Chapter IV

A HIMALAYAN LOVE STORY

Her Analysis Of Agonies Of Love

With her haunting novel on loss and fatalism Namita Gokhale confirms her reputation as one of India’s finest writers. She has the rare gift of observing and recording life. This is the story of beautiful Parvati and Mukul Nainwal, the local boy who returns to Nainital in his youth. The novel is set in the background of Nainital. The story is told in the voices of the two persons – Parvati and Mukul Nainwal. Namita Gokhale has an extraordinary knowledge of human life and character. Most of the characters are drawn here from common life. In this novel she deals with the life of Parvati who grew up in Jeolikote, a popular tourist halt on the road to Nainital. Her father had died of tuberculosis when she was one year old. She had no brother and sister. Her only living relative was her mother’s step brother, Hiranand Joshi, the principal of The Manava Public School in Nainital. Since childhood Parvati felt a sense of emptiness inside her. Parvati laments:

When I was a child, I would look at other faces, at their ordinary expressions of laughter and sadness and tears, and wonder at the ease with which they juggled these masks about. All I ever felt was a constant
festering sense of anger and unease. I felt trapped inside my skin and bone and circumstances, and for this reason I began at a very early age to avoid people.¹

Parvati and her mother were living in Jeolikote and her uncle provided them the house and allowed them to collect rents from kirana shop that belonged to him. He executed his duties though he had some hatred for them. When her father died, it was Hiranand Joshi who came to their help. On the suggestion of Masterji, she was sent to school though her mother was not prepared for this. Like other children, Parvati was a curious child. She had the ambition to buy a cow. So she and her mother thought of many schemes to raise the money but they did not get success. She had a desire to wear a sweater of the soft angora and lambwool. Parvati used to collect firewood from the forests behind her house. She says:

After I came back from school I had whiled away the midmorning sharpening my precious lead pencils with an old knife. A sharpened pencil gave me an immense sense of satisfaction, and I used to collect the pencil shavings in cardboard box, certain that I would someday find a practical use for them.²
Parvati, an ambitious child, wanted to be rich. When her mother asks her about the pile of pine cones, she replies:

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 golden everyone will think we are very rich.\(^3\)

Namita Gokhale presents her as a stubborn child who decides to collect pine cones against the desire of her mother. Once when she was making a pile of pine cones, an angry drizzle gave way to a hail storm and she took shelter under the oak tree. She saw a mad woman who jumped off the branches of the oak there. She was tall, and lean and very strange. She smelt of tobacco, combined with a rank animal smell that made her gag. Parvati was frightened by seeing her and began to run but she caught her and said:

You silly girl, you are young and pretty just now but remember, soon, very soon, you’ll become just like me!...

... your teeth will fall away, she whispered, and your hair too! I was young and pretty once but look at me now!\(^4\)
It seems as if her madness anticipated the madness of Parvati. She was totally shocked to see the wretched condition of mad woman. She was haunted by words of that woman when she said – 'I'm a tree, I'm not a flower any more. That's the only way'. Parvati feels shocked and admits:

The terror of that afternoon has remained coiled in my heart, and through every action of every hour of my life, I have been aware of it. That was the day I realized I was doomed. I had nothing to gain in my life; only to lose. I would become like her. My hair would fall off, and my teeth as well, for her madness had called out to mine.\(^5\)

That mad woman sowed the seeds of madness in Parvati. The appearance of the woman was a shocking one. She realized that her beauty will wither away after sometime and she would be like that mad woman. When she knew about the relations of her mother and the tenant Shrikrishnji, she was surprised and felt that people had great masks in their lives. Out of agony Parvati laments:

My world was shattered. People were not as they appeared. There was another life behind their masks. These cavorting figures were no better than ghosts – they
belonged to a nightmare. I shut my eyes tightly, willing them to disappear, but they were no wraiths; my mother and our tenant stood before me in the flesh, their true nature unmasked.  

Parvati was not ready to face the reality and hence decided that though they looked similar, her mother and the woman whom she had seen with the tenant, were two different people. But after sometime she accepted the truth that it was her mother and not anyone else. Now Parvati became the victim of nightmares. She admits:

I began to have nightmares. I would wake up, trembling, drenched in sweat, and toss and turn in bed until the dawn broke. I had a recurring dream where I was bound and gagged and thrown deep a steep cliff at midnight. The feeling of weightlessness, of falling, of hurtling through space, would overcome me and I would awake with a thud.  

There came great change in the behaviour of Parvati now when she had known the truth about the deceitful behaviour of her mother. She stopped to go to the school and did not even come outside the house. But everything became good when Shrikrishnji shut his shop and went to the plains. After sometime her mother became the patient
of tuberculosis and was admitted in the T.B. sanatorium in Bhowali. But Parvati was surprised at her own behaviour. She knew that after her mother’s death, there would be a great change in her condition and began to wait to live in the house of her uncle. She remarked:

I knew that she was going to die and I was deeply shamed by my lack of sorrow. I was worried and watchful, but I had no grieving to offer. I knew that my life would change after she died. My uncle’s house was a Sahib’s house with servants and sofas, and I looked forward to the day I would get to live there.⁸

Parvati was very happy in the changed conditions and studied in the G.G.I.C. Her uncle also had sympathy for her. She enjoyed a certain status in the eyes of the masters and teachers. It is in the house of Masterji that Parvati met Mukul first time. He was a particular favourite of Masterji. She remarks:

The Parvati who had lived with her mother in Jeolikote had receded deep into the past, and a merry young creature had set up camp inside me.⁹

Everything has changed in her life now but Parvati recognizes everyone’s true nature. She discovered that
the maidservant in the house of Masterji was very simple who was without a mask. She was much impressed by the personality of Salman, the history teacher and knew that he wore a mask. She was so much fascinated towards Salman that she did not care for society or even Masterji when she secretly made physical relations with Salman who was a Muslim. She knew well that Masterji would not allow their love affair, however good a history teacher may be. Parvati knew that the love of Salman was not a permanent one, he wore a mask, but she was happy to have relations with Salman. Parvati lacked religious feeling. She did not care for religion and tradition now and continued to have relations with Salman. She accepts:

My view of tradition and religion was influenced by hers (mother). The fact that I was a Hindu Brahmin girl and Salman a Muslim did not, therefore, strike me as any impediment to our union. However, although he was most enthusiastic about getting his hands on me whenever possible, Salman never talked of future or a life together. We were playing a shadow game, and the most precious ingredient of our passion was that both of us sensed that it was not permanent.
Namita Gokhale shows that Parvati told Salman the need for secrecy. So she advised him to control his passion otherwise he would lose his job if Masterji came to know about it. When Salman had gone, she did not feel sad because she knew that he was only a shadow. She remarks:

I was stoic, even relieved, about his departure. A part of me had recognized the risks I was taking. My encounter with Salman had quelled some silent hunger within me. I felt triumphantly normal, and indeed the next few years were probably the happiest in my life.¹¹

Then she began to flirt with Mukul Nainwal though Mukul had real love for Parvati and even he came to meet Parvati when she had been married to Lalit. The first time Mukul met Parvati in the house of Hiranand Joshi. Mukul may be compared to Chandran, the hero of the novel The Bachelor Of Arts. Just as R.K. Narayan shows that Chandran was so much charmed by the beauty of Malathi that he fell in love with her. In the same way Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul loved Parvati at first sight. He felt that there was something attractive in her beauty. He always thought of Parvati but at that time Parvati did not pay heed to Mukul. He expressed his desire to her uncle but he did not allow him to marry his niece; because he feared miscegenation. Now Mukul lived out of Hiranand
Headmaster's ambitions, and became a moderately successful man. But he never forgot Parvati, the only woman he ever loved. On the other hand, for Parvati, the prospect of marriage to Lalit was not very exciting, but she was not in the position to oppose Masterji or his decision. She remarks:

Masterji had decided that I was to be married to Mukul's best friend, Lalit Joshi. It was not that I disliked Lalit, in fact, all in all, I rather liked him. But Masterji could not be expected to understand that I was a woman, and Lalit was, in my eyes, still a boy... but I was hardly in any position to contradict Masterji or his decision. Lalit was a Brahmin like me, our horoscopes and our Gotras matched: we were not related to each other, as was so often the case with Kumaoni Brahmins. Moreover, Masterji wanted me off his hands. He had done his duty and it was time for me to do mine.  

Parvati married Lalit but her marriage with Lalit was not a happy one. Lalit kept a stubborn, watchful distance from Parvati and she began to suffer from constipation and a ceaseless mounting tension. Parvati did not like his personal habits but took great satisfaction from the praise of other family members. She remarked:
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 Nookie: he must surely have hated me even then. Gradually, this hatred seeped osmotically into our system, and became both a verdict and judge.\textsuperscript{13}

Parvati was leading the life of tension and hostility. She further says:

I had been married for over a year, but we were not nearer to consummating our marriage, and by now I had become reconciled to the idea that we never would. I wondered if this was God's punishment for my slutish behaviour with Salman, or if the sins of my mother were being visited on me.\textsuperscript{14}

Lalit was jealous of Mukul because both of them had attended upon her like pageboys and paid her homage. Days were passing in bitter and brooding silence. When Parvati and Lalit were leading the life of loneliness, Raju, Lalit's younger brother, came from Bareilly and Parvati began to enjoy his company at night. Parvati did not think it wrong to sleep with Raju in the kitchen while
Lalit was sleeping lonely in his room. She thought it was not a betrayal as she remarks:

... he was an allay, he was like me, we were both lonely, our needs possessed us, and we made uncompromising, uncomplicated love.\(^{15}\)

She further says:

... soon we fell into the habit and learnt to maintain our faces in the daytime. I felt safe with Raju. He was an allay. I could bank on him. He was, after all, not a stranger, he was my husband's brother, he was family. I reassured myself that this was no betrayal.\(^{16}\)

Namita Gokhale shows that Parvati did not think it immoral to have physical relations with her husband's brother. But Parvati was an Indian woman and it was wrong on her part to enjoy the company of Raju. But this relationship made Parvati happy and the glow returned to her face. Even after the departure of Raju she continued to have an extraordinary sense of well-being. Now she began to smile and when Lalit caught her smiling, he thought she was smiling at him. Lalit began to compliment her on her cooking and a great understanding came between Parvati and Lalit. Parvati remarks:
We had the two of us suffered so much misery together that we were both relieved by this sudden reversal of fortune. We did not mock or question it, but timidly went along with the tide of happiness. Lalit was after all, my husband. He earned for me, I cooked for him; we had been friends in our childhood. We could become lovers, confidants, allies.\textsuperscript{17}

But all her hopes were ruined by the tragic fate when she knew that her husband was on the verge of death. Lalit was suffering from tuberculosis and before he could get proper medical treatment, he died. Parvati was pregnant and after sometime gave birth to a daughter. Namita Gokhale describes that Parvati’s widowhood and breakdown had met with no compassion. When Mohan described her position to Mukul, he remarked:

She was abandoned, Mukul. She was in a bad shape and no one wanted to have anything to do with her suffering...\textsuperscript{18}

Namita Gokhale describes the plight of Parvati. Her uncle was fed up of her brooding silence and increasingly slovenly housekeeping and sent her off to live with Lalit’s family. But they could not afford the economic burden of a widow and her child and so they dispatched Parvati to the asylum at Bareilly. She was lonely and
there was none who could help her. On the other hand, Mukul, who loves Parvati, is usually modest, sensitive, searching a way for himself and conscious to get some job or occupation. Mukul was favourite to Hiranand Joshi and he fulfilled Hiranand Headmaster’s ambitions. When Hiranand Joshi got her married to Lalit, he became very angry and remained ill for many days. But he lived out Hiranand Headmaster’s ambitions and became a successful man in Hong Kong. He married Adeleine, a Burmese, half-Burmese and half-English. When Mukul got the letter of Masterji and knew that he had entrusted the sum total of his life’s intellectual and material endeavours to Mukul, he was fated to return to Nanital. So Mukul returned to Nanital to fulfil the last wishes of Hiranand Joshi, who had left his house and the other responsibilities to Mukul. He looks back at life with mixed feeling of regret, rage and anguish. He thinks of Parvati, of his father and Hiranand Joshi, of his college days, of Lalit and his present hopeless state. He thought of Hiranand Joshi and remarks:

I should have killed him and strangled the constipated matchstick of a body, smashed his cerebrum, destroyed the tyranny of gratitude by which he bound us all. But we were all beaten and bribed and exhausted, even Lalit to whom he had gifted Parvati. Now it was her daughter Irra who was
burdened with the same charity. At least she seemed aware of its price.\textsuperscript{19}

Mukul felt that he could not marry Parvati because of Hiranand Masterji and yet forgave him for the strange justice that Masterji granted. Mukul was grateful to Hiranand Masterji because his dreams and ambitions were moulded by the latter. It was Masterji who sought Mukul and moulded him in the image of a fine gentleman. Mukul had great regard for Hiranand Masterji because in his whole life he worked hard for education and for the physical and moral upliftment of Hill Folk. Hiranand believed passionately in western Empirical thought. He considered Science as the true religion of Modern India and wrote letters to Jawaharlal Nehru about his views of modern India. He had also written to George Bernard Shaw about Evolutionary Socialism. Mukul recollected past when he had to suffer a lot because of the excessive attentions of Hiranand Masterji and other students hated him and called Masterji's collaborator. He said:

I never told Hirananda Headmaster of the pain his attentions caused me. I remained pathetically grateful for the occasional communicative look, the private pat, the sharing of information and opinion, the belief in a future, the mere sanctuary of a home.\textsuperscript{20}
He thought that Hiranand Master had chosen to love him because Masterji was just as unlovable and unloved as Mukul was. Masterji had so much eternal faith in Mukul that he left all he had to him.

Mukul had seen the world. He had fulfilled his wildest ambitions and was an International Civil Servant in the Crown Colony of Hong Kong. Apparently, Mukul was a successful happy man but inwardly he was not satisfied and felt lonely. He regarded himself fatherless, questing, and burdened with the shame of parental inadequacy.

Mukul was above all caste prejudices that were rampant in the society. He did not like the decision of Masterji about the marriage of Parvati. But he said to Mohan that he would have been ashamed to introduce his mother to Adeleine and his English mother-in-law Elaine. He knew that his mother would not like his marriage with Adeleine.

Namita Gokhale presents Mukul as an incurable romantic who was extremely lonely. And when he saw Pasang Rampa, the Tibetan girl, he was forced by something to meet her. He remarks:

Again I was overcome by the same uncontrollable lust. I wanted her more than
I had ever wanted any woman before. I looked hungrily at the moist red mouth.\(^{21}\)

Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul wanted to enjoy the company of Pasang Rampa and could not control his lust. His physical desires were getting out of hand and to satisfy his body he passed one night in the company of Pasang Rampa in her room. But at that time he felt that his sexuality was a jungle and he was lost in the dark:

I watch amazed as my whole life flashes before me. I am dying. I do not exist, I have left myself to enter her. And it is over. I light a cigarette in the dark. I am breathing heavily, and my hands are shaking. I feel as though I have been incarcerated in a dark cavern, I crave light and air. My body is satiated. And my spirit? It is shamed.\(^{22}\)

Mukul further accepts:

It was almost as though I were fated to meet the Tibetan girl again. In retrospect I cannot understand my behaviour with her or why I went to her room at all.\(^{23}\)

Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul is ashamed of his behaviour and longs for his wife Adeleine. Mukul realizes
that the body is an abomination. And he feels guilty at heart.

Mukul had true love for Parvati and was now a victim of unresolved childhood romance. It was through the last letter of Masterji that he knew of Parvati's insanity. He remarks:

I had always known, of course, that Parvati was prone to depression: her playful gaiety alternated frequently with long silent spells, when her eyes would darken and take on an even more terrifying beauty than when she was happy. I could remember her sitting in the garden till the shadows lengthened, staring her palms. I used to timidly try to cajole her out of the inwardness.  

Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul had married Adeleine, a widow but his marriage was a solemn and joyless event. He was still lonely and dreamt of Parvati. He remembered how he used to go to the house of Masterji and meet Parvati. Mukul was fully cognizant of his responsibilities and Irra's welfare. He remarks:

I realized that she was the daughter of the only woman I had ever truly loved, and
that I had no option but to be responsible for her.\textsuperscript{25}

When Mukul knew that Parvati had been discharged from the mental institution at Ranchi and was in Nainital, he feels forced to meet Parvati. He dreamt Parvati yet did not want to face her now. He accepts:

I was by now so used to thinking of Parvati as a motif that it came as something of a shock to realize that she was still around, and in not a very pleasant way. My mouth felt dry and there was a constriction in my throat. I was not at all prepared to cope with Parvati in the flesh. She was a memory, an emotion. She was entangled in the idyll of my youth. I felt that she had no business to intrude upon my middle age now.\textsuperscript{26}

Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul loved Parvati and yet did not want to face the reality. He cherished Parvati as a great memory in his heart. As he was very nervous and restless, he was compelled to meet her. He admits:

This unpleasant and unnecessary complication would have to be dealt with firmly, and I foresaw a tiresome time ahead... I was inordinately nervous.
dreading at every moment a knock on the
door and Parvati’s arrival.27

Namita Gokhale presents Mukul in a great
confusion. He wanted to fulfil Masterji’s last wishes and
hence came to Nainital. He was ready to help Iria, the
daughter of Parvati but after meeting Parvati, he felt
great change inwardly and remarks:

I felt a primal social revulsion. It was a
mistake. She was an impostor. I suspected
her of sanity. I had never loved her.28

Mukul was obsessed to see the wretched condition of
Parvati. Though now he felt that he had never loved her,
yet he loved her greatly and brought Parvati and Iria to
Relax Inn; because Abha, the wife of her cousin
Pushpendra was not ready to bear them in her house. He
wanted to do something for Parvati but felt helpless. He
remarks:

I have reached the age when one’s own
mortality is an uncomfortable but
inalienably established reality, a faint but
factual presence lurking like a particle of
dust in the peripheral vision of one’s soft
contact lenses. I am forever hearing of yet
another friend who had had a coronary.
Yet, so relieved was I that nothing worse
had happened to Parvati that, asking no questions of anybody, I rushed the two of them into my room.\textsuperscript{29}

Mukul finds himself entrapped into a state of helplessness when he is not able to do anything for persons he loves. He wants to be the slave of Parvati and admits:

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.\textsuperscript{30}

But for Mukul happiness can only be got in retrospect. He was happy but it was the time to go back because he had some responsibilities towards his wife and was bound to fulfil them. So he promised Irita that he would always help her whenever there would be any problem. But he felt shame and cowardice and said:
My cheeks were burning in shame, but the orphan in me, the resentful dependent, was determined to bluster his way out of accusation and responsibility. Even the thought that I hadn’t been good enough for her mother to marry slithered in. I tried not to acknowledge it, but it knocked at my mind nevertheless.\textsuperscript{31}

He further remarks:

I felt rejected and used. They were treating me like a tourist. I was nearing the end of the story, of my part in the story. I was a passenger in a boat which was nearing the shore, the boatman jostling for space, intent upon arrival, wedging his way through the other boatmen in their empty boats, awaiting custom.\textsuperscript{32}

Namita Gokhale shows that Mukul finds himself in such condition that he could not do what he wanted. He wanted to stay for the help of Parvati and Irra because they were his personal responsibility and had true love for them. On the other hand, he had responsibilities towards his wife too. He was at a loss and began to think about his own existence. He failed to know himself:
I thought of myself, of who and what I was, and the self I was leaving behind. I thought of Parvati and of Irra, and the other lives I was abandoning. They assumed in my mind a formal, official shape. There was nothing I could do for them. 'Country condition do not permit'. I noted mentally, as I closed the file. 

Mukul said to himself that he got a great failure in love and took pleasure in the phrase but he thought that it had been every way, a surrogate life.

Namita Gokhale delineates almost all the characters in the powerful realistic manner. Irra, the daughter of Parvati is practical, grave and sincere. When Mukul asks her opinion about Pooran, she remarks:

Pooran Daju cannot be trusted. You had better be careful with him. I am alone in the world, you know, so I have learnt to be careful. Perhaps people in the plains are even worse.

Mukul felt his responsibility for Irra's welfare. Through Irra, Namita Gokhale shows the plight of the girl who is fatherless and her mother is insane and she is dependent on others. Mukul remarks:
I realized she might grow into a very beautiful woman if only she were allowed to.  

Namita Gokhale presents Irra as a composed, reasoned and careful girl who has the ambition to be a doctor. She was not with Mukul who was going to leave them. She knew that he had to go. Irra knew that Parvati could be happier outside asylum and so she suggested Mukul to sell the Bhowali property. Namita Gokhale shows Irra’s practical approach when she tells Mukul that it is money that will take care of her. The following conversation between Mukul and Irra confirms her practical nature:

‘But who will look after your mother?’ I asked, concerned again, for I had got my reprieve, I could buy my way out, and I would not have to pay for a padded cell. Yet I was older than her, I knew it was not so easy.
‘I will,’ she replied.
‘And who will look after you?’ I persisted.
‘The money will,’ she said simply.  

Irra was conscious of her education as she told Mukul:
I will do my Intermediate next year, and then I can give my premedical here, or in Allahabad. I want to do medicine, if I can get the marks. Daju was saying, five hundred rupees a month would be adequate.37

Namita Gokhale shows that Irra was very careful of her future and the happiness of her mother and what she needed only was money. Mukul helped Irra in her plans and acted upon her advice.

As a feminist, Namita Gokhale is fully conscious of the condition of woman in a male-dominated society. In the Indian society women are not allowed to decide their future and have to crush their desires. In the present novel she appeals for the equality of women and men. Here she reveals that Parvati's mother is not ready to send her to school because for her, education of Parvati was a waste of money. It was because of uncle, Hiranand Joshi that Parvati was given an education because her mother had no option but to accept the wishes of her brother. Parvati said:

She would complain bitterly about the cost of books and uniforms, although the actual school fees were of course heavily subsidized. 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 to get married to some no-good, and take my gold Champakali necklace off with you as dowry.  

Namita Gokhale brings out the plight of womanhood when she remarks:

It is a double curse, to first be born a woman, then get straddled with another female to provide for.

She further remarks:

Our Pahari men were always crowding around the local tea shops, playing cards or purposefully spitting out tobacco. They were the drones who gratefully left the labour to their women, the thin, hardy ghasyarans who balanced incredible heights of fodder and fuelwood on their heads.

Parvati took interest in bees and often read the Introduction To Bee-keeping and found out the similarities between the lives of bees and Paharis. She said:
Male bees are usually short-lived. They never collect pollen, nor have they any other responsibilities in connection with providing for their young. Female bees do all work of nest-making and provisioning.\textsuperscript{41}

Namita Gokhale presents the ancient belief that it is good for a woman to live within the circle of society.

Hiranand Masterji told Mukul not to misunderstand him if he has not allowed him to marry Parvati:

... it is not that I myself subscribe to these antiquated theories, or believe in caste or creed, but it is always wise to remain within the circumscribed circle of social acceptance, especially for a woman.\textsuperscript{42}

Now the question arises - Why is it expected from a woman to live in the circle of social acceptance? Why can she not enjoy the freedom like a man? Why is a woman not allowed to choose her way according to her desire? Why does a woman become the victim of society which is dominated by male? Why is a woman not allowed to search for her identity?

Namita Gokhale depicts the familiar aspects of every day life in a natural and realistic manner and tries to
create an atmosphere of absolute truth. Like Galsworthy, she accepts that the rich are preferred to the poor. As Galsworthy shows in *The Silver Box* that there is one law for the poor and another for the rich, similarly through Raju, Namita Gokhale says:

In our society a rich man is forgiven anything.⁴³

She asserts that in the society rich are given every kind of freedom and the poor people are bound to suffer. Namita Gokhale has full sympathy for the poor and hence may be called a great humanist like Mulk Raj Anand. She depicts the rough and tragic circumstances in which the poor Pahari people live.

Namita Gokhale exposed the people like Hiranand Headmaster who read George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell and Rabindranath Tagore but did not allow Mukul to marry Parvati because Mukul was not a Thuldhoti. When Pooran informed Mukul about Pushpendra, Parvati's cousin and told him that he has married a Rajput, a Bisht girl who ran away from her first husband to marry him Mukul vented his anger:

Good for him! Someone in your family needed to teach you a lot of lesson! Caste, caste, caste – but then, I suppose there isn’t much else left for you to be proud of!
My wife is not a Brahmin, Oh no, not even a Nandhoti Brahmin! No, she is Burmese, half-Burmese and half-English. The same English who once ruled you! And what happened to your pride before them?\textsuperscript{44}

Hiranand Headmaster informed Mukul that he was not convinced that Parvati was a suitable partner for him. But even Mukul himself told Ira that it was because of caste policy that he was not allowed to marry Parvati. He tells Ira:

Your granduncle Hiranandji, who has left me this house now - he was the same man who prevented me from marrying your mother! He wouldn't allow me to marry her. He mated her to that tubercular Lalit instead because his genes were right.\textsuperscript{45}

Like Mulk Raj Anand, Namita Gokhale shows that the caste system is a hideous nightmare in Hindu society. It deprives millions of people from human status.

Namita Gokhale was fully familiar with the problems of Pahari people whose life is still very hard. There was also a great danger of animals in Joodlekote as Parvati remarks:
And one winter in the 1940s it was reported that there was a man-eating tiger on the prowl. I can never forget the stark terror that possessed us when we had to perforce use the open-air privy behind our house. My mother would stand guard holding a burning branch of cactus bush in her hand, and then, after I was through, I would hold guard for her. A permanent knot of tension developed in my stomach and I refused to go to school or run any errands for my mother.\textsuperscript{46}

Through Jayesh, Namita Gokhale presented her own views. Jayesh, a filmstar, wants to leave everything only to live in hills. He says:

I am just a simple hill boy at heart. A Delhiwala by birth but by heart belongs to these hills.\textsuperscript{47}

He further says:

Do you know if I wasn't up to my ears in debt, I would give up everything, every film I have on hand, my house and my flat in Bombay, even my wife perhaps, though not my son, and live up here in the hills.\textsuperscript{48}
Jayesh feels himself helpless among the hillmen but has great love for them. Hence, he suggests Mukul to help them. He tells Mukul:

You have the chance of lifetime, with your contacts, you could get all sorts of assistance and grants. I could help you collect money as well. You could do something. Educate them. Help them.\textsuperscript{49}

On the other hand, Mukul did not want to stay there. He thought:

... but I knew there was nothing I could do. I could not pipe water, nor make the soil fertile; I could not create industries, or jobs, or even grants and quotas. All I could do was help a few more to run away, as Hiranand Headmaster had helped me. Or I could run back myself and shatter in the pride of destitution the acceptance of sorrow, the banishment of ambition. I could shed my worries about credit cards and boring dinner parties, but very little else. I could build a house, plant a tree. It was too late now to have a son.\textsuperscript{50}

Namita Gokhale refers to the poverty of the poor hillmen who have chimneyless houses. Ram Singh, the
servant who attended the room in Relax Inn died of asphyxiation. The poor hillmen die due to lack of windows and chimneys. Mukul Says:

A high temperature, smoking angeethi, shut windows, no chimneys — a common enough occurrence in our hills.⁵¹

Namita Gokhale hints the fuelwood crisis, deforestation, soil erosion and changing weather patterns. She presents the pitiable conditions of Pahari people through Pooran:

These plains people think of us Paharis as a race of servants.⁵²

The novel brings out the plight of Paharis who are simple and innocent. Jayesh expresses his desire to live among hills. Jeewan describes the changed condition of poor hillfolks and says:

The hills are not the same any more. People want all sorts of things now. They watch television, and they want Surf and Lux and Colgate. But you can't use the detergents and cosmetics when you go to the riverside to bathe! The men go off to the plains to find work and leave their women here in the hills to plough the fields. When
they come back to harvest, their wives have had yet another baby, from where or how no one is ever sure. Oh, our hills are becoming just like plains! They come here to escape the summer heat and leave their city habits behind! Every summer our temples are robbed! We Paharis are simple folk. we are not greedy! It is as though we enjoyed being poor.\(^{53}\)

Namita Gokhale shows that the conditions are changing now in hills. Through Hiranand Masterji she shows that the tourists have destroyed the beauty of hill stations like Nainital:

All my life, I have unsuccessfully striven to inculcate the values of Public School Life in these hills. It was, alas, like throwing pearls before the swines. Nainital is no longer what it once was. I cannot even bear to go to Tallital any more, for fear of encountering some bestial ex-pupil.

As for the tourists, the less said the better. They have all but destroyed this once scenic hill station. Nainital is no different now from Meerut or Bareilly.\(^{54}\)
Namita Gokhale expresses her own experiences in this novel too. She expresses that though the Pahari people are dirty, rude and have some bad habits but they are very honest and peaceful as she remarks:

Property of every kind is left exposed without fear and without loss. Of the inhabitants, everyone speaks well. They are indeed dirty to a degree I have never seen among the Hindus, and extremely averse to any improvement in their rude and in efficient agriculture, but they are honest, peaceful and cheerful...55

Here Namita Gokhale exposes the so-called lovers of trees. Harish refers to Pooran Paper, the journalist and Shri Vishwajit Singh, the forestry minister who pretend that they have love for trees but it is because of their self-interest that they cut down trees. Namita Gokhale satirizes the approach of the journalists like Pooran Paper and forest ministers like Shri Vishwajit Singh. Harish bitterly says:

... if I may be blunt, our friend Pooran Paper is a journalist. He lectures villagers, villagers who don’t have a lota to use while shitting, about the problems of soil erosion! Conservation! Ecology! I agree it’s necessary, but nowadays they make it
seem as though it's better to let a man starve than to cut down a tree! But when these journalists need a loan, it's us, the wicked forest contractors, that they turn to. And then, Pooran Paper has the ear of the forestry minister. Shri Vishwajit Singh, minister for forests, jails, sports and animal husbandry! And we all know how much he loves trees, don't we?'

... And why does Shri Vishwajit Singh love trees, pray? Because—his eyes grew bloodshot and his voice rose to a roar—'BECAUSE, gentlemen, trees are felled into timber, and timber is made into pulp, and this pulp is converted in Nasik into crisp new rupee notes. And our friend Pooran loves trees, but he also loves the timber and the pulp and he loves those currency notes as well.56

Namita Gokhale has great admiration for national anthem — Jana, Gana, Mana. Through Mukul, she admires it:

India has what is probably amongst the longest national anthems in the world. The abbreviated, recorded version, heard in panelled, carpeted interiors, sounds very
different from the lusty chants of post-
Independence, post-Nehru children.\textsuperscript{57}

As asserted in third chapter, Namita Gokhale had firm faith in Indian Philosophy. She accepts that both happiness and sorrow are predestined in human life. There is a constant struggle between man and fate but man is a poor helpless creature in the presence of fate. As Toru Dutt said:

\begin{quote}
Can man's device the doom repeal?
Unequal seems to be strife,
Between Humanity and Fate;
None have on earth what they desire?
\end{quote}

She further says:

\begin{quote}
We are her plaything; with her breath
She blows where she lists in space.
\end{quote}

Like Toru Dutt and Thomas Hardy, Namita Gokhale accepts that Fate plays an important part in human life. It seems that human powers are helpless before the mighty Fate. After the death of her mother, Parvati was fated to live in the company of her uncle and was very happy in new surroundings. It was a chance that Hiranand Josh decided that Parvati was to be married to Lalit and not Mukul, while Parvati had longing to marry Mukul. And the love of Parvati and Mukul remains unrequitted. If
Parvati had married Mukul, her life would have been happy. But she was predestined to marry Lalit who was indifferent towards her. Hence it was written in her destiny to suffer in life.

Again, there came a change in the attitude of Lalit and a great understanding developed between Lalit and Parvati. She thought that they could become lovers, confidants. But fate thwarts her hopes. Lalit died because of tuberculosis. It was also fated that for her to be mentally ill, and was consigned to an asylum.

Namita Gokhale has belief in astrology and palmistry as she mentions a plunging head line in her palm and that head line was the sure sign of insanity. Mukul remarks:

Mental illness runs like a secret rivulet through the genetic pools of Kumaon. No one is secure from its visitations. From where could Parvati have got that plunging line in her palm? Could it have been her father's sister, who came from Dubkia, and was kept chained in a cowshed until she died? Or was it from the maternal side of her family? 58

Parvati was fated to be married with Lalit and to suffer his great hostility. Then she was also predestined
to be a widow and insane. Namit Gokhale refers to some religious rituals in this novel that she herself has experienced. When Mukul went to the Nandashatami Mela, he was strangely moved to hear the voice of the priest and to watch the quiet Pahari women who were seated cross-legged before the timid flames of the sacred fire. When the Havan was being conducted, the Pahari women were totally silent and self-possessed and were oblivious to the noise and revelry about them. Mukul found that he was weeping to see all these rituals and the temple as he remarks:

The tears streaming silently down my cheeks turned to unaccountable heaving sobs as I feel prostrate upon the steps of the first of the four shrines. Although the doors were locked, I knew that it was the temple of Naina Devi, of the Goddess Parvati whose husband is Shiva. Her eyes had become the verdant lake whose peaceful waters even now murmured behind us. My mother, my home, forgive and bless and regenerate, I wept. 

Namita Gokhale has firm belief in Indian mythology and ancient beliefs and yet hates superstitions. In The Discovery Of India, Nehru says that he does not like superstitious beliefs and outworn ideas. Similarly Namita
Gokhale is against superstitions. Through Mukul she expresses her own views:

A man lay the wet ground as though convulsed by a seizure. He was whimpering softly to himself. Occasionally he would slouch to a sitting position and articulate faint cries and screams, which, Mohan informed me, were prophesies regarding the future of India. I disdain superstition, although I suppose it has its place in every society, and left the two brothers to witness what was in all probability nothing more or less than an epileptic stroke.60

Namita Gokhale also presents some other superstitions in the novel that are rampant among the hill folk. She is fully aware of the tensions and conflicts, stresses and strain in human relations and hence rightly presents that in her works. Though she expresses her ideas through English language, she is pure Indian both in spirit and thought. She writes mostly about Indian people. Human relationship occupies a great place in her novels. Many popular rituals and beliefs are frequently mentioned in the novels. Namita Gokhale uses such vernacular words as Pahari, Daayan, Kaki, Sadhu, Bhabhi etc. She does not translate them into English. Those words show her Indian sensibility. She analyzes individual feelings, emotions and actions for an exploration of latent human conflicts.
The novel is rich in local colour and has all the charms of a regional novel, depicting the rich culture and traditions of the Kumaon hills. Through proper selection and ordering her material the novelist lays stress on the distinctive spirit of her chosen region and writes about inhabitants of Nainital, scenes and experiences, she is familiar with. She shows the tragedy of Parvati and Mukul and probes into their psychology. Here her characters are ordinary and common. They are seen in society. Pooran Paper, the journalist, Pushpendra, the lawyer are like other journalists and lawyers respectively who have their self interest in every activity. Her style is remarkable for simplicity, and precision. This novel is also brief.

Like great philosophers, Namita Gokhale reveals her views about death. She remarks:

The body departs, it is taken away, disposed of, it disintegrates, decomposes, it is gone. The ashes are thrown into muddy rivers, the cows come and eat the sacrificial rice, and on the thirteen day even the lamp that guides the spirit to the other world is extinguished. But things remain.\[^{61}\]
Like Browning, Namita Gokhale asserts that death is not the end of life. It is not final. It is an adversary, an unequal one. She further remarked:

Death does not make think of death: death urges us towards life. ⁶²

According to her, there is always a battle between death and the remaining things of the dead persons. And in this battle the things are the victors though they remained unused and 'lie like mortality wounded snakes in steel boxes.' They do not perish with the dead. But here the approach of the novelist is unsatisfactory because it is a fact that though these remaining things do not perish with the dead but they are not immortal as Shakespeare said:

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless sea,
But sad mortality o'ersways their power.

Everything in this world is bound to be destroyed, nothing is permanent.

_Time_, Sonnet No. 65

The statement 'Death urges us towards life' is significant, as death makes people realize the importance of life. Just as evil is essential for goodness, death is essential for life as death teaches everyone that life is everything.
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