



CONTENTIONS OF FAMILY AND MOTHERHOOD IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR

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Abstract

The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of these individual families as its molecules. In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy, without any need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family he is the bourgeois and the wife represent the proletariat. In the industrial world, the specific character of the economic oppression burdening the proletariat is visible in all its sharpness only when all special legal privileges of the capitalist class have been abolished and complete legal equality of both classes established. The democratic republic does not do away with the opposition of the two classes; on the contrary, it provides the clear field on which the fight can be fought out. And in the same way, the peculiar character of the supremacy of the husband over the wife in the modern family, the necessity of creating real social equality between them, and the way to do it, will only be seen in the clear light of day when both possess legally complete equality of rights. Then it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands the abolition of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society. Frederick Engels' work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* written in 1884 is a foundation stone in understanding the modern family system in the world. Engels confirms that the study of primitive history reveals the practice of polygamy by men and polyandry by women at the same time and their common children as common to all.

Keywords: Anita Nair, modern family system, oppression, equality of rights, democracy, polygamy

Engels makes a revolutionary statement that in order to liberate women, one needs to bring the whole female sex into public industry which in turn, is possible only through the abolition of monogamous families. As long as family stands for private ownership of property which entails the basic economic unit in the society such a change is impossible. Engels mentions the Nair community of Kerala to evidence how the status of women deteriorated as a result of the transition from matriliney to patriliney that happened in

community. The colonial administration along with Nair Reform Movements led to the division of property among other social and economic change, owned by all members of the tharavad, into individual properties which resulted in the formation of nuclear family units comprising husband, wife and their children. While talking about the politics behind the concept of family Judith Stacey observes that in classic patriarchy women accept subordination in exchange for protection and secure social status. Whereas the “modern patriarchy sugarcoats this exchange by wrapping it in an ideology of separate spheres and romantic love” (91). According to Stacey the concept of contemporary family construes marital commitment as a product of the free will and passions of two equal individuals who are drawn to each other by romantic attraction and complementary emotional needs. But the domestic division of labour makes women subordinate to men quite apart from their individual desires (93). In her words:

Under the guise of a separate but equal division of labour between male breadwinners and female homemakers, women and children became increasingly dependent upon the earnings of men. The nineteenth century gave rise to cults of “true womanhood,” celebrating womanhood and maternalism. This generated conception of femininity that continue to infuse Western family ideology. The development of analogues doctrines about the “tender years” of young children who need a specifically maternal form of love and care began to undermine earlier legal doctrines, which had treated children as patriarchal property. (92)

She argues that a clear perspective of a contemporary family turmoil will be possible only by recognizing contradictions inherent in the ideology, principles and practices of the modern family system. While considering different forms of patriarchies and how women have dealt with them sociologist Deniz Kandiyoti observes that women strategize within a set of concrete constraints and she terms it patriarchal bargain. She explains that she coined the term to convey the complex and difficult compromise that works out in patriarchy. As she puts it “it is intended to indicate the existence of set rules and scripts regulating gender relations, to which both genders accommodate and acquiesce, yet which may nonetheless be contested, redefined, and renegotiated” (148). She uses the word bargain to show the asymmetrical exchange where women bargain from a weaker position. In her article “The Idea of a Home: A Kind of Space” Mary Douglas defines home as “so a home is not only a space, it also has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has 126 aesthetic and moral dimensions (289).

The domain of home is often overburdened by social definitions especially that of a female space. The notion home is generally preceded by the adjective ‘sweet’. Thus, it is believed/expected to be a place/space where people are living in harmony whereas this harmony is achieved through the politics of power. I refer to Foucault’s concept of power to substantiate this argument. Through this I try to analyze how the discourse of power works through the medium of home and how women and children succumb, respond, engage with or challenge this power. I examine how the stereotypical notions of home are acted out to achieve the so-called solidarity it symbolizes and how social identities are formed out of it. I also try to understand the gender and power relations as played in the micro space of home. Michael Foucault who was interested in the knowledge and the power that acts on human beings argues that the discourse of knowledge/power works through language. He says when a child learns to speak, she picks up the basic knowledge and rules of her culture at the same time. On his idea of power Foucault contemplates that “power is possessed; it flows from a centralized source from top to bottom and, it is repressive in its exercise (a prohibition 127 backed by sanctions)” (28). Foucault argued that process of gendering and power begins from the very beginning of a child who learns to speak a language.

In the same manner, Luce Irigaray argues against the patriarchal set up of a home and demands that women should develop an acritude feminine to express their views outside the prevalent language constructed by men. Drawing upon Foucault’s concept of power, an attempt is made here to analyze how patriarchy enjoys power over home- its women and children. Foucault looks at power as something which is beyond the state or the class of people to that of something which is exercised at a ‘microcosmic level’. Family or home is this microcosmic level where the members and their relationships formed through power relations. The domestic space has been one of the most oppressive space where women and children are

subordinated to patriarchal power. The paper discusses the concept of home as a gendered space and the second part examines how the ideal of motherhood is worked in this gendered space as an instrument of patriarchy. The novels taken for discussion in this chapter are *Lessons in Forgetting*, *Ladies Coupe* and *The Better Man*. These three novels by Anita Nair have the themes of family, motherhood and childhood intertwined with the plot of the novel. For ages it has been an internalized fact that women are house-keepers and nurturers to children whereas men are breadwinners. As Linda Jones puts it in her dissertation,

Linda Jones puts it in her dissertation, In spite of years of feminist consciousness, I assert that the hierarchal relation between genders has not changed significantly. The notion persists that home and family belong to a woman's sphere, rather than being a joint responsibility. Some societal attitudes that currently prevail are that women marry and lead conventional home-centered lives, the home being the terrain where the woman's traditional roles of domesticity, nurturance and subservience are still expected to be fulfilled as a natural function of her womanhood. (9)

Generally, patriarchy refers to the rule of the male head of a family where the eldest male member enjoys control over every other member in the family. During the twentieth century patriarchy became fundamentally important concept in gender studies and it has been theorized to understand male subordination over women. In radical feminism family is identified as a key for patriarchal power. Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan refer to S. Walby's views on patriarchy as: a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women.

For Walby, the feminist movement was a key factor in bringing about the change from private to public patriarchy, via the struggle for the vote, for access to education and to the professions, to have legal rights of property ownership, rights in marriage and divorce and so on. However, patriarchy itself was and is not defeated. It tries to expose the idea of a father, somebody who protects the women and children from the outside world, mother who is an embodiment of unconditional love and care and children who are to be loved and protected from all sorts of exploitation and has to be nurtured to be successful in their life, which is possible only with the help of a 'sweet home.' One of the questions this chapter asks is this- how this make-believe home and its relationships produce a male dominated place by restricting the women's and children's spaces? The paper analyses how homes have shaped women's and children's identities as per the needs of patriarchy. Barbara Welter in her *The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860*, proposes that assigning qualities to women such as the embodiment of unconditional love towards their children alleviated the anxiety of men.

For they could travel long and stay away from home peacefully by keeping women at home to take care of the children. Until the 1970s the word 'gender' was used to demarcate between the biological sex difference and to assign the behavior either as 'masculine' or 'feminine'. The purpose behind such assignment of gender roles was patriarchy's agenda to create a consciousness among women to internalize the idea of domesticity as their primary choice. In *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972), Ann Oakley proposes that 'Western culture exaggerates gender differences and gender roles, centers around women as housewife and mother and warns that anybody who moves away from such roles is actually hampering one's happiness. She further opines that 'gender slips uneasily between being merely another word for sex and being a contested political term'. (2) As Simon de Beauvoir's famous statement goes 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman', (8) the hierarchical opposition between the sexes were consciously drawn out to favour the masculine principle where the feminine becomes the 'other' or the 'second sex'. Shulamith Firestone in *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) suggests that: patriarchy exploits women's biological capacity to reproduce as their essential weakness.

The only way for women to break away from the oppression, she argues, is to use technological advances to free themselves from the burden of childbirth. Moreover, she advocates breaking down the biological bond between mothers and children and establishing communes where monogamy and the nuclear family are things of the past. (57) Home is a physical and a mental space where one finds shelter to both the body

and the mind. As T. Chapman puts it 'home can be defined as a secure, private, physical retreat from the world; as a representation of identity; as a relationship and as a cultural object'. (19) Thus home is something which we imagine as a place of our dreams and a refuge from the outer reality. In this sense it protects one from the public gaze. If the physical home is constructed by bricks and concrete the mental imagination of a home is constructed by the relationship between its members. Thus, home is more what we imagine than what actually it is. If one imagines it in terms of a secure place so it is. In the same way if one imagines it as a threat to one's identity that is also right. A home need not necessarily fulfill the ideal of 'a safe haven' all the time. Sharmila Sreekumar in her work *Scripting Lives: Narratives of 'Dominant' Women in Kerala* opines that Family and domesticity have been endlessly put into social discourse. The overruling fear, often bluntly expressed, is that combative and competitive domestic women would detrimentally affect the balance of power within domesticity. Their constant battle, it is feared, would erode and exhaust man's power to define terms, thus leading to inevitable collapse and destruction.

If a century earlier, anxious energies were being expended on the break-up of the joint family, today what generates comparable trauma is the perceived breaking up of monogamous nuclear domesticity. There are chat shows on television, scholarly documentation and studies, magazine reports and articles that discuss the catastrophic increase in rates of divorce, in the numbers of unmarried women and in incidence of splintered households. The domestic woman gets summoned in these discourses as both cause and cure of the present predicament. Her ideality turns out to be at once a durable commonsense that requires no elaboration and a beleaguered one that needs to be endlessly constituted, corrected and fortified. Discourses of contemporary domesticity therefore, expend tremendous space and obsessive energy on the renewed construction of the ordinary woman. (235-236) J. Giles asserts that the homologies of the modern meanings of 'home' are organized around key oppositions--home/away, stasis/movement, everyday/exceptional, private/public, traditional/modern, dependence/independence, feminine/masculine' (37). These binaries got more complicated when new structures and relationships were enacted at home. It shifted from a heterosexual relationship with their dependent children to same-sex associations and at times children living with single parent.

In such situations cultural norms pressurize these individuals to conform to the societal rules, barring them from being different from the majority. In resisting such conventions, one finds them to be at the displeasure of the guardians of conventions. 'In view of these changes, the home for many has again been reestablished as a haven of self-displacement and expression - a safe haven in which expectations are no longer anticipated and the home is redefined as largely conflict-free.' (39) The two instances from the novels shows how this moving away from norms by individuals in a society is treated by the society and how the individuals respond to it differently. In the novel *Ladies Coupe*, the family of Sarasa is excommunicated by the Brahmin community as they deviated from the societal norms after her husband's death. The sudden demise of Subramanya Iyer left the family poor and in order to meet both the ends Sarasa had to send her eldest daughter Jaya to work as a prostitute. Soon the Brahmin community who were unwilling to extend any kind of help excommunicated them from their circle and they had to leave the place. Akhila, who was a childhood friend of Jaya, questions her own mother for not helping Sarasa's family and she held the Brahmin community including herself and her mother responsible for Sarasa's present condition. To this her mother replies that "I wish it weren't so. But when one lives in a society, one has to conform to its expectations. I am not one of those revolutionaries who can stand up to the world. I am a simple woman. A widow. And I need to belong to the society we live in." (83) This is the common response of the society to the so called 'aberrant' behaviors.

Sarasa had searched for all other kinds of jobs before sending her daughter to this profession in order to feed the younger ones and she replies to the neighbor who came to advise her You tell me now. I am willing to work. Do any kind of work to earn a living. I went to each one of the houses in the neighborhood and asked if anyone wanted a maid. And everyone behaved just like you did. Giving me a handful of rice as though I were a beggar woman and then shooing me away. If I was younger, I would have sold myself to keep my family fed and clothed. But this is tired flesh. No man has any use for it. (82) Taking another

instance from the same novel, the story of Karpagam is another moving away from such kind of binaries. Karpagam is Akhila's childhood friend who was looked after by her mother. It's she who motivates Akhila to live a life of her own without being afraid of society's concerns. At first Akhila thought of Karpagam as a woman who 'radiated content' (199). To her Karpagam represented happiness, content and all other familial happiness because she is married and she has a family of her own and Akhila failed to have a family of her own even though she is working.

Later she realized that happiness is not something one can have after possessing all one wants but being able to be happy in what one has. And Karpagam too has her own share of miseries to tell irrespective of her ability to be happy. Karpagam is a woman who dares to live life as she pleases rather than how the society expects a widow to live and she asks Akhila to choose to live a life of her own. To Akhila, 136 Karpagam's words give much inspiration and courage to make many decisions in life. You are wondering how is it I still wear the kumkum and these colourful clothes? Would you rather that I dressed in white and went about looking like a corpse ready for the funeral pyre? I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me, didn't we as young girls wear colourful clothes and jewelry and bottu? It isn't a privilege that marriage sanctions. The way I look at it, it is natural for a woman to want to be feminine. It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these laws anyway? Some man who couldn't bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men. (202)

In both these stories women move away from patriarchal societal norm in order to find their own ways of living independently rather than choosing what the society has expected them to do. This moving away from the set binaries makes the society more complicated and difficult to deal with for the patriarchal powers. Both these women are not informed of any kind of theories of enlightenment but they chose to live a life of their own rather than the one of despair and inconsideration. In order to understand what a home is, one has to get an idea about homelessness. The contrast is between the privileged people who have a home and the homeless- dispossessed, outcast or exiled who are left without a place to situate themselves or any sense of belonging. Despite being constrained by home; one has a feeling of homelessness, nowhere to base or place oneself. This happens because there exist multiple identities within the micro space of home. There are the expected, desirable and fulfilled roles of a daughter, wife and mother and there is one's own search to own an individuality and identity. This will reconstruct the whole stereotypical notions of a home. Home is not just a shelter for food and accommodation but it is the place where one's personal and cultural identities took shape. 'The term homeless means the absence of a sense of place.' (78).

In Indian families children are educated both formally and informally about their roles as grownups in the family. While a girl is trained to become a good homemaker, a boy is educated to find a livelihood. Though there have been changes over these years, even a highly educated working woman's primary responsibility is expected to be a good mother and a wife. In a society where marriage and child bearing are given as the first priority for a woman home plays a vital role. In Marie-Anne Casselot's "Dwelling Trouble: A Feminist Critique of Heidegger's Concept of the Home", she discusses Iris Marion Young's essay home and the two different approaches taken by the feminists on the concept of home. One stand point views home and homemaking as something negative which controlled women's movement in the society. Women's work has been made invisible or devalued in a male dominated society. Housekeeping and other familial duties takes away women's self as an individual in the society. On the other hand, Young also presents feminists who advocate for a "critical acceptance of homemaking as a milieu to develop agency and one's sense of identity". (11)

In such a situation Young proposes her idea about home as: The appropriate response to this fact of privilege is not to reject the values of home, but instead to claim those values for everyone. Feminists should criticize the nostalgic use of home that offers a permanent respite from politics and conflict, and which continues to require of women that they make men and children comfortable. But at the same time, feminist politics calls for conceptualizing the positive values of home and criticizing a global society that is unable

or unwilling to extend those values to everyone. (11) The home in Anita Nair's novel is a male dominated space where most women try to fit themselves into an umpteen number of norms which are there to restrict women. Though at the outset there seem to be gender equal spaces her home and its inmates are the byproducts of patriarchy. A house gets a meaning of a home by the way the members feel about it. This gives meaning to a physical house that of a mental home. The concept of a home varies from person to person in the way one imagines about it. Thus the meaning of a home is attributive. In the case of *Giri in Lessons in Forgetting*, a home is the lilac house and the material prospects attached to it. To a small town born Giri the lilac house-the huge, old house at the heart of the city and its inmates are an embodiment of aristocracy, culture, wealth and elegance. For that matter, to him marrying the young girl of the lilac house was the first step in the social ladder to reach the aristocracy. For Meera, home is that perfect place which assures peace, safety, love and care.

Giri turns this as a tool to exert his power over the family by providing economic and emotional security. Thus the studious and ambitious Meera is entangled in the spell of patriarchy to become an ideal society lady who will match up to her corporate husband. For him wife is someone who is fragile and delicate so that needs to be well taken care of. She remains as the 'pet goose' or 'goose girl of the Lilac house' who plays around with her two children protected by her husband. Her life seems to be perfect and she flaunts away her roles of the cook book writer and that of an ideal wife until Giri leaves her for another relationship. Here Meera reminds one of Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House* where a crisis leads her to undertake a search for a space of her own. Through marriage Giri has got control over the Lilac house and over Meera's body, the two things which he believed will make him successful in life. He considers both his property and, when he realized he had no say on the selling of the house he walked out of their marriage too. This crisis faced by the Malayali men can be read in connection with the life of men in the erstwhile matrilineal system prevailed among the Nair community in Kerala. Historian Praveena Kodoth observes that the legal abolition of matriliney was beneficial for the Nair men who were facing a crisis of authority and control. Kodoth claims that 'the reform in matriliney was also an attempt to produce 'men' out of those who lived as useless entities under matrilineal system.' (Shifting 6) Ratheesh 140 Radhakrishnan in his doctoral thesis exemplifies this by citing O. Chandu Menon's *Indulekha* which is widely thought as the first novel in Malayalam. O Chandu Menon's much discussed novel *Indulekha* (1889) is an example of a narrative that demonstrates how the social reform context during the turn of the century in Malabar was also a period of radical refashioning of Nair male identity. Madhavan, the hero of the novel, is pitted against the decadent Suri Nambudiripad, a Brahmin, whose 'unacceptable' sexual advances are facilitated by matriliney. It is worth noting, as an aside, that even the mobility that Nair men seem to have developed over the years is modelled on Madhavan's experiences outside Kerala. Madhavan could be seen as the prototype of the Nair man as represented in later writings in Kerala. (219) Radhakrishnan adds that men were not completely at disadvantage in matriliney as the karanavan or the male head of the tharavad and some nephews enjoyed certain powers.

Matriliney had a very complicated structure and power relations and it can't be said that the shift from matriliney to patriliney or patriarchy is a parallel shift of power from women to men. Both men and women had certain benefits and disadvantages being in matriliney. To Giri, who belonged to a deteriorated Nair family, Meera was a stepping-stone to climb the social ladder. He thought of the riches laid out before him. A bride with social graces and a beautiful old home. A grandmother who referred to Sir Richard Attenborough and Satyajit Ray in the same breath. A mother who breathed finesse. Giri had never known such people before. He thought of his father in his yellowing banian and dhoti in Palakkad. He thought of the old decrepit house and relatives as stringy and penurious as his father. Giri had made careful plans about where he would be by the time he was thirty, forty, forty-five... thereafter would be the playing fields of his life. To accomplish this, he needed to round off the edges that still clung to him from the small town, lower middle class boy he was. Meera would make this possible, he knew with certainty. Meera, who exuded upper-class dom like the *L'iar du temps* she wore. Discreet, elegant, and old money. (Anita Nair, *Lessons* 40-41)

He eyed the Lilac house, the ancient mansion symbolizing past glory, which is situated at the heart of the

city with three generations of women staying there. By marrying Meera he takes the ownership of not only the house but the inmates too thus duplicating the role of the karanavan in a Nair tharavad. "All I could think of was, how am I going to get my foot into this door? I was the prince inching around the enchanted house, seeking to find a way in." (36) All his hopes vanished as the three women disagreed to sell the house to move to an apartment and Giri's dream of starting a business of his own remain unfulfilled. This made him walk out of the marriage all of a sudden in an evening to move to a new city with a new and younger wife. This male anxiety can be read as a reminiscent of old matrilineal male anxiety and as Radhakrishnan pointed out the mobility and experiences with which Giri goes through are modelled upon the prototype of Madhavan in *Indulekha*. Henrik Ibsen, considered to be the father of modern drama, attacks the stereotypical notions about a woman thorough his masterpiece, *The Doll's House* (1902), through the character of Nora Helmer. The plot revolves around the house of Mr Torvald Helmer and his family where he is the master and his wife is yet another child for him to be taken care of. She is expected to look after the children and family while he handles more serious things like financial matters. These role- plays are necessary to keep up any family life "successful" and any small deviation from this line breaks the tension of patriarchy. Later to an angry Helmer Nora reveals that she can no longer play around him as his doll and walks out of the home leaving the door open. In the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*, one could see the same Nora in Meera who plays the role of a wife in the society circle and that of a goose girl to her husband so long as he was there at the lilac house. According to Cheryl Walker, in *Women and Gender in Southern Africa* (1990), one of the means by which men control women in a male dominated society is by giving them a well-defined but circumscribed position within society to which some honour and respectability are attached. (121) Family is an institution with a legal identity, and the State recognizes as a family, only a specific set of people related in a specific way. It is not only the law that defines 'family'- extralegally too, you are forced into being part of a family which is strictly defined in this narrow way. A 'family' can only be a 143 patriarchal, heterosexual family: a man, his wife, 'his' children. The family, as it exists, is based on clearly-established hierarchies of gender and age, with gender trumping age; that is, an adult male is generally more powerful than an older female.

Thus the family, as an institution, is based on inequality; its function is to perpetuate particular forms of private property ownership and lineage- that is, patrilineal forms of property and descent, where the property and the family 'name' flow from father to sons. (Menon, *Seeing* 5-6) The above quoted passage shows what is a family in modern sense. Even after a long period of feminist consciousness the hierarchical relation between genders has not changed much. The everlasting notion of home is that it belongs to a woman's field rather than a joint responsibility. Women are brought up as future wives by her parents and after marriage she is expected to lead a homecentred life revolving around domesticity, nurturance and subservience. In *Lessons in Forgetting* Jak, the scientist who moved to USA from Tamil Nadu remembers his childhood with his mother after father's departure for sanyasa. He saw his mother feeling guilty for not being a good wife to satisfy his father's wishes while Jak felt he failed as a good son. The structure of family is thus drawn around the actions of the man in the family while the women and children succumb to their given roles. Jak's mother later regrets: I clung to him. I shouldn't have. When people stop loving each other, they shouldn't stay together. It doesn't do any good. I 144 should have understood his unhappiness. I should have let him go when he first wanted to. A year after you were born. But how could I? the child needs a father, I pleaded. I need a husband, I wanted to say but didn't. Your father wouldn't have let that hold him back. But you... I bought time with you. And I did everything I could to please him, but it only seemed to make him resent me more. (169) One's idea of a home is how she/he imagines it and time plays a major role in it. Time makes one feel nostalgic about things which one did not care much. When there is no home to depend upon one tends to nurture ideal memories about one's past home.

The things/places which were quite unimportant once, gains prominence and certain omissions are made to fix the romantic ideal about one's past home. In the novel *Lessons in Forgetting* Jak and Nina met in the United States. They wanted to get married soon as they were likeminded people who missed India, their homeland, amidst their professional life. The marriage soon ended in divorce as the well accomplished professionals could not get along well with their ego and their two daughters are deeply hurt by this. Smriti,

the eldest one who stayed with her father was brought up a with carefully edited version of his childhood back in Minjikapuram, a village in Tamilnadu. It is this imaginary home of Jak that his daughter goes in search. The divorce of their parents affected them so much that his children never trusted them anymore. She chooses to study in India to experience the life she had heard from her father as if to compensate the void she felt after her parent's separation. Later Jak helplessly realizes that he and his daughter had gone through the same void after their parent's separation. This was a Nina quick to anger. With every day the rift widened, until they lived strangers to each other's dreams and bodies. He wouldn't cling as his mother had. He wouldn't wait till she left like Appa had. He wouldn't make his daughters ever wonder, 'Is it our fault?' He only wanted for them what he couldn't have. Stability. In whatever form he could provide. But as he sought consolation, Smriti too sought hers. In a faux family, to compensate for the one that Nina and he weren't able to provide. (170)

Here both Jak and his elder daughter feel for home as a refuge and go in search of it. Whereas Nina, his wife and Shruti, the younger daughter, seem to be getting along with their new ways of life. The way Jak chooses to remember his past and how he presents it to Smriti is what led to the ultimate shift in their lives. Whenever Jak faces frictions with Nina he goes back to his village life for solace which he alters in his own way before telling it to Smriti. While the father makes peace with his present through this romanticizing of his past, the daughter goes in search of her father's village to escape from the present familial problems. After reaching India Smriti realized the family and the village life in India doesn't match with the way her father created in her mind. One of the acquaintances she made on her visit to the village government hospital made her 146 grow suspicions about the working of the hospital. Her secret inquiries on the women in the neighboring villages made her to see the appalling rate of illegal female foeticide conducted in the hospital, which showed her the shocking reality within the families in that village. Jancy James observes that certain sections of women in Kerala had received a long period of informal tutoring even when they were not given any formal education. Many of them were trained in Sanskrit, Classics and Classical music (98). But these accomplishments were not expected to be expressed in public and were considered as male possession.

Tanika Sarkar in her work *Hindu Wife Hindu Nation* (2003) identifies that towards the end of the nineteenth century the focus of the Hindu nationalist agenda shifted from human relationships to social service and patriotism. In order to understand the political sphere of the nationalism one need to understand the politics of relationships within the family. As Sarkar points out, the home then had to substitute for the world outside and the head of the family ruled the home as the king ruled his kingdom. 'Just as the King reigns over his dominion, so the head of the household (karta) rules over his household' (Narayan Ray, Bangamahila). The karta, therefore, becomes within the home what he can never aspire to be outside it-- a ruler, an administrator, a legislator or a chief justice, a general marshalling his troops. Apart from compensatory functions, the strategic placement of the home assumes other functions as well. The management of household relations becomes a political and administrative capability, providing training in governance that one no longer attains in the political sphere. The intention is to establish a claim to a share of power in the world, a political role that the Hindu is entitled to, via successful governance of the household...If home was not merely an escape from this world but its critique and an alternative order in itself, then love and affect had to be the organizing principle of this inner, hidden nation, and the exercise of power needed to be replaced with the notion of self-surrender and general self-fulfillment. Household relations had to be shown as supra-political ones, relations of power represented as purely emotional states. (38-39) The governance of the household through various powers rendered the household relations into political ones.

Anita Nair does this in her novels like *Mistress*, *Lessons in Forgetting* etc. Relationships in the family in these novels are based on power though they may appear as emotional bondings. Through an examination of Anita Nair's novels, we see how stereotypical notions of home are continued to be enacted through role-play and how social identities are formed out of it. Meera, Jak's mother and many women in the world were forced to accept the family they live in for they never moved away from the societal norms. It's been tuned that women have no life without their husbands. I have seen many men claim proudly as to how their mother

never stepped out of the house without their father! It's been internalized in the minds of women that they have no existence without a husband. Their only connection to the society is through the identity as someone's wife and even a modern, urban woman like Meera is not free from this. A woman alone is an awkward creature, or so it appears. A bedside table missing its companion. A lone kitchen glove. You could make do, but it really isn't seemly. Where do you seat her if it is a sit-down meal? If she has come with an escort, that's all right then. But if she is alone, you alternate between having to watch out for her and watching for her so that she doesn't sink her predatory claws into your spouse. Pity is one thing. And yes, sisterhood is key. Women have to be there for women. So you have her over for a coffee morning or drinks... but for a whole evening, she is best avoided. (Anita Nair: 2006) Home is a space where all issues regarding one's individuality and identity get shaped and formulated in course of time within the larger institution of family. A conjugal relationship is the one where women are subordinate to men to fulfill their duties as a wife.

The celebration of Indian culture and traditions in the works of Toru Dutt, Sarojini Naidu etc. were part of this. Indian nationalists argue that other than material aspects of the West one need not imitate the West for the East is more spiritual than the West. In order to highlight this superiority, the inner/outer distinctions were reinstated for they believed that so long as they retain its culture one could adapt to the modern material world without losing the real identity. As Chatterjee points out "the home represents our inner spiritual self, our true identity. The home in its essence must remain unaffected by the profane activities of the material world-- and woman is its representation. (238) The dichotomy of materialism and spirituality corresponded with outer/inner or home/world distinctions. The world is the outer where the western material power subjugated the country whereas the inner space or home is unaffected by these things and keeps calm with spirituality. "In the world, imitation of and adaptation to western norms was a necessity; at home, they were tantamount to annihilation of one's very identity." (Chatterjee 239) Hence, home became the site where resides the national culture and it became the women's responsibility to safeguard its culture without any deviations. As defined the woman became subjected to patriarchy which uphold the traditional Indian woman as opposed to the modern west.

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