Preface

The doctoral dissertation entitled Repression, Rebellion and Regression: Perspectives on Namita Gokhale’s Novels, makes a methodical study of how Namita Gokhale looks at the social problems, particularly the problems concerning women in a patriarchal society, from a feminine perspective. Gokhale, well launched in the area of Indian English fiction with her first novel, Paro: Dreams of Passion (1984) is an emerging woman novelist of the twenty-first century who deals with the cultural, social, and economic barriers that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination in the patriarchal Indian society. She is of the view that unless these barriers are removed, there is no hope for Indian women to liberate themselves from the dominating patriarchy which reigns supreme in the Indian society. It is imminent that the women should assert themselves in a positive way.

As a writer of women-centred fiction, Gokhale notices that a higher percentage of women have attained social and political equality; they have come a long way but it is still not far enough. Through her novels, she wishes to bring home to her readers that women deserve a dignified position in the society because they possess their own inherent strength and innate capabilities that help them succeed even in fields that are traditionally considered male bastions. At the same time she is not for unbridled freedom for women. She does not support the modern women who get into immature engagements in
order to avenge themselves. Her protagonists who dare to transgress and cross the limits face serious consequences.

The forces and taboos that have been in practice in the Indian society cripple the growth of women and thwart the development of their personality. Unlike their suppressed and silent counterparts of the earlier period, the modern Indian women show the guts to protest against the oppressive practices and cultural conditions in order to safeguard their position in the society. Their struggle for liberation from the socio-cultural barriers, in most of the cases, ends in troubles, psychological trauma, and frustration. The protagonists in Gokhale’s novels represent such women. In their urge to break the repressive norms of the society, they become rebels. As rebels they take impulsive decisions and cross the traditional limits set by the society. In matters of love and marriage, they exercise inordinate freedom. The uncontrollable sexual freedom that they enjoy for themselves leads them to vulnerable situations from which they will have to escape either through regression or death. Their rebellion and its consequent degeneration show that unless a woman preserves her *swadharma she cannot enjoy the fruits of her efforts against social injustice. Through the unsuccessful stories of her women characters, Gokhale exhorts that under no circumstances, an Indian woman can afford to lose her dignity and decorum; nor can she afford to deviate from the path devised for her by the Law of Nature.
Gokhale’s women are experimental characters and most of them exemplify the notion that the women who indulge in puerile engagements as a protest against the double standard of the society get crushed in the end. It is not easy for them to unlearn what was drilled into them as part of tradition and culture at an early age. Also, it is difficult for them to show dereliction in the different roles they are supposed to play in life. When they realize this truth, they stand bewildered for a while; then decide to revert to their original state or end their life. This practical outlook of Gokhale attracted and prompted the researcher to work on this aspect hitherto untouched by other researchers.

It has been hypothesized that sexual promiscuity or any other form of degrading activities and failure to respect the basic cultural values do not ensure empowerment or gender equality for women. The real empowerment rests on a woman’s status in the society earned through dignity and decorum. The onus is upon the woman to keep her "femininity" intact in any adverse circumstance. The woman who succeeds in this test is empowered. Indulgence in undue liberty and transcending the moral and cultural limits would only take her to eternal ruin.

The present dissertation comprises of five chapters. The introductory chapter briefly examines the development of Indian English writing as a body of literature and aims at fixing the position of Namita Gokhale in the realm of Indian English fiction. It also attempts to focus on the role of Indian women writers in the fight for the rights of women in the Indian society. Special thrust is given to a brief biographical sketch of Gokhale and her career as a writer. It
is followed by a brief survey of her writings and the hypothesis on which the study is based.

The second chapter Repression deals with the circumstances that cause repression in all the stages of a modern Indian woman’s life. It examines the double standard of the patriarchal social set-up as the root cause of the repression in Gokhale’s women characters. They experience repression in their parental as well as familial home. Hence, their repression is classified as pre-marital and post-marital repression.

As daughters, the protagonists feel neglected by their mothers. The mothers give preference to their sons. The orthodox mothers insist on invalid taboos and the elderly people stress caste-based marriage. Maternal frailty and unknown paternity cause anxiety and feeling of inferiority in the daughters. Unrealized longings due to economic depravity and hostility shown by women to women are the other causes of their pre-marital repression. Repression persists in their post-marital life too. They feel disappointed in their hope that marriage can redeem their situation. They are not treated as female counterparts by their husbands. They feel fettered by the monotonous life of domesticity. Their repressed psyche seeks relief in rebellion.

In the third chapter Rebellion, attention is focused on the women in revolt against the social and cultural barriers that hamper their freedom. Their rebellion is grouped as adolescent, marital, maternal and geriatric. Most of the protagonists throw all the conventional moralities to the wind and do all that
men are inclined to do. They have no principles to guide them and no alternative values to live up to. They get married hoping that their life would be better, but soon they get disillusioned. In disillusionment, they indulge in licentious acts and refuse to accept the situation imposed on them. They assert their individual rights to satisfy themselves. The provoked women characters in Gokhale’s novels, Paro, Priya, Gudiya, Parvati, Rachita and Shakuntala embark on a life of their choice and prove that they are as resilient and daring as men.

While Paro indulges in social extremes, Priya violates the middle class morality. Gudiya rebels against slum life that denies dignity and status to an individual. Parvati is consciously hurting towards disaster by transcending sexual limits. Rachita takes revenge on the oppressive society by avoiding the men and women around and choosing to live alone in the “house of shadows.” Shakuntala suffocated by domesticity steps out of the house into the larger unknown world. The unnamed mothers of some of the protagonists show their protest against social restrictions by violating the accepted norms of motherhood. The only silver line is the grandmother representing the old generation. She fights against social injustice and exhibits her resourcefulness by creating female space within patriarchy.

Regression is the title of the fourth chapter and it dwells at length on the consequences of rebellion. As the term indicates, the protagonists find themselves in a condition which is worse than their original position. The forces standing against feminine rebellion are too strong for these women who have to pay a dear price for their rebellious steps. They tread back as they are
pushed to the wall. Their regression is presented by the novelist as the inevitable result of the rebellion they launched. They take a reverse course to their earlier mode of life with a revivifying spirit.

Left with no chance of redemption, Paro commits suicide. For Priya, return to her Indian “roots” is the only way out. Gudiya retreats into a simple life in the temple precincts once despised by her. Parvati’s deliberate violation of the norms of conduct results in her mental derangement. Rachita, a woman of status and vanity is reduced to a recluse. Shakuntala’s attempt at challenging female domesticity and male supremacy results in her degradation from a true, high caste wife into a low caste mistress. She recoils from her itinerary quest. All the characters who oppose the repressive forces and taboos prevailing in the traditional society find themselves alienated with no solace coming from anywhere.

The last chapter Summation recapitulates the points discussed in the earlier chapters. It ties up all the points together and sums up the causes of repression, the means of rebellion, and the consequent regression. The women characters of Gokhale represent Indian women in general because all Indian women are subject to the prejudicial attitude of the patriarchal society. In the male-dominated Indian society, Indian women have always been relegated to a secondary position. This set-up constitutes the chief cause of repression in the protagonists of Gokhale. Their repression at its extreme point engenders rebellion against the established social and cultural barriers that curtail their liberty. They do this through daring and whimsical actions which do not yield
the desired result. At last they fall victim to a syndrome in which regression or termination of life either by the self or destiny seems to be the only escape route. The novelist foresees a new social order in which gender differences do not exist and women are just treated as human beings. In such a society, man and woman co-exist as complementary to each other in equal footing and not as superiors or inferiors. In this doctoral dissertation the researcher has followed closely the research methodology outlined in *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Paper*, Sixth Edition, 2004.