

## Liberated Women in Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

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**Abstract.** *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a parody on present day India. Namita Gokhale has skilfully hung different scenes like globules of a rosary to depict the seamier side of Indian life and morality. This is an enthralling and gripping book that wears its numerous complexities daintily. It will keep on haunting its readers long after they have put it down. Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a hot and frequently horrible "Indian" novel about commitment (profane, fake and genuine), grandmothers, singing, abjection and pickling. After *Midnight's Children* and *Small Things*, pickling has progressed toward becoming a significant Indo-Anglian theme. It was justifiable that love, death became Namita's obsession. Obsession with death and love brought about two books: *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* composed after she beat cancer and the non-fiction *Mountain Echos*. Regardless of tragedies in her own life, she finds 'a lot of enchantment in regular daily life which is to be found, she gives a straight opinion that suffering is a great incentive to growth and failure is more significant than success. It uncovers and re-characterizes character.

**Keywords :** Self-identity; modernity; liberation; tradition; patriarchal society. endurance.

*Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is the account of Gudiya and her old grandmother, who, along with Gudiya's mother, have fled from small town. This magical book, with its surreal humour and insidious readability, wears its numerous complexities lightly. It will keep on haunting its readers for long time. She quotes, "I am deeply interested in religion and I am a very religious person myself. But then at the same time I can see the absurdity of religion and all the trouble that it causes. If you have come up across luck, lost all that you claimed and are hesitant to work for your living, there is a formula for survival in comfort. You should simply to find a big peepal tree and set up your abode under it. Smear its trunk with saffron glue, put a dark stone against it, and by that keep a wreath or two of marigold blooms and a platter of copper with a couple of coins in it to urge others to do the same..." (*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, 39) It is a parody on the society. This is the topic of Namita Gokhale's most recent novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (Penguin). In her story a family of kothawalis once living in a large haveli and disparaged by rich zamindars, merchants and even the sahib log lose all their money and end up themselves on the road and try to find for destitution. S. Chandra has pointed out:

Namita Gokhale has succeeded in projecting women as people whose desires, likes and dislikes matter as much as those of their male counterparts and

the extent to which women characters are successful  
in ordering their lives without male support.  
(Chandra,53-58)

Ammi is too old, making it impossible to be of service to her customers yet at the same time has a sweet voice to sing bhajans. Her daughter, who has all that a prostitute needs, all of a sudden loses all her hair and elopes with kindred who do wouldn't fret having a bald mistress. Her girl is still Doll, too young, making it impossible to be deflowered. So the destitute grandmother and her granddaughter arrive in Delhi, find an affable *peepal* tree, set up an improvised temple and a cottage to rest in. In the blink of an eye business picks up. Presently they have an ample bosomed flower seller, three untouchable leper beggars at a respectable distance, a shastriji who can appropriate mantras in Sanskrit and the most critical of every one, a *pehalwan* (wrestler) who brings (assurance cash) from retailers and encourages proprietors to evict recalcitrant tenants and tenants to get landowners' property at a major charge. He also has a clout with neighbourhood government officials. The slab of stone turns into the centerpiece of an enormous marble temple. When Ammi passes on, she is buried as a holy person. This adds to the holiness and wage of the temple. Gudiya grows into a beautiful girl. She is not happy concentrate in a school keep running by a kind Parsi woman who tries to embrace her as her daughter. She dreams turning into a film star and accepts the name Pooja, the daughter of wealthy zamindar. Then falls in love with a handsome but food for nothing clarinet player, member of a band leading wedding processions. She is more than willing to lose her virginity to him when he takes her behind a bushy cluster. Rather than Gudiya, alias Pooja, it is Kalki who vanishes to attempt his fortunes in Bollywood :

*Midnight's Children* cleared a way both thoughtfully and narrative for other essayists. Gokhale's second published novel, manages the subject of adoration and death, as Namita Gokhale had herself confronted an individual catastrophe in her life, which is reflected in this novel. The grandma has been depicted as a woman of extraordinary asset and brave. (*Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, 53)

This novel of 240 pages is a decent perusing and mirrors a personal effect. Indeed, even this novel has been enacted in a play form.

The character of the grandmother possesses a place in the title of the novel, as she is a woman of ability. She doesn't fall prey to the troublesome conditions, however with her foresightedness carves a home for herself and her granddaughter-Gudiya. She accumulates a bit of marble and a few stones, takes one steel *thali*, and puts some money and a ten rupee note. She sings *bhajans* to a better tune and she attracts a huge gathering of disciples. She turns into a living

holy person. The theory of life for her was, "There is a cycle to saving things, to preserving them, and then to devouring them, letting them go." (229) Then Gudiya raises her voice, "Our temple grew in fame and fortune" (13). This way the grandma made a living for herself - a space for herself with her skill and capacity to move things as according to her advantage. This was the grandmother's new *avatar*. She had set herself on a platform. People would shout great comments for her, regard her saint Lily. Riyasuddin Razvi remarked, "Your grandmother is a learned lady; I hope you grow up the same" (10). The character of the grandma is very brave, vivacious, ambitious, capable, yet it is a distortion of the 'new woman' in the expressions of Sharad Srivastava. Her first analysis occurred when she needed to handle Sunder Pahelwan. She with her inborn cleverness managed him and became friendly in the process. She quotes to him, "Seize our money Pahalawanji, but spare our self-respect. I am the widow of a Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman's curses may follow you" (12). This way she could handle the circumstance as she had the art to talk convincingly to the people. The people who came to annihilate the house were rebuffed, as the power taken illicitly, from the street pole blasted on the leader of the departmental chief. Then the scorpion bit a man who spit toward the sanctuary, while Shambhu found a wallet loaded with money outside his tea stall. In this way God reviled the ones who restricted while those who regarded Him were kept under His kind care. Ammi could make a favourable circumstance with her communicating power. Gudiya remarks about their circumstance, "Everyone knew that the will of God was guiding us. We felt invincible, all of us, in our separate ways" (14).

Namita Gokhale would discuss femininity and masculinity, the congruity of Shakti and Shiva here the binaries are again discussed. She quoted, "Even the holy Peepul tree can be bound in matrimony to a young bough of the margosa; such is the nature of life" (36). Gudiya and grandmother shared so many secrets, as Gudiya, she also aimed for a life of imagination. Once she told Gudiya, When I was of your age Gudiya, I wanted to be a film star. There were only silent films in those days, no sound. I wanted to be like Zubaida or Jayshree. But look at me now - a holy woman! Truly, no one can understand the ways of God" (51). Gudiya is the storyteller of the story. It also has the autobiographical traces. She has a place with the third generation in the novel. The novel has been titled by the name of her grandmother and the Indian culture is bugged with false convictions and anything relating to God will achieve confidence and the people who don't regard the heavenliness are rebuffed. The author underlines the guilelessness of the Indians in regards to God; anything profane can also possess a virtuous place in the pretence of the name of God or Goddess. Gudiya has recorded every one of her perceptions, feelings with most extreme care; she has depicted every one of the nuances with a female precision. All the trivialities have been described in the novel. The novel starts in a meditative tone and makes a kind of vacuums. She quotes, "When my mother went away, my grandmother and I were left to fend for ourselves" (1). She further raises her doubts

regarding religion, "I was still a stranger to the paraphernalia of religion, brought up as I had been, ignorant of God or Divinity, and I puzzled to make a sense of the unfamiliar tableau as the flickering lamp cast new shadows on my grandmother's trusted face". (2-3) Then she again trusts in regard to apparitions and her grandma showed her to drive off the ghosts. She learnt numerous lessons from her grandmother popularly known as 'Ammi'. She has her murky recollections of the past.

Then it was concluded that she ought to be sent to class and admission was looked for in St. Jude's school. She explains on her school picture and discusses the principal:

The principal of St. Jude's was a pale Parsi lady with gentle eyes that hid behind thick spectacles and the kindest face I had ever known. Roxanne Lamba took an immediate fancy for me and singled me out for her attentions (15).

As a kid she has recollections of her grandmother, mother and she even now again misses her Shambhu, Phoolwati, Magoo Lila-the women around the temple. She reminisces one of the incidents:

High on the upper branches I could glimpse Shambhu and Magoo, naked, hidden by the leaves, leering at me as they performed obscene and unspeakable acts. I tried to close my eyes, but they were closed already and I could not shut out the vision. And then again, in those branches, suspended against gravity, I saw my sad beautiful mother, and she too was naked and she too was enjoined in the unspeakable act with Riyasuddin, the beggar (21).

These demonstrations strongly affected Gudiya, which is obvious in her later life. Then as they were settling, some disturbances also affected Gudiya. But her grandmother oversaw things effectively. Thus she had made an emanation for herself:

Numerous miracles happened, she attempted to do and undo things. Gudiya disliked that in light of the circumstance, her Ammi had removed herself from her; however once when she persuaded a chance to be with her she raised her emotions and Gudiya could rest her trust in her. After her mother's departure, now her lone blood relation in the world, her grandmother is also being distanced. There was a rustle of something that may have been lizards,

or even snakes, but I was not at all afraid, for I was alone with my grandmother at last (51).

These words toss light how the young child's feelings function, as she has been relinquished by her mother and now her only relative in the universe, her grandmother is also being distanced. But she had people like Lila and Phoolawati with her-the women dedicated to her grandmother. She further has to say: Grandmother's increasing abstraction, her detachment, and her inexplicable remoteness had affected me much more than I betrayed.

Outwardly I was a happy and normal child although I could already see from the looks on male eyes that things were changing and that my mother's fabled beauty and grandmother's legendary charm had their genetic renewal (54).

She remembers her grandmother, "I missed my grandmother, but she was there with me, in the act of pickling and in the act of remembering and the act of surviving" (229). Gudiya could grapple with all the challenges of growing entering the time of youth room adolescent were amicably solved by Phoolwati-she showered care, love and understanding on Gudiya which she merited the most in her present situation. Yet at the same time parent's role she couldn't play proficiently, generally Gudiya won't have landed herself with Kalki. Soon Gudiya created cognizance in regard to her physical appearance, she could encounter the progressions and in the process disliked her name, which seemed like wood-lacked feelings. She wanted other names like might be Samina, Shabnam or Sharmila. She quotes, "I continued to oscillate between my two worlds. My existence veered between the St. Jude's Academy for the socially Handicapped and the Mataji ka Mandir as our residence was now commonly known" (69). This way she was looking a place among this conflicted twin positions. This is the trait of the postmodern culture. it was concluded that she should cease her studies especially against the will of the principal of the school. Not long after her grandmother passed away, allowing her to sit unbothered on the planet, she experiences different feelings:

My life had always possessed a haphazard and unreal quality, and now when I contemplated my grandmother, contorted into an extraordinary death-pose by the indefatigable Pandit, my last link with reality snapped. This was not my Ammi; in fact, she had not been my Ammi for quite some time now. Yet continuity and cohesion my life had ever contained had been gifted by her. What was to become of me? (76).

Her grandmother was to be buried in the temple sacrament and pandit Kailash Shastri deftly dealt with the crowd; he gave them leaves and blossoms from the

garlands they had brought for Ammi. He oversaw things efficiently even in the time of emergency. The memorial service occurred in the midst of awesome devotion and custom, Ammi was buried in the back courtyard. Gudiya raises her feelings at this juncture: I could cease to be Gudiya now, perhaps I could even start to be Shabnam or Samina or Sharmila, "all that was known and familiar and sure had passed, and the future held in its palm every possibility and impossibility" (80). This way a new beginning awaited Gudiya; a new *avatar* was awaiting her like her grandmother, when she acquired sainthood. Gudiya and Phoolwati shared good moments; they were very friendly to each other and comforted each other. They would even share pranks. They went on a shopping spree as Phoolwati had acquired a new status after handling Shambhu's business. They enjoyed the trivialities of life, the happy moments together, "Together, we combed the streets of Karol Bagh and Lajpat Nagar" (182). This way time passed. In fact this change of name does not connote positivity as it recommends change of identity, otherwise Gudiya in spite of all odds stands firm under the care of Phoolwati. It is against woman's rights; she exceptionally well leads her life without Kalki. she was taken care by Mrs. Lamba, however life at her place was choking for Gudiya and she came back to Phoolwati, the etiquette at the former's place was stifling. She had now gained the temple a new order of steadiness and perpetual quality under the care of Panditji. At that point in an inquiry what she strives for, she answers:

I want to marry a rich man! A handsome, fair, rich young man with a motor car and a *chikna* white skin and a big dog and a *chowkidar* to guard his *kothi*-with an upstairs and a downstairs and a spiral staircase (104).

This way she spilled out her heart's yearning. She delighted in the food made by Phoolwati which was spicy while that at Mrs. Lamba's house was plain and tasteless which she disliked. She savoured a *chapatti* and pickle even made by Phoolwati. Like Gokhale's other heroines, even *Paro* of the *Paro* notoriety, there is reference towards food in her different books as well. As food is the essential thing in life, Gokhale depicts the need for her courageous women regardless of their remarkable ways. Gudiya cites, "She needed the dough with deft, efficient movements and soon the delicious aroma of *chapattis* cooking on the girdle filled the room. It smelt wholesome and good". (106) On one of her journeys she happened to meet a young fellow and was awed, "He was so handsome that I could feel my insides quiver" (111). She additionally stated, "My insides were all a flutter. I could hardly breathe. I thought that he would kiss me; but he didn't" ( 149). Then something unordinary happened. He ripped open my kurta and fondled me with fierce passion. He pummeled my breasts until I cried with pain, and then moved his attentions downwards. When he entered me I let out a cry of pain (153). This time I experience the full glory of sex. ( 154)

Moreover, Gudiya was beguiled by the opposite sex. She also says towards the end of the novel:

I looked into the many mirrors that crowded the room. I could barely recognize myself. I imagined I saw many faces staring back. Which of them was me? The reflected images echoed the question through the wilderness of mirrors, until the beautician broke into my reverie, asking what shade of nail polish I wanted to use. I settled on Midnight Magic, a frosty magenta lacquer. After I had been kneaded and pounded with cream and unguents, and my hair oiled and deoiled and artfully styled into a cascade of flowing curls, I returned to Phoolwati's house (233-234).

The above articulation from Gudiya proposes her absence of control, idea of free will is observed. It additionally implies that things charm a young girl raised in the avenues effortlessly. Further addressing in the school she remarks, "I am going to become a ...I paused as my mind scanned the pinnacles of becoming. I am going to become a film star and marry the prime minister's son" (126). Kalki entered in the life of Gudiya and though she was aware of his limitations but could not avoid him, she confesses, "I understood well that there was something both noble and base about Kalki" (188). When Lila touches her on hearing of her pregnancy, she was overpowered, "As I felt her knobby fingers and tough old wrists kneading my shoulders in embrace, strength and renewal flowed through my body like a rising sap. I felt invulnerable and unafraid, and I laughed at myself for my fears and uncertainties" (218). Then she appears to be very strong and even believes in giving, this perspective is very unique contrasted with Paro, the courageous woman of the other novel. She advises to Kalki, "I'll get you the money, Kalki. I'll sell my *stridhan* for you." (219) This motion with respect to Gudiya is typical of self uprightness and exhibits herself as a subject to an object. Kalki remains for the object and she as the subject-the male order. But, in spite of the numerous great gestures with respect to Gudiya; she doesn't fall in the class of a 'new woman' however, a deviation of it. In this perspective, it is watched that in Kalki's non-appearance she doesn't surrender to the conditions, however adjusts to it. To cite her perspectives, "I missed him, but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss. I loved Kalki, but love is not life, and the imperatives of survival pulled elsewhere" (224). These perspectives with respect to Gudiya uncover her strength as a woman. Though Kalki charmed her for the time being but again leaves this circumstance successfully. It proposes positivism. She is a strong individual, similar to her grandmother. Otherwise the next generation thinks that it is hard to adjust to the circumstance. The character of Phoolwati has been exhibited as a strong, fierce, loving, practical, caring and affectionate one. She and Lila were the women around 'Ammi'. Lila was almost a

nonelement yet Phoolwati was a loyal woman and her presence is felt through the novel. In the novel at first she has been depicted as an entertaining, cartoonish character however, later on builds up an identity of stability, dignity and goodwill. She takes care of Gudiya after her Grandmother's death, showers nurturing love and care. She was dependable by Gudiya and shared all her turmoil. Giving an embrace she stated, "Yes, you are, you are a woman and we women need to stick together. Now that you are an adult, not a girl, we can be friends" (55). This confirms, beyond doubt, Gudiya's bonding with "Phoolwati. In fact, Phoolwati forms affectionate and cordial relationship with Gudiya and is exceptionally careful about Gudiya's well being" (Ghanshyam & Mukta, 50). After the passing of Ammi, Gudiya was taken care by Phoolwati and when once she was sick was taken to Mrs. Lamba's house, around then Mr. Lamba attempted to clear up things, at that point she addressed critically, "Arre sahib, don't worry about your money on our account. We may not be rich like you, but we do have our *izzat*. By the grace of god, our Gudiya is not short of money". (93) She even was promptly advising things straightforward to individuals, told the Pandit, "Achha, Panditji, RamRam! I trust you will never be wanting in the execution of your duty" (105). She would chidingly discuss Sunder Pahalwan, "This Sunder Pahalwan is becoming a real nuisance, all the time, its Phoolwati this, Phoolwati that. I don't know why he is always pestering me" (117). This way Phoolwati was completely dedicated to Gudiya's mind. She always be with the side of Gudiya, and understood her feelings, even when she was desperate for Kalki it was she who helped her. The character of Phoolwati turns out with many flying colours; she doesn't repentantly sits after Shambhu's passing, however takes keenness of his business and furthermore takes Sunder Pahalwan's help. She cooks very tasty and good food- feeds Gudiya and even herself though she had a few stomach related problems. As said in the previously mentioned section, Lila is not an exceptionally noteworthy character in the novel depicted by Gokhale. She is completely devoted to Ammi and she deals with her needs, is dependably at the beck and call of her, rubs her feet and is with her. She practically turns out to be half dead after Ammi's death. She was prepared to pass on a few messages from Ammi:

I am here today because the spirit of our late revered Mataji herself has instructed me..."and here her voice changed and became uncannily like Ammi's, "not to forget her she speaks from the hereafter. She has described heaven, swarga, to me. She says it is a very nice place; the weather is very pleasant, not hot and dusty like our Delhi. The people are all very beautiful, tall and fair and graceful, rather like our Gudiya. The air is clear and the food is good, although of course, they don't need to eat anything there. It's only for taste, if you get what I mean, sometimes a mango, sometimes a *mithai*. She has told me to remind you-this is her message-which

everything is transient, everything passes,  
everybody dies, but it makes no difference because  
life continues (142).

These words additionally help us to remember Lila's commitment towards Ammi. She was a lady of simple ways and confidence. Mrs. Lamba is the Principal of St. Jude's school for socially handicapped. She is a Parsi by confidence, and has a place with a rich family. She was tender by nature and had a unique liking for Gudiya. They were the proprietor of sharp blades. Mr. Lamba was an over specific man. Her full name was Roxanne Lamba, she loved Gudiya in particular and after her Ammi's demise when fell debilitated, called a specialist, dealt with her affectionately, she even was superstitious by nature and took after certain ways, she set a falcon feather under the pillow of Gudiya, "Shikasteh, Shikasteh, Shaitan, Ahriman AhrimangajastehKaruKerdar"(72). She supported Gudiya by soothing words, "Remember that you can tell me everything. Don't think you are alone because your grandmother is gone" (100). Malvika Mehta is a minor lady character in the novel. She was a graduate with social work and was deputed at St. Jude's school. She doesn't assume a conspicuous part. She was proper and prim, dressed in dignified and appropriate manners outwardly. Outward glamour and appearance is the emblem of the contemporary times but this unnatural beauty does not have long lasting influence. Rather than Malvika, Leela and Phoolwati gain a conspicuous place. In one of her advising sessions, Gudiya watches her:

She was extremely good looking. She had creamy white skin, jet-black hair, cut in a short, extremely succulent lip. She was dressed in simple clothes that I suspected of being very expensive something about her looks; her clothes and her air of total control aroused my instant and unprovoked hostility...(124)

These are the lady characters in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* depicted by Namita Gokhale. Every one of the women characters assume a noticeable part and men are on the fringe. Obviously the Pandit has a part however, yet the women depicted are all the more effective. In another interview given to S.Mohanty, Gokhale spoke about her personal experience as a writer and the most remarkable influences on her writings, "I am from Nainital and this has always been an important part of my being. People may be lost in their new cosmopolitan wilderness, but I have a primary identity as a Kumaoni Brahmin girl". (Mohanty, 20-21) The character of Gudiya is minimal odd and that of the grandmother is odd yet at the same time falls in the matrix of a post present day lady, who is self-sufficient, fit and does not capitulate to conditions. Contrasted with her debut novel, this novel has all the earmarks of being more somber and matured in its approach. Priya and Paro neglect to systematise their lives, while Ammi shrewdly sets her unravelled life systematic. In spite of the fact that Gudiya is not absolutely fruitful in making her life orderly,

she is ideal with the assistance of Phoolwati. When ladies attempt to utilize their body as a weapon, they don't succeed, however it gives a terrible trouble to their lives. But, along with dissimilarities there are numerous similarities also. Namita Gokhale tries to pass on the message that there are things above passion through her fundamental characters- Gudiya and Ammi in this novel.

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