of Uttar Pradesh, (now in Uttaranchal) the northern state of India. Then she is taken to Nainital where her youth life is passed. After marriage they shift to Bareilly and finally to asylum. The story of first
part is described in her own words in first 50 pages. It’s also named after her; PARVATI: THE DANCE OF THE HONEY BEE. The second part is narrated by Munkl, it is named after him; MUKUL: DREAMS OF REASON with sub chapters and titles to each chapter. It is a record of his memories and reminisces.

The second part begins with Hiranand Joshi’s letter of 26th February, 1982 written to Mukul assigning him the duty to look after his property as per his will. Mukul arrives to Nainital from Hon Kong. Now the story is tossed between past and present like a pendulum.

It describes Mukul’s parentage, his love for Parvati, his friends, adventures, relations with Hiranand Masterji and others. There are some historical references of Partition of India, discussion of Nehru’s policies by Mukul and his friends, Masterji’s letters to Nehru, his remarks about Gandhiji and the then Hindi filmi hero, the evergreen Dev Anand and his affair with Suraiyya. The novel ends with Mukul’s departure for Hong Kong.

Setting:

A Himalayan Love Story is Himalayan in scale and setting. The Himalayan Hill Town of Nainital becomes the backdrop of the novel. The lake district of Kumaon, is in Uttarakhand, a northern state of India. The story takes place in Nainital but it also refers to some other places. It begins at Jeolikote, a tourist halt, on the road to Nainital and takes the reader to Nainital, then Bareilly, and even shifts to Hong Kong.
The places of Nainital, like GGIC- Government Girl’s Intermediate College, China Peak, Snow View, Bhimtal, Talital, Municipal Library, Mali Bazaar, Mal Road, Ramsay Hospital, Pashan Devi, Smuggler’s Rock, Naina Devi Temple, the nearby village of Bhovali are the real places of Nainital and they become the settings of the novel. The span of the novel is really Himalayan in area, it spreads from Nainital to Hong Kong via Bareilly, Delhi and back to Nainital. The locations, places and buildings play a significant role in the novel. Hiranand Masterji’s house, *Wee Nooke* becomes pivotal place in the novel. It is described as pilgrim’s place for Mukul, the hero of the novel.

**Language:**

In *A Himalayan Love Story* Namita has used the same simple and natural English. It is conversational and almost colloquial with a touch of locality of the area. Though Namita’s language is simple, it goes very well with the characters’ level and knowledge. She also uses many Hindi words for Indian foods and sweets. They are roti, chapatti, kheer, dal, jalebi, samosa, dal-bhat, aloo tikkie, etc.

As a woman naturally Namita has attraction for saris, dresses, jewelleries, nail polishing and wedding ceremonies. All her novels have beautiful narrations of engagement and wedding ceremonies. Namita uses a number of Indian - Hindi words and phrases that give the novel a flavour of Indianness. They are chai-wala, choolha, dhaba, durbar, mushaira, khadi, raga, paan, Malhar, janeyu, *koi baat nahin, chhoti chhoti baten* etc. She describes some places with their well-known item or identity features associated with them i.e. Jeolikote, Rampur,
Moradabad etc. Moradabad has been described as famous for *machchhr, makkhi aur Mussalman*.

The novel has some references of Hindu beliefs and philosophy. She refers to 84 lakhs of births of the soul of human being and its Karmic theory. Namita is well versed, her reading and knowledge of Sanskrit, English and Indian literatures is reflected through the references of *Meghdoot* of Kalidasa, T.S. Eliot, Lines of Rudyard Kipling, Swami Vivekanand’s maxims etc. Her interest and knowledge of history and political-international affairs is also revealed through the references of Dalai Lama and the references of renowned International writers and personalities. The proverbial sayings give a new charm and effect to the narration. *i.e. Throwing pearls before the swines, Many a swallow can feed on a rich man’s leftovers, Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown etc.* The incident of loss of money in the bus and the three brothers of the Hotel Inn are very humorous.

**Narrative Technique:**

Namita has adopted the first person singular narration technique in this novel. Parvati and Mukul are the protagonists, who narrate their life and experiences. The novel begins with narration of Parvati: "*I have always recognized that I carry an emptiness inside me, although I did not at first understand it.*" The novel is divided into two parts; **PARVATI: THE DANCE OF THE HONEY BEE** and the part two; **MUKUL: DREAMS OF REASON.** Part one is narration of Parvati’s life in her own voice. Part two is description of memory and reminisces of Mukul, who comes back to Nainital. In part two each chapter has been given sub-titles. They are apt, appropriate and suggestive of the
happenings in the chapter. *A Himalayan Love Story* is a tender love story shifted by the grace of the narrative. It has all the softness of a Kumaoni shadow. The hill town of Nainital, the natural surrounding, the folk all they become an inseparable part of the novel. The description of Nandashtmi fair is excellent:

> Shawls and bangles and ribbons were hung in confused colourful display. Sticky looking jalebis and other sweetmeats were piled in unappetizing heaps beside enormous frying pots. Everybody appeared possessed by a reckless abandoned gaiety. A well dressed old man walking a pet monkey on a chain. I heard the crashing of cymbals and the merry sound of a tambourine, followed by a young man dressed as a woman....

The descriptions of natural surroundings, traffic, Nandashtmi fair, city of Nainital and sacrificing ceremony at Kali temple give the novel a touch of Indianness and make it marvellous. As Namita passed her childhood in Nainital, she has penned picturesque descriptions of the hills and the hill folk, “You know how Nainital loves gossip and exaggeration.”

With its realistic and picturesque narration, Nainital becomes one of the living characters in the novel. There are plenty of references regarding its history, legends, places, people, past and present condition of the town, the changes etc. Hiranand Masterji also narrates the town in his letter to Mukul to Hong Kong, “Nainital is no longer what it once was .......... As for the tourists, the less said better. They have all but destroyed this once scenic hill station. Nainital is no different now from
Mukul also observes, “I arrived at Nainital. It was changed, changed utterly. The buildings were all in a state of dilapidation.”

Mukul arrives after many years to Nainital in search of his love. He is fantasizing about Parvati and everything about her. The narrations of his nostalgic condition present him as a great lover:

An unrequited love, long since forgotten was beckoning me home……….. That night, I dreamt of Nainital again. I dreamt that Parvati and I were swimming in the lake. We were naked. The green slimy water enveloped our new born bodies, absolving them of lust or regret………… The rocks under Pashan Devi lay exposed, dry and scraggy, like weeks-old chocolate cake. A ridge that ran across the water was coming into view; the hump of disfigured dromedary. Sulphurous springs gurgled opposite Smugglers Rock. Parvati and I were standing naked on the muddy floor of the lake. Her body was as beautiful as I had always known it would be. Her breasts were not small and hard like Adeleine’s but generous and yielding…….But of course it was only a dream.

The three brothers of Hotel Relax Inn, Jeewan Jaundice, Sohan Selfish, and Mohan Mischief are very interesting and humorous.

Vision:
In this novel, perhaps Namita finds the world deceptive due to some nearest people living with masks. We are reminded here of Kundan of *Aandhali Gali* by Dhiruben Patel. She was also deceived by her father in the same way. Her father had illicit relations with a Christian woman. Here little Parvati is horrified at the sight of her mother’s illicit relation with their tenant. She says, “*My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks.*”

*A Himalayan Love Story* is really a story of fierce sexuality and unrequited love. With this haunting novel about romantic loss and fatalism, Namita Gokhale definitely confirms her reputation as one of India’s finest writers, and one with the rare gift of seeing and recording the epic in ordinary lives.
The Book of Shadows

The Book of Shadows was published in 1996. It is a work of startling originality by one of India's most daring and talented writers, Namita Gokhale. This ambitious novel investigates the nature of reality, love and faith. Scarred by her lover's suicide and an acid attack that has left her permanently disfigured, Rachita Tiwari has sought refuge in a remote house in the Himalayan foothills. In this rambling house, built by a foolhardy missionary over a hundred years ago, she lives alone, painting and repainting her nails a bright red, careful not to look into mirrors. As she retreats into herself, battling for her sanity and fearful of a world she no longer trusts, a different dimension claims her and the tremendous history of the house is played out before her:

This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house. I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. This house which knew me as a child, has taken me in again. We have closed ranks together, me and the house. We have become as one spirit; it is us against the world.  

Rachita is a young university lecturer from Delhi, whose face has been disfigured in an acid attack. Her fiance had committed suicide by hanging himself and, blaming Rachita for his death, his sister takes revenge by throwing acid in her face. In this extract from The Book of Shadows by Namita Gokhale, the main character moves between different levels of unexplored consciousness as she tries to grasp her new reality:

........ a world of shadows closing in around me. I still can not sleep at night; I am afraid of closing my eyes. I dread
both dreams and reality but most of all I dread the half-light of that moment when one is not yet asleep, when the realities of night and day interlap, when the will is suspended and unreason begins its reign.  

The Book of Shadows is not a typical ghost story. A reader is supposed to make a guess while reading the passage from the novel:

I remember waking up that night to find an iridescence suffusing the room... I would imagine it to be from what I have read about séances and things like that........a man in a cassock climbing uphill. When he turned to face me I confronted the deep empty sockets of his skeletal face. Yet I could sense that his eyes were sad, and that the grim contortions of his smile, of calcium and bared cartilage were a travesty of his deepest emotions... 

The reader expects here, a scene from the archetypal ‘ghost story’. But it does not happen so in this story. If the reader is expecting scene after morbid scene from this novel, he is bound to be disappointed, for Namita Gokhale's this novel is far from the typical one. When Rachita Tiwari's well-regulated life turns chaotic, she retreats to the comfort of the Himalayas, to a colonial house built by a missionary over a century ago. It is here that the story unfolds. With its idyllic settings and fascinating history, the house and its nostalgic link to her childhood prove to be therapeutic. Rachita’s uncle living at Bangalore had bought this house from an English man many years ago. She spent her childhood in this house with her sister. It is an old and gentle house for her. She says:
It has taken me in, enveloped my hurt. It soothes my hatred, hushes my sorrow. It had been hostile at first, angry that we had forgotten the sanctuary of its love. This old and gentle house, built by a missionary a hundred years ago, was the repository of my youth, the custodians of my dreams. ¹¹³

She comes to forget the terrible assault of her fiancé’s sister and his death. She wants to recover in this shelter of her childhood. Lohaniju, the old servant in eighty now looks after her in the house. He is witness of the various phases of the house. He is a skilled storyteller. Rachita is glad to be in the company of such fatherly figure. The spirit residing in the house, behind the curtain plays a very interesting role in the novel. The narrative belongs as much to the caring spirit of the house. We meet a ghost with a conscience. One, who befriends crows, has an eternal empathy for butterflies and even falls in love. He guides the reader through the complex chronological events that the house and he has witnessed. Compelled to speak after a century of silence, he tells the reader of his esteemed friend, the devout Father Benedictus, who exorcised the house from the evil legacy of the infamous Munro and his wicked coterie. Rid of their diabolism and esoteric indulgences, the house then plays host to the exquisite Dona Rosa and her vain lover, Captain Wolcott. There is also the missionary James Cockerell, whose diary portrays the genesis of the house. There is the fine line between the substance and the shadows that this novel is all about. Rachita, the protagonist feels:

I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened........... 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.  

Among the visitors and residents of the house, there is the vain fool, Captain Wolcott, and his tragically sensuous mistress, Dona Rosa, ‘of the wandering heart’; the doomed lovers Marcus and Munro, disciples of Aleister Crowley, infamous dabbler in black magic; Father Benedictus, ‘seeker of knowledge’, at peace with himself and his God; and the all-knowing, sage crows. With and above them all is the resident ghost of the house, solitary and sad, at times merely an observer as the fantastical destinies unfold around him, and at times unable to remain detached. After a century of silence something compels him to speak—words that the injured woman now inhabiting the house will hear; words that will give her back to herself. Thus part ghost story, part erotic romance, The Book of Shadows is an ambitious book that investigates the nature of reality, love and faith. It is a work of amazing originality by Namita Gokhale. The creation of the spirit is a wonderful achievement by Namita:

Our kind is not nourished by the sun: it is the moon which gives us sustenance. We wax and wane with the moon, except when harnessed by a human energy, when the pull of the tides loses its grip. As dawn broke over the mountains, lighting up the still white presences of the snows........ I fled to my refuge, my fated spot. This night of passion, my first, had initiated me into the sorrows of mankind; the unfaith, the terrible and tenuous link of love.  

102
When humans die, their psychic residues spill over to our world, to other worlds. Their collapsing energies emanate a mighty helplessness, clogging up consciousness, making it difficult to comprehend or switch over to other spheres. I knew at that moment someone had died……. When I returned to my spot behind curtain, I saw a little child, already dead.  

As it is not a typical ghost story yet each page leaves the reader in thrill and excitement with the haunted house. The house has a history of over a hundred years with some unusual happenings while its construction. Rachita has some strange experiences in this house. Yet they are not frightening one for her. Lohaniju can’t imagine leaving this house till his death. Rachita narrates such happenings:

One night, as I was brushing my hair in the dressing room, I had a curious experience. I was overtaken by the sensation that my feet were not where I expected them to be. The ground below me had lost its authority, it no longer exercised the inevitable pull of gravity. The jute matting beneath me had abandoned faith and logic and assumed a life and form of its own. I felt weirdly disembodied; I was flailing, and my senses were overshooting themselves. It was as if I were receiving no information from my peripheries, as though my centre had been displaced. The fundamental and organic mooring of personality had completely abandoned me - I was as floppy as a rag-doll, but in the hands of what monstrous child I could not say.
I listened patiently to Lohaniju............. when we were disturbed by a loud, indeed violent, hammering at the front door. Nobody ever comes to this house, so we were both naturally surprised by the intrusion. Lohaniju rose awkwardly on his long leg and hurried out to see who it was. The lights went off....... Lohaniju returned after a while, shaking his head in puzzlement. There was no one at the door.  

The house occupies the most significant place in the novel. It is the epic centre of various terrible tremors that make the hair stand of the reader. The shadows haunt in this house and in the mind of Rachita for whom the house is a refuge. With its fantastic narration, the house becomes one of the living characters in the novel. She says, “My uncle in Bangalore had bought the house when we were very young...... An Englishman who had never lived here had sold the house to my uncle in an inordinate hurry. Lohaniju came with it.”  

But the house has a long history, its natural surroundings, the ever-associated Lohaniju, the hallucinatory crowd of characters, the spirit behind the curtain etc. make it enchanting one. Lohaniju, the eye witness of the history and condition of house says:

Oh, the stories I can tell you about this house, Bitiya, they would make your hair stand up on end! The things I have seen here with my own two eyes, the sights I have witnessed! But then, the house has its secrets and I have to respect them, as its faithful retainer.
The house hasn’t changed much. It is still just as the diaries describe it as being. It’s like a time-warp, this house set in the thick of an enchanted forest, this house that doesn’t let you go.  

During the sleepless nights Rachita feels some strange movements in the house. She narrates:

_Last night there was someone in my room. Even Lady could sense it. She cocked up her ears, as though alert to some sound I could not hear. Her brown fur rose and stood on edge. A ridge formed on the curvature of her back and her trusting brown eyes seemed focussed at some point near the fireplace._

_I remember waking up that night to find an iridescence suffusing the room. It was a circlet of light, like a gas balloon, or like ectoplasm, as I would imagine it to be from what I have read about seances and things like that. It wasn't fuzzy at the edges, but quite well defined, with a double-edged outline of orange and pink shaping its billowing luminescence. It hovered over the old desk that stood in the corner, it looked gentle and utterly harmless. I reached out under the bed for Lady's warm brown fur, and fell asleep again._

_The Book of Shadows_ is fine example of a real fiction. It is a ghost story without a ghost. It is story of a tormented, tortured psychic. It is simply reflection of Rachita’s illusory mind. Actually it is not a typical haunted house in the real sense of the term. It describes a world of fiction
through the illusions of a character that is obsessed by past-horrible acid attack. Namita excels in creating a selfless character of Rachita. The spirit behind the curtain is the another self of Rachita. It presents the internal and the external character of Rachita. Namita narrates:

Proprioception is the science of the sense of the 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 corners of other abandoned memories and perceptions. Dona Rosa and others are not real…… they are emanations of the past, insubstantial, evasive, ambiguous. I am alive, a skin encapsuled being who belongs to the world of living. I feel as though a scab has fallen from an old sore. In the shadow world between the living and the unliving, even sickness is an indication of a possible restoration to health….  

The novel is a superb blend of psychology and reality. The house is a place of refuge and healing touch for the abandoned character like Rachita. It is a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile, of forbidden passions and family histories told in a sensual descriptive style. It is a compelling story. Pratibha Ghogale observes:

The book of Shadows is a place to record and remember, to mark down rituals and thoughts. It is a collection of personal thoughts and meaningful statements, an expression of a state of being. This novel is just that - an expression of a state of being.
During the time, Namita was writing her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* in 1980s, she almost died of cancer and lost her young husband from cirrhosis of the liver. Since those years, death, love and lust have been her most common themes. This novel has many autobiographical elements. Namita Gokhale herself admits it. She says in the author’s note to the novel:

> I too have lived in the house I have written about. This is a novel which has its core in truth. It has been written itself, under circumstances which would appear strange to most people. It has been a vehicle to resolve my personal pain, but there is more to it than that.\(^{126}\)

She also revealed herself and gave a glimpse of the creation of the novel in an interview with Mita Kapur:

> Every time I write a book, I feel I'll never write again. But before I know it, I've begun again. *The Book of Shadows* was a strange book. I was a bit of a ghost myself. A lot of the book wrote itself.\(^{127}\)

> I obsess over life. I love life, I enjoy but I always know what life is. A small reminder of death in any work of art adds to the pleasure of life. I've been sitting with death for a long time.\(^{128}\)

The hallucinatory world, the abnormal characters, their sexual orgies and violent-bizarre incidents replicate the distortion and deformity of the human mind and its age-old lust for wealth, knowledge and sex. The characters of Captain Wolcott, Dona Rosa, Crowley, Munro, Marcus,
Nicholas Krutz, Mann, Veera are the symbols of such human deformity who create an weird and gruesome world before the reader’s eyes.

Namita realistically throws light on women in all her novels. As her works are woman-oriented, she feels a woman's life is "reflected in the rhythm of the seasons, not like men whose stories are rooted in wars, territories and legislation". Namita’s favourite, the hill folk again have a prime focal point in this novel too. They become an essential part of the novel with their rituals, beliefs, habits, superstitions, legends and their ways of life.

**Characterization:**

Rachita Tiwari is the protagonist. She is the central character of the novel. The novel revolves around her. It is the story of her unusual experiences and strange happenings in the house. It is a kind of abnormal portrayal. The whole story is a reflection of the shadows and hallucinations shaped the mind of Rachita. Her shadowy mind creates a fictional hallucinatory world that is wonderful. She comes to the house of her childhood at Ranikhet for recovery and refuge:

*I have come to the hiills to heal, to hide, to forget. To forgive, to be forgiven..... I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened.*

*I came to the hills to obliterate my past, to seek refuge in the immediate present. Here was my past stalking me again, leaping out of a Led Zappelin tape like a jack-in-box, like a practical joke gone sour. My instinct tells me*
to lie low, to evade discovery, to await yhe return of strength and continuity.  

She taught English literature at Jesus and Mary College, Delhi. She suffers from loneliness and psychological pain that is occurred due to her fiancé’s death and his sister’s acid attack that has destroyed her beautiful face. She has not seen her faces in the mirror for many days. She can’t forget the painful condition:

_In the flat light of my hospital room, of my clean white hospital room which still smelt of construction, my hospital bed which did not creak, in that new environment so disconnected from the final moment in that month of insanity - in this room without shadows, I felt contrition. Not regret at Anand's death - I hadn't killed him, of that I was sure - and not even anger at his sister's revenge. No, I felt contrition. Love, touch, joy, passion, the hard reality of my best friend's husband secure in my welcoming womb, the elation of being alive, of riding life - these were the culprits. I felt safe in that room without shadows: no harm could come to me there. My mind too yielded its recesses, its secret pockets of pain and hope and expectation, and lived for the one clean moment of inhalation and expiration._

Rachita falls in love with a young man, called, Anand, who aspired to become a writer or a film maker. He is twenty six and Rachita is thirty three. Anand could recognize her well. He complained her of her true nature, **“The trouble with you is that you don’t bother to listen to me. The trouble with you is that you are so bloody self-possessed. You are**
conceited, you are vain, you are frivolous. The trouble with you is that you are you!”

She herself admits that she has become a victim of the disease of dementia— that is a disease of mental disorder and memory failure:

_No, I’m talking about myself, Rachita Tiwari, touching thirty-four, forgotten as a person by the world, remembered only as a sensational story._”

'You are a neurotic wreck,' I told myself, but I was not imagining it, that face was there waiting patiently to unmask itself. This morning, as I brushed my teeth, I evaded my face in the mirror as I normally do, but there was a new dimension to my horror and repugnance, for it had struck me that the face I saw in my dreams was really my own.

In the house, she is reminded of her childhood memories with her sister. She also narrates some unusual experiences to her in the house:

_There is a young girl in my memories; I saw her again last night when I was unable to keep my open. she is thin and shy, I see her hiding behind a curtain in this very bedroom, behind the curtain in her parents' bedroom, and as she watches them fornicate, as she watches them at their loveless, joyless task, and notices her mother's eyes heavy with resentment, she feels someone else watching them with her. She does not know who this presence is, but it is a calming soothing presence, it_
holds her hand, it gently strokes her forehead, it instructs her to shut her eyes and pretend nothing has happened. When she shuts her eyes she can see a garden in bloom, a sweet-smelling garden in which a beautiful woman in a blue dress is walking, holding an enormous bouquet of flowers. It is the garden outside this house. When she opens her eyes again her mother is tugging at the drawstring of the petticoat she wears under her sari, and the girl waits until they have left the room before she emerges from her hiding place. I suppose that girl was me. \(^{135}\)

I can see beyond the curtain. I know there is someone there, something that will surely claim me one day. Resistance is useless. \(^{136}\)

I dreamt again of a woman standing in a garden, a bunch of summer blooms in her hand. I dreamt of a man in a cassock climbing uphill. When he turned to face me I confronted the deep empty sockets of his skeletal face. Yet I could sense that his eyes were sad, and that the grim contortions of his smile, of calcium and bared cartilage, were a travesty of his deepest emotions. I dreamt of deep night and a procession of fireflies. When I emerged from my night-consciousness I recalled these images with clarity and precision. I found they did not leave me or erode in my memory as the day progressed. \(^{137}\)
Rachita’s character is explained through her speech and her behaviour. In the end of the novel, she recovers and she herself admits, “I had bid farewell to the world of my confabulations. I had acquired achieved, possessed myself again.”

Lohaniju, mysterious caretaker, serves as a force guarding Rachita's vulnerable sanity. Lohaniju is a servant in the house. He is 80 years old. He is a very good story teller. He is a creature of habit; he likes to have a dog around the house. He showers fatherly affection over Rachita and takes care of her. As per his desire he belongs to the house and dies there only. Due to normal sickness, his death seems abrupt and unnatural.

**Plot:**

The structure of the novel is complex. Scotsman on the title page of the novel describes it as ‘Cleverly constructed and beautifully written’. The feeling that a reader gets is of moving in and out of the shadows, one moment everything is clear and the next suddenly it is dark. The novel begins and ends with the encounters with Rachita's student, Zenobia. In the beginning Rachita refuses to read Zenobia's poem. She quotes Oscar Wilde to her "All bad poetry is sincere." She tells Zenobia to "pay heed to Oscar Wilde's dictum." Yet in the end it is Zenobia and her boyfriend Pashu are the ones who witness and perhaps are the instruments of Rachita's return to the sane world. Thus it moves between past and present. It is divided into chapters; I.i, II, I.ii, III and I. iii. The story narrates Rachita’s arrival in the hilltop house at Ranikhet, her recent terrible past, the acid attack, and her fiancé’s suicide in flashback, her
strange experiences and her memories of childhood in the same house. In
the end, she plans to leave for Delhi.

Part II is titled; THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF WILLIAM JAMES
COCKERELL, M A that describes the genesis of the house onwards
1868. Rachita reads the missionary’s journal it’s like flashback narration.

Then part I.ii that deals with Rachita’s observations and
hallucinating and haunting experiences in the house.

Part III narrates the spirit’s story and past residents and visitors of
the house. Of course that is the self of Rachita. The hallucinations of
Rachita create a wonderful fictional world of various characters.

Part I. iii describes Rachita’s recovery and her decision of
departure from the house.

Setting:

In Gokhale's world, the misty mountains forever remain an eternal
backdrop. Gokhale's persona remains that of the Kumaoni Brahmin
woman she is. The writer who grew up in Nainital remains obsessed by
the air of the mountains. All of her work seems to be stuck with her
personality as a Kumaoni Brahmin girl. She said: "My way of looking at
the world remains trapped in that primary identity; once you start loving
the hills they hold on to you." 139

Over a hundred years old house, on a hill near the Himalayan Hill
town of Ranikhet becomes the spot of the novel. Almost all incidents
take place here. It is described wonderfully. The house plays such a
crucial role that it becomes like a character in the novel. The lake district
of Kumaon, is in Uttaranchal or Uttarakhand, a northern state of India.
The story takes place in this strange house. It also refers to some surrounding places. It begins at this haunted-strange house and it also ends in the same house. Thus the house becomes pivotal place in the novel. The novel begins with very first narration of Rachita, the protagonist, “This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house. I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. This house which knew me as a child, has taken me in again.”  

The protagonist, Rachita suffering from hallucinations and dementia gets well in the end. The house proves a healing shelter for her. It is not a stereo type-typical haunted house. Though there are a plenty of death and murder scenes, the novel ends with an optimistic note. It ends, here in the same house, when Rachita decides to leave for Delhi. “This house that has taken me in, where I have let loose my fears, hidden my shame-this house which has nurtured and healed me- is it now at last time to bid farewell to this house?”  

Language:

In The Book of Shadows Namita has not used the same simple and natural English as other novels. She uses a few inevitable Indian-Hindi words here. They are mukhiya, Thakur, choti, janeyu, samskara, isht-devta, bhang, lota, amavasya, mai, shakti, sanyasini, pradhan, etc. The Book of Shadows has a plenty of references of literary characters, poetic lines, citations from Emily Dickinson, Shakespeare and English literature. They are the reference of Julius, Brutus, Hamlet and references of the genius psychologists of twentieth century, Freud and Jung. Hindu gods and goddesses like Mahakali, Kaal-bhairav and myths of Kagbhshandiji are also referred.
Hindu beliefs and philosophy of the principle of Karma has many relevant references. Above this, the novel has some allusions of Sanskrit Vedas and Sanskrit literature. All this shows that Namita is well-versed. Her reading and knowledge of Sanskrit, English and Indian literatures is exposed throughout the novel. She also discusses a topic of criticism, *the aspects of novel* through the character of Rachita as she is a lecturer in English literature. Rachita repeatedly quotes Mahadevi Verma, Yeats, Emily Dickinson, and Shakespeare. Her opinion of the poets of Chaayavad is - "they were all hopelessly silly."

**Narrative Technique:**

Namita has adopted the first person singular narration technique in this novel. Rachita, the protagonist narrates her life and experiences in the house and her past life. The novel begins with narration of her arrival at Ranikhet:

*This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house. I live here alone in the hills, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn. This house which knew me as a child, has taken me in again. We have closed....... We have become as one spirit; it is us against the world.*

In her earlier novel *A Himalayan Love Story*, Namita traced the lives of two star-crossed lovers who grew up in Nainital, bears testimony to her overpowering sentiment for the region. However, she has no particular stylistic slant, the only common thread running through her writing being "a bizarre, macabre sense of humour". And her intention has always been to "turn the stereotypical romantic novel on its head".
The novel has stream of consciousness tone. It is also psychological in nature. The novelist wants to render the soul or psyche of the character, the inner reality rather than the outer one. Again hill folk are presented here with their rituals, habits, superstitions, legends and their ways of life.

Each chapter opens with some citation or poetic lines related to the incident and happening in the chapter. The chapter two is given a title- THE INDIAN JOURNAL OF WILLIAM JAMES COCKERELL, M A It has all the touch of Kumaoni shadow. The hill house, the natural surrounding, the folk all they become an inseparable part of the novel. The descriptions of seasons are excellent. The wonderful characters, the illusory world of Rachita’s mind, the strange old house with many mysteries, the Himalayan black bears, panthers, the hillside plants, flowers, birds, animals with their particular characteristic features, hill folk with their ways of life, their deities and their beliefs, mountains, the trees, hill side river, the daayans, terrible nights…. all this enchanting environment make The Book of Shadows an unforgettable romance. The descriptions are fantastic, strange, haunting and grotesque; some of them are of course, bizarre.
Namita Gokhale's latest novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, translated as *Shakuntala: Smriti Jaal* interestingly, this was being published simultaneously in English and Hindi. Gokhale finished the original in English and then worked with a translator for the Hindi version. In fact, the Hindi one was ready first. *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, published in 2005 is again a story of a Kumaoni Brahmin girl named Shakuntala. Grew up in mountain country near the riverside of the holy Ganga, she is a woman who has always seen herself aloof from her life. As a girl, she is eager to see the world, to wander with the freedom of birds and clouds and has thirst for glimpse of new lands, people, ideas etc... The novel deals with the theme of a woman’s desire for freedom and the philosophy of birth and rebirth. Based on Sanskrit myths and legends, the novel is truly Indian, written in English. Gokhale's Shakuntala stresses on the fact that having been named Shakuntala, after Kalidas’ heroine, she carried within herself the samskaras of abandonment.

In the novel, the very first time Shakuntala runs away from home, she is barely past childhood. She finds refuge in a cave with a woman who introduces her to the mysteries of the mother-goddess. She is told “in every one of her forms, the goddess is always Swamini, mistress of herself.” It is a valuable lesson, Shakuntala discovers, as she navigates the startling twists her life takes. *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* published in Hindi, under Penguin’s new Indian language publishing programme, as *Shakuntala: Smriti Jaal*. At the event, television personality Nalini Singh and designer Oroon Das read extracts from the book.
The story begins at Banaras; holy Kashi, the city of Shiva. Shakuntala, the protagonist, begins her story with the reference to Shakuntala of Kalidasa, the genius of Sanskrit literature:

_I was named Shakuntala after the heroine of Kalidasa’s classical drama. My namesake was not mortal like me, she was a nymph, daughter of celestial apsara Menaka who seduced the sage Vishwamitra and stole his seed. That Shakuntla had been deserted by her mother, and her birth-father Vishwamitra, and later by her husband Dushyanta—one could say that she carried within herself the samskaras of abandonment._

Shakuntala’s reincarnation tells her story with the legend as the backdrop. Modern Shakuntala compares herself and her condition continuously with the legendary-mythological Shakuntala. She is Shakuntala, a mythological character, the most beautiful creation of the versatile Kalidasa. Shakuntala was the daughter of Menaka, the paragon of beauty. Her mother stole the seed of the sage Vishwamitra. She was the shadow of her mother, very beautiful. One day, when King Dushyanta came to hunt in the forest, he was spellbound to see her charm. He fell in love with her and secretly married her. It was called as “Gandharv Vivah”. But after marrying her, Dushyanta returned to his palace, gifting her a ring as the evidence of his love. But the ring was lost which was the memento of their secret marriage and the misfortune started playing its role. When Shakuntala went to the palace along with her son, King Dushyanta disowned her. He had forgotten her completely and she was banished from the court. Along with her son, she passed through the difficult phases of life.
The modern Shakuntala lives on the ghats of Kashi, the most ancient of cities. Death lives here, forever mocking life and its passage. She asks the questions to herself, “What do we live for? Why do we die?”

To run away, always to run away from the self? Does the appetite for life become its own meal? Can the thirst of the river ever slake its waters? 144

Thus contemplating on her existence, she describes her childhood life. She was born and brought up in hill area of Himalayas, in a poor Brahmin family. Her father was a Vaidya. After his death, she was looked after by her widow mother who concentrated on her son more because he was an important pillar of the house. She neglected Shakuntala. This modern Shakuntala also was hungry for experiences. There were things she wanted to see, to know, to do. She wanted to fly in the air like a bird:

All day I roamed the hills, where the forests abound with deer and stag, where tigers and panthers prowl..........
But I loved the woods, and would return home reluctantly only when the shadows lengthened and the trees whispered like ghostly spirits. 145

She was thirsty for knowledge and travelling. She was interested in Holy Scriptures but her illiterate mother forbade her. Her mother used to say, “You wicked, heartless girl, were you born only to trouble and torment me?” 146

Therefore, Shakuntala hated everything about her mother and did not like her mother. She was married to Srijan, a rich man, the chief of fourteen villages, whose two wives had already died. But he loved Shakuntala. She was the third wife of Srijan, but everybody used to say that she was the most beloved. Srijan’s other wives were dead and had
not given him any children. But he was very happy with Shakuntala. He wanted Shakuntala to be like the star of Arundhati, the emblem of fidelity. He also organized Agnicayana ritual so that Shakuntala might bear son and he may have an heir to light his funeral pyre. But Shakuntala knew that there was more inside her than the limits of her experience dictated. Shakuntala followed her duties as a wife disregarding her real desire of travelling and getting more and more knowledge and experiences.

But a turning point in her life came when Srijan brought a woman home from his travels to work as Shakuntala’s maid and to follow her command. Her name was Kamlini, who looked down upon Shakuntala from a great height and viewed her with contempt. She was from Lichhvi, daughter of a headman of the town. This was the time when Shakuntala loved Srijan more than anyone she had ever loved. But later on she came to know that the so called dasi was the wife of Srijan. It proved a disaster in her life and their love had vanished.

She ponders over the preacher’s words that she heard in childhood by chance, ‘Arise. Commence a new life.’ It happened when they were returning from a village fair and on the way a Bhikkuni was preaching to a group-sangha of Buddhists. Srijan’s mother had renounced the world and she had become a Buddhist nun. Once Shakuntala expressed her desire and told the priest that she wanted to see the world and wanted to travel as the men folk do, “A man’s equal in bed, why could I not desire what men enjoyed; the freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and perhaps find…. something?” 147 But the priest answered that men were the masters of women. Namita presents her feminist approach here. The priest reminds her the ways of the world. The society believes that a father protects the daughter in childhood. The husband protects a woman
in youth and sons protect her in old age. So the priest further tells her that a woman is never fit for independence and that is the way of the world. Shakuntala can’t understand why it is so. She has some questions:

_I could never understand rituals, why some things had to be one way rather than another, why a twig on the sacrificial fire must point to the right rather than the left, why a woman who was menstruating was unclean...... who made these rules?_”

She feels that it is the way of the world to crush the desires and aspirations of a woman in all the possible ways. The novel has the sub theme of Vedanta religion versus Buddhism. It has simultaneous references of Buddhism and Lord Buddha. She feels that the Buddhist religion was better than the established religion which had no place for women, but the Buddhists inducted women as novices. There is throughout comparison between the Vedant religion and Buddhist religion in the novel. Gautama Buddha was a prince of the Sakya tribe. Perturbed by the problems of life and death, the sorrows of the human state, he decided to set forth as a homeless wanderer in search of the truth. The prince Gautama escaped his palace walls to see and taste the curious wonder that the world is. He was enlightened and became Buddha.

One day while wandering on the shore, Shakuntala saw a man whose looks were utterly carefree, reckless and happy. He was Nearchus, a Greek, horse trader. He was from the land of Yavanas. Shakuntala knew instinctively that he has traveled for long and through many worlds to be there. He smiled at her and she was enchanted by his smile. She was highly attracted by him. She felt that she could not go back where she had
come from. When he asked the name of Shakuntala, she replied that it was “Yaduri”. The word signified a woman’s yoni, a body part. This meeting proved a crucial turning point in the life of Shakuntala. Now her identity as shakuntala was lost and she was Yaduri. She abandoned both Srijan and Shakuntala. She thought that her thirst for travelling and wandering would be satisfied by this man. Thus, as she was hungry for experience, she deserted home and family for the company of a Greek horse merchant.

From here her life was completely different. She had crossed the boundary of the social norms and conventions assigned to the women by the society. But now she has assumed another identity, that of being ‘Yaduri’ and not ‘Shakuntala’. She started living with the Yavana and she surrendered herself to this new life. In the company of Nearchus she realized that world was a wild and amazing place. She was glad to be free and alone. Nearchus had seen and known so much and she travelled with him to many places. She enjoyed life and flew like a free bird. Sometimes she used to feel home sick. On the banks of Ganga, she felt an intense sense of home coming. But now the way to back was ceased. Gradually she sensed that her presence was becoming a burden on the freedom of Nearchus, “He held me roughly and slapped me on the face, his own face was twisted in confusion, and told me that he hated women, they were all sluts and slatterns to the core, they were not for love.” 149 But she was helpless. She knew well that now the society would not accept her once again with the same dignity and honour that she was given in the past. She had broken the so called confines of the society.

They lived in the outskirts of Kashi, in the quarters for the foreigners. There was organized a show of the classical play Abhijnana
Shakuntalam by Kalidasa. When Nearchus saw the classical play Abhijnana Shakuntalam acted on the stage. He was reminded of the same plot-story he heard in his own land. He said to Yaduri, ‘it is easy for men to forget women they meet,’ he said. ‘I confess it has happened to me as well, a few times in my life.’ Shakuntala had heard the play from the tutor of his brother Govinda who became a sage and was known as Gureshwara. Shakuntala narrates the play and condition of the Shakuntala of the play, ‘I could see the men in the audience nodding their heads in sympathy. Shakuntala stood before them, shamed, abandoned, discarded, and I suffered with her the consequences of her passion.’

Now this Yavana was passing through the same phase. He confessed that it happened to him as well, quite a few times in his life. King Dushyanta also did the same thing. He also seduced Shakuntala in the sacred grove and forgot her. The modern Shakuntala-Yaduri can be compared with the Shakuntala of Kalidasa. Even in the moment of disgrace, the original Shakuntala had the sanctity of a secret marriage. But the condition of Yaduri was not like her. While keeping the relation with Yavana, she did not have the sanction of marriage. She thought that she had betrayed everything. She was of the opinion that she had renounced her name and was no longer Shakuntala, only Yaduri, the unthinkable and unmentionable one.

After a lot of contemplation Yaduri at last left Nearchus and went to Kashi to live with the daughter in her womb. But unfortunately in an accident a bull threw her down and the infant died in the womb itself and Yaduri remained alone in death bed. A Buddhist nun took her to a shelter. Shakuntala knew that Death was approaching her, “To face death is not as difficult as one might imagine. The main point is that there is very little
time........ I had set out in search of a part of myself, and it had eluded me. I had not traded one life for another.”

Finally, the novel ends with Shakuntala’s redemption in this city of Moksha.

Focus on Condition of woman then – today:

The novel basically deals with feministic perspectives. Woman and her age-old condition in society are at the centre in the novel. With the passage of time everything has changed. The life style of the society also has changed. This changed world is completely different than the age in which lived the original Shakuntala. But the condition of woman in the changed world is one and the same. The plight of woman has not changed with the passing of the time. Still she is a victim of the social customs and traditions. Still she has to follow social norms. Still in rural areas, she is unclean and is tormented during her cycling period as Shakuntala had been:

That afternoon I was in the kitchen, searching for a sesame ladduka, when I felt the blood trickling down my legs. ‘Something had bitten me mother!’ I cried out fearfully........ ‘Have you no modesty, girl! She hissed. ‘Defiling the household fires when a holy man is visiting us! ....... You are a woman now, you had better understand what that implies!’ She dragged me to the low stoop beside the cowshed, pushing me in; she secured the makeshift door with a narrow log. I lay on a pile of hay and grass, wondering what I had done wrong. The blood was flowing furiously, and I felt possessed by blind, flapping panic.
Even today she is dependant on father, husband or son. Still today ‘Dushyanta’ is given the social sanction to keep relation with so many women at a time, but Shakuntala….? She is abandoned if she follows the way of ‘Dushyanta’. Today she is well-educated, more capable than male but still she has to tolerate and suffer. No doubt every generation should preserve culture and try to shape the future and coming generations. But it does not mean that while preserving the same, the dreams and desires of woman should be crushed under the heels of male dominance. Then only real peace will be established in the society in the real sense.

When Shakutala of Kalidasa secretly got married to Dushyanta, he had wives a plenty. She also accepted the situation. In those days a woman had to accept this. It was prevalent because it was accepted and sanctioned by the society. The apsara Menaka, her mother also seduced the great Sage Vishwamitra, but, then she was immortal and such deeds were permitted to nymphs and celestials. But what about a common woman? ‘A woman is like a cow fettered to a stump, my daughter,’ he said. ‘Her freedom is like the twine of duty that binds her to her household.’ 154 If she wants to live a free and desired life, she is always condemned. Here Srijan could also marry and remarry again and again. Society accepted it. But if Shakuntala wanted to live such a life, she had to become “Yaduri” a fallen woman.

When beaten and neglected by Nearchus she ponders on Kalidas’ Shakuntala and the unfortunate Narangi, her maid servant. After the death of her husband, her bother-in-law satisfied his every need through Narangi. Soon married to other woman he killed Narangi suspecting her of being in love with their neighbour. Shakuntala feels, “What is a woman’s desire?” It is like the waxing and waning of the moon,
incapable of constancy. I remembered the star of Arundhati, the symbol of fidelity....” A woman is always expected to be like the star of Arundhati, a symbol of fidelity. Those are the tales of women’s lives and sorrows and infidelities and deaths in modern age also.

Namita throws light on hoary same condition of woman in the society. This modern Shakuntala is the prototype of all women, right from ancient times to the modern. She has given the proof of her patience, tolerance and strength at every step. In every aspect of her life she has shone like gold. She had many ups and downs in her life. In fact people used to discuss her beauty and virtues. Those were the days when a woman had to depend on a man, may be in the form of a father, husband or son. She did not have an independent identity. Marriage and love needed social sanction. In fact the strong women lead to strong families and strong nations. Every age is the witness of the same. But what does a woman get from the society? Is a question to be asked?

**Established religion versus Buddhist religion:**

The novel presents the sub theme of Vedanta religion versus Buddhism. It has many references of Buddhists and Buddhism. Shakuntala feels that the Buddhist religion was better than the established religion which had no place for women. But the Buddhists inducted women as novices. There is throughout comparison between the Vedant and the Buddhist religion in the novel. A priest of Varna dharma condemns the Buddha:

> These were troubled times for Brahmin everywhere.  
> Govinda, parroting the gaunt temple priest who was his first guru, said that the deceitful faith of the Buddha had
usurped the true path of ancient religion. Disorder reigned, and kings, merchants, common folk all were overcome by the false piety of the new ways.  

Gureshvar, the priest also believes that the changes were sweeping the land. The nations of the East were in turmoil and the religion of the Sakyamuni, Gautam Buddha was destroying the foundation of the old faith. Shakuntala is helped by the Buddhist nuns. She is in a big hall before a big wall-painting of Buddha. She listens to the prayer of, **Buddham sharnam gachhami**……. When her death is very near the nun asks her to submit to Buddha for redemption. She says to Shakuntala, *Sister, accept the Buddha before you die, renounce the world and yield to him!*  

The novel also narrates the historical event of Ratnavali’s letter to Gautama Buddha asking him to teach her the path of Dhamma. The novel also has many historical indications. It sometimes seems a mingling of history, religion and mythology. It refers the medieval kingdoms of Kannauj and Maha Koshala. Namita makes a satire on the then caste system of varna dharma observed even during wars:

*I was the only woman in the group. The other travellers maintained a courteous distance. They would not eat with us, for the caste rules of the varna dharma forbade them from dining with mlechhas and impure foreigners. ‘I can not understand the ways of your people,’ Nearchus complained. ‘Even in battle, they continue to cook separately, each soldier tending to his own fire pot for fear of caste pollution. Who can win a war like that?’*
V. Pathak and U Dabir comments on *Shakuntala*:

*Namita Gokhale, the leading novelist, is drunk with the sound of words and that it makes her novels a hypnotic read. Shakuntala is the proof of same. It is an intriguing interplay of history and myth, suffused with profound metaphysical queries about the self.*

**Characterization:**

Shakuntala is the protagonist and the central figure of the novel. The novel revolves around her life. The story of modern Shakuntala is just like the legendary Shakuntala. She is also caring, lovable, beautiful and dashing. Shakuntala’s character is explained through her thoughts, emotions and her deeds. But she is a tragic character. In the end of the novel, Shakuntala seeks redemption in the city of Moksha.

Shakuntala stresses that having been named after Kalidasa’s heroine; she carries within herself the samskaras of abandonment. Shakuntala is a woman who’s always seen herself aloof from her life. As a girl, she wants to wander with the freedom of birds and clouds. She desires to see the world and travel as the men folk do. She represents the condition of woman since old days. Shakuntala wants to gain knowledge and study scriptures but she is not allowed because she is a woman.

She marries a much older man, Srijan. He was a headman and his two wives had died. Shakuntala becomes his third wife. But their marriage is soon troubled by the appearance of a handmaiden. Shakuntala then moves on a straw in the ocean of her compulsions. From a wife, she now is little more than a whore to a Greek traveller. She now becomes
Yaduri and gives up her old identity. They reach Kashi, the destination Shakuntala has always ached to arrive at, but now they have to stay in the foreigners’ quarter. Finally, even her lover Yavana is also fed up with her and she is neglected by him. Modern Shakuntala is not helped by any celestial mother, Menaka. She is pregnant and eager to give birth to her daughter. But she meets with tragic accident and finally she also dies in the holy city of Kashi. Anita Nair in *Book Reviews* writes about Shakuntala:

> Namita Gokhale’s *Shakuntala* reminds me of Alistair Cooke’s description of Marilyn Monroe: "a woman of tragic integrity". *Shakuntala*, the eternal outsider. The little girl hovering by the door as her brother is being taught grammar. The wife, who doesn’t belong. The whore ruled by shame. Eventually *Shakuntala* seeks redemption. And it is here that I have a grouse with the story line. Almost lovingly written all through, in its finale, the story suddenly acquires the leanings of a morality tale.... *Shakuntala*—forlorn, bewildered woman of tragic integrity—deserves better. 160

Srijan is Shakuntala’s husband. He is a typical representative of the hill folk. He is a rich mahasamant of the village. Shakuntala is his third wife, previous two wives had died. He is a loving husband. He represents patriarchal society of medieval age. He expects his wife to be faithful to him but he himself has illicit relation with their maid servant Kamlini. He is a hypocrite man. He is anxious to have a son to light his funeral pyre after death. He organizes Agnicayana rituals so that his wife may bear children. After Shakuntala’s disappearance he feels grief and anxiety. He
tries to search her in all directions. But he is a very practical man he finds comforts in Kamlini after Shakuntla’s departure. He plays a minor role in novel.

Nearchus is a Yavana. He is a Greek horse trader, a mlechha. He is very handsome and attractive. Just at first sight Shakuntala is tempted by his charming personality. He is a man of trade and travelling. He has travelled through, Egypt, Magna Grecia, Persia, Kabul and many other places. He is passionately in love with Shakuntala-Yaduri. He takes her with him. But he also proves a typical man simply interested in sexual pleasures with her. He is fed up with her and begins to ill-treat her in the end.

Kamlini is maidservant to Shakutala brought by Srijan from his tour. She is from the village of Nandkot, near Licchvi. She is daughter of a headman. Shakuntala is jealous of her mysterious dasi. Later on she comes to know that Kamlini was the kept of Srijan. After Shakuntala’s disappearance she becomes Srijan’s wife.

Gureshwara is a scholar and a mendicant. He is elder brother of Shakuntala. He became a sage in his youth. He is representative of the Vedant religion. He has travelled a lot. He is a minor character in the novel.

Narangi is a maidservant in foreigner’s quarters. She is an unfortunate woman. Her innocent husband commits suicide for a false accuse. After his death Narangi has to reluctantly share her brother-in-law’s bed. He marries another woman but he murders Narangi suspecting her illicit relations with their neighbour. She is a minor character.
Plot:

Namita Gokhale's novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* has conventional plot. It has well structured plot. It is divided into 20 chapters plus chapter 0 before the first chapter and chapter 00 after the last chapter. The story narrates Shakuntala’s childhood life in hill village on river bank of Ganga, her marriage with Srijan, her desire for travel and knowledge, her elopement with the Yavana, her travelling experiences, her sufferings and finally her death in Kashi. The story seems rather fascinating, revolving around the restlessness and destined turns of the woman.

Setting:

All of Namita’s works seems to be stuck with her personality as a Kumaoni Brahmin girl. In Gokhale's world, the misty mountains, rivers and forests forever remain as eternal backdrop. Here the protagonist shakuntala is born and brought up in hill village of Himalayas on river bank of Ganga. The story begins at Banaras; holy Kashi, the city of Shiva and it also ends there:

*Banaras; holy Kashi. The city of Shiva. The faithful arrive here in the hope of departure. To die in Shiva’s is to escape the remorseless cycle of reincarnation, to get away for eternity, to be rid of it. Death lives here, mocking life and its passage.*

Kashi, with its medieval description and religious environment is like a living character in the novel.
Language:

Namita has used the same simple and natural English like other novels. She uses a few inevitable Indian-Sanskrit words, they are kumkum, mahasamanta, nagrik, yajman, shamshan vairagys, vastu-shastra, havan-kunda, linga, yoni etc. There are many references of Hindu gods and goddesses like Shiva, Vishnu, Raka- goddess of the moon night, Kaali and Ambika. The novel is full of mythological allusions. It has reference of the seven goddesses-the Sapta Matrika-Brahmni, Maheshwari, Kaumari, Vaishnavi, Varahi, Indrani and Narsimhi. It also narrates the well known myth of Shankarachrya’s philosophical encounter with Mandana Misra and his wife Bharati and the public debate on religion. The other myths are of Lord Varuna, Shiva-Shakti, Menaka and Vishwamitra, Narada’s transformation into a female by Lord Vishnu to explain the power of Maya’s illusion, hell and the myth of Vaitarani-the river of death.

It is also throbbing with the contemporary superstitions, customs, conventions and ways of life. The narration of caravan is wonderful. There are many descriptions of omens like throbbing of left eye for man and right eye for woman. It has narrations of various rituals like Upanayana Samskar, Agnicayana ritual-for fertility of a barren woman, Sapatvasna-the invocation to destroy rival wives, rod of Visvavasu-three nights’ separation after marriage to avoid the lusty Gandharva’s claim etc.

Hindu philosophy and the principle of Karma and rebirth have many references in the novel. Moreover, the novel has many allusions of Vedas, Sanskrit myths and Sanskrit literature. The symbols and images of
caged bird-mina, a baby monkey with collar and a leash, a kite, and the black buck chasing the chariot make the narrations interesting and suggestive. Even the new name accepted by Shakuntala ‘Yaduri’, itself is symbolic. It signifies a ‘yoni’, a woman’s sexual organ, as Yaduri is fallen a woman.

**Narrative Technique:**

In this novel also Namita has adopted the first person singular narration technique. Shakuntala, the protagonist narrates her life and experiences and her past life. The novel begins with the narration of her stay at Kashi, “I remember my first sight of Kashi: funeral fires blaze on the stepped ghats, inverting on the broken mirror of the waves.” The descriptions of seasons, hills, forests, nights, village fairs and rituals are fantastic. Kashi, with its medieval descriptions becomes like a character in the novel. It is marvelously narrated with its age-old connection with Moksha and the funeral pyres. As usual in Namita’s novels, this novel also has many narrations of love-making and sexual intercourse. But they are natural like a part of human instincts and needs.
Notes and References:

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5. Ibid., p.83.
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7. Ibid., p.104.
8. Ibid., p.48.
9. Ibid., p.100.
10. Ibid., p.120.
11. Ibid., p.137.
12. Ibid., p.142.
13. Ibid., p.33.
16. Ibid., p.48.
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18. Ibid., p.137.
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21. Ibid., p.117.
24. Ibid., p.44.

28. Ibid., p.01.
29. Ibid., p.120.
30. Ibid., p.03.
31. Ibid., p.147.
32. Ibid., p.54.
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34. Ibid., p.158.
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37. Ibid., p.05.
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41. Ibid., p.153.
42. Ibid., p.154.
43. Ibid., p.196.
44. Ibid., p.54.
45. Ibid., p.55.
46. Ibid., p.52.
47. Ibid., p.10.
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49. Ibid., p.05.
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58. Ibid., p.40.
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62. Ibid., p.66.
63. Ibid., p.56.
64. Ibid., p.77.
65. Ibid., p.72.
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67. Ibid., p.111.
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79. Ibid., p.24.
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82. Ibid., p.35.
83. Ibid., p.37.
84. Ibid., p.42-43.
85. Ibid., p.16.
86. Ibid., p.41.
87. Ibid., p.105.
88. Ibid., p.15.
89. Ibid., p.16.
90. Ibid., p.17.
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98. Ibid., p.196.
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100. Ibid., p.207.
101. Ibid., p.55.
102. Ibid., p.110.
103. Ibid., p.01.
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105. Ibid., p.83.
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122. Ibid., p.64.
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130. Ibid, p.32.
131. Ibid., p.20-21.
132. Ibid., p.31.
133. Ibid., p.65.
134. Ibid., p.24.
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148. Ibid., p.42.
149. Ibid., p.130.
150. Ibid., p.149.
151. Ibid., p.148.
152. Ibid., p.194.
153. Ibid., p.31.
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