

**The Exploration of Feminine Psyche in Namita Gokhale's
Gods, Graves & Grandmother and *A Himalayan Love Story***

R. Kaleeswari, M.A., M.Phil.



Namita Gokhale

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Abstract

Namita Gokhale is a contemporary writer of Indian Writing in English. Her novels deal with the experiences of women, their aims, concern, demands, sensibility and consciousness. In *Gods, Graves & Grandmother*, Gokhale creates a female space which her women occupy with dignity, confidence and feeling of self-worth. Through the relationship of Shambhu-Phoolwati confirms the 'New Woman image'. Phoolwati was kicking her husband Shambhu when he drunk and tried to beat her marks a reversal of the patriarchal norm of wife-beating. Gokhale's third novel *A Himalayan Love Story* deconstructs the stereotypical confines of sexual boundaries by exploring an identity of a woman. It is a well-known fact that sexual

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 **17:10 October 2017**

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subjugation can lead to mental illness. Gokhale not only describes the mental ailment of her protagonist Parvati but also a whole generation of her female ancestors. Parvati's insanity is the reflection of the inhuman treatment that she suffers at the hands of her homosexual husband and the society.

Both novels are the accounts of feminine triumph highlighting women's strength, resilience, adaptability and spirit against all odds. Besides this, there is an uninhibited celebration of women's sexuality and beauty on one hand and a rebellion against a purely sexual identity on the other.

Keywords: Empowerment, Eminent Women, Experience.

Namita Gokhale

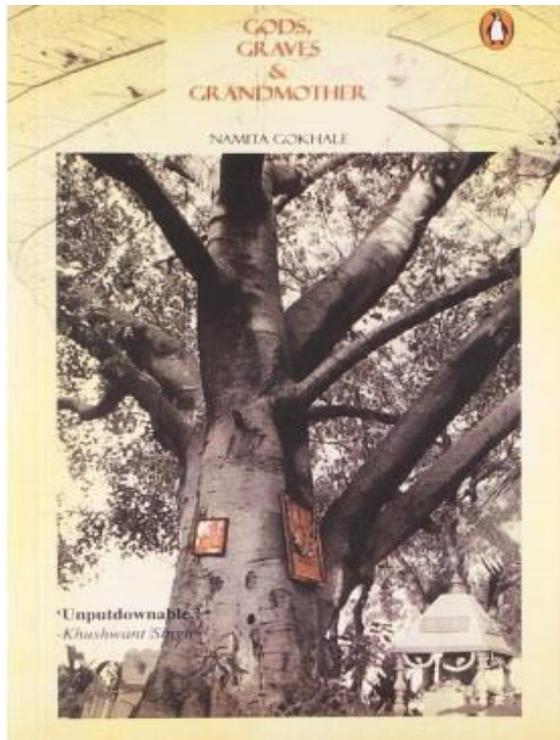
This paper **The Exploration of Feminine Psyche** exposes the mind of women or their deepest feelings which control their attitudes and behaviour. Namita Gokhale serves as a torch-bearer, championing the cause of women's liberation and strives hard to throw away the male-made shackles that confine and crush woman's way to empowerment. The select novels for study *Gods, Graves & Grandmother* and *A Himalayan Love Story* revolve around the experiences of women with similar views, aims, concern, demands, sensibility and consciousness. Gokhale's characters are always like an unsolved mystery. Taking inspiration from day to day happenings she creates a world in which the inner and outer selves aspire for harmony. The deeper dimensions of this quest for harmony, mostly unknown to her characters themselves come to the forefront in her narrative. Her male and female characters get affected by the social conditions in which they live; a society that is traditional as well as modern. They are the human beings caught in the terror of facing existence with all its sickening reality. Lost in the labyrinth of their personal, social and cultural problems, her characters are seen struggling to come to grip with life.

Gods, Graves & Grandmother

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Ammi of *Gods, Graves & Grandmother*, a Muslim courtesan converts herself into a blessed Hindu saint. Previously a rich *kothewali*, Ammi entertained Nawabs and Englishmen, and earned money through prostitution. Her family consisted of her brother, her daughter and the child of her daughter, Gudiya. A turn of fate rendered the family poor and destitute with tragic consequences. Gudiya's mother ran away with a beggar, Ammi's brother committed suicide and Ammi was left alone with Gudiya. The involvement of Ammi and Gudiya's mother in prostitution ends in the escape of Gudiya's mother with a beggar. Ammi is a resourceful and very practical woman. Being without money she utilizes and manipulates the situation in order to survive. Ammi presents a fine example of the pragmatic approach to life. Gudiya and Ammi are now without money and live in Delhi slums. Ammi steals a marble slab and places it beneath the peepal tree along with five rounded river stones and a few marigold flowers, to complete the quickly improvised shrine. Her personality changed as a god woman, Ammi forms a relationship of authority and respect with the people in the neighbourhood as well as the people who come to visit her temple.

Sainthood of Ammi

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Sainthood has some boundaries also, which affects the relationship between the grandmother and grand-daughter. Ammi keeps a distance from Gudiya. Abandoned by her mother, Gudiya hardly finds any solace in the detached relationship with her grandmother. In fact broken homes and families, lack of parental affection and security, absence of a loving mother in the childhood, lack of family ties, parental irresponsibility and a steep rate in divorce are all contributing factors to delinquency. The natural process of menses is very troublesome for Gudiya. Gudiya says,

Thirteen is confusing age for a girl; there is turmoil and agitation in the body and the mind and even the environment. When I began my menses, I knew nothing what to expect... I asked, and was quite unprepared for the stinging slap my query provoked. Another slap, and I was consigned to room, with orders not to emerge until instructed. (GGG 54)

Crisis in Adolescence

Early physical maturity but lack of emotional support may lead to crisis in adolescence. There is a link between brain and psychological conditions and it may produce somatic symptoms. Physical maturity and low intelligence lead to delinquencies. The granddaughter and grandmother relationship undergoes added conflict and strain in the adolescent years because of Ammi's role as a saint and teacher of religion. Gudiya says, "I began to hate her with a desperate longing. I needed to provoke and anger her, and yet when I confronted her and met the calm sanity of that wrinkled face I withdrew even further into confusion and hurt" (GGG 69). Gudiya is under great psychological stress and nervous tension and feels the burden of loneliness and confusion weigh down upon her without any proper support and guidance from her grandmother.

Communication Gap

Ammi and Gudiya faces communication gap. Gudiya reassess her relationship with Phoolwati. Phoolwati is the widow of Shambhu who owns a flower shop at the gate of the temple. Phoolwati plays the role of Gudiya's mother. She forms affectionate and cordial relationship with Gudiya and is exceptionally careful about Gudiya's well-being. In Gudiya's life, both father and mother are absent to take care of Gudiya who grows up without parental

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care. But like a traditional mother, Ammi feels the burden of Gudiya's youth. In India a growing girl is taken as a problem. Our social structural codes dictate that a young girl should be kept in strict discipline and away from male company till her marriage. Ammi keeps a watchful eye on Gudiya. The personal loss of Ammi's affection makes her misunderstand Ammi. She even starts hating her own name because she does not think of herself, 'like a doll' (GGG 69).

When Ammi dies Gudiya is left alone again. She sheds more tears at Ammi's death than she did when her mother abandoned her. After Ammi's death Gudiya's only hope is in her future marriage prospect. For every woman, the next most important relationship in which hopes to find love and security is that of marriage. So Gudiya enquires of Pandit Kailash Shastry, "Will I marry a rich man? And when?" (GGG 104). She has high hopes from marriage.

Gudiya Falls in Love

Gudiya falls in love with the young and handsome boy Pandit Kailash Shastry. He is a member of the Shiv Mohun Band Party. Pandit Kailash Shastry gave this young man the name 'Kalki'. Kalki lost interest in Gudiya after exploiting her sexuality. It is only under the pleasure of Sundar Pahalwan that Kalki marries Gudiya, but even after marriage their relationship is hardly compatible. He treats her badly, which leaves Gudiya feeling tired and depressed. Kalki's habit of gambling and drinking became a great problem for Gudiya and she finds herself unable to adjust to the situation. Phoolwati advises Gudiya after the marriage that she should consider her husband as a disposable being and not to waste her time on him as the child has a legitimate father. Kalki developed hatred for Gudiya because he thought that it was Gudiya who had disclosed about their relationship, which led to his humiliation by Phoolwati and Sundar Pahalwan. Their marriage is arranged as Gudiya is found to be four months pregnant. Indian social system never accepts the birth to a child before marriage. It is considered unacceptable by the society.

Kalki's Role and Responsibility as a Husband

Kalki does not change his attitude or behaviour. He is neither concerned about the coming child nor does he ever bother to look after his pregnant wife. Gudiya has no one with

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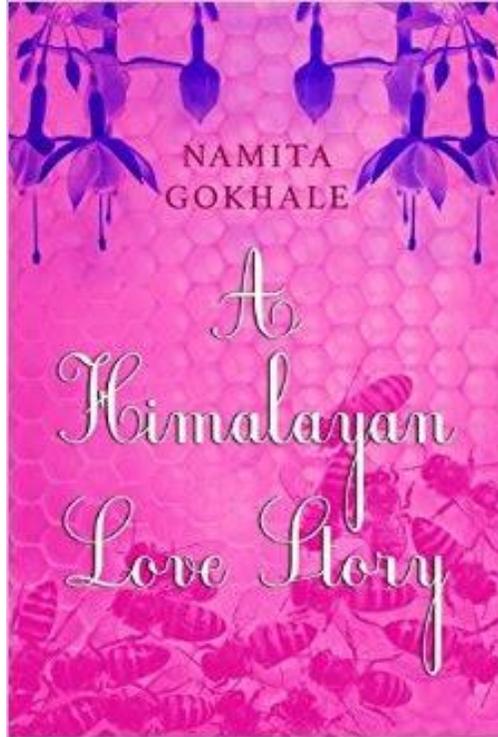
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whom she could share her problems. Gudiya realizes that her husband Kalki is not a permanent or life-long support for her. She realizes that he is attached to her just for physical pleasure and her wealth. Gudiya proposes to Kalki that he should leave her and try his luck in Bombay. This proposal of Gudiya is just reversal of the patriarchal norm where a husband usually decides to leave his wife. Gudiya allows her husband to leave her. She says to him, “Why don’t you try your luck in Bombay again, Kalki?” But when Kalki says “I don’t have the funds”, she immediately takes off the thick gold necklace and other gold ornaments and gives them to him saying, “I’ll sell my Stridhan for you” (GGG 219). This is the firmness shown by Gudiya in supporting her husband. She arranges everything for the welfare of her husband. Gudiya acquires greater confidence and a clear perception of life and realizes that Kalki merely a shadow and this shadow will serve her no purpose in life. She married him just to give a name to her child as it is important in the Indian society. After the purpose of getting name for her child, Gudiya does not need the presence of a husband who has never cared for his wife and child.

Nevertheless, the absence of Kalki delivers Gudiya from a sense of inexplicable bondage. Though she loves him, she is glad to be alone after Kalki leaves. As she has no father or any other male to strongly influence her life, she is totally alien to the idea of depending on a man throughout her life. She says, “There had been no models of masculinity to teach me the lessons of dependence as a woman” (GGG 224). She misses Kalki but it is shocking to know that in his absence she senses “an opportunity for growth, for escape, which ...[She] was determined not to miss” (GGG 224). She loves Kalki but for her “love is not life, and the imperceptibly, his hold on me lessened” (GGG 224-225). Finally, she realizes everything in her life.

A Himalayan Love Story



A Himalayan Love Story (1996) is the third novel of Namita Gokhale. She seems to be interested in a lot more mere survival. The novel is about the evaluation of 'New' female identity. She has successfully projected the urges, dreams and desires of Indian Women, in particular the middle-class housewife who refuses to be bounded and suffocated by her surroundings. She exhibits deep insight into human nature and understanding of day-to-day problems. She has dealt with the themes of clash between modernity and tradition. It also dealt with the identity crisis of the protagonist.

Deconstructing the Stereotypical Confines of Sexual Boundaries

A Himalayan Love Story deconstructs the stereotypical confines of sexual boundaries by exploring an identity of a woman. It is a well known fact that sexual subjugation can lead to mental illness. Gokhale not only describes the mental ailment of her protagonist Parvati but also a whole generation of her female ancestors. Then, she believes that ideal love is the fulfillment on the levels of the body, mind and soul. It can be said to correspond to the physical, emotional and spiritual aspect of love.

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Parvati

In *A Himalayan Love Story*, Parvati is the frail, poor and neglected daughter of a poor illiterate widow. She is growing up in one of the most backward areas of U.P. She was under the kindness of her maternal uncle Mr. Hiranand Joshi. Mr. Hiranand Joshi being the Principal of a public school seeks high position and respect in society. Parvati attains an appropriate age for admission in school but her mother is against her education. Parvati is always denied basic happiness, which she longs for and wishes to gain but fails miserably to achieve. She is forced to lead a life which denies her any freedom. She is shown as a simple girl cherishing the desire to life that fascinates her. Parvati lives in a family which has always neglected and ignored her as a human being. She is lonely in her despair. Her attitude is differing from her mother's attitude.

An interesting thing is the reversal of roles of oppressor and benefactor in a male dominated patriarchal society. It is Parvati's mother who opposes her admission to school while Mr. Hiranand "insisted that I [Parvati] be given an education" (HLS 6). Parvati tells her mother that she wants to build a palace of pine cones as her childhood wish but her mother replies to her childish desire with a "resounding slap" (HLS 14). This treatment is very outrageous and harsh for a child. Parvati is a dejected and sad child. She says, "I had nothing to gain in life; only to lose" (HLS 15). Parvati loses her mother also. Parvati is admitted to a local school and every day after school she went to collect woods from the nearby jungle.

Parvati's mother dies of tuberculosis and Parvati is brought to Nainital by Mr. Hiranand Joshi. After her college days it is decided by Mr. Joshi that she will marry his student Lalit Joshi. The most important decision of her life is taken by someone else that she has to comply with. Parvati's husband Lalit is a homosexual who fails to give any physical and emotional gratification to his wife. During her college days Parvati had formed a premarital relationship with her history teacher Salman, but in her married life she is denied happy and satisfactory conjugal relationship by her homosexual husband. Lalit complies with the false cultural and social codes that define homosexuality as a weakness. Afraid of social embarrassment and censure Lalit does not disclose the truth of his sexual preference to anyone. Parvati already enjoyed a passionate physical relationship with Salman. She finds it all the more claustrophobic

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to live in a sexually starved marriage and expresses her ordeal in words, “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” (HLS 33).

The young, beautiful Parvati desires her husband to be hovering around her but Lalit spends much of his time in his office, paying no attention to his wife and her sensual desires. Parvati longs for companionship but finds none. She hopes foolishly that someday Lalit would love her, but it never happens and she says with resignation, “The pressure only escalated with time. A bitter silence built up between us during those waiting nights. Months passed and the reluctant bridegroom still did not get down to his duties. I began to suffer” (HLS 33).

Lalit

Lalit never cared for his personal health and hygiene. It is very difficult for Parvati to live with such an unclean person and she says,

I found it unpleasant to live in such close proximity to a man. Lalit was not very clean in his personal habits, and a dark, stale smell of sweat sat upon his body (HLS 34).

In the beginning, Parvati wanted to marry Mukul , the friend of Parvati but her guardian decides that she will marry Lalit. The reason for this lies in the conventions of society. Girls are supposed to marry within caste. Mukul was not suitable for her from this point of view while Lalit was. Thus the decision of a conventional society is imposed upon her and her life is ruined. Lalit turns out to be a gay and thus the possibility of the sexual satisfaction is also not there for her. She is forced by the demands of her body to make a physical contact with Lalit’s younger brother. The scene where Mukul comes to visit Lalit and Parvati after their marriage is brilliant from the artistic point of view where just by a brief description the novelist makes the situation very clear.

Lalit, look at Mukul with hunger in his eyes. The mask of lust taut upon his ordinary face; the telltale twitch near his mouth made him appear both pathetic and obscene. I

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thought of those long-ago days in Nainital, when the two of them had attended upon me like pageboys and paid me homage. (HLS 36-37)

Marriage of a Gay with a Woman

Namita Gokhale, however, is not interested in the psychology of a gay. Her concern is the effect of the marriage of a gay with a woman and how a woman suffers in this case. Parvati's frustration stems from the fact that her husband is a gay. After the death of Lalit because of tuberculosis, Parvati becomes insane. The rest of the novel is a poignant description of how economic considerations play a major role in the kind of life a woman is forced to spend if she has no financial resources of her own. The relatives of Parvati take her out of the mental asylum where she has been put when it seems that she has inherited property.

Gokhale's Protagonists

In her novels Gokhale's protagonists mostly display the tendency for withdrawal from the real world. One prominent feature of the writings of women novelists of the second half of the twentieth century has been the realistic approach towards the needs of the body. They have deconstructed the myth foisted upon the psyche of women that body is something sacred and its urge for another body outside marriage is a sin which cannot be atoned. A patriarchal society like India never insisted upon a similar condition for men. For ages women accepted this male injunction unquestionably. Women have started questioning this myth, and women novelists have broken it in their stories and other literary creations. In Gokhale's novels, *Gods, Graves & Grandmother* and *A Himalayan Love Story* she delineates her male characters. They are weak characters without any strong reason they hang themselves bidding good bye to this cruel world and stop their life journey very early. They do not show courage to face the life as it is. Females are stronger than male for they have enough cause for suicide but they choose to face the world with their disfigured face and finally prove themselves as survivor.

Paradigm Shift

Gokhale effects a paradigm-shift in the position of her women who are autonomous and do not depend for their survival, as Manu postulates on their fathers, husbands or sons. They have the requisite strength to face life with all its ups and downs. They are sharply etched out in

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terms of their self and identity. They are cast in the mould of the New Woman who solves her problems herself, and is assertive, practical and resilient. This image of the New Woman constitutes a forceful and effective rebuttal to the definition of woman as a sweet heart, a paramour, a mistress in most of the dictionaries. This significant work of fiction is in sharp contrast to several novels which end with madness, death, suicide, surrender of the female protagonists. In her novel, Gokhale creates a female space which her women occupy with dignity, confidence and feeling of self-worth. Gokhale's women characters want to live with their counterpart, for in them they find shelter and security. These are the women who represent the emerging new woman; a woman who can go against all traditional concepts and establish her identity, so that her individuality is maintained and her desires are fulfilled, and her demands met on an equal footing.

Thus, the novels of Gokhale are the accounts of feminine triumph highlighting women's strength, resilience, adaptability and spirit against all odds. Besides this, there is an uninhibited celebration of women's sexuality and beauty on one hand and a rebellion against a purely sexual identity on the other. There is a strong plea to see women as human beings, as individuals having an identity of their own and not merely as sex objects consumed by male authority. She in her novels has dealt with the pubescent period of women which shows her concern for the rights of women since the onset of womanhood.

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