



# Short Story as a Literary Form: An Analysis of "The Habit of Love" by Namita Gokhale

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## Abstract:

The short story is a distinct and versatile literary form that has a rich tradition in literature. Short stories are typically characterized by their brevity, their focus on a single event or theme, and their ability to convey complex emotions and experiences through a carefully crafted narrative. The short story form has proven to be a powerful tool for exploring complex themes and ideas, and for capturing the essence of human experience. In this research paper, the short story collection by Indian author Namita Gokhale "The Habit of Love" is analysed. "The Habit of Love", was published in 2012. Through the analysis of "The Habit of Love", a modest attempt is made to examine how the short story form is used to explore complex themes and to convey the essence of human experience. Short stories have been a popular literary form for centuries, and continue to captivate readers to this day. Namita Gokhale's "The Habit of Love" is a collection of short stories that explores themes of love, loss, and human relationships. This paper analyses the collection and provides insights into the key elements that make short stories a powerful and effective form of literature.

**Keywords:** Short story, Namita Gokhale, Habit of Love, Theme

## Introduction

Namita Gokhale is an acclaimed Indian writer, poet, and publisher who has published several books, including fiction and non-fiction. Her short story collection, "The Habit of Love," was published in 2012 and consists of thirteen stories that explore the complexities of human relationships, the fragility of love, and the impact of loss. The collection is a powerful example of the short story as a literary form and highlights the key elements that make it an effective means of storytelling.

A short story is a literary form that has the power to capture a moment, a feeling, or a theme with striking economy and precision. The Habit of Love is a testament to the power and versatility of the short story form, and a striking example of the ways in which it can illuminate the complexities of the human experience. This collection explores the many facets of love - its joys and sorrows, its complexities and contradictions - through a range of

diverse characters and settings. Through her use of lyrical prose and vivid imagery, Gokhale evokes a sense of nostalgia and longing, while also grappling with larger themes of identity, displacement, and the passage of time. In this research paper, we will delve into the artistry of the short story form and analyze the ways in which Gokhale employs it to convey her vision of love. We will explore how the collection's themes and motifs intersect with Gokhale's prose style, as well as how the stories can be read as a cohesive whole.

## Short Story and its History

A short story is a work of fiction that typically revolves around a single incident or a small set of characters, with a focus on character development, setting, and theme. The length of a short story can vary, but it is generally considered to be shorter than a novella or a novel.

The history of the short story as a literary form can be traced back to oral storytelling traditions that existed long before the invention of writing. Ancient cultures around the world had storytelling traditions that involved the telling of brief tales, often with a moral or lesson attached.

In the Western literary tradition, the short story emerged as a distinct genre in the 19th century. The development of print technology and the rise of popular magazines provided a platform for writers to reach a wider audience with their stories. Some of the earliest short story writers in the English language include Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Washington Irving. In the early 20th century, the short story continued to evolve and gain prominence as a literary form. Modernist writers such as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Ernest Hemingway experimented with new narrative techniques and styles, pushing the boundaries of what a short story could be.

Today, the short story remains a popular and vibrant literary form, with writers around the world continuing to explore its possibilities and push its limits. Some of the most celebrated contemporary short story writers include Alice Munro, George Saunders, and Junot Diaz.

## Short Story as a Literary Form

A short story is a literary form that has been around for centuries and has been used by writers to convey ideas, emotions, and experiences. One of the key strengths of the short story is its ability to capture the essence of a moment or emotion in a powerful and compact way. The brevity of the form allows for a concise, focused exploration of a particular theme or idea, without the need for extended exposition or narrative development. This makes short stories a popular form for exploring complex emotions, interpersonal relationships, and the intricacies of the human experience.

Gokhale's short stories are characterized by their focus on human relationships, particularly those that are complicated and fraught with tension. Her stories often explore the inner lives of her characters, delving into their emotions and motivations. Through her narratives, she explores themes such as love, loss, longing, and the complexities of modern life in India. In her short story collection "The Habit of Love", Gokhale presents a range of stories that offer insight into the human condition. The stories are set in different parts of India and feature a

diverse cast of characters from different social and economic backgrounds. Each story is unique in its way, but they all share a common thread of exploring the complexities of human relationships.

Gokhale's mastery of the short story form is evident in the way she can convey complex emotions and ideas in a compact and concise manner. Her stories are character-driven, with a focus on the interior lives of her characters. She uses vivid imagery and sensory details to bring her characters and settings to life, making the reader feel as if they are right there in the story with them. Overall, Namita Gokhale's work demonstrates the power of the short story as a literary form. Through her exploration of human relationships and her masterful use of language and imagery, she shows how the short story can be an effective way of conveying deep truths about the human experience in a concise and powerful way.

### **Gokhale's Prose Style and Language**

One of the most striking features of Gokhale's collection is her use of lyrical prose and vivid imagery. Her writing is evocative and sensual, and she creates a richly textured world that draws the reader in. For example, in the story "Omens II" Gokhale writes, "In the sky, the clouds were scattering again, and a weak rainbow arched across the valley: a blessing, a consolation." (Gokhale, 182). Through this description, Gokhale not only creates a vivid image of the setting but also conveys the emotional state of the characters.

In addition to her use of imagery, Gokhale's language is also marked by its complexity and nuance. She uses words and phrases that are often poetic and sometimes obscure, forcing the reader to slow down and pay close attention to the text. For example, in the story "The Habit of Love," Gokhale writes, "I knew the name of the mountain of which I had dreamt. Naming things makes them tidy, manageable, complete. The name of the mountain was grief." (Gokhale 22) This sentence not only conveys the character's state of mind but also reflects Gokhale's skill as a writer. The characters in the novel demonstrate a distinct masochistic trait in women, whether it be in regard to their spouses, lovers, or sons. A few stories have the undertone of death, yet they are always laced with optimism. It can be stated with certainty that Gokhale has perfected the skill of writing about death for a general audience since she does so with a great deal of beauty and understanding.

Her writing style is resplendent with metaphors and unusually crafted analogies. In *Life on Mars* she writes, "Our pheromones, our ganglia and our neurons wave out to each other" (Gokhale, 3). In *The Habit Of Love* she describes her present state and writes, "Like three helium balloons bobbing disconsolately against a low ceiling, tangled rather than tied together by our floating strings." (Gokhale, 18) Not very picturesque and yet hard-hitting.

### **Characterization and Setting**

Another important element of Gokhale's collection is her skill in creating complex and multifaceted characters. Each story features characters who are grappling with different aspects of love, and Gokhale explores the many ways in which love can both enrich and complicate our lives. In "Love's Mausoleum", the protagonist, Malika, is struggling with her traumatized past and she is trying to come to terms with the end of a relationship. Gokhale creates a nuanced portrait of Malika's emotional state, as well as her relationship with her ex-husband.

Along with her skill in creating characters, Gokhale's collection is notable for its use of setting. Each story is set in a different location, ranging from the bustling streets of Kathmandu to the tranquil hills of Nainital. Gokhale uses these settings not only to create a sense of place but also to reflect the larger social and cultural issues that the collection engages with.

### **Significance of the Short Story Form in *The Habit of Love***

Namita Gokhale's short story collection, "The Habit of Love," explores themes of love, loss, and human relationships. In the author's note, Gokhale states, "These stories were written on and off, over several years. They have been imagined in airports, scribbled during flights, corrected in traffic jams, deciphered from the backs of envelopes." (Gokhale, 183) The collection consists of thirteen stories, each of which provides a unique perspective on these themes. The stories are set in India and range from rural villages to urban centers, providing a diverse and nuanced view of Indian life and culture. The characters in *The Habit of Love* may be largely divided into two groups: contemporary metropolitan women, and women from earlier periods of history such as Kunti, Qandhari, and Damyanti. The tales like "Living on Mars," "The Habit of Love," "Grand Hotel I," "Grand Hotel II," "Grand Hotel III," "Omens I," and "Love's Mausoleum." "The Day Princess Diana Died" and "GIGALIBB" depict the lives of contemporary women. However, the stories like "Kunti," "The Chronicles of Exile," and "Hamsadhwani" are based on the inner lives of women from a bygone era.

One of the key strengths of the collection is the way Gokhale uses the short story form to explore complex emotions and relationships. The short story form is significant in *The Habit of Love* as it allows Namita Gokhale to explore complex themes and narratives in a condensed and precise manner. The use of multiple perspectives and points of view adds depth and complexity to the narratives, while the use of flashbacks and foreshadowing adds to the richness and complexity of the stories. The short story form also allows Gokhale to focus on a single moment of insight or epiphany, creating a powerful emotional impact on the reader. The stories are often centered on a single incident or experience, but within that framework, Gokhale can convey a wealth of emotional depth and complexity. For example, in the story "The Habit of Love," Gokhale explores the aftermath of a failed marriage and the impact it has on the characters involved. Through the use of flashbacks and introspection, Gokhale can convey the complex emotions and motivations of the characters in a concise and powerful way.

Another strength of the collection is the way it explores the nuances of Indian culture and society. The stories provide a diverse and multifaceted view of Indian life, from the struggles of rural villagers to the complexities of urban relationships. Gokhale's writing is vivid and descriptive, providing a rich and immersive experience for the reader.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the short story is a powerful and versatile literary form that has a rich tradition in literature. Through its ability to explore complex themes and convey the essence of human experience, the short story form has proven to be an effective tool for capturing the complexities of human experience. "The Habit of Love" by Namita Gokhale is a prime example of how the short story form can be used to explore complex themes and convey the essence of human experience. Through its exploration of love, desire, and commitment, the short story

provides a nuanced and insightful examination of the complexities of human relationships and is a testament to the power of the short story form. In conclusion, Namita Gokhale's short story collection, "The Habit of Love," is a powerful example of the short story as a literary form. The collection explores themes of love, loss, and human relationships, and uses the brevity and focused nature of the short story to convey complex emotions and ideas. Through her writing, Gokhale is able to provide a nuanced and diverse view of Indian life and culture, making "The Habit of Love" a compelling and immersive reading experience.

Namita Gokhale's collection *The Habit of Love* is a masterful exploration of the many facets of love and its role in shaping our lives. Through her use of language, characterization, and setting, Gokhale creates a richly textured world that draws the reader in and offers a nuanced perspective on the complexities of the human experience. Moreover, through her engagement with larger social and cultural issues, Gokhale offers a powerful critique of contemporary Indian society, highlighting the challenges faced by those on the margins of society. Ultimately, Gokhale's collection is a testament to the power of the short story form and its ability to capture the complexities of our lives in all their richness and nuance

### Works Cited

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