Chapter 6

CONCLUSION
The thesis has attempted to trace a pattern of awakening, protest and freedom in the novels taken for study. The chapterisation sets the pattern in the beginning. For clarification, let us return once again to it. Women in India, though emancipated in certain areas and in particular cases, still face oppression. Problems like Sati, female infanticide, dowry, restrictions, and rape are the order of the day. The saga of Roop Kanwar in the eighties cannot be erased from human memory. Writers and activists are still fighting against it. Much to the chagrin of strong willed feminists, these problems still persist. But that is only half the scene. The other invisible, unheard half needs to be highlighted. And this is where the chapterisation of this thesis becomes important. Of subtle and enduring interest is the character of Grandmother in Namita Gokhale’s Gods, Graves and Grandmother. The protagonist Grandmother, who uses her charm, her intellect, and her raw will to survive the hardships of life. Her character acquires significance when related to her profession, not that of a prostitute, but the religious image she portrays.

Grandmother, being god mother, utilizes the religion for her survival. The worshipping of stone ‘God’, symbolically suggests her search for identity. She, though a prostitute in her earlier life, changes her persona as ‘mataji’, knowing fully well that in India religion has a strong
influence over the lives of people and she can sustain in the present world only by using it. She holds the protecting shield of religion against all the authorities who wants to subdue her. Grandmother resists through various strategies to lead her life. She makes use of superstitious beliefs for her benefit without believing in it. Her behaviour during the eclipse shows her strength to manipulate the rituals. In a way, she subverts the patriarchal system, which checks women through rituals and traditions.

Even her granddaughter, Gudiya Rani, being a creature of possibilities, learns to assert her identity by changing her name from Gudiya Rani to Pooja. Namita Gokhale never projects this girl as a feeble one, but portrays her as strong and manipulative girl, who uses the circumstances for her benefits. Her struggle against the social evils such as rape, domestic violence shows her conscious effort to change and establish her identity. Though she marries Kalki, her lover, gets rid of him easily without any remorse. She asserts herself with courage. Like Pooja, even Phoolwati, the wife of late Shambhu, exhibits her strength of character to face the problems of women in India. She courageously questions the society about the ways where women are being exploited. She becomes more professional than her late husband. She has enough spirit to shape her life.
Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni’s *Sister of My Heart* and *Vine of Desire* traces the link a step ahead. When faced with the ever-present problem of gender disparity in terms of a preference for a boy child, Sudha, protagonist of *Sister of My Heart*, musters courage to walk out of her marriage. And once she shakes off the fetters of one convention, the others fall of easily. She knows that her mother would not support her and Pishi, her widowed aunt who comes to her rescue. Pishi’s voice echoes the pain and trauma of numerous widows in India. And what Pishi says needs to be mentioned here even though it is a repetition.

When I came back to my parent’s home as a widow, how many of society’s tyrannical rules I followed! How old was I then, Gouri? No more that eighteen. I packed away my good saris, my wedding jewellery, ate only one meal a day, no fish or meat, fasted and prayed for what? Every night I soaked my pillow with guilty tears because I was told it was my bad luck, which had caused my husband’s death. Men whose wives died could marry as soon as a year had passed. They didn’t stop their work or their schooling. No one talked about their bad luck. We even have a saying, don’t we, “Abhagar goru more, Bhagya baner bau- the unlucky man’s cow dies, the lucky man’s wife dies!” But when, after three years of being a widow, I begged
my father to get me a private tutor so I would at least have my studies to occupy me, he slapped me across the face. I considered suicide, oh yes, many times I those early years, but I was too young and too afraid of what the priests said: those who take their own lives end up in the deepest pit of hell. So I lived on in my brother's household. What else could I do? But though he was kind and you too, Gouri, I know it was charity, I had no rights in this house, or anywhere else. My life was over because I was a woman without a husband. I refuse to have our Sudha live like that. (Sister of my Heart. 269)

Sudha has the courage to break away as the second chapter suggests. She breaks away from the bondage of marriage and the oppressive societal order of patriarchy. She breaks away to build a new world order for her daughter Dayita. She has the courage to reject marriage knowing that marriage is still a sense of social security for a woman. She draws energy from numerous other women like Anju and Sara. What Sudha accomplishes in Sister of My Heart and Vine of Desire, Nila in French Lover, goes a step further to consolidate the position of a woman.
Though Nila begins her journey through the institution of marriage, her path is more risky, unconventional and shocking to the conditioned mind. She attempts to seek freedom from conventional roles, societal structures which cause suffering and humiliation. She married to Kishan Lal, a restaurant owner in France, soon finds out that he is a man who wants a servant than a wife. Soon after the marriage, Kishan leaves the house locked and she feels restless and impatience. She feels herself locked in the house and desires to be free. She represents the new Indian woman’s voice. Her definition of self-identity is a refreshing break from the mythological image of Indian woman. She should have the freedom to decide her own identity. In her letter to Kishan, she justifies her action of going away from his house and also from the bond of husband and wife. She makes it clear to her husband that she cannot survive within so many restraints and strictures.

After leaving Kishan Lal, she enters into a lesbian relationship with Danielle, which is partly an exploration of her real self. Then she meets Benoir, a French man whom she loves intensely. Even then she finds that, he behaves in the same way as Kishan does, but he is more sophisticated in his approach towards Nila than Kishan. These Experiences make her to take an unusual stand at the end. Though pregnant, she refuses to marry Benoir. She wants to abort her baby. All her action seems strange and
unusual to her upbringing in Indian society. Nila doesn’t need a man for her identity. She believes that she had fallen in to the trap of love and has come out of it herself. Hence, Nila revolts openly. She makes an attempt to transform the oppressive social strictures by walking out of established institution like marriage and even motherhood.

This thesis made an attempt to show how the woman in the novels of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Namita Gokhale and Taslima Nasrin search for their identity. The protagonists portrayed by these authors are no longer passive victims, never are they cowed down by the conventions that have trapped them, they no longer remain either as aristocratic toys or as spineless chattels. Anju, Gudiya, Nila, Grandmother, Phoolwati, depict a tendency to survive against oppression. Though all the characters have been brought up in India with a conditioned mind, and have a characteristic of what Virginia Woolf says, ‘The Angel in the House’, they are successful in establishing their own self in their struggle against phallocracy. Sudha fights terribly to safeguard her child, and it is through this child she finds her new identity. Gudiya, too after becoming pregnant, decides to send her husband to Bombay forever. Contrary to this, Nila rejects this motherhood. She wants her child to abort.
Thus, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Namita Gokhale and Taslima Nasrin capture the triumph of human spirit over the oppressive society by trying to attain dignity, status and independence. The women in their novels are never passive. They are always learning to grow from their past experiences. The women, with their inner strength and dignity paving their way through aggressive, violent world, serve as an inspiring ray of hope. There are no easy solutions for their problems, yet, the courage and confidence they show are amazing. They never succumb to societal forces and continue to fight in their own ways. In spite of all the confrontations with reality of woman’s vigour and vitality remain unshaken and the goal is to awaken feminine consciousness. No longer is woman chained by the conventional mystique of her Gender. She breaks away from the blind dogmas, indulging her self in search of true-identity.

To conclude, one can say that a woman’s Identity is a “process”. It goes on changing and adopting itself to situation and circumstances to survive.