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Namita Gokhale *The Book of Shadows: A Critical Study of the Protagonist***Harshita Chhikara****Assistant Professor****Department of English****Sh.L.N.Hindu College****Rohtak****(Received:12May2022/Revised:20May2022/Accepted:5June2022/Published:12 June2022)****Abstract**

One of the famous Indian writers, Namita Gokhale, has sieved different emotions and presented this beautiful concoction of women's feelings from a woman's perspective. The protagonist, an acid attack survivor, who has lost the love of her life, feels the pain intimidating, and as solace, she finds her childhood home in the hills soothing to the core. Either one has to bear the pain and live through it without a sigh or find a replacement to fill in the void and transfer oneself into a different realm. The novelist, in this book, has answered the question of survival, which is full of illusions distanced thoroughly from reality. This paper analyzes those painful events which have rendered nothing but an agonizing life for a woman.

Key Words: Trauma, Hills, Illusion, Emotions, and life.

Introduction

Namita Gokhale was born in the year 1956 on January 26th in Lucknow. The Indian writer spent her childhood in Delhi and the foothills of the Himalayas, Nainital. She is Kumaoni by birth, and her native touch is also reflected in her works. The Book of Shadows is also autobiographical work reflecting the novelist's life profoundly. She has authored eighteen books, including a series of fiction and non-fiction works. Her debut work is the novel named *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, published in the year 1984. The first work became controversial due to the direct sexual humor on the elite class of Delhi and Bombay. Gokhale was diagnosed with cancer in her late thirties, and during that period, she lost her husband too. The trauma and pain she underwent are reflected in the works *A Himalayan Love Story*, *the Book of Shadows*, and *Shakuntala*, the play

of Memory. The non-fiction collection includes Mountain Echoes, The Book of Shiva, in Search of Sita – Revisiting Mythology, Priya: In Incredible Indyaa, and the Mahabharata.

Analysis

One of the famous Indian writers, Namita Gokhale, has sieved different emotions and presented this beautiful concoction of women's feelings from a woman's perspective. The novelist has given the picture of the protagonist, who seems to remain far beyond the mundane world.

"My mother was from the mountains, and I knew this house as a child... I already belong to it. It has taken me in, enveloped my hurt. It soothes my hatred, hushes my sorrow."

Rachita Tiwari is an autobiographical portrayal of Namita. She lives in the present overlooking the past, yet the past keeps her cluttered, leading to her physical and mental instability. The protagonist, an acid attack survivor, who has lost the love of her life, feels the pain intimidating, and as solace, she finds her childhood home in the hills soothing to the core.

I have come to the hills to heal, hide, and forget. To forgive, to be forgiven. My friends resisted my decision... but I knew I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened. (6)

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Rachita's lover, younger than her by nearly seven years, found her cheating on him; whether it was the truth or the unknown assumption, he could not face either her or the situation, and ultimately, he ended his life for no reason. The decision of Anand not only ended his grief but ended the happiness of Rachita too. She was constantly trying to cope with the reality, which made her move to her childhood home, away from all.

I had been happy here as a child, and I am determined to be that again; to forget Anand's indulgent and wanton act of self-destruction, ignore his stupidity, and restore my life to its own course once again. (7)

It directly indicates how weak he was, and his sensitivity and emotions seem to transfer into the mind of Rachita. Anand's sister, with a vengeance, attacks Rachita with acid; thus, physical distortion and mental agony overtake her simultaneously. "In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I might

meet in the mirror is no longer mine." (3) She has the grit to survive through the pain, allowing her to take refuge in the hills, her childhood home. She begins to love her loneliness despite the memories thronging in her mind. She is alone and spends time reading the read and the unread. "Alienation is a device to make the unfamiliar familiar, I said, addressing a sea of guileless faces or to render the familiar unfamiliar." Thus, she unravels the fictitious thought processes and begins to create a world of her own. She travels far remote into the world of hallucinations and imagination, which profoundly suggest the sub-conscious desires of her inner self. Psychological transformation occurs in her. She starts to live in a world of imagination and develops a world for herself. She begins to hate her physical appearance. The acid attack that had morphed her face had also altered her thinking. She stopped looking at herself in the mirror. She hated herself and what had been happening to her, but she was neither weak as Anand nor aggressive as Anand's Sister.

She was constantly waiting for the dawn in her life daily. She had set a routine for herself, but eventually, she was after the dawn, the darkness had left a deep scar on her, and she wanted the light to make her feel better and bright. She was unsure of that. Maybe that was the reason to frame a world and people of her choice. "There is a young girl in my memories, I saw her again last night when I was unable to keep my eyes open." She was happy amidst her imagination, and those characters did not leave her as Anand had left. "I sit at the window, gazing at the mountains, at the pine and the oak that surround us. Filling up these notebooks, listening to Lohaniju's stories, watching the day turn to dusk, awaiting the dawn." (18) The emotional trauma after the acid attack was unbearable for her, "the pain, the unbearable pain." The novelist has given all the minute details of the protagonist's pain and loneliness. "I have not looked into a mirror for months now, and my face that familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction." She started reliving her childhood days, listening to stories that prevented her from getting intimidated by past incidents. The past exercises a tenacious hold over the future, and sometimes it tyrannizes the future into repetitive patterns. "I came to the hills to obliterate my past, to seek refuge in the immediate present." (32)

Through this novel and the protagonist's picture, Namita Gokhale has given a hint of her pain. She had been in absolute trauma and pain after losing her husband. It was the lovely bond that had rendered her weak from inside. The same was the condition of Rachita. It was her love for Anand which had made her fragile. Personal experiences contribute a lot to sculpting one's life.

Rachita had been trying to the fullest to cope with the reality and move on towards the future with enough grit, "My instinct tells me to lie low, to evade discovery, to wait for the return of strength and continuity." She kept herself busy reading but could not keep herself from the pain, which always haunted her despite her sturdy thoughts.

Conclusion

In this particular novel, Namita deals with the emotional aspects of a woman's life. Women are generally strong; awful experiences and stupid decisions are responsible for the distortions they face. One must learn and unlearn specific lessons from the life of Rachita. Fragility could in no way become the reason for self-destructiveness; psychological weakness also should not creep into the mind as it happened in the case of Rachita.

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