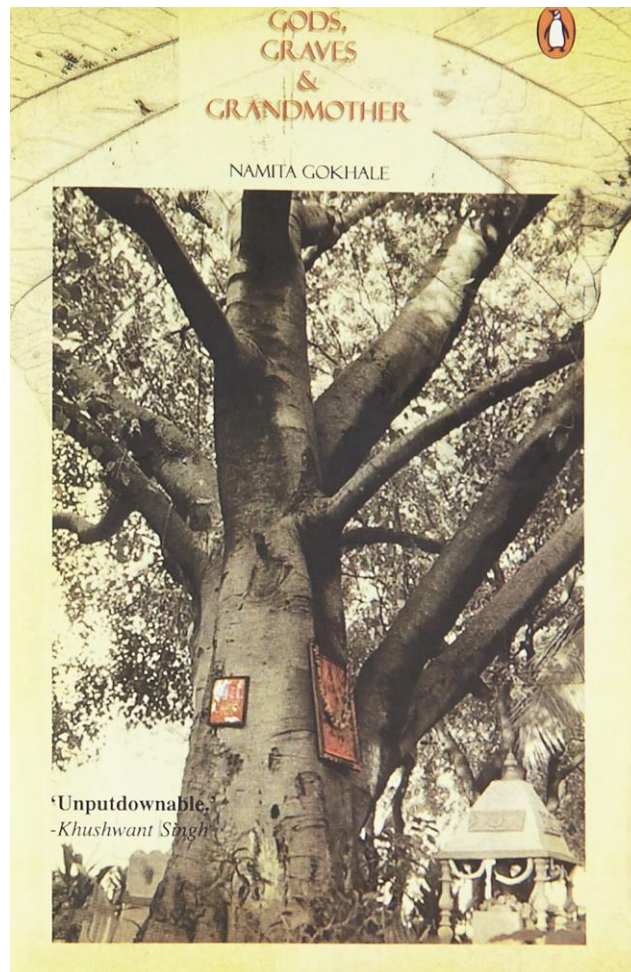


## Treatment of Death in Namita Gokhale's *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*

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### **Abstract**

This paper explores Namita Gokhale's treatment of death through the novel, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. It basically attempts analysis of predicament of Gudiya, the woman as silent sufferer, forever waiting for emotional support and creative release. She is the woman, who loses her real identity for sometimes and begins to think herself as a wife. But finding her husband irresponsible and uncaring, she has hardly anything common with him. There is a wide psycho-emotional gulf between the twos and at this stage; she has no one to share her agony with. In true sense, the art of the novelist has the power to transmute the most ordinary, common place, every

day experience into everlasting expression of artistic form and value in this novel. She portrays the various shades of human nature with deftness, reigning true to life, making her readers loud her works. The compelling question that the paper raises is about the fate of women who find themselves almost destitute and helpless in the cruel hands of the callous world. It tries to give the picture of female characters cut out from the roots. They are not adjusting easily. It is the main reason of their being alienated.

**Keywords:** Namita Gokhale. *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*, Death, Alienation, Pain, Predicament, Fate of Women

### **Namita Gokhale's Fiction**

The novels of Namita Gokhale are a harmonious blend of pain and relief, joy and misery, meeting and departure, attraction and repulsion, experience and innocence, comfort and rage. Gokhale conceives her characters from the present day society and one can freely see them in the roads of India. As she pens for the magazines too, she characterizes the people she encounters every day in different parts of the country. Like modern psychologists Gokhale examines different shades of conflicts that she notices in society. Characters acquired from various levels of society in her novels affirm the fact that she examines the overtones of their inspiration and problems. Her Bombay is explicitly the Bombay as she has viewed it with her own eyes. Her Kumaun region is also the Kumaun in which she has spent her childhood. She learns about the austere realities of the Ghats of Kashi and interprets them as they are. Genuineness of Gokhale's art remains undisputable like that of John Keats. She finds beauty with truth; she asserts her conviction in the generative power and the vision of the artist. With her knowledge and perception she discovers the truth about the people she portrays very lovingly. This is the secret of her success as an artist in Indian English literature.

### **Human Life from the Perspective of Women**

Gokhale has perceived human life in her fiction from the view of the woman. She has attempted to reconsider the feminine role in society. Gokhale portrays human passions such as fake pride, greed, vanity, anger jealousy, lustful attitude and perverted love in her novels. The art of story-telling of Gokhale, her acute perception of human nature and her intense portrayal of the landscape of Kumaun Hills and surrounding plains have acquired for her an enduring place in Indian English fiction. She will be remembered as an honest, gifted and genuine writer, who regards her characters, with sympathy and indulgence. It is this combination of sympathy and simplicity that accounts for her appeal to a broad range of readers. Gokhale enjoys an immortal and unique spot among the Indian English women novelists.

### **Apt Words to Recount**

The craftsmanship of Gokhale is magnificent. In imparting the ideas she employs apt words to recount. Sometimes she employs a sense of irony with biting humour, but whatever be the mood the motive is always subtle. She shines in clicking all the scenes from the panorama either of her own life or from observations made from actual life. She might have used her imaginative technique to cast the text according to the need of her novel. Her narrative style is both traditional and modern. According to the demand and theme of the story, she adopts first-

person narration, second-person narration, and flashback. She tries to forge a close relationship with her readers and as a result most of her novels are in the first-person narration.

Gokhale is a woman of values. She is committed totally to her craft. Honesty is a trademark of her art she always believed in clarity and evocative power of description. She is a versatile personality whose motive is to entice the imagination of her readers by telling interesting incidents through her characters. She has splendidly depicted the life of aristocratic class as well as the pains of lower class. She has immortalized the Indian people by portraying them, their manners, their interests, their curiosities, their quirks, their philosophies, their dilemmas and their refinement in her fiction.



**Namita Gokhale**

Courtesy: <https://markmybook.com/author?author=Namita%20Gokhale>  
***Gods, Graves and Grandmother***

Gokhale's second novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* (1994) is the tale of Guidya and her almost aged grandmother (Ammi), who, along with Guidya's mother, fled from their small-town to the suburb of Delhi. It is of course, on account of, some scandal and disgrace they has to suffer in their original place. Ammi settled along a solitary roadside corner in the suburbs of Delhi and gradually became a famous Bhajan singer. Subsequently, temple is raised and numerous devotees permanently started to live and function as astrologer, beggar, merchants selling flowers and other pooja items around the temple there. After few years when the temple became a famous religious site, one-night Ammi is found dead. Gudiya and people concerned are dejected and disappointed. Her devotees however, gracefully buried her remains. Later on, Gudiya married with Kalki who later on, deserted Gudiya with her infant. Superstition, tradition, trade, intrigues and muscle power among the greedy devotees ruled the scene there after.

### **Illness and Death, Love and Passion**

The experience of illness and death, love and passion, has moulded Gokhale's novel. For the author, the act of writing signifies not only a therapeutic act, but also a general expression of

experience in different spheres of life of various characters of her *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. In the novel, Gokhale portrays the agonies and deaths of Magoo, Mamajee, Shumbhu, Ammi. Mrs. Roxanne, Lamba, and Sunder Phalwaan. Gudiya's grandmother lived in a kothi comprising one hundred and thirty rooms. Her mother, Mamaji lived in separate annexe with the kothi and a courtyard, a mango tree in it. Various Nawabs and Englishmen used to visit her to relax and enjoy the aristocratic shows of singing dancing and merrymaking in the evening there. Meanwhile her Mamaji and other persons committed suicide by hanging himself from a mango tree Gudiya narrated herself about it as under: "Then I remember the mango tree in the court yard, the one on which my Mamaji hung himself" (6). Gudiya adds:

Then something very bad happened; nobody ever told me what. I know that my Mamaji died. He is found hanging from the mango tree in the shady courtyard with the raat-kirani and chameli bushes. Somebody else died too, someone my mother always referred to as "Him." In the long late mornings, when my mother and grandmother thought I am asleep, they discussed 'Him' in tragic whispers. "He" died, and the police got suspicious. (7)

This stopped the festivity at the kothi altogether and Gudiya's mother fell critically ill and visits of police investigating the deaths and the subsequent court case depleted the entire riches and the entire family shifted to old Delhi with the aid of Riyasuddin Rizvi. Shambhu the tea-vendor attracted towards Saboo's wife Magoo. Subsequently, after much infatuation between them Magoo's husband Saboo murdered his wife. His husband Saboo chased Shambhu and succeeds in murdering Shambhu. Magoo's husband left the blood-spattered axe behind and disappeared into the cool night, headed indeed for the shack behind Shambhu's tea-stall where the liquor is brewed. After fortifying himself, he made for Shambhu's room and tapped softly on the door. Foolish Shambhu opened it. His visitor knocked him down and dragged him to the bushes behind the peepul tree. There he smashed a rock upon his head and killed him. Then he returned to the temple, breathing heavily.

### **Malicious Romantic Activity**

Shambhu is killed on account of his malicious romantic activity with Saboo's wife Magoo. The terrific scene of murder of Shambhu made a deep psychological horror upon Gudiya. Saboo made Shambhu lie in the grave nearby. After burying Shambhu, murderer Saboo appeared before Ammi and asked to be forgiven for the grotesque crime, he committed and also pleads to absolve. So, as an admirer of *The Gita*, Gokhale refers to the theory of death as the body dies and soul remains immortal. On the occasion of Shambhu's Sharaddha, Ammi remarks that life is only a passage. Shambhu is not dead, as he exists in the mind of Phoolwati. However, all are strangers on earth. One has to leave this worldly life one day. In the novel *The Age of Reason*, Jeal Paul Sartre gives the theory of existentialism and Gokhale has the same in her psyche. Indeed, Shambhu is dead even while he is alive, as he did not bother for Phoolwati at all.

### **Service to the Handicapped**

Later, Gudiya also joins St. Jude's Academy meant for the socially handicapped on Good Friday, when Gudiya is planned to leave for Simla with her school-mates. Ammi Gudiya's dearest guardian is found dead on her bed. Her death too appears not a natural one, as is clear in Gudiya's narration.

## Gudiya

Apart from the anguish and frustration Gudiya suffered because of Ammi's sudden death, she has also decided to quit her studies. Pandit Kailash Shastri compares Mataji with Goddess Durga. Phoolwati, Pandit Kailash Shastri, Lila, immediately, resolve to confine further activities around the corpse by closing the door of room for themselves for about an hour. After they re-emerged, the posture of the dead-body stood changed altogether. Now the dead-body of grandmother no longer lay on the trundle but propped up and seated on the ground with one hand raised as if warding off any attack. Ammi's granddaughter, Gudiya, who lived with her to the last, could not understand the changes made. As Gudiya has admitted in the following lines:

I knew very little of the rituals surrounding death. Perhaps all dead people were made to sit upright after death; perhaps it is a part of the decorum.

The public, who were by now thronging the temple precincts, were informed that my grandmother had not died, which is something mere mortals did. She had attained maha-samadhi, by voluntarily relinquishing her consciousness to the larger universe. (74)

Guidya further adds:

Ammi's body is propped up, surrounded by lamps and camphor and incense. Their eyes seemed to be asking some questions, begging some hope, from grandmother's lopsided figure and raised arm. (76)

## A Super Spiritual Person

As Ammi is considered as supreme presiding mother of the temple and it is claimed that she has not died but she has attained maha-samadhi by voluntarily surrendering her consciousness to the larger universe, termed as mahasamadhi.

Only mortals die but Ammi is shown as a super spiritual person who can relinquish consciousness of this world and pass on to larger universe. Hindu religion has a vast treasure of literature right from Vedas, Upanishad, Puranas and hundreds of other holy books like Ramayana and Mahabharata.

On Pandit Kailash Shastri's instruction Ammi's last rites continue. The ceremonies continued. Pandit Kailash Shastri filled up the hole with salt until it reached grandmother's neck, pressing it down until the head is immovable. Lila also addressed devotees about the blessings from cosmic powers where the departed saint Ammi has gone. Ammi has also described from heaven to her about the congenial atmosphere prevailing for its dwellers there.

## Roxanne Lamba

Meanwhile Mrs. Roxanne Lamba who has a very generous and benevolent attitude towards Gudiya falls critically ill with choked throat despite frantic assistance, offered by her husband, Mr. Lamba, and her nephew, Cyrus. But, death had its toll. Gudiya rightly states:

Death is no stranger to me. I had seen my Mamaji dangling from the mango tree in the courtyard and one-eyed Shambhu sprawled under the peepul tree. And then my grandmother, seated in her grotesque and unnatural Samadhi. Now Roxanne

Ma'am too had joined the other world. She had become an Uravashi. The spirit had departed from her body. I could not imagine her rubbing shoulders with Magoo and Shambhu and the man with the laughing red mouth. It suddenly struck me that I had no real proof that I is alive; perhaps I too is dead. The dogs had not stopped baying. Everything else is still and silent. I pinched myself a check if it hurt. (196)

### **Sundar Phalwan Stood also Murdered**

Phoolwati's second husband Sundar Phalwan stood also murdered at his doorsteps by some mysterious person. At end of the story Gudiya is shown in a very sober mood because she is also the witness of several other characters in the story as is clear by her statement below:

I often dream about my mother, but she is elusive even there. Grandmother is dead, Roxanne is dead, Sundar is dead. Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight. (240)

### **To Conclude**

Gokhale writes *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* after she has recovered from long illness. She accepts the past and yet ponders of present and future. Gokhale has viewed human life in her novels from the view of the woman. She has attempted to redefine the feminine role in society. Gokhale portrays human passions such as false pride, greed, anger jealousy, vanity, lustful conduct and perverted love in her novels.

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