

Sexuality and Subjectivity: (Re)-interrogating Sexualised Female Gender in Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story*

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Abstract:

The attributes of sex and sexuality of female characters in literary fiction have been significant in their attempt to accomplish their personal goals and desires. These become even more enticing when a particular writer paints an almost aesthetically pleasing narrative that deals with sexuality in order to come to the revelation of the central aim of the portrayal of rising female characters dealing with self-freedom. *A Himalayan Love Story* by the notable Indian English writer Namita Gokhale is one of the most glaring displays of the nuances of female sexuality portrayed within the narrative. By portraying the novel's central character, Parvati, to be using numerous sexually explicit behaviors in the novel, Gokhale brings in the very idea of the comprehension of personal sexuality. This paper scrutinizes the subjective position of Parvati in the novel by dealing with her sexuality which becomes her weapon in the novel to make men fall for her. Also, the paper makes an effort to question the very nature of the portrayal of female sexuality in the novel because the life of Parvati, as it was seen in the novel, was devoid of any emotional attachment with their male counterparts. Thus, Gokhale makes a scathing comment on the very nature of society's social conventions by making use of the character of Parvati.

Keywords: emotional, female, sex, social, weapon

It is strange, but I often write about things before they happen to me or those around me. I was terrified by these coincidences until a brilliant woman explained that writers are intuitive and often carry a field of prescient energy. Otherwise, every writer I know cannibalizes experience; it is inevitable.

Literature is rightly considered the carrier of the intricacies of human living. A particular fictional

narrative can enable an individual to make him or her empowered within the broader living tenets of the world. If aspects like love and hate find an important place in numerous fictions, topics related to sex and sexuality have also risen at an extreme level. They have been associated with portraying the qualities of human living in the rawest manner possible. It also has to be stated that along with sexuality, there is a more significant concern related to an individual's emotions because, at the heart of physical intimacy between two individuals, there lies a solid emotional connection. Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* is a heartbreaking portrayal of female sexuality as the sheer instrument of asserting the subjective position of the central character, Parvati, in the novel. The writer makes the readers aware that Parvati's almost perversion towards the fulfillment of the carnal desires comes with a more excellent price- of not having any emotional attachment with the men she has physical intimacy with.

The depiction of Parvati's frank inclination toward sex has greatly shattered the otherwise silent atmosphere related to the topic in society. As Lukas makes a pertinent remark, "Today, however, the pendulum has swung to the other side, and a new ethic of silence surrounds the problems associated with casual sex and the benefits of reserving sex of committed, monogamous relationships" (3). The plot of the novel centers on the tale of Parvati, who is presented as the ill-treated daughter devoid of her father's love as he was dead in the novel. Gokhale presents that she is from the area of Jeolikote, one of the very remote locations in Uttar Pradesh, and was

always neglected by her mother, who was living a widowed life. Drawing a significant connection between the natural surrounding and the life of Parvati, Gokhale aligns her character with the presentation of the captivating Kumaon Mountains. It was observed that Parvati led her life in the hills without any troubles. As a young girl, her mind was filled with numerous thoughts and imaginative ideas as she remarks, "I imagined myself confronting a class full of children" (Gokhale 10).

Gokhale depicts that Parvati had the inherent desire to lead a life of affluence which gets substantiated by her reiteration,

A sharpened pencil gave me immense satisfaction, and I used to collect the pencil shavings in a cardboard box, confident that I would someday find a practical use for them. I am going to build a palace...a palace of pine cones. We can even live there. It will be warm and cozy in winter, and if I paint the pine cones, everyone will think we are rich. (Gokhale 13)

The attributes of sexuality come to the forefront in the novel, with Gokhale portraying her husband as a gay who tortured her to the extreme. Thus, from the outset of the novel, it can well be sensed that there was a life of repression of sexual desires and inclinations being led by Parvati as she never had physical fulfillment from her husband. There is an air of incompleteness from the beginning of the novel, evidenced by the statement, "I have always recognized that I carry emptiness inside me, though I did not at first understand it" (Gokhale 3).

The sexual perversion in Parvati can be said to have transpired from her mother, who had a sexually fulfilling life with the tenant, Shrikrishnaji. Gokhale states that Parvati's mother had sexually dependent on him as she was a widow. Thus, there was physical attachment between the two without connections to emotions. According to Kuhu Chanana, "Parvati's mother is a sexually liberated woman who, despite her conservative lower middle-

class background, enjoys her drink and delves into the flesh" (163-64).

The sexually explicit life led by Parvati's mother was seen to have a profound role in her life which led her to follow the same path during her later life in the city. The first instance of attraction was visualized with Parvati getting attracted to her tutor, Salman, at her uncle's residence. In her words, "I first saw Salman, and I was dazzled by his beauty" (Gokhale 23). Moreover, Gokhale portrays that she also used to flirt with a guy called Mukul, whom her uncle liked. The final blow to their sexual independence of Parvati was seen when she was married to Lalit Joshi, a gay, by her uncle. With depression reigning supreme in her mind, Parvati utters, "My husband looked puzzled, even oppressed, and kept stubborn, watchful distance from me" (Gokhale 33). The final ratification of the body was accomplished in a relationship with Raju, Lalit's husband. This incestuous connection between the two, as Gokhale depicts, provided Parvati with the doorway to sexual accomplishment. Regarding her blissful life with Salman initially, Parvati makes the following remark,

I was caught completely unaware by the devastating bliss. Eating sweet squelchy gulab jamun, biting into a fresh fragrant apple, clambering up a khumani tree, with the blue sky above and the complex pliant branch beneath my legs pretending I was riding a horse – nothing in my meager experience of physical pleasures had ever predicted such ecstasy. As I succumbed to the rhythm of Salman's body within mine, I Knew paradise. (Gokhale 28)

However, with all the entanglements of the body, it was seen that Parvati's husband became the fatal prey to tuberculosis, and there was a gradual deterioration in the mental health of the character. The crushing defeat to her body came with the marriage of Raju, who was, till that point, fulfilling her bodily desires. Moreover, Gokhale depicts a very pathetic situation in Parvati's life by showcasing that she

becomes the mother of a girl called Irra and is also discarded by her husband's family members. With no other option left in front of her, it was, at last, seeing that Parvati had become a lunatic.

Thus, *A Himalayan Love Story* is a heart-wrenching establishment of the idea of emotional fulfillment of human beings through the attribute of female sexuality. The characters of Parvati and her mother become the representations of the unattained love and longing which every individual seeks in life. Although Parvati had an accomplished sexual life in the novel to the very core, she was always living a life of starvation in the context of emotional fulfillment. Thus, Gokhale makes the readers sympathize with Parvati at her utter poor fate at the end.

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