

REDISCOVERING SELF: A STUDY OF NAMITA GOKHALE'S THE BOOK OF SHADOW

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ABSTRACT

Desire is what we think to possess. It acts like a motivation for doing the work but when a person becomes passionate about the desire, the desire itself becomes a madness. Only desires can't motivate a person unless one becomes passionate. Human beings desire so many things in life but they achieve only a few which are designed by the destiny as well as the passion. Desires are the energy boosters. Sometimes this energy booster overcome the boundaries of time and space as in Rachita's case. Rachita was able to come to terms with her disfigured self and her abnormal life which was a result of acid attack. Rachita realizes a parallel world, a world beyond time and space, her life transforms and she embarks upon a journey of self realisation, a journey of rejuvenation, a journey of new phase of life. She takes a diversion of new journey of real life where she can easily enjoy the ordinary things. This book is not a saga of sufferings rather it is just like the holy water of river Ganga which connects its readers with the gist of life.

Keywords: Rejuvenation, Rediscovering, Diversion, Self-Realization, Alienated etc.

Rachita, a young educated woman transforms her life just by yielding towards passion. As she herself admits when she saw Anand's hanging body. His trust was shaken as Rachita admits, 'I had yielded to passion..to the not so subtle persuasions of my best friend's husband.'(Gokhale 5) Life made her disappointed and alienated. It was not easy for Rachita to understand what was happening in her life. After Anand's suicide, his sister attacked on her with acid. This acid attack disfigured Rachita emotionally and physically. Namita Gokhale has described the pain of humiliation that Rachita Tiwari feels as a woman and a beloved. Actually, her fiancé, Anand committed suicide as he found himself helpless to face the challenges of this cruel world. She was a teacher and taught English literature at Jesus and Mary College. It was the same college which had a connection with Namita Gokhale Everything around her was unexpected . She was alone in this cruel world. Except a sister, she had no one in the name of family. But sometimes isolation proves as the best company. Rachita decision to live alone in the old house was somewhat psychic as many critics viewed it so. But this is the real art of Namita's pen which explores the reality of this land of acid attack where women not only survive but also fight to get the favourable condition for themselves. In this novel, Namita has projected a very strong Indian woman interns of Rachita Tiwari. Critics are of the view that there is Ipseity disturbance (Internet) in Rachita's case. But I think her behaviour is quite normal. After acid attack, her decision to live with her memories of childhood, was the only way to introspect where she was wrong. Nissim Ezekiel in one of his poems 'Poem of the Separation' has written 'It's true we cannot live on echoes'. (Internet) We are agree to the statement of Nissim but it is also true that testing of echoes is necessary in order to test the life. Acid attack makes a woman insecure and helpless. But Rachita was a strong woman, she was not helpless even she denied to call her sister. She planned to live alone in that lonely house. The old house seems as a real character in the story, just like a mother who holds everything of her child, her bad experience, good memories, her fear etc. Her old house became a starting point of her new journey to investigate the true meaning of life. 'The tall oaks lean against each other, their groping limbs invading the territories of other trees. They draw strange screeching sounds as bark brushes sap, and the shadows of the forest start speaking in the dark. In the evening the tortured pines sigh as though with one voice' (Gokhale, 1)

Rachita in her old house meets with her childhood again behind the curtain of the house. The characters like Lohaniju proves Namita's art of characterization as supreme. He acts as a voice of the house. There was a young girl in the memories of Rachita who watched her parents fornicate. It was her childhood memories. It was her suppressed feelings which made her alienated.

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Her experience with shadows was not a sign of hallucination rather it was a process of rejuvenation. She was dealing with all her suppressed passions at conscious and unconscious level. Even the licking by her dog was the only way which connected her to this cruel world. During night, Anand's voice and his sister's face haunted her but she did not get afraid as she felt no guilt on his death. It was his fault. The interesting part of the novel starts when Rachita started to read the old journal given by Lohaniju. Through this story, Namita Gokhale has tried to unburden herself from the absolute pain and trauma after the death of her husband. In Rachita's pain and anger, we can feel the pain of Namita. Rachita kept herself busy while reading old Journal, poetry etc. but sometimes failed to keep away the memories of Anand and his sister. Emotional aspect is highlighted in the whole story. Fragility was one of the main causes of pain in Rachita's life. But when she read the journal of William James Cockerell, she realised that everywhere there is an impact of sin. But even then, life is going on. Rachita realizes that life is a precious gift, more important than anything else.

In the middle part of the story, Namita has introduced a minor character Lali, who tried to pursue the missionary and his refusal became the root cause of her death in the same way as Anand failed. Here, Namita has tried to divert the mind of readers towards the norms of Indian culture. In Indian culture, we learn about the power of control, control through meditation. Control through norms of society etc. Uncontrollable desires have always been the causes of degradation of life. I have pondered the wisdom of writing this journal; memory is capable of delusion, and the mind of man falls prey to many fancies.' (Gokhale page 56.)

Through Rachita's life, Namita has made explicit that we all are the pilgrimages in an overcrowded bus but with different aim and destinations. No one knew about each other. 'We are like people in a very crowded bus, towards the end of a very long journey. We sense and know our separate destinations, and yet the journey which has thrown us together has knit a sense of intimacy between us'. (Gokhale 68)

Namita Gokhale has rightly written that experience is the organic material of life. It is through the experience of other lives narrated in old journals and from the stories of Lohaniju, Rachita very easily started to overcome her inner pain. Even she started to go outside for a walk. In that old house Rachita felt the presence of spirits and shadows. She realised the fusion of her emotions with her mental strength. Rachita was acquainted with the term Synesthesia. Sometimes she realised that she was suffering from it. 'I can see beyond the curtain. I know there is someone there, something that will surely claim me one day. Resistance is useless.' (Gokhale 76)

The story of Wolcott and Dona Rosa narrated by a spirit reveals the mysteries of life, how human beings indulge themselves in the web of aspirations and desires and how the karma effect the whole course of life. Some critics are of the view that this book is marked by abnormality of minimal self-awareness. If this is true then how Rachita, a victim of acid attack succeeds in overcoming his wounded soul. The resident ghost of her house speaks to her. It can be understood in such a way that Rachita was talking to herself. Her imaginations were weaving her own world with the help of the stories told by Lohaniju. She took the experience of story within a story of old house. She realised that nothing is important than life. Life is comprised of pain, suffering, joy and happiness. Sin is also a part of it. In spite of negative factors, life never diminishes. Rachita kept the memory of that old house just like Kamla Das' *My Grandmother's House*. As Kamala Das reminds love and affection of her grandmother in her poem 'My Grandmother's House', in the same way Rachita Tiwari reminded the happiest moments, she spent in that old house. The poem is nostalgic in nature. It expounds the days of Das' childhood. In the same way Rachita had lost her way in the quest of materialistic pleasure. She seems to announce in the words of Kamala Das: 'I lived in such a house and was proud, and loved...'. (KDAHP 97) It was just like a storehouse of Rachita's dreams. Fate had given her an opportunity to visit that house again. It was her new journey to undergo the soothing impact of the house in order to heal the wounded soul. It was the only way to get salvation from the darkness of Anand's memories and to regain her life again. Sometimes turning back becomes the only way to understand what life expects. Rachita Tiwari's memory of an old house is the reflection of Namita Gokhale's own memories and dreams. As she says in her interview:

'Nature has a healing power and it knows how to balance the energy', Namita Gokhale 's works are dealt with nature. The Book of Shadows displays the healing power of nature. The protagonist inhales the strength of nature to get rid of her pain. It was the nature that helped her to say goodbye to her hallucination. Namita has revealed her faith in the spirit of mountains. There is a reference of Airee, the folk god of hills and the daayans in the stories of lohaniju, which foretells the coming interaction of Rachita with the spirit. Namita Gokhale also believes that nature is a beautiful source of information. It acts as a medicine and can heal the wounds easily .Man is not capable to expose the secret of nature. The episode of Munro and Marcus reveals the fact how a human can be inhuman and even worse than animal.

A male child was sacrificed by cruel Munro and Marcus. Here, Namita Gokhale has tried to expose the power of death. As she writes:

"When humans die, their psychic residues spill over to our world, to other worlds. Their collapsing energies emanate a mighty helplessness, clogging up consciousness, making it difficult to comprehend or switch over to other spheres. I knew at that moment that someone had died." (Gokhale 107)

Death of Colonel Osborne, Father Benedictus, Nicholas Mann, Wolcott, exposes the power of Evil. The teachings of Father Benedictus to the spirit of the house regarding body and soul, was a solace for Namita to understand the fact that spirits have more significant place than human beings. She realised that soul never dies. Namita Gokhale's husband's death kept her aloof from the task of art for a long time. The very frustration and anger were reflected in Rachita's behavior before her acid attack. Writing is a very private task. Namita Gokhale herself has admitted in one of her interviews that she writes about things before they happen to her. This intuition power of her inner self makes her a strong writer while writing this novel, *The Book of Shadows*, she has experimented with the thought of spirit. There is a parallel world of supernaturalism in the world of human beings. After the death of her husband, Namita also experienced this supernatural power. In this parallel world, the reality gets reserved in the subconscious mind and most of the time, normally a person can't understand what happens. Namita Gokhale has herself shared her experience with the spirit in one of her interviews. She says that the manuscript from her computer disappeared automatically and computer experts were not able to find the fact. As she says:

'I think that's true that most writers lead extremely lonely lives. Yeats wrote about the day's vanity, the night's remorse. Writers lead very internalized lives, and even if they are fairly gregarious, as I am, they have to be alone somewhere inside them'. (Internet)

In the whole process of retreat and regeneration, Rachita visited a new world of spirits and shadows. She realised that these spirits are also bound with the impact of karmas. The Universe always opens harmony and balance for everyone. But no-one can escape from the karmic account of oneself. It is the body of human being that is the cause of sufferings. And to overcome these sufferings, one has to control one's body. As Namita writes

"For the human race, the body above all is the instrument of your suffering. (Gokhale 139)

Self-awareness is the best tool to conquer the war of life. Rachita in her prime time, was so indulged in herself that being a teacher of literature, she had no interest in poetry and especially the poems written by her students. There are so many things in life which we don't accept easily but it doesn't mean that they are of no use or less significant. In the journey of life to fulfill the quest of identity, one has to go through the process of retreat. Retreat is not a process to escape rather it is a systematic discontinuation from self. When our soul goes through the prism of life, it disperses into different shades of aspirations. And in this dispersion a soul forgets its real identity. Namita Gokhale has used these symbolic references to focus the journey of Rachita towards life. Neurosis is the outcome of isolation and alienation. Rachita was suffering from it. Rachita's neurosis was also the outcome of Anand's suicide and acid attack on her which was unexpected. She tried her best to be normal and to face the challenges of life with her inner strength. As Bijay Kumar Das has rightly said in his book *Post Modern Indian English Literature*.

‘Life and death are not mere binary opposites for him. He takes death not as a closer of life but a sad reminder of the inadequacies of it. Since death renders all human efforts futile, we have no other alternative than to turn to God for solace.’ (PMIEL 75)

There were eight rooms in that old house. Being alone in the house, she felt crowded. She felt the presence of many people there. It was not her hallucination because her dog raised her ears when she focused her eyes at a particular point. She felt the presence of someone, someone who was invisible but dogs have a sense to smell or to see anything invisible. Rachita succeeds in her investigation of real face of faith and life. Face is termed as the sign of identification. When her face got damaged, she was forgotten by the people of her own city. She was just a story of acid attack for them. This acid attack damaged her one Identity but she found another one, a new face of life, a new face of faith and self-realization. In the end, Rachita was able to come to terms with her disfigured self and her abnormal life takes a diversion of new journey of real life where she can easily enjoy the ordinary things. This book is not a saga of sufferings rather it is just like the holy water of river Ganga which connects its readers with the gist of life.

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