

A Himalayan Love Story: Navigating Love, Loss, and Fate

Sujatha Lokanadham¹, Y. Somalatha²

¹Research Scholar, Andhra University

²Professor, Andhra University

Abstract

The Paper presents an analysis of Namita Gokhale's novel "A Himalayan Love Story" and its exploration of universal themes such as love, loss, and fate. The background of the study lies in the innovative literary expression of Indian writers, with Namita Gokhale being a prominent figure focusing on contemporary Indian society and women. The research problem centres on the portrayal of characters navigating through love, loss, and societal constraints. The aim is to analyse the journey of the protagonist, Parvati, and the implications of societal norms on her life. The methodology involves a qualitative analysis of the novel's characters and their experiences. The participants are the characters in the novel, set in the backdrop of the Kumaon Hills. The results reveal the characters' struggles with societal expectations, desires, and the inevitability of fate. The implications highlight the power of love in the face of adversity, as well as the limitations imposed by societal norms.

Keywords: Namita Gokhale, A Himalayan Love Story, love, loss, fate, societal norms, Indian literature.

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Life is a game of whist. From unseen sources
The cards are shuffled and the hands are dealt;
Blind is our efforts to control the forces
That though unseen is not less strongly felt.
-Iron quill.

Indian writers are constantly innovating and experimenting with different forms of literary expression, propelling the frontier of traditional storytelling. They often use humour and satire to critique social and political issues, exposing hypocrisy, challenging authority, and raising awareness about important social problems. Namita Gokhale is a prominent writer focusing on contemporary Indian society at large and Indian women in particular. Namita Gokhale is one of India's best-known and most-loved authors. A prominent writer, festival director, and literary activist, she is the author of twenty-three works of fiction and non-fiction. Her pioneering work has earned her great acclaim over the last few decades. Namita Gokhale is an accomplished Indian English novelist known for her works that revolve around themes like Love, longing, loss, passion, sex, sexuality, and loneliness. Her novels are set in diverse locations such as the Kumaon Hills, Mumbai, Delhi, and Kashi. Gokhale's characters are relatable and contemporary, and her narrative style is descriptive, painting vivid pictures of the scenes. Her works include travelogues, memoirs, essays, stories, and retellings of ancient texts. Gokhale's writing is influenced by Indian classical

literature, philosophy, religion, and ethics, but she doesn't burden her readers with unnecessary discourse on abstract topics. Gokhale made her modest beginning as a novelist with *Paro: Dreams of Passion* in 1984, and her second novel, *Gods, Graves, and Grandmother*, was published in 1994. Gokhale's third novel is *A Himalayan Love Story* with a rich plot, diverse characters and a unique narrative style.

A Himalayan love story is an award-winning novel in first person narrative. Parvathi a small girl of seven years of age is the narrator of the first part of the novel with the title 'The honey bee' and she lives along with her mother. "I have always recognised that I carry an emptiness inside me although I did not at first understand it" (*A Himalayan Love Story 2*). The story proceeds as Parvati grows. Parvati from her childhood longs for true love, happiness and good companionship. She lives all alone with her mother who is always sick, Her mental, physical and social isolation makes her sick in health and mind. It's merely existing rather than living for both of them. The peaceful place, Himalayan ranges, and beautiful seasonal flowers could never make Parvati happy with beauty, sweet smell or soft texture. Of these flowers. She just considers them as a source of income. Parvati's mother, a widow always feels bad for not having a boy child she would complain bitterly about the cost of books and uniforms although the actual school fees were of course heavily subsidised. She further says survival is the basic instinct.

It would be different if you were a boy, she would say angrily then you could earn and provide for me in my old age but all you are going to do is get married to someone no good and take my gold Chamkali necklace off with you as dowry it's a double curse first to be born as a woman and then having a girl child (*A Himalayan 11*).

Parvati with this conditional relationship and materialistic perception of life never feels true affection from her mother, further, her mother's relationship with Sri Krishna kills her aspiration to live her life. She even feels abandoned but never speaks it out.

An objective analysis of Namita Gokhale's characters reveals a definite journey of an individual from innocence to experience and finally to either wisdom or trauma her moral instinct makes her characters discard them. After many adventures and misadventures in life the character is written to the all-pervasive reality of the society, they live in. Parvati loses her mother to tuberculosis and remains alone in the world. Her Maternal uncle Hiranand Joshi takes her to 'Wee Nookee' to his home and takes care of her. Parvati feels neither lonely nor secure in her uncle's house, but she enjoys the pride of being a person related to Hiranand Master. Its mere silence pervades the house. Parvati gradually gets acquainted with the silence of home and engages herself with cooking and other household work. She is happy there studying at a Government College. She makes friends with Hiranand master's favourite students, Mukul Nainwal and Lalit Joshi. Parvati enters her teenage and feels proud of her beauty. She takes it as a privilege to be adored by Mukul Nainwal. Parvati starts loving her body charm and the beauty of her skin and face. She feels elated for being attractive. Emptiness in her life started getting filled with self-possession and admiration. Parvati with no second thought gets into a physical relationship with Salman, the history teacher without thinking of the consequences of a pre-marital relationship.

Mukul Nainwal, a Young man and a student of Hiranand Master gets attracted to Parvati as well Parvati starts to see the self through his eyes. They enjoy the emotion of love by spending time together. Mukul

is genuine in his desire to marry Parvati and take care of her. For him, Parvati is a goddess, he admires, adores and loses himself in her presence. Soon Parvati turns twenty and her uncle decides to get her married to Lalit Joshi, his student as he belongs to his community. He did not bother whether they liked each other. Mukul feels bad and gets hurt but cannot venture to speak to Hiranand Master regarding his love for Parvati. Neither Parvati nor Lalit dares to speak their opinion to the elders. They just accepted it as destiny and moved ahead in their lives with heavy hearts. Parvati has no hatred for Lalit, He is her childhood friend. Loving, building a relationship and bonding with Lalit is not a troubling thing for Parvati. Mukul leaves Nainital with a heavy heart in search of a job and is compelled to marry a dominating Anglo-Indian woman at a distant place. Parvati's world got flipped again, it is not a happy marriage but, Parvati is pretty happy to stay in a combined family and spend good time with Cousins and elders in the family. But Lalit could not be intimidated by her. He neither considers her as his wife nor a childhood friend. They continued living together with no bonding between them for a year. Later, Lalith and Parvati moved to the plains for jobs. Raju, Lalith's brother also stays with them in the plains. Parvati knows how emptiness in life troubles somebody, how it would be with no emotional support. She expects Lalit to fill all these gaps, but Lalit who is a homosexual couldn't comfort Pravati either physically or emotionally.

From childhood to womanhood Parvati has emptiness within her, longing for love pleasure and happiness. She remained fatherless, motherless and neglected. Even when she had her mother, the daughter-and-mother relationship isn't been glorified in the story. Parvati's mother lives in frustration, hopelessness and deprivation. Parvati and the character of her mother are similar in many ways. Both have become widows at a very young age. Namita Gokhale, the author is also a young widow, but with hope and an optimistic attitude. Parvati also got a girl child Irra to take care of. Both of them long for love, happiness and pleasure. Parvati breaks up the societal shackles and runs after physical pleasures. Parvati compelled the self by circumstances to surrender herself to destiny. The bitter and rude life made Parvati's mother stoic and rude, even to Parvati. But Parvati never suffered Irra with her rude behaviour. Further, Parvati made sure to take good care of Irra. But Parvati could not manage the stress and struggle, hence ending up with mental illness, where Irra has to take care of her in turn. The dependent Parvati started her life depending on her mother, Hiranand Joshi, Lalit and even on her daughter, however strong she is, being gritted and determined to live a happy life. She could not make it happen till the end.

As titled it may be a love story of Mukul Nainwal and Parvati, but the story is deeper than it appears at the beginning. Parvati endures so much misery, pain and emptiness that led her to mental illness. Even Lalit Joshi is also portrayed as a victim of the culture and traditions that define homosexuality as a weakness. He could not disclose the truth of his sexual preference to society or the family because of social embarrassment. Lalit loves Mukul and admires him, but Lalit's marriage with Parvati blocks all his desires and expectations of life. If it's not the marriage, the conventions of society about gender identity would be a block for him. It is the fate of Lalit that he has to abide by and keeping all his aspirations aside he continues living in a marital relationship and makes Parvati a victim.

Both the wife and husband have been struggling with desires, but can't help one another with the conditions prevailing. Parvati started getting into a physical relationship with Lalit Younger's brother with no regrets. She considers it right. Lalit's condition has become even more miserable. His suffering turned into restlessness and he became violent and rude towards Parvati. A new Parvati emerges with the

happiness and pleasure she attained by being in relation with Raju. She became more active and energetic. She even expects Lalith to live in a good marriage with her soon. But destiny decided to let emptiness be her constant companion. soon Lalit died of Tuberculosis and Parvati was left with Irra.

On the other side, Mukul an ardent lover of Parvati was not considered to get married to Parvati just because of the reason that he belongs to another community. Hiranand Master has considered Mukul as his son, they do have a very special bond between the two. Hiranand master is always very kind to taking responsibility for Parvati and taking good care of her. But when it comes to marriage, he did not consider Parvati's opinion, he just got the marriage arranged for the reason that Lalith is of his community.

Though Mukul admires Hiranand Master as his guru, he cannot accept the decision of getting Parvati married to Lalit. He couldn't excuse his guru and take it positively. Lalit, Mukul and Parvati compromised with the social circumstances. They just suppress their passion, love, and longing and accept destiny as it is. The suppression has led them to live life according to the social norms and stereotypes by asserting their desires through other means.

A Himalayan love story beautifully displays the desires and urges of both men and women. These characters refuse to be limited by the boundaries and choked by the suppressive environment especially, the protagonist Parvati grows beyond the conventional image of a Middle-class housewife. Parvati's life is full of challenges. The way she dealt with those problems and challenges is fatalistic. She just accepts the fate and continues living with hope.

Parvati struggles to find true love and sexual gratification on her way to achieve this. She defied the norms imposed culturally by upholding her carnal needs. The Kumaon hills serve as the perfect realistic background. Namita Gokhale with her characters depicts the real face of society. Parvati has been brought up like a wild beautiful flower from the Himalayan Regions, but with no care and concern, yet beautiful and strong. She longs for the unknown beauty of the world and explores it all by living freely in the mountains.

Parvati lives in dreams of becoming rich and leading a comfortable life. Namita Gokhale portrayed every small character to contribute the best to the theme, plot and flow of the story. Parvati encounters an old lady in the woods with a frightening, haunting appearance and says "You silly girl, you're young and pretty just now, but remember, soon, very soon, you'll become just like me! She further said. 'I am a tree; I am not a flower anymore'" (A Himalayan 12).

The statement illustrates that all women reflect the reality that women are desirable as long as they are beautiful. A woman is admired and adored only when she is beautiful. Along with the age and beauty the worth and importance fade away. Further, Parvati's marriage with homosexual Lalit Joshi added more chaos to her life. He died of tuberculosis Parvati and the newborn Irra have become a burden to the family of Lalit. Parvati took the responsibilities of Lalit's home. She owned the people and took good care of them, but, unfortunately, they disowned Parvati after the death of Lalit Joshi. Parvati, her mother and then her daughter Irra are devoid of the love and care that any human being deserves. Each phase of life has brought new injuries to Parvati. She always juggles with the challenges.

Mukul returns to Nainital on receiving the last letter from his Master requesting him to settle the property issues and fulfil his last desire to donate some to the social cause. On his way to Nainital Mukul feels happy to meet his childhood love, Parvati. He is still suffering from an unresolved childhood Romance. Mukul feels deeply hurt to see Parvati in such a condition, she is perverted, and her mental condition is not good. Depression and physical and emotional starvation led her to the mental asylum. Mukul looking at his love Parvati feels bad.

Her feet were not well cared for, but they had remained small, fair, and pretty. They reminded me of the feet of the goddess Lakshmi. I wanted unaccountably to fall at her feet, to kiss them, to be her slave, to die for her. I could picture her sitting in a calendar frame upon a lotus, on a tiger, on a peacock. Her face was battered and blue and bruised, yet a smile played upon her lips, a smile of mysterious interaction with sorrow and acceptance. She was my Durga, My Kali, my Saraswati. But I am a failure in Love. (*A Himalayan* 196)

Though the story ends on a sad and melancholic note, the readers still remember Parvati and Mukul as strong characters with a strong inclination to make life beautiful and worth a living. No character with these many issues tries to end themselves. They are all strong-minded and accept life as it comes. They respected life and valued it for being blessed with it. They accepted their fate and lived life to the fullest. There is no visible special concern for women in Namita Gokhale's novels. She would like to give a raw picture of society by portraying the true selves of people both men and women. They have been suffering to live according to social norms. On the other side whoever takes the freedom to live a life of their choice, fails to manage and utilise it properly to have a happy life. Either way, life ends with chaos. The characters of Namita Gokhale are smartly provoked to balance the transition by respecting tradition and society.

Literature reflects society and is intertwined with its social structures. It is an effective and powerful tool for highlighting, addressing, and combating all of society's challenges. Because he or she is sensitive enough to react rapidly to the culture's paradoxes, a writer reflects on society. Literature is a string instrument in the hands of writers, allowing us to effect beneficial change in society that is judged suitable for the general benefit. It's worth noting that social duties were discovered in the world of literature. From time to time, many challenges and difficulties have been mentioned. Women have long been a subject of fascination in literature, and she has found her place among the enormous collection. Women's concerns have long been a hot topic among authors. Women's writing had a revolution in the twenty-first century, and it is a strong medium. Women authors today are mainly educated in Western countries and have sufficient financial resources. The struggles and terrible times women suffered in a patriarchal society are shown in their novels. (Jain Preeti 2022).

Through its deep dive into love, loss, and fate, *A Himalayan Love Story* invites readers to reflect on the universal themes of love, longing, and human existence, reminding us of the enduring power of love to illuminate the darkest corners of our souls and guide us towards the light of understanding, acceptance, and transformation. But in the presence of lost love, leading a life of this kind is chaotic. The fatalistic nature of the story leaves no option or escape for the characters and leads them to the darkness of chaos. The story ends with Mukul leaving for his Wife in Hong Kong, as his wife's daughter met an accident and is struggling on death bed. Mukul in a helpless condition says. "there was nothing I could do for them.

‘Country conditions do not permit’ noted mentally. He promised Irra education and made arrangements accordingly. Parvati’s destiny of emptiness would continue accompanying her.

“That man is not master of his fate but that fate masters him. Do what he will he can- not escape his destiny. Fate is irresistible, unconquerable and its decrees are absolute” (Leach 373).

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