

Suppression of Desires in Namita Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story*

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Abstract. One of the famous Indian writers, Namita Gokhale has emerged as leading woman novelist whose fiction is a harmonious contribution of joy and sorrow, pain and relief, attraction and repulsion, meeting and departure. She has written what she observed around her. From Kumaon to Mumbai, she observed the lives of women and narrated them in her novels. Her women characters are quite familiar to the readers and one can easily meet them next to their house. Namita Gokhale has shown her dissatisfaction regarding the position of women in Indian society and raised her voice against injustice done to them through her women character. Her novel *A Himalayan Love Story* is the pursuit of emancipation. The novel deals with confinement of sexual boundaries of suffocated and suppressed environment. Parvati emerges as a new woman beyond the stereotypical image of a woman who searches for true love and sexual gratification. Suppression of sexual desire leads Parvati to mental illness. Parvati's marriage with a homosexual husband Lalit and her unfulfilled physical needs, compel her to break stereotypical sexual boundaries. And throughout her life she searches for true love, and her own self with identity. The paper critically examines the confinement and suppression of sexual desires, and subjugation of Parvati leading to mental illness.

Keywords : Confinement; emotion; life; suppression; unfulfilled desires.

Namita Gokhale is one of the famous women novelists who revealed her concern for the welfare of woman. She was born in 1956 in Lucknow. She spent her childhood between New Delhi and Nainital, in the foothills of Himalayas. Namita Gokhale is an Indian writer, publisher and festival director, and author of twenty books including ten works of fiction. Her recent novel *Jaipur Journals* was set against the vibrant Jaipur Literature Festival, of which she is founder director. Namita Gokhale's debut novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion* created a furore due to its frank sexual humour.

Her novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* was adapted into a musical play. Experience of illness and loss informed her later books *A Himalayan Love Story*, *The Book of Shadows* and *Shakuntla, the Play of*

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Memory, Things to Leave Behind. Priya in Incredible Indya was a sequel of *Paro: Dreams of Passion* are also famous for her literary talent. Her non-fiction work includes *Mountain Echoes, The Book of Shiva. In search of Sita-Revisiting Mythology, Finding Radha: The Quest for Love, Travelling In, Travelling out, Himalayan Arc: Journeys East of Southeast, Himalaya: Adventures, Meditations, Lost in Time: Ghatotkacha and the Game of Illusion* etc.

Woman has always been considered secondary and inferior to men. It is said that God created man first and then woman from the rib of man. As Adam, the first man of the earth remarks about Eve, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man." (Singleton, 33)

In literature women's voice has not been given due recognition and veneration. John Singleton points out, "Woman writers have in the part been categorized as either bitchy or gossipy. They shriek like harpies or they're trite and trivial." (23) But modern woman raised her voice against injustice and atrocity which called them inferior to man. The New woman never hesitates to pronounce her volition and convictions. At least they created awareness of the existing inequalities in society. Friedan holds the view:

For a woman as for a man, the need for self-fulfilment-autonomy, self-realization, independent individuality, self-actualization is as important as the sexual need, with as serious consequence when it is thwarted. Woman's sexual problems are in this sense, by products of suppression of her basic need to grow and fulfil her potentialities as a human being, potentialities which the mystique of feminine fulfilment ignores. (49)

Indian women writers today have attempted to break old, conventional myths surrounding the man-woman relationship. Woman writers today enjoy greater freedom and do not shy to explore inner psyche of woman. They have realistically portrayed woman in their novels. Namita Gokhale is one of the women writers who explored the feminine consciousness of the woman characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and enrichment of their inner self in a male

dominated society.

Namita Gokhale has given free voice to misuse and maltreatment of ladies in her novels. *A Himalayan Love Story* is the story of Parvati, a frail, neglected and poor daughter of a widow, growing up in Jeolikote, a popular tourist halt on the road to Nainital. Parvati lives with her illiterate mother. They spend their lives under the kindness of her mother's step brother Hiranand, the Principal of a Public school in Nainital. Parvati describes about herself:

My father had died of tuberculosis when I was a year old. I had no brothers and sisters. Our only relative was my mother's step brother Hiranand Joshi who was as I mentioned, the Principal of a school – The Manav Public School- in Nainital. He was a mean and humourless man whom we both hated. (5)

Parvati remained a neglected, fatherless child and not even get the affection of her mother in real sense which a child need. Mother daughter relationship is not glorified in this story. Parvati's mother spends her life in deprivation and frustration. In many ways Parvati and her mother's character has many similarities. Like Parvati her mother too, gets widowed at the early age of her life and she has to bring up a daughter alone without any male support. Somewhere in her heart, she is compelled by the situation to bury her desires and to surrender before circumstances. This bitter and rude life makes her stoic and rude even towards her own daughter Parvati. Her husband dies of tuberculosis and as a lonely woman she has no any strong male support. Financial crisis also makes her suffer throughout her life that she is not even in favour of giving further education to her daughter Parvati. She considers it a waste of money and complains bitterly about the cost of books, fees and uniforms. She says:

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 some no-good, and take my gold champakali necklace off with you as dowry. It's a double curse, to first be

born a woman, and then get straddled
with another female to provide for! (6)

The novel deals with suppression of desires and sexual confines of woman. Not only Parvati but also her mother and the whole generation of women often suppress their sexual desires which may lead them to mental illness. Parvati's mother fulfils her sexual needs from her tenant Shrikrisanji and secretly spends afternoons with him. She finds her happiness, beauty and glow back that her own daughter Parvati could not understand the secret about that happiness and glow. She says:

Her skin seemed to regain an earlier,
remembered sheen, and the fine nest
of wrinkles around her eyes all but
disappeared. Her gait, too had changed;
there was a rhythm to it that nobody who
knew anything about these things could
have missed (13)

At Hiranand Masterji's house, she first sees Salman and dazzles by his beauty. Parvati is attracted towards Salman Siddique, the history teacher. He has pale ivory skin and an air of composure and confidence that seem destined for a larger world than Nainital. But Parvati has an ability to recognise masked faces of people. She immediately senses that Salman wears a mask, the knowledge of which excites her and she takes the challenge of establishing relationship with him. Salman helps Parvati with her history homework. Parvati remembers her late mother and says in this regard:

Had my mother still been alive she might
have expressed some doubts about and
impressionable young girl being taught
history by a young man of such
exceptional beauty. But Masterji, who
kept a Muslim maidservant and had
himself taken a vow of chastity after
Vivekanand, was above such mundane
concerns. (23)

But Salman takes more interest in establishing relationship with Parvati than teaching history. Parvati knows that she is playing game and both are aware about the fact that the passion is not a permanent one. Hence, when Salman leaves Parvati without bidding her goodbye, the rejection

does not hurt her. She can bear the pain. She enjoyed good time with Salman. Parvati's quest for true love continues even after Salman's rejection. She already knows that Mukul Nainwal, a devoted student of Masterji waits upon her devotedly as Parvati is considered as a shy and reserved girl. She starts flirting with Mukul Nainwal. His absolute adoration and love, worked as balm to her soul. She keeps herself busy with her studies and works of housekeeping. She goes to Cinema with Mukul and Lalit. She recovers herself from the pain of betrayal from Salman. She feels, "My nervous energy was building up again, and I was certain it was happiness." (33)

When Parvati turns twenty Masterji settles her marriage with Lalit who is a Brahmin like her. But life has decided something else for Parvati. Marriage with Lalit does not prove a happy one as Lalit was a homosexual and therefore cannot fulfil the marital duties. He is hostile towards Parvati and she wonders whether the roots of this hatred has started establishing itself in those happy days at Wee Nooke where she has been bonded in friendship with Mukul and Lalit giving her safety and security. She says:

After our marriage, after I became Mrs. Lalit Joshi, I realized that the stubborn hostility that Lalit harboured towards me could not have developed overnight, it had its roots in those happy days at Wee Nooke: he must surely have hated me then. Gradually, this hatred seeped osmotically into my system, and became both a verdict and sentence. (34)

Apparently, the novel seems only a love story of Mukul Nainwal and Parvati but this is deeper than it looks in the beginning. Parvati, the protagonist of the story endures so much pain, miseries, resistance of desires and sexual confinement which leads her to mental illness. Parvati loves Mukul Nainwal but the conventions of Indian society compel Parvati to marry Lalit as girls are supposed to marry within caste. The false conventions of traditional society ruin her life because Lalit is a homosexual who is unable to satisfy Parvati sexually. Parvati gets ready to marry Lalit because of the gratitude towards her uncle Hiranand who takes whole responsibility of Parvati after her mother's death. She herself admits:

I considered the prospect of marriage to Lalit. It was not likely to be very exciting, but I was hardly in position to contradict Masterji or his decision.

... Moreover, Masterji wanted me off his hands. He had done his duty, and it was time for me to do mine. (32)

Parvati surrenders herself before the wish of her uncle and fake traditions of Indian society imposed on women. Parvati's husband Lalit fails to perform her marital duties towards her and can't give any physical and emotional gratification to his wife. Parvati has some expectations and desires from her husband as any newly married woman. But Lalit spends much of his time in his office, paying no attention to his wife and her sexual desires. Instead of love and intimacy a bitter silence builds up between them during those waiting nights. Lalit turns out a gay so he is unable to satisfy Parvati sexually. In her school days Parvati has enjoyed passionate sexual relationship with her history teacher Salman, but now in her married life she remains hungry of love and sexual gratification. It seems difficult for her to survive in sexually starved marriage. She expresses, "I had tasted real passion, and I could feel nothing but scorn for this farce. My young husband looked puzzled. Even oppressed and kept a stubborn watchful distance from me." (33) Lalit is a homosexual; this fact is revealed to Parvati when Mukul Nainwal visits Bareilly. Lalit looks at Mukul with hunger in his eyes and the mark of lust sat taut upon his ordinary face. Not only Parvati but also Lalit becomes victim of the fake cultural and social traditions that defines homosexuality as weakness. He cannot disclose truth of his sexual preference to anyone because of social embarrassment.

In this novel Namita Gokhale draws attention towards Parvati's condition who marries to a gay and her sufferings in this case. For sexual needs, Parvati is compelled to make physical relation with Lalit's younger brother Raju. Parvati breaks stereotypical tradition of sexual boundaries and emerges as new woman who does not surrender before the situation and fights bravely to fulfil her desires. She even reassures herself that this is not betrayal. Parvati feels safe with Raju. She starts improving her looks which she forgets to maintain. The glow of her skin returns back. A new Parvati emerges with confidence and happiness that a nimbus of understanding between Lalit and her faltered suddenly.

Parvati develops a secret hope in her heart that one day Lalit and her relations will improve and they will have normal marriage. But Lalit's unfulfilled desires make him violent and rude towards Parvati. And Lalit's homosexuality leaves Parvati in deep trauma which made her hysterical towards Lalit. After death of Lalit, Parvati's hysteria develops into madness. Her condition becomes miserable day by day and she is sent to mental asylum after giving birth to a daughter Irra.

In the present novel, the narrator has depicted dark and hidden side of women character. Their fears, hidden desires which never fulfils and lead them towards mental illness. Parvati loves Mukul Nainwal but they are compelled to leave each other due to false old convention of the society which does not allow a girl to marry outside the caste. This tradition ruins her life fully. Throughout her life, Parvati searches for true love and emancipation. Namita Gokhale believes that ideal love is the fulfilment on the levels of the body, mind and soul. But Parvati remained deprived of all these things and has to bury her desires which lead her to insanity. Parvati, her mother, Lalit and Mukul all have to compromise with their desires for the sake of society. Parvati and her mother both suppressed their sexual desires due to having authority in the male dominated society which lead them to rebel against societal norms and break old stereotypes by asserting their sexuality by any means.

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