Chapter 3

NAMITA GOKHALE'S

GODS, GRAVES AND GRANDMOTHER:

TRADITION
This chapter makes an attempt to read Namita Gokhale’s *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* exhibiting an ideology of a sub-culture of North Indian lower class woman. Namita Gokhale wants to study the nature in woman and how they attempt to carve out an Identity, peculiar to their situation. The novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* searches the span of life in the downwardly mobile class of the Indian metropolises. Set in the backdrop of semi-urban Delhi, the novel deals with Gudiya’s picaresque adventures which cover a cross-section of Indian society, and it also moves between the everyday details of poverty, ignorance and illiteracy, and the supernatural realm of the temple which forms the focal point in Gudiya’s life. Namita Gokhale exposes the humorous underbelly of merchandised religiosity. She makes Gudiya Rani an observer within the limits of the narrator’s character. Her characters exemplify with physical passion, with the strength of self – survival at the cost of deep-seated hurt.

Namita Gokhale was born in 1956. She was married at the age of eighteen to Rajiv Gokhale, the son of the law minister in Indira Gandhi’s cabinet. Gokhale worked as a film journalist in Bombay. In the late 70s, she edited *Super*, a film magazine, along with her husband. Her first novel *Paro: Dreams of Passion*, created a stir by its frankness in the early 80s, and pioneered the sexually frank genre, which made Shoba De...
famous. Gokhale was stricken with cancer of the uterus while finishing Paro, and barely survived. A few years later her husband died. While bringing up her two daughters, she has written four books and continues to work as a journalist. At present she lives in Delhi.

Gods, Graves and Grandmother is a gripping and enthralling novel with its many complexities. It deals with Gudiya Rani’s life, which takes on an extraordinary momentum of its own after her Grandmother’s ‘him’ dies. They were thrown into absolute penury. When they reach Delhi, Grandmother does a miracle. A slab of green marble stolen from a building site and five rounded pebbles from a sahib’s garden, are transformed into an inviolable place of worship. After the death of Ammi, the Grandmother, Phoolwati enters into the life of Gudiya, as a guardian. Gudiya’s affair with Kalki and her life after marriage take twists and turns. We see before us the peculiar dance of chance and will that is human existence in the novel. Namita Gokhale explores this search for identity among the lower class women through the characters of Grandmother, her granddaughter Gudiya Rani, and Phoolwati, the ardent disciple of Grandmother. This chapter intends to focus on these three characters. In the very beginning of the novel, we recognize the instinct to survive in Grandmother. She is Grandmother throughout the novel. She is known as Grandmother, a Kothewali, Ammi, and Mataji. She is such a
flexible character that she adjusts herself to any religion and to any persona successfully. For the reader her name becomes immaterial, as they are comfortable with her different names.

Grandmother had been a great singer, a Kothewali, whose voice was “more liquid and beautiful than Lata Mangeshkar’s”. She had been enormously rich. Eleven Nawabs and two English Rolls Royce and Daimlers used to line up outside her house in the evening. After the death of ‘Him’, she lost everything she had and came to Delhi in search of life. When they are in Delhi, her daughter runs away with a beggar, virtually leaving the grandmother on the pavement without any money. Earlier she had survived using her body as a tool. But now as it has lost all the charm to attract men, she thinks of using religion as a tool to survive. She abandons her burka, and consigns it to her trunk, along with the sequined gheraras and beaded reticules. She assumes an entirely different persona. She even changes religion, and believes that religion is,

... a type of fashion. Bombay cut, Calcutta style, London look.

In the old havelis the fashion was for Mogal beauties from Persia, from Samarkand, and so, being a fashionable lady, my mother switched to burkas. Here now, under peepul tree, perhaps this is better. In foreign countries, England, Amreeka,
Christ is the fashion, so those phirangi women, they wear skirts and even trousers. (Gods, Graves and Grandmother 13)

Religion, in India, is not confined to the places of worship, but it is a way of life and has a strong hold over the lives of the people. Grandmother knows that peepul tree is one of the sacred trees in India, which has the power to make the place religious. People in India are so religious that they worship god in the form of stone statues, and in certain cases only a stone without proper shapes. In some moments they ‘see’ Gods emerging in a stone and they worship it in the name of “Udbhava God” and that particular stone becomes sacred, and the place becomes holy. The grandmother utilizes this belief and uses it as a tool to survive.

We should indeed have starved, had not my resourceful grandmother stolen a marble slab from the buildings site beyond our shanty. This marble-clean, cold and veined with the merest hint of green shadows- she placed beneath the holy peepul tree which shaded our little hut. Then she found five rounded river stones, purloined them, really, from a sahib’s rocky and arranged them on the marble attar. Marigold flowers from the sahib’s garden, and the third stainless steel
thali which we didn’t need, now that mother had gone, and our shrine was complete. (Ibid. 1) says Gudiya.

The stolen marble becomes ‘God’ and grandmother prostrates herself before that ‘God’ so still and silent, and for so long that her granddaughter is afraid that she might be dead or in a coma. A garbled chant, distinctly pious and devotional emanated from grandmother’s trained singer’s throat. Grandmother excavates the strategies that she had to adopt in future. She defies authorities through religion, and uses it as a weapon against her exploitation. Religion provides a space to express her anguish. Sundar Pahalwan, who exercises territorial rights over the stretch of pavement, asks to pay rent. He says,

Ten rupees a week, to be revised after two years. If that is not acceptable, the girl can beg on the crossroads, thirty percent to our syndicate. If the girl is inclined, you could beg and she could occupy herself better. (Ibid. 12)

Grandmother’s honeyed voice takes on a new texture altogether. She exclaims,
Arre Rama, Rama, Rama. Seize our money, Pahalwanji, but spare our self respect. I am a widow of a Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman’s curses may follow you! (Ibid.13)

When she uses words like ‘a widow of a Brahmin priest’, Sundar Pahalwan is taken aback. She perfectly hits on the sentiments of Sundar Pahalwan. His tone is already uncertain when he asks for money again. Grandmother catches this and authoritatively says,

If you come here this same time next week, I will have it ready.

(Ibid.13)

She is intelligent enough to perceive the breakout where there is a viable solution to her problems. She has her ways to confront Sunder Pahalwan. When he returns after a week, he finds a statue of Durga astride a Tiger and a raggedy crowd of worshippers around the shrine. Sunder Pahalwan goes, leaving eleven rupees on grandmother’s thali. Superstitious beliefs of people come to the rescue of grandmother; in other words, grandmother uses this aspect for her benefits. The statue of Durga is lits up by an electric bulb, which a religious minded lineman has connected to the street lamp. The milkman has left a liter of milk in an
earthen container. A man from the municipal corporation comes with a demolition order for the cement structure, which housed grandmother, falls at grandmother’s feet and begs his forgiveness for the blasphemy. His boss arrives with a copy of the demolition order. The electric wire explodes over his head and burns his nose. Next morning his wife and his mother visit grandmother, and leave five hundred rupees, a sari and a shawl for grandmother, with their profound apologies. The electrician gets promotion. Shambhu, who asks the blessings of grandmother, finds a wallet full of cash in the bench outside his tea stall. A scorpion bit a man who spit in the direction of the temple; everyone believes that grandmother is guided by the will of God. It is the shrine beneath the peepul tree that nourishes the grandmother and Gudiya. Money pours in. Grandmother finds that she is rich beyond her wildest dreams. Not only grandmother, but Phoolwati also shows the vigor and rationality to confront the formidable problems of the women in India. She picks up enough courage to raise her head and asks pertinent questions about the ways of the society.

Phoolwati, the wife of Shambhu, comes to Delhi for Shambu’s funeral and decides to stay on. Phoolwati is a plump and attractive woman, having a commanding personality, and possesses a better head for business than Shambhu had ever displayed. Phoolwati is very
professional and uses every opportunity to her benefit. She negotiates a reduced five-year rental plan from the street lord Sundar Pahalwan, with the percentage of take thrown in. Apart from the teashop of Shambhu, she sets up another stall just outside the temple, where she sells incense, marigold garlands and coconuts and little brass amulets, which she had ordered from Muradabad. She visits Grandmother along with a photographer. Within a fortnight, colour postcards of grand mother, with ‘OM’ prints across them in gold embossed letterings are for sale outside the temple for two rupees. When some other entrepreneurs try to move in and out up their own stalls and kiosks outside the premises of the temple, Phoolwati, with the help of Sundar Pahalwan, nips their effort in the bud. Phoolwati strives from sufficient courage and power to stand on her ground and she has enough spirit to shape up her unfair life and inform the world that she lives in the larger concept of love. Sundar Pahalwan, the dada of the locality, is charged by brave Phoolwati. She says sharply,

Lost your tongue? Such a Dara Singh hulk of a man, but with the courage of a mouse! Why are you so scared of Phoolwati man? Will she bite you? Will she eat you up? Arre bhai, Phoolwati is just a timid woman and you are a hero-wrestler. Just say what you have to say, you want to discuss business with me, don’t you? Then say so! Come to my house at seven
this evening and we can discuss whatever you want to!

(Ibid. 105)

Phoolwati was intelligent enough to perceive solutions to the problems around her. Sometimes grandmother, feeling eccentric and inward, would refuse to sing. At first, Phoolwati tried to cajole her, but then exasperated by her stubborn refusals, she hit upon a novel plan. She took to taping grandmother’s spontaneous bhajans, and when Ammi was in a disobliging mood Phoolwati would simply play the tape over the public address system. Grandmother wishes her grand daughter to lead a good sophisticated domestic life, which is not there in her life. She instructs Shambhu to buy a kitchen set, when Gudiya Rani, her grand daughter, asks for dolls. The minuscule pots and pans do not interest her grand daughter in the least. In spite of this, Gudiya Rani is not allowed to play with dolls. Gudiya thinks, “Perhaps grandmother considers it somehow idolatrous”. But grandmother says,

You’re better off learning to cook, Gudiya ...became a good cook and marry a respectable man. (Ibid. 15)

In a patriarchal society a girl is trained to be a good wife and a good mother. She is forced to cultivate feminine virtues like tolerance and
cooperation. She has been given guidance about domestic work, rearing of children and caring for the family and its members. Grandmother wants Gudiya to be more practical than emotional. She exhibits her practical nature in many incidents. Saboo, after murdering Shambhu, who has had an illicit relationship with his wife, digs a grave in the presence of grandmother. While digging the grave, a lumpy bag springs out of Shambhu’s grave and throws a shower of gold at grandmother’s feet. Saboo is so involved in the burial that he does not even notice the gold. As Saboo begins shoveling the earth back over Shambhu, grandmother seizes the moment and scurries forward to pick up the glimmering gold coins that lays scattered around her feet and safely places it in an inner old trunk. When the police find the axe and the fingerprints of grandmother on it, grandmother denies everything and anything, denies for that matter that she even knows Shambhu or Saboo or Magoo. She knows how not to reply the questions of police. She maintained a stubborn suspicious silence, her prayer beads in her hand and a murderous scowl on her beautiful ravaged face. She was deft at the art of survival. She knew that some terrible and unplanned retribution had finally overtaken her. Gudiya says,

I can never forget the look she gave me as she left to the thana with the police only for a day, the stubborn resistance to the
world’s outrage which her eyes conveyed to me, taught me.

(Ibid.25)

Grandmother expresses a note of protest, in all her actions with intense tone and emerges as a strong-willed woman. When she returns from the police station, she is her old matter-of-fact self again. She goes about her chores with her usual swift economy of movement, emptying out the collection boxes, sorting out the notes and change from the withered flowers and storing them in the new steel trunk. Grandmother’s reaction reminds one of Susan Guber and Sandra Gilbert who says,

Women use silence as a means of manipulation, passivity as a tactic to gain power, submission as a means of attaining the only control available to them.¹

Grandmother wants to free herself from the accusations by the police. No one can obstruct grandmother’s basic need to grow, her intellect to discern, and her soul to expand. Growing up is a painful process, as one has to oppose the established forces in order to become something. The unfamiliar, unknown, untrodden path poses new challenges to woman as she engages in redefining and restructuring her belief and attitudes. Soon she begins to ignore her granddaughter, Gudiya altogether.

¹Susan Guber and Sandra Gilbert, A Mad Woman in the Attic (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979) 50.
Gudiya says,

My grandmother began to believe in God. She took to fasting four days a week. Even when she was not fasting, she would eat just fruits and nuts and sometimes a little yogurt. She took a vow of silence and remained completely mute for a month, crouched silently in a corner of the temple, her stubborn eyes resisting any questions or answers or any kind of communication with any one. She stopped combing my hair or looking out for nits or feeding me or plying me with warm milk. A luminous peace began to float like a cloud over her, 

distancing her from me. (Gods, Graves and Grandmother 27)

The girl, who lived in a world of fantasy, is knocked by the bitter truths of reality. Her grandmother’s neglect hurts her deeply and she is jealous of those imposters, those newfound Gods and Goddess, who has stolen her grandmother from her. She succeeds in overcoming the gloom and darkness of life by accepting the hard facts with resignation. She says,
I learnt to stand on my own feet and even began to look after grand mother in a fumbling, uncertain way. I would comb grand mother’s hair or coax her to eat some rice and curds... Nobody bothered with me, and I was left to fend for myself, which I learnt to do rather well. I went to school as I pleased, ate what was available, and observed everything I could. (Ibid.27)

Passages like,

She (grand mother ) was not unkind, but she withdrew into some intense and personal confrontation with the statues and idols around her; often I would find her muttering queries to Durga or Hanuman... concentrating solely on her prayer beads or else singing hymns and bhajans in a startlingly strong and youthful voice. .. She had almost stopped eating altogether. She had become thin as a stick and a smell compounded of the essence of old age and sandalwood incense enveloped her... her skin became incandescent and an electric energy seemed to light her still presence. (Ibid.27)
suggests grandmother’s distraction from the real world. Whether she is really drawn towards God or is it one of the strategies that she uses as part of her survival, is a question to be answered. When we see grandmother’s lack of concentration towards her grand daughter Gudiya, her negligence towards her body and health, and her muttering queries with Gods, we are to think that the grand mother is desperately trying to transform herself into ‘godmother’ or ‘mathaji’ as people call her. But Namita Gokhale also projects another self of the grandmother. She writes,

In spite of her distraction, grand mother administered the temple with an iron hand. Everything had to be perfect. The premises were kept scrupulously clean, and all devotees who constituted the inner circle, the little band of believers who had surrendered themselves to Ammi’s wisdom, had specific chores assigned to them. (Ibid.30)

She resists through a variety of strategies, as she has her own dreams to be fulfilled, and her own life to live. It is her protest against female subservience, self-sacrifice, and self-denial, and she is taking time to decide her own identity as grandmother or godmother. She only dons the robe of a godmother, and does not believe in the religious rituals. Her behavior during eclipse demonstrates this. She preaches to her devotees
to maintain the ritual injections, and stay indoors for the duration of the moon’s banishment. She seemed unusually relaxed that evening. At the time of eclipse, along with Gudiya she comes out of her house. She says to surprised Gudiya, who is fearful about the night of eclipse,

_I know Gudiya and that’s why there isn’t any Phoolwati or Leela around to pester me!_ (Ibid.50)

The real grandmother is with her grand daughter. The behavior of grandmother clearly indicates that she is not superstitious, but she uses it for her benefit. Humming to herself in a happy lilting melody, she reveals her past and her dreams to Gudiya. She says,

_When I was your age, Gudiya, I wanted to be a film star. There were only silent films in those days, no sound. I wanted to be like Zubaida or Jayashree. But look at me now a holy woman! Truly, no one can understand the ways of God!_ (Ibid.51)

When Lila, one of the devotees, discovers and questions grandmother about their disappearance at the time of eclipse, she says,
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It's all right, Lila, I have many siddies, and these things do not have the power to affect me. (Ibid.52)

In another incident, grandmother comes out of the temple in total darkness. It is a Poornamashi night, and as she has evidently planned ahead, she carefully lowers the bag full of gold coins into the pit and returns. She hides herself in front of the world. She has perfected the art of presenting confusing abstractions as exalted philosophy and converted her lack of specific religious knowledge into a Gnostic strength. She is also sceptical about the beliefs. When Pandit Kailash Shastry objects Gudiya’s going to a school trip to Simla on account of ‘Amavasya’, Grandmother says,

Let the girl go if she wants to. If one were to start listening to these astrologers, the second fool would never follow the first. I am ready to undertake any journey on an Amavasya night! (Ibid.71)

and she does undertake such journeys. She makes use of superstitious and religious beliefs of people for her convenience, but never allows herself to be superstitious. The author highlights the hidden thoughts, especially the conflict festering in the mind of grandmother
when she traces Gudiya is growing up. Puberty is the period when the
differential treatment of girls cannot be masked. Besides the training to be
a good wife, a major difference in the bringing up of sons and daughters
is in the restrictions placed on the girl’s freedom of movement. Puberty in
many parts of the country emphasize the fact of the girl’s body
‘flowering’ or ‘ripening’ into womanhood. The girl’s sexual maturity is
welcomed as a vital step on the road to becoming a woman whose
fertility would be a credit to the family. When Gudiya’s menses begins,
the grandmother agitates. Gudiya at the age of thirteen is a confused girl,
who faces the turmoil and agitation in her body and mind and knows
nothing to expect. She thinks she has hurt herself without noticing and
earnestly approached her grandmother for help.

I showed the dark blood spots on my bed cloths and on my
frayed kameez. ‘Should we call the doctor’ I asked and was
quite un-prepared for the stinging slap my query provoked.
Another slap and I was consigned to our room, with orders not
to emerge until instructed. (Ibid. 54)

Woman’s power of creation begins with her menses. The girls are
not instructed about this and when it happens, many times the girl
experiences a psychological trauma. They are considered as impure and hence are untouched for those three days. Grand mother says,

This girl is good for nothing but trouble from now. (Ibid. 54)

For Gudiya, her grandmother appears as a wicked old witch and she hates her passionately and with all her heart. When she is instructed not to step into the temple compound since she is impure, and she should not offend gods, Gudiya could not understand. She says,

It's not my fault, I haven't done anything wrong. (Ibid.55)

Here we have to reconsider grandmother's words. When she was a 'kotewali', she made use of her body as a tool to survive. At that juncture, a girl reaching maturity would have been a welcoming thought. But now she is in the vicinity of the temple and since she is a godmother, she thinks this girl is really a trouble as sexuality is a taboo in the place of religion. At this time Phoolwati, the wife of Shambhu, and a caretaker of grandmother, comes to the rescue of Gudiya with a passionate heart. She says,
In our village we celebrate the arrival of womanhood, the descent of the Devi. But then your grand mother is an old lady; she has to manage the temple. Perhaps she doesn’t want you to grow up; she would have preferred a little girl who would sit on her lap and listen to fairy tales forever. (Ibid. 55)

She brings Gudiya a collection of old rags and towels, and many presents - a length of ribbon, a set of bindis, a small mirror, a kajool stick, even bright, shiny lipstick. It is Phoolwati who opens the new world of cosmetics to Gudiya. She introduces Gudiya to the magical world of films, brings her Ice cream, and gives Gudiya the information about the facts of life, and instructs Gudiya about their usage and disposal. She assures her to stick together. Gudiya says,

I was overcome with gratitude, although I did not express it, and looked disdainfully at her offerings as nothing less than the homage legitimately due to my grand mother’s grand daughter. In my heart of hearts, I was immensely moved and resolved that I would ever forget Phoolwati’s kindness. (Ibid. 55)
Gudiya fights the hostile world by asserting her identity and being the grand daughter of the grandmother who has learnt to protest humiliation. When, Miss Mehta, who is a teacher of Gudiya, asks,

**So, Miss Gudiya Rani, what is it you want to become? You can’t be a Gudiya all your life, you know.** (Ibid. 126)

Gudiya, being upset and angry, and asserting her identity retorts,

**Firstly my name is not Gudiya, but Samina, and secondly, what I want to become; I don’t need your help for... I am going to become a film star and marry the prime minister’s son.** (Ibid.126)

Gudiya becomes a creature of possibilities, unfettered by a past, totally involved in the process of becoming. Possibilities are denied to women. They are fettered by the past. We may find that women are already ‘become’ rather than ‘becoming’. They have to struggle for a name. Gudiya desperately decides to change her name, her identity and her very self. Especially at important junctures, during the process, the individual marks an identity change in tangible ways. Changing the name is one way of marking an identity. She experiments with several names
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like Sameena, Sharmila, Gudiya Lamba etc., then she decides to rename herself ‘Pooja’ in the honour of her favourite film star and keeps the surname as Abhimanyu Singh, as Pooja Abhimanyu Singh, she practices a series of elaborate signatures, replete with flourishes. Her words,

I carefully hoarded clues and signs of my new identity—pop music, dangling earrings, a regal look, a photograph of my father and a disposition towards revenge. (Ibid. 128)

shows her conscious effort to change and establish her identity. Pooja’s infatuation leads her to love Kalki, a handsome young boy, who works in ‘Shiv Mohan Band’. When Kalki takes Pooja to attend a marriage party and rapes Pooja, Phoolwati handles the situation and says,

Your grandmother handed me the responsibility of bringing you up and no one can say that Phoolwati goes back upon her responsibilities. (Ibid.155)

Phoolwati, in order to handle the responsibility handed over to her by the grandmother, arranges an engagement between Pooja and Kalki with the help of Sunder Pahalwan.
The author wants to throw light on one of the evil practices, rape where woman becomes the victim. A practice of providing justice to the woman is to marry her to the person who rapes her. This again is a kind of exploitation, where the culprit enjoys all the privilege and the victim again victimized. Just like any Indian girl who is conditioned, Pooja too contemplates over this and hopes,

There was still very little that I knew about Kalki. I was sure that, once we were married, my undemanding love would lower the defenses he had built around himself and that one day we would achieve some sort of harmony with each other. (Ibid.158)

Pooja comes to know that Kalki believes and hopes that her grandmother had had a ‘mantra’ to conquer everything. She personally has no belief in the efficacy of magic spells. She is woman enough to understand that any espousal of rationality or disavowal of magic would swiftly provoke Kalki to retreat back into frigid disinterest. Pooja does not want to lose this opportunity. She makes use of it to establish her authority over Kalki. She says to Kalki,
Remember that I am my grand mother's grand daughter! In time – if you are nice to me – I might even teach you what I know. (Ibid.177)

We have already seen how grandmother uses the opportunity while tackling men. Pooja adopts the ways of her grandmother. It has the intended effect on Kalki. He is unusually affectionate and considerate. Many a time he tries to coax and humor Pooja into parties. She is not blind to the realities of Kalki’s nature. She discovers that he invests his entire salary on lottery, and borrows money from her. He owes money to the entire number of Shiva Mohan Band. The infatuation or the immature love towards Kalki gives way to the rational and practical way of life. She has been observing the life of her grandmother and Phoolwati. When Sundar Pahalwan proposes to Phoolwati she agrees, subject to certain conditions, that he has to build a house for her, the ownership of which should be irrevocably hers, that he should allow her to continue running her business as before, and lastly, that Sundar Pahalwan has to treat Gudiya as their adoptive daughter. Phoolwati cleverly combines her security and her economic independence and dominates over Sundar Pahalwan. Phoolwati’s dignity, intelligence, perseverance and good will gave stability to Gudiya’s young self. She says,
We shared the same fiercely independent spirit, but mine had floundered in the confusion of identity and norms. Whatever or whoever I had lost in mother and grand mother, I regained in abundant measure in Phoolwati’s love and warm embraces and her flatulence and mammoth bosom bothered me not a bit.

(Ibid.57)

Analysing the situation, Pooja says,

**I no longer want to marry Kalki!** (Ibid.209)

Pooja wants to have an abortion. But the doctor and Phoolwati objected and refuse the idea of abortion. In order to have a ‘legitimate father’ to her child, she gives consent to marriage with Kalki and becomes Pooja Thakur, another identity that a girl gets after marriage.

Simone de Beauvoir expresses,

Marriage enslaves her to a man, but it makes her mistress of the home... queen in her hive, tranquility at rest within her domain, but borne by man out into limitless space and time, wife, mother, mistress of the home, woman finds in marriage at once energy for living and meaning of her life.¹

Though marriage provides happiness and security within the framework of family, life with Kalki makes Pooja constantly tired and depressed. Kalki's ultimately coarse nature, his vanity and cruelty, wore her down to the extent that her considerable natural resilience seems to have disappeared altogether. She becomes the victim of domestic violence. Kalki comes home drinking and beats Pooja. She says,

On the whole, I managed to maintain a brave front and Phoolwati glimpsed very little of the agony I was undergoing. I was determinedly cheerful, but inside, there was a deep unutterable fear that this was how my whole life might pass in indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties. (Gods, Graves and Grandmother 217)

Simone de Beauvoir says,

The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of feminity: they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways. ²

Pooja, a victim of domestic violence, and a victim of her own romantic illusions decides to implement a plan for her survival. With a regained agency, she executed her plans. She is polite and painstakingly pleasant, and praises Kalki constantly. She extols his good looks, his musical talent and his loving temperament. Pooja asks Kalki;

Why don’t you try your luck in Bombay again, Kalki? I’m sure you could hit it big! You could set a break in films or even became a pop star! (Gods, Graves and Grandmother 219)

Pooja took off the thick gold necklace Phoolwati had gifted her, the earrings and the four gold bangles and thrust them all at Kalki and she said calmly,

I will get you the money, Kalki; I will sell my stridhan for you. (Ibid.219)

Disposing gold, Kalki and Pooja go together to the railway station, where after paying a bribe to the clerk, they purchase a single one way ticket to Bombay, second class sleeper. In a way, Pooja buys her freedom. Her life changes after Kalki leaves. However she says she is used to changes, it has been a constant in her life. She says,
Except for Ammi, who in spite of her many surprising manifestations and avatars, continued to remain my Ammi, everything around one had retained a sort of recurring flux. So I accepted Kalki’s departure with resignation and even a degree of relief. (Ibid.223)

When Pooja looks back at her married life with Kalki and contemplates, she feels there are many things about Kalki she does not know. She is married and yet not married; Kalki was most certainly there, somewhere, but he was no longer here, at home, to trouble and torment her, with the authority that their marriage conferred. Kalki has gone, she is glad to be alone again. She says,

My mother had never had a husband, neither, as far as I know, had my grandmother. I had never known a father. There had been no models of masculinity to teach me the lessons of dependence as a woman. (Ibid.223)

This is important because Pooja has no norm to follow. She has to learn by experience. She believes she loves Kalki, but love is not life, and the imperative of survival pulls elsewhere. Everyday, gradually and imperceptibly, his hold on her lessens. She thinks, though she misses
Kalki, in his absence she has an opportunity for growth, which she determines not to miss. She misses her grand mother, but she was there with her in the acts of surviving. Pooja never explodes or bursts out in anger, but contains her anger and rage, revenge and hostility by remaining calm and steady. The destructive forces of patriarchy fail to wipe out her identity completely. She rises to occasion always like phoenix to struggle with the life negating forces. Phoolwati and Gudiya are the women who have developed true strength within themselves and who no longer need to compete with anyone in order to feel accomplished, no need to indulge in the neurotic need to be protected. Their awakening leads to a re-appraisal, a truer vision of the world.

Grandmother asserts herself with confidence and faces the crisis with courage. She knows she will be judged not only by the authenticity and power with which her image is presented, but also by the honesty with which she interprets the world of her social relations, and the people for those who have direct experience of it, but are moved by the power of evocation, judgement, and good faith. Women do not however always emerge as victims of oppression but as survivors in a system that views marriage as the ultimate refuge of a woman. The problems experienced by women relate to both physical and mental health during the crisis, but
this coping strategy helps them emerge somehow stronger and better equipped to deal with their situation and lives.

If Grandmother and Gudiya Rani protest staying within the confines of tradition, and making use of religion to achieve their means, then Sudha in the next chapter breaks free from them.