

Haunted by Altitude: The Sublime and the Supernatural in Representations of the Himalayas

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Abstract

The Himalayas are portrayed in literature as a haunted, sublime place where the natural and supernatural coexist, evoking wonder, fear, and environmental awareness. This article seeks to explore how the sublime, which Burke and Kant defined as overwhelming vastness and obscurity, appears differently in Himalayan contexts by drawing on writings by Ruskin Bond, Namita Gokhale, and Andrew Harvey as well as local oral traditions. These mountains, which are frequently depicted as transcendent and spiritual, are actually haunted by ghosts and psychological trauma, making them the subject of postcolonial Gothic research.

Gokhale's *A Himalayan Love Story* weaves feminine subjectivity, memory, and ecological instability within a feminised, fractured landscape. At the same time, Bond's minimalist ghost stories unveil an eerie everydayness where colonial remnants and personal loss seep into mist-shrouded hills. Mystic encounters and philosophical contemplations of the sublime coexist in Harvey's *A Journey in Ladakh*, establishing the mountains as sentient, revelatory beings.

Thus, the Himalayan literature creates a "haunted geography" in which spiritual longing, cultural displacement, and environmental degradation are all addressed through the supernatural as a critical lens rather than as a mere trope. These texts portray the Himalayas as living, mythical beings—the boundaries between the sacred and the spectral, the remembered and the forgotten—in a time of ecological crisis and cultural loss.

Keywords: Sublime, postcolonial research, Ruskin Bond, cultural displacement, environmental degradation

In literature, setting never works as a mere backdrop but as a participant, through which stories breathe, and consciousness takes its form. The Himalayas, literally translating to ‘abode of peace’, have long occupied a liminal space between the material and the metaphysical, thus standing out not only as a geographical wonder but as a site of cultural and literary imagination. They stretch across multiple nations and traditions, inspiring a vast corpus of literature that seeks to engage with their magnanimity, mystery, and spiritual resonance. In literature, the Himalayas emerge as living entities embodying sacred geography and dynamic narrative forces. The towering altitude of the Himalayas is both a source of awe and unease for onlookers, positioning them as a space where human comprehension falters before its vastness. Thus, the Himalayas become the site of revelation and spiritual transcendence, but also the arena of desolation, dread, and supernatural terror.

This duality between gods and monsters gets a theoretical echo in the sublime beauty that was the main aesthetic category of the Romantic and Gothic. The sublime, as developed by Burke and Kant, distinguishes the antithetical human reaction of being both attracted and repelled by the enormous and the terrible, i.e., the infinite. This mapping of the aesthetic framework onto the Himalayan landscapes has the effect of presenting the mountains as having both the attributes of being places of great enlightenment and estrangement. However, the Himalayan sublime cannot be characterised purely as Romantic because of its being enveloped in the spectral presence, the ecological fragility, and the postcolonial anxieties that together make it hard to simply celebrate nature's splendour. So, there is a visible reaction to the philosophical position put forward by the Romantic writers that can be traced back to the fears and tensions of the modern world. In this void, the supernatural does not appear as a simple decoration but rather as a narrative technique through which authors cope with the different aspects of altitude, isolation, and cultural memory. Ghosts, portents, and appearances of spirits all participate in the storytelling of the Himalayas, thus turning the physical height into a mental mood. The Himalayas change into haunted landscapes holding the unresolved past, environmental suffering, and unfulfilled spiritual desires. Thus, the literature of the Himalayas typically invites the visible to meet the invisible, the human to meet the otherworldly, the time-bound to meet the eternal.

The essay reveals that the literary visualisation of the Himalayas intermingles the beauty of the sublime with supernatural topos in narrative structures, thus creating what can

be called a haunted geography. Through a close analysis of the works of Ruskin Bond, Namita Gokhale, and Andrew Harvey, in conjunction with the regional oral traditions and folk tales, the significance of the mountain is escalated by the writers to such an extent that it becomes a place revered, a colonial frontier, and an ecological barrier. Theoretical frameworks from Burke and Kant's concepts of the sublime, postcolonial Gothic discourse, and ecocritical theory are used to place the Himalayan literature in the context of a larger discussion about the emotional impact of the landscape and the invisible aspects of people's consciousness regarding ecology. In the end, it wants to show how the very highness turns into a haunting place where the distinctions between the divine and the otherworldly, the lovely and the scary, are always mixed up.

Oral Traditions and the Indigenous Supernatural

The Himalayas have an extensive and vibrant oral tradition consisting of gods, spirits, demons, and even shapeshifters that are still alive today. These narrations exist in places like Kumaon, Garhwal, Himachal Pradesh, and Nepal, among others, as a resource for understanding the supernatural that seals off the ecological, moral and social aspects. In the mentioned places, the natural world is indistinguishable from the world of the gods and other supernatural creatures. The territory is alive, conscious, and ethical, where the spirits that offer protection and inflict punishment, along with the gods who are in the rocks, rivers, and trees, coexist. In the Himalayas, the indigenous supernatural is believed to be at play through an ontological closeness between man and nature. Harish N. Bhatt, in his ethnographic study of Kumaoni oral traditions, notes: "the mountain is not a view—it is a relative. The gods are living inside it, and the dead are coming back to it" (Bhatt, 2015). Here, the mountain lore acts as a storehouse of environmental ethics, where the spirits of rivers, forests, and mountains play the role of the balance keepers between man's needs and nature's restraints. When the situation of balance is disturbed by pollution, cutting down trees, or avarice, the earth responds. An example of this is found in Himachali beliefs, where the guardian spirits known as *devta* or *gram-devta* are said to inflict punishment on people who cut down trees in sacred places or divert water from sacred places. This supernatural moral economy reflects what Deborah Bird Rose refers to as "ecological ethics of connectivity," where relationship supersedes power (2004). Thus, in the Himalayan view, the sublime is not a mere aesthetic experience but a life-long experience of being-reverence. The feeling of awe in front of the

mountains and glaciers does not come only from their size, as in Burke's and Kant's supernatural philosophising, but from relational give-and-take. To climb, to cut, or even to talk rudely about a holy mountain can be considered a spiritual offence. The splendour of the mountain does not evoke only the abstraction of terror but also the reality of moral weight.

One of the most influential beings in Himalayan legends is the *Churel*, the angry female phantom that is prevalent across North India, especially in the Kumaon and Garhwal regions. The *Churel* is described as the spirit of a woman who either died while giving birth or who was unjustly treated by men. She is characterised by her backward feet, long hair, and the desire for revenge. Although she belongs to the realm of ghost stories, her story is told in such a way that it implicitly criticises the violence of the patriarchal society. The existence of *Churel* is seen as "a spectral protest against the silencing of female suffering in rural societies" (Tiwari, 2020). Her presence is not regarded as an accident but as a sign, the persistence of the wrongs done through the supernatural. In some Kumaoni villages, the *Churel* is both dreaded and worshipped at the same time. To appease the *Churel*, offerings of food and vermilion are made at the crossroads or under the banyan trees. The ritual of appeasing the spirit changes fear into negotiation, which is the acknowledgement of feminine power in the moral universe. In that way, the *Churel* represents what Gayatri Spivak calls "the subaltern feminine voice", a voice that can only be heard through haunting (Spivak, 1999). In the same way, the Himachali myths about *Matrika Devi* speak of the mother goddess whose angry nature results in landslides and storms, unveiling an eco-feminism that existed long before the term 'eco-feminism' was coined. The goddess's fury causes her to let it be known through the forests and rivers, thus making the violation of Mother Nature connected to the violation of women. The sacred and the eco-friendly turn into one: defilement equals desecration. Even the water bodies in Himalayan oral narratives usually take on roles and attributes of gods. In the Kullu Valley, the River Beas is treated like a goddess who punishes people who dump garbage or carcasses into her water. According to Meera M. Katoch, "the river in Himachali myth is a moral being; its floods are not accidents but acts of justice" (2018). These myths operate as a kind of environmental law, incorporating and declaiming sustainable practices through spiritual means. By giving rivers a mind, the communities curb their ecological imposition. Thus, the supernatural acts as an ethical system that is more powerful than legal enforcement. The magical and the real are together in the Himalayan oral traditions, while in the West, there is a separation of nature and culture. The

mountain, forest, and river are not resources to be controlled but are connections to be maintained. Living in the Himalayas means engaging in a life continuum that even includes the ghosts. The supernatural is not “other” but is part of the social fabric and a reminder that existence includes the invisible.

Himalayan oral narratives frequently coalesce history and mythology; thus, contemporary local memory is expressed by an unearthly power. In Kumaoni ballads, like those of *Golu Devta*, the saintly presence of a medieval king, a ghost literally dispenses justice. The worshippers pen their complaints on paper and fix them to the temple walls, hoping for the divine's help. Rakesh Raturi points out that “the supernatural becomes the very guarantor of moral order in this continuous folk-jurisprudence” (2019). The continuity of such customs is an indication of how community storytelling and ritual acts serve as the main sources for the different aspects of the community's consciousness. Here, what is sublime is not just the beauty of nature but also the experience of participants. The fear and awe brought about by the high mountains or the deep valleys are filtered through the mythic systems that connect fear and respect. Mountains are sublime because they are populated by gods, ancestors, and even invisible forces that make them morally vibrant. As Simon Schama points out, “landscape is the work of the mind; its scenery is built as much from layers of memory as from layers of rock” (Schama, 1996). Himalayan oral traditions manifest this concept: they superimpose memory onto the land, converting geography into divinity.

The indigenous supernatural of the Himalayas, with its intricate tales of mountain spirits and deities, turned upside down the predominantly human-centred Western notion of the sublime. Not only that, but these stories also reflect the consciousness of the human being as part of the animate cosmos that is larger than nature. The shepherd who can engage in a dialogue with a *yaksha* (spirit of the mountains), or the farmer who brings a *nag* (water serpent) to peace and thus experiences the force of nature, is how human beings relate to nature through awe of their mutual perception. The Himalayan oral traditions seem to anticipate posthumanist and new materialist ethics, which see that nonhuman entities possess a kind of agency. Indeed, in the eyes of such an ethic, the stones, trees, and rivers of the mountains are living creatures with moral and emotional interactions. As Arne Naess posited in his notion of “deep ecology”, such worldviews “expand the self to encompass all living beings” (1989). Therefore, the indigenous supernatural is beyond the racial divide of

ecological and philosophical sublime, and this is a kind of understanding that is not limited to the categories of human vs. nonhuman, natural vs. supernatural, or vice versa.

The Sublime in the Himalayas: Terror and Transcendence

The Himalayas, with their immense altitudes and forbidding terrain, offer one of the most compelling manifestations of what philosophers and aestheticians have termed the sublime. For example, writers like Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant developed powerful and lasting theories about the nature of the sublime as paradoxical feelings of awe and fear (in a way, one would feel important because of his/her insignificance in front of the gigantic and mysterious greatness). In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke characterises the sublime as something that brings forth “delightful horror,” which is a feeling composed of fear that is safely encountered through imagination. Burke connects the sublime to darkness, great size, and strength: “Anything that can in some way cause to appear ideas of pain and danger... is a source of the sublime” (Burke, 1958). The Himalayas, with their lofty summits, are both splendid and threatening and thus most powerfully demonstrate this dichotomy. In contrast, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790) shifts the sublime from nature to the human mind, proposing it to be the result of imagination being overwhelmed by size or power, but reason claiming victory in the end. Among the different variants of sublime experience, he places the mathematical sublime, associated with immeasurable vastness, and the dynamical sublime, linked with nature’s overpowering forces. The use of these frameworks on Himalayan literature uncovers the divine and humankind’s humility as a result of the height and desolation. The colossal height of the mountains, their erratic weather, and vastness form a situation where human perception is always being pushed to its limits. The one who travels in the Himalayas will, according to Kant, experience the “failure of the imagination” before the immeasurable, a scale of the aesthetic that irresistibly confronts the infinite (Kant, 1987). The lessening of the aesthetic effect or retreat from it is therefore the realisation of God’s presence in very human terms.

The dynamics of the landscape are at the heart of the narrative in Andrew Harvey’s (1983) *A Journey in Ladakh*. The travel writer is not simply an explorer but rather a pilgrim whose journey is determined by the factors of high altitude, remoteness, and spiritual desire. The main character’s journey through Ladakh, with its monasteries perched on cliffs and

barren flats that seem to be lost in the sky, symbolises a shift from the material to the spiritual realm. The harshness of the area, its stillness, and cold brightness create a consciousness that sways between fear and exhilaration. Harvey (1983) states that the landscape "fights for your attention," which gradually makes the individual disappear like a speck of dust in the vastness surrounding it. The bareness of the Ladakhi landscape is a perfect example of what Kant identified as the mathematical sublime, the inexpressible vastness that cannot be quantitatively measured. The peaks covered with snow and the limitless expanse of plateaus are beyond any possible quantification; they make the human being look as if he or she is there just for a moment. This artist of infinite becomes, so to speak, Harvey's narrator led to be. Kant's notion that the sublime "reveals a power of the mind that exceeds all standards of sensibility" (Kant, 1987) is realised in Harvey's experience, which elevates the physical to the heights of moral and spiritual quality. Nevertheless, the Himalayan sublimity also has a share in the dynamics. The nature here is not a controlling but rather an overpowering force that is even more active and menacing: on the one hand, the avalanches, storms, and the high altitude threaten physical endurance, and on the other, nature's enormous power is felt through its silence. Burke (1958) remarked that "terror is in all cases whatsoever... the ruling principle of the sublime", and Harvey's narrative proves this. The danger often puts the traveller down, the hazardous routes, the lack of air, and the quiet which is almost death. However, as Kant argues, the dynamical sublime relies on the subject's realisation that the threat is outside and then, ultimately, that freedom of morality prevails over the natural force. In this interplay between the feeling of being at risk and being uplifted, the leading character of Harvey's book discovers what he refers to as the "truth of surrender"- a realisation that fear can lead to spiritual growth (Harvey, 1983).

The blending of mysticism and the supernatural is what sets the Himalayan sublime apart from its previous European Romanticism. In *A Journey in Ladakh*, the distinction between the material and the spiritual is erased. Harvey tells of very vivid dreams, visionary experiences, and coincidences that he is not able to explain and that interrupt his empirical journey. The supernatural elements do not lessen the text's realism; on the contrary, they explicitly emphasise that the mountains are conscious beings. The Himalayas become a powerful living force of the earth and the spirit at the same time, representing what Rudolf Otto (1923) calls the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, the awe-inspiring mystery that is both dreadful and attractive at the same time. The mixing of the sublime and the supernatural

changes the Himalayas into what can be called a ‘holy geography’. The mountain is not just the location of experience but the very instrument of revelation. The sublime, therefore, serves as a gateway between the tangible and the intangible by meeting the overpowering nature. The explorer faces not just the outer great expanse but also the inner great expanse of being. As per Arup Bhattacharya (2016), “the Himalayan sublime is intertwined with the area’s mythical and religious consciousness; it is a stage where humanity’s limitation and God’s infinity meet” (2016). The postcolonial angle becomes visible in this Himalayan sublime when it is related to the history of exploration and orientalism. European Romanticism frequently put the sublime in aesthetic and moral frameworks. On the other hand, Himalayan literature at times exhibits the sublime through indigenous mythologies and ecological consciousness. The mountain is not merely a visual phenomenon but an entity that can act. According to Sreya Banerjee (2019), “altitude turns into atmosphere—the very space breathes, remembers, and haunts” (2019). Harvey’s mystical experiences are intermingled with the above notion; lights and presences imply that the land is responding to one’s perception, and nature itself is answering. The Himalayas additionally signify what present-day ecocriticism has labelled the ecological sublime, which is the case of enormousness and strength that does not call for control but rather endurance through ecological interdependence. The harsh conditions highlight the thinness of the human race and the merging of the living and the non-living. The Himalayan sublime, in this way, opposes the human-centred view of the world. It opens up what Morton refers to as the “hyperobject”—an existence scale that humans cannot measure, where the vastness of nature wipes out the power of the individual (Morton, 2013). Harvey’s spiritual awakening is the same as this ecological insight: being in the Himalayas as sublime means being aware of one’s existence in a living, interdependent whole.

The sublime in the Himalayas is not an aesthetic category that has been fixed, but rather a way of living that is constantly being changed. It unites terror and transcendence, fear and revelation, mortality and eternity. Harvey’s Ladakh turns into a threshold where the height of the point reached indicates the degree of insight obtained; the physical act of climbing up the mountain is a parallel to the metaphysical ascent towards illumination. The mountains, in their awe-inspiring devastation, reveal the Kantian contradiction: they crush the body but enliven the spirit. The Himalayan sublime is a ghostly presence, not just because of its supernatural attributes but also because of its cultural, ecological, and existential

implications. It symbolises the very place where human comprehension meets its boundaries and, at the same time, finds signification in that very encounter.

Haunted Hills: Ruskin Bond and the Spectral Everyday

Ruskin Bond has an extraordinary place among the modern Indian English writers as a storyteller of the Himalayan foothills. His stories have the power to transform the supposed tranquillity of Mussoorie, Dehra, and Landour into regions full of ghosts where their existence can be felt. Despite being praised and appreciated for the simplicity and beauty of nature in his writing, Bond's works in the genre of ghost tales, which are encased in the anthologies of *A Face in the Dark and Other Hauntings* (2016) and *A Season of Ghosts* (2016), show the author's continuous fascination with the mysterious world of ghosts, which is the opposite of reality. They convey that the Himalayas, generally pointed to as the places for sublime spiritual experience, are also, in fact, deadened by history, memory, and loss. By his description of the misty atmosphere, silence, and ghostly figures suddenly appearing and vanishing, Bond makes the supernatural a part of the ordinary life of the people, creating what can be called as “spectral everyday.”

In *A Face in the Dark*, Bond tells the story of Mr Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, who is on his way back to school, passing through a pine forest at dusk. He comes across a boy sitting on a stone, silently crying. When Oliver tilts the boy's head, he sees that the face is devoid of features. There are no eyes, no nose, no mouth, and he runs away, only to meet a night watchman whose lamp reveals the same lack of facial features. The tale is short, only about four pages long, but the author's carefulness in the use of language is evident. There is no explanation, no resolution, only the choking quietness of the mountains. The lack of closure is indicative of Bond's method: the supernatural does not emerge from an excess of material but from the cuts, from what has not been revealed. As Arup K. Chatterjee points out, Bond's style “deploys omission as a means of spectralisation—haunting resides in what the narrative does not say” (2018). This spectral minimalism sets Bond apart from both Gothic predecessors and contemporaries. Unlike the intricate horror of Victorian ghost stories or the sensationalism of film horror, Bond's supernatural is based on subtlety and locality. His hills are full of spirits that gradually reveal themselves from the fog and memory; thus, they are part of the earth. The Himalayan region, with its mist and silence, is not a mere backdrop

but a character that actively takes part in the haunting. In this way, Bond transforms the concepts of the sublime as advanced by Burke and Kant from an enormous size and darkness that cannot be grasped into a postcolonial sublime, one that is based on environmental sensitivity and mental displacement. The fear is personal, not universal.

Bond's ghost stories are also a postcolonial Gothic in their way of presenting the issue. What are haunted houses, deserted bungalows, and abandoned cemeteries scattered about Mussoorie and Dehra, if not reminders of the colonial period? Within these places, one could still find traces of the Anglo-Indian identity, nostalgia, and exile. Chatterjee points out that in this respect, Bond's haunted spaces can be interpreted as "assertions of Anglo-Indian cultural subjectivity through haunted otherness" (2018). Thus, the ghosts become not only spectral entities but also metaphors for the empire's lingering presence, the instability of hybrid identity, and indeed the sadness of being neither fully colonial nor completely postcolonial. In the story "The Haunted Hill," set in the vicinity of Mussoorie, the little girl Usha finds refuge in a derelict church by the time the storm breaks out, and she sees ghostly figures permanently engaged in a dance (22–27). The hill, which was once vibrant during British rule, is now muted and uninhabited, a remnant of imperial leisure that has turned into ruins. The haunting symbolises the loss of history: the ghosts of British revellers are still seen as cheerful colonial characters even as nature takes over their territory. The Himalayas, thus, become places where time is layered and past and present live in discomfort, embodied in what David Punter refers to as "the return of the repressed colonial moment" (1996). The everyday Gothic of Bond turned colonial remnants like hill cottages, graveyards, and boarding houses into symbols that could speak. The narrator, revealing the stories of *A Season of Ghosts*, meets soft, mostly good-natured apparitions that reflect his craving for past times and the slow dying of the hills. "The Ghosts of Mine," Bond states in the introduction, "are soft, nearly friends; they lessen the solitude of the lonely" (*A Season of Ghosts* viii). The ghostly realm is connected to emotional history, showing the isolation of people who are cut off from both location and time.

In every Bond's story, the Himalayas are both the author's and the reader's landscapes. They are the mist, silence, and night sounds that become the very human feelings of sadness, longing, and loneliness. His narrators, most of the time, take solitary walks through the trees, over the deserted paths, or into the dilapidated places; these outward travels are equivalent to the inner journey to the areas that have been forgotten or repressed. The mountains, "cloaked

in mist and memory,” are the delusions of the subconscious. It is a geographic and psychological mix that is deeply linked to Freud’s idea of the uncanny (*das Unheimliche*), which is both familiar and strange. The hill station, with its colonial-style houses and the detachment of the Anglo-Indian residents, is actually "un-homely." The characters that come out of the light mist are the symbols of the return of the familiar past in a distorted way. Just as Bond's master in “A Face in the Dark” realises, the voiceless kid isn't just a ghost but also a projection of the teacher's own loss of identity, a psychological projection in a landscape that does not allow for individuality. The Himalayas, therefore, are uncanny in an environmental as well as in an existential sense. The physical mystery of the mountains, existing in the fog, the stillness, and the lengthy winters, was the main factor that gave rise to the environment and the existence of the uncanny beyond the mountain range. Bond's subtle style of narration highlights this dual ghosting. “The writers' apparitions do not frighten; they stay on, making it clear to us that there is a shadow behind every story in the mountains” (Roy, 2020).

Though Bond seldom moralises, his narrative links the supernatural subtly to ecological imbalance. His hills are not merely picturesque but rather delicate ecosystems being reclaimed, destroyed or polluted by mankind's activities like logging, building and entertaining. The “Whispering in the Dark” tale, where a ghostly voice in a forest cabin calls attention to the dead of the ancient trees and the wandering of animals, is an argument for what certain literary critics now call the eco-Gothic (Byron & Totaro, 2019). The haunting turns into an ecological sign: the earth itself suffers and is heard through spectral mediators. Rimi B. Chatterjee comments, “Bond's environmental vision cannot be dissociated from his drawing on the uncanny; the vanishing of the natural invites the coming of the supernatural” (2019). The Himalayas, in this view, act like living, responsive entities and a storage place for memories of mankind and nature alike. The ghosts bring to the surface the very issues that the living keep quiet about: loss of nature, cultural oblivion, and tiredness of the spirit. Bond’s otherworldly stories consequently coincide with modern-day environmental humanities, which perceive the landscape as an active participant instead of mere scenery.

The spirits of Bond, though, are still “gentle and harmless”; his gentleness does not in any way lessen their power; on the contrary, it redefines the Gothic in a Himalayan key. His haunting was shy visitations that make one think of them instead of panicking. The horror of Bond's upland precincts is of the mind and not of the body; it is the result of isolation,

reminiscence, and the realisation of the passing nature of things. The "spectral everyday" becomes a new condition of existence where the supernatural is perfectly integrated with the experience of life, where a fleeting shadow, a hush or a scent of a pine tree may be a sign of an invisible presence. In the case of literary Western Gothic, terror is not only conveyed through the use of grand architecture and violent spectacle, but also through the location of Bond's fiction in the domestic and natural spaces of the uncanny. The haunted bungalow takes the place of the haunted castle; the mist supersedes the candlelight; the inwardness replaces the outward battle. According to Punter, the Gothic is "a literature of thresholds" (Punter, 1996), and in Bond's *Himalayas*, the existence of thresholds is frequent: between the past and the present, empire and nation, human and nature, and living and dead.

Namita Gokhale: Memory, Landscape, and the Feminine Supernatural

Through her storyline in the novel *A Himalayan Love Story* (2002), Namita Gokhale takes the audience back to the enchanting and beautiful Himalayan hills, where the whole thing is about the strong feeling of love and being loved back, about the beautiful and terrible ways of memory and madness, the feminine being through in a place that is nurturing yet dangerous. The novel has a semblance to a memoir, but the author pretty much freehand draws the genre with lucid segments and fine spectral traces. The mountains are filled with spirits who show through their presence the buried pain, broken identities, and search for acceptance. Gokhale portrays the Himalayas as women: they are rich and alluring but also shaky and hard; they take a strong stand against male-oriented stories of nature, transcendence and the sublime.

Parvati's journey is portrayed through vivid memories that intermingle with dreams, thereby giving rise to a narrative that is neither entirely within reality and dream nor entirely in one of the categories. The ghostly and the myopic thus blend in a kind of narrative tone that is both dreamlike and real. The landscape of Nainital and Jeolikote acts as a mirror of the protagonist's feelings. Gokhale's work "skillfully handles the classic saga of one-sided love in the direction of emancipation, where the woman's voice tries to reclaim its place from the periphery of silence" (Chhikara & Rana, 2020). The supernatural facilitates the recovery: the ghostly figures that haunt Parvati are nothing but the wounds of the past, not the external demons to fight. *A Himalayan Love Story*, hence, falls in line with what Elaine Showalter

designates “the female malady”, the historical feminisation of madness as a symptom of repression (1987). Parvati's sight of phantoms, her craziness, and her estrangement are all due to a combination of both the oppressive male society and the destructive nature. The mountains that were once her sources of joy turn into places of fear, reflecting her uncertain identity. Therefore, *unheimlich*, literally, the uncanny applies where the familiar home space gets estranged and turns out to be menacing (Freud, 1955). Gokhale's domestic Himalayan settings of hilltop cottages, lakeside walks, and forested hills set, thus, the scene for these very unhomely areas of psychic disturbance.

In Gokhale's book, the spectral presences are closely connected with the feminine memory and the silences of history. The ghosts that Parvati sees can be interpreted as “buried voices,” the social order’s depiction of women through history. This ghostly presence can be seen as a purely feminist one, claiming that Gokhale “displays the unstated feelings of her women characters through spectral imagery that takes the place of direct speech” (Neethamma, 2023). The ghost thus reinforces the semiosis of repression whereby the repressed communicates in the forms that are beyond the reach of rational conversation. The colonial residue embedded in the land is of equal importance. The hill station of Nainital, which was once an English colony, has not completely lost the imperial imprint in its buildings, its societal norms, and even its spirits. Thus, Gokhale becomes a part of the postcolonial Gothic, where the haunting becomes a symbol of historical violence and cultural dislocation. The empty houses and graveyards described in the novel seize on Homi Bhabha’s idea of “the unhomely world”, the past's invading the present of the home (Bhabha, 1994). For Parvati, moving to the hills is hence not a return but a meeting with the memories of both the individual and the society's ghosts.

Gokhale’s fiction is also imbued with the supernatural that is sourced from the geographical instability of the landscape. The Himalayan sublime is no longer disturbed by the serenity of the very same disturbances caused by landslides, deforestation and erratic weather. To illustrate the impact of Indian Gothic, Rimi Chatterjee mentions Gokhale’s writing, which “emphasises the fragility of the mountain ecosystem to create an eco-Gothic setting where the land is alive and sad” (2019). The environment in *A Himalayan Love Story* is unstable, just like the human psyche of its characters: Parvati's breakdown parallels storms and floods, implying a relationship of interdependence between nature and awareness. The mingling of environmental degradation with emotional disarray thus places Gokhale in the

newly emerging ecofeminist Gothic. The Himalayas, feminised yet wounded by human encroachment, are the reflection of women's subjugation in patriarchal societies. The recurring images of erosion and landslides are a sign of the downfall, both in nature and in people's minds. The mountains, just like Parvati, are crying and shaking, thus drawing our attention to a common weakness. Gokhale's Nainital, thus, "is not a tourist haven but a living entity that undergoes decay and at the same time renewal, with its spirit being tightly linked to that of its people" (Basiya, 2019). In a strict sense, *A Himalayan Love Story* takes the form of a memoir but throws the genre's usual elements into the mix with ghosts' interference. Parvati's perspective is contemplative, though also somewhat untrustworthy, easily switching from being a clear-minded person to someone delirious. This characteristic enables Gokhale to blend the real with the unreal, thus violating time. The past keeps on pushing into the now; the spirits have chats with the living. The narrative of the book is so open that it is almost like the mountains are where different things coexist, since the fog and echo make it hard to tell the individual and the surroundings apart. Bharathi P. Reddy sees Gokhale's fragmented storytelling as a means to fight against the patriarchal temporality that is linear. (Reddy, 2015) The flow of time in the novel is like that of the monsoon, which is cyclical, returning over and over again to the most tragic moments.

Gokhale's Himalayas are very much ladylike in nature. They are motherly, but at the same time moody, the places where the coming and going are happening. This feminisation of the environment makes one remember Katherine Clément's statement that "madness and the feminine share the same terrain-the margin where language falters" (Clément, 1986). In the case of Parvati, it is the mountain that becomes that margin: a boundary line of geography where the voice comes out of the ghostly experience. The leading character's desire for the mountains is both physical and religious. Her coming back again and again indicates a craving to be one with the motherly landscape, even if it keeps betraying her. The conflict between being at home and being alienated is at the core of the novel's argument against the nature being claimed by the male. The women are the same as the hills; they are both worshipped and ruled, but then again, when they take their rights, be it through storms or ghosts, they manifest their power.

Conclusion: Mountains as Haunted Thresholds

The Himalayan sublime, depicted through various literary and oral traditions, cannot be defined simply as beauty or transcendence. It rather appears as a haunted threshold, a liminal space where fear and reverence, loss and wonder, coexist. Revered Himalayan writers like Ruskin Bond, Namita Gokhale, and Andrew Harvey, alongside native storytellers, present the mountains as living and morally significant places. The Himalayas turn out to be a "liminal zone," a space where the distinctions between human and nonhuman, sacred and ghostly, are not clear-cut (Turner, 1969).

The supernatural in Bond's little hauntings takes over the daily world, and at the same time, it uncovers the emotional aftermath of the colonial past. His hills are peaceful and upset at the same time, not only because of the ghosts but also the solitude. On the other hand, Gokhale continues to reshape the terrain from the woman's point of view: In her fiction, the supernatural reveals the hidden trauma of women and the frailty of one's place. The haunting in Harvey's *A Journey in Ladakh* turns into an encounter with the divine. The mountain becomes a spiritual interlocutor, radiant yet harsh, and self-surrender and humility are forced (Harvey, 1983). His sublime is of a devotional kind, not theologically terrifying, and is based on presence rather than absence. Besides the literature, the oral traditions of the Himalayas preserve an indigenous supernatural that combines ecology with morals. The *Churel* of Kumaon or the river goddesses of Himachal are all examples of an environmental awareness where the spirit world maintains the moral order. As Arne Naess puts it, these worldviews create a "deep ecological self," which is, in fact, the recognition of the relationship of continuity between the human and nonhuman worlds (Naess, 1989).

The rapid retreat of glaciers, deforestation and political strife at the same time cannot help but raise the question of the existence of the haunted Himalayan imagination. The spectral beings that have been assigned to its fiction, be it colonial, feminine, or ecological, are in fact the ones who are making the connection between us and the present-day nature we are estranged from. It means that reading these mountains as haunted thresholds is nothing less than a recognition of their voice's call to humility, reverence, and care. The Himalayas, through their silence and spectrality, remind humanity that beauty without responsibility leads to destruction, and that the sublime, to be, must also be ethical.

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