Rebellion
Chapter Three

Rebellion

The women of today are in a fair way to dethrone the myth of femininity; they are beginning to affirm their independence in concrete ways; but they do not easily succeed in living completely the life of a human being. Reared by women, within a feminine world, their normal destiny is marriage, which still means practically subordination to man; for masculine prestige is far from extinction, resting still upon solid, economic and social foundation. (De Beauvoir Introduction 30)

“Rebellion” is defined as a refusal to accept some authority or code or convention. In another sense, the word indicates organized opposition to authority; a conflict in which one faction tries to wrest control from another. The term is synonymous with insurrection, revolt, rising, and uprising. *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary* explains “rebellion” as “open resistance to, or defiance of, lawful authority”. The researcher has used the same word to express the resistance to conventional and cultural practices in the Indian society and the struggle of one section of people to grapple the privileges of another section. In its comprehensive usage, “rebellion” includes degenerating behaviour, shocking perversion, unprincipled way of life, undue love for modernity, and all unconventional odds. The term points to revolutionary thoughts as well when it is used in its connotative sense.
Rebels are not born. They are the products of the society. Repression experienced in life gives birth to rebellion. “Uneasiness on their part to lead a life where they can be the masters of their lives sets them afire. . . . they have taken the odyssey of life to know its kernel” (Raman 59). Oppressive conventions of the society stand in the way of individual freedom. The Indian society is specifically discriminative and biased to the women. When their aspirations are crushed, a sense of frustration creeps in giving room for disillusionment. In the long run, their annoyance breaks into resistance of the taboos and the ethical codes which they think hamper their individual liberty. This is true about the women characters in modern fiction. It is echoed by Arundhati Roy, “. . . They stuck to the Small Things. The Big Things ever lurked inside. They knew that there was nowhere for them to go. They had nothing. No future. So they stuck to the small things” (147). The inclination to reject the culturally imposed repression engulfs them and they daringly transgress the barriers and lead the life of their choice. Thenceforth their actions would be marked by unhealthy traits such as aberration, escapism, exoticism, hedonism, and libertinism.

As in all other aspects of human society, the status of women all over the world has undergone rapid changes over the years. Change is the law of life and it entails the survival and progress of life. The present century witnesses an unprecedented and undreamt of change in the position of women in the society. On the one side, it heralds an improvement in the status of women and on the other side, it signals an undesirable tendency in the women to rebel against the
hoary tradition and assert themselves in a way that spells doom for the culture of the nation. In the critical analysis of Anita Brookner's *Hotel du Lac*, Janaki highlights this situation, "A woman in the contemporary era has developed the urge to create a milieu for full expression of her emotional and moral self and what is important to her—the craving to be accepted as an individual, a person in her own right and enjoying the same status as man has always enjoyed" (131). The need for self-expression and self-fulfilment makes women question the conventions and defy the customs. The same fact is echoed by Gopalan's critical observation, "Moving towards the new millennium we find women making rapid strides in all walks of life. She had succeeded to a great extent, [...], to break the fetters of her servility and oppression and prove her worth to the world" (163).

The male-dominated norms are opposed and male assumptions of superiority are condemned by the challenging women. In the context of feminist struggle for emancipation, Kumar in his book titled, *Indian English Literature: A New Perspective* puts forth Kriestava's vision of the three-tiered feminist struggle, "women demand equality, women extol femininity, women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical" (62). In normal course, a woman in whichever circumstance she lives stands for peace. To a great extent, she can remain tolerant in the face of trials and tribulations. But when things go beyond control, her capacity to endure erodes and she rises up to resist and retaliate. This extreme step taken by the women of today is precisely put forth by Klein, "... restricted by a century-old history of
submission, which had bred in them a sense of inferiority, women’s chief claim in their struggle was, as a natural result, to prove that in all respects they were just as good as men” (34).

The influx of the western culture has invaded the Indian minds. Guy in his analysis of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* notes that the play, “with its theme of female emancipation anticipated the feminism movement by several decades. Nora is the first champion of female liberty and a role model for the movement” (“Influential Ibsen” 4). The rude shock Nora receives, when she realizes the hypocritical and selfish nature of her husband, awakens the woman in her. She abandons the security of her husband’s home and shuts the door behind her. She herself admits that she does not know what is in store for her. Nora’s ability to step out from the carapace of complacent comfort and undertake risks for an independent life choice has been associated with the emergence of the “New Woman” in western culture. The concept of “New Woman” has made a deep impact on the modern Indian woman.

Indian women of the elite society have drawn their concepts of fashion, beauty, marriage, love, sex, motherhood, womanhood, and selfhood from the West. Commenting on the character Daisy, a pro-modern social worker in R.K. Narayan’s *The Painter of Signs*, Trivedi says:

She [Daisy] advocates radical feminism and rejects the male order. . . . She does away with all the sacred and social obligations like marriage and motherhood. . . . She finds
motherhood a severe limitation and opts for a childless existence whereas a traditional woman is valued mainly for her fecundity, her capacity to bear sons. (137)

Daisy represents the women of the privileged class who look down upon the conventional roles allotted to Indian women as wife, mother, sister, and daughter.

Banished to their inner house, the women in India were supposed to be untouched by the rays of the sun except looking after the household bearing and rearing children and catering to the needs of their husbands. Even Milton, the well-known English poet placed women in a very low position asserting, “He for God only, she for God in him” (PL IV 299). Even a reformist like Charles Dickens created the character of Jellyby in his novel The Bleak House to demonstrate the irrelevance of pubic affairs to women. Sarojini Naidu, the Nightingale of India too celebrated the segregation of women from public gaze in her poem “The Purdah Nashin”. Gone are the days when women were called the weaker sex. These were the days when women were satisfied with three K’s—Kitchen, Kids and Knitting. But the twenty-first century modern Eve with coveted education, esteemed position and high social status raves, rages, and asserts on her honour.

The notion that militancy and buoyancy are traits associated with youngsters, stands belied in the modern context. Standing in their respective spheres, they display their capacity to retaliate and fight against what they can no longer sustain. Daughters, wives, mothers, and grandmothers are
indistinguishably stuffed with a daring spirit to battle against the injustice meted out to them. They have no qualms about breaking and stepping over the conventions of the society. They are hostile to the worn out conventions which stand in their way of progress. Hence, they attempt to violate those conventions. The determination to challenge the moral codes comes out in different ways depending on their age and circumstances.

The struggle of women in the tradition-bound Indian society holds a place in Gokhale’s writings. Gokhale believes that the so-called women empowerment which has become a hackneyed term in the present times remains a hollow and insubstantial concept. While the discriminative attitude of the society is a crucial factor, the response of the women themselves worsens the situation. The idiosyncrasies and their erratic and erroneous way of conducting themselves have contributed to their predicament. Their mode of protest is often unacceptable.

In their efforts to assert themselves and show their rebellion, Gokhale’s women characters turn the applecart of patriarchal order upside down. Their protest against male hegemony takes a different form in matters related to sex and marriage. They are extraordinary when they rebel against the traditionally accepted female sexual behaviour. The dissatisfied wives either divorce or walk out of their homes. They abandon duty and decorum as wife and mother.
The rebellion of Gokhale’s characters can be categorized as adolescent rebellion, marital rebellion, maternal rebellion, and geriatric rebellion. Paro, Priya, Gudiya, Parvati, and Shakuntala form the first group of adolescent rebels; Paro, Priya, Parvati, Rachita Tiwari, and Shakuntala in their role as wives stand for marital rebellion; maternal rebellion is represented by Paro, Gudiya’s mother and Parvati’s mother. Gudiya’s grandmother is the only grand dame to focus geriatric rebellion.

Indian girl children are brought up with the sense and consciousness of tradition and morality. From their childhood, they are taught by their mothers to be modest and meek. The elders imbibe in the girl children the spirit of cautiousness because of the marauding male animal that is on the prowl everywhere lying in wait for an unwary victim. As women in India are paying a heavy price in terms of a rising tide of violence and assault on their honour, girl children are warned to be extremely careful in their dealings with men lest they molest them unawares. Purity and chastity are virtues which adorn Indian women.

Conservative views of sexuality are still regarded as the norm in spite of the technological progress in modern India. Outspokenness in sexual matters and frank depiction of sex are considered a taboo. Virginity is held to be a concept of serious significance. However, with increased exposure to the world culture due to globalization, and the proliferation of progressive ideas and growing literacy, India ironically goes through a western-style of sexual
revolution of its own, especially in cosmopolitan cities. Gokhale’s women are modelled on these changing phenomena.

Gokhale’s Paro, the protagonist in Paro: Dreams of Passion grows up in oblivion of the traditional Indian way of life. She strikes the readers as an exotic and unconventional character in all roles of her life as daughter, wife, and mother. Right from the beginning of the novel, she is a proud, audacious and self-confident ambitious woman “with an assured cat-like grace” (14). As a daughter, she is said to have been “a bother in the well-ordered lives of her parents” (30). She slips in her moral conduct and fails to conform to tradition. The daughter of a retired Brigadier, she grew in due course into “so exotic a creature” endowed with ravishing sensual looks (14).

Paro is the only child to her middle-aged parents. Since her father is a military officer, a settled life is not feasible for him. As her mother keeps following her father to wherever he gets transferred, Paro has to spend her entire early life in a boarding school in the hills. Lack of proximity with her mother during the adolescent period remains a powerful factor in the life of Paro. Born in an upper-middle class family, she is a child of privileges. She does not have the experience of worldly deprivations. Referring to her luxury, Suresh tells his wife, Priya indulgently, “But you know she’s not meant for the kitchen” (67). Priya cannot remember Paro ever passionately longing for anything in the world. “She didn’t know about queues and ration cards and bus routes; and I [Priya] don’t think she even tried to learn; she only shut out that world, slugging down gin after gin and surviving in stubborn hope” (72). Paro
has money, good education and is never deprived of any need but mother's love and care. She is a modern girl destined to face life by herself.

Paro leads a westernized life of her own choice and becomes a rebel to rise against the Indian social codes and moral behaviour. Though a brilliant student with high aspirations, she is very attractive and seductive for a school girl. “I was good. You know, I was the head girl in my final year. Man, I wanted to be P.M. of India, you know” (30). Her loneliness in the school hostel during the Dussehra vacation is exploited by her art master. “He was quite young, this art master, and very good looking in a long-haired way. Anyway he tells me, ‘You look like a wood nymph.’ Then he starts getting sexy... After a while I liked it. I liked it one hell of a lot” (30). She surrenders herself to the art master’s lust and she never feels ashamed of her immorality afterwards. What would be a disgraceful experience to a traditional girl is merely a “funny thing” for Paro (32).

The carnal experience with the art master is taken for realization of love by Paro. This is the beginning of her journey of waywardness. It is astounding that Paro is neither shy nor ashamed. She does not make any attempt to protect her virginity, the most essential feminine attribute in the Indian society. A normal conventional Indian girl would have plunged in depression or gone out of her senses at the loss of her femininity. But Paro remains unaffected by the humiliating experience of her rape. Perhaps, she shows her protest against the repressive conventional belief that a raped woman is doomed for ever.
Lack of parental control plays the havoc in Paro’s life. Being left to fend for herself in her teenage it is natural for a girl to slip into immodest behaviour and it happens thus in Paro’s case. The unruly life-style of Paro has its inevitable consequence. She is expelled from the school. The news reaches far and wide. As her father could not bear the scandal, he resigns his job and shifts to Delhi. However, Paro feels no pang of it. She is not affected either by the scandal or the expulsion from school. She goes to college where B.R. falls in love with her.

Many frailties distinguish Paro from other girls of her age. She is full of contradictory traits. She loves and cares her body and makes efforts to show it off and attract men to her side. At the same time, she attempts to impress others with her valour by causing pain to the much cared physique. She draws blood by pricking and writes her name with it on a novel to prove to her friends that she is not afraid of pain. By such flamboyant behaviour, she tries to captivate celebrities towards her. Despite all her efforts to enthrall the opposite sex, she fails to get a man in her imagination to idolize. This arouses her rebellious temperament and she resorts to a hedonistic life-style and demolish all the patriarchal postulates that force a woman to become a prisoner of her own sex.

Priya, another chief character in Paro, flouts the moral codes of conduct in her aspiration for a modern and unrestricted life. Despite her “somewhat dubious social status”, Priya possesses “certain robust charm” (11). Her self-consciousness of her appealing look gives her the confidence to violate the repressive middle class culture that abounds in a plethora of do’s and don’ts.
Like Paro, she too has the humour of a sensualist and in her sexual desires she is no less than Paro. Her unconventional behaviour is quite incongruous with the middle class milieu in which she has grown up.

In the strata of society to which Priya belongs, for an unmarried girl morality is synonymous with virginity and all brides are supposed to present their virginity as a wedding gift to their husbands. This customary belief is overthrown by Priya who willingly submits herself to unlawful sexual relationship with her boss before the consummation of marriage. She has been working in B.R.’s company until she gets married to Suresh. B.R., the sewing machine industrialist, is a womanizer. Priya is enthralled by his opulence and enchanted by his love-making. Despite his immorality, he looks attractive and lovable to her. She impresses him as the “most beautiful and intelligent girl” in the office (11). As a typist in the company and then as B.R.’s secretary, she experiences ecstatic and emotional moments with him. In the first meeting in his flat, B.R. conducts her like a princess and gently pours her some wine in a stemmed glass. It is her first taste of alcohol. Mesmerized by B.R.’s western cult, she allows herself to be taken by him. She is at such western style of love-making until it gets on her nerves when Paro traps B.R. in wedlock and jolts her out of her “lush romantic haze” (3). Priya’s pre-marital relation with her employer is not merely the result of the western liberalized life-style, but also a foolhardy attempt against the repression caused by her economic backwardness and unrealized dreams.
Gokhale’s Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a character with a rebellious bend right from her adolescence. Love for new identity is a mark of transgression in the modern youth. The urge to define themselves is strong in them. Bearing a label fastened on them by their parents would seem to be yet another sign of slavery imposed on them. Some girls do not find any sense in being known by a name allotted by someone else even if it happens to be their own parents. They want to acquire a name that would give them a new identity and a new status to them in the social hierarchy. Accordingly, Gudiya too decides to change her name.

Gudiya, the slum girl, is the daughter of a courtesan mother. Born in a family of courtesans who lead a free sexual life, she does not know her paternity. It is a custom with the Indian society to look down upon the daughters of unwed mothers and relegate them to a low status. The low status in the society as well as the poor economic condition of the family causes a deep impact in the psyche of Gudiya that she rebels against everything that denies her a dignity and status in the society.

As the first step towards a new identity, Gudiya erases her name and gives herself a new, sophisticated name. The change of name by herself is rebellious. It has been an age-long practice in human society that children are always named by their parents or respectful elders. Even if the child is not satisfied with the name, later he or she cannot so easily think of changing the name, for it would be an act of disrespect shown to parents. But Gudiya does not have any respect for such a tradition. She does not want to identify herself
with her real name that is given by the elders. She is not pleased with the name “Gudiya” because in Hindi it means “doll.” The name seems to belittle her personality, arrest her growth, and render her insignificant in the social circle. “I despised my name. I don’t remember if I ever had any other, but ‘Gudiya’ was what my mother or grandmother had always called me. I didn’t feel like a doll; I had never possessed a doll in the entirety of my childhood” (69). She finds freedom to change her name after the death of her grandmother. “I could cease to be Gudiya now, perhaps I could even start to be Shabana or Samina or Sharmila. All that was known and familiar and sure had passed, and the future had in its palm every possibility and impossibility” (80).

Gudiya fancies herself to be a film star or a famous courtesan and tries out many exotic names which might suit the new personality. She avers to her teacher, “I am going to become a film star and marry the Prime Minister’s son . . .” (126). The teacher’s mockery of her impracticable dream of becoming the richest woman in the world sows the seed of vengeful rebellion in Gudiya’s mind. “I resolved to change my name, my identity, my very self. I became a creature of possibilities, unfettered by a past, totally involved in the process of becoming. All I lacked was a name” (127). Gudiya decides to call herself “Pooja” in honour of her favourite film star. After struggling for getting a surname, she settles on “Abhimanyu Singh,” for she guesses that an English man might have been her father. The name, “Pooja Abhimanyu Singh” sounds best as it would “forever cherish the terrible tale of my [Gudiya’s] parent’s star-crossed love” (128). It does not appear shameful to keep the name of an
unknown English man as surname. The change of name is emblematic of Gudiya’s rebellious attempt to carve out for herself a new identity in society and put herself in the position of dignity and self-worth.

Gudiya assumes herself to be the real Pooja Abhimanyu Singh and fancies that she is a changeling who is wrongly put up in the place of the actual Gudiya. She narrates:

I [Gudiya] was cautiously transforming from Gudiya to the self-born identity of Pooja Abhimanyu Singh. I spent a lot of time conceptualizing Pooja, her background, her family, her past and, naturally, her future. I decided that Pooja had been switched at birth by a careless hospital attendant. The other child, the actual Gudiya, was growing up, surrounded by comfort and luxury, in her ancestral home. Her doting parents complied with her every wish, little realizing that she was nothing but a changeling, while the real Pooja Abhimanyu Singh languished in Phoolwati’s hut, deprived by cruel fate of her true heritage. (Gods 144)

Gudiya guesses that the photograph appropriated from a junk shop to be that of her estranged father, Thakur Abhimanyu Singh and spends hours examining it. She hates to live with Phoolwati, a woman of no repute in the religious surroundings. The whimsical thoughts and behaviour of Gudiya reveal her exotic nature, a trait of some rebels.
Gudiya oscillates between the world of piety and glamour. She is ignorant about the paraphernalia of religion. The grandmother’s religious practices are puzzling to her. She has been brought up in such a way that she is ignorant about the existence of God or divinity. The improbable sainthood of her grandmother and the notion of associating success with education irk Gudiya. She does not believe in interpreting life’s problems in the light of religious philosophy. “Ever since we left the haveli, I had unquestionably accepted whatever cards life had dealt me” (118). She is least bothered about the future and is disposed to face any situation that will come her way. Gudiya herself admits her ill-pruned independent spirit when she says, “Phoolwati’s dignity, intelligence, perseverance and goodwill gave a stability and bulwark to my young self. We shared the same fiercely independent spirit, but mine had floundered in the confusion of identity and norms” (57). These words of Gudiya hint at her aggressive nature.

Gudiya is rebellious in the sense of reversing the tradition of man chasing a woman for her sensual appeal and a woman admiring a man for his masculine strength. She falls in love with Kalki and offers to forego anything in the world, be it wealth or status, for the sake of his handsomeness. She refuses to listen to the counselling of her grandmother’s acolyte, Phoolwati, to give a second thought to her whimsical option for the unworthy Kalki. Gudiya’s daring decision to marry a man just for the exterior glitter is an instance of the exotic and defiant attitude of the modern girls to the traditional concept of marriage.
As Gudiya thinks that she has attained womanhood, she does not like to be treated like a little girl fond of fairy tales. She affirms herself to be too old for fairy tales. She asserts her womanhood when she states, "I know all about life. And besides according to all of you I am a woman now" (55). On the installation day of her grandmother’s statue, Gudiya curses her grandmother for her improbable sainthood and indulges herself in daydreaming of a future life with Kalki, far away from the temple. She ponders:

I was beginning to realize that I was beautiful and the thought exhilarated me. I wanted to enter the world of excitement, a world I did not know and which, quite unfoundedly, I associated with my absent mother. What was, after all, the sum total of her realized romances? After being jilted by a harmonium player, she had eloped with a beggar! Yet I wanted more than anything to be like her—to be courageous and wicked—to escape from the stifling piety that enveloped my beloved grandmother. (Gods 69)

Gudiya’s wicked courage is revealed through her unacceptable sexual conduct. She experiences the full glory of pre-marital sex with the prince of her dreams, Kalki. It does not matter to her that he is an illegal son and has no financial status for a pompous life. As she is in pursuit of a jerry-built status like that of her courtesan mother and grandmother, she disregards the factors of social status, material status and moral propriety which are generally considered in a traditional marriage. It is perhaps to show her protest against
the social discrimination between the low-born and the high-born that Gudiya willingly marries Kalki, the orphan.

Gudiya seeks to satisfy her longing for a dignified identity in the society by the rebellious means of assuming the identity of a social celebrity, Pooja. Imagining herself to be Pooja, a daughter born to rich parents, she hates the poverty-stricken surroundings in her guardian, Phoolwati’s hut. She says, “As Pooja, I had even begun to find the smell in Phoolwati’s hut unbearable. Now suddenly these smells reeked of poverty and social suppression. I resented my surroundings intensely and longed to somehow break out into a new life” (145). When Phoolwati is introduced by Roxanne to her husband as Gudiya’s aunt, Gudiya frowns because, “She was not like my beautiful grandmother or my even more beautiful mother” (91). But she is so pleased when she is referred to as “darling” by Roxanne.

Gudiya’s assertion of her individuality is discernible in her rejection of her principal’s plans for her bright future. Roxanne wishes to see Gudiya, a school teacher or an educationist like her. She persuades Gudiya, “Come back to Sharp House and live with us again . . . You have a spark. You have potential. Education is a drawing out, not a putting in. I want to draw the best in you” (129). But Gudiya ignores the wishes of Roxanne and conceives her own ideas of success. Her stream of thought flows in a different direction:
Her ambitions left me unmoved. I did not associate success with studies. ‘Shabnam’ or ‘Samina’ would be a film star or even a famous courtesan. I was sure she would be rich, very rich. I had only the haziest idea about what educationists or IAS officers actually did. If they were dowdily dressed and wear spectacles like Roxanne Ma’am, I wanted to have no truck with them. (Gods 69-70)

Gudiya’s unruly behaviour and lack of etiquette in the school is a mark of her rebellious nature. She calls her teacher “stupid bitch” and threatens, “I will be the richest woman in the world, travel by aeroplane – and lock you up in jail, you witch!” (127) Gudiya boldly faces the situation when her misconduct is reported to the principal:

The reproach in Roxanne Madam’s eyes bothered me not a bit. I wanted to battle it out with my adversary, to prove that I was as good as her in every way, if not better. Still some part of my Ammi’s tact and good sense came to my rescue, and I rendered a very convincing apology . . . while I swore secret and terrible revenge. (Gods 127)

Gudiya swears to herself that she would raise her status and take revenge on those who have humiliated her for her low status. She asserts, “Grandmother had inculcated in me a fierce sense of my own worth. I resolved that someday, somehow, somewhere, I would get even with all of them” (130).
Gudiya’s story testifies how a young girl’s concept of self-worth would embolden her to revolt against social discrimination between the poor and the rich.

Parvati, the protagonist in *A Himalayan Love Story* is yet another example of adolescent revolt against sexual and moral restrictions. To drive away the dullness of her village life, she follows the means which are not allowed for women of her village. Throwing off her customary shyness with English, Parvati often reads the pamphlet “Introduction to Bee-keeping” aloud to herself. The demarcation between the male bees and the female bees seize her thoughts. She comes to know, “They [male bees] never collect pollen, nor have they any other responsibilities in connection with providing for the young. Female bees do all the work of nest-making and provisioning” (11). The knowledge that female bees are hard-working and male bees are short-lived generates rebellious thoughts in Parvati. She notices that the Pahari men of her village are the drones who ungratefully leave the labour of carrying big bundles of fodder and fuel to their women. But the men are always crowding around the local tea shops, playing cards or purposefully spitting out tobacco. Rich personages like her classmate Lata Sah’s mother for whom she knits many sweaters are the queen bees. As Parvati does not see any justice in what she sees around, she feels an inner urge to rise against the hypocrisy of men and the snobbery of the rich.
As the first step of her resistance of social injustice, Parvati rejects the dull and monotonous life in the village and indulges in activities forbidden to the Pahari girls. The death of her mother provides her with the opportunity for a comfortable town life at the house of her mother's step brother in Nainital. The fashionable and modern life Parvati enjoys in the town is in contrast to the conservative ways of her village. She shows her protest against the free life of Pahari men by emulating their sexual privileges.

Unlike the conventional women, Parvati shows signs of sexual liberation and love for glamour and dignity. She refuses to assign the traditional role of a provider to the men she encounters. She keeps affairs with them without any emotion of love or commitment to marriage. Having no intimidation of the social constraints of feminine behaviour, she willingly loses her virginity to Salmon. The knowledge that Salmon is a hypocrite incites Parvati. “I could immediately sense that Salmon wore a mask, but the knowledge excited and challenged me” (23). Parvati is aware that she is moving rapidly towards disaster but of course she does not care. This aberrant approach to life is an aspect of Parvati’s rebellion.

Parvati is rebellious in her perception of men to be just partners and not providers. She refuses to assign the traditional role of a provider to Salmon and quite uncharacteristically views him solely as a sexual partner. She finds fulfilment in sexuality taking it for real love. Just as the male bees completely vanish from the life of their female mates after providing sexual gratification, Salmon disappears into the busy world of Bombay and the rebellious Parvati
does not show any sign of remorse. The news of his escape does not sound like a bolt from the blue. Traditional girls are likely to become desperate as though everything is lost with the disappearance of the men after sexual intimacy. But Salmon's departure leaves no dent in Parvati's being and she is little disturbed at the news of his disappearance. She states:

I was stoic, even relieved about his departure. A part of me had recognized the risks I was taking. My encounter with Salmon had quelled some silent hunger within me. I felt triumphantly normal, and indeed the next few years were probably the happiest in my life. (*Himalayan* 31)

Shakuntala, the protagonist in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is a *vanavasi* girl of stubborn nature brought up by her orthodox, gender biased, Brahmin widow mother. Shakuntala, unlike her mythical counterpart is bold and restless at a time when women are confined to the household. She dares to challenge the conventional and cultural norms imposed on her by her mother. She questions the social rules and customs and at the call of opportunity goes out into the unknown world to satisfy her adventurous spirit.

At a time when Brahmins experience troubles due to the confusion and false piety of the new ways of spirituality, Shakuntala's brother Guresvara is determined to maintain his Brahmin orthodox identity. He claims that disorder is never the true state. But Shakuntala disputes, "I saw no error in disorder; it
seemed to be the natural condition of life” (11). Unlike her orthodox brother, she favours new concepts of life and resists conservative beliefs.

Shakuntala rebels against the deep-rooted notion that women are the weaker sex. A fake religious man with a mess of matted hair and a snake coiled around his ash smeared neck tries to coax her and take her to the far end of the temple grounds under the pretext of showing a snake charmer. When she is alone with him he tries to take advantage of her femininity. She very boldly hits him with her fists and runs away with an air of victory over his masculine pranks.

Supposing that women are weak, patriarchy does not allow a girl to go out alone. It is another subjugating patriarchal stratagem. Shakuntala’s suppressed tombuoyant attitude rises up to erase the patriarchal expectation of women’s dependence on men for security from external dangers. Customarily, elder brother will play the role of a protector to his sister in fearful situations. But Gokhale portrays the reverse through a role-change. Shakuntala is sketched as a tomboy whereas her elder brother is presented as a nervous child. She plays the role of fending her brother’s fear of the dark.

Shakuntala is a girl of uncompromising spirit. Her protest against the meaningless taboos is expressed by her bold walk-out into the wood, unmindful of the danger of the darkness. “Driven by anger, by shame, by pride I walked the reverse path, away from the home that had rejected me” (32). She attempts to persuade herself out of her fears of the surroundings. She whistles to herself
a cheerful tune that makes her courageous. She fearlessly follows the rock-
demoness, so hated and feared by the villagers. The premonition of the
demoness, "You must be strong, Shakuntala. There is little place in your world
for strong women, but none for the weak" emboldens Shakuntala to rebel
further in the future (36).

While adolescent protest is stimulated by the torment of gender
discrimination and the desire for glamour, dignity, fortune, and knowledge,
rebellion after marriage is due to lack of love and infidelity. The characters,
who wriggle out of their conventional system of life in their adolescence,
continue to wrestle for emancipation after marriage. Their repressed selves riot
against the sexual freedom of their husbands. They are forced to wage rebellion
against the exercise of mastery over women by men. In their rebellious steps,
they are aided by their innate boldness and defiance.

Marriage is considered the sole end in the life of an Indian woman.
From her childhood, she is prepared to play the role of a wife and then a
mother and she is not allowed to think of any other role in life. A woman in the
Indian society is married off to serve not only her husband but his entire
family. She is forced to relinquish her freedom and cater to the demands of the
members of her husband’s family. While considering the benefits of getting
into matrimony, Walker states, “History proves that marriage is essential to the
well-being of human society and that celibacy brings ruin upon states” (80).
But this hoary institution of marriage has come under tremendous strain in the
modern times especially in the narrow stratum of the Indian society. Radhakrishna observes:

Today, the institution of marriage is in transition. . . . Where gender roles were defined, it was easier to conform to a pattern, but with the inevitable emancipation of woman, her economic independence, western influences and new value systems, imbibed from peer groups or passed on by her parents, marriage has assumed a new face. ("Marriage in Crisis")

Indian marriages which were arranged affairs in the past have given way to marriages of choice. This has been a revolutionary change. Yet there are families in which the parents still play a prominent role in finding brides or grooms for their children but the opinions of the children are taken into account. It is an undeniable fact that despite the recent westernization and modernization, the Indian mind-set remains unchanged at the bottom. As a result, man-woman relationship in the modern Indian set-up is full of conflicts. "The Indian woman has begun to realize that marriage in most cases acts as a deterrent—it is not a loving and equal partnership. Marriage cuts a woman off from the mainstream of life and prevents her from achieving her goals" (Chakravarthy 135). Conflict in married life is a stark reality in the urban life in India. Gokhale’s novels are records of the increasing marital discord which leads to conjugal rebellion.
No protagonist of Gokhale has had a happy marriage. All types of marriage namely, arranged marriage, love marriage, and love-cum-arranged marriage end in troubles. Though Gokhale’s women, excepting Paro, do not take legal divorce, yet they are separated from their spouses. They leave their husbands and lead a life of their own. To escape the hegemony at home, the woman who has innate mental strength opts for a life of her own choice. Infidelity on the part of her husband is unpardonable to Paro that she recklessly divorces him. She starts sexual liaison with other men. Priya, the middle class woman shatters the image of a stereotyped wife by following Paro’s course of action. Parvati, the victim of traditional marriage indulges in incestuous relationship. Gudiya, the slum girl, realizes her mistake in choosing Kalki, a man of low status and coarse nature as her husband and sends him off to Bombay so that she can lead a free life. Shakuntala in her irresistible desire for travel abandons her identity as Srijan’s wife and becomes the mistress of a low caste Greek traveller. Rachita is exceptional in accepting a man below her status in every respect as her fiancé and venturing into sexual freedom with another married man.

Paro, the protagonist in *Paro* symbolizes women who lack femininity and possess masculinity in inordinate measure. She is much above emancipation and liberation. In the words of Pathak, “Paro, liberated from marriage and convention, exudes a startling vitality of mind, a vigour that is as crude as it is real” (188). She tears down people with a mere sentence, and she uses her mocking wit as adeptly as a sharp little scorpion. “She was, of course,
a Scorpio” (32). Paro is the very contradiction of the values and virtues of Indian womanhood. She ushers in a rapid cultural change in which men are mere instruments. She champions radical feminism, rejects the male-order, and does not take marriage or motherhood as sacred. Singh adds, “She represents a woman who . . . refuses to be consumed by the monstrous schematization of the male-dominated institution” (“Woman” 36).

Paro is a society lady who is not bound by any barrier. She represents a slice of life of the “jet-set” section of the society. She wanders through the world of privilege and Scotch whisky which the rich inhabit. Priya, the narrator, remembers Paro as one “flushed with drink and anger” (2). Paro is quite a luminary in the Bombay social scene. She is prominent in the fashion shows organized in aid of war widows, charity premieres for spastics, jam sessions and fete for worthy causes. Her photographs often appear in the social columns of the *Onlooker* or *Eve’s Weekly*. She is looking constantly sensual in all the issues. Avinendra, one of Paro’s lovers, explains that she, “. . . is a real individual. She has the courage of her convictions. She is not a kept woman; she is free. That is why I love her” (47). Paro’s hedonism and sexual liberty go against tradition and subvert the sexual freedom of men.

Paro is unconventional in her attitude to the Indian concept of marriage. She repudiates the traditional belief that marriage, be it happy or unhappy, is too sacred to be broken. She gets into wedlock with B.R. carrying the strange ideology that marriages sound too good to last. As Paro declares, her marriage soon ends in divorce. Since the marriage is based on mere infatuation and not
love, it does not warrant durability. B.R.’s unfaithfulness annoys Paro that she unhesitatingly divorces him and thus rejects the tradition that insists on a compromise at all situations in married life. Paro’s daring act of throwing away her husband is a rebellious step against male-domination.

Paro is a woman of guts that she is least worried about her divorce. She shows more interest in caring her physique and is keen on making herself presentable at all times and in all places. She lives in open adulterous sin with Bucky Bhandpur, test cricketer and scion of a princely family. She has no sense of shame about her free sexual life. It does not affect her social status in any way. The society looks at her with admiration and considers her presence in their midst a matter of pride. Priya, her voyeur comments:

This is the Paro who is but recently liberated from marriage and convention; she is still convinced that she is as young and desirable as she ever was Life has not tired her – she is undiminished . . . she’s left a husband and a lover, she has a small son of ambiguous parentage. She is a conversation piece at dinner parties and it is considered daring and chic to know her. (Paro 26)

Paro is neither chaste nor submissive as is expected of a woman. She indulges in whimsical social extremes and crosses all limits set for Indian women. In her quest for sexual variety Paro becomes a nymphomaniac. Aptly called the “Madonna of the garbage heaps”, she shops from man to man to seek
satiation in carnal contacts (81). The patriarchal society allows many women for men, but Paro proves it out-of-date and shows that women can exercise the same privilege without shame. Commenting on her forwardness, Mohan in his critical analysis of Paro writes:

Feminism is making through her with all the castrating kicks to a man’s mind and the writer . . . makes Paro not just a model of feminism but of a woman, who trusts herself, keeps pride and humanity even in terms of faithlessness to men. She outdoes the woman’s liberal movement in making her stronger than what it embodies. . . . She is not merely a symbol of ‘dreams of passion’ . . . But she represents the fictional countering force against the social hypocrisy of the time-killing subculture of Delhi and Bombay. (140)

Paro’s passion and promiscuity in her marital life become emblematic of the struggle for liberation from the contracting socio-cultural environment which binds an Indian wife to the societal taboos and impinges on her self. She declares, “I am myself . . . and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person” (48). Just as Ammu in Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things emerges as a rebel by challenging the andocentric notions of her society and becomes a symbol of all that the men folk do not want her to be, Paro upsets patriarchy and asserts her individuality.
If Paro is an extremist in her rebellion, her friend Priya is a mild militant. Priya’s marriage is a typical example of arranged marriage. With a view to ensuring security, position, and comfort, Priya opts for arranged marriage with Suresh. When the proposal from the Delhi based lawyer comes for Priya, her photograph along with a resume of her “many skills and talents” is sent to him and “he found fault with neither” (20). Within a week Priya is married to Suresh. She has no particular reason to fret about the marriage. Yet she is not satisfied with her marital life. She acknowledges:

My marriage was middle-class one, much as any other . . . My husband was a virgin, and did not seem to notice that I was not . . . Suresh unburdened all his ambitions, his hopes and dreams to me. He wanted to prove himself, to make it. Now that I was his wife, he wanted to ensure for me every possible happiness that he could provide. (Paro 21)

Like Paro, Priya too realizes quite early in life that men are to be used for women’s personal situations. Hence, when she is shown the photograph of Suresh leaning against a car, her calculative impulses start working and she gives her consent to marry him. Even before Suresh approves of her photograph, Priya conceives plans of manipulating her husband to lead a life of her whims and fancies. Priya “was caught in a whirl of feverish planning and anticipation” (20). Her colleagues are a little disappointed to hear that it is an arranged marriage. Even Priya is not happy with this marriage for she describes him contemptuously as “an owlish youth leaning on a Standard Herald
car” (20). Even after her marriage, she longs for B.R. while her sensibility disapproves of it as against feminine morality. “But my head would tell me that I had not got such a bad deal after all” (21). Though she has nothing to find fault with Suresh, she yearns for Paro’s husband.

Priya violates the “one-man-one-woman” norm of the middle class Indian society in her aspiration for a modern life. She renews her earlier liaison with B.R., her ex-boss and considers the experience to be a middle-aged revival of dreams. Her adultery, an objectionable issue in her society, does not give rise to the apprehension in Priya that her husband may find it out. She enjoys every moment of her extra-marital relationship without any tinge of guilt. At the same time she is watchful to convey the image of an ideal wife, cook, housekeeper and host. It shows Priya’s power to turn the value-system of male-dominated society upside down. Priya’s description of her second brief stint with B.R. explains her fearless denial of the ethics of a traditional wife. She brags:

I would meet B.R. almost every evening, and have dinner with him, with wine, candlelight, roses and all the trappings of covert remnants. We would make love in anonymous hotel rooms. I would punctuate his appointments and draft short memos of passion in his absence. . . . It was a second youth, a middle-aged revival of dreams. I had never even dreamt of such passion, and I kept delaying the inevitable return to Delhi and Suresh’s clumsy,
hateful arms. . . . Bombay held me in thrall. Those were the happiest days of my life. (Paro 39-40)

Priya’s crafty transgression is an intentional retaliation against the male privilege of extra-marital enjoyments. Her husband gives her a mild homily that “it is not good for women from good families to be talked about” and reassures his absolute trust in her (44). Priya who is confident of manipulating Suresh the way she likes, refuses point blank of any wrong sexual relationship. She is able to get a reprieve from her otherwise gullible husband. Her subtle handling of the situation dispels his doubts about her. Priya’s sway over her husband is effectively expressed when she comments on his gullible nature, “… his suspicions quite allayed, the poor fool” (45).

What Priya does in her life qualifies her to be called an emancipated modern woman who has shed some of the inhibitions imposed on woman in the man-made social order. In the middle class families educated women have no independent role to play. But Priya proves herself to be different by adopting western life-style and keeping a job after marriage. After her miscarriage, in order to escape the boredom, Priya takes up a part-time job in her friend’s book-shop in the Oberoi hotel despite her husband’s objection. Her behaviour upsets her husband and he objects to her untraditional practice, “Priya, think of my position in society. Why, people will think – doesn’t her husband earn enough for her to take up such a job?” (100) But Priya is firm in her revolt against the conventional belief that man is for the field and woman is for the kitchen. As Betty Friedan in her book, The Feminine Mystique attacks the
society which holds that "truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights, the independence and the opportunities", Priya opposes the patriarchal denial of a career for women by picking up a job after her marriage (43).

Priya is a rebellious individual who is obstinate in achieving gender equality. She decides to take up a job without waiting for her husband’s permission. She gets a salary of one thousand rupees, yet she takes money from her husband for her personal expenses and calls it a “legal due” for having married her. She has been accumulating all her salary in her personal account. Suresh feels that his wife working in a book shop will affect his status. He argues that he has a prestige in the society as a lawyer and her stubbornness to work spoils his reputation. But Priya’s rebellious mind thinks along with the journalist and Zee News editor, Saxena who promulgates, “... women must realize that they have to save themselves. Unity, firmness of purpose, courage, self-determination and assertiveness are to be developed. The silence has to be broken” (24). Priya perceives no harm in breaking through the crush barrier that debars women from asserting their rights and limits their progress in life.

Gudiya in the novel, Gods protests against the predicament of the marginalized courtesans. She sets high aims to attain a recognizable position in the society. In the process of erasing her low status, she violates the traditional ways. She disobeys the elders and marries the man who she loves. She justifies her choice:
I was not blind to the realities of Kalki’s nature, nor had forgotten the lessons of my mother, the inept prostitute, with her pitiable habit of falling in love. In spite of my total and consuming infatuation, I understood well that there was something both noble and base about Kalki. (*Gods* 188)

Though Gudiya’s marriage is love-cum-arranged, it is no way different from the other types of marriage treated by the author. After marriage, Gudiya leads a miserable life. She is unhappy about Kalki’s habit of drinking and borrowing money. Wishing to become a millionaire one day, he invests his entire salary on lottery tickets. Gudiya is aware of his disagreeable nature; yet she cannot break off the marriage as he is not absolutely bad. Gudiya gives her ornaments to Kalki to enable him to go to Bombay in order to try his luck in the film world. But Kalki gets lost in the tinsel world and is heard of no more. She remains self-possessed even after she loses her husband. Her desperate married life cannot dispel either her deep faith in life or the force to resist distress.

Phoolwati in the same novel is a sharp contrast to the traditional housewife in the Indian household. She exemplifies how a woman with valour can have mastery over her husband and rebel without transgressing feminine limits. Her married life is an instance of the reversal of the patriarchal domination. Phoolwati, the vigorous woman is afraid of nobody and nothing. She is bold enough to kick her husband when he gets drunk and attempts to bully her. “Afraid-shaafraid nothing. Your grandmother used to call me an
avatar of Durga. Even when that Shambu used to get drunk and threaten to beat me up, two kicks on his bums would settle him and teach him some manners” (106). And she does not behave as a stereotype wife would have been when Shambu is murdered. His death does not evoke the traditional wails of grief and helplessness from Phoolwati. On the contrary, she rejoices in his murder as she has never liked him for his rakish tendencies and feels like rewarding the murderer for giving the fellow his due.

A measure of Phoolwati’s grit may be witnessed in the manner in which she deals with the slum bully, Sundar Pahalwan, her second husband. Like the grandmother in the novel, Phoolwati too is not cowed by the bullying Sundar Pahalwan who somehow tends to lose his aggressive hauteur when he is in her presence. She shows courage and anger while dealing with him. The volatile Phoolwati marries him on certain conditions and keeps him properly reigned in. She remains in control of affairs and proves to the society that women can sustain without male support.

Parvati in Himalayan is one among those non-stereotype wives created by Gokhale. She is portrayed as a character bearing the dual image of a patient wife and of a woman who breaks tradition by her flirtatious nature. Parvati has an arranged marriage with Lalit Joshi when she is just twenty. Ignoring her sexual dalliance with Salmon, a Muslim boy and flirtation with Mukul, her adorer, Parvati’s uncle decides her marriage with Lalit only because he belongs to his Brahmin caste. Lalit, the gay man is unable to provide any physical and emotional gratification to her. Parvati’s sexually liberated self cannot reconcile
itself to the sterile life she is forced to lead. She finds it claustrophobic to live in a sexually depressed marriage. The starved body and rejected soul finds fulfilment in an incestuous relationship with her husband’s brother, Raju. Parvati’s audacious perversity is a part of her rebellion against male prerogatives and a means of giving voice to the deplorable plight of the poor but beautiful Pahari women.

Rachita in *Shadows* is a rebel in accepting Anand, a man five years younger to her. Anand is twenty-six while Rachita is thirty-three. “It wasn’t only the arithmetic that was wrong” (5). A lecturer in English governed by vanity falling in love with a younger guy of no position is ridiculous and rebellious as well. Rachita–Anand love affair has been tumultuous with as much love as violence thrown in the courtship. The affair ends in his suicide. Anand’s recorded voice reveals the trouble of the match:

That’s just what I was saying! . . . That’s exactly what I was saying. The trouble with you is that you don’t bother to listen to me. The trouble with you is that you are so bloody self-obsessed. You are conceited, you are vain, you are frivolous. The trouble with you is that you are you! (*Shadows* 30)

Thinking that she would be ridiculous before the public, Rachita decides to get away from everybody. She fears that the disfigurement has sealed up her prospects in life. The possibility of an unsavoury publicity likely to be caused by the media and an unavoidable encounter with her students disturbs her. Her
wounded pride does not allow a humiliating experience. She takes the bold step of avoiding the madding crowd in the city and living in a lonely Himalayan village to cope with the circumstance. Rachita shows her protest against the oppressing men as well as women by opting for a withdrawn life.

Rachita’s knowledge of the history of the house where she has taken refuge reveals that it is a house crowded with the shadows of its former inhabitants and she is trapped. She finds herself in a situation which necessitates her struggle with the demons within and without to maintain her sense of identity as she stumbles on the edge of insanity. A situation which would have otherwise weakened and destroyed an ordinary woman is faced boldly by Rachita. Her case can be treated as an example of a woman’s success in challenging the human as well as the spirit world.

The eponymous character in *Shakuntala* regards marriage to be a leverage by which she can accomplish her purposes. She thinks herself to be a free woman after marriage. Unlike her stereotype orthodox mother, Shakuntala opts for a new life advocated by the *Bikkuni*. She finds inspiration in his words, “Arise. Commence a new life!” and continues with her rebellious journey (15). Thoughts of equality spring up in Shakuntala’s mind when she is abed with her husband, Srijan. “A man’s equal in bed, why could I not desire what men enjoyed: the freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek and perhaps to find . . . something?” (48) She curses the sexual and cultural taboos that shrink the days of conjugal pleasures. Her vehement protest is against the traditional belief in the defilement of women’s menstruation.
As the Hindu customs and beliefs are found to be so rigid and Hinduism itself is packed with do's and don’ts, she thinks of abandoning her religion and breaking the caste barrier. She disapproves of the glory attached to the learned priests and professes her own intelligence to her husband who always demarcates between a home-bound lady and a devout. She satirizes the trumpery of the priests of Kashi, their showy mannerism of flapping their *dhotis and their affected Sanskrit style. Infuriated by their pretentious, hypocritical talk, Shakuntala imitates their mincing ways. In answer to Srijan’s reprimand that she fails to be a docile and unresisting wife Shakuntala boldly asserts:

I was no uneducated hill woman who knew only how to clamber on rocks and climb trees! My brother Guresvara was a revered monk. Although we did not use the high language of prayer and ritual in our daily speech, I too had learnt how to construct declensions and conjugations in Sanskrit, been taught the proper mode of address for men, beasts and objects. (Shakuntala 50)

Though Shakuntala has not studied philosophy as her brother did under an *Advaita guru, she is aware of her knowledge of scriptures. She is confident that she “could argue with the scriptures, if only in my mind” (48). The rebellious thoughts and arguments of Shakuntala point to her protest against male hierarchy.
The caste barrier gets broken in the process of Shakuntala’s rebellion. Fish is one of the staple items forbidden to Brahmins. But Shakuntala heartily eats the seasoned catch of the fisherman friend. “I was not a shakahari like my brother Guresvara. My mother ate no meat or fish but Srijan’s household did not abide by any such rules” (64). She stoops to solicit intoxicating western drink and taste fish forbidden to high caste people. She wanders in the company of a low-caste woman, which is defilement according to Brahmins. Wearied of the slothful life at home, she often slips to the yonder woods to while away time with the fisherman and forgets the duties of a woman and a wife.

Shakuntala is exotic in her hunger for experience of the outside world. She dreams of the life of an itinerant wanderer. “I wanted to see, to know, to do. My ignorance irked me” (46). She hates the cocooned life that denies chances to see the outside world. She has not seen so far even an elephant. To show her protest against the tradition which prevents an unmarried girl or a married woman to move feely, she often goes to the abandoned hill temple and indulges in day dreams. She feels envious of the Buddha who escaped his palace walls to see and taste and feel the world filled with notes of curious wonder. Her mother-in-law’s freedom to go away from the family and follow the Buddha’s track appears covetous to Shakuntala. She knows that her mother-in-law’s escape is a violation affecting her husband and her young son. Yet, she longs for that freedom.
Disregarding the very fact of her precious pregnancy, she gets away from home to live life on her own terms. She abandons her duty and decorum as a wife. Feeling jealous of the handmaiden brought home by her husband, she desires to break all her societal restrictions to lead a life of pleasure with an impure, low-caste Greek traveller. “He is built to ride women and horses” (158). Shakuntala justifies her love for travel in terms of gender equality. She seems to question the system that allows men to travel and seek, but prohibits women from exposure to outside world regarding it unseemly and inappropriate for them.

Shakuntala revels in the complete freedom from rules and bonds. She is not exhausted of the continuous travel. “But I was intoxicated by this utter and absolute freedom, the constant movement, and I was ready to go on and on, until the end of the world if necessary” (136). In her pursuit of living a life of her liking, Shakuntala is reduced to a sexual oddity. She assesses herself as, “My body has abandoned itself to shame here. It hungers, lusts, contorts with pleasures that grow weaker and more desperate by the day . . . . I am nobody; I am a body” (161). Surely she seems to have forgotten that there is more to life than just sex. She resembles Paro who rebels against male hegemony and tradition by exercising her sexuality. The author in the course of the story comments:

She rode her pleasures with determination, denying the pain that rotted in the core of her self . . . . There is a dark shade that stalks us in all our lives, seeking our debasement. It is said that the food
we consume in our last life will consume us in the next: perhaps the seeds of Shakuntala’s karma carried in them the sad fruit of Yaduri’s disobedience. (*Shakuntala* 131)

Shakuntala’s quest for knowledge is as great as a bear’s hunger for honey. Nearchus, her travel companion is amused by her eagerness for the smallest scrap of knowledge or information. “You are a peculiar woman”, he said. “You find more pleasure in my tongue than in my kisses!” (136) The strange things such as loud laughter, filthy food and crude behaviour, she watches around weakens her mind at night, but with the day she regains the poise and confidence of a free woman.

After stepping out of the house to travel with Nearchus, Shakuntala calls herself “Yaduri” which means a woman’s private part. But Shakuntala introduces herself by that name not realizing at the moment that the word Yaduri is symbolical of sexuality. “I was Yaduri now, I had abandoned both Srijan and Shakuntala” (121). She just knows it to be the name of an old woman who had sometimes assisted her mother in her healing work. Kakkar, the psychoanalyst notes, “Sexual taboos are still so strong in some Hindu communities that many women, especially those in the higher castes, do not have a name for their genitals” (20). Since Shakuntala’s days with Nearchus as his mistress are known for her unlimited sexuality, her self-borne new identity of “Yaduri” might be understood as a mark of protest against the Hindu practice of ignoring the sexuality of women.
While the rebellious protagonists transgress the traditional order of love and marriage to protest against sexual oppression and gender inequality, rebellion in mothers is perceivable in their neglect of duty. Traditionally, “motherhood is more than the pretty picture you see of a tender woman bent over the baby she is feeding at her breast. A mother has to walk strange and tortuous paths” (Hariharan 88). In the post-modern society where there are no absolutes and certainties any more and even the traditional notions of child-rearing and bearing are undergoing a paradigm shift, the definition of a mother is also changing. The image of the mother as presented in the scenario of Gokhale’s fictional world is in contrast to that of the traditional mothers who are expected to be just sacrificial goats or saint-like figures with a beatific smile.

The term “mother” in the Indian context is synonymous with affection and real concern for one’s children. Mitchell, the British psychoanalyst and social feminist observes, “it is within the role as mother and housekeeper that woman finds the oppression that is hers alone. As this defines her, so any movement for the liberation must analyse and change this position” (13). Gokhale’s Paro provides an instance of this revolution. Paro’s unconcerned attitude as a mother reflects the change in the traditional definition of maternal love. She “was, of course, an indifferent mother” (33). Leaving Aniruddha, her son of dubious parentage with Lenin, one of her lovers, she makes visits and attends parties. Unbothered about the “withdrawn and retiring child,” she just commands Lenin, “Just look after Junior and see that he has his dinner. I’ll just
have a paan and return” and roams around with Shambu Nath Mishra, one of the most controversial politicians of the day (80). Lenin has been playing the surrogate father to Paro’s child during her little jaunt to the States. The pathetic condition of the boy is touchingly presented:

She [Paro] was utterly miserable, and so was young Junior, who no one ever called by his proper name, Aniruddha, and whom no one even noticed these days. The only person Junior could share his misery with was Lenin for, over the years, Junior had come to accept Lenin as a familiar part of the landscape” (Paro 85).

Gudiya’s mother in Gods does not conform to the definition of maternal behaviour by the social system. Like her mother, she is a courtesan and an unwed mother. Hence, Gudiya is left to guess who her father may be. She takes into consideration her complexion and makes guesses of her father. The “wicked waylaid mother” is an exceptionally beautiful woman (23). Women practising the trade of a courtesan rarely follow moralistic principles. Gudiya’s mother too leads an unscrupulous life. She is “the inept prostitute, with her pitiable habit of falling in love” (188). She elopes twice, first with a harmonium player who “decamped with her luggage and her jewellery” and then with the beggar, Riyasuddin Rizvi (8). Her way of life creates an inferiority complex in her daughter. She is a representation of degenerating motherhood.
Just as dereliction of duty as a mother is unpardonable, the blame of achild who slips up or brings a bad name to the family is squarely laid on themother. Parvati’s mother in *Himalayan* is blameworthy for her daughter’smisconduct. Her irreligious life has negative impact on her daughter that shetakes courage to flout religion and tradition. Talking on her affair with Salmon,the affirmed pleasure-seeker, Parvati refers to her mother:

> My mother was atypical in that she had completely lacked inreligious feeling. She always looked more than a little scornfulwhen confronted with the pious sentiments of our Jeolikote neighbours... The fact that I was a Hindu Brahmin girl andSalmon a Muslim did not therefore strike me as any impedimentto our union. (*Himalayan* 29)

Gokhale’s disapproval of the error-prone mothers is conveyed throughParvati’s displeasure at her mother’s loose morals. After the death of herhusband, she indulges in liaison with Shrikrishniji, the tenant shop-keeper.Parvati is horror-struck to see her mother’s weirdness. The traditional beliefthat “mother” is another word for sacrificial affection is seen overthrown by themodern mothers in Gokhale’s novels.

The only character of Gokhale representing the geriatric rebels is Ammi,thegrandmother in the novel, *Gods*. It is a religious satire that highlights themachinations of the grandmother who transforms overnight from an agingMuslim *kothewali* who used to wear burqua and gharara and exclaim
“Hai Allah”, to a blessed Hindu saint, in a bid to the harsh realities of Delhi’s street life (17). The novel built around the time of Babri Masjid issue presents the woman as a rebel against religious rigidity. Her rebellion lies in the grit, determination, assertiveness, and resourcefulness displayed in the teeth of adversity. Her courage and diplomacy in dealing with the rogue, Sundar Pahalwan evokes praise. A similar character is found in Arundhati Roy’s Baby Kochamma in the novel, *The God of Small Things*. Kochamma is a first generation woman who displays amazing power. Her being a woman never balks her to carry out devious plans. Likewise, Ammi, the grandmother proves herself to be a challenging woman. Her character is best summed up by Gudiya, “She was not the one to shed tears” and she “never wasted her time on anger” (6). She conforms to the postulates of the “New Woman”–the ideal concept formulated by the feminists.

Before her transformation into a priestess, the grandmother runs a *kotha*. As is usual with courtesans, she becomes implicated in a murder case and is forced to leave her comfortable kotha along with her daughter and grand-daughter. They are in utter penury. They have no shelter to turn to and no human beings to lean upon for help. The old woman confronts the situation boldly. She establishes a temple almost single-handedly and appoints herself as the priestess of the temple. Her transformation from a courtesan to a holy mother is effected as easily as one changes a shirt. She tells her grand-daughter:
Arre Gudiya, these religions, what should I tell you, they are a type of fashion. Bombay cut, Calcutta style, London look. . . . And so, being a fashionable lady, my mother switched to burqas. Here, now, under this Peepal tree, perhaps this is better. In foreign countries, England, Amreeka, Christ is the fashion, so these phirangi women, they wear skirts and even trousers. Don’t trouble yourself about all this, or your hair will begin to fall like your mother’s. (Gods 10)

Commenting on the grandmother’s odd experiences of sex, crime and blasphemy, Agarwal writes, “The spectacle of religion, crime, and sex walking hand in glove has always been fascinating” (873). Whatever is on the cards the grandmother is able to carry all before one. It is fascinating that she makes a positive use of the negative forces and like a catalyst, precipitates a change and hope for women of well-defined calculations.

The grandmother together with her acolytes Lila and Phoolwati constitute a world in which women live without any constraints imposed by the males. They confabulate, plan, and act according to their own wishes without getting bogged down by any social agents or forces. They seem to be in command of the situations they face and do not act as the passive receptacles of the male bounty or pity. Interestingly, the men who enter their lives of these women either get murdered or lead mild, subdued lives. When the grandmother dies, her last rites have been made a very big occasion as if a very important person has left the world. The public are informed that “she had attained maha-
samadhi, by voluntarily relinquishing her consciousness to the larger universe” (59). There is a business-like practicality about the old woman which enables her to come to grips with insurmountable troubles that dog her and her granddaughter’s life. The grandmother is a rebel who makes a success of her life in a highly competitive world. Venkataramanan in his review article “Arrested Flight” observes:

Ammi, who knows only too well that in certain social situations, religion is merely a convenient disguise to wear, begins her saintly career with a piece of purloined marble slab and a few pebbles . . . and a firm faith in her own ability to belt out soul-stirring bhajans. Her ascendance to magic status and relative financial security is swift and unstoppable. (33)

The first generation women represented by Ammi, the grandmother and Phoolwati are successful in their venture to resist harsh circumstances because they know how to channelize their resources in the right direction. Even when they break the conventions, they are led by a determination to reach their destination. The second generation women represented by the mothers are neither strong women with survival instinct nor extreme rebels. They are so-called mothers with a bias for their daughters. Their perpetration stigmatizes motherhood. Their unbecoming indulgence projects their opposition to the patriarchal postulates. All the mothers are not sacrilegious to motherhood. Shakuntala’s mother, an overly orthodox woman is an exemption. The third generation of women presented through Gokhale’s protagonists is more
assertive than the first generation but fails in the pursuit of self-fulfilment. Tempted by the world of glamour and excitement, they plunge into immature activities without thinking about the consequences. They indulge in unrestrained activities. They do not pay regard to the code of conduct that the society prescribes. They are governed by passions rather than principles. They have no body to rely on; no good mothers to emulate nor fathers to depend on. They are their own masters.

In their rebellion against the repressive gender-discrimination, male-domination, and crushing practices, taboos and beliefs, the young protagonists tamper with traditional values. Their erroneous methods of protest end in disillusionment. Ultimately, they become aware that their life of resistance and rebellion will not always fetch positive results. To their great shock, they realize that their rebellious trajectory has taken them to a regressive stage of life.