Chapter Three

Quest for Self-Identity

. . . the quest for self represents “the syndrome of growth” as opposed to “the syndrome of decay” and frees man to act with full awareness and freedom in a socially “productive” way with ‘love’ for others to further the growth of his inner being.

(Erich 132)

The self is the subject of one’s own experience phenomena like perception, emotion, and thought. The self has been studied extensively by philosophers and psychologists and the concept of ‘self’ is central to many religions. Indian philosophy is based on the principles of transcendence of the senses and spirituality. It believes in soul and tries to analyse its aspects through an evaluation of the ‘self.’ ‘Know thyself’, the motto of Greek philosopher Socrates, stresses the importance of understanding about one’s mind and soul. The true self of a person is hidden behind his hypocritical self. Every man is leading two lives. One is a life that a person leads outwardly, and the other is hidden within himself. Pointing out the dual nature of man, Aurobindo remarks:

So too we have a double psych entity in us, the surface – desire soul which works in our vital cravings, our emotions, aesthetic faculty and mental seeking for power, knowledge and happiness, and a subliminal psychic entity, a purer power of light, love, joy
and refined essence of being which is our true soul behind the outer form of psychic existence we so often dignify by the name. (Aurobindo 220)

Everyone needs to get guidance from the self. Everyone must know themselves before knowing about others. Study of self is more important than study of mankind, and it is in fact the first step to study and understand humanity. Lord Krishna urges Arjuna in the Bhagavad Gita, “know then yourself; know your true self to be God and one with the self of all others; know your soul to be portion of God. Live in what you know; live in the self, live in your supreme spiritual nature, be united with God and Godlike” (Aurobindo 101-02).

According to Hindu philosophy, Atman means inner self or soul. Hindus believe that in order to get liberation, a human being must acquire knowledge about self. Hindu philosophy preaches that one’s true self (Atman) is united with the universal self (Brahman). The realisation of truth about self or soul leads a man towards the path of Dharma (righteousness). Hinduism describes Dharma as the path of righteousness that makes one’s life fruitful and happy. Namita Gokhale’s female characters wish to make their life fruitful by their quest for realisation of self.

The word “identity” is paradoxical in itself, meaning both sameness and distinctiveness. There are various factors that either make up or control the self-identity of a person or an individual. An individual’s identity incorporates the personality, looks, fears and beliefs. Culture is one of the important factors that affect the self-identity of an individual. The environment around an individual can also affect the personality, values as well as beliefs of an individual.
The environment includes friends, family members, and the people around him which has an impact upon the life of an individual. If the environment gives negative impact, the individual will have low self-esteem. Regarding self-identity, Madhu Kishwar in her article “Off the Beaten Track, Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women” remarks:

Every human being is the product of many crosscutting, multi-layered identities. For instance, a vital part of my identity is defined by gender. But I am also [among other things] a daughter, a sister, a college teacher, a writer, a Punjabi, a Hindu, a resident of a particular neighborhood, and citizen of India. Most identities [E.g. those based on nationality, religion, language] are acquired or mutable. A few are fixed and immutable, such as biological parentage. Identity based on native land, village or locale where a person is born and reared are also fixed. (250)

The quest for self-identity forms the underlying theme of most of the major novels in Indian writing in English. ‘Who are they?’, ‘Where are they going?’, ‘If life is a journey, then what is their destination?’ are the eternal questions confusing the Indian scholars and pundits. A sense of stability, security and belongingness is necessary for an individual’s happiness. When the sense of harmony and the sense of belongingness are lost for some reason, man suffers from feelings of insecurity, anxiety and loss of confidence. The loss of identity makes a person very pathetic. As a result, his voice becomes an alto in a chorus. Dennis Wrong rightly suggests that the terms ‘identity’ and ‘identity crisis’ have become the “semantic beacons of our time”, for these “verbal emblems express
our discontent with modern life and modern society” (12). He also observes that
the term ‘identity’ has become, “a value-charged, almost a charismatic term, with
its secure achievement regarded as equivalent to personal salvation” (12). When
an individual finds himself in the fullness of his capacity, having satisfied all his
needs, and plays active roles in society, his identity may be said to have been
established. Erikson remarks, “... identity is a configuration arising out of
‘constitutional given,’ idiosyncratic libidinal needs, effective defenses, successful
sublimations and consistent roles” (116).

The struggle for existence bothers the life of every individual in this
modern world. Every person tries to give meaning to his birth in this world. Their
life journey centers on the quest for the ‘self’. The journey involves numerous
obstacles, the challenges and failures. Carolyn Herilbrun’s book Reinventing
Womanhood illustrates some current confusions about female identity in
literature. Through the centuries, Indian woman has carried the family burden.
She has to work a lot for her husband, children, and family. In the Indian society,
she is given a secondary status and is treated as an inferior being. In Indian
English literature, women writers constitute a major segment. These women
writers struggle to establish their own identity. They have to fight with the
archetypal social order and codes to establish their sphere. Sandra Gilbert and
Susan Gubar find the woman’s quest for self-definition as the underlying plot of
the nineteenth century writing by women. Elaine Showalter sees “self-discovery,
a search for identity, as the main theme of women’s literature since 1920” (13).

Women undergo a tough journey throughout their life. “Indian woman’s
identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by the societal and cultural
norms of a practicable familial structure” (Chandra 22). The reason behind the
dependence of woman on man is the archetypal and traditional image created by
the society. It is aptly remarked by Prasana Sree that an, “Indian woman usually
does not bother about her own personal happiness and comfort as she addresses
herself to the task of making others happy and upholding traditions and
conventions” (77). The Indian women’s quest for self-identity increased
tremendously after independence.

Indo-English women writers focus on the problems that women face in
their life. Writers like Anita Desai, Mulk Raj Anand, Kamala Markandeya, and
Bharati Mukherjee focus on the theme of quest for identity. Mulk Raj Anand’s
*Lalu Triology*, Markandeya’s *Some Inner Fury*, and most of the novels of Anita
Desai, Bharati Mukherjee, Shashi Deshpande, Manju Kapur and Arun Joshi have
quest for self-identity as their major theme.

Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order
to establish an identity that is not imposed by a patriarchal society. Critics
believe that the psyche or self of an author is revealed through his/her literary
works. Nayantara Sahgal uses the quest for identity theme as the nucleus of *Rich
Like Us*. A good example of the western educated female protagonist’s quest is seen in Gita Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*. A woman loses her real
self by obeying to the patriarchal norms and codes insisted in her family and
society. She does not realise about her skills, strengths and power. She knows
only to perform her duty as a daughter, wife and mother. Tilo in Chitra Banerjee
Divakaruni’s *The Mistress of Spices* holds an inner strength. Her power of
intuition and later her power of healing cures many people, but fails to provide a
relief from her isolated and barren life. She is bound within the boundaries of tradition. She fails to realise her own self. When she loses the bond, she is able to realises her true ‘identity’ and finds love and peace in her life. Thus it is clear that unless one realises one’s self, there is no peace or harmony in their life.

The novels of Namita Gokhale are concerned mainly with the theme of searching for self-identity. The readers can easily identify the reflections of author’s own self in her novels. The writer is leading a very difficult life. She was suffering from cancer of the uterus when she finished her first novel, Paro: Dreams of Passion. She uses writing as a tool to escape from her personal worries and this is an oft-used technique of most of the writers too. According to Namita Gokhale, “that’s true, Yeats wrote about ‘the days vanity, the nights remorse! Writers lead very internalized lives, and even if they are fairly gregarious, as I am, they want to be alone somewhere inside them’ ” (qtd. in Humra Quraishi). She has created female protagonists of flesh and blood who are courageous, bold and sensitive in their approach towards life. They do not hide anything from others. They are caught between two forces, the traditional reality that is around them and the inner reality that is within their heart. Namita Gokhale endeavours to establish woman as an individual who is free from traditional constraints and redefines her identity in accordance with the changed social codes in the modern society.

Namita Gokhale’s novels reveal her wide range of experience that she encountered throughout her life. She vividly depicts the tensions, complexities, joys and sorrows of her female protagonists. She writes only to secure the sense of self-individuation and to give salvation to the readers. The female characters
undergo moments of excruciating mental torture and for them, marriages are an experience of conflict, frustration, and a long period of stress. Their anguish and stress lead them towards exploration of self-identity. Regarding her real identity, Namita Gokhale describes in an interview with Humra Quraishi, “‘My way of looking as the world remains trapped in that primary identity’ once you start loving the hills, they hold to you. I would love to be careful, fun-loving person but I suspect I’m more of an anxious, irritable sort of person in private.”

Various external and internal factors affect the psyche of female protagonists in Gokhalian fiction. The external factors are betrayal, loss of virginity, economic inequalities, and social boundaries like caste, creed and discrimination. The internal factors comprise quest for self-identity, disillusionment in love, great expectations, and aspirations.

*Paro: Dreams of Passion* is a fine texture of quest for self-awareness. The theme of the novel is women’s search for creativity to do something new. The novel describes isolation and suffering in the life of all characters. Paro and Priya long and search for self-identity and their life is the unsolved mystery. Though they have satisfied their material needs by using money, their emotional needs remain unsatisfied.

Paro’s quest for passion, fame, wealth and publicity forms the heart of the fiction. Paro is a child of middle-aged parents who is rather a “bother in their well-ordered lives” (*PDP* 30). She spends her childhood in the hostel of a remote public school. She is raped by her art master while in her teens, and this experience leaves an indelible scar on her psyche. In her quest for self-identity, she hurts and controls men whom she meets. In her every encounter with a new
male, she lets herself go for a conquest and relentlessly uses the tactical advantage of her sex to obtain a victory, which often proves to be pyrrhic. Through the weapon of sex, she attempts to overcome her psychological suffering. Lynne Henderson says:

> Rape denies that you are a person, that you exist. In contrast, love making affirms your existence, and undesired sex at least does not completely deny your personhood. . . . Women experience total helplessness and obliteration during rape. When a woman’s existence just does not matter, intercourse becomes rape. (193)

Paro is an educated and economically independent woman who attempts to search her identity throughout her life. Her struggle leads her to discover the hidden strength within herself. She knows that illicit, extra-marital relationships with many men will not be accepted in Indian society, but she does not care about these restrictions. She has seen her husband’s extra-marital relationships with other women and this hurts her badly. She leaves B.R. and as a part of her divorce settlement, she receives money and property from him. She is not ready to live silently with B.R. After breaking the relationship with B.R., she develops relationship with Avinendra (Lenin) who is young enough to be her son. Once when Paro finds B.R. with Priya, she “. . . spat, with force and accuracy, into his [B.R] startled face. B.R. was devastated. He shrank, crumpled, and did not even pretend to recover” (PDP 43). This spat on B.R. is her revenge on him through which she wants him to realise his sins.

Paro thinks that B.R. is fully responsible for shattering her dreams of happiness and thereby, sets herself free from the loveless trap. She realises that
she cannot change things in her life. She has to continue the journey in the same path that she has chosen. After breaking the marriage bond which is considered to be holy in the orthodox Hindu society, she enjoys life with many men. After some years, she is tired of the mechanical existence. She yearns to find her true self, and in her quest she moves towards the theatre. She is taking a role of Clytemnestra in a play about which she says to Priya, “oh, I’m doing it in an attempt to, you know, find myself. I mean, I haven’t spent the last umpteen years fucking the men in my life, and getting fucked myself in the process” (109). She searches her identity while looking at the mirror, “Who are you, Paro? I asked myself. And I knew I didn’t know. So I started looking for myself again, deciding to follow wherever my search took me” (109). She compares her life with the life of Clytemnestra, and realises that this male dominated social network has degenerated her. She explains this to Priya:

This Clytemnestra is a passionate and strong woman, with this creepy husband so she kills him . . . it’s all these male types, because of the social framework you know, all the fucking freedom of men, and none for women; so she has no other outlet for her frustrated intelligence. She’s a very enigmatic character . . . just like me. (PDP 111)

Unfortunately, the society has outlined and defined some constraints for women. In order to attain their estimated goal of liberated self-hood, they often employ strategies to overcome their insecurity, uselessness, and fear. They often use sex as a tool to fight against conventional boundaries and constraints, “To prevent an inner life that has no useful purpose from sinking into nothingness, to
assert herself against given conditions which she bears rebelliously, to create a world other than that in which she fails to attain her being, she must resort to self-expression” (Beauvoir 292).

Realising the failure of her revolt and emotional solitude, Paro denies a fulfilling life to herself and destroys her own life. Immobilised in renunciation and cynicism, she is not able to assert her will positively and suffers from finding no real purpose in her life. Her relationship with ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur a test cricketer is a declaration of her individual independence. Her romantic affection for Lenin is a conquest for her attention seeking and emotion-starved self. Her servile infatuation with Shambhu Nath Mishra is understood as a loud testimony to the psychological bondage of women. Even Priya is taken aback by the behaviour:

The whole thing puzzled me. I could not understand the situation. I could well ascribe the worst possible motives to her, and suspect her of having a liaison with such an influential figure for all the implicit and unsuitable gains. She could derive from her position as his mistress. What left me totally stunned was her absolute and unconditional emotional surrender. (PDP 81-82)

Paro’s emotional surrender receives the typical masculine response. Mishraji does not like “such smothering devotion” and “wants to get rid of her” (84). She attempts to continue this senseless romance, telephoning him incessantly, “trying always to dodge the phalanx of secretaries and officials surrounding him, trying constantly to be with him” (PDP 82). She undergoes
humiliation of begging and kneeling, even after beaten by the wife of Shambhu Nath Mishra.

Paro is so ego-centric that, “she loved her body and cried like a baby at the slightest physical hurt” (32) and “she would talk on, compulsively, about herself, always herself” (29). She has greedy vitality and vanity. The narrator observes, “Her fatal flaw was vanity. She loved self-dramatization. I sometimes wondered what she would be like, alone in an empty room; whether she would simply go limp and collapse, or posture and practice for her next encounter” (PDP 33).

Paro marries young and energetic European Loukas Leoros. But he is not able to satisfy her and after a short period of time, she returns to India. Her liaison with Lenin is reestablished after her arrival to India. She meets with a car accident in her drive with Lenin and is injured badly. Leoros and his assistant Tony come to see her in the hospital. The presence of Leoros and Tony tortures Paro a lot in the hospital. She feels very frustrated as Priya points out:

I can see her, staring moodily out of the panes, which had misted up in the winter cold. It was raining softly outside, and the cars on the street were wet blurry streaks of light. I think I saw tears in her eyes. Her hair tumbled over her face, she sat hunched up, stony-faced, yet somehow more defenseless than I had ever seen her.

(PDP 166)

In the end, Paro realises that a world earned through sex, glamour, wine, jewels, and food is not the real world. The world of her is only maya (illusion). Though she declares herself to be independent, her attempts of suicide indicate...
her lack of confidence and hope in life. She carries hollowness within herself. She realises her mistakes and repents for the part she has played throughout her life. By the end of the novel, Paro accepts her ex-husband B.R. Priya observes, “‘Bubu,’ Paro screamed, and sheathed him in a joyous embrace. I couldn’t even see if he was resisting, for she wrapped him as completely as a banana skin. He emerged, smothered but smiling, and planted a decorous kiss on her excited cheek” (PDP 155).

Paro’s yearning for freedom is fulfilled by her insanity like Pecola’s abnormality in Toni Morrison’s The bluest Eye. Pecola from her childhood yearns for freedom and for white beauty. She is the representative of Black Americans. She is abused a lot even by her step-father. At last, she attains the thing she longs through her insanity. Being insane, she believes and hopes that she has got the freedom and beauty that she yearned for. Paro becomes insane because of her depression and neurosis which drives her to cut her wrist to welcome death. Her death signifies the release of her soul.

In the case of Paro, the quest for identity does not end in a positive note because she commits suicide. She dies in the struggles of creating a new identity for women in the tyrannical conventional society. In the words of Macquarrie her desire is “not simply the termination of life, not just an event that comes along at the end of the story, but itself enters very much into the story” (196). Her death is her attempt to revolt against the traditional models, conventions, and ritual practices. Her death affects all the characters in the novel. Priya, “couldn’t imagine a world without her” (PDP 167). Leoros takes the help of his psychiatrist to recover from the shock of her death. Suresh is not able to utter a word, locks
himself in his room and takes a lot of “tranquilizers” (PDP 168). Everyone wants her to be alive.

Priya represents women who search for identity. Priya’s quest for identity is the evaluation of the whole upper middle class society’s search for meaningful and liberated identity. She works in the company of B.R. All the female employees admire and worship B.R. by thinking that “he was a real dreamboat” (1). Priya loves B.R. passionately and devotes herself mentally and physically to him, but B.R. marries Paro. The presence of Paro is always hateful to all the female employees including Priya herself. The marriage of B.R. shocks all the girls especially Priya as she mentions, “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 a vindication” (PDP 3).

Priya cannot make up her mind to attend B.R.’s marriage function. But later in order to have a look at Paro, she decides to attend the party in the office. She changes her appearance, and hair style, because she wants to look new and moreover fill the void in her mind by projecting herself beautiful. Paro too looks very beautiful. She is straightforward and proud in her activities and in her manner of conversation with others. B.R. introduces Priya to Paro as the most beautiful and intelligent girl in the office. Priya’s quest for self-identity begins at this juncture and she desires to get an attractive personality. She dreams of beauty, grace and harmony. She works as a typist in the beginning, but after the marriage of Anita, she is promoted as B.R.’s secretary. Being a secretary, her strength increases, which Priya describes with a feeling of revenge:
B.R. elected me from the typists’ pool to become his secretary. So I bade goodbye to Mary and Ivy and became one of the twice-born. I had to do the flowers in his office (I bought a book on Ikebana) and I had to answer his calls. She [Paro] would telephone him every fifteen minutes on any possible pretext, and often he would instruct me to tell he was not in, or that he was busy in meeting. Those would be my fleeting moments of golden revenge; I would picture her, thwarted and vexed, and bask in my power.

(\textit{PDP} 15)

Once when Priya returns back home, the atmosphere of her house is completely changed. Her mother tells her about a marriage proposal which came through her sister (mother’s), and the bridegroom “was a lawyer in Delhi and from a prosperous and decent family” (20). Her marriage is arranged and no one in the office believes that it is an arranged marriage. Suresh, her husband, is certainly good and caring and he tells Priya all his hopes, dreams, and goals. Priya praises her husband’s good nature as follows, “Now that I was his wife, he wanted to ensure for me every possible happiness that he could provide” (\textit{PDP} 21).

Priya presents a different aspect of a woman’s voyage towards self-identity. She opts for arranged marriage as it is the only institution which can provide socio-economic and emotional security to a woman. Simone de Beauvoir has very rightly commented:

\begin{quote}
Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society. It is still true that most women are married or have been or plan to
\end{quote}
be, or suffer from not being. The celibate woman is to be explained and defined with reference to marriage, whether she is frustrated, rebellious, or even indifferent in regard to that institution. (292)

Priya accompanies Suresh on his trip to Bombay to deal with a case. There they see Paro with a handsome young man. There, they come to know the fact that Paro got separated from her husband and has an affair with ‘Bucky’ Bhandpur, from a princely family and has a small son through ‘Bucky’. Paro faces many legal problems regarding her divorce and problems related to her tenants. Hearing all matters, Priya is very happy with a sense of triumph, “I felt a certain complacent pleasure at the thought that it was now she who needed my husband” (PDP 29).

Priya always seeks Paro’s reflection in her to get the place of Paro in the life of B.R. She desires to be Paro by smoking, wearing fashionable dresses, and drinking. She behaves to be very bold and unique with Suresh to preserve her individuality. But he does not like her behaviour and he wants her to be a traditional woman. She accepts this because she is more practical. She adapts the style of a typical Indian wife as Suresh wants her to be, “I realized that my only weapon in an indifferent world was Suresh, and I decided to groom him patiently until my ministrations bore dividends” (PDP 24).

Priya happens to stay in Bombay to look after her pregnant bhabhi (sister-in-law) and knowing this B.R. calls Priya in the absence of his new wife Bubbles. Bubbles is out to Poona to meet her parents. Priya and B.R. both indulge in love making. Priya secretly meets B.R. in a restaurant every evening and in one such
evening, Paro sees B.R. and Priya together. Paro discloses the matter to Suresh. When Priya comes back to Delhi, Suresh asks several questions to Priya. Being a trustworthy and truthful husband, he tries to make Priya understand, “I trust you absolutely. But even then it is not good for women from good families to be talked about” (PDP 44).

Priya and Suresh lead a happy married life and their happiness assumes a special shape, when they come to know that soon they would have a child. She knits sweaters, shawls, booties and stitches nappies for her unborn child. Suresh is very caring towards Priya anticipating the birth of his first child. Priya describes her happiness in this way, “Everywhere I was followed by the genii of Suresh’s solicitude. Suddenly, our life attained mutuality. After all, I was carrying our child, whom we would bring up and who would inherit our goods and look after us in our old age” (68). But her happiness did not last for long. After the abortion, nothing is normal in the life of Suresh and Priya. Suresh is extremely busy with his routines and responsibilities. Priya is alienated, lonely, and felt a deep sense of depression. So, she has joined a part-time job in Oberoi Hotel. Suresh is very upset by the decision of Priya, “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?” (PDP 100). For Priya, the job is an escape from her empty life. In this connection, Reimenschender in his article “Alienation in the novels of Anand” remarks, “If man is alienated from his own nature of his fellow beings a fact most obvious in the existence of antagonistic classes within a society” (96).

Priya is careful to keep her marriage intact, despite her infatuation with B.R. She rarely displays her real self to her husband. She is watchful to convey
the image of an ideal wife, ideal cook, ideal housekeeper and ideal host. Her close friend Mary’s letter gives her an awareness that “in some distant world, people were normal, friendly, relaxed, happy, cheerful. . . .” (PDP 120). Her marriage fails to provide her the promised happiness. It has destroyed her psyche and doomed her life.

Priya tries to transform her loneliness into a meaningful life and also to redefine her own identity. She attempts to overcome her alienation from her husband by writing her past on papers. She pours down all her memories of her past in those papers. She writes about her relationship with B.R, Suresh and Paro. Through her writing career, she realises that she also has an ability to do something like Paro. She criticises Paro and Suresh badly in her novel. She is not to be considered as an extrovert like Paro. As she mentions, “Paro was indeed a love-sick animal if I ever saw one” (85). Priya comments:

Paro was a child of privilege. I couldn’t remember her ever passionately wanting anything; she took the luxury and adulteration that surrounded her for granted, as part of the perks. But now, with a despondent Lenin by her side, she had her first experience of deprivation, of the indignities of need. She didn’t know about queues, and ration cards, and bus routes; and I don’t think she even tried to learn, she only shut out that world, slugging down gin after gin and surviving in stubborn hope. (PDP 72)

While writing a reply to Mary’s letter, she thinks about writing a diary. Writing provides a solace from her lonely life. The journey of Priya starts on the day when she has started writing her diary. The diary in which she writes about
“passion, boredom, vanity and jealousy” provides way to dilute her stress and burden (144). She writes, “The letter probably saved me from a nervous breakdown. I wrote and rewrote torrents of letters, and predictably, posted none. But I started a sort of confessional, a diary, which eventually became this thing, this novel’’ (PDP 120). The book is her confession and catharsis. As Ferheiz Bharucha says:

Namita Gokhale 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. This identity could be that of self as artist, in the case of Paro or a culturally impost role identity, as wife, mother, or novelist for Priya. (68)

Priya’s attraction towards B.R. is revealed through her murmurs “Bubu, darling” while asleep. These words surprise Suresh, but he cannot connect B.R. with Priya still he gets angry. He comes to know the truth after reading her diary. Priya admits her affair and says that she has never loved Suresh and, “every word that I have written about you is the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. B.R. loves me and he’s loved me for years, much before he even knew you, in fact” (PDP 125).

Suresh is very much irritated at her reply which makes him to send her out of the house. Priya breaks her relationship with Suresh and goes to her brother Atul’s house. In the airport, she is very sad and dejected, “I felt alone, and not at all confident actually. I felt nothing only numbed, and trusting only to memories of instincts and response to get me through” (131). In her brother’s home, Priya enjoys the company of her nieces and nephews and thinks,
“I wondered what it must be like to have children. Perhaps my marriage might even have been saved if I had children” (134). In Bombay, she has ample time in her hands and starts to read a lot of books. Her sister-in-law, Dolly does not want her to be there because her father is coming to stay with them. So, Atul pleads with Priya to move to Andheri flat, their parental home. There is no one in the Andheri flat, because mother passed away a few years ago, she is alone and regrets for her faults and wants to go back to her home. She describes her condition, “I didn’t eat for two days after that. I just lay on bed, doing nothing, waiting for the doorbell to ring. I was sure that somebody or something would miraculously intervene to save me from this living death. I was engulfed by insecurity and terror” (PDP 139).

Priya sometimes travels back to her past in search of a meaningful life in the present. The process of going back to the past signifies her psychic quest. To make a good relationship with Suresh and others, she adjusts and sacrifices many things. Every human has the potential for self-realisation. The realisation of self cannot be accomplished in a single day. Gradually, the realisation dawns on Priya. The inward journey starts for Priya when she is alone. She remembers the past and realises that she can no longer be the same with B.R. She remarks, “I am an Indian woman” and for her “husband” is her “God” (137). She makes several calls to Suresh. On one such occasion, Paro takes the phone and Priya puts the receiver down. She then writes many letters to Suresh. At last, she speaks to Suresh through phone and asks, “Can I return home please?” Suresh also responds positively and says, “If that is how you feel, perhaps we can give a try again” (PDP 151). After separation, Priya realises her true love towards Suresh.
Priya’s home coming shows her realisation of herself as an ideal Indian married woman. Priya’s quest starts from B.R.’s office as his beloved, then as Suresh’s wife, a sister, a sister-in-law, aunt, friend, mistress, and as a mother, but her quest ends nowhere.

Suresh is absorbed in the legal matters and also enjoys in the company of friends. He meets Priya only on breakfast or dinner time. He even goes to Bangkok for relaxation. She is alienated from the world as she mentions:

I had nobody, but nobody, who loved me, liked me, or even cared for me. I had a host of acquaintances – my kitty party friends all of whom despised me with the same intensity with which they disliked each other; Atul Bhaiya, whose wife didn’t like me in the least, and who wrote me a token cheque every Rakshabandhan; Lenin who had sent me a postcard once from Paris; and B.R, who, paired with Paro, still figured as one of the twin divinities in my private mythology. And, of course, Paro herself, friendly deceptively normal, enacting scenes from a cosy family life with Bucky – Paro, whose very existence made mine seem duller.

(PDP 117-18)

B.R. also realises his mistakes of going after many women. He says, “Alas . . . for women there are always other men. But for men there are only other women. I suppose that sounds paradoxical, but perhaps, I have finally come to terms with the impotence of my spirit” (PDP 145). He realises that his sexual urge should have a limit and he has the notion that sex is only a part of life and beyond it, there are so many other things too. Dasan quotes Mulk Raj Anand
from his article “Kama Kala: Some Notes on the Philosophical Basis of Hindu Erotic Sculpture”:

The male and female forms thus become the manifestation of duality desired by supreme God the earthly symbols of manliness and procreation and just as our human love is seen as a symbol of the great love of supreme God, so the joy of physical union reflects the limitless joy of the deity on creation. (46)

Lenin’s quest for self-identity and love, ends in an arranged marriage. Suresh gets fame and name, but his quest to become a father remains unfulfilled.

In *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, readers observe the search for identity in almost all the characters. Gudiya is ashamed because she has no idea of her birthday, birth place or even about her father. She thinks to herself, “I had no idea when or where I was born, I did not even know who my father was, and neither, for a fact, did my mother or grandmother” (104). She does not like her true identity and name. Although she does not know what her surname should be or who her father is, whether he is an English or a Sikh, ultimately she renames herself as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh to get a new and fortunate identity. She herself remarks, “I was cautiously transforming from Gudiya to the self born-identity of Pooja Abhimanyu Singh. I spent a lot of time conceptualizing Pooja, her background, her family, her past and naturally, her future” (*GGG* 144).

Gudiya’s mother deserts and leaves her alone pathetically when she is a child. Grandmother becomes a God-woman and godliness keeps her away from Gudiya. Lack of parental affection makes her dejected and alienated. Abrams, a critic, remarks, “Warm and secure family ties are necessary requisite for the
growth of mentally, morally and physically healthy children. Children without adequate supervision at home are more liable to run wild than those who have a stable and secure home background” (11).

Lack of understanding of a situation, leads a person towards alienation. When a person is unaware of his own self, he feels alienated, even though he is surrounded by several fellow beings. Wherever there is melancholy of departure and separation, there is physical and emotional alienation. Though Gudiya leads a luxurious life in the house of Roxanne, she feels isolated from the commotion around her. Her deep obsession with the death of her near and dear ones makes her desolated, lonely, separated, and alienated. She thinks that no one is ready to understand her feelings. The concept of alienation is correctly defined by Norman O. Brown, a psychoanalyst in *Life against Death*:

Apollo and Dionysus stand for self-alienation and self-unification respectively. Once man enjoyed the Dionysian ego, but he lost it in the process of civilization in his great endeavour to prove to himself that he is superior to all the other beings in Nature. And his mind started working independent of his body. This led to the emergence of the Apollonian ego, where the feelings of his mind do not spread through his body and where the sensations of his body do not reach his mind. This makes his personality and his life incomplete. Then he strives to overcome this and feels frustrated at his failure. (55)

Gudiya’s isolation makes her to creep out of Phoolwati’s hut and goes to the edge of a dusty park, which is unknown to her. A handsome boy on a white
horse helps her to come out of that park. It seems to Gudiya that he is a Rajput prince and he leaves her alone again. She loses her way to home and she has the marvelous sense of freedom, simultaneously, a feeling of alienation. She encounters some fearful and dangerous experiences on her way. An electrician, who has been one of the devotees of grandmother, helps her to reach the temple again.

Gudiya again meets that very handsome boy on white horse and he takes her behind him on the horse. After some time, he leaves her on the temple gate. Earlier in the novel, Panditji foretells Gudiya’s future that Kalki will marry her and save her from all sufferings. Gudiya considers the boy whom she met as Kalki, as described by Pandit Kailash Shastry. He defines Kalki, the scourge of the Kalyug (Age of Vice):

When the end of the world approaches, Kalki will come astride a pale horse and put an end to this confusion of sin and pain. Lord Vishnu, it is said by those who know, will appear in his tenth and final avatar. He will appear as Kalki. Handsome and a king among men, he will be armed with a huge axe; his voice will resemble the rolling of thunder, the noise of which will spread terror everywhere, first he will destroy all kings, then all other men. Finally, seeing that his father and mother are but sinners like the rest of mankind, he will sacrifice them also to appease his anger. After this a new age will begin, when, once again, virtue and happiness will reign on the earth. (GGG 134)
Gudiya is always eager to discover more about Kalki from Pandit Kailash Shastri. Pandit Kailash Shastri foretells that Gudiya would inherit an old woman’s money and marry a rich boy. On the day of Gudiya’s engagement, he is surprised because he is not the boy about whom he has foretold, “I simply don’t think that he is a very nice person. Besides, who and where are his family? What is his surname, or even his name for that matter, leave alone his gotra!” (*GGG* 157).

Later, Pandit Kailash Shastri tells Gudiya that the name mentioned by him is only a metaphor. After engagement, Kalki’s behaviour has changed. Gudiya comes to know that Kalki is an orphan and his parents did not live together. Inspite of knowing everything about him, Gudiya hopes that one day they would get some sort of harmony with each other. She also wishes to have Ammi’s blessing for good luck and fortune.

The statue of grandmother is placed in the temple compound with a *Mahabhoj* (dinner), where the real character of Kalki comes out when he asks Gudiya to have the knowledge about the *mantra* (Hindu slogan), which could compel the people to tell about their houses, bank accounts and daughters. Kalki is in the habit of borrowing money from Gudiya and almost from the entire members of the Shiv Mohan Band where he works. Although Gudiya loves him so much, she realises Kalki’s nature as she aptly says:

I was not blind to the realities of Kalki’s nature, nor had I forgotten the lessons of my mother, the inept prostitute, with her pitiable habit of falling in love. In spite of my total and consuming infatuation, I understood well that there was something both noble
and base about Kalki. I refrained from telling him about the treasure. I would surprise him with it at the appropriate time. I would use the gold to buy him. (GGG 188)

Karl Marx’s Theory of Alienation discusses the four aspects of alienation, i.e. alienation from the object produced, alienation from one’s work process, alienation from himself and alienation from environment. These four aspects of alienation symbolise powerlessness, meaninglessness, self-estrangement, social isolation, and abnormality. Gudiya is unable to relate herself to anyone around her. Being alienated, she listens to or sees the spirits of Shambhu, Magoo, her mother, and her mother’s lover Riyazuddin on the peepul tree:

Suddenly I could hear the sibilant murmur of the peepul tree, and there was Magoo swaying seductively on the lower branches, her face grinning in a terrible fixed way. I tried to will her away but she refused to go. One-eyed Shambhu joined her. And then, out of the corner of my eye. I saw Rivasuddin Rizvi, entwined from the waist with my beautiful mother. They were grinning hideously. (89)

After her marriage with Kalki, in spite of her happiness, her cruel husband makes her feel alienated, Gudiya reveals her anguish:

The streets were crowded with habitation and through the windows of the bus I could see lit windows, bits of sofas, corners of bookshelves, television screens, lampshades, people. Everyone and everything seemed contained, defined, in context. Only I was alienated and at large. (GGG 113)
Kalki becomes a drunkard, acting cruelly towards Gudiya. Gudiya feels that she has inherited her mother’s tendency to get into trouble. She desires her self-identity and wants to revolt as she remarks, “but my spirit, by some inexplicable alchemy of nature, was restored. I resolved to find a way out of the intolerable situation” (217). She also remarks, “Why had I been so afraid of Kalki? Why had I let him beat and abuse me as I had done” (GGG 224).

Like all the other protagonists of Namita Gokhale, Gudiya’s quest for identity is an unending process. When she is separated from her husband, she learns, not only to broaden her experiences, but also to protest effectively. She experiences loneliness and unfriendly treatment and she also undergoes some phases of depression. In those circumstances, Phoolwati is just like a balm who clutches her for emotional sustenance. She gives her social, economic and mental support. The encouraging words of Phoolwati give her enough confidence to emerge from the emotional trauma to face the world. The search for identity of Gudiya represents women reader’s search for awareness to overcome sufferings in their life.

Grandmother transforms her identity from a Muslim courtesan into a devout Hindu woman. She aims to explore her self-identity, but circumstances force her to put on a disguise to hide her true identity. She creates her own God according to her need. About the concept of God, Burtt in his *Types of Religious Philosophy* says:

Man’s major religious ideas, humanists hold, are everywhere functions of the dominant needs and values of the people holding them. God, far from being the creator of a man, is always himself
created by man; he is the result of the play man’s idealizing imagination over the quest for the appealing goods that life appears to render possible. (375)

Ammi hides her real identity of a Muslim woman because *purdah* is needed for a Muslim woman. Niaz Zaman, a modern critic, commenting on *purdah* says, “The true meaning of *purdah* is modesty. Thus women in *purdah* are not supposed to raise their voices. They are supposed to allow their elders, male or female, to guide and guard them” (158). For Ammi, the question of survival is more important than her caste or tradition. She knows well that she cannot survive as a Muslim woman amidst the dominant Hindus. So, she sheds all her marks that show her as a Muslim and loses her identity. She has to lose her identity to create a space for her against the traditional, customary society.

The blind faith of the devotees reveals how successfully Ammi has generated a new identity for herself. Her escape from the world of courtesans to the world of Hindu sainthood represents her firmness that has rooted herself in a new soil. She has proved her as a successful person not only in this highly competitive world, but also as a spiritual mystic which very few women are known to have attained. She is an individual who does not escape from problems, but faces them bravely. Referring to spirituality, Sri Aurobindo, a philosopher remarks, “Spirituality is its essence an awakening to the inner reality of our being, to a spirit, self, soul, which is other than our mind, life and body . . .” (857).

It is to note that Gudiya’s grandmother attains self-identity through spirituality. Grandmother realises the need for spirituality in life. One must
liberate himself from human ego to embrace a spiritual life. Grandmother does the same thing and achieves salvation. She spreads spirituality even after her death through her devotee, Lila, “this is her message – that everything is transient, everything passes, everybody dies, but it makes no difference because life continues. Even after death everything changes, but everything continues . . .” (GGG 142).

Phoolwati’s positive attitude towards life leads her towards the realisation of self. Even in this twenty-first century, widow remarriage is not approved among the orthodox Hindus. But illiterate and poor Phoolwati does not hesitate when Sundar Pahalwan proposes to marry her. Her volatile personality successfully keeps Sunder Pahalwan under her control. Nigam in his article “Women in Contemporary Indian English Fiction” observes, “if the woman desires, she can put an end to the marital victimization and oppression” (92).

In A Himalayan love story, Parvati is portrayed as a woman who longs to be loved by her mother when she is young, and by her husband after her marriage. The novel revolves around her and is in fact the story of three generations of women – the mother, her daughter Parvati and Parvati’s daughter, Iraa. Once in the forest, Parvati meets a mad, thin and strange looking woman, who smells tobacco. The sight of the woman makes her very disturbed. The other disturbing moment is that she finds her mother in the arms of Shrikrishanji. This incident makes herself avoid her mother and makes her have a worse relationship with her mother. It seems to her that people have another face behind their mask. The incident hounds her a lot. She is sleepless because of her mother’s illicit relationship. She muses:
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. I shut my eyes tightly, willing them to disappear, but they were no wraiths; my mother and our tenant stood before me in the flesh, their true nature unmasked. (*HLS* 16-17)

Even after that incident, Parvati thinks that her mother and the lady whom she saw with their tenant are two different persons. Parvati is influenced by the life of her mother. A child inherits the merits and demerits of her/his parents. Parvati’s mother is portrayed as a person who lacks spirituality. As Parvati reveals:

‘If I ever meet that old man, God, I’ll tell him what I really think of him!’... ‘If I’ve survived, it’s in spite, not because, of the old-so-and-so...!’ My view of tradition and religion was influenced by hers. The fact that I was a Hindu Brahmin girl and Salman a Muslim did not therefore strike me as any impediment to our union. (*HLS* 29)

Parvati’s mother is a widow of optimistic nature, which is clear by her statement, “‘Perhaps Masterji is right. Parvati’, she said ‘your education might turn out to be of some use after all. Look at the postmaster’s daughter; she’ll get into service soon. You could become a teacher!’” (*HLS* 10). This statement defines her quest for self identity through her daughter.

After the departure of Shrikrishnanji to the plains, Parvati’s mother also goes to sanatorium and later to the other world. Parvati’s uncle looks after her
well. He is depicted as a well disciplinarian who provides Parvati and her mother with the house and allows them to collect rent from the Kirana shop for their sustenance. He is only the step-uncle of Parvati, but he takes care of her like a maternal uncle. He always thinks of the well-being of Parvati. In spite of his broadmindedness, he allows Parvati to study history from Salman. Parvati clarifies her views:

Had my mother still been alive she might have expressed some doubts about an impressionable young girl being taught history by a young man of such exceptional beauty. But Masterji, who kept a Muslim maidservant and had himself taken a vow of chastity after reading Vivekananda, was above such mundane concerns. 

*(HLS 23)*

Masterji has known thoroughly the rules of God and nature, which is revealed by his letter to Mukul, “I was born on the last day of the last year of the last century. The destined span of years is fast drawing to a close. As Dr. Freud had said, ‘The goal of all life is death. I have had a lonely life’ ” *(HLS 53-54).*

Masterji considers Mukul as his true spiritual heir and wishes him to establish a Hiranand Joshi Memorial Trust by using all his property for the upliftment of the folks of the hill. He retains his heartfelt faith in Mukul from the beginning till the end. He faces all the difficulties such as the death of Parvati’s father, death of her mother, Parvati’s madness, and the burden of bringing up Irra very bravely and optimistically. Parvati’s in-laws ignore her after the death of her husband. It is the pathetic condition of Indian widows in their husband’s homes.
Masterji gives shelter to Parvati at that time and does his best to protect her and Irra till his death. He donates all his body organs after his death:

‘I do declare that all monies, assets and properties listed herein are entirely self-acquired, and therefore wish to ensure that a thorough medical check-up be conducted upon me to ensure and ascertain that I am de facto legally and medically no longer in possession of my Life or Senses at the time of my Demise. Furthermore that all my viscera and organs be donated to the noble cause of Science after the expiry of my last breath.’ (*HLS* 145)

It shows his quest for self-actualisation, his sensibility and true desire to think of the welfare of human beings. Through his death and donation of body organs, he is successful in his quest for self-identity.

*A Himalayan Love Story* is about romantic loss and fatalism. Mukul Nainwal, a student of Masterji, is a local boy, who returns to Nainital in search of the woman he has ever loved. On the arrival of Mukul, the insane Parvati dresses herself in a complete manner. This event immensely pleases her, filling her with a sense of serenity. It shows her quest for love and meaning of her existence.

Parvati is not satisfied with her married life with Lalit and she cannot realise her real self. She is deceived by her mother from her childhood. She is betrayed by Salman. She is once again deceived by fate in her married life. Parvati receives so many shocks in life and she is philosophical and is ready to accept death with all its intricacies. At one point, she discovers a new meaning to life and death; they both are parts of a cosmic design, awesome in their majesty:
What surprised me about death was this: the soul departs, leaving
the body forlorn. The body departs, it is taken away, disposed of,
it disintegrates, decomposes, it is gone. The ashes are thrown into
muddy rivers, the crows come and eat the sacrificial rice, and on
the thirteenth day even the lamp that guides the spirit to the other
world is extinguished, but things remain. (HLS 47)

She quests for love, care and attention from her husband. It is denied by her
husband. So her quest for love compels her to have sexual relationship with
Lalit’s younger brother Raju, which is illegal and is not expected from an Indian
wife.

Mukul Nainwal loves Parvati truly. He is forced to marry Adeliene. He is
again compelled to take the role of heir to Masterji. He wants the absolute love of
Parvati, yet he knows that he has to discharge the duty of a husband and father.
He is trapped in his own quest and is completely isolated. His quest for self is
divided into two, one is to retain and cling to his past identity and enjoy it. His
old love for Parvati revives and wishes to fade away, to dissolve in the
reminiscences of the past and loses himself in order to recover his past identity.
And the second one is his new identity in Hong Kong, with his wife and his
daughter. He defines his changing identity:

From the age of ten until I was twenty two Wee Nook e had been
my retreat, my haven, my sanctuary, my passage into the outside
world. It had represented all that was desirable and attainable in
life. It had contained books, a telephone and a radiogram. It was
here that I had seen moulded by Hiranand headmaster’s dreams and ambitions into the man I am today. *(HLS 95)*

Mukul returns to Nainital as per the last wish of Masterji. He is overpowered with nostalgia. When he goes to the temple of Naina Devi, he defines his sense of alienation:

> I discovered that I was weeping. The tears streaming silently down my cheeks turned to unaccountable heaving sobs as I fell prostrate upon the steps of the first of the four inner Shrines. Although the doors were locked, I knew that it was the temple of Naina Devi, of the Goddess Parvati whose husband is Shiva. Her eyes had become the verdant lake whose peaceful waters even now murmured behind us. My brothers, my home, forgive and bless and regenerate, I wept. *(HLS 87)*

Parvati suffers from a variety of psycho-socio disorder, including anxiety, anomie, despair, powerlessness and loss of beliefs and values. The childhood trauma is the main cause of her alienation. Although she is involved in everyday chores, she is alienated. Her words show her pathetic state during her childhood days:

> My mother could not understand the change in me. I had become even more withdrawn, there were dark circles under my eyes and I could tremble at the slightest sound. School was out of the question. I did not even venture downstairs any more, except to go to the privy in the backyard. *(HLS 19)*
The Book of Shadows opens with a very philosophical question regarding the real identity of the protagonist, Rachita Tiwari. She is a thirty-four-years old English lecturer at Jesus and Mary College, Mumbai. Her fiancé, Anand, killed himself because of her infidelity. At the sight of Anand’s suicide, Rachita realised:

Who was this swaying on a rope before me? This was not my lover, the stroker of my brow. It was an unbearable excess of all that was possible and bearable. There was defect here, and a loss of dignity. This travesty of not-life was not how death was to be faced: of this I was sure. (BS 5)

Rachita Tiwari travels towards the path of self-realisation. She tries to escape from the nuances of life and it sets forth her sense of alienation in this world. Rachita’s parents were dead and she had only one sister. She resides at her Mamaji’s (uncle) house, who does not have any children. As a victim of hatred and malice and tormented by guilt, Rachita realises that the solitary house will soothe her and comfort her back to normalcy. She hopes that the lonely house will bring back the lost happiness to her. She spends her time in self-contemplation, relieving her memories from the past. She loves the tales of Lohaniju, an old caretaker of the house and says:

I love this kind of talk, it sends delicious shivers of anticipation down my spine, it suspends my disbelief and so, conversely, ups the ante with my belief – in myself, my childhood, my life; in who I am. At this stage I need more than anything to believe, and if I can believe Lohaniju, I can believe anything. (BS 16)
The belief in Lohaniju is very necessary for Rachita to regain her lost confidence. She is shattered by the death of her fiancé, Anand and the acid attack on her face by his sister. She engages herself in reading old comic books, illustrated fairy tales and a bundle of frayed and yellowed children’s paperbacks. She involves herself in simple activities to relieve herself from the incurable wounds. In fact, her involvement in children’s literature reveals her desire to escape into the world of imagination from the burden of reality that she is living in. She meditates to forget and free herself from her bitter memories. Osho in his *The Orange Book* has remarked that meditation is a way to get relief from one’s loneliness rather than escaping from it.

Rachita longs to escape from her present world and finds comfort in the memories of her childhood days. Rachita’s garrulous servant Lohaniju used to tell her many stories in the past. She wants to forget the alien language, English, and seeks refuge in the servant’s soft Pahari. She spends her days drowning in the childhood pleasure of comics. For Rachita, the house is a symbol of security and existence. She does not like to be calm in the house. She believes that if she does so, she may have to confront her real self, so she keeps herself busy in reading the Journal of Missionary.

Rachita learns the story of the house by reading the journal of missionary. From the journal, she comes to know that the house is built by William James Cockrell and his wife, Fanny, the two missionaries. For both of them, that place is a paradise. The arrival of a Botiya girl, Lali creates misunderstanding between the husband and the wife because Lali tries to establish physical relationship with
Cockrell. Finally, Lali meets a tragic and dreadful death in a suspicious manner. Cockrell cannot forget the sight ever. He feels guilty of the death of Lali:

The villagers, whose superstitions I had hitherto mocked, said Airee was angered, and so a demon had possessed Lali, that she had been the victim of a malicious goblin that prowled often and betimes in these parts. They exonerated me of any ill intentions, for they knew that I was an honourable man. Yet my spirit was shamed and my faith humiliated. My mind was wracked with guilt and despair, that awful scene forever imprinted on my eyes. (BS 55)

As the villagers are haunted with superstitious belief, nobody is ready to work for the house as they believe that the house is built on the inauspicious site. So, Cockrell brings some Mussalmaans from Bareilly to complete the construction of the house. Sometimes, Fanny feels the presence of some kind of spirit and apparitions. And later, she also “shut her eyes in eternal sleep” (56). When Rachita finishes reading the book, she returns to her own self. But she feels the presence of someone following her:

I am being stalked. I know I am being stalked. All the evidence is there – all the telltale signs of a . . . person? entity? stalker? . . . intent on pursuit. Every time I turn my head I see the shade of someone hurriedly retreating. There is a suspicious silence which follows my silences like a pause. I don’t like it. I am afraid Someone, something . . . this house – it has begun to speak to me. I do not want to listen to its stories, they are malicious and
convoluted. It is not my imagination, there are things I see, words I hear that are outside the sphere of any experience I have ever had. \((BS\ 61)\)

The journal written by William Cockrell depicts the role of missionaries and their orientalist approaches towards the natives. He imagines the natives as shadows hovering around him and wonders if they are really human beings or only shadows belonging to some other undisciplined world. In fact, the journal documents not only the history of the house, but also the progressive breakdown of a man, facing an alien culture and climate.

Namita Gokhale’s story says that a ghost too has quest for self-identity. The ghost is the oldest tenant of the house who narrates many stories to Rachita. One such story is about the vain fool, Captain Wolcott and his sensuous mistress, Dona Rosa. The ghost is attracted by the beauty of Dona Rosa. He is charged by the sexual intimacy between the two lovers. He cannot control his passion and enters the body of Wolcott to enjoy sex with Dona Rosa. The ghost describes his own identity:

The body, like the clothes we wear, are only emblems of identity, to mark the wearer as such-and-such; these outward accoutrements often serve to conceal more than they reveal. Much deceit and dissimulation hide behind the flowing robes of my cassock. I am, after all, a human, perhaps not a very wise one, once, as a young man, when I was in the military, I fancied myself a soldier of the body, eager to combat evil with sword and gun of course I discovered soon enough that the real evil lay within, but in those
days when I first donned the tight-fitting uniform of the soldier, I can assure you that I felt quite differently quite assuredly, clothes make the body that constitutes the man, and you, dear spirit, are blessed beyond belief not to be burdened with these mill-stones! 

(\textit{BS} 72-73)

The ghost tells the stories of the other ghosts in the house to Rachita. The lovers Marcus and Munro, the disciples of Aleister Crowley, a famous dabbler in black magic, the crow, the enigmatic Father Benedictus, all are the resident ghosts of the house. Father Benedictus is a scholar and the writer of two modern and much acclaimed books on Theology. Rachita feels that she has learnt many things from Father Benedictus. She says:

I learnt a lot from Father Benedictus. In the course of our many conversations, which stretched late into the long nights, he taught me the art of verbalization, organized thought, the language of humans. Words are difficult quantities for us to comprehend. They are shadows themselves, elusive approximations, but I mastered them. That mastery gave me joy and satisfaction and also body; it earthed me, grounded me, made me human-like. (\textit{BS} 130-31)

The ghost possesses alienation. He is unable to communicate and conceptualize like human beings. He lives in a vacuum of silence. Forced to live in a state of lonely and silent life, he withdraws from the world of human beings and resides in the shaded darkness of the house behind the curtain. Sometimes like Rachita, he also tries to move from a state of alienation to a state of identification by entering into the body of Wolcott:
I still loved her, the essence of her, the pulsating energy I had seen from the other world, but I realized that her lover Wolcott did not entirely share my feelings. Sometimes I even tended to agree with him. The human body is, all said and done, a gross and ineffectual machine. The process of incorporating and excreting food, fuelling and evacuating the organs, has always struck me as plainly repulsive. When, at the dinner table, I would watch Dona Rosa wipe a morsel of bread from her lips, or chew ruminatively on a tough piece of meat (for the meat in the house was always tough) I would experience the most intense alienation from my circumstances, and years for the formless grace of my essential self. (BS 158)

The death of Lohaniju forces Rachita to know her real self because she is alone in the house with her memories. Her sister wishes her to be a writer, but she does not want to be a fictionist. Her sister wants her to meet a surgeon, who can remake her face, but she does not have interest in it. Gradually, she identifies the presence of Dona Rosa, Marcus and Munro in the house. At the end of the story, Zenobia comes to meet Rachita along with her boy friend Pashu. The novel begins and ends with Zenobia Desai, the student of Rachita who plays a vital role in moulding Rachita’s personality. Zenobia and her boy friend Pashu are the two persons who encourage Rachita to return to the real world. Zenobia can be considered as Rachita’s alter ego. Rachita is much affectionate to Zenobia, as she aptly remarks, “It’s only Zenobia who understands, I feel safe with
Zenobia” (*BS* 226). She transforms her sufferings of an indifferent fate and alienation into self-awareness by her act of moving away from the old house.

Each and every character in the novels of Namita Gokhale has unsolved misery throughout their lives. They are hypersensitive, solitary and introspective and they search for their real identity. By knowing the horrible history of the house, Rachita dives to fantasy and is unable to cope with reality. Her relationship with reality passes through three stages, her life as a lecturer, life as a child with her family, life in the haunting house with its stories, and finally, she becomes successful in getting her real identity.

It is stereotyped that males are known for knowledge, power, consciousness, and strong action, while females are known for their emotions, weak physique, and domestic intimacy. But Rachita is distinct from the stereotypical women. She has self awareness and is optimistic as she remarks:

> Proprioception is the science of the sense of self. My centre, my identify, my selfhood had for a while abandoned the confines of skin and bone, abandoned my cage and run away to cower in dusty corner of other abandoned memories and perceptions. Dona Rosa and the rest are not real, they do not belong any longer to this clear and unquestioning morning, they are emanations of the past, insubstantial, evasive, ambiguous. I am alive, a skin-encapsulated being who belongs inalienably to the world of the living. I feel as though a scab has fallen from an old sore. In the shadow world between the living and the unliving, even sickness is an indication of a possible restoration to health. (*BS* 213)
Rachita is the representative of modern women who search for an authentic selfhood and simultaneously understands the existential problems of life. After coming to the old house, Rachita accepts her displacement and marginalization as a woman, remembers her past but she does not fail to recognise her true self as well. She undergoes different stages from innocence to experience like Sri. Aurobindo’s *Savitri*.

Every man is recognized by his face, but Rachita loses her face, her identity. Still she does not lose her sense of selfhood. She accepts her present existence without complaining about anybody. Rachita’s identity transforms at the end due to her awareness of the fact, reality and trust in life. Rachita mentions:

To be ourselves we must remain in control of our scripts. We must make and remake ourselves, possess and repossess our world, cast and recast our lot in every precious moment. Above all, we must know what to hold on to, what to discard, in this radical flux which is life.

I felt disquietingly alive. My repertoire of memory had run out: I had bid farewell to the world of my confabulations, I had acquired, achieved, and possessed myself again. (*BS* 229)

These wordings show that she has regained from her inner conflict. Sufferings and sorrows in her journey of life have not destroyed her spirit. In her loneliness, she does not lose heart, but tries continuously to get her true self in the most adverse circumstances and ultimately gets success in finding out it and the meaning of her existence. As she reveals:
When I awoke, that is to say, when dawn broke with the certainties of the morning like birds chirping and the first ray of sunlight illumining the Nanda Devi peak through the distant mist and fog – when dawn broke I felt all right. I felt as though I had the right to exist, as though I was a part creation, of the dawn chorus, of the healing sunlight that was showing up in shy dappled patches in the garden. I was a glob of consciousness, of reactions and conditioning, enveloped in skin (damaged skin, but nevertheless). I was defined in time and space and dimension, I had the right to exist!

That was the breakthrough, the sudden insight into my innocence, my lack of culpability, my exoneration. (*BS* 212-13)

Alienation is a condition in which a person feels lonely or has been isolated from a person, place or thing they have once enjoyed. Rootlessness and loss of identity are the causes of alienation. The sense of alienation of Rachita leads her to find out her real identity. Rachita defines alienation, “‘Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar,’ I [Rachita] said, addressing a sea of guileless faces, ‘or to render the familiar unfamiliar’” (4). She suffers from abnormality, lack of commitment, cultural estrangement, social isolation, and loneliness because of her relationship with Anand. By experiencing all the psychological constraints, she defines alienation very well, “Words like alienation belong to the context of psychopathology. All human beings harbour their particular and individual manifestations of the other. In the widest sense, every neurosis is the outcome of some form of alienation” (*BS* 63).
Rachita is alienated from the society and its people. She is not able to go back to the city life because of this alienation. She is alienated from the external world, which intrudes upon her consciousness. In her life, time and circumstances act as a catalytic agent, which brings about a change in her identity. As Viola Klein observes:

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

Rachita’s sense of self-awareness develops a positive attitude towards the existence of a woman in the world. She soon understands that her journey of life also involves her search for her own identity. In order to attain it, she feels that she must turn away from the dictate-normed society. Her act of refusing to see her face in the mirror for a long time signifies her complete rejection of the ways this society traps a woman by its silent dictates. She rejects Delhi, the capital city and seeks shelter in the ancient old house, and surfaces with a new strength, power and self-knowledge, which ultimately enables her to find out her real-self. There are various events and situations which help her to undergo the process of self-discovery. Although she faces boredom, alienation and depression in the house, they cannot weaken her will to live, as she herself observes:

If you lose – If one loses – one’s sense of self, there is no remedy but to proceed on a simulated model. All self-image is anyway a construct of circumstances. If you lose an arm or a leg, you cannot
forget what you have lost, the phantom pain is there to remind you, but if you have lost of your sense of selfhood things are quite different, for (this is the important part) you are no longer there to know it. Who will find you again?

I felt like asking somebody – anybody – if I was really me at all. I needed an impartial examination into the whole thing. (BS 216)

Like P.B. Shelley, one of the greatest poets in English literature, Rachita believes in the existence of man both as a social being and as an imaginative being. According to Shelley, ‘to exist’ means a life of two worlds, the first is the outer world and second is the inner world. Rachita believes that every man is an imaginative being. She is a victim of alienation and circumstances. Her alienation leads her towards identifying her real self. The changing atmosphere of her high aspirations also breeds into identity crisis:

Am I the perpetrator or the victim of this dream madness - do I inhabit these phantoms or do they inhabit me? Although I can still view things from the outside. Yet I am irresistibly drawn into this internal and external disorder, this doubling of consciousness. I am still stunned by the speed and skill with which this seductive new world has breached the already frayed realities of my life. (BS 67)

Rachita tries to heal her wounds by reading literature. When she was a lecturer, she did not like poetry, so she did not read the poetry of Zenobia, but later she read poetry to keep away from her loneliness. It is a fact that poetry is
like medicine for painful hearts. She tries to search herself in the poetry of Mahadevi Verma:

Like my face in the mirror, Mahadevi is a reminder of the self I actually am.

*In the bosom of the night I am the arrow of the day’s desire.*

*Empty was my birth,*

*And the down is as a death:*

*Darkness alone the companion of my restless spirit.*

*Speak not of union: In separation I am eternal.* *(BS 73-74)*

Rachita’s search for self-identity symbolizes the assertion of her, a voice with promise and a voice of hope, which articulates her thoughts. The novel does not depict her life as a totally dismal and hopeless struggle. It ultimately presents the hope and sense of change in the mind of the protagonist. The novelist creates a world of fantasy and authentic selfhood. The novelist ends the story with a lot of affirmation and asserts Rachita’s individuality as a woman. Through the character of Rachita, Namita Gokhale portrays the inner struggle of herself to discover her real self. The novelist intends to say that life is a worthy one; it is a progression towards a higher consciousness.

Namita Gokhale’s *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is a tale of a wandering soul, Shakuntala, who has a quest for self-realisation. The novel is Shakuntala’s voyage towards self discovery and her innumerable experiences of life. The theme of the novel is about exercising guilt and fear of the past, Shakuntala’s “escape from the bondage” *(SPM 18)* of her situations, her quest for self-identity, her nostalgia, and her attainment of self-actualisation. Abraham
Maslow defines self-actualisation as, “The full use of talents, capacities and potentials. A most outstanding quality of self-actualization . . . person is the transcendence or dichotomies, so that opposite qualities are integrated and expressed by the same behaviour” (Dicaprio 421).

Shakuntala has started her journey as a wanderer whose motives centered on pleasure and fulfillment of flesh desires, but by the time she reaches her journey’s end, she realises that life is a *maya*, yet, this awareness does not diminish her doubts about life and death. She remains equally doubtful as in the beginning of her journey. In the process of her journey, she breaks all the myths constructed by the patriarchal society. The doubt, she faced at the end is not about life but about ‘the Death’ as she states:

> I wanted to talk about this, to understand. I carried little faith in the village priest and his stories about the path of the soul after death, of the various levels of purgatory, of the pitralok and the heaven of Indra and so on. How, after all, could anybody who had not actually died know these things? (*SPM* 84)

The mythological Shakuntala is portrayed as an unfortunate lady. Kalidasa’s Shakuntala is abandoned by her parents. Later, she is seduced by king Dushyanta, who leaves her pregnant and does not even acknowledge her, when she goes to his court. She is portrayed as unlucky owing to the hard life she faced. In contrast, Namita Gokhale’s Shakuntala is a dynamic woman, who is willing to question the injustice done to her. In her childhood, Shakuntala gets a chance to hear the story of Shakuntala of the great poet Kalidasa through the
home tutor of her brother. She longs to have a mate as the mythical Shakuntala. She remarks:

That night, as I tried to sleep, I conjured the other Shakuntala, reclining on a bed of lotus leaves, by the vine-wreathed banks of the Malini River, writing a love letter to the king. I too was ready for love, eager for the exquisite sting of Kamadeva’s arrows. King Dushyanta would surely arrive to claim me, his horses panting from the hunt. He would take me to distant land beyond our unchanging hills. (24)

After marriage, Shakuntala’s quest for freedom and self-actualisation increases. She cites the reason:

Perhaps it was my husband Srijan and his tales of travel, or simply the consequence of a foolish, imaginative and reckless nature. I was hungry for experience. There were things I wanted to see, to know, to do. My ignorance irked me; I had, for example, never actually viewed an elephant. (HLS 46)

Shakuntala comes to know about the son of Kamalini. She is very much depressed to imagine Srijan as the father of Kamalini’s son. She loses her patience and trust in this world by this thought. Her impatience urges her to shed tears and also makes her blind. Shakuntala loses her own identity in search of the love of Srijan. She loses her own identity by dressing up herself just like Kamalini in order to get hold of her husband. She is sad and dejected for not being able to give an heir to her husband. She goes to the forbidden temple and
once again meets the rock demoness whom she met when she attained womanhood to have comfort and relaxation.

Shakuntala does not want to surrender defeat to Kamalini. She tosses between the desire to renounce the world and in the pursuit of conquering her husband with the wildest caress that she can offer during the night. The love game continues and so does the twisting of two conflicting desires of which she could choose none and give up none. Her real self has ever wanted to conquer the world, travel and renounce life like a monk, and engage in learned conversation over the matter of logic and philosophy. On the other side, as a dutiful wife she desires to fulfill the codes of social practice, befitting a married woman by bringing a son to Srijan, and thereby claiming her status, respect and domination.

An ‘omen’ is an event or happening that a person takes as a sign of something to come, either good or bad. Some bad omens happen in the house of Shakuntala, as a crow feather under Shakuntala’s pillow, a bowl of honeyed figs in her room, and a cat who stole the milk from the kitchen. All these incidents make Shakuntala eager to know the reality of death. When she discussed this with Kundan, a fisherman, he explains the nuances behind life and death citing examples from his career:

There is an element in which each of us survives, in which we can thrive. This fish for instance, which is so happy in the water, which swims about without a care in the depths of the holy river, once this fish is out of its true elements, released into the air that you and I can so easily breathe, it dies . . . ‘That is Death. It is the loss of our natural environment. If this fish could suddenly learn to
breathe in air, it would continue to live, it could have an afterlife. There are creatures that can lead such double lives, such as the frogs that crowd into your house during the rainy weather,’ as indeed they did, and never failed to frighten me . . . and there are beings who can do the same, who continue to live on after they die, because they are not dependent on their bodies alone. 

(SPM 84-85)

The news of Shakuntala’s pregnancy gives joy and satisfaction to Srijan and all the others in the family. Once, Shakuntala notices a snake coming to drink milk from cow’s udder. She goes to the village priest to hear his interpretation of the omen. She does everything as he instructed. The maid Amla suggests her to go to the rock near the holy temple at Gangadwar to have a safe childbirth. The next morning, Shakuntala goes along with Kamalini to the rock. She goes to pray alone for her child. There she meets a man and she believes that he would fulfill her lifetime desire of seeing the world:

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

Shakuntala returns home, but cannot sleep that night because Nearches urges her to return the next day to the same rock. She lies to Srijan that she has to
go there again to pray. This is the turning point in her life which changes her life and her identity. Shakuntala narrates the incident:

Taking off my silver anklets, I flung them into the water and ran towards him. The Yavana led me to his horse. He mounted it with a quick graceful motion and pulled me up behind him. My arms settled around the serrated leather belt on his waist and I fell into rhythm with the movement of the animal. On that pebbled shore I left Shakuntala and all her memories. (SPM 115)

It is clear from the above statement that the anklets are the symbol of her bondage with Srijan and they symbolize her life of slavery. Her action of throwing the anklets into the water indicates that she is free from the boundaries of conjugal sphere and responsibilities. She starts her journey with a man and continues her journey for several days. They go to the forests, fields and waters with ‘untiring regularity’ (123). She has no feeling of repentance in her heart for she gets everything she has longed ever since from her childhood, “I took to my changed circumstances with ease, I did not think of the house in the mountains. The young woman called Yaduri had no history. She lived in the ceaseless present. Only the river traveled with her, its murmur in her life-blood” (SPM 129).

Shakuntala leaves for an adventurous life as soon as she gets a chance. She always has temptation, “It was the picture of the bigger world their words conjured up that left me breathless with excitement. A world of limitless possibilities, awaiting discovery” (75). The death of Shakuntala leads to the birth of a fallen woman, Yaduri and she begins her new life in the holy Kashi, the city
she has longed to visit of all the towns and cities of the world. She is “hungered to see the greatest city of them all, proud, immortal Kashi” (129). Her brother has described the majesty of the city, the temples of lord Shiva, the burning ghats, the great river of remembrance and forgiveness, Ganga. She is spellbound to see the first sight of Kashi and cannot forget it at all. Having arrived late at night they see funeral fire blaze on the steeped ghats. She becomes more philosophical and opines, “death lived here, I had heard, forever mocking life and its passage and shivered with a fierce sense of premonition” (SPM 137).

For Shakuntala, the scriptures and religious beliefs have no significance. Born as a high caste Brahmin, she knows that her life as Yaduri is a lazy life, eating, drinking and getting conjugal pleasures. The company of the Yavana is all dirt and squalor, a life of sensuality filled with utter dejection and degradation. She begins to feel a unique sense of displacement. Past memories of the mountains, desolate temple, her husband Srijan come to the mind of Shakuntala when she sees the dramatic performance of Kalidasa’s Abhijnanasakuntalam along with Nearchus. Her namesake’s memory evokes a sense of pain and strange emotions and she realises her namesake shares only one side of her fate i.e. exile and ill-fate, whereas her namesake has not outraged her self-identity. Yaduri has outraged the very code of human and woman’s existence and its limitations. She realises:

Even in the moment of disgrace, Kalidasa’s Shakuntala had the sanctity of secret marriage. But I had betrayed everything I had renounced my name, I was no longer Shakuntala, only Yaduri, the unmentionable one. I had abandoned the husband whose true wife
I was. No matter that he had other wives before me, the noble king Dushyanta had wives aplenty, and yet there was no slur in his love-making with Shakuntala . . . only I stood condemned. (SPM 150)

On one occasion, Nearchus slaps Shakuntala and tells that he hates women because they are all sluts and slatterns to the core, but she has no other way to escape. Still she loves him because he hears her very intensely and never bored of her questions, regarding the world. He is always amused by her hunger to have the smallest scrap of knowledge and information because she is ready to go on and on, until the end of the world.

In the house of Nearchus, Shakuntala meets a servant maid Narangi. Narangi tells about her bad fate and sad story. Narangi is married to a young man when she is a girl. He leaves her for another woman. She marries a barbar again and has a son. He works for one of the great nobles of Kashi. One day, by mistake, he cuts the throat of his master while shaving. He is charged of attempting murder. He commits suicide to escape from this cruel world. She at present lives with her brother-in-law who has an affair with his neighbour. After saying her sad story, she never returns for many days. Later, Shakuntala comes to know that she is murdered by her brother-in-law who suspects her of having an affair with a neighbour. By hearing the death news of Narangi, Shakuntala feels her useless existence in this world, “I am nobody; I am a body. A traveler picked me up as he might pluck a fruit from a tree, and now he is impatient to throw the core away” (SPM 161).
Worldly pleasures bring a whole new awakening in Yaduri. She realises, “pleasure is an inexplicable emotion. Its boundaries recede like the mirage that follows the road by the Ganga on a hot summer day” (131). She begins to lose the grip, which infuriates the Yavana, who smiles at the recollection of the cleaning woman’s statement, “love is an inverted tug-of-war, and the one who pulls harder loses the game,” (SPM 157). At last, Nearchus’ presence too makes her alienated. The more she mingles with the group of wild, lustful, strange companions of Nearchus, the more she feels like an outsider. Voices from her past begin to make a distant call. Her state is like that of the mighty river, Ganga. Like Ganga, she too has descended from the mountains and enters the dirty shores and planes of the mortals. She has many unanswered questions. So she decides to visit the real Kashi, crossing the great Ganga.

Nearchus wants to go to Kandhar for his work and he promises to take her to Persia after returning. Everything seems to be coming to an end that night. She thinks that she does not belong to Srijan, Nearchus or to her brother Guresvara. She feels alienated by her desire to see the world and she leaves him. Shakuntala in the end gains the assertion of will and confidence. She visits Kashi, the city of dreams with a sense of impending ill-omen. She describes her dream city:

The Kashi we lived in belonged to these foreign Malechhas, who had come for generations to Indika and made it their own. This part of the city, the Maga, did not merit pilgrimage. Those who suffered the misfortune of entering the next life from the left bank were accursed to be reborn in the body of an ass. (SPM 141)
On the banks of Ganga, she feels an intense sense of home-coming. She is aware that she can’t return to her home as she has broken the codes prescribed by the society. She finally realises her identity and accepts, “one might travel for many nights and days, but the place where one began was perhaps the only place where one belonged” (*SPM* 172).

She decides to kill the ghosts of her memory that haunts her. It dawns on her that both, Srijan and Nearchus are mere shadows in her life and now she is all alone with her unborn daughter. The novel ends with the words of Shakuntala, “I would not waste my tears. I had not wasted my life” (*SPM* 208). Her journey is worthwhile because it educates her to know about her own true ‘self.’

Shakuntala has ever wanted to be liberated, crossing the river she meets with the supreme liberation, death. The novel can be read at two levels. At the surface level, the story line is of the narrative of an ill-fated woman, cursed for life’s disorder. The rebellious nature makes her a woman of her own destiny, who has to submit finally to the will of the same fate. At the deeper level, it is a tale of every woman, who dares to raise questions against the socially and religiously established codes of conduct. The novel is the journey towards self-awareness and self-identity.

Shakuntala has broken the social codes and the religious conventions. She believes neither in dharma, nor in the concept of heaven, hell, and purgatory. Her life takes a last turn, when a charging bull attacks on her stomach and there is blood everywhere. She is rescued by a Buddhist nun. She is again doubtful of her journey after death. She is confused and in a state of chaos, whether her life’s decision is right or wrong. She lies in a pool of blood on the cobbled street of the
holy Kashi, in pain and agony. Even in her death, she refuses to give up. She has no beliefs in religion and its doctrines and has always mocks at them. At the end of her journey, she once again has to confront these issues and feels helpless, as she herself has not found any answer to them. She refuses to submit both to the Hindu belief of Moksha of the Karmic cycle of life and death and to that of the Buddhist. The time of her departure is very clearly described by Shakuntala:

I [Shakuntala] clutched desperately at her cold hands, as though she were my mother, my saviour, which of course she was. She dug into my bleeding flesh, scavenging determinedly for the essence of my soul from the vehicle of my body scooping deep into the wound in my womb, Yami took the child with her, and as she left, another figure, a human one, materialized in the doorway and smoothed her kind fingers over my forehead. (SPM 191)

Shakuntala loses her child. She feels that death is not a difficult task, “Everything happens in such a rush, so suddenly, that there is no place for terror” (194). She undertakes her journey to the other world. Through death, she gets the selfhood, which she has always longed for, “‘Don’t weep for me,’ I murmured, to nobody really. I would not weep for my daughter, I would not waste my tears. I had not wasted my life. I had lived like a minor wind, I saw myself afloat and rising” (SPM 208).

Poonam in Priya In Incredible Indyaa is isolated and alienated by her family members. She belongs to a well-to-do family. She has an elder sister who is very traditional and good at studies. Poonam has a tough time in school. She always looks at movie magazines and pictures of film stars instead of learning.
Later, their parents separate and get divorced. Her sister is engaged to a nice Gujarati boy. He falls in love with Poonam and marries her. After this incident, her parents never speak to her. At times, her sister writes to her. After some years, she gets divorce from her husband. She then joins Manoviraj Sethia’s company. She comments that she continues her life with friends and film magazines. Poonam observes, “Women need to hold on to each other, together through the tough times. Poonam seemed a bit discomfited by her bare-all confessional. . . . Thank God for women friends! she [Poonam] declared . . .” (PII 126).

To sum up, the quest for identity is the major problem experienced by most of the modern men and women. Namita Gokhale’s protagonists are reluctant to adjust within family and society by sacrificing their own desires. They want everything and everyone as they wish to be. They are depressed when they do not get the opportunity to fulfill their desires. They rarely accept the Indian norms, conditions and social codes. They search for their true self and sometimes their quests remain unfulfilled due to their selection of wrong paths which take them beyond the social boundaries.

All the protagonists of Namita Gokhale revolt against the patriarchal system. They have their intense desire for self-identity. The history of the Indian society gives a vivid picture of women. She is treated as a non-human entity and subservient to male. She is made dependent on her male counterpart and supposed to follow his order meekly. The oppression and suppression in the society never allow her to get her own identity.
Namita Gokhale’s women are always in search of their righteous place in the family and society right from their childhood. They are not directed by others and are conscious of their self. Paro, Priya, Ammi, Gudiya, Phoolwati, Rachita, Shakuntala and the other minor women characters are conscious of the humiliation imposed on them. They struggle with the traditional and diabolic elements, which enables them to look into their own self and understand what is right and wrong. Namita Gokhale attempts to say that women are also human beings with self-identity. This realisation is their gift. Being a human being, they also have desires, both physical and emotional, which they try to fulfill. They hate any kind of discrimination on the basis of gender.

In this chapter, the researcher attempts to bring out the quest for self-identity of many characters in the novels of Namita Gokhale. The reason behind their loss of identity is rootlessness and some unforgettable childhood trauma. In the process of quest for self-identity, sometimes they choose wrong paths. But at one point, they regret for their mistakes. Though some characters die at the end, they get salvation since they realise their mistakes. Having discussed the quest for identity in Namita Gokhale’s fiction in this chapter, the next chapter analyses the psychological conflicts of the characters in her novels.