Summation
Chapter Five

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Wherever we go in India we find certain norms of conduct accepted by a large section of the people. There are lapses no doubt, but they are considered a departure from approved conduct even by those who are guilty of them. . . . It is true many women in actual practice do not act like Sita; but the good women will be expected to conform to the pattern of conduct prescribed by that ideal. (Munshi 72)

The present study entitled Repression, Rebellion and Regression: Perspectives on Namita Gokhale’s Novels probes into the transitional phases that Gokhale’s women traverse while struggling for emancipation from patriarchy. Indian women who have been battered for ages still conserve the guts to react against the unjust social inequality and subjection they undergo in social life. Unlike the women of earlier decades who either suffered silently or protested mildly, the women of the present day confront male-supremacy defiantly and antagonistically. Quite paradoxically, their efforts to upset the applecart of male-hegemony get nullified because they do so at the expense of their innate femininity. The loss of the strength of womanhood takes its toll. Their pursuit of freedom takes them nowhere near their goal. They are forced to retrace their steps to the starting point and retrieve the grace of womanhood which they abandoned during their struggle for liberation. This ineffectual
exertion on the part of Indian women stands as a major concern for the contemporary Indian English novelists, especially the women writers who concentrate on feminist problems.

The first chapter, Introduction attempts at a peep into Indian English tradition and surveys the writings of the contemporary Indian women novelists, placing the novelist under study in the foreground. The status of women in the tradition-bound Indian society has been the focal point in the writings of the author concerned and this chapter highlights this. Gokhale's contemporaries such as Shashi Deshpande, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Shoba De, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri and Kiran Desai invariably write on the position of women in the Indian scenario. Their writings indicate a considerable change from conventional novel writing. They go beyond the domestic space to explore freely and boldly different kinds of female experience. They portray women characters who defiantly emulate western way of life, show no hesitation to adopt untraditional steps and thereby jeopardize their entire life.

Namita Gokhale, as a woman writer of the twenty-first century, stands out unique and universal in her treatment of women characters. Her prime concern is to highlight the strength and dignity of women and ensure a fair deal for them in the patriarchal Indian society which considers women weak and worthless. She tries to drive home her point of view that human beings irrespective of their gender status possess the same feelings and emotions. According to her, women have every right to lead an honourable and
self-sufficient life and any discrimination shown by the society requires redress.

Gokhale's novels born out of experiential and observational realities picture the physical and psychic aspects of women that set light on their subtle and complex, emotional and mental behaviour during their course of interaction in a world full of injustice to women. The novels depict women in a new light. These women represent the new Indian woman's voice and her breach of the traditional way of life. Notwithstanding the andocentric Indian culture where female voice is often submerged and unheeded, the novelist presents her protagonists as stormy. Since the author believes that women being portrayed as victims of male hegemony would further deteriorate their position in the society, her women characters are projected as rebels. The conflict and tension caused by desire versus despair provoke the characters to move along the track of life punctuated by repression, rebellion and regression. Each one of the psychological stages they go through requires a detailed study. Hence the core chapters of the dissertation make a deliberation on each of them.

The second chapter Repression aims at examining the causes and consequences of repression in the women of Indian set-up. Repression is an unhealthy mental state. It is caused by several factors such as unfulfilled emotional needs and worldly wishes, curbed talents, rejected views, muffled voice, humiliating experiences, restricted mobility, traumatic loneliness, sexual rivalry, caste barrier, denial of equal rights, childlessness, economic
dependence, fear of insecurity, infidelity in marital life, rejected love, restrictions, and the out-dated taboos imposed on day-to-day life. All these get accumulated in the subconscious mind and cause erratic behaviour.

Repression of women is a universal phenomenon and a favourite theme with many women writers. The theme of repression is quite effectively and convincingly treated by Namita Gokhale in her fiction. Gokhale by virtue of her feminine sensibility and psychological insight probes into the inner minds of the repressed characters in her novels and brings to light their traumatic experiences. She portrays an impressive array of women characters whose repressive experiences make them slaves of their situations. This terrible and pitiable predicament can be attributed to the double standard of the Indian society with regard to freedom and morality.

Different codes of conduct are set for men and women. Tradition and custom bind women. Their freedom is thereby curtailed. At the same time, men are free from all kinds of restrictions. As a result of this discriminative attitude of the society, the Indian woman’s life is sidelined. No wonder it affects her psyche. The man who enforces chastity on his wife can afford to be unfaithful and wayward whereas a woman’s promiscuity is considered a social problem.

Westernization and the resultant modernization in thoughts and attitudes have brought out some changes in the life of Indian women; but there is no room for complacency. Actually there is seen a conflict between tradition and
modernity. Women themselves have started thinking in terms of their position in the social hierarchy. The long experienced repression has triggered a rebellious spirit in them. Stimulated by that spirit, they commit unconventional acts which do not bring in the desired effect. This transgression leads them to regression, rather than progression.

The theme of repression in Gokhale’s fiction can be classified as pre-marital and post-marital. Failure to obtain maternal love results in repression in girl children. Paro, Priya, Gudiya, Parvati and Shakuntala are callously deprived of maternal love because of which they experience repression. Each of the characters longs for the mother’s love and the failure to get it lands them in repression.

There is no cordial relationship between the mother and daughter in Paro: Dreams of Passion. In all stages of life, Paro is uncared for and left to fend for herself. The absence of mother’s proximity and the resulting estranged relationship leaves Paro, a disobedient daughter with little indoctrination on the concept of virginity and adolescent cautiousness. Hence she fails to resist the advances of the art master when she is a teenage schoolgirl. The incident of rape which gets registered in her psyche is the basic cause of Paro’s repression. Love and maternal solicitude are rarely directed at her voyeur, Priya. A pall of depression always hangs down the house. The unloving, callous attitude of the mother causes a feeling of insecurity which leads to her repression.
Gudiya in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* is a daughter deserted by her mother. Even in her dream her mother eludes her. The need for mother’s love and care afflicts her mind. Moreover her mother being a courtesan demoralizes her. The grandmother who brings her up pays little attention to her. The old woman’s increasing abstraction, her detachment and her inexplicable remoteness affect the little girl. These problems together cause repression in Gudiya. Hence she withdraws into a world of confusion and insecurity. The very thought of her mother and grandmother embarrasses her.

Parvati’s mother in *A Himalayan Love Story* is unhappy on account of her being a victim of the patriarchal Indian society. As a widow with modest means of livelihood, she considers her daughter a real burden. Parvati grows up in an atmosphere of discontent and frustration. Her longing for a sophisticated existence finds fulfilment in fanciful and fantastic dreams.

Shakuntala, the protagonist in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory* is an over sensitive girl who finds it extremely difficult to adjust with her surroundings. Her mother symbolizes the orthodox Indian motherhood. Her obsession with marital virtues and her discrimination between her son and daughter is the cause of dejection and despondency in Shakuntala.

Maternal misdemeanor is another reason for repression. Indian society celebrates motherhood as sacred. To the child, its mother is infallible, an icon who is adored and emulated. While Gudiya in *Gods* is tormented by the thought of unknown paternity, Parvati in *Himalayan* is lacerated by her
mother's amorous advancements with the tenant shopkeeper. Gudiya is vexed by the immoral activities of her mother. She is very much embittered about the mystery surrounding her paternity. Another thing that upsets Gudiya is the low status she has in the society. She tries her level best to conceal it from others.

In Parvati's case, it is the feigned goodness of her mother that disappoints her. She is full of anxiety and fear to watch the abnormal behaviour of her mother. The woman's addiction to tea and her indulgence with the tenant shopkeeper are objectionable to Parvati. She detests each and every movement of her mother which appears devilish to her. The relationship between the mother and daughter gets estranged. In the absence of some one to share her fear and anxiety, she withdraws into a state of repression.

Daughters of the present generation are victims of gender discrimination coming from their own mothers. Priya's mother in Paro is determined in making her son a doctor and ignores her daughter's prospects in education. Likewise Shakuntala is repeatedly reminded by her mother that education and scriptures are the prerogatives of men and they are forbidden to women. Excessive love and concern for the male child at the cost of the female child paves the way for repression in women.

In spite of the advancement in science and technology and the subsequent urbanization, India is still taboo-ridden. Worn-out customs and out-dated taboos repress women. A menstruating female, for example, is considered an object of defilement and needs to be kept apart from the
mainstream. The orthodox women themselves consider menstruating girls untouchables. Gudiya and Shakuntala are the victims of unreasonable, unscientific and unjustifiable customs of the society. The social custom of sending a menstruating girl into exile seems repulsive to Gudiya and Shakuntala. The menstruated Gudiya is deserted by her grandmother when Shakuntala is heartlessly expelled from the house by her mother. In her husband’s house, Shakuntala is not allowed to have a close view of an elephant during her menstrual cycle. Thus the mothers with their biased, harsh, oppressive, and orthodox attitude to their daughters remain the cause of their repression.

Restriction of mobility contributes to repression in adolescent girls. Female adolescence is looked at with suspicion. A young girl is bound to remain at home. Fearing that a girl’s preposterous desire to travel will ruin her life, mothers do not allow their daughters to roam. This kind of repressing problem is represented by Gokhale’s Shakuntala. Her mother never concedes to her girlish desire to move about freely.

Another factor contributing to repression is economic mediocrity. Priya and Parvati are affected by repressed psyche because of their economic dependence and depravity. Priya, as the bread winner of the family is obliged to fulfil her mother’s dream to see her son as a doctor. The result is that she is forced to restrict herself from materializing her dreams of leading a fashionable life like that of Paro. Being deprived of economic independence, she covets the wealth and munificence of B.R. But to her great shock, Paro, her friend traps
him into wedlock. This experience creates a scar in Priya's mind. She feels crushed, beaten, and defeated.

The disappointment of the mediocre girls, who have no economic background, resulting from their failure in raising their status through relationship with celebrities ends in repression. Parvati, who lost her father at the age of one, does not get any of her dreams realized. Both the mother and the daughter depend on the charity of her uncle. The impact of economic dependence is such that Parvati avoids meeting people.

Hostility shown by a woman to another woman known as woman-to-woman oppression is a factor leading to repression. This rare type of repression Gokhale deals with is exemplified through Rachita Tiwari, a supercilious lecturer in *The Book of Shadows*. Rachita betrothed to Anand indulges in acts of infidelity. Her life changes dramatically when her lover Anand commits suicide. His sister, an urban character flings a beaker of acid upon Rachita's face to punish her for her brother's death. The disfigured protagonist goes away to her childhood home in the Himalayas, abandoned but for an old caretaker, Lohaniju, who is a great storyteller. The solitary life in the hills affects Rachita's psyche. She turns to the dog named Lady for company. She begins to hate men altogether. The very word marriage nauseates her as she knows that the acid-attack has rendered her unfit for marriage.
Mothers wed and unwed, conventional and modern cause repression in their daughters. The daughters having been tormented by their tradition-bound mothers look forward to a life outside their parental home. Thinking that marriage can liberate them from the suffocating environment at home, they get into it only to realize that the situation becomes worse. Incompatibility and disagreement in marriage intensify repression in them.

Marriage without love, childlessness, and sexual perversions are all causes of repression. The neglected daughters who embark on married life with great expectations get shocked to see that their husbands do not love them. For instance, Paro who has had a love marriage starves for love. The so-called love marriage is just a power game.

In Priya’s case marriage does not provide her with any better situation. Loneliness represses her. The Indian custom restricts girls from seeking a divorce which means that once a girl gets into marriage she has to be in it till the end. In marriage, she is supposed to play the multiple roles of an obedient wife, a good cook, an efficient housekeeper, and a hospitable hostess. Playing all these roles without getting anything in return she becomes a spiritual wreck. Life seems to be quite worthless. In some cases, lack of children plays havoc in a woman’s life. Priya grieves that had she been blessed with a child, her marriage would have been saved.
In the patriarchal Indian society, childlessness is the cause of trouble in a woman’s world. It is attributed to the wife’s incapacity to procreate. Not only that, motherhood is regarded as the test of womanhood. Marital incompatibility along with denial of motherhood affects the woman’s psyche. Priya’s marital life demonstrates this difficult position of Indian women. She conceives a child after many futile years of marriage. Priya hopes that an addition to her family would eliminate her loneliness in life. But her expectation to become a happy mother is shattered by her miscarriage. Her agony gets more intense as she has lost a child and also the love of her husband who puts all blame on her inability to become a mother.

The domination of the man over the woman causes repression in the women. Here also Priya’s story testifies this. She is denied all kinds of freedom. Economic independence is also denied to her. She has no say in anything concerning her husband’s private life. He dictates a code of conduct for his wife and expects her to observe it. He feels that his wife, a woman of low economic status does not deserve privileges of any kind. Hence he does not allow her to meddle with matters concerning himself and his contacts. Such unjust treatment and humiliation at her husband’s hands cause repression in Priya.

As in the arranged marriage, in love marriage also there are pitfalls. For instance, Gudiya’s is a love-cum-arranged marriage. Gudiya in Gods marries Kalki, setting her eyes on his handsomeness. After marriage she goes through a series of miseries. The so-called married life with Kalki represses her. Soon she
learns that she has been cheated and exploited in the name of love. Her husband’s coarse nature disturbs her so much that she decides to send him to Bombay to seek his fortune. When Kalki leaves without trace, Gudiya suffers an aching sense of loneliness.

Parvati in *Himalayan* is the victim of a loveless marriage with a homosexual. Her marriage is an example of the authority that parents exercise on their daughters in matters such as career and marriage. Parvati’s compulsory marriage with Lalit for orthodox reasons ends up in her mental derangement. Her uncle ignores her love for Mukul Nainwal because he is a Brahmin of a different clan. He fixes her marriage with Lalit, as his horoscope matches with hers and he is a Brahmin like Parvati. The ideal match in caste does not make the marriage ideal. Lalit is discovered to have homosexual attraction to her lover. Trapped in marriage with a gay, Parvati leads a life of repression. Her story proves that it is love and not caste or religion that sustains the relationship between a man and a woman.

Lalit’s liaison with Parvati’s ex-lover, Mukul is a bolt from the blue for her. She is fated to live in suppressed sexuality. The lack of privacy in the joint family gives her no chance for knowing and understanding her husband. Her attempt to suppress her dejection and maintain her relationship with her husband is taken for praiseworthy reticence, essential to the Indian woman. Parvati tries to soothe her mind by getting engaged in cooking delicious food for her husband. It has been a practice with Indian women to bridge the discord created due to the absence of physical love by cooking well to the satisfaction
of their husbands. This conventional strategy also does not yield fruit in the case of Parvati. She is a victim twice. Being married, it becomes mandatory to be a chaste wife and tied up with a gay husband, her life collapses.

Shakuntala, the eponymous character is a butt of post-marital repression of a different sort. Her marriage with Srijan is not up to her expectation. Her urge for freedom is not realized through the marriage. The life of domesticity disappoints her. Shakuntala consents to marry Srijan, a man many years elder to her, to escape from the cumbersome life with her biased mother. In her familial home, there is nobody to dominate her and nothing to torment her. Despite the freedom she enjoys, she cannot be happy. She feels restless at the monotonous role of house keeping. Srijan is always on his business travels, leaving her to live in loneliness. He is a combination of orthodoxy and modernity. Yet he does not consider his wife’s wish to travel as men folk do. Srijan’s indifference to her confinement worries Shakuntala. She rebukes men for their lack of capacity to comprehend the wishes of women. She laments that the men who are the masters of the family and of the world, lack in the power to probe women psychology. Shakuntala’s tale verifies the fact that it is not only a tradition-bound man but also a man of modern thinking insists on his wife’s conventionality.

The Indian women, in whichever circumstance they find themselves, are vulnerable. They are treated as objects of pleasure and not as individuals with feelings and emotions. For instance, Shakuntala who travels to Kashi in the company of Nearchus believing that he will take her to distant places and
quench her yearning for travel is used as such. He exploits her company to satisfy his sensual desires and later deserts her as one would throw away the core after tasting the fruit.

The women in the male-dominated society are not allowed to make use of their potentialities; nor can they supersede their male counterpart. Shakuntala is not permitted to come out with her philosophical concepts while her brother who cannot even define the word “self” is privileged to attend philosophical debates. Though she is not taught scriptures, she has the innate knowledge of spirituality and the gift of the gab. But she is denied the opportunity to participate in discussions. This proves that the inherent and innate faculties of women get bottled up in the traditional Indian society.

Sexual rivalry is a reason for repression. Just as Paro is the cause of trouble in Priya’s married life, Kamalini, the handmaiden brought home by Srijan upsets his wife Shakuntala. Doubts about the fidelity of her husband erupt and repress Shakuntala. She doubts Kamalini to be his mistress and Srijan to be the unlawful father of her child. The presence of the handmaiden intensifies Shakuntala’s worry about her incapacity to become a mother. The sight of Kamalini aggravates her anxiety of sexual rivalry. Shakuntala is afraid that Srijan would abandon her on account of her barrenness and her place would be usurped by the handmaiden.
A woman, if she is born in the traditional Indian society, is destined to pass through the stage of repression of some sort since her childhood. Paro, the daughter of an upper middle class family is sexually abused in her adolescence. Later, her marriage to an industrialist ends in divorce and this leads to her degrading sexual spree. All the misfortunes in Paro’s life can be attributed to the lack of maternal care.

Priya belonging to a middle class family is not treated well by her widowed mother. She expects her boss to become her saviour. But her dream is thwarted by Paro, her friend who marries him. With a vengeance, Priya turns to a rich man whose wealth she hopes would make her happy in life. But it turns out a loveless marriage. The man is too busy in his pursuit of worldly glory to bother about his wife. Moreover, Paro’s interference in their life amplifies the dullness in her marital life. At a point, Priya dares to break the vestige of a conventional wife. She continues her stealthy relationship with her former lover who is presently Paro’s husband.

Gudiya, the descendant of a courtesan family has genuine cause for repression. She does not know who her father is and her mother is a wayward woman. Even her grandmother fails to make her happy. Naturally her emotions get repressed. The young girl overwhelmed with dreams of a glamorous future fears that her shameful background and her grandmother’s wiliness may hold back her vision of social status. The repressed condition of her mind stimulates a rebellious spirit in her. With a new determination she steps out of the suppressing tradition and starts a new life.
Parvati’s repression can be ascribed to her mother’s repression due to her unhappy marriage and the ensuing sexual perversion. Widowed at an early age, the mother keeps clandestine contacts with her tenant shopkeeper and satisfies her suppressed sexual needs. The sexual transgression of her mother terrifies Parvati and makes deep impact on her psyche. Subsequently, it leads to her sexual licentiousness.

Rachita, a pompous city-bred college lecturer is held responsible for the suicide of Anand, her fiancé. It affects and represses her mind. The vengeful acid-attack by Anand’s sister aggravates her repression. Being not ready to succumb to her oppressive circumstance, Rachita flees from the city to her remote childhood home and withstands the horrifying loneliness with unwomanly and untraditional strength.

Shakuntala’s repression owes its origin to the biased attitude of her Brahmin mother. Her talents are not allowed to bloom. Her desire to roam around is restricted. Her views on topics of her interest are suppressed. Her marriage with Srijan, an active businessman further shackles her movement. Srijan fails to satisfy her long dreamt of wish to travel to distant places with her husband. The handmaiden brought home by him completes the development of repression in Shakuntala. Repression is at its seams and Shakuntala comes out with a readiness to break tradition.
In all the above instances, the biased attitude of the mothers sows the seed of repression in the daughters. After marriage, the situation does not get redeemed. The unkind and orthodox attitude of their husbands put the women into all kinds of miseries in domestic life. Their thoughts and feelings get bottlenecked. As this situation goes on, there comes a moment when they get possessed by a rebellious spirit. The urge to fight the oppressive and out-dated conventions of the society goad them on and nothing can take them back. Their rebellious spirit prompts them behave in an unconventional manner which would be questioned by their society. Their efforts to better their lot end in futility and they even have to bear the brunt of their own actions. This issue is the subject matter of the third chapter Rebellion.

The position of the present century women is very much different from what it was till recently. On the one hand, there is seen a little bit of improvement and on the other hand, there is visible an unhealthy tendency among the modern women to rebel against the hoary tradition. It is unthinkable for the women of the times to remain a suffering and sacrificing individual. The need for self-expression is acutely felt; the demand for gender justice is getting more and more vociferous. Their desire for liberation takes them to the extreme point of libertinism. All the restraints in terms of female sexual behaviour are flouted. Duties are abandoned and decorum is breached rather than observed.

Rebellion in different stages of a woman's life is being dealt with in the third chapter. The order being followed is adolescent rebellion, marital rebellion, maternal rebellion, and geriatric rebellion. Adolescent rebellion is
illustrated through the unconventional behaviour of Gokhale’s protagonists. Paro who is self-conscious and seductive does not take virginity as anything precious for a girl of her age. She is not affected by the loss of her virginity. It is a matter of pride for her that she has been seduced in her teenage because she considers it a sign of her being attractive to the other sex. Her expulsion from the school for reasons of morality does not have any emotional impact on Paro. Traditional way of life is a funny thing for her. All that she wants is to possess a man of her imagination and no barrier would pose an impediment to her. She is the prototype of emancipation with no respect for marriage and convention.

Priya, Paro’s friend is no less seductive. She is equally conscious of her physical self. Born in a middle class family, she longs for the beauty and harmony of a woman of the upper class society. In her desire to move from her original middle class climate, she takes care to look attractive to men of status. She pays no attention to the middle class morality she has imbibed through her birth. In her fascination for the western liberalized life-style, she flouts the ethical codes of conduct. While in pursuit of modernity, she is unconcerned about preserving her virginity. She yields to the advances of her boss, a womanizer and enjoys pre-marital liaison with him. His opulence and the western style of love-making enthrall her. Like Paro, she too has the humour of a sensualist and indulges in love-making of the western fashion.

Gudiya in Gods has a rebellious bend which can challenge all codes of conduct the traditional Indian society has set for an adolescent girl. She is very much sick of her slum environment and wants to get rid of it. For this, she even
adopts a new name for herself and gets transported into a world of make-believe. Some girls of the modern society are of the notion that a girl of a fashionable name invites more attention than a girl of a traditional name. They consider that it is the name that determines one's status in the social hierarchy. Accordingly, Gudiya wants to change her name for in Hindi “Gudiya” means a doll. She feels that the name lowers her position in the social circle and arrests her progress. Hoping that a royal-sounding name would enable her to rise in social status, she gives herself the name of her favourite film star, “Pooja”. She fancies herself to be the richest daughter in the world; she guesses that she was born to an English man, Abhimanyu Singh and adds it as her surname. Moreover, she is cautious in not being known as the daughter of an unwed courtesan. She tries to conceal this identity from others as she knows well that it will not augment her grade in the social hierarchy. All these whimsical traits in Gudiya reveal the rebellious spirit innate in her.

A man chasing a girl for her beauty is not questioned in the Indian society. The reverse of this tradition is shown through Gudiya. She goes after a handsome young man which shows that she has no respect for the rule of the patriarchal society that a girl should not chase a man. Her rebellious mind ignores the fact that Kalki, the handsome instrument player she follows is a social inferior. She is willing to lose her virginity to him before marriage. It is another bizarre dream of the girl that she would be film star one day or a famous courtesan in the future and marry the Prime Minister’s son. Her spiritedness to become a society lady elicits mockery from her teacher. Gudiya
is provoked and she challenges the teacher herself. All these whims of Gudiya testify how a girl’s urge for liberation and allurement for jerry-built status can embolden her to embark on any unconventional action. Gudiya rebels against everything that denies dignity and security to a girl born in a courtesan family.

Adolescent rebellion against restrictions is exemplified through Parvati in *Himalayan*. Like Priya and Gudiya, she aspires for the pleasures of modern life. Her attempts towards this dream begin with her loud reading of English without the customary shyness. She applies the parameters of the bee world to the human world and refuses to see men as providers but as sexual partners. She has no tears to shed on the death of her mother. She is preoccupied with the thoughts of the comfortable life in reserve for her in her uncle’s house. She deserts her village and happily migrates to the town of Nainital. Overwhelmed by the dazzling handsomeness of her tutor Salmon, she succumbs to his sensuality for a while. Neither his position of a teacher nor his different caste bothers her. This is only the beginning of a sexually promiscuous life for Parvati. She is aware that she is treading the path of danger, yet she is stoic. The departure of Salmon does not make her worried in the least. She sees nothing wrong in sully ing her femininity. Salmon is just an object of sexual pleasure for her. She only considers him an object that quelled her sexual hunger. Parvati’s story shows that adulation of sensuality is not the monopoly of a man; a woman can also desire a man for the satisfaction of her sensual needs. This is nothing short of rebellion.
Shakuntala, the protagonist in *Shakuntala* shows the boldness to challenge the conventional restrictions imposed on girls by the orthodox Indian society. She goes out into an unknown world for satisfying her love of roaming. When a fake religious man approaches her with sexual motive she hits him and runs. She protests against the stigma of menstruation by leaping out of the house and wandering in the wood disregarding the danger of darkness. She resolves not to go back to her uncaring mother. Shakuntala’s resisting forward movement invalidates the deep-rooted notion that women are the weaker sex.

Innate boldness and defiance assist these adolescent girls in battling against the patriarchal society. While adolescent protest stimulated by youthful whims and fancies is less harmful, rebellion after marriage proves disastrous to themselves. Paro’s marriage with B.R. in *Paro* is a love-cum-arranged marriage. As it is not a marriage of love but of infatuation it fails to endure. Paro who has had an unrestricted and unconventional upbringing has developed a rebellious nature. She has no inhibitions of any sort. In the case of her divorce, she takes the initiative which is something contrary to the patriarchal set-up. She disregards married fidelity and changes sexual partners frequently. The patriarchal society allows polygamy and forbids polyandry. Paro shatters this norm and confirms that women can keep relationships with more than one man if they want. Quite impulsively she divorces her husband and gets into sexual relationships with other men who are either elder or younger to her. In every encounter with men she makes a questionable use of her sexuality and
manipulate them to her own gain. Her defiant activities show that women can exercise all the privileges enjoyed by men with pride.

Paro has no respect for the Indian traditional view of marriage and sex. Neither the rape nor the divorce makes any impact on her spirit and she moves about with pomp and pride. Scotch whisky is the elixir of her life. She manipulates all the men who she comes across in her life and defies all the norms of the patriarchal social order. Her loose morals stand symptomatic of the struggle for emancipation from the social taboos the Indian woman suffers in her marital life. The exotic and the erotic behaviour of Paro amply testify her aberrant rebellion.

Priya, who tries to emulate Paro’s western practices and the strategy of manipulating men, fails to uphold Indian womanhood. She who marries Suresh for personal gains continues her affair with B.R., her ex-lover-cum-Paro’s husband. She indulges in extra-marital relationship without any sense of guilt. She pretends to be an ideal wife who can host guests. The value system of the male-dominated society is demolished by her unwavering tactics. Even when her husband discovers her adultery through her diary, Priya does not regret; she only admits it. She goes on with her arbitrary ways. She adopts western life style and finds a job opportunity which would make her economically independent and quell her loneliness at home. Her hypocritical, confrontational and unfaithful behaviour qualifies her to be called a modern woman who has the innate power to fight against the discriminatory attitude of the Indian society but at the risk of the principles that standardize life.
Gudiya’s marriage with Kalki in Gods fails. She runs the risk of losing all her jewels in sending Kalki off to Bombay to shine in the film world. The man neither brings fortune nor returns. Kalki’s absence affords Gudiya a relief from the daily torture she has been undergoing. Yet, paradoxically, she misses her husband. Despite the pangs of separation, she remains composed. The unhappy marriage can neither obliterate her faith in life nor dry up the force to withstand challenges in life. The sense of responsibility overrules Gudiya and she decides to live life in her own way. Rebellion in married life is exemplified in these instances.

Phoolwati, Gudiya’s guardian typifies how a woman can have authority over her husband. A patriarchal society allows superiority for men over their wives. In Phoolwati’s case a reversal of this trend is seen. Her husband who comes home drunk is not feared, but bashed by her. She is a strict contrast to the traditional housewife in the Indian household. After the death of her first husband, she marries another man but only on certain conditions and keeps him under her control.

Parvati in Himalayan breaks tradition by her flirtations in married life. Her disregard for sexual purity, which is held to be the hallmark of an Indian wife, is a definite mark of her rebellion. A gay husband and barrenness, both prompt her to lead a sexually liberated life. She regards all her paramours as providers of sex and does not want lasting relationship with any of them. Raju with whom she has libidinal relationship is just like a male bee to her. Neither his disappearance nor the news of his marriage disturbs her. Parvati, like the
queen bee, is satisfied with the sexual rejuvenation derived from him. Her sacrilege of marital relationship is a protest against the partisan attitude of the Indian society.

Rachita in *Shadows* revolts against the traditional concept of Indian womanhood. She betrays her fiancé, Anand by yielding to the passions of her friend’s husband. Unable to tolerate her infidelity, Anand commits suicide and Rachita has to pay a heavy price for his rash decision. The acid-attack on her face by Anand’s sister disfigures Rachita and she retreats into a solitary house. It is rebellious on the part of Rachita to love Anand a man, five years younger to her and has no source of revenue to support his family. Her rebellious nature is much more evident when she deceives Anand by her outgoing nature. After the acid-attack she tries to avoid the mob because her pride does not allow her to face it in a humiliating state. Her option for a withdrawn life in the remote hills is a bold and rebellious step taken to overcome the double oppression—that of patriarchy and women-to-women oppression. The eerie atmosphere in the deserted house does not demoralize Rachita, rather she takes to flout the superstitious beliefs associated with the house. This shows her mental strength to resist oppression and deny the traditional concept of spirits.

Shakuntala, the eponymous character, considers marriage as a ladder climbing which she can reach the dignity and status which evaded her hitherto. The thought of equality arises when she is in bed with her husband. She breaks tradition by showing disrespect to religious men and by ignoring religious rituals. She claims that she also has got the knowledge of the scriptures. She
cannot approve of a system that allows men to travel and restricts women from moving around. She is vehement in her protest against the do’s and don’ts in the Hindu religion. She opposes Hinduism that shuts out women from scriptures and turns out fallen women. Fish, one of the staple items of food forbidden to Brahmins, is tasted by Shakuntala. She does not believe that a Brahmin should not eat fish. Buddhism that offered women the opportunity to break away from the restrictions of home life appears to be the best religious mode to Shakuntala. To show her protest against the tradition that undermines feminine strength and sexuality, she drops her original name “Shakuntala” that indicates passivity and introduces herself as “Yaduri”, a name that denotes the core of feminine gender. Never to step out of the house is the prime command of the Hindu tradition to women. But the rebellious Shakuntala disobeys this tradition and gets away from home to travel with a low caste foreigner. In all her points of view Shakuntala is unconventional and rebellious.

Rebellion in mothers is portrayed through their neglect of duty. Gokhale’s fictional mothers stand in strict contrast to the traditional mothers who are benign and selfless. Paro, the rebellious wife, is equally rebellious in her role as a mother. Without any prick of conscience, she leaves her male child, Aniruddha to the care of one of her lovers, Lenin and roams around with another lover, Shambu Nath Mishra. Lenin is more worried about Paro’s son than Paro herself. He has been playing the surrogate father to the boy of ambivalent paternity. The boy is more attached to Lenin than to his mother. Paro thoroughly fails to perform her duty as a mother. Her son is the victim of
her rebellion and breach of duty. Paro’s irresponsible and unloving behaviour as a mother shows the visible revolutionary change in the basic traditional concept of motherliness.

Gudiya’s mother in Gods represents degenerating motherhood. Being a courtesan, she leads a free sexual life ungoverned by moralistic principles. She is a runaway mother and fails to be a role model to her daughter. Leaving her little daughter, Gudiya who was born not out of wedlock, under the protection of her old mother, she elopes first with a harmonium player and later with a beggar. This shameful act affects Gudiya. She is tempted by the wanton pleasures of her mother and prefers the life of a famous courtesan to that of an educationist or a school principal. She sees no error in going after a baseless man infatuated by his handsomeness and her life goes topsy-turvy. Gudiya blames her mother for all her suffering in life. A mother who is to be the fountain of joy and pleasure to her daughter is found to be the cause of her daughter’s tears.

Parvati’s mother in Himalayan exemplifies motherhood in its stained form. She is a weak woman with no belief in religion. The same weakness is inherited by her daughter, Parvati, a Hindu Brahmin girl. To keep a stealthy affair with Salmon, a Muslim does not matter to Parvati because her mother does not have respect for any religion. Her mother indulges in prohibited activities which cause anxiety and encourage indiscreetness in Parvati. Parvati’s mother stands a strict contrast to a stereotype Indian mother who is a synonym for sacrifice and affection.
Geriatric rebellion is represented by Ammi, the wily grandmother in the novel, *Gods*. She rebels against social injustice to women as well as religious rigidity. As a descendant of a courtesan family, she favours a free life. When she gets implicated in a murder case and is driven out from her brothel into the street she decides to overcome the predicament by donning the guise of a religious woman. She constructs a *jhuggi* for shelter and a make-shift temple for livelihood. Being a woman of pragmatic outlook, she is able to carry out her strategy of transforming the few purloined stones into a temple and herself into a holy mother without difficulties. Her bewildering innate strength to stand trials and live on with dignity and self-respect in her own way assures hope to women in debilitating situations. She stands heads and shoulders above all Gokhale’s characters as an icon of success in the face of odds and difficulties that the patriarchal society places in the life track of women.

The first generation women represented by Ammi, the grandmother and Phoolwati are successful in their venture to resist harsh circumstances. Even when they break the conventions, they are led by a determination to reach their destination. The second generation women represented by the unnamed mothers are neither strong women with survival instinct nor extreme rebels. Their perpetration stigmatizes motherhood. Their unbecoming indulgence projects their opposition to the patriarchal constrains. The third generation women represented by Gokhale’s protagonists are more assertive than the first generation but fail in their pursuit of self-fulfilment. They are governed by passions rather than principles. They have had no body to emulate; neither
good mothers to follow, nor fathers to depend on. They transcend all limits of freedom for women.

The fourth chapter **Regression** throws light on the repercussions of the rebellious actions on the part of Gokhale’s protagonists. They reach a point when they have to either go back to their starting point or leave the world. While some of the regressed women find anchor in the hoary and hallowed tradition after their vain quest, some go insane and yet some others meet with ignominious death. Of the different characters delineated by Gokhale, Priya and Gudiya regress in the sense of being reverted to the position shunned earlier. Parvati and Rachita regress towards a lower state leaving little hope for further prospects. Paro and Shakuntala recoil from their quest of modernism and liberation and meet with fatality.

In her attempt to liberate herself from marriage, Priya in *Paro* adopts the means of manipulating the opposite sex but cannot reach the same level of emancipation as Paro does. She plays the dual role of an Indian wife and an adulteress. Nemesis seems to bring her adultery to light. When her bogus self is disclosed to her husband he suggests separation and she angrily walks out of home. The subsequent emotional alienation drives her to attempt suicide twice but in vain. She ruminates over her past and regrets her break with tradition. A letter from her erstwhile friend about her happy married life makes her conscious of the errors she committed. Adding to it, a re-reading of the books she read in her youth enlightens her on the value of married life. The realization dawns on her that despite her acts of protest, she is an Indian
woman and an Indian woman should look upon her husband as “God”. Also the tragic end of Paro cautions her about the consequences of violation of the time-honoured culture. Priya feels a compulsion in her mind to return to the traditional way of life with her husband. Her joyous reunion with her estranged husband is a proof of the real significance of middle class morality and the institution of marriage.

Gudiya’s efforts to embrace modernity and elevate her status in the society end in vain. Her ambition to attain social position by replacing her original name with a modern one does not fetch any gain for her. Her love marriage with Kalki, a handsome scourge ends in disappointment. She lives in inexplicable agony. All this takes its toll on her physical health and bouncy spirit. Gudiya realizes her folly before her life disintegrates and manages to make the best of the disintegrating situation. She schemes to send Kalki off to Bombay. She parts with her jewels, makes money and sees him off to try his luck in the film world. Kalki does not return but his departure is a source of relief for Gudiya. Even in the forlorn state she develops a positive outlook. She emerges as a phoenix from the debris of the past with a glint of hope for the future. She goes back to anchor on the mode of life followed successfully by her deceased grandmother. Gudiya’s regression is brought about by her contact with Phoolwati, the chief disciple of her grandmother.

The regression of Parvati and Rachita is from an energetic condition to a state of inaction. Parvati is mentally deranged after her compulsory marriage with Lalit. A couple of love affairs and an unhappy marriage with a gay man
affect Parvati’s inner mind. Nemesis falls on her sexual hazards. Her final decision to love her husband is the reflection of the conventional mind-set of the Indian woman. But before Parvati can realize her decision, her husband leaves the world. Marital dissonance, social indifference, and the consequent isolation cause neurosis in Parvati. She is left in a mental asylum.

Rachita’s unfaithfulness is the cause of her regression. The acid-attack with which her vanity has been humbled by her avengers is the turning point in her life. Once a high-profile lecturer with a rebellious attitude to men and marriage, she is forced to retreat into a terrible world of silence. Solitude affects sanity and she tries desperately to retain her good sense. She feels that the world from which she fled would help her regain it. But she cannot leave her childhood home of shadows as a sense of belonging detains her. Rachita keeps a low profile and is remembered only as a sensational story by the world rather than an individual.

Paro’s is the story of a social butterfly reduced to social debris. A reversal of the sexual freedom of man is seen in the episodes of her life. She enslaves the male with her beauty and sexuality and traps every man she encounters in her quest for love. The excessive sexual freedom reaches a point when it rebuffs. Her success degenerates into misfortune. In a drunken drive she meets with an accident which tarnishes her beauty. It horrifies her to think that her power to captivate men no longer remains with her. She also realizes the sterility of rebellion. Disgusted with the life of emotional solitude, she commits suicide.
Shakuntala caught up in a pool of domesticity passes from a proud Brahmin wife to an irredeemable low caste mistress. Her peripatetic longing takes her to a low caste Greek traveller who uses her as a sex object. She concedes to his needs and finds pleasure in his western customs. Soon restlessness creeps in. Her appetite for travel is no longer as strong as before. The sense of futility of her roaming and sexual experience put a check on her libertinism. It naturally results in her regression from enthusiasm to sluggishness. In this state she realizes the severity of her past mistakes and the precariousness of the present position of living with an unpredictable low caste man.

As Shakuntala feels that she has disgraced herself, she does not have the guts to go back to her husband. She goes away from the traveller and wanders off in the city of Kashi with the feeling of remorse. Suddenly her spirit is revived at the thought of the Buddhist philosophy to start a new life. She walks towards a Buddhist monastery to commence a spiritual life. But destiny forbids it. She dies in Kashi in ignominy. Shakuntala’s shift from the noble state of Srijan’s true Brahmin wife to the dishonourable end as the mistress of an unclean low caste traveller indicates regression of her female self.

The novels taken for study are Gokhale’s expressions of her response to the treatment of women in the human society. She is dismayed to see the gender based discrimination between man and woman in the society. She cannot justify privileges being monopolized by a section of the society on the basis of caste or status they are born in. Gokhale is not gender biased however.
Women’s problems are handled by her with a sense of balance that emphasizes modernity and cultural dignity. She upholds womanhood and advocates that a woman can assert herself by means of her virtues like sense of duty and loyalty to her partner, to her children, and to her self.

This sanguine attitude of the novelist is effectively presented through the negative delineation of her protagonists. They are strikingly distinct and disapprovingly daring. They try to overcome the trials and tribulations they encounter in life by standing strong and bold and loom large. In their quest for liberation from native culture they go astray and thereby cause their own degeneration. At the syndromic juncture, they learn that those who violate the time-honoured values can never attain fulfilment and begin to regress giving up their rebellion. All the women characters invariably display the strength to surmount all the handicaps they were born with and yet cannot root out the tenets ingrained from their early years. The unsuccessful stories of Gokhale’s women evince that an Indian woman fails to be steadfast in her efforts of unleashing the shackles of customs and beliefs because she remains tattooed with the deeply anchored tradition.

The protagonists become aware of their unrighteousness and obligation to family and culture when they reach the stage of topsy-turvy. The catastrophe they encounter compels them to look back and regress. Unable to withstand the emptiness of their unplanned resistance, they backtrack but with a determination and strength to face any challenge in life. Some of them make a resolution to adopt a new mode of life while others recoil from the
quest and perish or get perished. Their experiences convey the message that retribution is in reserve for inordinate freedom and unbridled passions. A woman who keeps to her moral limits and wields her strength is sure to succeed with impunity.

The problems faced by the women in the patriarchal society can be only solved by the women themselves. The dignity of the women does not depend on things like formal education or decent employment. They should realize that daughters deserve equal opportunities as sons of the family. Economic independence is a must for a woman to show her capability and morale. The real potential of women has to be appreciated. The resilience of women exhibited in all walks of life should change the mind-set of people. Gokhale agrees with the stand of Mathews in whose view, “They [women] believe that they are human beings first and women later... It is that spark of courage in a woman that marks her to be a winner” (“The Psychological Aspect” 9). The society is expected to treat women as human beings first and women next.

Gokhale is not against modernity. She wants the taboos not relevant to the present context to be changed to the new situation. In Bhagat’s view, “Even the most up-to-date man is the sum total of all his yesterdays. We have so many times rung out the old and rung in the new. We shall do it again and again” (“The Old and The New” 5). Accordingly, Gokhale respects tradition—a tradition that is flexible and accommodative. Her characters show that the strength that comes from rebellion would be ruinous. It becomes apparent that no one can break tradition without causing pains to oneself. Gokhale
emphasizes what Jeeya in *Mountain Echoes* had said, “Inspired by the words of Mahatma Gandhi, we kept our door and windows to change but kept our feet firmly on the ground” (114). Tradition can be questioned not in a rebellious way but gently with moral strength and without losing femininity, the keystone of the edifice of Indian culture.

From a synoptic and synthetic view of what has been discussed so far one perceives that the women characters of Gokhale do not remain static whereas they get transformed through various stages such as repression, rebellion and regression, a paradigm of linear evolution. Harsh experiences in life teach them hard lessons which enable them to perceive things prudently. In the process of breaking the yardsticks meant for women, the protagonists take tradition in their strides and in the end, fall into disparaging situations. They realize that the bedrock of tradition nurtured and nourished by generations stands too formidable for them. Having reached a state of maturity they understand their vulnerability to the unfavourable situation. Regression seems to be the only option left to them. Hence they take the resolution to swim with the tide of tradition rather than swim against it.

It is hoped that the findings of this study of Gokhale’s novels provide ample proof to validate the hypothesis that the onus is upon the women to keep her femininity intact. It is a woman’s responsibility to see that her womanhood is unimpaired. Decency and integrity in conduct of life is of paramount importance for a woman. Before taking aggressive steps in pursuit of liberation, the woman should think about her role in the human society.
Discretion should not be kept at bay. Valour comes only next to prudence. Tampering with values is like playing with fire.

It is also hoped that this study will cater to the academic curiosity of the researchers in Indian English Fiction. Very few critics have attempted to analyse the works of Gokhale. Her works remain indeed a virgin area to tread upon and fit for exploration by scholars, researchers, and critics. Gokhale’s novels can also be compared with other Canadian or African-American writings.