

# A Lacanian Reading of Namita Gokhale's *The Book Of Shadows*

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## Introduction

Ever since Sigmund Freud discovered that the creative faculty draws on drives and fantasies that are buried in the unconscious and that they provide the clues to understanding the imaginative mind as well as individual works, it created room for a number of speculations. Literary criticism has been flooded with different variants of psychological criticism which include studying the work presented in terms of its characters, the author's mind and the reader's mind.

Psychoanalysis is the dynamic form of psychology which was developed by Freud as a "means of analysis and therapy for neuroses but soon expanded it to account for many developments and practices in the history of civilization, including warfare, mythology and religion, as well as literature and the other arts" (Abrams 1999: 248). Psychoanalytic criticism can attend to the author of the work; to the work's contents; to its formal construction or to the reader. The author's life and emotions are analysed and the literary work is seen to supply evidence for this analysis. This is often called "psychobiography". A literary text, according to psychoanalytical critics, hides or represses its real content behind manifest content. Besides Freud, there have been other prominent psychoanalysts like Jacques Lacan and Carl Jung. Though they may differ in their approach in theory, all psychoanalytic approaches to literature have one thing in common—the critics begin with a full psychological theory of how and why people behave as they do, a theory that has been developed by a psychologist/psychiatrist/psychoanalyst outside of the realm of literature, and they apply this psychological theory as a standard to interpret and evaluate a literary work. The developer of the theory and the details of the theory will vary, but the theories

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are all universalistic in scope, positing patterns of behaviour that are not dependent on specific times, places and cultures.

### Jacques Lacan

If Freud's theories focussed upon the relation between authors, readers or characters in psychoanalysing literature, Jacques Lacan was responsible for the gradual move away from 'persons', i.e. authors, readers, or fictive characters, towards the text and towards the reading and writing operations. He "proposed in the 1950's, a 'linguistic' interpretation of Freud" (Suprenant 2006: 206). Lacan's most celebrated dictum, "the unconscious is structured like a language" (1973: 203), implies that psychoanalysis as a discipline must borrow the methods and concepts of modern linguistics; but he does it from a psychoanalytical vantage point (Lodge 1988: 61). Thus, Lacan's view of psychoanalysis involved the intermingling of human subjects and language. Lacan also focussed upon topics such as the ego, transference, psychosis, the death drive, repression and sexuality, as Freud had. But he argued that Freud "had understood the linguistic nature of human psychology but that he had simply lacked the Saussurean vocabulary necessary to articulate it" (Clark 1994: 452). Lacan's conception of the unconscious as structured like a language and the relationship between the symbolic order and the subject opened up a whole new way of understanding the play of unconscious desire in the text (Homer 2005: 2). Lacan's argument lay in the fact that speech, particularly language was central to psychoanalytic practice and to any theoretical conclusions that might be extrapolated from it. Therefore the focus of Lacanian criticism is not upon the unconscious of the character or the author, but upon the text itself and the relationship between the text and reader.

Lacan's ideas and theories were influenced by various methods and theories ranging from structuralism to linguistic theory. He was also influenced by phenomenology, psychology, ethology and philosophy, which are four strands of thinking that are present in his controversial essay, "The Mirror Stage" (1936). The anthropologist Claude Lèvi-Strauss and his works had a wide ranging influence upon structuralism. He, in turn was influenced by Saussure's foundational distinction between language and an individual's speech. Lacan derived from Claude Lèvi Strauss, the idea that what characterises the human world is the symbolic-function- a function that, intervenes in all aspects of our lives (Homer 2005: 36). Lacan's

version of psychoanalysis was based upon ideas articulated in structuralist linguistics and anthropology. He was properly post-structuralist, which is to say that he questioned any simple notion of either "self or truth", exploring instead how knowledge is constructed by way of linguistic and ideological structures that organize not only our conscious but also our unconscious lives. Freud was tempted by organic models and had a desire to find the neurological and thus "natural" causes for sexual development. Lacan on the other hand offered a more proper linguistic model for understanding the human subject's entrance into the social order.

According to Lacan, the entrance into language necessarily entails a radical break from any sense of materiality in and of itself. One must always distinguish between reality (the fantasy world that we convince ourselves is the world around us) and the Real (a materiality of existence beyond language and thus beyond expressibility). The development of the subject, in other words, is made possible by an endless misrecognition of the Real because of our need to construct our sense of "reality" in and through language. We are so reliant of our linguistic and social version of "reality" that the eruption of pure materiality (of the real) into our lives is radically disruptive. And yet, the Real is the rock against which all of our artificial linguistic and social structures necessary fail. It is thus, this tension between the Real and our social laws, meanings, conventions, desire, etc. that determines our psychosexual lives (Felluga 2003: 10). Not even our unconscious escapes the effects of language, which is why Lacan concludes that "the unconscious is structured like a language". Lacan's ideas also had references to Jakobson's distinction between metaphor and metonymy which he identified with Freud's categories of condensation and displacement respectively. He equates neurotic symptoms with metaphor and desire with metonymy (Lodge 1988: 62). Lacan puts forward the concept of Freudian ideas in relation to the concepts in linguistics and philosophy, in books like *The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* (1953) and *The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious* (1957).

In Lacanian psychoanalysis, the unconscious is the ground of all being. The unconscious is not a chaotic mass of disparate material, as might formerly have been thought, but "an orderly network, as complex as the structure of a language" (Barry 1995: 111). By relating metaphor to condensation and metonymy to displacement, Lacan exemplifies his views about how the unconscious was structured

like a language. Lacan also observes that Freud's dream analysis, and most of his analyses of the unconscious symbolism used by his patients, depend on word-play, on puns, associations, etc. that are chiefly verbal. He divides the psyche into three major structures that control our lives and our desires which are the Real, Imaginary and the Symbolic.

### **The Real**

The Real stage is when the infant is driven by Need — for food, comfort, safety, etc. which it gets from its mother. As with Freud, Lacan believed that the infant needed to be separated from its mother and form a separate identity in order to enter into civilization. This separation leads to some kind of "loss". The child realizes here the difference between itself and its mother and starts becoming an individuated being. It loses that primal sense of unity, safety and security that it once had with its mother. There is an original unity in the Real and thus there is fullness and completeness. Every need is satisfied for it. Due to the fact that there is no absence or loss or lack, there is no language in the Real. For Lacan, language is always about loss or absence; one needs words only when the object one wants is gone. Thus in the Real, there is no language because there is no loss, lack or absence.

### **The Imaginary**

Lacan's Mirror Stage corresponds to Freud's stage of primary narcissism where the subject is in love with his or her own image or body. The child begins to identify with the mirror image that it sees of itself. But Lacan says that this identification is a misperception:

The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation — and which manufactures for all the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic — and lastly to the assumption of the armour of an alienating identity, which will mark with its rigid structure the infant's entire mental development. (1977: 4)

It is out of the process of misrecognition that the EGO is formed. "The ego emerges at this moment of alienation and fascination with one's

own image....The function of the ego is...one of misrecognition; of refusing to accept the truth of fragmentation and alienation" (Homer 2005: 25). Thus, the mirror stage is when the child begins to experience fundamental alienation where it sees in its mirror image a self which it would like to be, an ideal self, well coordinated and unified. It now identifies itself, imaginatively, with images and objects. Lacan calls this phase in the development of a child the realm of the Imaginary because the idea of a self is created through an imaginary identification with the image in the mirror. The imaginary is a realm of images, whether conscious or unconscious. According to Lacan, the notion of otherness encountered in the imaginary phase and associated with demand, comes before the sense of "self" which is built on the idea of otherness. It is in the mirror stage that the child "enters into the language system, essentially a system which is concerned with lack and separation — crucial Lacanian concepts — since language names what is not present and substitutes a linguistic sign for it" (Barry 1995: 114). When the child begins to formulate some idea of otherness and a self identified with its own "other", its own mirror image, the child begins to enter the symbolic realm.

### **The Symbolic**

The Symbolic order is the structure of language itself. We have to enter it in order to become speaking subjects, and to designate ourselves by "I". Whereas the imaginary is all about equations and identifications, the symbolic is about language and narrative. Once the child enters into language and accepts the rules and dictates of society, it is able to deal with others. According to Lacan, the acceptance of language's rules is aligned with the Oedipus complex. Thus the symbolic is made possible because of one's acceptance of those laws and restrictions that control both desire and the rules of communication. As Lacan remarks:

It is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law. (1977: 67)

The real stage concerns need, the Imaginary concerns demand and the Symbolic is all about desire according to Lacan. Once an

individual enters into language, desire is forever afterwards bound up with the play of language. However, Dino Felluga opines:

(The Real and Imaginary), continue to play a part in the evolution of human desire within the symbolic order. The fact that our fantasies always fall before the Real, for example, ensures that we continue to desire; desire in the symbolic order could, in fact be said to be our way to avoid coming in full contact with the Real, so that desire is ultimately most interested not in obtaining the object of desire but, rather, in reproducing itself. (2003: 17)

Thus the Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic work together to create the tensions in the psychodynamic individual.

The distinctions made in the mirror phase between self and Other, mother and child, become categorical or structural ideas. So, in the Symbolic, there is a structure or structuring principle of otherness and a structuring principle of lack. The Other is a structural position in the Symbolic order. It is the place that everyone is trying to get to and merge with, in order to get rid of the separation between “self” and “other”. Derrida calls it the Center of the system, of the symbolic, and of language itself. Thus, as a result of the transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order — to the construction of the self-image and the acquisition of language — the child is socialized with the family through acknowledgement and acceptance of difference (in gender) and absence (of the mother’s body). It is the repression of desire, and hence, the unconscious, that determines human behaviour. Thus, to acquire language, is to subject oneself to the inevitability of desire. As language articulates the “fullness” of the imaginary and cuts it up into parts, it also cuts one off from the Real — which lies beyond the symbolic order.

### Namita Gokhale and *The Book of Shadows*

Namita Gokhale’s works are full of passion, where she expresses herself through her writings. Her uninhibited self is projected in her novels as well as in her articles and interviews. Although she had a passion for literature, it is ironic that she could not fulfil her dreams to study English literature. Before the unfortunate incident in college which ruined her academic career, she was “a really serious literature student. I wanted to teach, to get a Ph.D.” (Gokhale 2002 : 1).

She also says that “I’ve always had this thing for literature...in college, it seemed as if I was on a perpetual high. I just wanted to read and read. It was all I lived for” (Gokhale 1986: 43). The authors who have influenced her were Dickens, Dostovosky and Muriel Spark. *War and Peace* and *The Tale of Genji* are the books which she has kept going back to (Gokhale 2007(b): 2). Her affinity to literature, whether English or regional, comes through in most parts of the novel. The indifferent attitude of the nuns at her college when she could not continue her degree would make us believe that she could have started having an aversion to English literature. This may be contrary to her real thoughts and feelings, but a closer look at *The Book of Shadows* tends to give support to this fact.

In *The Book of Shadows*, Rachita Tiwari is an English Lecturer at Jesus and Mary College, the same college which Namita Gokhale attended. Rachita gets acid thrown at her face after an ugly showdown with her dead fiancé’s sister. She retreats to the hills to nurse her physically and mentally wounded self. Her days are spent reading, listening to Lohaniju’s tales and taking walks in the nearby forests. In the house, she feels strange presences lurking in the shadows and she attempts to fight the fears that confront her both consciously and unconsciously. Her thoughts are often interspersed with lines from the poems of Emily Dickinson, Mahaswati Devi and other literary figures, which begin to get on her nerves:

Where did that come from? Bits and pieces of all that  
I had learnt and studied dart about my head like shrapnel.  
I dodge these high words, this alien language, and seek  
refuge in Lohaniju’s soft and consonated Pahari. The  
Kumaoni language, Pahari, is dismissed as a mere dialect,  
yet its sounds reassure me, silence my puzzlement and  
pain. (Gokhale 1999(a):12)

Rachita seeks refuge in the language of her birth just like her creator, who has an inclination towards her Pahari dialect. Later, as she comes across the missionary’s journal in the house, she says, “It is a contradiction of my situation and of many other academics, that we have to write and study a language which is not primarily our own. An adoptive and imitative idiom hinders the sensibility” (Ibid: 33). These views are the same as Gokhale’s who believes the English language is “a barrier from the subject you write about, and then the whole experience and its baggage, which you have to dissociate



yourself from" (Gokhale 2002: 2). Gokhale's stress on the importance of regional languages led her to become a publisher. Though she writes in English, she is into publishing in Indian languages.

As she spends her days in the old house, reminiscing her past and the shadows that haunt her, Rachita remembers her student, Zenobia Desai who has a passion for English literature and is an intelligent though slightly despicable, girl: "In every classroom in the world, there is one disconcerting student with the gift of being right at the wrong time..." (Gokhale 1999:4). She also describes her as "my least favourite student, the bane of my academic life" (Ibid: 220). These references to academic life and the resentment felt by Rachita Talwar are reflected in Gokhale's own resentment to her academic life during her college days. After the unfortunate incident with her attendance and her optional paper, she says that it put her "in reverse gear against the academic profession" (Gokhale 2002: 2). But, she recovers and says: "in retrospective, it was the best thing that has happened to me. As a reaction I went into publishing and the rest followed" (Ibid: 2).

*The Book of Shadows* was written after Gokhale lost her husband Rajiv due to liver cirrhosis. She had been going through a lot of pain and trauma owing to this, and the novel was an outcome of the pain and anger that was inside her. She says,

I didn't realise that this was a book about pain. It's only after I 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 graceful, there was a lot of anger inside me. That's what I fuelled Rachita with. (Gokhale 1999(b): 18)

Rachita is also filled with a lot of anger for what has happened in her life. Her fiancé Anand had committed suicide and Anand's sister blamed her for it. In the process, Anand's sister splashed a beaker full of acid on Rachita's face, disfiguring her physically, mentally and emotionally. This is the reason for Rachita's anger and hurt which Gokhale projects as an offshoot of her personal anger and hurt. Rachita's sojourn in the mountains is filled with pensive and philosophical thoughts which pervade the novel right from the first page when she relates herself to the old house:

This house belongs to me, as I belong to this house...we have closed ranks together, me and the house. We have become as one spirit; it is us against the world. All day I sit and stare at the blinding shadows of the snows. I sit here by the window and shelter in the certainty of these presences, so different from the bewildering world below. (Gokhale 1999 (a): 3)

Rachita is in a state of a confusion and disorientation. She is unable to come to terms with her disfigured self and looking into a mirror is an impossible and torturous step. She cuts off all ties from her fast paced city life and society, preferring to spend her time in "solitude and soliloquy to come to terms with what had happened" (Ibid: 7). She comes to the hills "to heal, to hide, to forget. To forgive, to be forgiven" (Ibid: 6). Gokhale reveals her feelings upon her husband's death in an article, where she says, "...I was grieving in an internal way that was eating my insides, leaving me sick, bulimic, raw and corroded...I inhabited an endless tunnel of grief and I was travelling it alone" (2000: 106). She felt empty and alienated even though she had her two young daughters with her. She says she sensed something "cloying" and "fetid" in her mourning, "My stubborn refusal to look at sunsets, sunflowers, soap operas, or seductive men – that was fear not grief – fear that my love for him, the only bulwark of my life, might also collapse in the ceaseless flow of the present" (Ibid: 106). Like Rachita, who prefers to "hide" and soak in her grief in the old house, rather than confront her insecurities, Gokhale had also abandoned all sense of hope and restoration after Rajiv's death.

Before coming to the house on the hills, Rachita used to teach English Literature at a college, where she says she was an "overgrown student masquerading as an academic" (Gokhale 1999(a): 4). She had been living in the imaginary stage where she had a career and a love life though both turned out to be unfulfilling. It was a state of fulfilment where nothing seemed to be lacking. But we find a sense of absence and emptiness in Rachita's life. For example, although she taught literature, she admitted that she was just "masquerading" and she sometimes felt that in her lectures she was "merely being clever" and "gassing a bit" (Ibid: 4). Even her betrayal of Anand speaks about the consistency of her love for him. The first page of the novel points towards Rachita's idea and awareness of the imaginary stage when she says:

We define ourselves by the people that we know, by the face we see in the mirror. In my case all the parameters have changed. I can feel the doors to self-knowledge banging shut upon me. Even the face I meet in the mirror is no longer mine. (Ibid: 3)

Here, we are introduced to the concept of Lacan's imaginary stage in an individual, where the imaginary is precisely the realm of images (in this case, the people in Rachita's life and herself) in which we make identifications with objects and this is how the ego is built up. There is a sense of misrepresentation because one bolsters up a fictive sense of unitary selfhood by finding something in the world with which he or she identifies with (Eagleton 2000:165). Rachita has lost all sense of understanding and reasoning due to the crisis in her life. It is ironic how her normal life takes a new turn right in front of the mirror when she becomes a victim of an acid attack:

I had encountered her as I was re-contouring the shadow on my eyes in the misty mirror in the bogs next to the cafeteria....This was my first day in college after Anand's death. I saw her in the mirror, her face almost at my shoulder, and turned around in vague panic. And then it happened. As my vision blurred, as my consciousness dissolved in a river of searing pain, I could hear the tinkle of her bangles, glass against gold, and the swish of her starched cotton sari as she walked out, leaving me alone in the toilet block. (Gokhale 1999 (a): 6)

This moment in Rachita's life is symbolic of her journey towards awareness, where she would encounter the clash between Real and Reality in an individual's development. Rachita's life before her arrival at the house, dwelt in the realm of the symbolic, where there was dissatisfaction and a sense of absence and loss. The house gives her a sense of belonging and a refuge from all the tormentors in the world of her "reality":

My mother was from these mountains, and I knew this house as a child, spent many happy summers here....I already belong to it. It has taken me in, enveloped my hurt. It soothes my hatred, hushes my sorrow. It had been hostile at first, angry that we had forgotten the

sanctuary of its love. This old and gentle house...was a repository of my youth, the custodian of my dreams. 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. (Ibid: 7)

The house represents the symbolic state of happiness for Rachita. The social world of the imaginary order, consisting of Anand's death, the pesky Zenobia Desai and Rachita's pseudo academic life is a world of unfulfilling desires. Rachita's retreat to the house on the hill can be termed as a return to the Real, where she breaks away from all human contact and socialization and confines herself to the silence and peace of the house, surrounded by surreal images and the occasional interactions with Lohaniju. It is in the house, with Lohaniju's comforting presence, that Rachita's growth as an individual begins. The house where she retreats to is a metonymy for change in Rachita's life. Her childhood days, filled with innocence and happiness are revived in this house and Rachita's journey from the symbolic to the imaginary realm occurs here. Alienation is what Rachita seeks at the beginning — to alienate herself from the crisis that had taken place in her life. It surfaces in the novel in the form of her feeling of alienation towards the poetry of the English language:

I dodge these high words, this alien language, and seek comfort in Lohaniju's soft and consonated Pahari. The Kumaoni language, Pahari, is dismissed as a mere dialect, yet it is my mother tongue, its sounds reassure me, silence my puzzlement and pain. (Ibid: 12)

Another reference to alienation is the songs that she listened to by the Doors which were about alienation (Ibid: 13). Thus, her feelings and the things that she does are a reflection of her alienated self. This is a sign of her break away from the imaginary realm towards something more symbolic. At first, Rachita seeks a way of escaping from "reality" by occupying herself with Lohaniju's stories and folk tales of the hills and the old house:

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. His voice carries in it the residual texture of my childhood. I trust these stories in a desperate and vulnerable way... (Ibid: 16)

Then there is her fascination with books from her childhood which she discovers:

There was a heap of old comics, illustrated fairy-tales, and a bundle of frayed and yellowed children's paperbacks. I was still hungering for a happy ending, so I devoured the fairy tales first, but I always abandoned them halfway. I wasn't ready for the bit where the Prince asks the Princess to marry him. (Ibid: 17)

This interest in stories and fairy tales is symbolic of her interest to recall her innocent childhood days which were filled with happiness. It also shows us her escapist nature where she tries to shield herself from the realities of her adult life. She enjoys living in this imaginary order where there is nothing lacking. The crisis in her life breaks her away from this state of fulfilment which she constantly desires. But it is not possible and she has to confront and accept these realities. As the novel progresses and comes to an end, Rachita begins to find ways to start anew and get out from the stagnancy of the hopelessness and self pity that surrounds her. She looks into the mirror for the first time in months and discovers that:

I looked just fine — quite nice really. I am thinner than I used to be, so the structure of my face showed better, and my shoulder length hair left loose covered up a great deal of the damage that the hydrochloric acid had perpetuated. A little foundation, a slash of lipstick, and I could surely face the world again. (Ibid: 218)

This act of looking into the mirror is a symbolic act where Rachita moves from the imaginary stage to the symbolic stage. A sense of positivism begins to creep into Rachita's attitude towards life. She had been living in a state of denial and refusal, where she could not come to terms with the changes in her life whether it was on the physical level or a more philosophical level. She realises:

My world had been undermined, taken apart, reduced to anarchy and chaos. And now, mysteriously, inexplicably, beatifically, it had reintegrated into something more than the sum of its parts. The most crucial matters continue to remain hidden because of their very ordinariness. We are unable to see the important things because they are right before our eyes. (Ibid: 230)

Thus, Rachita is able to realise the presence of the father figure who dominates this symbolic phase. This father figure represents the cultural norms, laws, language and power. The symbolic phase represents a further remove from the mother who represents total unity and wholeness. Through recognition of the name of the father, one is able to enter into a community of others. Rachita moved from the Imaginary to the Symbolic order when she realises that she had "acquired, achieved, possessed" herself again. Thus in this way, it is possible to demonstrate the presence of Lacan's concepts of the Imaginary and the Symbolic in *The Book of Shadows*.

Gokhale admits that writing a novel was a therapeutic experience and may be this novel helped her ease the grief and anger she felt after Rajiv's death. She compares Rachita's situation to that of her own in an article where she says:

Initially, I had thought that at the end of the novel, Rachita would go back to the city, perhaps have a plastic surgery...and live on. But somewhere along the way, I realised that this wouldn't happen. She would live on in that house in the 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 the spirit. In a sense, it is also about rebirth. (Gokhale 1999 (b): 18)

Thus we find that Gokhale has put a lot of herself into the novel and we find a number of parallels between her main character Rachita and herself.

Gokhale's brush with death when she escapes from cancer of the uterus as well as the death of some of her loved ones could be the cause of her constant reference to death and morbidity. She remarks, "A small reminder of death in any work of art adds to the

pleasures of life. I've been sitting with death for a long time" (Gokhale 2008 : 1). She has often been asked if Priya in *Paro: Dreams of Passion* is her alter ego. In an interview with Swapan K. Banerjee, she tells him that "Priya is not my alter-ego, she is a carefully constructed character. I have never kept a diary, and am not careful about filing, maintaining, preserving notes" (Gokhale 2007(b): 2). But there are some instances in the novel which corresponds to Gokhale's real life habits. For instance, Priya describes how she would write fervently about *Paro*:

I would write everywhere, in my sleep, over my morning tea, hunched over the commode, in the shop, in the crevices of my mind....I covered sheet after sheet with my neat spiky handwriting....I scribbled on the backs of envelopes, on notepads, with my eyebrow pencil on the back of a letter; anything to contain the flood of memories when the dam broke. (Gokhale 1984: 121)

Gokhale's own confession about her compulsive writing in an interview with Mita Kapur is similar to Priya's: "I got compulsive about writing. I wrote on backs of envelopes, scraps of paper. When I have to write, I can write anywhere — at airports, in crowded places. It's a downloading experience" (Gokhale 2008: 2). Her experiences in life, beginning from her early marriage, her academic let down, her brush with death and her husband's death had perhaps left her emotionally and mentally drained. By her own admission she "had a very eventful life" (Gokhale 2006:1). These events in her life could have led to her philosophical bent of mind where she tends to view everything philosophically. Talking of her grandmother Shakuntala Pande, she says that she (her grandmother), married when she was just thirteen years old. She had been a tomboy, cycling through Nainital in her sari, and a rebel, speaking her mind in a progressive family. Gokhale says that she learnt "the value of doing your own thing, unashamedly" from her grandmother (Gokhale 2007(a): 1). Perhaps her grandmother's rebellion and independent streak of mind rubbed on to her which is also seen in her female characters like *Paro*, *Shakuntala*, *Ammi*, *Phoolwati* and *Rachita* in her novels. Gokhale's characters are thus a reflection of her own independent and rebellious streak of mind which emerges in her creativity also.

## Conclusion

A psychoanalytical analysis of the author enhances our in-depth understanding of the text, apart from getting closer to the writer's mind. It also enables us to bring out the uniqueness possessed by a writer as compared to another due to the varied experiences lived out by them. Beneath the surface of *The Book of Shadows*, lie a lot of revelations about Gokhale's personal feelings. The angst felt by Rachita Tiwari is an expression of Gokhale's own angst in her personal life at the time of writing this book. Her pain and anger at losing her husband, her affinity to her roots and her inclination to her dialect are revealed in the course of this book. Thus this book reveals a lot about Gokhale's own state of mind.

Lacan's emphasis on language, his theory of the individuals' growth and development as he/she journeys traversing the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic stages are important aspects which have been employed by Namita Gokhale in *The Book of Shadows* and also helps in unravelling the underlying meaning of the author's mental landscape.

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