

Issue of Feminine Sexuality in Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story*

S. Priya^{1*}, Dr.R. Palanivel²

¹Ph.D. Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University

²Assistant Professor, Department of English Annamalai University

Abstract

This paper explores Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* from the perspective of a woman living in Indian hills. It focuses on the feminine mind that is upset by things like frankness, melancholy, ebullience, assertiveness, honesty, and strong assertion. A few of these attributes are connected to the novel's protagonist. In addition to being a brilliant and compassionate lady, Parvati's strong protests the pointless limitations force her to live a certain way after her marriage to Lalit Joshi because of her previous physical relationship with Salman, a history teacher. It also demonstrates how impossible and challenging it is to find unconditional connection in the harsh realities of the outside world. In the story, the new woman searches for her identity and defines herself, but she also encounters and hears the traditional male voice and image - often a derogatory one - of a woman in this patriarchal society. Her approach is particularly efficient in analysing the range of emotions, interactions, and misinterpretations that comprise married couples' relationships.

Keywords: Woman, Feminine, Marriage, Identity, Sexuality

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Namita Gokhale is a writer from the twenty-first century whose portrayal of female characters is both distinctive and relatable. Her main goal is to uplift the dignity and strength of women while making sure they are treated fairly in India's patriarchal culture, which views women as inferior and weak. She tries to emphasize her thesis that all people, regardless of gender, experience the same emotions. She contends that women have a full right to live honest, independent lives and that prejudice against them in society must end.

In her writings, Gokhale is renowned for taking a strong stance on the hotly contested subject of feminine sexuality. By expressing their sexuality and developing their identity, Parvati of *A Himalayan Love Story* breaks down the conventional bounds of sexuality. "The Dance of the Honey-Bee," the title of the opening portion of *A Himalayan Love Story*, has many connotations. It is symbolic of the sexual liberation Parvati's mother longs for. In terms of sexual encounters, the author can make a very intriguing comparison between Parvati's mother and the queen honeybee. In addition, Parvati's mother, a middle-class Brahmin widow from Kumauri, desires sex with her bachelor tenant, Shrikishnji, rather than material or social assistance. She shares the same desire as the honey-bee to relentlessly utilise Shrikishnji's masculinity - devoid of all love and attachment - to explore her individuality. But despite her superhuman efforts, she is unable to succeed. In this background, Parvati's ironic aloud reading of a chapter from her book titled "Introduction to Bee-Keeping" and the events in which her mother is stung by a bee and fails to profit from beekeeping are highly vivid.

Finally, Parvati's mother passes away in a terrible circumstance. Thus, in contrast to the male honey-bee (drone), it is the female that has a fatal end when attempting a sexual encounter. The novelist's objectives are questionable in this instance. She depicts Parvati's mother as a sexually liberated woman who, despite her traditional lower middle-class upbringing, enjoys her drink and gets into the flesh; however, her portrayal as an evil twin, as perceived by the young narrator, and her tragic demise cast doubt on the author's intentions and cast doubt on the entire scenario.

From this point on, Parvati enters the story. Following the tragic death of her mother, she moves in with her distant uncle, masterji, and continues her education under the tutelage of a very attractive young Muslim teacher named Salman. Another widely held belief that has been successfully refuted is the one that states that a woman wants a man for social and financial security, while a man desires a woman for her physical attractiveness. The author's use of term "beauty" expresses her wish to value the sensory and artistic qualities of pure male attractiveness, free from the socially constructed notions of masculine charm. Men are attracted to wealth and power, not to their physical characteristics. Unusually for her, she sees Salman only as a sexual partner and refuses to give him the typical position of a provider.

Here, it has been effectively demonstrated that a crucial component of "feminine sexuality" - the open admiration of sensuality - is not exclusively the domain of men. This "personal myth" or "individual component" is what drives Parvati to have feelings for a young Muslim without being frightened by what society expects of a woman. She surrenders her virginity to him out of want rather than experiencing the so-called elevating feelings of love or marriage. She is not experiencing puritan guilt feelings. She doesn't feel damaged by Salman leaving. Therefore, Parvati's preference for "personal myth" over "cultural norm" demonstrates her sexual liberation. Furthermore, the abrupt exits of Salman and

Shrikrishnji are very similar to the drone (male honey-bee) theme. They totally disappear from their female mates' lives after satisfying their sexual needs.

But Gokhale's claim that Parvati has a sense of rejection and belated shame following Salman's departure is noteworthy because a fully sexually free woman shouldn't experience feelings of rejection and shame. Parvati must eventually wed Lalit. The most significant decision of her life has been made by someone else, and she must accept it. Because of the false cultural and social rules that characterise homosexuals as "prevent," "effeminate," and "abnormal," and heterosexuals as "normal," "common," and "masculine," she is unable to receive any physical or emotional fulfilment from her homosexual husband Lalit. Lalit, in turn, is similarly subjugated.

Most people consider homosexuality to be a sign of weakness. It makes sense that Lalit wrecks both Parvati's and his own lives by forcing him to marry a woman while concealing his homosexual nature. Having experienced an intense physical relationship with Salman, Parvati feels even more constricted in her marriage due to the lack of sexual stimulation.

Parvati uses her culinary skills to try to fill the void left by the absence of physical touch. But, Parvati finds the company of mice and cockroaches less unpleasant than that of Lalit because this traditional method of bonding is unable to satisfy the demand for sensual pleasure. The anger and violence aimed on Parvati are the subtle undertones of subjugation and pain that a gay Lalit experiences. Even for doing anything as innocent as opening his letter, she must endure domestic violence. This letter is written by Mukul, her husband's childhood dream who is in love with Parvati.

The entire episode exposes the various facets of sexual oppression and how they are related to one another. On one level, the story portrays the predicament of a married woman who has experienced the joys of intimate physical contact but is forced to live in a state of sexual denial because of her gay husband's immoral actions. He purposefully marries Parvati despite being fully aware of his sexual orientation to uphold the stereotype of a strong, successful, and socially acceptable heterosexual man. On the other hand, because heterosexuals still hold a lot of power over homosexuals, the reader is forced to feel sympathy for Lalit, who is likewise marginalised. Gay and gender politics are intricately entwined in this complex issue. Depending on whether queer or feminist ideas are used, victim roles are interchangeable.

The entrance of their mutual acquaintance only serves to widen their gap even further. Mukul's unconditional embrace soothes Parvati's hurts from Lalit's rejection. The main protagonists are imprisoned in an unusual scenario. Lalit is envious of Parvati since he has fantasies about Mukul, who he finds attractive. His revelation horrifies Parvati. Both Parvati's double marginalization - her marriage to a gay husband and the fact that her marital status prevents her from responding to Mukul's advances - and Lalit's unfortunate circumstance - being gay in a world where heterosexuals predominate - indicate that there is a narrow area in the sexual realm where patriarchy affects both men and women.

In a traditional Hindu middle-class community, motherhood's tutored happiness serves as a cure for all emotional and sexual unhappiness. It is strange, though, that sometimes these compulsions are what make a woman more aware of her sexual wants. She discovers that the over-glorification of motherhood and the artificial joys of housework and cooking are nothing more than coercive weapons to govern and control the all-consuming feminine sexuality when the customary panacea is unable to relieve the frustrations brought on by sexual famine.

Gokhale was born into a Kumauni family and spent her early years at Nainital. Most of her writings seem to capture her personality, whether it be that of a Kumauni Brahmin girl or as a lady. The protagonist feels empty in her life from the beginning of the novel, even in her early years.

The protagonist of the novel, Parvati, was raised in Jeolikote, a well-liked tourist destination on the route to Nainital. She resided in the home of her step-parent uncle, Hiranand Joshi, the principal of The Manava Public School in Nainital, along with her illiterate mother. At thirteen, her mother married the second son of an Almora family of considerable wealth, but he quickly lost all of his possessions to gambling and other addictions. In addition, he was impoverished at the age of thirty-two, suffering from tuberculosis, and he passed away without receiving the necessary care. Parvati's uncle encouraged her to pursue an education, but like Gokhale's other main characters, she is also a victim of society's limited perspective on women's place in the world. Despite the waste of money, her mother thought she was educated. Her mother did not give her anything because she had such a lowly attitude towards her daughter. Since raising bees is the primary industry in that area, Parvati's mother started knitting sweaters and taking up beekeeping when they decided to purchase a cow. Her mother recognised the value of education for Parvati at that time.

During her time spent raising bees, Parvati learned a great deal about solitary, sociable, and female bees. But they had to abandon that notion fast. Once, while gathering firewood in the jungle, Parvati came upon a strange-looking, tall, slender, and insane woman who had a strong tobacco odour. To Parvati's great distress, she made a weird prophecy that she would one day be as rational as that madwoman. Her mother's departure from the house and the sound of a woman laughing in Shrikrishan's shuttered Kirana shop are the other unsettling moments. She discovered her mother in Shrikrishan's arms due to a smashed side window. She experienced anaesthesia once more, along with extreme distress and dismay regarding her mother's connection.

Parvati continued to regard her mother from the perspective of a daughter even after that incident. She demonstrated the mentality of a young child towards her mother, demonstrating that the woman with ShriKrishanji is not the same as her mother. However, her mother appeared thinner and older when he visited Bombay. She was diagnosed with T.B. that

signified her transition from this world to the next. As Parvati grew older and attended Inter College, she became a young girl. She got to know Lalit Joshi and Hiranand Joshi's private pupil Mukul Nainwal. The history teacher Salman Siddiqui's attractiveness draws her in. Her terrible future is mostly due to her desire. Her uncle gave her permission to see Salman for some historical clarification because he is not narrow-minded in the slightest.

Salman's physical attributes were not the only thing that attracted Parvati; his education was another. Parvati had to be admitted to the Ramsay Hospital after receiving a typhoid disease diagnosis. Salman met her there and they started a nightly physical relationship. Salman's presence in Parvati's life is causing her to heal quickly and to resemble "an angel from heaven." Despite her strong attachment to him, she was aware that their divergent religious beliefs could pose a risk to their relationship. She did not hear about Salman for a while as she understood that their relationship would not last and that their meeting was but a shadow. After learning of his liaison with an Anglo-Indian nurse at the Ramsay Hospital, she followed him to Bombay, where he eventually settled permanently.

The protagonist's light-hearted feelings at that point are revealed by the author. She flirted with Mukul Nainwal and had a very carefree and cheerful life even after Salman left. Her life once again took a turn that was not what she had wanted. Parvati's uncle made the decision to marry Lalit Joshi. She didn't despise him and thought he was still a boy, but she wouldn't dare go against her uncle. She married Lalit Joshi, but from the wedding night on, she and Salman suffered from a terrible sadness because of their connection. However, she was well received in his family. His relatives treated her with great kindness. Like strangers, they cohabited together. She occasionally thought that their relationship may improve if they had privacy, but because they were a joint family, that was not likely to happen. They later moved to Bareilly, where Parvati was hoping for a better marriage. Parvati received a letter one day from Mukul, who was visiting Bareilly for official business. She couldn't get that from Lalit at the moment, therefore she needed Mukul's love expression in addition to his compassionate attitude towards her. However, Lalit was so unpleasant and enraged by her well-groomed that he slapped her.

While Lalit's family is waiting impatiently for some good news, there is just silence between them. That quiet is only disturbed with the entrance of Lalit's younger brother, Raju. Parvati does an excellent job of contrasting and comparing the personalities of her husband's younger brother. While Raju is ostentatious, endearing, and slothful, her husband is diligent and hardworking. Parvati's physical yearning and loneliness one night forced her to have a sexual relationship with Raju, and he did not object. Parvati's life had a significant shift. With him, she felt confident in herself. Even their neighbour inquired as to whether there was any good news.

Following Raju's departure, Parvati and Lalit started to get intimate. Maybe Parvati's fate was meant to be even worse - more terrible and devastation. Over time, they learned that Lalit was struck by tuberculosis and that he had left this world prematurely to travel to another, leaving her alone herself. Through the persona of Parvati, the author presents a highly positive view of death: "Death does not make us think of death: death urges us towards life" (48). She gave birth to a daughter after Hiranand Joshi took her along and informed her that she was pregnant.

Parvati tells the first half of *A Himalayan Love Story*, while Mukul, who moved to Hong Kong with his wife Adeliene and her daughter Marie, tells the other portions. He received a letter from Hiranand Joshi containing his will, which stated that Mukul was to care for all of his belongings and use them either for the betterment of our hill people or to further his life's mission of educating others. In a world where men predominate, Hiranand is stricken by cancer, Parvati is insane, and her daughter Irra is only a burden to them all. The following day, Mukul departed for Nainital, where he met Pooran, the nephew of Hiranand, his wife Neera, their two kids, and Irra, Parvati's daughter. He sensed a strong connection between Irra and Nainital. He finds it surprising that Irra responded in her mother's manner. Irra's innocence, her sad yet sweet eyes, her astute observation, her astute reasoning, and her beseeching expression make him feel extremely close to her. Irra suffers greatly at the hands of Pooran's wife, Neera. Pooran gave a naive response when Mukul questioned him about why Hiranand opposed them.

In Gokhale's portrayal, Mukul is portrayed as a detester of caste, creed, and the colour system of society. As a result, Hiranand refused to marry Parvati because of his Khasia Brahmin background, and as a result, he married a widow who is half Burmese and half English. Because of their caste at the time, Mukul was even more frustrated than ever in front of Pooran, his wife Neera, and Irra because even Parvati had disregarded him. After arriving in Nainital, Mukul was constantly engaged in his past. His pursuit of Parvati's affection brought to mind Hiranand and Lalit. Despite being in the presence of Mohan, Sohan, and Jeewan, he was reminded of his first encounter with Parvati because of her flawless neck and attractive appearance. He fell deeply in love with her right away. In Parvati's eyes and in his own heart, he confessed his own search for love.

Due to his deep feelings for Parvati and Irra, Mukul brought them to Relax Inn with him. While there, he received a call from his wife Adeliene in Hong Kong informing him that "her daughter" had gotten a crumb in the swimming pool and had water in her lungs, necessitating her quick return to Hong Kong. He is left wanting to do something for Parvati once more. Irra assisted him in packing in some way, but he secretly harboured a horrible sense of cowardice.

Irra shown incredible bravery and pragmatism at that moment. She told him that once Pooran and his wife regained possession of the house, Parvati would be sent back to the insane institute and that she, Irra, would give her pre-medical after Intermediate. With great caution and optimism, she would oversee her own destiny and take care of her mother, if

she could sell the Bhowli land and earn enough money to support both of them. Without taking any action for his beloved Parvati and her daughter Irra, Mukul departed for Hong Kong the following morning. He felt as like he was “a failure in love,” and he is deeply sorry that he is powerless to help them, since he is their only hope for providing for their needs. He attempted to discover who he really was, but he felt like a coward and a failure. Regarding Gokhale’s skill in characterization, the majority of her novels serve as a foundation for feminist beliefs. Her art is heavily focused on ladies. The fine texture of the feminine mind is disrupted by genuineness, candour, frankness, boldness, strong assertion, melancholy, ebullience, and other things in the novel *Himalayan Love Story*. A few of these attributes are connected to the novel’s protagonist. In addition to being a brilliant and compassionate lady, Parvati’s strong protests against the pointless limitations force her to live a certain way after her marriage to Lalit Joshi because of her previous physical relationship with Salman, a history teacher. According to Gokhale, finding companionship without conditions is either impossible or very difficult in the harsh real world. The novel depicts the new woman’s search for self-identity and her attempt to define herself on the one hand, but also her hearing and seeing the traditional male voice and image - often a negative one - in this world dominated by men on the other.

In the current work, Gokhale paints a picture of a lady who is aiming for self-fulfilment and experiencing a nervous breakdown because of an unpleasant marriage. Parvati’s shortcomings from her past prevent her from living on her own terms, and her shared family prevents her from advancing in her married life. Both her and her husband had experienced a minor difference, although this was only before Lalit passed away.

Gokhale wants to show that love, care, understanding, and acceptance of each other’s identities are vital components of a marriage, even though her focus on Parvati’s imperfect and unsatisfied marital life stems from her previous relationship. It is evident from Mukul’s departure to Hong Kong at the end of the novel that he loves Parvati and recognises his obligations to her, but at a sensitive point in their marriage, he drifted to his wife in Hong Kong. This is because all women are sentimental and yearn for a complete home with a caring husband and loving children.

The relevance of Gokhale’s subject, which includes human relationships, alienation, a fascination with violence and death, conformity, and nonconformity, as well as impersonal forces like those of time and place, is well-acknowledged. She approaches it with rhetorical devices and creative authority - what we refer to as originality. She has personal and universally applicable insights on significant facets of human existence to share. She employs a metaphorical language approach to convey the characters’ intense emotions and severe stress. Even if she does not use imagery much in her stories, she nevertheless brings ethereal character features and abstract, indefinable events down to the level of concrete reality. Two essential components of her narrative are place and atmosphere, which are established with the aid of imagery. Additionally, it helps the novelist successfully convey her concepts and ideas.

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