Regression
After years of suppression, we, as a nation, are discovering that we have the power of choice. So we make our choices more consciously today. However, some of us, intoxicated by this sense of personal empowerment, tend to go over the top a little. Add to this the fact that our levels of tolerance have decreased over the years, and you find more people taking impulsive decisions that they are hard pressed to reverse. (Nagaswami 4)

Gokhale’s protagonists justify their claim for gender equality by vindicating their guts to emulate men in any sphere of life, be it sexuality or spirituality; revelry or religion. They exhibit their resilience to break the traditional image of women by transgressing the ancient codes of conduct and stepping out of the boundaries drawn for women by men. They are least worried or shameful about their unfeminine steps ahead. Ultimately, at the extreme point of rebellion, the protagonists are disillusioned. They realize that they have no sense of fulfilment and their hare-brained violation of the age-old values in the course of their protest has given rise to more painful issues. “They move away from their own cultural environment and go to an alien land. But rather unfortunately, they neither adopt the values of the foreign land nor do they keep their links intact with their native land. . . . finally become nowhere women” (Josan 127). The protagonists of Gokhale find themselves in a similar
Towards the end of their pursuit, they become aware that being Indian women they cannot root out the basic values ingrained in them from their early years. Gaur observes, "In order to realize their ultimate goal of liberated self-hood, women often employ their sex, yet find it impossible to defy the traditional conditioning and constraint" (109). This statement can be applied to Gokhale’s protagonists who at the final stage of their rebellion understand that the socio-cultural norms of the Indian society are too deep-rooted for them to defy.

The rebels, who are cognizant of the steadfastness of the persistent traditional beliefs and ideals and the meaninglessness of rash resistance, come down to respect and safeguard native culture. The women who are in favourable situations take a reverse course to what they have left behind while the others are either forced to end their life or fated to die. The different modes of regression that come their way as the natural consequence of their preposterous thoughts and erroneous life are discussed in this chapter.

In their pursuit of social status and self-fulfilment, Gokhale’s women tamper with feminine values. They lead an unprincipled life and bring destruction for themselves. Their misconception of women’s rights, empowerment and freedom puts them in the wrong track. They realize their efforts against the partisan attitude of the society end in vain. They attach little importance to discipline and regulated life and act without vision of the consequences. They progress through halfway in their attempt of liberation, but become frustrated in the end. They become conscious of their folly of negating
the norms of traditional behaviour prescribed by Indian culture and regress to the earlier way of life.

The word "regression" has layers of meanings. It is synonymous with arrest, blow, check, defeat, disappointment, hindrance, misfortune and set back. In common usage, "regression" means return, withdrawal, reversion or retrogression. *ENCARTA World English Dictionary* defines the term "regression" as, "reversion to less mature or earlier state, often involving the appearance of forms of behaviour associated with childhood" (1582). The word is used in various branches of study in different contexts. In Psychology, "regression" signifies return to the previous pattern of feeling or behaviour. In Freud's version:

... in all probability this 'regression' wherever it may occur is an effect of a resistance opposing the progress of a thought into consciousness along the normal path. ... It is to be further remarked that regression plays a no less important part in the theory of the formation of neurotic symptoms than it does in that of dreams. (eNotes)

The researcher has used the term "regression" in three different shades of meaning—reversion to what is left behind, shift toward a lower state and recoil from the quest to perish. Of the different characters of Gokhale’s delineation, Priya and Gudiya exemplify regression by accepting what is left behind while Parvati and Rachita represent regression involving a shift from a high-profile to a low-profile. Paro and Shakuntala degenerate themselves and
recoil from their respective quest. All the regressed women divest themselves of their libertinism and return to the anchorage of Indian “roots”.

In the process of regression, some of Gokhale’s women characters return to their earlier pattern of life as they consider it more comfortable relatively; some others go mentally deranged and yet others encounter death. Priya, a middle class educated working young woman feels tempted by Paro’s hedonistic western life-style. Like Paro, she aspires to liberate herself from marriage and convention. She plays the dual role of an Indian wife and an adulteress which leads to a separation from her husband. On her realization that there is nobody to show real concern, she comes back to her husband but with a new understanding of married life.

The story of Gudiya also ends with a return, but not to her husband. She has her own will and way and knowingly marries a man of coarse nature, solely for his handsomeness. But the marriage is not successful. Yet, before allowing her life to disintegrate, she returns to the abandoned temple precincts to live with Phoolwati, her grandmother’s disciple. Parvati, once a smart young woman is reduced to the state of a neurotic. Her compulsory marriage with a gay man results in marital discord and libidinal relationship. Just when she learns to endure the homosexuality of her husband, he dies and Parvati’s life ends in schizophrenia. Rachita Tiwari, holding a dignified place in the society as a lecturer is completely isolated from the familiar world. Since the acid-attack disfigures her face, she withdraws from the vengeful and oppressing city life to the remote childhood home and lives the life of a recluse.
Paro and Shakuntala fail miserably in their quest for fulfilment. Their resistance to repression results in their vengeful revolt against the sexual liberty of men and domesticity of women. They become hedonists in the course of their resistance. Their sexual hedonism which forms the hub of their pursuit ends in suicidal and accidental death respectively. Disillusioned and disgusted with her life, Paro denies a fulfilling life to herself and destroys her own life. She meets with the fate usually reserved for all ego-centric sensualists. Shakuntala's self-indulgence is punished with cruel death. All Gokhale's protagonists thus fit themselves into the theme of regression in one sense or the other or in more than one meaning.

The life of Priya in the story, Paro: Dreams of Passion is a case of study in resistance and regression. Priya is unconventional and protesting in the course of her life but on realization of her futile attempts to assert herself, she gives up her bizarre life and resorts to the traditional mode of family life. She marries Suresh, a rich lawyer for convenience and keeps extra-marital relation with her ex-lover and Paro's husband, B.R. Her house-keeping is a deliberate imitation of whatever little she could glimpse of the liberated Paro and her home, "... the potted plants on the balcony are looked after with a religious favour, afternoons are spent in leafing through the magazines and sipping tea holding the cup daintily ... little finger held artistically away" (118). Following Paro, she attempts to liberate herself from her middle class pseudo-morality by means of manipulating the opposite sex. She longs for the grace, beauty and harmony represented by Paro.
Priya's domesticity, her miscarriage, and her husband's dallying with Paro disturb Priya's psyche so much that she launches her protest exerting unfair means. "I felt tired, and nauseated, and disgusted, and defeated" (126). Priya takes up a job against the will of her husband and resumes her extra-marital affair with B.R. to escape boredom after her miscarriage. But neither the job nor B.R.'s love can give substantial satisfaction. Hence, "I abandoned . . . the escape routes thereof" (118). She directs her attention to the unending trivia of housekeeping. Yet loneliness cannot be defeated. Priya is startled to realize that oppressive loneliness is her sole companion. Without anyone to love her, she feels bored and her effort at mindless survival leaves her physically exhausted. She falls a prey to hypochondria which encouraged by an unethical doctor, leaves her to all practical purpose an apathetic person. She expresses her state of sullenness:

I realized suddenly that I was quite alone in the world. I had nobody, but nobody, who loved me, liked me, or even cared for me. . . . I was tired, and bored, and exhausted with the effort of mindless survival. . . . I felt constantly ill, and even found a doctor who pandered outrageously to my hypochondria, so that I was constantly benumbed by the consumption of millions of tablets and pills. My mental and physical states would co-relate to the degree of absorption of the various chemicals in my bloodstream, so that I was to all practical effect an absolute zombie. (Paro 118)
The letter Priya receives from her old friend, Mary probably saves her from a nervous breakdown and speeds up her regression. “Mary’s gregarious letter was like a vision, a reminder that in some distant world people were normal, friendly, relaxed, happy, cheerful . . .” (120). Priya feels happy to hear that her friend is happily married and has four children. In her wish to be happy like Mary, she ruminates on the routes to her husband’s heart.

Priya finds herself in an emotional crisis before she could deal with her plans of recasting her cracked life. Her adultery and her intention to publish her diary that contains Paro’s sexual history are discovered by Paro. The disclosure widens the cleavage in Priya’s marital relationship. Paro accuses Priya of being a “sneak, little spy, bloody lesbo” (116). Suresh frowns at his wife’s unconventional step, “Writing about us like this is something, which, to my mind, no Hindu housewife would ever do . . .” (124). Losing control over her emotions, Priya flares at Suresh and Paro. On regaining composure, she tries to reassure Suresh of her faith and trust in him. But Paro’s seductive charms on him do not allow Priya a chance to pacify Suresh. Hence, Priya takes recourse to the impulsive reaction of walking out of home. However, urged by her personal needs, she returns home. She recalls:

I walked out of my home all right, but I didn’t know anywhere I could go to. I hadn’t met B.R. for ages; my mother was dead; my brother’s wife didn’t like me; I didn’t have any other friends, relatives or lovers. I walked around the park outside our house for a while, then sat down on a bench there. . . . The full round moon
shone behind the trees; the park looked beautiful and enchanting. A cricket sang incessantly in the hedges, and I felt strong, and whole, and not at all upset. In a while I discovered I needed to go to the toilet. After a little hesitation I decided to go home. . . . I went back home. . . . They [Suresh, Paro] looked very complete.

(Paro 126-127)

Priya regrets her return home. Yet, as she has nowhere else to go, she stays there to continue to live as the wife of Suresh. In the course of her husband’s cross-examining, she inadvertently admits her love for B.R. and her intention to publish her voyeuristic diary and invites troubles for herself. “In that case I think we would be best advised to live apart’, he said, and his voice had the ring of finality. I realized I had been entrapped by cross-examining double-talk” (129). Like any husband would do, Suresh expresses his consternation over Priya’s objectionable doings and demands a separation. Priya unwillingly leaves for Bombay and suffers loneliness, “I felt alone and not at all confident” (131). Unable to bear emotional alienation she attempts suicide twice, but in vain.

Priya muses over the happenings in her life; the intellectual response to the situation mirrors her psychological conflict. On the one hand, she aspires for modernity but on the other hand, she cannot wipe out her middle class sensibility. Her justification of her own extra-marital affair with Paro’s husband and inability to tolerate her husband’s disloyalty to her provide an ample proof of her emotional inconsistency. Her introspective analysis of her
situation reveals that as long as a middle class Indian woman cannot root out her middle class morality, for a woman like Priya facing abject loneliness, the option of going back to her husband is better than any other choice of living. The new knowledge impels Priya to return home.

The other forces which hasten Priya’s regression are the discovery of the masked love of B.R., her ex-lover and the new found wisdom in the books she had read in the past. Unable to bear her loneliness, Priya goes to B.R. anticipating that his love would heal her frustration. But the dream collapses at the startling news of his proposed marriage with an Australian girl, who he really loves for the first time. His indirect confession of the feigned love he has shown to her so far alerts her to the existence of the pleasure-seeking humbugs like B.R. “I thought, in a tired sort of way, of my life. I thought of B.R. and Suresh, and Lenin. And I saluted Paro’s courage” (151). Apart from this disillusioned experience, the observation in the beloved novel, Rebecca, “Rebecca had after all, done nothing wrong . . . Rebecca’s only fault was that she was strong, stronger than Max!” influences her deeply (137). This knowledge “held the blinding flash of revelation” and turns up Priya’s entire system of values (137). In addition, her reading of the remorseful stories of thwarted love, parental misdemeanour and dark family secrets narrated in the Hindi romantic literature brings it to her awareness that “the heroines were torn only by contrition and remorse” and drives her to resolve, “‘I am an Indian woman,’ I told myself, ‘and for me my husband is my God’” (137). Above all, Paro’s suicide in the end brings a note of warning to stay on to her traditional
limits. Priya gathers from the different experiences that as an Indian woman nurtured by a hoary cultural tradition, she must equate her husband with “God” himself. She learns to respect the Indian concept of marriage and the “one-man-one-woman” formula.

Priya’s experiences in her rebellious pursuit of emancipation teach, “The trouble with these Indian men is that they’re all after one thing only” (152). The revelation prepares Priya to regress and cope with the reality. She makes a plunge to go back to her husband. Suresh, referred to as an “owlish youth” now appears to be gallant, handsome, and brave in her dreams (20). Aiming at a long and happy married life, she writes piteous letters to Suresh begging his indulgence and pardon. However, he concedes to her last telephonic appeal, “Can I return home please?” (151) Priya’s return to her husband is interpreted diversely by critics. As Anand in his critical essay, “Paro: A Psychological Approach” puts it, Priya “returned home victorious in her struggle with modernity, acutely aware of her roots” (211). She realizes that despite her little acts of protest she is an Indian wife and returns home to live out this philosophy using strategy.

Priya’s joyous return to her estranged husband is interpreted as an affirmation of the real worth of middle class morality and the institution of marriage. According to Srivastava:

And Priya’s ‘acceptance’ by her husband does not amount to any magnanimity on his part. The fact that Suresh tells Priya that they can give their marriage another trial is suggestive of Suresh’s
acceptance of her in a manner an estranged husband would return to his wife and home with no feelings of guilt attached. (108)

Priya’s story, however, clearly establishes that the middle class woman can only live within the bounds of her social norms. Priya is not able to positively assert her will. She falters in her attempt to liberate herself and cannot reach the same level of “emancipation” as Paro does. She therefore gives up her attempts of liberation from marriage and convention and decides to conform to tradition. It matters little, whether she does so through choice or compulsion or conviction. Priya’s retreat to her original life suggests the enduring value of the basic cultural mores and the meaninglessness of perverted resistance.

Gudiya representing the third generation women in Gods, Graves and Grandmother is beset with regression of fortune. She has been “enjoying gaja-kesari yoga” (propitious period of fortune as stated in astrology) for three years since her arrival in Delhi (213). After her marriage with Kalki, a man of her choice, she finds herself in self-bred predicament. Repressed by the factors of her courtesan lineage, the fake religion of her grandmother, and the longing for maternal affection and social recognition, Gudiya becomes a rebel. She speaks tauntingly to her teacher and refuses to take the help from Roxanne Lamba, her school principal and discontinues her studies. As a girl, Gudiya intensely resents her religious surroundings and longs to somehow break out into a new life. This aspiration takes her astray from tradition and the long standing customs and practices.
Gudiya drifting towards modernity is quite contrary to the existing realities around her. In her love for a new identity, Gudiya erases her original name “Gudiya” and calls herself “Pooja Abhimanyu Singh”. In her adoration of beauty, the so-called mark of modernity and status, she falls in love with the handsome Kalki, a man of coarse nature, who possesses nothing other than his handsomeness. Enticed by his gait and the white horse he rides on, Gudiya yields herself to his ravenous emotions and gets married to him. Since his love for Gudiya is materialistic, the marriage brings nothing but misery. She begins to feel her mistake in choosing Kalki as her husband. The disappearance of her girlish infatuation for Kalki and her natural resilience marks the regression in her aggressive life journey.

Gudiya learns from the odd experiences of her life that life is more than evanescent pleasures, tinsel dresses and fancy names. Under the pretext of supporting Kalki to become a popular personality in the film world, she sends him off to Bombay and retrieves herself from his tortures. She constantly feels tired and depressed. However, her feminine sensibility to cope with traumatic situation wards off a disintegrating end that is similar to that of Paro and Shakuntala. Gudiya’s retrogression almost amounts to correction of her mistakes with the aid of Phoolwati, the disciple and devotee of her grandmother.

Gudiya passes through various kinds of experiences that bring about modifications in her personality and her approach to things. She herself is puzzled to see the different faces in the many mirrors fixed in the beauty
parlour. The many faces seem to stare back and ask Gudiya, “Which of them was me?” (233) Gudiya could barely recognize herself. Her grandmother, an erstwhile rich courtesan singer, moves to Delhi for it is a city where “a lot can be done” (9). A slab of marble and five round marbles are transformed into a place of worship by the soul-stirring songs of the grandmother. Since then Gudiya’s life takes on an extraordinary momentum of its own. Her pre-marital affair with Kalki, the vagabond bandwallah results in her pregnancy. This forms a set-back in Gudiya’s life of “wealth, power, and success!” (213). Gudiya’s three years of life in the temple precincts is characterized by what she longs for namely, wealth, power, and success. But it does not last long. Her free, untraditional sexual life with Kalki arrests her social climbing and since then she undergoes regressive experiences and paces the reverse track.

Gudiya’s wrong notions of life and life partner lure her into an apparently glittering world which from the angle of the regular social conventions is dark and dismal. The marriage of Gudiya and Kalki takes place after careful consideration of the auspicious moment, but the marriage fails. She faces difficulties of house-keeping and suffers untold agony. She is to pay her excellent physical health and the happy care free life in her youth as toll for being tied up in wedlock with Kalki. “Kalki’s ultimately coarse nature, his vanity and cruelty, wore me down to the extent that my considerable resilience seemed to have disappeared altogether” (216). When Kalki comes home drunk and ill-treats Gudiya using abusive words and giving blows, she remains passive. The reason is stated in her words, “Why I had been so afraid of Kalki?
Why had I let him beat and abuse me as I had done? One answer, of course was that he had been handsome beyond belief” (224). The only explanation she finds for her total submission is the magnetic handsome look of Kalki. She reproaches herself for her misconception of marriage and the undue value attached to sensuality. She comes to the conclusion, “married life is not everything. One can do a lot of service even as a single woman or as a single parent” (Manohar 184). The awareness of her frailties brings about her retrogression to the kind of sustenance that has been exemplified by her wily grandmother. Gudiya returns to her grandmother’s world where women get on without male support; where women are their own masters.

Phoolwati, Gudiya’s guardian after her grandmother’s death, cannot bear Gudiya’s set-back in her life of fortune. She keeps telling Gudiya to return to her house, but “some vestigial shards of pride kept me away” (216). When it is suggested that she can fend for herself by becoming the lead singer for a party-band, Gudiya expresses her helplessness to Kalki’s master, “I had been bequeathed with none of my grandmother’s multifarious talents. I seemed instead to have inherited only my mother’s propensity to get into trouble and unfortunate situations” (217). She determinedly looks cheerful, but “inside, there was a deep, unbearable fear that this was how my life might pass—in indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties” (217). Gudiya’s sense of fear is indicative of her vanishing recklessness and the arresting regression. The regressive blow of the unfortunate marriage, however, cannot ruin Gudiya. She takes comfort in the philosophy that is derived from burnt pain in her fingers,
“pain is the general principle in life” (220). Unlike an ordinary traditional woman, she manages to maintain a brave front.

Gudiya’s meeting with Lila, one of the few women disciples of grandmother influences her sensibility. Lila’s narration that she could become a free woman, unbound by her sons only after throwing her gold ornaments into Gudiya’s grandmother’s grave, strikes the germ of an idea in Gudiya. She sells all her gold and sends Kalki to Bombay to try his luck and become a film or pop star. Her act of giving away all her ornaments communicates the psychological regression of disinterestedness in the much dreamt of elevated status and ephemeral possessions.

Gudiya with her small daughter, Mallika at last returns to the once avoided temple surroundings to live a life of her own with Phoolwati. She feels relieved of her escape from Kalki. Yet she is not free from the thoughts of him. Her real predicament as she laments is:

I was married and yet not married; Kalki was most certainly there, somewhere, but he was no longer here, at home, to trouble and torment me, with the authority that our marriage conferred. . . . My mother had never had a husband. Neither, as far as I knew, 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. . . . And yet I had acceded immediately and inevitably to the conditionings of womanhood. (Gods 224)
Gudiya’s state of affairs is something unique in that she was married and yet unmarried. The unguided life and adverse circumstances cannot, however, irretrievably trap her. Kalki is no longer with her to trouble and torment her which, according to her, is the authority conferred on him by the virtue of their marriage. Gudiya recalls the unenviable position of her mother and grandmother who could not have their husbands. She also remembers that she had never known a father or any other models of masculinity to teach the lessons of dependence as a woman. Though Gudiya is unknown to an exemplary life, her experiences in life inevitably bind her to the stipulations of womanhood. Gudiya’s transformation from toughness to meekness is her real regression.

Gudiya’s way of life changes after Kalki has left. She is not quite happy. There is an aching sense of her husband’s absence. She cannot still admit, not even to herself, that she is glad to be alone again. Yet, she manages to make the best of the disintegrating situation. “I missed him, but I sensed in his absence an opportunity for growth, for escape, which I was determined not to miss. I loved Kalki, but love is not life, and the imperatives of survival pulled elsewhere” (224). It is true that Gudiya is much affected by the absence of her husband. Yet she is determined to take control of her disintegrating life, seeing in his absence a wonderful opportunity for personal growth and a chance for escape.
Gudiya hopes that with the passage of time she will be able to cover the disturbed memories “with a veil of fabulism and mystery” (240). She often remembers her grandmother and her outlook on life and takes strength from her homilies, “The world [is] just an illusion, something to be tolerated, something easy that passes like a hot June afternoon before the cool of midnight” (15). Except for Ammi, the grandmother, everything around Gudiya has retained a sort of recurring flux. So she accepts Kalki’s departure with resignation, and even a degree of relief. “On the whole I managed to maintain a brave front. I was ready for whatever came my way” (233). Though forlorn she is, her mental basis remains unshaken. Despite the loss of all relationships, she has a positive outlook, “I often dream about my mother, but she is elusive even there. Grandmother is dead, Roxanne is dead, Sundar is dead. Even Kalki is gone, but the end of the world is nowhere in sight” (240). She is confident that it is easy to live in the present. Her wish to live with her daughter is blatant. The failure of Gudiya does not let her down. She emerges as a phoenix from the debris of the past with a beautiful dream for the future which she wants to share with her daughter. A similar attitude is perceptible in De’s Aasha Rani, the protagonist in *Starry Nights*, who swears, “We are going to succeed and never look back” (233). Like Aasha Rani, Gudiya would not allow the unpleasant past to stand in the way of her burning desire to succeed. “Rendering the past acceptable if not accountable is a talent I inherited from my Ammi” (240). Gudiya’s inclination to look back to the past signals regression in purpose.
Phoolwati who lives alone after the death of her husband is happy to take care of Gudiya. Both of them live in perfect harmony and friendship, with mutual love and affection, supporting and nurturing each other. The gynocentric world they inhabit is presented as self-sufficient in which the male support is neither wished for nor missed. Phoolwati has an affectionate and protective attitude towards Gudiya, the unfortunate young woman. Gudiya in turn lends emotional sustenance to Phoolwati, the widow. The mutual backing reflects the concept of sisterhood which is one of the features of the feminist ideology. An alternative model of living that does not lean on male protection is offered by Gokhale for women through the regression of Gudiya.

Psychological mode of regression is identified in Gokhale’s A Himalayan Love Story and The Book of Shadows. The decline of Parvati in Himalayan from good sense to insanity conforms to the pattern of regression. Parvati is a promiscuous character connected with a couple of torrid affairs and an unhappy marriage with a gay man, Lalit Joshi. Dazzled by Salmon’s imposing personality, she enjoys sexual revels with him and a bonded friendship with Mukul Nainwal and Lalit Joshi. The friends “attended upon her like pageboys and paid her homage; when I [Parvati] was a princess and Salmon my prince” (37). This life of bliss soon gets contaminated. “Everything about the past year fell swiftly and precisely in place” (37). The deep friendship degenerates as Salmon suddenly vanishes and Parvati begins to flirt with Mukul. It undergoes further change when she has had to marry Lalit. Hurt by Parvati’s rejection, Mukul leaves for Hong Kong. During his formal visit to
Lalit and Parvati, the latter discovers “a lewd construct” behind the noble and passionate friendship between her husband and Mukul, her adorer (37). She asks herself, “Which one of us would have foreseen this corruption of hope and happiness?” (37) The regression in the relationship between Mukul and Parvati and the change in the earlier bonded camaraderie among Parvati, Mukul and Lalit reflect further retrogression in each of their lives.

Nemesis falls on Parvati’s sexual disorderliness. The irresistibly passionate Parvati learns to resist her temporal passions and urges in the course of her sexual rebellion. She finds the answer for her firmness of mind in Mukul’s eyes pleading for absolution. She gives a picture of herself thus:

I was defined, formulated, forgiven: I was a Hindu woman, a married woman. I would tenaciously live out the role, safe in its unremitting code. If I performed the motions with enough fluency and ease, then perhaps within the confines of my neglected womb, I would find the inner space, the private territory, the strength to stage and execute a very private revolt.

(Himalayan 37)

Parvati resolves solemnly to live out her role as a Hindu woman by following its unremitting code. A nimbus of understanding suddenly falters between Lalit and Parvati. The new Parvati is a confident and happy woman. She cherishes the secret hope that one day they could become lovers, “confidantes, allies” (44). In a strange progress, she learns to dissemble and in
the process she becomes trained to love her husband. "I [Parvati] can in retrospect honestly say that by the time he died I had learned to love Lalit" (45). This cultivated habit of loving her husband is again a reflection of the conventional mind-set of Indian society. "You have been a good wife, Parvati," he [Lalit] whispered, 'a good and patient wife'" (45). Parvati's dual image of a woman who defies the cultural code by delving into sensual pleasure and that of a patient wife signals resignation to tradition. Her retrospection on her relation with her husband exhibits realization of her lapses in life.

Parvati, living in the plains of Bareilly as Lalit's wife, comes back to "Wee Nook" the house of her youth, as a widow. Before Parvati could realize her new decision to turn a new leaf with Lalit, the author introduces a regressive check in her amoral life. Lalit dies of galloping consumption. The pregnant Parvati becomes a widow. As prophesied earlier by a witch, she is reduced to the pale shadow of her former self. She wails like a child who wants to be reunited with its mother. She screams and laughs; her sanity wears away. Marital dissonance, social indifference and the consequent isolation cause signs of neurosis in Parvati. The unhappy marriage ultimately ends in schizophrenia. Parvati is lodged in a mental asylum. Her mental derangement is counted as Parvati's irrevocable *Karma. Parvati herself wonders, "if this was God's punishment for her sluttish behavior with Salmon, or if the sins of her mother were being visited on her" (36). Her widowhood and breakdown meet with no compassion. She is abandoned and sent out to the asylum at Bareilly. Mukul
Nainwal, Parvati's devoted and disappointed adorer, now married to a white woman, re-enters at this point from Hong Kong. He comes to know:

She [Parvati] was abandoned. She was in bad shape and no one wanted to have anything to do with her suffering. Fed up of her brooding presence and increasingly slovenly house-keeping Hiranand Headmaster had sent Parvati off to live with Lalit’s family. But the economic burden of a widow and her child had been too much for them, and she was dispatched to the asylum at Bareilly. *(Himalayan 138)*

Mukul is given to understand that Parvati is in bad shape, abandoned by her own kith and kin. Having been fed up with her slovenly housekeeping, her uncle sends her off to live with Lalit’s family. As they find the widow and her child a great economic burden, she is promptly dispatched to an asylum. After a brief period of angst-ridden mourning, Mukul leaves the deranged Parvati and her daughter Irra to the mercy of a loutish trio of vague relatives and rides back sad and lonely. He becomes aware that there is nothing he could do for them as “country conditions do not permit” (207). The economic backwardness of his native land of India and the rigid caste system of the Indians prevent Mukul from changing his plan of leaving for Hong Kong. Hence, it is manifest that Parvati will continue to be an abandoned woman. “Parvati, who in her youth showed some spark of promise, is now a lunatic” (54). These words of Parvati’s uncle aptly sum up her reduced status and regression in life.
Rachita, the protagonist in *Shadows* is another victim of regression. She flees agony but ends up in greater pain. She is a high-profile lecturer with a rebellious attitude to marriage and men. Rachita who enjoys life asserting superiority as a lecturer in a city college is brought down to a very lower state of a recluse. It is understood as Rachita’s regression. A braggart and a spoof, Rachita encounters a fall at the physical and psychological sense. In his review article “A Spirited Effort”, Venkataramanan, the journalist comments, “In the process, she seems to have posited a new Law of Conservation of Pain: it can neither be created nor destroyed, but only transformed from one form to another” (30).

Rachita is a lecturer in English in Mary and Jesus College at Delhi. Her vanity as a lecturer is referred to as, “Ah, the vanity of the young – and I was young then” (4). She takes pride in teaching rich young girls from “Punjabi Bagh” (4). She is a humbug. “I was merely being clever, I was gassing a bit...” (4). Though not an expert in teaching, she professes to be a confident teacher and smirks at the students, “a class full of critical adolescents” (221). Rachita is merely trying to present herself as a clever person to the students. No wonder she is given to gassing which in the due course augurs regressive bathos.

Rachita is in love with a guy who is younger to her but it proves to be false. As she admits later, she has no real love for him. She sees no harm in keeping pre-marital contacts with her friend’s husband after the betrothal to her lover, Anand. Her unfaithfulness to her fiancé is the cause of her regression.
Her non-conformist perversion hurts him. Unable to bear her act of infidelity, her fiancé commits suicide. Anand’s enraged sister takes vengeance by throwing acid on Rachita’s face. This incident suddenly transforms Rachita from a smug, vain Lecturer in English into a confused recluse. In her assessment of her personality, she finds that her avengers have blemished her beauty but not her vanity. Rachita’s pride and her awareness of it presuppose regression that naturally falls on the way of assuming and arduous characters.

The acid-attack deforms Rachita’s face. She feels that her promising life is destroyed. “There was defeat here, and a loss of dignity” (5). Lacking in moral strength to face others, she withdraws from the Delhi scene and flees to her childhood home in the remote hills to hide her face and forget the incident. “Delhi appeared a wilderness of heartbreak and pain” (7). Far away from the city, she feels alienated in the “house of shadows”. She recalls the memories of the past and hallucinates off and on. The ghastly history of the house affects Rachita’s sanity. She is finally reported to suffer psychic neurosis which borders on regression.

The psychological pain and the physiological distortion compel Rachita to escape reality and retreat into her self. Such withdrawn state of life is a common pattern in the novels of Anita Desai. Her Sita in Where Shall We Go This Summer? goes to an island with the hope that it will provide a sanctuary for her tortured self as Rachita shifts to the mountain house to obliterate her painful past. Like Rachita, she is also disillusioned. The island seems as
suffocating as the city. It confronts Sita with a kind of primitive actuality that proves as unbearable as the reality that her home in the city spells.

The death of Anand does not affect Rachita in any way. She has no drop of tear to shed or no feeling of pity to express over his death. Rather, she feels relieved to see that she has escaped from tying up herself to an abnormal family. She never feels guilty of her infidelity to Anand. Rachita throws the blame on his family and his emotional instability. "Insanity obviously ran in their family, as also the tendency to take recourse to extreme action upon the slightest provocation. Just my luck" (6). She asserts that she is never responsible for the death of Anand. She, quite callously, attributes the death of the guy to the taint of insanity that is characteristic of his family. She shows the guts to conclude that not only Anand but his whole family is crazy. This extremity of behaviour indicates that Rachita’s arrogance will be very soon replaced by regression.

The house where Rachita takes refuge is crowded with shadows. Trapped within herself she feels the shadows of Captain Walcott and his mistress Dona Rosa and the other residents of the house closing in on her. She dreads dreams and reality and remains wakeful overtaken by shadows and voices from her past tenaciously gripping her and almost tyrannizing her. Her sole desire is to flee back. "My heart beat so hard, when I woke up my mind was blank, I was exhausted, and my one desire was to get away" (64). The surrealistic environment induces Rachita’s inclination for regression that she intends to strike a compromise with the world she once rejected. Standing at
the threshold of regression, she plans to go back to the city that has harmed her. However, the idea remains unrealized.

To keep herself sane in the house of shadows, Rachita needs to distract herself. Though she hates poetry, she reads the poems of Mahadevi Verma, one of the Indian “poets of the shadows” who “recoiled from the new realities of modern India and retreated into a regressive post-Romantic swoon” (71). The poems have a magical effect on Rachita in inciting regressive thoughts. Despite her efforts to keep herself sane and clear of the shadows, her alienation corrodes her psyche. In her illusions, Rachita sees unfamiliar and unpredictable colours. “I discovered a prism in an old drawer in the desk upstairs. When I looked through it, the world changed. I sat with the prism held close to my eyes, lost in the splendour and surprise of this new world” (74). Zenobia, her least favourite student with a flowing white beard, Lohaniju, the old cook reduced in age, and Anand with a friendly smile in her room are the other illusions that disturb Rachita. She realizes to her horror that she is suffering from progressive dementia and wants desperately to be sensible. She rings up a psychologist to solve her problem. “Doctor, I’m seeing things . . . things that aren’t there, I mean. I’m imagining things. I’m hallucinating. There is something wrong with me” (220). The doctor explains that in sensory isolation, the human input channels tend to become filled with discordant signal and people begin to hallucinate. Rachita immediately resolves to cure herself of the mental aberration and regain her normalcy. “I decided that I was suffering from progressive dementia, and resolved to telephone my sister, I wanted desperately
to be sane, to know and understand and belong to only one reality, one mode of belief" (228). The doctor’s confirmation of her mental illness and her own consciousness of it envisage Rachita’s gradual recoiling from the independent world of her quest.

It happens so little to Rachita in terms of events and developments. There is not much improvement in her worldly situation. “One thing is certain. I cannot teach again. Never ever can I summon the certitude to face a classful of critical adolescents” (221). As the acid-attack has broken down her beauty, she cannot face her students and there is no hope for Rachita to regain her lost position of a lecturer. Yet, somewhat liberated from the consciousness of her face, she treads the path of self-discovery, the only one anodyne for her pain. Barely managing to emancipate her withering mind from the tyranny of an autodidactic self, she takes her lessons from nature. The event of her instinctive, firm clutch at the nettles to avoid falling on her face brings to her knowledge that a “firm hold on anything, even reality, hurts less than a timid half-way encounter. Pain is a pre-condition to life, a prelude to joy. It is a teacher, not a tormentor” (70). Though pain remains unvanquished and constant, this new knowledge combined with the real happenings of the house keeper’s death and the unexpected visit of her least favourite student Zenobia with her boy friend facilitate resignation to the keynote of life:

... to be ourselves we must remain in control of our scripts. We must make and remake ourselves; we must possess and repossess our world, cast and recast our lot in every precious moment.
Above all, we must know what to hold on to, what to discard, in this radical flux which is life. (*Shadows* 229)

Rachita’s rebellious spirit becomes weak and she begins to analyze life in the traditional and philosophic light. She learns that she must remain in the control of the script of the drama of her life, recasting her lot in every precious moment. She also feels the necessity of knowing what is to hang on to and what is to reject in the fast changing life. She is desperate to go back to the city but cannot, for “Delhi seemed very far away, another world of dust, grime and vengeance” (70). She prefers the gentle Himalayan landscape to the madding crowd of the city. She upholds, “The very air here is different; it is thinner and purer than city air” (9). Therefore she resolves to spend her life in that house itself. In a sense, her resignation to the world of the spirit that symbolizes harmony between the body and the soul can be considered a sort of regressive rebirth for Rachita.

Rachita realizes that she has been humbled with the loss of her physical beauty. “The avengers of my vanity have broken me, humbled me with these small depredations of skin and bone and tissue, leaving me less than I was” (7). Once Rachita reconciles with herself, her trauma ends. Just as Sita in Anita Desai’s *Where Shall We Go This Summer?* gets awakened to the formula of “accept, face and live life”, Rachita’s solitariness awakens her to the same truth of life (105). With the gradual healing, Rachita regains confidence to face the world again. She begins to think normally and repents for what has happened. “My body had done what it should not have, and it has paid the price. . . . My
mind has now to negotiate a truce with the body, return from its exile and wanderings to the homestead of my limbs the hearth of my hungers” (219). She blames herself and her body. “It is not my body which has betrayed me it is I who have betrayed this body” (219). The world despised appears good that she thinks of bidding farewell to the house. But the sense of belongingness bids her to remain there. “Rachita Tiwari, touching thirty-four, forgotten as a person by the world, remembered only as a sensational story” (65). The protagonist who is just thirty four is already forgotten by the world. She keeps a low profile at the end of the story. She has ceased to be an individual with an “authoritative teacher’s voice” (221). Her regression from dignity to indignity vindicates the ineffectiveness of the mode of rebellious flight from the harsh realities of life.

Gokhale’s eponymous characters in Paro and Shakuntala face regressive incidents which drive them to withdraw, reverse, and die out. Paro who represents the fact of sexual indulgence amongst the highly westernized urban Indians is a woman of passions beyond fancy. “. . . for being thoroughly possessed by the Animus” Paro lost her sense of femininity (Jung 98). Her passions owe their inception to the incident of sexual abuse in her girlhood and her loveless marriage with a womanizer. Initiation into arbitrary sex in her girlhood and the sexual liberty of her husband cast down Paro. She becomes aberrant in her encounter with the opposite sex. She abandons all inhibition and liberates herself from marriage and conventions. “Her passion was very literal, that way, almost pornographic. She always used it as an instrument of warfare, to further her ends” (126). Paro possesses very strong passions which border on
pornography. She finds her sexual prowess, a very handy instrument of warfare to further her ends of liberation from the contracting socio-cultural environment which binds woman to the societal taboos and impinges on her self.

Like any exhausted gross sensualist, Paro is ultimately doomed to suffer from atrophy in emotions and cynicism. Her beauty ceases to cast a sway over men and regression sets in. “As she is narcissistic, she is unable to discern that sex is no substitute for happiness that sexual indulgence is coarsening and devitalizing rather than revitalizing” (Bharucha 67). She tries to take life in her stride, but is caught unawares. Gaur aptly comments on Paro’s regression after her rebellious phase:

Paro’s unsettled life can be interpreted as an impatient and poignant protest of a woman who was terribly alone and did not want to pilfer her identity in a man-made world, a woman in whose behaviour the luminous screen of non-conformist gestures have concealed an inner void which could not fill up despite innumerable relationships, a woman who ended up jeopardizing her life itself in the process. (107)

Paro exemplifies a reversal of sexual freedom. She adopts the most extreme step of practicing all that is allowed for men and endangers her life itself in the process of liberation. The objectionable sexual freedom enjoyed by her runs its course. She is disappointed at her vain pursuit of true love. As life
in Greece with the homosexual Loukas is sterile, she returns to her native place and renews her camaraderie with her ex-husband and ex-lovers. The happiness does not endure long, for she soon feels the blow of misfortune. She meets with an accident in a drunken drive. This tarnishes her beauty. The bitter realization that the power of her charm to sway over men is no longer on her side forces her to put an end to her meaningless sex spree. Chandra opines:

She had launched the struggle for her liberation, for self-definition trying to live life on her own terms, but the interiorized system overwhelms her, making her realize its potency and her own fragility and, thus, despair fills her heart which eventually results in suicide. (54)

Consumed by the sterility of rebellion and disgusted with the life of emotional solitude, Paro commits suicide. She slashed her wrists with a fruit-knife when everybody else was at the peak of enjoyment during a party and put an end to her hedonistic sojourn. Priya could read an immense dejection on her face as if she had realized the futility of her struggle. She describes the frustrated and penitent moments of Paro:

I can see her, staring moodily out of the panes, which had misted up in the winter cold. It was raining softly outside, and the cars on the street were wet flurry streaks of light. I think I saw tears in her eyes. Her hair tumbled over her face. She sat hunched up,
stony faced yet somehow more defenceless than I had ever seen her. (*Paro* 166)

Priya’s observation of Paro indicates her regressive moments. Paro’s sad look reflects her state of degradation from the position of social honour. Mohan in his critical analysis titled, “Semiotics of Feminine Ideology and the Adaptation of Zola’s Naturalism in Namita Gokhale’s *Paro*” draws attention to Paro’s rebellious extremity and the hard-pressed reverse to the other extremity of quietness. He states:

Like Becky Sharp and Sister Currie, she ascends to the top of the material and biological world only to find out the sterile emptiness of life. At the top there is nothing to go on; life is too naturalistic for any metaphysical reality and the only way out is to end life as Paro dies in the end. (107)

A woman keeping no sexual barrier is regarded a slut in the Indian society. She has to pay a dear price for her sexual liberty. Perhaps this rattling reality impels Paro to leave the world. Anand in his criticism of *Paro* finds a note of caution in the death of Paro and reflects, “In civilized societies there is no room for Paros…” (208). Paro’s story elucidates that women like Paro who are promiscuity personified cannot live in a civilized society with its own norms of sexual behaviour.
The uninhibited and liberated Paro who is able to entrap all men she encounters finds it impossible to nullify the social constraints. She is haunted by the feeling of injustice which generations of mental, economic and emotional slavery have ingrained in the feminine mind, yet she is not able to take on the world as a sovereign arbiter of her own destiny. Pathak in his critique titled, “Paro Dreams of Passion or Passion of Dreams?” notes, “In her bravado, she committed suicide, thereby creating “a void” in the life of those who had come into her contact. All her efforts to be “moving towards some kind of internal stability at certain critical junctures, came to nothing” (197). He understands that in a moment of reckless bravado she took her life. But her death created a feeling of emptiness in the life of those who had crossed her life. All her earnest endeavour to achieve some sort of internal stability came to naught.

Paro’s wayward journey ends in suicide. Commenting on her regressive destiny, Gaur says, “She had attained almost a celebrity status and was looked up to as the prototype of a liberated woman. But her ultimate rejection of the viable option to live . . . makes her flights from one extreme to the other less genuine” (107). Paro’s drastic step of committing suicide illustrates the futility of revolutionary bohemian protests in a society which has always tacitly supported campaigns to eliminate women who transgress the set limits of social conformism.
Regression is manifest in Paro’s emotional stance too. She is at the outset a sexual militant. She is a vain, touchy, and malicious character possessing the knack for trapping and enchanting the opposite sex. Yet, paradoxically she wants a man of great place who could hold her attention and glorify her abject emotional surrender. She wants to possess such a man completely and be possessed by him. Girls in the Indian milieu are nurtured on the myth of the saviour-hero. The Indian society cherishes the myth that a woman can realize her true worth and happiness only if she finds appreciation by a man. All women are systematically trained to seek the justification of their dependence on men. Even Paro who is known for her manipulation of the opposite sex turns back to follow one of her lovers. She invalidates the traditional concept of feminine dependence on men through wielding supremacy over them and also affirms it by stooping to the lowest level of being enslaved by Mishra. Her regressive behaviour is commented on by Gaur:

Her live-in relationship with Bucky Bhandpur was an assertion of her individual independence, her romantic affection for Lenin was a conquest for her attention-seeking and emotion-starved self, but her servile infatuation with Shambu Nath Mishra has to be read as a loud testimony to the psychological bondage of women. (106)

Paro flits like a butterfly in social circles but this life cannot be perpetuated for ever. Soon she is reduced to “social debris” (73). Being an exotic creature without any inhibition of the male world, she tries to put a brave
and liberated show. Pathak in his essay, "Paro Dreams of Passion or Passion of Dreams?" observes, "Caught up in the sybaritic social whirl of New Delhi Paro, cuts a swathe through the world of privilege and decadence" (196). Since she lacks commitment to any ideal or vision, she fails in her search for some kind of meaning from life and is forced to recoil and regress when her weird rebellion reaches its climax. A woman who hooks every male she encounters in eternal bondage to her is driven in the end to a forlorn condition having nothing to boast of and nobody to live with.

Similarly, in *Shakuntala*, the protagonist’s quest to live life on her own terms is reduced to her being an equal sexual partner of a low-caste foreign traveller. Caught up in a pool of domesticity, Shakuntala passes from a proud Brahmin wife to an irredeemable low-caste mistress. In her review, Nair observes:

> She calls herself Yaduri and rides off into the sunset with a Greek traveller. From a wife, she now is little more than a whore. There to slake lust and perhaps listen to the forlorn ramblings of a man tormented by his own secret demons. When they reach Kashi, the destination that Shakuntala has always ached to arrive at, they have to stay in the foreigner’s quarter. ("Shakuntala: Namita Gokhale")
In Nair’s view, Shakuntala’s association with the Greek traveller marks her degradation from a proud wife to a despicable whore. At Kashi, the place she had always longed to reach she had to stay in the quarters meant for low-caste foreigners. Shakuntala’s vengeful liaison with a low-caste foreigner brings dishonour to her grace as Srijan’s wife. She feels penitent and retreats to commence a new life. As destiny would have it, a bull attacks her to gruesome death. She is thus defeated in her endeavour to enjoy a life of free movements.

Just as Paro experiences regression in her sexual sway over men, Shakuntala too encounters regression in her protest against domesticity. Her husband brings home a handmaiden from his travels. Suspicion and jealousy possess Shakuntala. She reports, “I had always considered myself beautiful, until the day I met her” (65). Though she desires a free life like people of the West, she could not compromise with her husband when he brings home a beautiful woman to be her handmaiden. She violates tradition by abandoning home, her husband, duty, and decorum.

Torn by jealousy and driven by desire, Shakuntala leaves home and travels with a low-caste Greek traveller, Nearchus whom she meets by the holy Ganga. She revels in the complete freedom breaking bonds and barriers that tie up a woman to monotonous domesticity. She surrenders herself to a world of pleasures. Western customs creep into her life. She eagerly tastes wine designed to send the senses astray and complies with the wish of Nearchus. Shakuntala acknowledges, “We will celebrate our friendship and love by sharing the wine” (163). But restlessness soon compels her to forsake this
world as well. Her appetite for experience is no longer as strong as before. The realization of her sin and mistakes is symptomatic of her regressive mind.

Shakuntala broods on the meaninglessness of desire and perceives, "What is a woman’s desire? It is like the waxing and waning of the moon, incapable of constancy" (157). The change in her stubborn desire for travel signifies a check in her libertinism and regression from enthusiasm to slovenliness. She realizes her mistake of transgressing tradition. Born to an orthodox mother and brought up in a conventional atmosphere, she is quite familiar with the norms and taboos and the regular life-pattern meant for women in her village. Her unnatural behaviour and violation of tradition is quite deliberate. "It is the nature of night to follow day, and day to follow night. It is the nature of water to flow. It is the nature of women to have children and grand children and see them grow. There is a child in my belly and I [Shakuntala] have fled from our home" (166). She knows well that it is unbecoming of a wife to leave her husband and home, particularly during her pregnancy. But she unscrupulously steps out of home and feels penitent when left alone in the unknown world. The pensive moments of Shakuntala act as a catalyst in effecting a reverse journey home.

Kalidasa’s Shakuntala succumbed to Dushyantha’s advances and stood ashamed, abandoned, bewildered and suffered the consequences of passion. Similarly, Gokhale’s Shakuntala gives herself up to the desires of Nearchus and suffers the consequences of her sluttish passion. "My body has abandoned itself to shame here [Kashi]. It hungers, lusts, contorts with pleasures. . . . I am
nobody; I am a body. A traveller picked me up as he might pluck a fruit from a tree and now he is impatient to throw the core away” (161). Shakuntala appears a burden on the freedom of her companion. She looks back to her past. She recalls how the immortals intervened to set right the course of events in the life of her namesake. “The noble king Dhushyanta had wives aplenty and yet there was no slur in his love-making with Shakuntala. . . . The apsara Menaka . . . had seduced the great sage Vishwamitra, and such deeds are permitted to nymphs and celestials. Only I stood condemned” (150). Since she is an ordinary mortal, she stands dishonoured. Living with a *Yavana, her caste is now even lower than that of a *mlechha cleaning woman.

Shakuntala’s shift from the noble state of Srijan’s true wife to the whore of Nearchus indicates regression of her female self. Nearchus takes it for granted that Shakuntala is his wife. Shakuntala shudders when Nearchus proclaims, “You are my wife now, my delicious Yaduri!” (163) Being a foreigner, he confirms the relationship with kisses on her lips in full view of all his friends. Her Indian mind-set cannot accept it. She intones, “I cannot be his wife; I am the wife of another” (163). Her heart is full of regret when she thinks of her husband. She feels sorry for having dishonoured herself. Nair perceives, “Shakuntala, [is] the eternal outsider. The little girl hovering by the door seeking to glean knowledge as her brother is being taught the rules of grammar. The wife who does not belong. The whore who is ruled by shame. Eventually Shakuntala seeks redemption” (“Shakuntala: Namita Gokhale”). In the observations of Nair, Shakuntala has always been on outsider. Born into a
*vanavasi family living near the forests of the hills of ancient India, Shakuntala grows up roaming in the woods. It is a custom in the hills that unmarried girls in the Brahmin households are never taught how to cook, as the kitchen rituals prohibit virgins from cooking. Hence, Shakuntala spends her time watching clouds and birds. As a little girl, she has to stand by the door to listen and gleam a little of the knowledge imparted to her brother. As a wife, she does not conform to tradition and becomes the traveller’s mistress. She is ruled by shame and eventually seeks redemption from the shameful life she has led.

Shakuntala wants to go home. It is not that the traveller is unkind. He is often tender, and they are bound together in a mysterious and indefinable way. “Yet I did not belong to him, I belonged to nobody” (173). It dawns on her, “One might travel many nights and days but the place where one began was perhaps the only place where one belonged” (172). The sense of belongingness induces Shakuntala to regress. She leaves the Yavana and wanders off in the city of Kashi. With revived strength and spirit, she walks to a Buddhist monastery to commence a new life. Destiny forbids it. She dies in Kashi but in ignominy.

The imbalanced acts of Gokhale’s protagonists press them hard to retrogress and backtrack. Like rebellion, regression too forms an important strand in their behavioural pattern. The characters who resist traditional taboos and break the customary way of life, find themselves more desperate and more distressed in the end. They feel alienated and frustrated. Their life journey proves that rebellion and resistance with no scruples to prop on will yield no
fruit. When they realize the futility of their impulsive rebellious attempts they made to attain equality in the social sphere, regression becomes inevitable. The regression of the protagonists indicates Indian women’s incapacity to resist the tradition they have been bequeathed with. It is succinctly echoed by Tara Pande, one of the women portraits in Gokhale’s *Mountain Echoes*. The author possibly reiterates Pande’s assertion:

> And yet basic values never change. Nobody thought of defying . . . discipline or breaking with tradition. . . . These values were in turn transmitted to my children, through practice and precept and helped them all to carve successful lives for themselves in the modern world. . . . These early values remain the anchor of my life even today. (73)

All the major characters of Gokhale namely Paro, Priya, Gudiya, Parvati, Rachita, and Shakuntala who strive for liberation from the repressing postulates of the patriarchal dogma-ridden society encounter regressive forces and hence backtrack with their steadfast assertive spirit to recast life to their modern needs. Having vainly pitted the strength of their sexuality against male hegemony they stand blameworthy of dereliction of traditional responsibilities and debased womanhood. They show their protest against the social injustice done to women by breaking the traditional barriers and seizing the place of men in matters of love and sex. Their attempt at reversing the traditional practices of Indian life worsens their situation and brings no sense of fulfilment. The disappointed and disillusioned rebels become wary of flouting
the traditional concepts which form part of their inherited consciousness and take a reverse course to reform themselves or cease to live. The unfavourable reprisal that is in store for some reckless rebels proclaims the author’s message that those women of no sexual integrity and decorum are destined to doom. The promising life assured for the other rebels who regress not to surrender but to sustain, anchoring their lives in the “roots” of Indian tradition prove that the women who are prepared to make amends for the error they committed have hope.