

Acid Aggression Against Women : A Study of Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows*

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In Hindu traditions, women is considered as a silent sufferer. She has been a secondary status whether it is in family or in the society. In Indian English Literature, fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment. The women writers face much struggle to establish their identity and also to assert their own individuality. Today's woman desires her just a right place in the society.

Namita Gokhale is a writer and publisher. She is one of the founders and co-directors of the Jaipur Literature Festival. Her first novel, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* became very famous. Namita Gokhale has written a hand full of novels and two works of nonfiction. *The Book of Shadows* is the best appreciated fiction. The publisher says, "Part ghost story, part erotic romance, *The Book of Shadows* is an ambitious book that investigates the nature of reality, love and faith. It is a work of startling originality by one of India's most daring and talented writers."

All the novels of Namita Gokale reveal the restriction of human being by her association with social customs that reflect her connections with the object world. In her novels, the women characters undergo moments of excruciating mental torture deep within themselves, and marriages are often presented as an experience of conflict, frustration and a long dawn period of stress. Rachita Tiwari in *The Book of Shadows*, certainly has the mentality and will power of their own.

The Book of Shadows is a fine texture of her experience of Delhi life and her intimacy for the Himalayan World. The novel initiated with the formal and full of egoistic life of Delhi.

In *The Book of Shadows*, the protagonist is Rachita Tiwari. Rachita lived in a remote house. It is situated in the Himalayan foothills. The novelist has also lived in that house. She explained it in her Note.

Now-a-days acid attacks on women increases. They suffer a lot. They may blind. They may get disfigured faces. There are many girls and women face much

problems like denied marriage or even getting employment. There is a direct for inheritances, dowries, jealousy. Women are the first victim. That too, they are attacked by acid. The reason behind is, the acid is the cheapest object. Women become sufferer. They may even face the death.

In the novel, *The Book of Shadows*, Rachita's fiance is Anand. Anand committed suicide. He hung himself in the room itself. It was such apathetic scene in this novel. "Who was this swaying on a rope before me? This was not my lover, the stroker of my brow. It was an unbearable excess of all that was possible and bearable. There was defeat here, and a loss of dignity. This travesty of not-life was not how death was to be faced: of this I was sure."

Anand's sister was very angry with Rachita. She planned to do the acid attack on Rachita. Though Anand's sister was a lecturer, she couldn't bear her brother's death. As she was the lecturer of Chemistry, it was very easy to get the acid for her.

Most of the protagonists in Gokhale's novel like lonely in their lives. After getting the acid attack, Rachita too decided to live the lonely life. She wanted to heal her wounds. Usually in Gokhale's novels, each heroine wanted to live alone in their family, but Rachita moved far away from the city environment as well as from her family. She says, "I have come to the hills to heal, to hide, to forget. To forgive, to be forgiven. My friends all resisted my decision. My sister even insisted on accompanying me here, but I knew that I needed solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened."

It is believed that males are known for knowledge, power, consciousness, strong action, while females are known for their feeling touch, weak action, and domestic intimacy. Some of these characteristics are not absolutely in the case of Rachita. She is distinct from others. She is not a doomed character but she is self aware and optimistic. As she remarks, "Proprioception is the science