Chapter Two

Feministic Unconscious

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing, and this is an impossibility that will remain, for this practice can never be theorized, enclosed, coded – which doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system; it does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophic-theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatism, by peripheral spheres that no authority can never subjugate.

(Cixous 340)

Feminism is a various group of political movements, social theories, and moral philosophies aimed at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic, cultural and social rights for women. It originally emerged in the west. Feminism as a term came out long after women started questioning their secondary status and urging equal rights on par with men in society. The unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that are present outside of one’s conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feeling of pain, anxiety, or conflict. Feministic unconscious is the operational term coined by the researcher which means the author’s unknowing deliverance of feministic perspectives.
Namita Gokhale in an interview claims, “I am a woman and so I am interested in the affairs of women. I use my writing as a tool to express my response to the treatment of women in the human society. This does not or should not make me a feminist” (qtd. in Brahmavathi). Though the author says that she is not a feminist, the researcher attempts to display the clues that may help a person to brand her as a feminist.

Charles Fourier, a Utopian socialist and French philosopher invented the term ‘Feminism’ in 1837. The terms “feminism” and “feminists” came into existence for the first time in France and Netherlands in 1872, Great Britain in the 1980s, and the United States in 1910. A feminist supports or advocates the rights and equality of women. The concept of feminism includes the protest against the subjugation of women. The current concerns of feminism extend from the overt oppression that male-chauvinistic social order thrusts upon uneducated and financially backward or conventionally religious women to the invisible psychological strain experienced by educated and free women in the cultured and civilised societies.

The western feminism emerged in Britain. Emmeline Pankhurst from Britain found Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) in 1903. The impetus for the first International Conference of Socialist Women came from the Congress of German Women in 1906. It suggested that a conference of Socialist women should be held in conjunction with the following years’ International Socialist Congress at Stuttgart. After a series of suffrage struggles in Russia, Women Congress was formed in 1908. The year 1910 was particularly important for western feminism. The second conference of socialist women was organised
in Germany. Clara Zetkin, a German Marxist theorist and activist, organised the first International Women’s Day in the same year. In 1911, a book named *Women and Labour* by Oliver Schreiner was published, and it concentrated on the legal rights of women.

The history of the modern western feminist movements is divided into three waves. Each wave comprised of various phases of the same feminist concerns. The first wave dealt with the women’s suffrage movements of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century winning women’s right to vote. It also focused on the promotion of equal contract in marriage, parentage, and property rights for women. The first wave feminism was otherwise known as welfare feminism.

The second wave feminism began in the late 1960s and the 1970s. It dealt with freedom and greater political action to improve women’s rights. This phase of women’s movement led to the universal acceptance of the suppression of women. This also included the protest triggered by the early writings of Simone de Beauvoir, Betty Friedan, Germaine Greer, and Kate Millet. Germaine Greer remarks:

> The first exercise of the free woman is to devise her own mode of revolt, a mode which will reflect her own independence and originality. The more clearly the forms of oppression emerge in her understanding, the more clearly she can see the shape of future action. (23)

The second phase was associated with the previous women’s movement. It was concerned with the issue of economic equality (including the ability to
have careers in addition to motherhood and the right to decide not to have babies) between the genders and addressed the rights of female minorities. ‘The Women’s Liberation Movement’ that occurred in the late 1960s and the 1970s is associated with the contemporary civil rights movement. They also demanded independence of lesbian relationships (“lesbian separatism”). The second wave is now and then connected with radical feminist theory.

The third wave feminism is a feminist movement that began in the early 1990s. It is largely focused on the inclusion of women in the traditionally male-dominated areas. It seeks to challenge and expand common definitions of gender and sexuality. Traits of third wave feminism include queer theory, women-of-colour consciousness, post-colonialism, critical theory, transnationalism, and a few feminist theories. This is chiefly concerned with the issues of gender and representation across a range of texts and cultural forms. The third wave feminist activism argues that equality with men as argued by second wavers has not been achieved and that “feminism” will not be “dead” until it is achieved. A comprehensive example of the third wave feminism is *Colonize This!*, a collection of works by young female writers discussing concerns like gender, racism, nationalism, and queer identity. Some eminent third wave feminists are Judith Butler, Jean Kilbourne, Rebecca Walker, Naomi Wolf, and Molly Yard.

Feminist theories aim to understand the nature of gender and sexuality. They focus on studying gender inequality, promoting women’s rights, interests, and themes of feminism like patriarchy, stereotyping, objectification, sexual objectification, and oppression. The feminist theories are applicable to all societies though they originated in the West. Feminist theories are the socialist
theories especially those of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The Marxist-socialist theory rose from the realisation that political liberalism was nothing without economic equality. Feminists influenced by Marxist theories are termed as socialist feminists.

Early feminist theorists believed that woman’s experience was different from that of man is because of the former’s prolonged oppression. But in the seventies there took place a paradoxical shift in thought. The champions of this new changed perspective refused to consider woman’s experience as different from that of man. The mother-centered theories of Jacques Lacan and the entry of lesbian feminists into the field of active theorizing led this change in perspective to new horizons. The important theorists of modern feminism have now engaged themselves in several well-defined groups such as Marxist-socialist-feminists, radical and lesbian feminists, and liberal feminists.

Marxist-socialist-feminist ideology is the most elaborate of the three feminist ideologies, because it has the rich tradition of Western Socialism. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels have considered the status of women in the family and in the society from an entirely different angle. Engels, in his celebrated essay *The Origin of family, Private Property and State*, examines the change in the status of women from the barbarian society to the modern conservative society. He mocks at the idea of monogamy because in the male-dominated society monogamy is only for the woman. Communist manifesto (Manifesto of the Communist Party) is written by Marx and Engels puts it, “Our bourgeois, not content with having the wives and daughters of their proletarians at their disposal,
not to speak of common prostitutes, take the greatest pleasure in seducing each other’s wives” (50).

Radical feminists believe that the despotism of men is the first and foremost basic case of subjugation by one group over another. “Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination. All other forms of exploitation and oppression (racism, capitalism, and imperialism) are extensions of male supremacy: men dominate women and a few men dominate the rest” (Betty and Roszak 273).

Shulamith Firestone, one of the radical feminists, has developed a comprehensive theory of the women’s oppression. The origins of sex class system lie in the biologically determined reproductive roles of men and women; women bear and nurse children, “unlike economic class, sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: men and women were created different and equally privileged” (8). Unless trustworthy contraceptive processes became available, women were “at the continual mercy of their biology” (8). She also argues that biology makes women dependent on males for the physical survival. Thus “the biological family is an inherently unequal power distribution” (8). The result is power psychology and the economic class system. “Natural reproductive differences between the sexes led directly to the first division of labour at the origins of class” (Firestone 9). Most of the radical feminists reject heterosexuality as a valid sexuality for free women. They consider men as their enemies.

Radical feminism is frequently associated with lesbian sexuality. Lesbian feminism is a related movement that came together in the early 1970s out of discontentment with second wave feminism and the gay liberation movement.
Lesbian feminists believe that only a woman can understand the passion and emotion of another woman perfectly. Some key thinkers and activists are Charlotte, Rita Mae Brown, Adrienne Rich, Audre Lorde, Marilyn Frye, Mary Daly, Sheila Jeffreys and Monique Wittig. In the words of lesbian feminist Sheila Jeffreys, “Lesbian feminism emerged as a result of two developments: lesbians within the WLM [Women’s Liberation Movement] began to create a new, distinctively feminist lesbian politics, and lesbians in the GLF [Gay Liberation Front] left to join up with their sisters” (19).

Philosophical branch of feminism is closely related to radical feminism. It celebrates the intellect and temperament inherent in women’s nature as essentially different from men’s nature. It concerns mainly with the female power. It believes that women have greater concern and respect for human life than men. According to philosophical feminism, women are the civilisers of this world. It highlights the difference between the nature and purpose of men and women and this has been the most popular form of feminism among men.

The birth of liberalism in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century moulded the structure of feminist thought. The important concern of liberalism was the “rights of man,” before the law and to participate in public life, especially to vote which is expressed mainly through the writings of Locke and Rousseau. These ideas were immediately followed by subsequent equivalent claims about “the rights of women” to participate in public life and to vote, to hold political office and to hold property.

The liberal feminists or women’s rights feminists believe that the inferior position of women is due to cultural and psychological factors. Mary
Wollstonecraft in her book *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) claims that women are essential for the nation. She also attacks the educational restrictions and mistaken notions of female excellence that keep women in a state of ignorance. She stresses the importance of women education because they educate their children and they can be the good companions to their husbands. John Stuart Mill, who is considered the first liberal thinker, has written *The Subjection of Women* (1869) which became the Bible of the feminists in the later part of the nineteenth century. According to Mill, the subjection of women is the product of age-long custom and is not the proof of any inherent inferiority in them. He continues:

> All women are brought up from the very earliest years in the belief that their ideal of character is the very opposite to that of men; not self will, and government, and government by self-control, but submission, and yielding to the control of others. All the moralities tell them that it is the duty of women, and all the current sentimentalities that it is their nature, to live for others, to make complete abnegation of themselves, and to have no life but in their affections. (36)

Simone de Beauvoir, one of the early feminist theorists, gave importance to the problem of gender inequality and otherness. Her *The Second Sex* is the foundation for modern feminism. Beauvoir’s analysis of women’s subordination proceeded from the assumption that men treated women as fundamentally inferior to them. She feels that women are reduced to the status of ‘the second sex’ and ‘the other’. She argues that the masculine is accepted as the norm, but
feminine is defined not in herself but as relative to man, never as an autonomous being. She aptly remarks, “The situation of woman is that she is a free and autonomous being like all creatures nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the states of the other” (267).

Germaine Greer’s *Female Eunuch* is an international bestseller and an important text in the feminist movement. Germaine Greer is an Australian theorist and feminist who discussed how restrictions were imposed on the emotions of woman and her sexual instincts in her book. In her foreword to the twenty-first century edition, Greer says women still have no freedom to speak loudly:

The freedom I pleaded for twenty years ago was freedom to be a person, with dignity, integrity, nobility, passion, pride that constitute personhood. Freedom to run, shout, talk loudly and sit with your knees apart. Freedom to know and love the earth and all that swims, lies, and crawls upon it . . . most of the women in the world are still afraid, still hungry, still mute and loaded by religion with all kinds of fetters, masked, muzzled, mutilated and beaten.

(11)

Betty Friedan gains attention to the problem that has no name experienced by the ‘happily’ married housewives. She describes how the conventionally assigned role results in the construction of a female mystique in her book *Feminine Mystique*. Kate Millet introduces the word ‘Patriarchy’ in her *Sexual Politics* (1970). The word was coined from the Greek word ‘patros’ which referred to the male-dominated power structure that forms the basis of the
society. Millet points out how male domination is maintained in the modern society. The picture of women’s oppression that emerges from Millet’s analysis is essentially that of an interior colonisation. According to Millet, in modern times patriarchy is sustained chiefly by attitudes rather than political or economic structures. Gayatri Spivak gives voice to the subaltern in her powerful essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* She disputes the demolition of Hindu rites *sati* in India by the British has been generally understood as a case of “White men saving brown women from brown men” (93).

Feminism has a very different set of concerns in the third world countries. With the history of colonisation behind them, the feminists from these countries engaged themselves in the task of liberating their women from oppressive cultural and religious conventions like *purdah* and *sati*. The lack of proper education and the influence of superstition are powerful hostile forces that they meet. Though most of the third world countries differ politically, socially and economically from one another, there is often a similarity in their ideologies. Their ideologies result from a common colonial experience that defines women as a property of men. Survival in these countries depends on the work that women do. Yet their labour has been undervalued and ignored. Whether waged or unwaged, female employment is subsumed by the family and controlled by ideologies that attach low status to women and their work.

Feminism is primarily a revolution in social consciousness. It has affected literature and literary criticism from its earliest days. Feminist criticism has now become a fully established branch of literary studies. One section of feminist critics attempt re-readings of literature written by women to discover
hidden expressions of feminist protest. The interesting example of such an endeavour is the work of Susan Gubar and Gilbert Sandra *The Mad Woman in the Attic*. They also analyse the women characters in Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre* and their concealed protest against men. Another section of feminist critics engage themselves in the task of unearthing forgotten, unknown and unappreciated texts of literary significance. Recent research in this field has brought to limelight several significant female writers like Rokeya Hossein, whose works were for long ignored or considered insignificant. These critics take up re-reading of male texts, too, mostly to reveal the positive or negative attitudes to feminism that these works conceal. Kate Millet’s reading of Henry Miller and Norman Mailer is a pioneering work of this genre. Another significant attempt in this field has been to discover a female tradition in literature. One of the pioneering studies in this field is that of Elaine Showalter. In her *A Literature of Their Own*, she analyses the works of the famous and unpopular British women writers and discovers a female tradition and subculture in English Literature which has so far been overlooked by male critics.

According to Showalter, the development of the female tradition is similar to the development of any other literary subculture. She obviously draws on Fanon’s study of colonial and racial subcultures which suggests that all literary subcultures (Black and colonial) go through three major phases. The first one is of imitation, in which artists and intellectuals in the subculture blindly imitate the norms of the dominant tradition. Showalter names this phase as the ‘feminine phase.’ The leading female writers of this phase portray their heroines as ‘ideal’ women and as the angel in the house. The second phase of literary subculture is
generally the protest against the dominating standards and values. Such protest is manifested mainly through the advocacy of minority rights and values including demands for autonomy. Showalter calls this phase of the literary tradition as ‘feminist phase.’ This stage coincides with the upsurge of the first wave of feminist movements and most of the works that Showalter includes in this phase openly demand better status and more freedom for women. The third and the most important phase is search for a genuine identity. It is in this stage the quest for freedom is turned inward and aimed at the goal of self-discovery. Sometimes all the three may appear in a single writer. It marks the development of a woman-centered literature of inner space.

The girl-child, even in the educated families, continues to suffer due to gender discrimination while the educated housewife is no better. In many cases she is treated as an instrument of reproduction. The increase in the number of bride burning and dowry deaths is a sad commentary on her status. Outside the family, woman is being reduced more and more to the level of commodity. The obsession to exploit a woman’s body for advertisement and sales promotion is taking away the dignity of her as a person. In the civilised societies, crimes against women are increasing in number. So, the women still do not benefit from security, dignity or freedom in the real sense. Engels puts the situation in the right perspective:

. . . That woman was the slave of man at the commencement of society is one of the most absurd notions that have come down to us from the period of enlightenment of the eighteenth century. Woman occupied not only a free but also a highly respected
position among all savages and all barbarians. People whose women have to work much harder than we would consider proper often have far more real respect for women than our Europeans have for theirs. The social status of the lady of civilization, surrounded by sham homage and estranged from all real work, is socially infinitely lower than that of the hard-working woman of barbarism. (481-82)

Even in the United States of America, this phenomenon is becoming more and more obvious. The achievement of economic independence does not guarantee emancipation from male-dominance. Rather, the economically independent, educated, emancipated modern woman finds herself burdened with even greater shackles. Ajita Garg has termed it as ‘woman doubly enslaved’ (24-27). It is enslavement on the domestic front and enslavement on the employment front. The miserable state of women is described by Ruth Prawer Jhabvala:

So like animals, like cows . . . Beat them, starve them, maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves, saying “do with me what you will, you are my husband, my God, it is my duty to submit to my God.” (455)

Modernism is often defined as a response to the scientific, political, and economic developments of the time and the way the people deal with those issues. Writers and authors of modern society reflect the issues of the time and give voice to the issues in their work of art. The concept of modernity keeps changing from time to time and from one social milieu to another. The roles of
women as well as men undergo a change along with the change in society. The modern women explore the entire domain of their family life, their social and inter-personal relationships, their roles as daughters, sisters, wives and mothers in a new frame of reference which they have evolved for themselves.

Industrialisation gave the opportunity of working outside home for a number of women. According to Coolidge, “not a few of these women were able to use their inherent intelligence and started to question and defy the traditional place of woman in western society” (85). As the time progressed, a gradual change took place and ‘the new woman’ emerged between the two world wars.

A woman is new if her basic concerns are deeper than merely seeking equality with men, asserting her own personality and insisting upon her own rights as a woman. The woman is new when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields. New woman is different from the traditional counterpart. She is conscious, free-spirited, resourceful, confident, independent, dynamic, at times even aggressive, uninterested in marriage, starves to acquire a new identity, and deals with the world around on her own terms. Modern woman in addition to economic, financial, and intellectual independence demands the right to choose whether to marry or remain single, to obtain work positions, and the right of sexual expression.

In the modern age, the first example of the ‘New Woman’ is Nora of Ibsen’s play A Doll’s House. Nora has become a ‘New Woman’ only in the last part of the play. In the beginning, she accepts her role which the man-made social system has imposed on her. She becomes a ‘New Woman’ when she tells her
husband, Helmer “Let us sit down and discuss” (Ibsen 85). This is the moment when she has rapidly developed a new insight into the man-made social order and the position of a woman in it. She abruptly sees her position as a woman, a wife, a mother in a new angle which is compressed in a single phrase ‘a doll’s house’ and she leaves this ‘doll’s house’ to discover herself.

William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, Ernest Hemingway’s *Snows of Kilimanjaro*, and F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* are examples of new feminist view coupled with the old view of woman in modernist literature. *The Snows of Kilimanjaro* clearly acknowledges the rapid changes that have taken place in society and the way these changes have affected women and their status. His story attributes the character Helen with traits common to the new woman. He even portrays Helen in a manly manner when she comes back into camp wearing jodhpurs (tight-fitting trousers) and carrying a rifle. Daisy, Myrtle and Jordan in *The Great Gatsby* are indeed modern women in search of enjoyment, self-fulfillment and self-realisation. Faulkner attributes to Caddy a number of traditionally feminine ethics and personality, but he also provides her with some modern and even masculine characteristics as well.

Feminist ideology in Indian literature originated from the West and Women’s Liberation Movement. Feminist literature in India has existed from the Vedic period. The introduction of western education, importantly with the arrival of colonialism in India under the British Empire, reformist movements, increase of women’s institutions, and the freedom movement made changes in women’s life in India. Women started getting education during this period. Education
gave women individuality and they began to question inequality that prevailed in society.

During that period, only rich women got education. Later on, social workers realised the need for women’s education and started many educational institutions. In the 1850s, Ishwarchand Vidyasagar founded several primary schools in villages of Bengal. John Drinkwater Bethune started the first women’s college in Calcutta in 1849. In 1851, Jotiba Phule came forward to educate the scheduled caste girls in Poona.

The work of Indian women writers is significant in making the society aware of women’s demands, and in providing a means for self-expression and, thus, rewriting the history of India. Later, in the nineteenth century, women writers became the literary figures with their numerous works that highlighted the predicament of women in the male dominated society. With the advent of reform in education, many great Indian women writers appeared to the limelight. Toru Dutt, Cornelia Sorabji, Shevantibai Nikambe, Krupabai Santhianathan and Swarnakumari Ghosal were some of the eminent women writers. In contrast to previous novels, women characters from the 1980s onwards affirm themselves and resist marriage and motherhood. Current writers portray both the multiplicity of women and the disharmony within every woman, rather than restraining the lives of women to one model. The novels budding in the twenty-first century provide examples of a whole range of thoughts towards imposition of tradition, some offering an investigation of the family construction and the caste structure as the fundamentals of patriarchal social association. They also understand legends by using new symbols and subverting the canonic versions.
Since the beginning of the feminist movement in the 1960s in the West, much has been written on women. Only a few feminist writers made their contribution to the women’s movement against this tyrannical patriarchy. Margaret Drabble, Doris Lessing, Iris Murdoch, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood have contributed greatly to the movement and have been internationally acclaimed as feminist novelists. They introduced the rise of a new wave of feminism across the world. Their influence on Indian writers resulted in a new breed of Indian feminists. The outstanding feminist novelists in the breed are Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Shobha De, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, Kamala Markandaya and Arundhati Roy. They occupy a prestigious position in Indo-English fiction. Their writings reproduce a range of shades, colours and visions. The statement of identity in their writings deserves a better treatment at the hands of their male counterparts. They protest against the cruelty perpetrated on the women by portraying their responses and reactions. The force of mutiny against emotionless life, incompatible marriages and disobedient ways of their life partners are obvious in their writings. The protagonists of their novels are women of a usual Indian society. The plot of their story is woven around the women who negotiate the oppression of a patriarchal society. They have heralded a new consciousness predominantly the pitiable troubles of the Indian women. Through women writers’ eyes, women can visualise an unusual humanity, with their support they can seek to realise the potential of human achievement.

Though a Western art form has been applied to an Indian mode of storytelling in the Indo-English fiction, the content of it seems to be Indians
revealing the Indian sensibility and the Indian social and political situations. The comprehensive vision and philosophical insight of the Indian women novelists make them on par with the writers of international repute. When the male writers concentrated on the individual’s predicament, socio-economic political changes and an over simplification of the feminine, women writers have concerned themselves with the subtleties of oppression, issues of power in a patriarchal set up and the unjust marginalisation of women.

Among the contemporary women novelists, Namita Gokhale is a conscious and a sensitive writer. Her views on literature represent her as a socially conscientious writer who believes in the close association of literature and life. She has made great and important contribution to Indian English fiction. Her keen interest in observing things around her made her a celebrated novelist. Her novels reveal her keen concern for the welfare of women.

Namita Gokhale’s women refuse to accept the narrow roles imposed on them in the name of tradition by patriarchy. They are very bold and courageous to go beyond their boundaries. They endeavour to make reforms in society against the role in which tradition has placed them. Mies argues:

. . . The process for the liberation of women and men are interrelated. It is not possible for women in our societies to break out the cage of patriarchal relations, unless the men begin a movement in the same direction. A men’s movement against patriarchy should not be motivated by compassionate paternalism, but by the wish to re-establish themselves a sense of human
dignity and respect. How can men respect themselves if they have no respect for women? (78)

The first novel of Namita Gokhale, *Paro: Dreams of Passion* centers around the lives of two women characters Paro and Priya. Priya, the narrator of Paro’s story and her own, informs the reader that how unconventional and modern Paro made her appearance at her own wedding reception. She marries B.R., the sewing machine entrepreneur, with whom Priya herself had love and physical relation, the whole scene is shocking to the middle-class sensibility of Priya and even to Paro’s parents.

Her audacity and confidence took my breath away. This was not how brides behaved in my world. All the brides I had ever encountered kept their heads – which were so perilously downcast as to appear anatomically endangered – well covered with their Sari Pallavs, but she stood proud and straight, and led the way, with B.R, and her parents trailing after her. Her father, I knew, was a Brigadier (retd), and her mother too looked an average member of the upper middle class. Both has a polite vacant smiles fixed uneasily to their faces, and they appeared in every way too mundane and ordinary to have bred so exotic a creature, as the shimmering bride before them. *(PDP 10)*

For an ‘emancipated’ woman like Paro, marriage is not permanent. In one of the conversations with Priya, she gives her views about ‘marriage’ in one brief sentence, ‘I always knew it [marriage] sounded too good to last! And it didn’t?’ After her brief marital stint with B.R, in her ‘quite unconcerned way’ she replies,
‘He used to be my husband’ (27). She becomes the “symbol of and prototype of emancipation and individuality”. “I am myself, ‘she would say theatrically’, and no one else. I depend on nobody. I am my own person” (PDP 48).

Namita Gokhale’s creations more or less reflect the characters of other Indian woman writers of her time. Asha Rani is the protagonist of Shoba De’s controversial novel *Starry Nights*. Asha Rani struggles for her inordinate ambitions with all her strength in a male dominated society. Like Asha Rani, Paro sets about mutilating, dominating men whom she meets, denying them their truths and values and dismantling their superiority. Paro’s visions and dreams have liberated her from customary marriage conventions, “Life has not tired her – she is undiminished, she has grown. She is still obsessed, loudly and clamorously, with questions that the rest of us answered, or decided not to answer, at some period around adolescence” (PDP 26).

Being discontent with divorce and having lived with a lover in open adultery, the next aim of Paro’s sexual voyage is Avinendra whom Priya calls ‘Lenin’. For Lenin, Paro is a mother-cum-lover figure. Paro also performs a role as the mistress of Shambhu Nath Mishra, an unscrupulous Minister. Her last and final sexual adventure is her marriage with Loukas Leoras, a Greek film maker and also a homosexual.

Priya, who has closely watched the sexual journey of Paro, feels that Paro’s adventures have liberated her ‘from marriage and convention.’ Priya remarks on Paro’s journey:

This is the Paro who is but recently liberated from marriage and convention; she is still convinced that she is as young and
desirable as she ever was. Her massive breasts, like the enlarged 
poles of her skin, have grown ponderous with age. Even her 
fingers have become fatter – but this coarsening of the body has 
also somehow catalysed a startling vitality of mind, a vigour that 
is as crude as it is real. (*PDP* 26)

Lenin recognises the truths that Paro has left a husband and a lover and 
has a small son of ambiguous parentage, but he does not in any way change his 
love for her. In one of the get-togethers of the social elite, Lenin remarks about 
Paro, “Now this lady . . . is a real individual. She has the courage of her 
convictions. She is not a kept woman; she is free. That is why I love her” (*PDP* 
47).

Paro is able to manipulate so many males in her life and all this in open 
defiance of the norms of male-made social order. Priya, too, feels perturbed by 
such a question, “how it was that she managed to manipulate people the way she 
did.” Paro’s outright answer is, “It’s part of being a beautiful woman. It’s a full-
time occupation and much harder work than it seems. But it has its rewards, I 
confess” (62). In each relation, she uses sex as her weapon to gain power. 
Foucault describes this as:

The notion of sex brought about a fundamental reversal; it made it 
possible to invert the representation of the relationships of power 
to sexuality, causing the latter appear, not in its essential and 
positive relation to power, but as being rooted in a specific and 
irreducible urgency which power tries as best it can to dominate. 
(*PDP* 155)
In the past, women were passive and mere objects, even if they knew about their husband’s illicit relationship, they obeyed to what the Puranas say that whatever happens in their life, their place is beside their husbands. But Paro is an emancipated woman, when she saw Bubu (B.R) screwing her neighbour’s daughter, she left him immediately. Paro says about this to Priya, “After that, I decided I would pay him back in his own coin. I mean everyone was in love with me, and who do you think could ever love that guy?” (59). Through this, the author tries to mock at the male-chauvinistic society which uses Puranas and Sastras only for their favour. But Paro fully knows of the man-made laws of the society of which she is a part to be exploited. When Priya questions Paro concerning ‘using’ B.R’s alimony after their separation, her abrupt answer is, “They [men] made the rules” (PDP 34). In other words, what she wishes to suggest is when a woman chooses to be bold, she can beat man at his own game.

The novelist apparently replicates the male norm of climbing the social ladder by using woman as crutches. Paro, a determined lady, does accurately the same. She makes use of men to achieve her ambition. Paro’s obsession and apparent promiscuity have become symbol of the struggle for liberation from the constricting socio-cultural environment which binds woman to the societal taboos and impinges on herself. Pathak, a critic, comments on this respect, “Paro, liberated from marriage and convention, exudes a startling vitality of mind, a vigour that is as crude as it is real” (Dhawan 188).

Priya sees herself in Paro. She decides to crystallise her dreams of passion into a steady ambition to capture a husband with status. Like Paro, Priya too, realises quite early in life that men are to be used for women’s personal
situations, hence, when she is shown the photograph of Suresh, ‘an owlish youth leaning on a Standard Herald car,’ her calculative impulses start working and she gives her consent to marry him. Here, she is forthright in declaring that ‘the car decided me’ (PDP 20).

In the strata of society to which Priya belongs, an unmarried girl’s morality is synonymous with virginity and all brides should present their virginity as a wedding gift to their husbands. But Priya has lost her virginity before her marriage. This fact does not give rise to any apprehension in her that her husband might find it out. In her own words, she comments how she has turned the value-system of male-dominated society upside down:

My marriage was middle-class one, much as any other. My husband was a virgin, and did not seem to notice that I was not. B.R. accepted my resignation with equanimity. Suresh unburdened his ambitions, his hopes and dreams to me. He wanted to prove himself to make it. (PDP 20-21)

Unlike the traditional woman, Priya is bold enough to have an extramarital relationship. When she goes to Bombay and meets her ex-boss, B.R.; the earlier contact is again established and Priya is enjoying every moment of it without any tint of guilt. Priya’s description of her second visit with B.R. describes her blissful state.

I would meet B.R. almost every evening, and have dinner with him, with wine, candlelight, roses and all the – other trappings of a covert romance. We would make love in anonymous hotel rooms. I would punctuate his appointments and draft short memos of
passion in his absences. We would copulate with a love that was both urgent and tender; he would examine every pore and crevice of my body with the wonder of one who finds a treasure that has been washed back from the sea. . . .

It was a second youth, a middle-aged revival of dreams. I had indeed never even dreamt of such passion, and I kept delaying the inevitable return to Delhi and Suresh’s clumsy hateful arms. . . .

Bombay held me in thrall. Those were perhaps the happiest days of my life. (39-40)

Priya also adds, “I wouldn’t have minded dying in those moments of perfect bliss” (PDP 37).

Priya soon returns to Delhi. At home, Suresh very reluctantly tells Priya that during her absence he has heard some rumours about her and B.R., he even goes to the extent of convincing her that he trusts her fully. Priya, who is confident of manipulating Suresh the way she likes, refuses her relationship with B.R. Later, Suresh finds out her illicit relationship with B.R. by reading the diary of Priya, she does not feel repentant at all and replies:

‘And if you think,’ I said, turning my attention to Suresh, ‘if you think I ever had, or could have had, any sentiment except . . . no, not hatred, you’re not even worthy of that . . . if you think I could have had any sentiment for you except ridicule – then you are just an egotistical fool; I’ve lived with you like a whore, because you paid for it.’ (PDP 125)
Sharad Srivastava in his *The New Woman in Indian English Fiction* eulogises, “what Priya does in her material life qualifies her to be called an emancipated modern woman who has shed some of the inhibitions imposed on a woman in the male-made social order” (108).

In the concluding part of the novel, Namita Gokhale emphasises that in a man-woman relationship, it is not the woman who is to be blamed. The new generation of women, are alert as they have become acutely aware of the snares in marriage. Thus, Priya and Paro indulge in sex as often as they please without any moral debasement and in their case, marriage ceases to be a sacred institution. Feminist critic Mangayarkarasi writes about Namita Gokhale’s women characters, “It is her way of reverting the male dominated value codes. Majority of women characters revolt and rebel against the subordination, Paro and Priya are very illustrative of this” (167).

Woman is deeply conscious of all the inequality and injustice in the society that is meted out to women and she has been its victim yet she has no complaint against it. Rashna Imhasly, a transpersonal psychologist, demonstrates, “The ongoing problem for women growing up in a patriarchal world not to trust their true feelings, they are taught to be helpful, brave and polite even when they feel sad, frightened, rebellious, and angry” (e-mail source). This is not because she has a moral foundation to give her power but because she has learnt to operate this social system to her benefit.

Namita Gokhale in her second novel, *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* has produced a matriarchal society which observes “women as strong people engage in all kinds of activities” (Gupta 40). The women characters in this novel are
independent and empowered and they have major roles to play in the novel. They are successful in creating a position for themselves in the male-dominated society. They provide evidence to the society that woman is equal to man in all phases of life. They live victorious, real, and contented lives, notwithstanding the hurts and disappointments they have to face. These women neither reside on their miseries nor do they indulge in self-pity.

Ammi is a courtesan, a kothawali (prostitute), and a Muslim by religion. She and her granddaughter, Gudiya, arrive at Delhi to break themselves from the shackles of penury that has pinned them down following the suicide of the grandmother’s brother and their loss of wealth and property. Ammi is intelligent enough to understand the nature of human psyche which is guarded by the tentacles of religion. In some way, she resembles Moll Flanders, one of Daniel Defoe’s creations.

Gudiya tells us how her resourceful grandmother steals a marble slab from the building site and adorns it with marigold leaves and “five rounded river stones” (1). Then she makes it into an altar and places it “beneath the holy Peepul tree” (1). Although not familiar with the higher principles of Hinduism, Ammi quickly becomes an expert in singing bhajans. She has ‘honeyed-voice’ and is able to utter “Arre Rama, Rama, Rama” (12), with ease. Immediately her new ‘avtaar’ (role) starts yielding results with abundance of money. Though not spiritual in the beginning of the novel, Ammi succeeds in creating “the paraphernalia of religion” (2), which eventually come as their means of sustenance. While the “shrine beneath the peepul tree” is an abode of worship for the believers and the same keeps Ammi and Gudiya “fed and clothed” (GGG 4),
she is able to achieve her desired end by turning the temple into a commercially viable venture with the help of Phoolwati, Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Kailash Shastri. Having attained her aim, the old lady gradually increases her ‘abstraction’ ‘detachment’ and ‘inexplicable remoteness’ thereby adds a mystical charm and aura to her personality.

Ammi uses her show of ‘Virtue’ and her ‘Silence’ to successfully manipulate the male-dominated society. She holds Pandit Kailash Shastri by her ‘silence’ and ‘vague generalisations’ about theology and Sundar Pahalwan by her show of virtue and piousness. Ammi is acknowledged as a superior being in theology and mysticism even by Pandit Kailash Shastri, a noted scholar in Hindu religion. The Pandit is so fascinated that at one situation he says, “‘I can sense that she is an extra-ordinary woman with remarkable Siddhis,’ . . . If even the dust from her mind were to settle on an ordinary mortal like me I would become a better and cleverer person” (GGG 53). Sharad Srivastava rightly observes:

Ammi cleverly manipulates Pandit Kailash Shastri into declaring her a ‘Saintly’ person. Of course, it is also in the Pandit’s own interest that Ammi should become a ‘Saint’ and draw a large following about her. It is this weakness of Kailash Shastri which Ammi is at once able to perceive through her long experience.

(114)

Hence, it is not at all surprising that after her death, the Pandit declares that she has attained Maha Samadhi (salvation) by voluntarily relinquishing her consciousness to the large universe. It is in keeping her in such status that she is
buried in the temple premises in the lotus position. She gets not only honour, but a sort of ‘sainthood’ with a considerable following.

Ammi’s first acid test comes when she is required to tackle Sundar Pahalwan, who is the dada (boss) of that area. Sundar Pahalwan is all out to exercise his territorial rights over the stretch of pavement which is being used by Ammi for her Jhuggi (slum residence). In her typical honey-voice, Ammi says to Sundar Pahalwan, “Seize our money, Pahalwanji, but spare our self-respect. I am the widow of a Brahmin, my husband was a priest, guard your tongue or else a virtuous woman’s curses may follow you!” (12). Pahalwan is further asked to come in the following week to take his cash. But on the following visit, Sunder Pahalwan is surprised to find Ammi singing a bhajan in front of ‘a statue of Durga astride a tiger’ under a ‘glittering Canopy’ (12) with a band of worshippers assembled around the shrine. Surprised by her bhajan, Sundar Pahalwan is completely overpowered and he puts eleven rupees in the Thali (plate) before leaving the shrine. Similarly, when the man from the municipal corporation comes with the demolition order for the ‘pucca cement structure’ (13), he bows at Ammi’s feet and begs her pardon for the ‘blasphemy’ (GGG 13).

Ammi discovers herself on the mistaken side of the law. Her fingerprints are found on the ‘axe’ with which a slum-dweller Saboo has killed another slum-dweller, Shambhu. Ammi is led off to the police station but the presence of her devotees succeeds in getting her out of the case. She is courageous and diplomatic in dealing with problems. She is quite vivacious, enterprising, skillful, yet she is an aberration of the ‘new woman’ in the words of Sharad Srivastava. She is not depressed a bit by the misfortunes that befall her daughter,
granddaughter or herself. She does not shed tears over the elopement of her
daughter with the beggar, Riyasuddin Rizvi. Gudiya remarks about
grandmother’s determination in the following words, “She was not the one to
shed tears” and she “never wasted her time on anger” (9). Later in the novel,
when Gudiya sees the statue of her grandmother, she identifies her bold Ammi
who had courageously fought against all the agony and misfortunes in life. To
her, grandmother’s, “marbled face looked almost tender and as I [she] stared deep
into the knowing stone eyes I [she] caught the shadow of an inscrutable grimace
– a knowing, compounded of pain and ruthless courage” (GGG 217).

Women hold great vigour and vibrance that can contribute to the well-
being of the world. Through grandmother and other women characters, Namita
Gokhale proves her attempts to extend considerable amount of hope, courage and
determination among the women. Though Ammi lost everything, she never
falters or bemoans the life of drudgery that she leads. Instead, she diplomatically
tackles Gudiya’s as well as her life. She gradually starts believing in God and
realises the power within her. She observes fasting four days a week. Even when
she is not fasting, she would have just fruits and nuts and sometimes a little
yogurt. Gudiya states that grandmother, “Almost stopped eating altogether”
(GGG 27). She observes a vow of silence, and stays totally speechless for a
month, stoops mutely in a crook of the temple. The stoic calmness she maintains
even when people around are swayed by their emotions ultimately leads her to
peace and serenity. Chaithanya Elsa Achankunju says:

Her gradual withdrawal to a life of prayer and silence throws light
in the ability of prayer to revitalize and keep us steadfast amidst
tribulations. Ammi epitomizes the inner strength of a woman to
resurrect from the rains and to still build a life for her and those
around. (76)

In her divine voyage, Ammi even neglects her one and only loving
granddaughter, Gudiya. Gudiya suffered a lot by this attitude of her loving
grandmother and says, “Soon she began ignoring me altogether concentrating
solely on her prayer, beads or else singing hymns and bhajans in a startlingly
strong and youthful voice” (GGG 27).

Gudiya embodies the modern liberated woman. She wishes to be like her
‘wicked waylaid mother’ (28). She loves her ‘beloved grandmother,’ but wants to
be ‘outrageous and wicked’ (68) like her mother who has been jilted by a
harmonium player, and eloped with a beggar. Gudiya’s readiness to lead a
carefree life is evident by her anger towards her teacher Malvika Mehta. In one
of the counseling sessions, Mehta asks the students about their ambition. She
speaks kindly to all the children. She pronounces all the names nicely except
Gudiya’s and asks what is her ambition in life. Gudiya is upset by her ill-
treatment and replies, “I am going to become a film star and marry the prime
minister’s son . . . I will be the richest woman in the world, travel by aeroplane
and lock you up in jail, you witch” (GGG 126).

Namita Gokhale gives importance to the passion of woman through
Gudiya. Gudiya wants to lead a life according to her own perception and vision.
Gudiya is the modern girl who does not know the importance of education. The
easiest course for her is to use her body to achieve her goal. This is exactly what
Gudiya does. During the adolescent stage itself, she is conscious of her body and beauty. She describes her physique:

I had developed a figure. My breasts were like torpedoes and long legs and very small waist. My skin was like my mother’s, very fair. I was not, thank goodness, blonde like her, although my hair had a bleached uncared look until Phoolwati took me under her wing. (GGG 54)

Gudiya does not realise that she is living in the male-dominated mercantile society in which women who seek to compete with men without mastering their laws may be ruined. She sees her prince in young bandwallah (works in Shiv Mohan Band) Kalki, but he is actually good for nothing. She is infatuated and impressed because “he was so handsome” (150). Gudiya likes him, even though in social status and wealth, he is inferior to her. She also enjoys sex with him. She describes it in a manner as any young immature girl mesmerises, “my insides were all a flutter. I could hardly breathe, I thought that he would kiss me; but he didn’t” (GGG 149).

Though Gudiya has an ambition of becoming rich, she gives up her idea as she becomes pregnant. Phoolwati with the help of Sundar urges Kalki to marry Gudiya. She even brings this issue to the knowledge of Pandit Kailash Shastri, “And if his [Kalki’s] little worm were to crawl into her [Gudiya’s] belly, and leave her with a baby in her lap, what will you and I do Panditji?” (GGG 158).

Gudiya soon gets married to Kalki. Having thorough knowledge about the psychology of a woman, Namita Gokhale is redefining feminism through Gudiya.
Gudiya always aspires for wealth and prestigious status in the society, so she transforms her name to Pooja Abhimanyu Singh, an aristocratic name and she hopes that the change of name would lift her in the social hierarchy. The new identity makes her self-confident, poised and graceful. She does not fall prey to any difficult circumstances.

Gudiya does not worry about the departure of Kalki to Bombay in search of fortune. This does not affect her happy life with Phoolwati. She herself puts it, “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). Gudiya is very strong like her Grandmother. She knows, “pain was a general principle of life” (GGG 220).

Gudiya proves the worth of the new name through her dealings with money-minded Lamba and his nephew, Cyrus. According to Roxanne’s will, she is to possess some portion of her wealth. But like royal personalities she generously says, “I don’t want it, I said. I won’t take anything from the two of you. Yet if Roxanne left me any money, if she believed in me, if it is my due, I will not refuse it. Let me talk to the teachers in St. Jude’s before I decide that” (GGG 207).

Namita Gokhale portrays women as subjects and men as objects. Kalki stands for object and Gudiya for subject, the male order. Phoolwati advises Gudiya after the marriage that she should consider her husband, Kalki a disposable being. Phoolwati says, “The child will have a legitimate father now. Your Kalki has served his function. You can’t waste your time like this, Gudiya, with these bandwallahs!” (GGG 216).
Gudiya comes to the realisation after some months of an unhappy married life. She becomes a woman of broken heart with all her dreams destroyed, “that this was how my whole life might pass – in indifference, indignities and calculated cruelties” (GGG 170). Kalki is given some money and packed off to Bombay. It is quite a contrast to the real situation in which a man gives some money to his unwanted wife and sends her away. Soon Gudiya forgets him and continues her life.

Namita Gokhale creates the temple as a place of wonder. The shrine serves as a place of shelter, protection and worship to a lot of people. Many lepers and beggars make their living depending on the temple. It provides income and life to Phoolwati, Lila, Pandit Kailash Shastry, Sundar Pahalwan, Gudiya and many others. Some miracles also happen in the premises of the temple. People who wish to demolish and dishonour the temple are punished. On the other hand, God blesses and loves all his devotees who glorify him.

Phoolwati is a fierce, strong, practical, loving, and caring woman. She is the widow of the murdered tea-shop owner Shambhu. She uses a different technique to handle both Sundar Pahalwan and Pandit Kailash Shastrī. She uses the art of ‘deceiving the deceiver’ with Sundar Pahalwan. After the death of her first husband, she realises the importance of male support and longs to have another man to do her works and picks out the slum-bully, Sundar Pahalwan. But Phoolwati does not let him guess that she is weak, but starts bullying the ‘bully’ at their first encounter.

Lost your tongue? . . . such a Dara Singh hulk of a man, but with the courage of a mouse! Why are you so scared of Phoolwati,
man? Will she bite you? Will she eat you up? Arre Bhai, Phoolwati is just a timid woman and you are a hero-wrestler. Just say what you have to say. You want to discuss business with me, don’t you? Then say so! Come to my house at seven this evening and we can discuss whatever you want to. (GGG 105-06)

Phoolwati is the representative of unconventional image of a woman. In the beginning, she lives in a village, while her husband, Shambhu, runs a tea shop in the city. The norm of wife-beating is inverted in her relationship with Shambhu, whom she beats when he consumes alcohol and tries to bully her. Namita Gokhale projects the same scene in her novel Priya in Incredible Indyaa. In Priya in Incredible Indyaa, the narrator Priya mentions about a woman who spat at her husband because he raised his hand to beat her and took the plaited hair and pulled at it violently. The death of Shambhu does not evoke the traditional wails of grief and helplessness from Phoolwati. She even rejoices in his murder and as she never liked him for his rakish tendencies and feels like rewarding the murderer for giving the fellow his due.

Phoolwati manages the shrine and the shop boldly. Sundar Palawan begins to admire her for her boldness, business tactics, her practicality and unsentimental nature. Even after the marriage, she continues her life without much difference, “To say that to accept and follow the husband blindly constitutes the whole dharma of a women is only an exaggeration, an arthavada. The role of the woman is in fact conceived as sahadhamacarya or moral companionship in the first instance” (Pande 43). Once Sundar praises Phoolwati
as, “no one in the whole of India can match my Phoolwati for brains, M.A., B.A., Ph.D. – she is cleverer than all that” (GGG 191).

Modernity implies the way which is new, advanced and does not resemble the past. Clara Nubile aptly enumerates what it means to be a woman in modern India:

Being a woman in modern India means to be entrapped into the inescapable cage of “being a woman – wife – mother” . . . . A woman cannot exist outside the boundaries of married life and motherhood, otherwise she is perceived as useless and unworthy according to traditional Indian view. . . . Indian women do not appear to have their independent role in society. (12)

Phoolwati is the modern woman because she does not bother about the societal restrictions. Phoolwati is aware that Indian marriage-market is heavily in support of men. When Sundar suggests marriage, she gives her approval subject to certain conditionalities. The narrator observes:

These were, firstly, that he would build a pucca house for her, the ownership of which would irrevocably be hers, secondly that he would allow her to continue running her business as before and, thirdly, that Sundar Pahalwan was to treat me [Gudiya] as their adoptive daughter. (GGG 179)

Phoolwati is here reversing the prevalent norm of the society where the conditionality would come from the male side. Unlike the traditional woman, she holds her grip over Sundar Pahalwan. Once when Sundar starts beating the school bus driver who has come to pick up Gudiya, Phoolwati allows him to beat him
for some time and then in order to show her superiority, she begins to scold Sundar for being cruel to the driver whom she now calls her guest, “You Joker, I called you here at seven and instead you stroll in any time and beat up my guests. Just who do you think you are, Mr. Wrestler?” (GGG 108).

Phoolwati handles Pandit Kailash Shastri in her own way unlike Ammi’s non-violent principles. After Ammi’s death Pandit Kailash Shastri starts delivering discourses on the Bhagavad Gita. Phoolwati objects to this, “Forget your philosophy-wilosophy. . . . Only Lata Mangeshkar could replace our Mataji” (120). Then she announces henceforth she will lead the bhajans. At first, everyone feels the idea as absurd because she has no musical skill. Yet she clings to her view and makes her ‘debut,’ “From the moment she picked up the mike, she was a star. Her infectious smile, her energy, her optimism, her spontaneity, all communicated themselves to her audience. The off-scale notes did not seem to matter. It was a sort of miracle” (122). Even the Pandit has to, ‘admit that the songs went down better than his discourses’ (GGG 122).

Phoolwati is a mother-surrogate, friend, guardian, sister, well-wisher and all for Gudiya. She attains prosperity through her determination and perseverance. She has immense enthusiasm to assist others and is generous. When Gudiya attains puberty, she gives a set of old rags and towels and instructs their usage. She gives Gudiya many gifts – a length of ribbon, a set of bindis, a small mirror, a kajal stick, and a bright, shiny lipstick.

When Gudiya feels depressed, lonely and sick after the death of her grandmother, Roxanne Lamba, the principal of the missionary school, St. Judes Academy for the Socially Handicapped, where Gudiya studies takes her home
and provides all comforts. Lamba, the husband of Roxanne tries to insist that she would not be the adoptive daughter. Then Phoolwati replies disdainfully, “Arre Sahib, don’t worry about your money on our account. We may not be rich like you, but we do have our izzat. By the grace of God, our Gudiya is not short of money” (GGG 93). Though Gudiya is luxurious at the house of Roxanne, she is not happy because she is lonely. She comes back to Phoolwati’s house and decides not to go back again.

Phoolwati always gives hope to Gudiya and provides her with all sorts of comfort. When Phoolwati gets the gold coin treasure from the temple premises, she keeps it safely in the bureau and says to Gudiya, “One key for you and one for me . . . but the money is yours; never forget it” (203). Later when Gudiya is deserted by her husband, Gudiya and her daughter Mallika live under the benign care of Phoolwati. Phoolwati’s mental strength is visible when her second husband Sundar Pahalwan, with whom she leads a happy life, is murdered. In Gudiya’s words:

Phoolwati did not scream or cry out or weep or respond in any of the ways I [Gudiya] might have expected. Instead, quietly, and with great dignity, she slowly dragged Sundar’s body back into the house. Then, she sat down beside him and began systematically breaking her green glass bangles on the cold marble floor. (GGG 235)

Namita Gokhale introduces the concept of sisterhood which is yet another feature of the feminist ideology. An alternate model of living is offered by the writer for women, which does not lean on male presence or protection and she is
optimistic in her attitude. After Kalki’s disappearance and Sundar’s death, the two females Phoolwati and Gudiya, live in harmony, with mutual love and affection. The gynocentric world that they inhabit is presented as self-sufficient in which the male support is neither wished nor missed, “When enough time passes, and the dust settles on those troubled memories, perhaps I shall be able to embellish them with a veil of fabulism and mystery. Rendering the past acceptable, if not accountable is a talent I inherited from my Ammi” (GGG 239-40).

Gudiya hopes that she will be able to invest herself with a veil of fabulism and mystery as her Ammi has successfully done. Ammi started a new life in the slum. She had been able to give an aura to her past life and died as a saint. Gudiya being the granddaughter of Ammi might as well repeat the game. With the blood of Ammi in her veins and the teaching of Phoolwati to direct her, Gudiya, who or else would have been perished in this patriarchal society might as well be on the way to be a new woman as she herself puts it, “The end of the world is nowhere in sight” (GGG 240).

Feminist studies show that the sophisticated upper class women maintain self-imposed rigidity. A very good example is Roxanne Lamba, an English educated Parsi woman. She is a broad-minded social worker. She is the owner of the sharp blade company, an old and respected firm of blade manufacturers and distributors. She is very much affectionate and has a special liking for Gudiya. Though she is rich, she does not have children. Her life does not carry much eager and zest. She leads a passive life compared to that of Ammi, Phoolwati, Lila, Malaviha Mehta, and Gudiya. She is magnanimous enough and sympathetic
to share some of her wealth with Gudiya. She is stronger than her husband Lamba, who has no job, no goals, and no commitment except for enjoying his rich wife’s assets. After Ammi’s death when Gudiya falls sick, Roxanne gives medical care and looks after her like a mother. When Gudiya is afraid of sleeping in a separate room, she places an eagle feather under the pillow of Gudiya to get rid of her fear. She even consoles Gudiya with her comforting words, “Remember that you can tell me everything. Don’t think you are alone because your grandmother is gone” (100). Gudiya remarks about Roxanne in the subsequent way, “She was the entirely good person I had ever encountered. From the time I had joined St. Jude’s, she had encouraged me to believe in myself and to trust in myself, and she in turn had always trusted and believed in me” (GGG 195).

Lila has an assertive independent personality. She is a calm, pious, self-effacing old woman who becomes a committed disciple of Ammi. She always accompanies Ammi believing in her supernatural power. She learns to live without male support. She lives at the temple and does service to God. Her love towards God and Grandmother is immense. She washes the clothes of grandmother and Gudiya and also irons them. She even massages the feet of Ammi. She has a dog-like devotion towards Ammi. At the time of the burial of grandmother’s dead body, she throws her jewels into the grave of grandmother as a token of devotion. On the contrary, her son who is more interested in the jewellery than his mother leaves her in the shrine permanently. She is actually half-dead after the death of grandmother, but she is overpowered by grandmother’s spirit and talks in her voice and gives sermon.
Malaviha Mehta is a minor woman character in the novel *Gods, Graves and Grandmother*. She is a graduate in social work and is deputed as a teacher at St. Jude’s school. She is prim and proper, well-dressed and glamorous, but this beauty does not have long lasting impact. In one of her counselling sessions, Gudiya observes:

She is extremely good looking. She had creamy white skin, jet-black hair, cut in a short, extremely succulent lip. She was dressed in simple clothes that I suspected of being very expensive something about her looks; her clothes and her air of total control aroused my instant and unprovoked hostility. She represented everything I most wanted to be and almost, but not quite, was. (GGG 124)

Namita Gokhale’s *A Himalayan Love Story* is an account of the tribulation of a Pahari woman ensnared in a marriage with a happy man. Parvati, the central character deconstructs the stereotypical confines of sexual boundaries. The title “The Dance of the Honey Bee” is loaded with multiple meanings. It symbolises the freedom of sexual choice. Like the dance of the honey bees – they dance in a haphazard manner as the path to the hills is in curvature – her life is at obtuse angle. The author is able to draw a parallel between Parvati’s mother and the queen honey bee in terms of rendezvous. It is a well-known scientific fact that in certain species (Australian red buck spider, praying mantis, drone bee, angler fish and fig wasp) the males are merely used for sex, after which they are genetically programmed for self-destruction. The males have no social interaction with females and solely function as a sperm-giver. The plight of the male honey
bee is one of the classical examples of sexual suicide. This unbelievable biological story is essentially explained by Mark Winston in his book, *The Biology of the Honey Bee*. Its main function in the hive is to fertilise the queen bee and it dies within minutes of the copulation. It does not work in terms of collecting pollens, grains, etc. Its only purpose of existence is sexual mating. Namita Gokhale believes that ideal love is the fulfillment on the levels of the body, mind and soul, which can be said to correspond to the physical, emotional and spiritual aspect of love and sex. For her, enjoying sexual pleasure is one of the basic steps on the way to achieve salvation. She believes that physical gratification is primary and important in women’s life.

In *A Himalayan Love Story*, most of the female characters need men only for sexual mating. Parvati’s mother, a Pahari middle-class Brahmin widow, also wants Shrikrishnji (her bachelor tenant) primarily for sexual mating and not for financial and social support. Parvati after the death of her mother lives with her step maternal uncle Masterji. She pursues her studies under the guidance of her history teacher Salman. She appreciates the physical charm of Salman, “He had a pale ivory skin, and an air of composure and confidence that seemed destined for a larger world than Nainital” (*HLS* 23). She views him only as a sexual partner. It bears a close resemblance to a controversial scene in D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*, where women are appreciating the sensuality of the nude sculpture of a black man.

Nancy Chodorow, a feminist, sociologist and psychoanalyst, feels that heterosexual fantasy and desire have an individual component, a private heterosexual eroticism that contrasts with or specifies further, the cultural norm.
This is called ‘personal myth’ by Ernst Kris, an Austrian psychoanalyst and art historian. It is this ‘personal myth’ or ‘individual component’ that impels Parvati to keep an eye on a young Muslim boy, Salman. Driven with desire, she loses her virginity to him without having any emotion of love or commitment to marriage. She does not have the feeling of guilt. Salman’s departure does not bother her a bit, “I was stoic, even relieved, about his departure. My encounters with Salman had quelled some silent hunger within me” (HLS 31). Here Parvati resembles Paro who has had a relationship with her art master and enjoyed each and every moment of sexual indulgence. Thus, the predominance of ‘personal myth’ over ‘cultural norm’ in Parvati exhibits her sexually liberated self. Shrikrishnji, Salman, and the art master bear close resemblance to the drone. After providing sexual gratification, they are completely out of focus in the life of their female mates.

Traditionally, women were not allowed to educate themselves because the orthodox Hindus thought that the knowledge of books would lead the women onto the path of ruin. Even in this modern world, “female education is treated as futile because it has no bearing on future marital roles” (Ross 211). Namita Gokhale presents a world where mothers are the obstacles to the success of their daughters. Parvati is a frail, poor and neglected daughter of a poor illiterate widow, growing up in one of the most backward areas of U.P. under the benevolence of her maternal uncle, Masterji. When Parvati attains an appropriate age for admission in school, her mother protests:

It would be different if you were a boy. . . . Then you could earn and provide for me in my old age. But all you are going to do is
get married to some no-good, and take my gold Champakali necklace off with you as dowry. It’s a double curse, to first be born a woman, then get straddled with another female to provide for! (HLS 6)

A similar incident occurs in *Gods, Graves and Grandmother* and in *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. When Gudiya goes to school and displays her newfound knowledge to all, grandmother considers education as waste of time and Gudiya comments:

> My grandmother considered it all a waste of time. ‘I have seen a lot of learned men,’ she would say, scrunching up her face in distaste. Their minds get dizzy from too much thinking. . . . ‘You’re better off learning to cook, Gudiya,’ she said, regaining control again. ‘Become a good cook and marry a respectable man.’ (GGG 15)

Grandmother’s words make Gudiya lose her interest in studies and aspires to marry a wealthy person.

In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, Shakuntala is portrayed as a woman who wants to learn many things, but the opportunity is denied by her mother. Shakuntala describes her agony:

> My mother never fatigued of telling me not to fancy myself a scholar, as the scriptures were forbidden to women. She worried incessantly only about her son, how she would oversee his education and ensure that he got the opportunities he deserved. Eventually, she managed to enlist him in a hermitage somewhere
high in the mountains. The Rishi there was as renowned as he was learned. (*HLS* 11)

Marriage according to Hindu Law is a sacrament and the bond of marriage is irrevocable. Marriages are mostly arranged by parents or elders. Parvati’s marriage is prearranged by her uncle Masterji. Mukul and Parvati love each other and Mukul reveals it to her uncle. But her uncle chooses Lalit because he is a Thuldhoti Brahmin like them, but Mukul is a Khasiya Brahmin. Caste system widespread in Indian society compels him to take this decision. Later, he writes to Mukul:

_Do not misunderstand me, the neat, precise handwriting had said, ‘it is not that I myself subscribe to these antiquated, theories, or believe in caste or creed, but it is always wise to remain within the circumscribed circle of social acceptance, especially for a woman.’ (*HLS* 104-05)_

As a result Parvati has to marry Lalit. The most important decision in her life is taken by someone else and she has to obey it. She never gets any type of physical or emotional gratification from her homosexual husband. Homosexuality is largely seen as weakness and abnormality, whereas, heterosexuality is considered to be ‘normal’, ‘common’ and ‘masculine.’ Lalit hides his nature of homosexuality and ruins her life. Parvati who has enjoyed a passionate physical relationship with Salman, finds it all the more claustrophobic to live in a sexually starved marriage. Her ordeal is poignantly portrayed by the author in these words, “I had tasted real passion, and I could, feel nothing but scorn for this farce.
My young husband looked – puzzled, even oppressed, and kept a stubborn, watchful distance from me” (HLS 33).

Women try to strengthen their relationships with their husbands by cooking tasty food for them. Namita Gokhale tries to show the futile effort of Parvati to claim at least some part of her husband’s body (stomach) through cooking. In Kiran Desai’s novel *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard*, Kulfi finds herself in an unsatisfactory marital situation and attains freedom through cooking exotic food. Cooking food is considered to give energy towards a positive and creative world. Psychologically women try to fill the void in their life, their souls, and satisfy their hunger through the next best alternative that can fulfill them, that is food. In Manju Kapur’s *Difficult Daughters*, the first wife is compelled to leave the bedroom for the second wife, but refuses to leave her hold on the kitchen and tries to partially eliminate the second wife by not allowing her to cook for the husband and hence exerts her rights on him. Parvati, with her expertise in cooking, attempts to satisfy her husband. But this conventional solution of bonding fails to replace the need for carnal pleasure and as a result of this, Parvati sleeps amidst mice and cockroaches in the kitchen.

Parvati has to undergo domestic violence even for opening her husband’s letter. Lalit feels jealous of Parvati opening a letter written by Mukul. In the past, Parvati used to go along with Mukul and Lalit, her two good friends. In those days, on one occasion Lalit saw Mukul and Parvati being very close. He cannot forget the event which results in aversion towards Parvati. Parvati is horrified at this disclosure:
I was indeed surprised to see the most undisguised jealousy in him. For a moment my spirit lifted. Then the truth registered, and I realized that I had blundered, my way into a nightmare; for the jealousy was mixed with an expression of intense yearning which was directed not towards me but Mukul. (HLS 36)

Adeleine, wife of Mukul, is a practical woman. She is an Anglo-Burmese widow with a girl child, who abuses Mukul. Mukul remarks, “Our mating was a solemn and joyless event.” Adeleine however teaches Mukul “the merits of dull comfort over passion” and gradually he is able to forget Parvati. She is a woman without feelings especially towards Mukul. He says, “I longed suddenly for Adeleine’s unemotional presence.” He has to say about Adeleine’s qualities, “Adeleine is a very level-headed woman, with a strong sense of order and propriety. She taught me the merits of dull comfort over passion, and gradually I was able to forget Parvati” (HLS 136).

Irra, daughter of Parvati, is a spiritually elevated girl. Her mother is insane and her guardian Masterji is dead. She has no one to give her a secured life. She trusts soulfully that Mukul, the heir of Masterji, will do something for herself and her mother. Though she wants to go along with Mukul, she allows him to start his journey immediately as Adeleine’s daughter has got cramp while she is in the swimming pool. She also gives assurance that she would look after Parvati. Mukul observes:

But who will look after your mother? I [Mukul] asked. . . .

Yet I was older than her, I knew it was not so easy.

‘I will,’ she replied
‘And who will look after you?’ I persisted

‘The money will,’ she said simply. (HLS 200-01)

At the end of the novel, the readers are sympathetic towards Irra because Mukul cannot do anything for her and her mother, yet he promises to be by their side when they need his help. But here, Mukul is an escapist and proves him to be an incapable man. At last, Parvati lands herself in a sanctuary.

The Book of Shadows provides an acute and clean look into the condition and treatment of women in the educated Indian society. Rachita, the protagonist is in love with Anand, her fiancé. Anand is younger than her, he is “twenty-six to my [Rachita] thirty-three” (BS 31). Although they love each other, they have frequent quarrels without any reason. Rachita once yielded to passion and had a physical relationship with her best friend’s husband. When Anand comes to know about the relationship, he cannot forgive Rachita and commits suicide. He leaves a long suicide letter, “Goodbye, Cruel world! I bid the farewell! You have tried me sorely, you have abused my trust! My tryst with time is over! Tell the faithless one, the Delilah, that her betrayal will cost her dear. . . . And so on” (BS 5).

Anand’s suicide marks the patriarchal norm of taking revenge by physical torture or emotional blackmail on the faithlessness of a woman. He cannot bear the infidelity of Rachita and puts an end to his life. Anand did not complain about Rachita’s infidelity. Rachita is not able to come out of the shock of Anand’s death. Her departed, “fiancé’s sister, as unstable a specimen as her sibling, had thrown a beakerful of acid on my [Rachita] face the day after the inquest” (BS 5). Though Anand’s sister and Rachita are highly educated ladies,
yet the cruelty with which Anand’s sister throws acid on Rachita’s face is an act of illiterate or narrow minded person. Acid attack has a very serious impact upon Rachita’s mental and physical health. Recollecting the experience, Rachita says:

As my vision blurred, as my consciousness dissolved in a river of searing pain, . . .

The pain, the unbearable pain. . . .

The acid had worked on the bone cartilage, and the surgeon has been cautious in his restorations . . . and my face, that familiar index of my being, has dissolved into absurdity and abstraction. Even my fingers do not recognize the changed contours of my cheeks, of the injured flesh. 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. (BS 6-7)

The world of Rachita and Anand are totally different. Anand is very aggressive while Rachita is calm and cool. Anand always expects Rachita to be obedient to him and live her life as per his wishes. Anand tries to dominate Rachita and emphasises that she must listen to him. Namita Gokhale rather focuses the world as a male-centered one. Woman has been forbidden from any role in decision-making and is expected to be confined within the four walls of the house. Sarah Grimke observes:

Man has subjugated woman to his will used her as a means to promote his sensual pleasure to be instrumental in promoting his comfort, but never has he desired to elevate her to that rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could do to debase and
enslave her mind, and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says the being he has thus deeply injured in his inferior. (10)

Namita Gokhale presents a world in which men consider women to be inferior and subordinate to them. It is expected from women to fulfil each and every paroxysms, likes, dislikes, moods, temperaments and habits of men. They take over the entire life and identity of the women just the way Anand does with Rachita. The total and complete authority of Anand over Rachita is exposed in the occasion wherein Rachita organises a party for Anand. Recalling the incident, Rachita says:

It was a wine and candlelight evening. I was wearing a red sari, a deep red sari. I had invited him to my flat in Delhi, I had engineered the atmospherics to charm the soon-to-flower genius, I had fallen in love with. . . .

Somewhere along the way the evening had turned sour, rancid. He threw a glass of white wine at me. I was so livid that I was radiating heat and anger, . . . Then he took a pin (a pin, goddamn it!) from the desk where my students’ earnest uncorrected tutorials and term-papers lay, and pricked his finger with it. He . . . pricked his finger carefully. A tiny droplet of blood, . . . oozed out of his skin. . . . He placed the drop of blood upon my forehead, between my eyebrows, just below my bindi. (BS 31)

The incident shows the territorial tendency of men who wants to mark the objects they hold thereby proclaiming their rights, and Rachita is no exemption.
Self-obsession of Rachita hurts Anand and his reaction against this is in the form of violence. This incites the author’s views on traditional patriarchal tendency and attitude.

In Indian society, the patriarchal norm stresses the importance of virginity for women. In the male-dominated society, men do not accept the relationship of a woman with another man outside the prescribed norms of relationships sanctioned by the society. Nasreen writes in this view, “In our society a woman is like a disposable sanitary napkin. If she is used by a single male she becomes an entirely untouchable object henceforth” (128).

Since the creation of the world, patriarchy has been imposed on women. Even myths have been made as well as understood from the male point of view. Whether they are queens of the noble families or the mother and wife hailing from ordinary houses, the images of women have always been fashioned according to the male imagination. The women writers of today are discovering their myths to interrogate men and to provide articulation to the marginalised and the oppressed women.

Rachita and Anand usually end up fighting for no apparent reason. In one such discussion, they start quarrelling and Anand bursts out at Rachita, “That’s exactly what I was saying. The trouble with you is that you don’t bother to listen to me. The trouble with you is that you are so bloody self-obsessed” (30-31). About her relationship with Anand, Rachita herself says, “Just my luck” (BS 6). By the term ‘luck,’ Rachita intends to convey that their relationship is not based on intelligence or mutual understanding but is a matter of chance. Anand keeps
suspecting Rachita and dominates her to such an extent that it crushes her individual identity. He treats Rachita as ‘an object’ and not as ‘subject’.

The death of Anand leaves behind only “the pain, the unbearable pain” (6) for Rachita. She feels guilty of Anand’s suicide and realises that the burden of that act lies on her alone, “My best friend’s husband had slithered off somewhere” (5). A woman is required to be pure and virgin till she is married and any indiscretions on her part is judged harshly and severely by the society, but for a man no such qualms arise. Rachita gives the probable reason that might have led Anand to take his own life and that is “defeat” and “a loss of dignity” (BS 5), which implies the notion of pride that a man has regarding the purity of his female partner. In our society, the idea that virginity equals purity is endorsed strongly by religious organisations.

In *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*, Namita Gokhale tries to prove how a woman can use her power to create a space for herself. In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf says:

> I am not sure how they were educated; whether they were taught to write; whether they had sitting rooms to themselves; how many woman had children before they were twenty-one; what, in short, they did from eight in the morning till eight at night. They had no money evidently; according to Professor Trevelyan they were married whether they like it or not before they were out of the nursery, at fifteen or sixteen very likely. (43)

Through the protagonist Shakuntala, Namita Gokhale has successfully developed the urges, dreams and desires of the Indian woman who refuses to be restricted
and suffocated by her environment. N.M. Nigam asserts that Namita Gokhale has that capacity to create a woman’s world, which sees “women as strong people engaged in all kinds of activities” (SPM 57).

Shakuntala lives in a traditional environment of rural India where empowerment of women is like a dream. Shakuntala is a village girl of Kumaon region, where the mountains, forests, and other natural objects are her best friends. She wonders whether this atmosphere, “the rain, the thunder, the lightning, all know my sorrow, my despair” (SPM 5). She wants to create a space of her own where she can enjoy the glitter and sparkle of freedom and restriction. Slowly but gradually, with courage and enthusiasm, Shakuntala involves herself in the process of women empowerment, where the new ideas of equality, social, cultural, and relational independence produce new role models for her. Tehelka, Indian news magazine says, “Namita Gokhale’s new novel chronicles the life of Mother India, Daughter India and Every woman in most India . . . a timeless tale . . . ambient with history and cross-hatched with lucid spare prose” (Cover Page).

Namita Gokhale has recreated Kalidasa’s Shakuntala. She has juxtaposed Kalidasa’s Shakuntala to a modern day ‘namesake’ (SPM 6) who is “abandoned in love” (Manglam 32). Regarding the reassessment of the characters of our great epics, Shashi Deshpande in a thought-provoking article Telling Our Own Stories, makes an appreciable comment:

Our epics and Puranas are still with us and among us. . . . Over the years they have been reinvented, reshaped and regionalized. Myths continue to be a reference point for people in their daily
lives and we have so internalized them that they are part of our psyche, part of our personal, religious and Indian identity. (86)

Shakuntala’s mother names her Shakuntala after the name of the heroine of Kalidasa’s *Abhijnanasakuntalam*. The mythical Shakuntala is a nymph, daughter of the apsara, Menaka and the sage, Vishwamitra. Namita Gokhale’s Shakuntala is the daughter of a common villager, a *Vaidya* (doctor of herbs), who passed away when she was barely five years old. Though they have similarity in their names, their objective and passion are different. Kalidasa’s Shakuntala suffers oppression and exploitation, whereas Namita Gokhale’s twenty-first century Shakuntala despite her sufferings is modern enough to abandon the world for self-fulfillment, identity, and self-realisation. From her childhood, Namita Gokhale’s Shakuntala expressed hunger towards learning different things, seeing different places and gaining varied experiences. There are things which she wants to see, to know, and to do. She is thirsty for knowledge and travel, wants to fly in the open air like a bird. But her mother always tells her, “birds return to their nest at dusk but clouds must weep their tears unseen in distant lands” (*HLS* 9). She does not want to play a role as a traditional woman. Namita Gokhale’s Shakuntala attempts to break the traditional image of a woman. Her dream is to have an independent life without any restrictions and bounds. *India Today* comments:

[Gokhale’s] Shakuntala is the female counterpart of Hesse’s Siddhartha, a seeker who must follow the trail of her destiny without looking back . . . Gokhale is drunk with the wound of
words and that itself makes for a hypnotic read. . . . This is Shakuntala for the 21st century. (Cover Page)

Namita Gokhale reveals the shocking fact that whether a woman is the epic Shakuntala or modern Shakuntala, the oppression and exploitation, she experiences are the same. The author deals with the female psyche and “break out the snare of silence” by “writing from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the Phallus” (Cixous 251).

In the beginning of the novel, Shakuntala is introduced as a five-year-old innocent girl and by the end of the novel she matures into a strong, experienced and spiritually elevated woman. Savitri in Sri Aurobindo’s epic Savitri is a powerful and enlightened woman who is physically and mentally very strong. She becomes elevated spiritually through her encounter with death. Likewise, Shakuntala in Namita Gokhale’s novel suffers oppression right from her childhood. Through suffering, she gets matured and spiritually elevated. She detests her mother’s repressive, authoritarian figure since her infancy. Shakuntala narrates her adventures and experiences as she remembers them. Her mother is a widow, illiterate, and a traditional woman. Shakuntala, her mother and her brother live in a remote village in the northern mountains. She is an enthusiastic, spirited, playful and restless girl. She aspires to get education, but it is denied to her.

A child’s first and foremost relationship is with the mother. The primary, life sustaining and nourishing relationship of a mother and child is rendered ineffectively in the novel owing to the mother’s adherence to patriarchal norms and biases that alienate the daughter and the mother. On several occasions
Shakuntala is humiliated by her mother for being a girl child. Once when due to rain Shakuntala’s skirt gets soaked and streaked with mud, her mother “strikes” her “thrice across the face” (6). Because of this ill-treatment at home, Shakuntala finds solace in nature. She visits the forest alone, watches the hawks and eagles, counts the clouds and gives names and shapes. She can see “an elephant trumpeting in the sky, and a fluffed rabbit” (*SPM* 5).

Shakuntala with her artistic sensibility about nature makes silence as a tool of her survival. Her love and sensibility for nature reveals to her the power of creativity. Creativeness in terms of attitude or spirit means, “Being less inhibited, less bound, less restricted or enculturated” (Dicaprio 401). Shakuntala finds her joys by keeping herself engaged in the company of nature, “All day I roamed the hills. Where the forests abound with deer and stag, where tigers and panther prowl” (8). Bitter experiences of her childhood days lead Shakuntala to spend her time in loneliness. She hates everything about her mother. The company of her mother and the smell of the house irritate her, “A fungal smell, compounded of stale gruel, smoke and disappointment, was settled like a pall about our house” (*SPM* 8). In the novels of Namita Gokhale, one could find mother-daughter hatred as predominant theme. Namita Gokhale, in her interview with the researcher explains that in her real life she loves her mother very deeply and what she hates is the gender stereotypes imposed on women. She furthers:

As a matter of fact, I am very close to my mother who is beautiful, intelligent and kind and I have lived with her ever since I lost my husband nineteen years ago. In my novels, the mothers are often hated by their daughters because of the gender stereotypes that
they helplessly inflict and perpetuate. It’s difficult to hate ones mothers but women often carry a residue of bitterness and recrimination against them and blame them for missed opportunities and a holding back of what is just and fair because of the constraint of Indian society that is an interesting and perceptive observation.

Shakuntala reacts against the discrimination by her mother, “with an anger so violent” (27) that it surprises Shakuntala herself. Shakuntala becomes a rebel in a system in which everything needs to be protested and changed. When the mother describes Guresvara, her brother, as a “reflection of some divinity” (19), Shakuntala dissolves into a jealous rage, plucks all the marigolds in the garden and stamps on them till they are interred in the damp earth. Her rage is symbolic of her inner conflict against the male-female gender discrimination. She is also surprised at the Sacred Thread Ceremony (Upanayan Samskara) of her brother in which he is invested with sacred thread. When the guru recites the Gayatri Mantra her mother thunders the garment into her ears so that she cannot hear the mantra. Shakuntala asks the reason for her mother’s strange behaviour. The reason given by her mother is, “or else you’ll grow a moustache and no one will marry you” (19). Hurt deeply by the partial treatment meted out at her right from the childhood at home, Shakuntala takes a resolution that “I would never treat my daughter so, I [Shakuntala] resolved” (SPM 31).

On being a woman, Shakuntala is denied of learning or performing sacred rites whereas her brother is supposed to be a man of destiny, born only to restore order and true dharma to the world. The role of Guresvara is stated in the novel
as, “Born a Brahmin, descended from the sapta-rishi s, the seven sky born sages, was certain that gods cherished him and acted and interceded on his advice” (SPM 11).

Womanhood indicates the ability of women to bear children and it should be considered as a boon from God. But in our Indian society, restrictions are laid upon women especially from the view of rituals related to the notion of purity and defilement. During these days, woman is considered as impure and is not allowed to come out of her seclusion. She is forbidden to touch anything or show her face to others, or even touch cooked food during menstrual days.

On reaching puberty, Shakuntala is treated scornfully by her mother who is driven by orthodox beliefs and rituals. At the time she attains womanhood, her mother is busy making sweets and food for his son Guresvara who is a sanyasi during his visit to home. When her mother sees the blood trickling down the legs of Shakuntala, she rebukes, “‘Have you no modesty, girl!’ She [mother] hissed. ‘Defiling the household fires when a holy man is visiting us! You are a woman now, you had better understand what that implies! She dragged me [Shakuntala] to the low stoop beside the cowshed. . . .’” (31). Shakuntala painfully asks herself, “What has I done wrong?” (31) which makes her feel the monthly ritual a “monthly curse of women” (SPM 46).

The same situation is described by the author in her Gods, Graves and Grandmother. When Gudiya tells the news of attaining puberty, grandmother rebukes:

‘Nothing but trouble,’ grandmother gabbled, for her teeth had begun to foil her, ‘this girl is good for nothing but trouble from
now.’ A look of virulent hatred crossed her face. She looked like a wicked old witch, and I hated her passionately and with all my heart. (54)

She also warns Gudiya, “don’t forget, you are not to step into the temple compound. . . . You are impure for a few days and we can’t offend the gods” (55). Gudiya does not understand the reason for grandmother’s upset. She asks Phoolwati about the bad mood of grandmother, “I could not understand. ‘It’s not my fault,’ I protested, ‘I haven’t done anything wrong. First Grandmother gets upset and now you! Why Phoolwati?’ ” Phoolwati replies, “In our village we celebrate the arrival of womanhood, the descent of the Devi. But then your grandmother is an old lady; she has to manage the temple” (GGG 55).

Shakuntala’s mother is overwhelmed with her son’s arrival and she simply ignores her daughter. Driven by shame, anger and pride she walks away from home that has rejected her. She experiences a sense of rejection even as a girl. She takes shelter in the woods. The woods comfort her, make her feel happy and enjoy freedom. She meets the rock demoness there. It is the rock demoness who sows the first seed to take the courageous step into her liberated world. She is in the ecstatic state, “I whistled to myself now, a happy, cheerful tune that gave me courage and indicated to anyone who might hear that I was not afraid” (33). The rock demoness advises Shakuntala to be strong to find a place in this man-made world. The demoness observes, “you must be strong, Shakuntala. There is a little place in your world for strong women, but none for the weak” (SPM 36). Through the demoness, Namita Gokhale raises voice to the voiceless.
Shakuntala is touched by the love story of Shakuntala and Dushyanta told by her brother’s tutor. The story stimulates the flow of love in her body and she herself confesses that, “I too was ready for love, eager for exquisite sting of Kamadeva’s arrows” (SPM 24). According to Hindu religion, marriage is a social institution. The institution of marriage is of great importance in the life of a young woman. It marks a point of maturity and signifies the flowering of life for women. But for Shakuntala it is a way to release herself from the clutches of her mother. She is eager to get married proving the views of Simone de Beauvoir regarding marriage:

There is a unanimous agreement that getting a husband – or, in some cases a protector – is for her (woman) the most important of undertaking. . . . She will free herself from the parental home, from her mother’s hold, she will open up her future not by active conquest but by delivering herself up, passive and docile, into the hands of new master. (352)

The marriage is a middle class arranged marriage. She is wedded to Srijan in the month of Magh. Srijan is a rich man, the chief of fourteen villages. She mocks at the ceremonies during the Indian marriage, “Now I was a bride. I had been instructed to look at the earth, to keep my gaze down and appear modest. Even as I garlanded my bridegroom, I looked down and saw only his feet” (SPM 39).

Shakuntala is the third wife of Srijan. She gets reminded of her mother’s advice about chastity of woman. Her marriage brings her a deep sense of ill-will towards the men-favoured society where men do not bother about their own
chastity. Mother stresses the demands of chastity to her before the marriage, “Never forget the vessel of your virtue is like the urn of water you balance on your head. She would say, you must not spill even a drop as you carry it home!” (SPM 40).

Namita Gokhale describes Hindu beliefs and customs in her novel *Shakuntala: The Play of Memory*. In one of the rituals of Hindu marriage, the bridegroom shows the double stars of Vashishta and Arundhati to the bride, which is a symbol of marital fulfillment and loyalty. Hindus believe in the story behind the double stars. Arundhati is the wife of great sage Vashishtha. Agni, the god of fire, has an eye on her. But her loyalty towards her husband is so strong that no other man can even think of her. According to the faith of Hindus, Vashishta and Arundhati become double stars. In the novel, Srijan shows Shakuntala, the star of Arundhati, the purest of wives, the emblem of fidelity on the day of wedding. The sight of Arundhati star and the words of her mother and husband on virtue of women make her thoughtful:

Why some things had to be some way rather than another, why a twig on the sacrificial fire must point to the right rather than left, why a woman who was menstruating was unclean, why games had to have rules? Things were as they were, and would remain so however strange or absurd they seemed. I resisted their certainties. . . . (SPM 42)

After marriage, Shakuntala leads a blissful life. She admits, “I am Shakuntala, the wife of Mahasamant Srijan, I told myself, and I am happy to be her” (56). In her new home, she enjoys a rare degree of freedom which she
explains thus, “I could swim in the river when I pleased, climb the tree in the forest in search of bird nests, rest in the grassy meadows to stare at the sky and dreams” (*SPM* 14). After a period of time, she gets bored with her life because Srijan was always engaged. She has to sit at home for more time without having any work. Betty Friedan describes this as “terrible tiredness” and observes:

This terrible tiredness took so many women to doctors in the 1950’s and one decided to investigate it. He found, surprisingly, that his patients suffering from “housewife’s fatigue” slept more than an adult needed to sleep – as much as ten hours a day – and that the actual energy they expended on housework did not tax their capacity. The real problem must be something else, he decided – perhaps boredom. Some doctors told their women patients they must get out of the house for a day, treat themselves to a movie in town. (31)

Shakuntala is excited to see new lands, and people outside her world. She is an emerging woman who questions herself, “why could I not desire what men enjoyed: the freedom to wander, to be elsewhere, to seek, and perhaps find . . . something?” (48). Once the priest asks why she is not happy, she replies, “I want to see the world. I want to travel as the men folks do” (103). The priest utters a shocking reply, “Men are the masters of women. Your father protects you in childhood, your husband protects you in youth, and your sons protect you in old age; a woman is never fit for independence that is not the way of the world” (*SPM* 104).
When Shakuntala’s brother visits her home, he tells about his “journey to the lands of the Madhya Desha, the middle kingdoms, where the Narmada flowed through canyons of marble rock” (74). He indulges in conversation with Srijan about copper and gold mines where men burrowed deep into the enrails of earth to extract precious metals. He also talks about religion, industry and trade taking place all over the country. Shakuntala listened intently to their conversation. She says to herself, “I sighed loudly, my emotions were compounded of loudly, my emotions were compounded of impatience and longing. My brother and my husband both heard the sigh and separately misunderstood the meaning behind it” (SPM 75).

Shakuntala is not able to bear a child even after some years of marriage. A man can also be responsible for the production of a foetus, but in Indian orthodox families, it is the woman who is held responsible for childlessness and is humiliated as barren (49). As instructed by the male dominated society, Shakuntala thinks she is responsible for this and says, “Every month my ritu would arrive and prove me barren; Srijan’s seed would not prosper within me. I was at fault” (49). Srijan insults her even for the slightest reasons and says gravely, “A lady of the household is bound by duties quite distinct from those of a priest or monk? Perhaps you are forgetting who you are” (SPM 50).

Marriage provides Shakuntala certain material and sexual convenience and to adapt a remark from Beauvoir, “it frees her from loneliness establishes her securely in space and time by giving them a home, and it is a definitive fulfillment of her existence” (451). Marriage under such condition is an agreement and not a blissful event. As marriage denotes the beginning of a new
life, Shakuntala also takes it as a step toward maturity. Shakuntala’s aspired freedom and joy is illusory and short-lived. Shakuntala’s expectations from marriage is to see the world, to wander with the freedom of birds, clouds, which ends with the rigid code of conduct imposed by Srijan. Several inhibitions of gender, tradition and orthodoxy of religion suppress the freedom of women. Nimsarkar in his *Women in Girish Karnad’s Plays: A Critical Perspective* remarks:

> In the conjugal life, wife enters husband’s home with great expectation and desires; she builds an empire of her imagination, of happy life and various plans, have children and success, would serve her husband, other relatives and society amidst protection and congenial atmosphere. That is the house, destiny that girls aim to have in the Hindu Society, and they are nurtured under such cultural teaching. (119)

When Srijan decides to perform the *Agnicayana* (altar of fire) ceremony for progeny, she does not have belief in it, but she consoles herself that the prayers might provide a change from the dull routine life. She asks Srijan “Will they bring an elephant for the ritual?” (49). Srijan laughs and answers that “you shall receive new garments and gold and silver ornaments” (50). She says, “I want to see an elephant!” Srijan remarks, “you are an odd woman. You do not care for ornaments or rich garments or a man’s flattering words” (SPM 50). It is true that she wants a change and unlike traditional woman she is longing for new experiences.
The idea of purity is forced on women by religious beliefs and values in
the various communities in India. She is denied of spiritual freedom. Srijan
arranged *Agnicayana* ritual for progeny, *Adhvaryu* (chief priest) asks Shakuntala,
“‘When did last have your monthly blood visitation?’ he asked, in a tone both
contemptuous and accusing. ‘Your impurity would defile the ritual, take away its
merit.’ I was tempted to lie and disrupt the prayers, but I was a well-born
Brahmin woman” (51). He also advised, “Be sure that you will be pure during
the prayers” (*SPM* 51).

Shakuntala faces a crisis when she sees that her husband Srijan has
brought a woman, named Kamalini with him from his travel to work as
Shakuntala’s handmaiden. The presence of another woman in the house lets off a
kind of rebellion in Shakuntala. When Shakuntala asks Srijan about Kamalini,
Srijan says, “Do not ask any questions, Shakuntala” (57-58). Shakuntala
concludes that “he [Srijan] was a man, men were allowed many women, it was
the way of the world” (*SPM* 58).

Shakuntala wants to befriend Kamalini, but she cannot do so. She feels
Kamalini to be her future replacement brought by Srijan. Srijan provides all the
household authorities and materialistic comforts to Shakuntala, but she refuses
them as panacea for her husband’s choice for the other women. Shakuntala feels
like a bird in the golden cage. She hates the laws constructed by men. The female
desire has a very vital role in our social fabric, but according to Namita Gokhale,
in our patriarchal society, men enjoy all the freedom, and women always wait for
their chance. Srijan instructs Shakuntala, “see that you treat her [Kamalini] well”
(58). Shakuntala says, “I screamed and sobbed aloud, beating my head against the
stone walls of the temple like the kind of women, I had not imagined I would ever become” (58). She feels safe, even secure and comfort in the temple and she says, “that is the thing about tears: if you cry loud and deep enough they become a form of comfort” (59). Kamalini’s attitude towards Srijan further causes inescapable jealousy in Shakuntala, “Who was she, why had Srijan brought her into our household?” (SPM 68) are the questions that revolve day and night in her mind.

Shakuntala feels heartbroken by the arrival of the new woman and declares, “the world was a place of treason, not of trust” (86) and the arrival of a woman into the house is, “a collapse of all that had been good and true in my life” (58). She is also depressed that she cannot bear a son to Srijan. She remembers Manava Dharma Shastra:

A barren wife should be abandoned in the tenth year, one who bears only daughters in the twelfth and one whose children all die in the fifteenth. . . . Even if my husband chooses to consort with her, she could not threaten me. So I told myself, but in my heart I felt hollow and afraid. (SPM 95)

Shakuntala dreads to think of her own future. She feels a deep sense of hollowness and fearfulness. It seems very urgent to her that she should become a mother. She visits priests and takes their advice for conceiving a child. She says, “It is a child I want” and “A child would change everything” (SPM 102). She performs prayers, yagna and takes herbs from the priest to get a child. Like most of the Indian women, Shakuntala too suffers from some psychological problems like sense of frustration, inner conflict, disintegration, sense of fear, pain and
silent suffering. Shakuntala is, thus, enslaved by her own limitations and denied to play any part in the social sphere.

Women’s exclusion from public life operating on two levels. Woman is relegated to child rearing by biological fiat on an individual level, which is then reformulated through the formation of the state and the institutionalization of public-private domains on a political level. (Eisenstein 14)

Buddhism is a path of practice and spiritual development leading to the knowledge of true nature of reality. It is a way of finding peace within oneself. Buddhists believe that nothing is permanent and every action has its consequence. Buddhism preaches its doctrine to all people irrespective of race, nationality, caste, sexuality, or gender. Shakuntala has an unquenchable spiritual thirst, a keen desire to renounce the world cropped up in her mind to become a monk like her brother and mother-in-law. Hinduism does not permit a woman to renounce the world. She feels jealous of Srijan’s mother who renounced this world. Srijan’s mother left the family and lived in a monastery as a Buddhist monk. Shakuntala always remembers the Bhikkuni’s Sermon, “Arise. Commence a new life!” (20). She wants to be a Buddhist monk like Srijan’s mother:

Perhaps I too could become a monk or a renunciate. Our religion had no place for women, but the Buddhist orders inducted women as novices. Like Srijan’s mother, I would sport a shaved head and wear ochre robes to live a life of penitence. I would walk and travel and see the world. (SPM 88)
Shakuntala leaves home to find some comfort in Matrika Temple on the bank of the river and takes off her silver anklet which is a symbol of control that binds her with responsibilities and duties of a woman to her family and home. She leaves the “silver anklet” on the bank as a sign of freedom and dreams of a liberated life where she can experience some relief from the shackles of tradition that restrain her individuality and right to live her life fully and freely.

Shakuntala realises that, “I am free; I will wear them again only when it is time to return home” (107). Wandering on the shore, she sees a man called Nearchus who is from the land of Yavanas. He is a young and well-built person with “muscular thighs and stocky calves and the curliest hair” (109). Nearchus’s appearance and experience attract Shakuntala very much. She says, “He looks utterly carefree, reckless and happy; his square, firm face holds a baffling merriment, and I know, instinctively, that he has traveled for long and through many worlds to be here” (109). He smiles at her and she is enchanted by his smile. She feels that with this man she can roam around the world and enjoy her life by wandering from one place to another. Attracted by this man, she says, “My life has changed; I feel that I cannot go back to where I have come from” (110). Her encounter with this young man is the turning point in her life and for a new relationship, she is ready to cross the “threshold of the house” (SPM 114).

Shakuntala leaves her husband “to travel to distant lands and experience an entirely different kind of love” (Gupta 56-57). Being attracted by his physical charm, she makes illicit physical relations with him. Their fierce love making provides her a soulful satisfaction. With new hopes of a new life, she loses the identity of “Shakuntala” and all the memories related to her. She changes her
name into Yaduri and becomes a fallen woman. Nearchus is amused by her hunger for knowledge and pleasure. He remarks, “you find more pleasure in my tongue than in my kisses” (129). She is an emancipated woman who wants absolute freedom. She is ready to “go on and on, until the end of the world if necessary” (SPM 129).

After a short period of time, she finds herself in an unknown city with the man. When he introduces her to others, he says, “you are my wife now, my delicious Yaduri” (163), Shakuntala thinks, “I cannot be his wife, I am the wife of another. But what can I say” (SPM 163). Shakuntala does not want to be the wife of any man because she desires to live her life on her own terms without any interference from others. Finally, Shakuntala leaves the Yavana without saying a word to him and decides not to think about the past. She is not ready to face defeat from a man again. She remains a strong-willed person throughout her life, and her courage gives her power to sing a song of her victory.

Shakuntala wants to abandon the world which is controlled and governed by men. Through Shakuntala, Namita Gokhale presents the image of an emerging woman who never cares either for the rules and regulations of the society or for marriage, the social institution. She likes to lead a life of independence. She rejects the patriarchal pattern of her physical home and moves to a new space of “new cosmos” from the periphery of patriarchal enclosure. The way which is chosen by her leads her towards self-determination, self-esteem, self-fulfillment and self-actualisation. The emerging image of Shakuntala is that of a “new woman” who achieves her desires and believes amidst all hardships. The term “new woman” is described by Usha Bande and Atma Ram as, “the new woman is
one who, shows off her feminine mystique, is aware of herself as an individual, she is free from her traditional, social and moral constrictions and is able to live with a heightened sense of dignity, and individuality” (14).

Through the process of women empowerment, the new ideas of democracy, female equality, and female socio-cultural and economic independence, come into existence, which produced new role models for women. The new culture of democracy enables them to think through the question of their rights. Indian feminist V. Geetha asserts that “economic, social, and cultural empowerment embody a new woman ideal, who is animated by female self-worth, independence, sexual daring and a desire to change the world, to make it more egalitarian for both men and women” (117). Thus, Namita Gokhale’s Shakuntala is fiercely independent and not dependent on men for power and endurance.

In Priya in Incredible Indyaa, the protagonist Priya changes her life style from a middle class typist to the modern woman because her husband is the Minister of State for Food Processing, Animal Husbandry, Fisheries and Canneries. From a hibiscus flower adorned girl, now she becomes the hostess of upper class social parties. She is a good homemaker, an affectionate and understanding mother, a good companion, and a woman with moral ethics. She is an embodiment of motherly love and is sought by her twin sons Luv and Kush continuously for their daily needs. Kush depends on her to keep his room clean and to arrange his clothes. Luv takes his mother’s help to sort out his broken relationship. The determined and outspoken boys need her help whether it is for
arranging marriage or getting approval in a homosexual relationship. She even learns to operate them with a rare mix of traditional values and modern thinking.

Paromita, a journalist and daughter of the Chief Minister, is a self-confident and outspoken woman who wears “crinkled cotton skirt with gold khari work motifs, and a white cotton man’s shirt with rolled-up sleeves” (PII 80). Paromita and Luv love each other. Luv needs his mother’s help to arrange marriage, but at the same time Paromita does not wait for her parents to arrange her marriage. She straightaway goes to her future mother-in-law to talk about her marriage proposal with her horoscope. This incident makes the readers remember that we are living in the modern India with empowered women. Shoba De rightly says:

A lot of kids today are entrusting this all – important decision to their folks – parents, relatives, even well-meaning friends. Of course, the new ‘arrangement’ is ‘Dekho’ session, social meetings orchestrated by middle men or women these days work in a more acceptable session. (Web Source)

Monalisa Das Mann, Luv’s ex-girlfriend, is a Bengali Sikh inhabited in the USA. She is the daughter of educated parents with loads of willpower and courage. She has a daring personality who approaches Priya to strengthen her broken relationship with Luv. She becomes a writer even though Luv betrayed her. She publishes a novel entitled The Unsuitable Bride and dedicates the novel to “Aunty Priya: The Desi Mom-in-Law from Hell I never had, and the living inspiration for this book” (PII 191). Namita Gokhale has depicted upper and lower class girls equitably. The aristocratic Suzi and Suki, daughters of famous
business magnet Manoviraj Sethia, as well as Dhobi’s daughter Dayavati who is studying Fashion Technology are emancipated women.

The female characters of Namita Gokhale liberate themselves from the male-dominant society. During the process of attaining freedom, they are able to loosen themselves completely from the shackles of social conventions. They are able to break away from the ideals of Indian womanhood. They do not want to be Sita, Savitri, Damyanthi or Gandhari. They are the representatives of the new woman and the emancipated woman. They transform themselves from the timid, dependent and dumb persons to self-respecting, self-confident individuals. During the course of their life journey, they tried to attain success in diverse ways. In this chapter, the researcher attempts to present and investigate women’s consciousness at the moral, emotional and spiritual levels. Beauvoir rightly observes, “One is not born, but rather becomes a woman” (249). Having discussed the women’s consciousness in this chapter, the next chapter **Quest for Self-Identity** analyses quest for freedom and identity of characters in the novels of Namita Gokhale.