

Ethical Values In Namita Gokhale's *The Book Of Shadows*

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Abstract

Namita Gokhale's **The Book of Shadows** is a profound exploration of ethical values interwoven with themes of guilt, redemption, and self-discovery. The novel, set in a remote Himalayan retreat, follows the protagonist, Rachita, as she grapples with her past trauma and seeks solace in solitude. Through her journey, Gokhale examines the moral dilemmas faced by individuals in moments of crisis, emphasizing values such as truth, forgiveness, and resilience. The novel underscores the significance of self-reflection and personal transformation, portraying how ethical choices shape human relationships and inner peace. Rachita's interactions with the inhabitants of the retreat highlight the complexities of human nature, where ethical boundaries often blur in the face of emotions and circumstances. The haunting presence of the past, symbolized by the spirits lingering in the old house, serves as a metaphor for unresolved moral conflicts and the necessity of confronting one's conscience. Gokhale weaves elements of spirituality and mysticism, reinforcing the idea that ethical values are not rigid but evolve with experience and understanding. The narrative also delves into themes of justice and retribution, questioning whether redemption is possible for those who have erred. Rachita's journey reflects a larger philosophical inquiry into the nature of good and evil, illustrating how ethical decisions are often influenced by personal suffering and societal expectations. The novel's lyrical prose and introspective tone invite readers to reflect on their own moral choices, making **The Book of Shadows** not just a story of an individual's redemption but also a meditation on the ethical struggles that define human existence. Gokhale's portrayal of ethical values extends beyond conventional morality, urging readers to embrace compassion, empathy, and self-awareness as guiding principles in life.

Keywords: Ethics, Redemption, Forgiveness, Moral Dilemmas, Self-Reflection

There is no denying the fact that *The Book of Shadows* is a treatise ethics. Bitter facts of life have been described in the novel *The Book of Shadows*, Namita Gokhale has described the humiliation that not fitchita feels as a teacher. Her fiance Anand committed suicide due to her breach of trust and he found himself helpless. She had no desire to survive in this cruel world. Rachita explains the concept of alienation her students in Delhi. In the beginning Rachita asks a question-who am I? So far she defined herself after seeing her face in the mirror. Now her parameter changes as acid has been thrown upon her face by the sister of

Anand. Rahita is left to herself and now alienation means the loss of identity for her. She becomes conscious of having cheated her lover. Now she takes shelter in the old house of Ranikhet and compromises with the world of shadows.

She feels that the world is cruel to her now. She is unable to face the Media. She reaches the hills of Ranikhet so that she may forgive others. Actually her friends fail to understand her vanity. Like Namita Gokhale, she lives in the house of her mother's brother. Rumina Sethi remarks:

Rachita is the protagonist of Namita Gokhale's *The Book of Shadows* a chronicle of displacement, strangeness and exile, of forbidding and family histories told in a sensual, descriptive style which lends energy to her tense psychological drama with all its intimacy and haunting elusiveness. It is an original and ambitious piece of work and wide-ranging with a laudable cosmopolitan edge.

Why does Rachita Tiwari run away from the memory of her finance? she recollects that Anand used to kiss her passionately:

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

Well, I had betrayed him. I had "yeilded to passion", as he put it, to the not so subtle persuasion of my best friend's husband. Unreality gets compounded by confusion. (5)

In her lonely moments she recollects:

And was another fictionalizer, he had wanted to be novelist, or a file-maker, or perhaps a great draed to be have trained my to avoid thinking him, of purple jeering tongue, and I go through the set drill of forgetting. (16-17)

Here Rachita approves Plato's theory that poets are removed from reality. However, she enjoys reading poems of Emily Dickenson, Mahadevi Verma etc. She refers to time as 'the invisible thief.

The pattern of Gothic Romances has been followed to create the world of horror. She admits that she is talking to herself daily. In October she feels shocked to see her handkerchiefs spotted with blood Quite often she feels that there is someone in her room. But who is in the room? Why does she not listen his sound?

I lay in bed paralyzed with fear. Dry mouth, sweating palms, thumbing heat and shallow hasty breathing. My heart beat so hard that at each beat a loose brass knob ce the bedstead rattled. When I woke up (although I don

know if I ever slept) my mind was blank, I was exhausted, and my one desire was to get away. (64-65)

She asks herself the cause of her restlessness

Experience is the raw material of life. Life is the sum of our meagre experiences. After a while it becomes easier just to drift. Yet anger can at least affirm, while regret redeems nothing. (66)

Namita Gokhale relates life and art. The Book of Shadows is

Perhaps I will after all one day write a novel - I'll become an author, I'll write a best seller and go for the launch in a black lace mantilla and have all the men in the audience wildly in love with me. (65-66)

At times she gets relief. Still she has hallucinations as she does understand 'something' though she feels them. But who are they and they like the characters of a science-fiction film? Why it is that chaos reigns. Everything has gone. only pain remains Inquished, a raw constant pain that is almost a stimulous... And these anomalousness; these confusions. What is happening to (67)

In a serious mood Rachita asks herself Does she exist? Has used to exist at all?-

You could say that I have ceased to exist, I have become but a consecution of surreal perceptions, derelicted by spatial time and left at the mercy of a world suspended between unrealities. (67)

Due to inner fear she feels herself to be nervous. She feels that he and her servant are only shadows:

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 had thrown us together has knit a sense of intimacy between us. (68)

Shadows haunt her regularly:

From somewhere beyond the curtain that divides my voice. appropriating myself. Moet nitions of who I am coming undone, and yet I do not think I am going mad course, that is what we all say, (68)

She finds herself bewildered in this unfamiliar world. Ramina Sethi says

Interwoven with insights into her life and the cause of her present misery, this story of claustrophobia and teme is propelled with dark as well as bright shadows of pathetic, sinister, and perverse figures who are associated with the central persona of the house in Kumaon hills. In her world no one individual can touch another's existence; all seem to be intangible specters and living ghosts like her servant or the dog. (T).

Namita Gokhale deals with the bitter realities of life in *Pars Dreams of Passion, Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, and *A Himalayan Love Story*, She has her own observations of life. But she seems to run away from humanity in *The Book of Shadows*. Rachita does not want to return to Delhi and recollects her students and small portions of her lectures. She feels immense agony:

Pain is a precondition to life, a prelude to joy. It is a teacher not a tormenter. Lack of stimulation leads only to teacher, not a tormenter. Lack of stimulation leads only a lack of sensation. Better, then, the pain.

Why can't I understand this in daily life. (70-71)

At times she feels highly tense as silence is troublesome for her A few words prove terrible for her:

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 see, words I hear that are outside the sphere of any experience I have ever had. (61)

At times she feels herself a patient of neurosis. Her servant talks of various superstitions and she ridicules them. In *The Book of Shaukove* she makes fun of the homely life of Shivji and Parvati and remarks:

I wonder if Shivji really lives there, under mount Kailash. Lohaniju assures me that he does, serpents and all. I asked him, just a joke, where Parvati went to get to her sexy little Cholis tailored and he fell into a rage, a real rage such as I had never witnessed before. He said I was half-educated and suspended between two worlds, like Trishanku. (62)

Sumitra Nand Pant, Nirala, Jayshanker Prasad and Mahadevi are regarded poets of shadows as they escaped from the realities of modern India. The following lines of Mahadevi Verma console her:

Pain sticks to my mind
Like a damp cloth;
As though drawing, these wet sighs
Come crowding to my lips. (72)

And-

In the bosom of the night I am the arrow of the day's desires.
Empty was my birth,
And the dawn is as a death:

Darkness alone the companion of my restless spirit.

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

When Rachita finds a prism in a drawer, she feels pleased with the range of colours. This pleasing new reality makes her feel safe and secure:

As I observed my world bathed in that beautiful glowing light, as I saw the table and the chair and the fireplace refracted in this puzzling but entirely pleasing new reality. I felt somehow safe and secure and familiar, as though I was retreating or retiring to place I already knew and recognized. I sat with the prism held close to my eyes, lost in the splendour and surprise of this new world. Everything was as it should have been, nothing around me had changed. (74)

Now she asks herself - Does she suffer from Synesthesia?

In *The Book of Shadows* Namita Gokhale shares her personal sufferings with the readers. It is true that she suffered the pangs of death these days:

I didn't realize that this was a book about pain. It is only after I had finished the book that I saw its purpose. In the book, Rachita, the connecting link of the story, feels a lot of anger. I had lost my husband some years ago. And although on the surface I looked peaceful, there was a lot of anger inside me. That's what I filled Rachita with... It was cathartic in that sense. The book is also about death. As if I'm trying to find out what death is all about. The ghost in the novel serves that purpose. With him, I explore the soul's outward journey. Initially, I had thought that at the end of the novel, Rachita would go back to the city, perhaps have a plastic surgery (she has acid thrown on her face by her lover's sister) and live on. But somewhere along the way, I realized that this wouldn't happen. She would live on in that house of hills. This is symbolic of my living on in the world of - well, I won't say psychic. Because I mock the obviously psychic - let's say, in the world of spirit. In a sense, it is also about rebirth.

In the third part of the novel Namita Gokhale describes Rachita's contemplative life. She analyses the love affairs of Donarozza and Woolcott. She admits her own limitations regarding the past and future and remarks:

I have my own limitations. Whereas the future (viewed in a certain light) is like a quicksilver stream capable of being gauged and understood, or an incoming bus that can be caught or missed, the past remains a mystery, to be grasped only in the chambers of memory. I knew I sensed Dona Rosa to the depths of her being, but her history, the particular truth of her past, could only be understood and reconstructed from scattered thought impulses and shards and splinters of memory. (80)

The artists records the sounds of the crows, the ravens, wolrus, etc: The crows are eternal wanderers and her friends :

Crows have ancient eyes, they look into the twenty-seven depths of surface events and understand their totality. There is nothing which they do not know. Their opinioned cousins, the ravens, are parvenur and pretenders, the object of much pity and ridicule in reind circles. The walrus, I understand, is acquainted with death, with the synapse between the worlds. The cat too is companion to many mysteries. (81)

In Ranikhet she survives in the world of shadows, and thinks of roza's love for captain Woolcott. Rachita talks of spirits and mystics:

It is never good to venture too far, for mysteries are fragile things, and every world and dimension is full of traps for the unwary. I hesitated, and you could say that in that hesitation I was lost. You will understand what I mean, it happens often enough with your kind. (87)

She feels that life is a series of choices:

I glimpsed for a moment the nature of human choice. Choice is the joker in life's pack of cards. It is choice that first guides the sperm on its long wet journey. Lonely. desirous of success, impelled by both past and future, it knows that its destiny is waiting, pulling it to the tip of the cape, the isthmus of choices. Some you make, and some are inevitably made for you. (87)

Rachita notices Captain Woolcott and Dona Roza making love to each other:

One kiss let to another, and in a short while they were tangled up in each other, the unslightly heap of holes and orifices and protruding parts which your race understands as passion. I was dismayed to see the change in Dona Roza. The proud nobility, the gentle, calm of her demeanour all vanished from view. (89)

Now Rachita admires the structure of a woman's body as there is nothing to be analysed in the body of a man:

A man's body is a most peculiar construct. A woman's body contains a symmetry of purpose - the breasts, which are the conduit of the life-force, and the womb, the matrix of life. A man is an idiot on two legs, with a tap of semen between the testicles; his life force is stored in a vulnerable exterior container. (90)

Rachita feels that Crowley could destroy the works of civilizations. He could analyze various aspects of cosmos, astral charts and the tree of life. But Crowley does not accept the theory of evil but Rachita does. Like the artist, she has full sympathy with the wild animals as they enjoy free life in the woods:

Captivity is anathema to the spirit of the panther, its essence is speed and agility and freedom. Animal energies, when released, remain in the air for a long time, and a permanent miasma of anger, sorrow and confusion had settled on the tennis field. Even the servants were reluctant to go there. (99)

Turner, Forbear, Kennedy and Dunbar find the dead bodies of Munro and Marcus in this house. The reason is that the only son of washer woman had been offered as a sacrifice to the gods by these two hunters. The spirits of hills fail to tolerate this sacrifice of pure blood. Here the artist condemns evil doers. Regarding Munro and Marcus she bitterly says:

The word evil does not belong to our plane, but I have to use it to explain to you what lay within those four walls. Just the smell was enough to drive anyone mad, composed as it was of fear and putrefaction. It is only natural for the flesh to decay, it is process; but Munro's decomposing face was caught in such a grimace of pain and anger, it held such a hideous monstrosity of expression. (120)

During moments of tension Rachita feels:

I have learnt from bitter experience that there is no solace or relief in philosophizing - it only exacerbates the wounds of my fractured experience. Still, something in that chill, lifeless February day made me cry out at the injustice of my situation. It is terrible to be suspended in time and space, without a body, without a context, ignorant of the reasons and circumstance that have led to this strange exile, this cruel isolation. Know edge is no consolation.(124)

However, she has her vision and understanding. She is not gused to forget action, hope and purposeful life:

My vision and understanding are only exterior. I can gaze at this passing show of humans, and watch their follies and frailties, but they can so rarely sense or see me. We belong to different worlds, and the bubble of accident that blankets me also denies me contact with other spheres and channels. The hopes that I have nursed for so long are all I have, I do not have the conviction to put them to the test. (124)

Shadows come and vanish, making her sad. The process of ansmigration is felt by her:

Presences arrive, from other planes, other existences, to observe, welcome and aid the process of transmigration. I look at them wistfully, even with a certain envy. When, I wonder to myself, shall I be reclaimed? Who is the one, the fried from the past, who will come and assist me to cross over? (125)

The arrival of Father Benedictus gives her joy. He wants to write a book upon the folk tales of Kumaon and Nepal. When he captures butterflies she has sympathy for them:

It resonates through my center for an unreasonable time. it is not that I am sentimental, butterflies just have that effect on me. It was agony to share the room with Father Benedictus: his orginastic delight in decapitating the innocent creatures drove me wild with rage. I decided to move out, and even accommodated myself in an outhouse near the main gate for some time. (129)

Now she has no doubts regarding self-perception as she becomes conscious of the growth of her consciousness:

Father Benedictus once explained that humans know themselves by means of vision, balance and the functioning of the sustaining organs; the thread on the beads being sentience, or the sense of self-perception. Well, my window on the world is naught else... (131)

Father Benedictus tries to understand the difference between things known and unknown, observed and unobserved:

Father Benedictus was a seeker of knowledge and a skilled interrogator. He drew from me the substance of my extraneous energies, things known and things observed, as also the subtler memories of unformulated associations, reminders and echoes, besides of course gauging the mechanical constraints and conditionalities of my existence. In return, he attempted to explain the contradictions of human life to me. (132)

She feels the power of words and says:

Words, too, could in my world be understood as a form of excreta, for they exist only after the act of cognition, as dead symbols of the mind's working. Of course, I could not understand or formulate these emotions before Father Benedictus gave me the gift of speech. (135)

Thus, Namita Gokhale has discussed various moral issues in *The Book of Shadows*. She never shows any indifference to ethical values.

Works Cited

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