

## Chapter 1

### **Nasrin's *French Lover*: Issues and Context**

This research is a critical study on Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* from the perspective of third world feminism. The major concern is the multidimensional patriarchal domination over women in Indian society as well as in Western society. Despite her innate desires for freedom, Nilanjana turns out to be a subordinate character not only in a gendered Indian society but also in a metropolitan Paris where she just remains a housewife rather than a liberated woman in the urban space. Though born and raised in a traditional Indian society she breaks up her nuptial tie with NRI to marry Benoir, yet ultimately she becomes an object of sex rather than an independent woman in a patriarchal society.

Nilanjana can feel independent neither in her own native world nor in a free Western world. In addition to exploring of the obvious exploitation and domination, this research critically exposes the female resistance against the male domination in *French Lover* through the Nilanjana. Hence, Nilanjana is the representative character of modern women who are in opposition to patriarchal social norms and values.

After her marriage, Nilanjana moves from her home, Calcutta, to Paris. Though she gets married to Kishanlal, they are opposite to each other; they never seem to attract each other. Their sexual life is just a matter of fact, or habit. Kishanlal fails to infuse any tremor in Nilanjana's sexuality. Not only does Kishanlal want Nilanjana to fulfill household chores, he also expects her to wait on him. In return, Nilanjana gets free lodging and boarding, and a lot of spare time. Nilanjana pitilessly despises him, and finally walks out on him.

She gradually evolves into a new improvised woman when she arrives in Paris. Moreover, she substantially learns and become used to with Western

experience. She befriends with a lesbian feminist who helps her grow spiritually and emotionally. Hence, at her arrival in India, she senses the activities and feelings of her father as a male chauvinist. Even her mother's sickness barely bridges the wide gap with her newly acquired sense of biasness when she confronts Anirban the way he deals with his wife.

Nilanjana returns to Paris with her melancholic heart by the demise of her mother and intolerable attitude of her father. While attempting to overcome her boredom and depression she meets Benoir Dupont, a blue-eyed blond handsome Frenchman, with whom she strolls the streets, the cafes and the art galleries in Paris. She consummates a passionate and sexually liberated relationship with Benoir. The relationship ends when Nilanjana realizes she is not his first priority. This is marked as her road to self-discovery.

Nilanjana's refusal to marry Benoir, her decision to abort his baby and her changed self to stand all the blames Benoir threw upon her makes her a transformed woman from a vulnerable victim. She tolerated all the atrocities but comes out as a triumphant against all the odds. Her resistance liberated herself in a remarkable way.

How does she stand against patriarchy? Why does she leave her boy friend despite material prosperity? Why does Nilanjana divorce from NRI husband? Nilanjana is an embodiment of ambitious women pursuing freedom. She replicates women's failures in their perpetual quest for liberation from patriarchy. The protagonist of the novel, Nila plays a revolutionary character for the sidelined women, whose hearts and souls are broken, tortured by the age old practices of male superiority. Nila brings transformation figuratively not only in her life but also in the thousands of others. This research tries to depict and analyze her journey meticulously.

Nilanjana is not only personifies the male subjugation of the female but also women's failures in establishing themselves as independent forces of society because the marriage institution in patriarchy does not entertain the female champion for freedom. Furthermore, the feeling of pseudo-consciousness is impeding to prolong the conjugal life as assumed by Hindu religious beliefs. The notion of independence, in this regard, is relative.

The research draws the theoretical insights from the third world feminist like Uma Narayan, Sara Suleri and Spivak in defense of its claim. While doing so, it will use a close discursive analytical style by drawing the feminist concepts and vocabularies. However, it specifically focuses upon subversion of the binary oppositions and hierarchic schematizations of the patriarchal discourse.

### **Review of Literature**

Nilanjana is a marginalized character in terms of gender relation. However she represents woman fighting for freedom across the world. She revolts against the male subjugation of the female. Nasrin has always been at the centre against all sorts of domination, for the outspokenness of her writings. Her novels bear in them stingy comments of religion and patriarchal domination. The *French Lover* has no exception to this fate. Many critics have underlined these aspects in Nasrin's writings.

Nila is conditioned by the example of her mother so as to cater the men of the family. So, initially in her marriage, she tries to do just that. She cooks and cleans for her husband and lies herself prostrate before his desires. The conflict comes to her mind when Nila gets a job for herself. One day she invites her friends and prepares a non-vegetarian meal. But this creates a rift between husband and wife. Then, she positively makes up her mind to be a dauntless woman. In this regard, Dr. Sigma forwards her view that "Nasrin's novel *French Lover* tells the story of the patriarchal

control exerted on the protagonist Nilanjana by her father, her husband Kishanlal and the domination of friends and lover” (5-6). The submission experienced at filial level triggers an utmost urgency of liberation at deep level.

Kishanlal behaves Nila as his slave brought from Calcutta. He makes her look after his house and his needs. One day she learns the secret about his first wife, Immanuelle and feels betrayed. When she questions Kishanlal about it, he admits it by justifying, as it earned him a French citizenship. Meena Shriwadkar claims, “Marriage is an obligation for womanhood but it makes a demand on woman. She is expected to go through a long process of learning what she has learnt in order to adopt herself to her new environment” (62). Nila though walks out her marital home but is yet not divorced from her husband. When she walks out of her husband’s house, she feels lonely until the day she comes across Benoir DuPont, a Frenchman on her flight from Calcutta to Paris. Eventually, she gets attracted to him as much as Dupont.

In that sense, her fascination is an act of fighting back the power structure that demands complete sacrifice out of her. The patriarchy never posits and values her feelings rather exploits her body and psyche as well. The protagonist wanders to and fro in search of her vitality amongst the deeply alienated and yet self-centered society. Chakraverty maintains, “She seeks a complex fulfillment that is unfamiliar to her present situation and also referencing an opposition to typified patriarchal constructs. In her own way, Nila enacts the war machine that transcends the commodification of her by obliterating the external rooting such negative constructs” (8). In search of liberation from patriarchal mindset, she changes relation from one to another. Such revolutionary act is closely associated with her ideals and wrath against the institution of submission.

She realizes a heightened sense of alienation. While going through identity

crisis. It is exerted proportionally as long as she remains with Benoir; a newly found so-called liberation. The later relationship is not distinct in the context of domination and exploitation by male-dominated society. It means she has to struggle to seek an ideal world in the odyssey of depression and dissatisfaction. The fact is evident that she attempts to form a brand new identity accompanied with Danielle, a lesbian friend. She thinks that it would liberate her by challenging patriarchy. Nevertheless, she finds it threatening enough since she is behaved peevishly. In quest of emancipation Reema Susan explains, “She finds her new life suffocating and yearns to escape from this loveless marriage. Finally she leaves the home of Kishanlal and her life undergoes an unbelievable transformation. She gets into relationship first with another woman and then with a French man, in her quest for love, she explores life and liberation” (9). She makes a point that new environment to women suffocate them in an extent that forces her to untie a relationship of marriage. In a sense, it is a process of transforming into a liberated state.

Similarly, Ramnath Kesarwani asserts Nasrin’s *French Lover* is the search for true self:

Her woman strives to seek true love, yearns for it, consume it and enjoy it. For some time she believes her journey for love is completed and she has achieved it fully but the moment she desires to dive deep in the valley of love she finds that it is her body that is loved not her “self”, her mind, her imagination, her choice and the dignity of being an individual. (12)

The passion of physical intimacy binds the male desire with the women’s body despising her true self. Sigma, G.R. opines “Nasrin’s protagonist Nila proves a brave character and she wants to retain her individuality against the destructive forces that

threaten her identity as an individual and as a woman since marriage subjugates her. Through the character of Nila, Nasrin portrays the inner struggle of an artist to express her feminine urge for self-expression” (29). In this way, Nasrin’s women characters are all dominated by male. They are not ready to tune themselves to the domestic sphere ruled by patriarchy. Nasrin wants to show that her women characters have liberated themselves from their subordinate status. The process of liberation is not similar from one to another character.

This research analyses the journey of a third world woman from her native land to the first world but her suffering remains the same. To analyze the text, the researcher has divided the paper into four chapters. The first chapter introduces the primary text and issues and contexts of research. The second chapter deals with the theoretical insights of Third World Feminism. The third chapter is a critical reading of the primary text from the perspective of third world feminism. And finally, the fourth chapter concludes the finding of the research.

## Chapter 2

### Women's Position and Feminism

#### Departure of Third World Feminism from Western Feminism

The term 'feminism' in English is rooted in the mobilization for woman suffrage in Europe and the US during the late 19th and early 20th century. However, the efforts to obtain justice for women did not begin or end with this period of activism. Feminism now functions as more of a foundational basis for many activists, policy-makers and academicians. But it has been a theoretical significance on the epistemological level. The growing feminist movement sought to change society's prevailing stereotypes of women as relatively weak, passive, docile, and dependent individuals to rational and dominant men.

In an effort to suggest a schematic account of feminism, Susan James characterizes feminism as follows:

Feminism is grounded on the belief that women are oppressed or disadvantaged by comparison with men, and that their oppression is in some way illegitimate or unjustified. Under the umbrella of this general characterization there are, however, many interpretations of women and their oppression, so that it is a mistake to think of feminism as a single philosophical doctrine, or as implying an agreed political program. (576)

James seems to be using the notions of 'oppression' and 'disadvantage' as placeholders for more substantive accounts of injustice both normative and descriptive over which feminists disagree.

Some might prefer to define feminism in terms of a normative claim alone. Feminists are those who believe that women are entitled to equal rights, or equal

respect. It is not required to believe that women are currently being treated unjustly. However, if one were to adopt this terminological convention, it would be harder to identify some of the interesting sources of disagreement both with and within feminism, and the term 'feminism' would lose much of its potential to unite those whose concerns and commitments extend beyond their moral beliefs to their social interpretations and political affiliations.

The focus of feminism is women's emancipation from the operation in terms of class, gender and sexual preference. Females are sexually victimized by male dominated society that has established certain restrictions and roles over sexes. As a result, male has started showing leadership and imposing his authority over female though there is no such role to justify the hierarchy between male and female.

On the wave model, the struggle to achieve basic political rights during the period from the mid-19th century to the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920 counts as 'First Wave' feminism. Feminism waned between the two world wars, to be 'revived' in the late 1960's and early 1970's as 'Second Wave' feminism. In this second wave, feminists pushed beyond the early quest for political rights to fight for greater equality across the board, e.g., in education, the workplace, and at home. More recent transformations of feminism have resulted in a 'Third Wave'. Third Wave feminists often critique Second Wave feminism for its lack of attention to the differences among women due to race, ethnicity, class, nationality and religion.

Liberal feminism is an individualistic form of feminist theory, which focuses on women's ability to maintain their equality through their own actions and choices. Liberal Feminists argue that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, less intellectually and physically capable than men; thus it tends to discriminate against women in the academy, the forum, and the market place. Liberal feminist



believe that “female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal constraints that block’s women’s entrance to and success in the so called public world”. They strive for sexual equality via political and legal reform.

Radical feminism is a perspective within feminism that calls for a radical reordering of society in which male supremacy is questioned all social and economic contexts. Radical feminists seek to abolish patriarchy by challenging existing social norms and institutions, rather than through a purely political process. This includes challenging the notions of traditional gender roles and raising public awareness about such issues as rape and violence against women.

Postcolonial feminists are concerned with the ‘double colonization’ of third world women who become victims of both the imperial ideology and native, foreign patriarchy. Moreover, even considering only relatively recent efforts to resist male domination in Europe and the US, the emphasis on ‘First’ and ‘Second’ Wave feminism ignores the ongoing resistance to male domination between the 1920’s and 1960’s and the resistance outside mainstream politics, particularly by women of color and working class women. One strategy for solving these problems would be to identify feminism in terms of a set of ideas or beliefs rather than participation in any particular political movement. About this Kumkum Sangari states, “like maleness, femaleness is not a fixed inalienable quantity: it is, rather, a mode of *social* being and so a historically specific value which can be redistributed and reformulated” (28-29). The primary source of women’s subordination, her role in the family and it is female’s role in the labor market.

It is simply women’s biological role in reproduction. Disagreements between feminists and non-feminists can occur with respect to both the normative and descriptive claims as well. Some non-feminists agree with feminists on the ways

women ought to be viewed and treated, but do not see any problem with the way things currently are. Others disagree about the background moral or political views.

From the beginning, the females are snatched by males physically, intellectually, psychologically and economically. Supporting this view David Morgan says, “This is not simply a greater representation of issues dealing with women-childbirth, menstruation, eating disorders and so on – but the greater likelihood of a more gendered discussion where women are the subject of the research in question” (69). The ill patriarchy’s rule is not suitable to any human.

However, there has been increasing interest in the parallel gender concerns and in the nature of actual and potential intersections between men and women. Feminism has highlighted a number of unexamined assumptions within post colonial discourse. The biological differences are always evident but Feminists are more concerned with the notion of constructionism. Christine Littleton clarifies, “while not endorsing the notion that cultural differences between the sexes are biologically determined, it does recognize and attempt to deal with both biological and social differences” (717). She emphasizes that culture does not differentiate sexes on biological ground rather comprehends it in terms of both biological and social context.

Feminists bring the catchphrase of ‘double colonization’ from post colonialism to assert both imperial and patriarchal ideologies. The term that was popularized during the 1980s has recently begun to be adequately theorized. It is the notion of the inescapable necessity of situating a feminist politics within particular colonized societies.

Without authenticity and analysis of extent and process of oppression, the Third World women have been portrayed as the “oppressed”. For the activists, women

meant white, middle class, and exclusively western vis a vis uneducated, ignorant Third World women. The very conclusion of international seminars has been widely criticized since such women's summits are supposed to uphold the position of women. In other words, positing "women" as an analytical category has been problematized. Women as a group/ social category is not a homogeneous collectivity.

Postcolonial feminists criticize Western feminists because they have a history of universalizing women's issues, and their discourses are often misunderstood to represent women globally. Supporting this view, Uma Narayan says:

Western feminist scholars engaged in analysis of "Third World women's problems" need to be aware of this historical background and proceed in a manner whereby they distinguish the terms of their analyses and representations from the terms of colonialist discourses, taking care not to exacerbate the problems set in place by this colonial, political, and discursive background. (55)

Narayan claims that Western feminist's analysis remains incomplete unless they do not acknowledge the history, politics and other background.

One of the central ideas in postcolonial feminism is that by using the term 'woman' as a universal group, they are then only defined by their gender and not by social classes and ethnic identities. The field of Postcolonial feminism arose from the gendered history of colonialism.

Westernized norms are often imposed on colonized regions. As a result, women's tradition, practices and roles are seen as distasteful by Western standard. It is considered a form of rebellion against colonial oppression by the westerners. It is believed by postcolonial feminists that the mainstream Western feminists ignored the voices of non-white, non-western women for many years. Thus it is creating

resentment from feminists in developing nations. Postcolonial or third world feminism is a form of feminist philosophy which criticizes Western forms of feminism, notably radical feminism and liberal feminism, for their universalization of female experience.

Term like “women’s problem/s” often hides the fact that women from different classes, cultures, races and religions face very different challenges and can experience even contrasting outcomes of the same social phenomenon. Supporting this view, Uma Narayan argues, “In the absence of such an understanding (of third world culture), it is surprising that many Americans fail to connect the unfamiliar phenomenon of dowry-murder to the more familiar category of domestic violence” (95). Narayan complains that Western feminism has remained on the surface in an attempt to understand the problems of other women. It gave a rise to third world feminism to explore the suffocations and domestic violence of themselves. It has invited a delicate and realistic picture of the third world women.

Postcolonial feminists criticize the western forms of feminism especially radical feminism and its universalized concept of the female experiences. They argue that the experience of white, middle class women in the developed west for whom gender oppression is primary cannot be easily applied to women for whom gender oppression comes second. The focus is primarily on oppression that is related to colonial experience, particularly, racial, class and ethnic oppression. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in her critique of western feminism writings on “Third World Women”, discourses of representation should not be confused with material realities. In her article “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse” She challenges the mainstream feminism asking the question, “when an assumption of women as an oppressed group is situated in the context of western

feminist writing about “Third World Feminism? ...” Thus there is a distinction between western feminist representation of women in the third world, and the western feminist self representation.

The major focus of Postcolonial feminists is that the cultures impacted by colonialism are often vastly different and should be treated as such. Colonial oppression may result in glorification of pre-colonial culture, which, in cultures with traditions of stratification of power along lines of gender, could mean the acceptance of, or refusal to deal with, inherent issues of gender inequality. While feminists are more of imperialist than for women in general. In this situation, third world women’s sentiment lies in the margin and they become sandwiched between two trends of dominations. As Gayatri Spivak puts, “Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject constitution and object formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness but a violent shuttling which is displaced figuration of the ‘third world woman’ caught between tradition and modernization” (89). Therefore, there is thin boundary between patriarchy and imperialism that makes a raw difference of subject and object formation. Moreover, the tendency of interpreting third world woman does not stop there. They visualize the third world women in terms of a scapegoat caught viscosly between tradition and modernization.

Spivak’s feminist agenda includes the complicity of female writers with imperialism. In her essay “Three Women’s Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” she remarks, “it should not be possible to read nineteenth century British fiction without remembering that imperialism” (269). In the essay, she attempts to examine the operation of the ‘Worlding’ of what is today Third world by what has become a cultural text of feminism. She has consistently focused on what in postcolonial studies has come to be called the subaltern with her feminist agenda. Her concern is the

problem with the representation of the Third world or the subaltern women by the western mainstream texts or theories. Since, colonized women almost by definition went unheard within their own patriarchal culture they were doubly unheard under a colonial regime.

Many postcolonial feminists argue that oppressions relating to the colonial experience, particularly racial, class, and ethnic oppressions, have marginalized women in postcolonial societies. They challenge the assumption that gender oppression is the primary force of patriarchy. Moreover, postcolonial feminists object to the perceived portrayal of women of non-Western societies as passive and voiceless victims, Mohanty states, “This is in contrast to the (implicit) self – representation of western women as educated, modern, as having control over their bodies as sexualities and the freedom to make their decisions” (261) Thus there is a distinction between western feminist representation of women in the third world, and the western feminist self representation.

Since the decades of the 90s - i.e. the height of post-modernism - more and more (primarily post-colonial) feminist scholars are arguing to avoid universalist claims about “women” and situate feminism in a specific social, economic, cultural, historical and political context for analysis, especially when discussing the Third World. Third World societies are mostly post-colonial, developing (economically speaking) countries and they are situated at a juncture where legacies of old traditions and influences of Western ways of life create fusion that continually shapes the structure of the societies. Each Third World society is distinct and is shaped by its cultural tradition, religion, social norms as well as the position of the particular nation-state in the world system.

As the sovereignty of the nation-states has been compromised under

globalization national policies are greatly influenced by international politics, affecting in turn, the citizens within each national territory. One example of such a phenomenon would be how structural adjustment policies adopted by Third World countries - pushed by the World bank and the IMF - have restructured the economic and social conditions and impacted the citizens overall and women in particular. But one has to be cautious here. When considering how structural adjustment or any policy so to speak or any social parameter is affecting women, one has to be careful to distinguish among women from different socio-economic backgrounds even within a country or a region. Just because women from one country are being impacted does not mean that all women in that same country are affected at the same extent if all are affected at all.

What rural women face when indicted with *Fatwas* following dire physical and social repercussions and what urban women face realizing that Islamic rules are being imposed to further strengthen the existing patriarchal structure - are very different experiences. This is not to say that there should not be a term "Third World" when talking about feminism. The factors along which the world has been categorized as First and Third contribute to the differences of experiences that women face in the First and the Third worlds. But appropriate consideration has to be paid to the specificity of the context.

Today, the Postcolonial feminists struggle to find gender oppression within their own cultural models of society rather than in the western colonizers. Much post colonial feminist writing overlaps with third – world feminism. Postcolonial feminist critics protest the use of essentialist strategies by identity based group being to succumb to naturalization of essential categories or when they are used to describe a group as an undifferentiated totality. These critics argue that the overlap between

patriarchal, economic and racial oppression has always been difficult to negotiate, and the differences between the political priorities of First world and Third world women have persisted to the present. They argue that colonialism operated very differently for women and for men, and the double colonization that resulted when women were subject both to general discrimination as colonial subjects and specific discrimination needs to be taken into account in the analysis of any colonial oppression.

The post independence practices of anti-colonial nationalism are not free from this kind of gender bias, and constructions of the traditional or pre-colonial period are often heavily inflicted by contemporary masculinity bias that falsely represents 'native' women as quietest and subordinate. To analyze the postcolonial Third world text it is necessary to proceed with the assumption of the voice of differences. As Mohanty states, "Experience must be historically interpreted and theorized if it is to become the basis of feminist solidarity and struggle" (37). Hence, one requires the knowledge of history to interpret the feminism in true sense.

### **Woman's Position in Hindu Tradition**

Traditional Hindu society believes in hierarchical system. There was discrimination between sexes in the past, which still exists in many Indian and Nepali societies. There are barriers between men and women. All political, social economical and religious aspects of the society are male oriented. Women, whether rich or poor, have to suffer in the hands of patriarchy. In traditional Hindu society, women are always taken as inferior, other and mysterious. In this regard, K. Sharma in *Role and Status of Women in India* writes:

Women have suffered enough from the heterogeneous nature of the Indian society with its basic pattern of economic and social inequalities. These inequalities are inherent in the traditional social



structure of Indian society. The role of women is categorically defined and expectations are clearly marked out. The traditional attitude wants to restrict the women to home; the attitude of both men and women are canalized in this direction. (55)

In Sharma's view, problem arises due to traditional Indian structure of family and its ideals explicitly held by male members of the society. The culture and tradition have been broadly defined by males on which women are projected according to their imagination.

Traditional Hindu culture is influenced by Hindu theology. Women of lower class suffer from double domination of caste and sex. They are enclosed inside the four walls, doing household activities. Women are treated as inferior race and deprived of different opportunities. According to Hindu tradition it is believed that women should not read the Vedas. In childhood a girl must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband. They have to respect their husband as a form of God. Traditional Hindu society is patriarchal in nature. In order to show the superiority of male, they dominate women very severely. The biological aspect called menstruation of women is also taken as impurity. During this period, women are forbidden to perform any rituals which itself is a form of domination upon women.

In traditional Hindu society, women are dominated economically and culturally too. They are far away from the reach of economic control. All the land and property can be bought and sold according to the wish of male. Males go to different official jobs whereas women are confined to the kitchen, farms and other domestic activities. Males' lives are measured by education, employment, marriage, prosperity and so on, while for women the phases of childhood, adolescence, adulthood and maturity are marked by menstruation, marriage, motherhood and at times by widowhood. There is discrimination between men and women in the work and work

field. Women are prohibited to do certain works. They are deprived of economic opportunity on the one hand and while on work they are discriminated by paying fewer wages in comparison to male even though they perform the same task. Despite the revolt against such domination and discrimination, almost the same system continued in the society.

Due to lack of education, unity among women and their conservative attitudes, they are suppressed by patriarchy. Though in cities some women are getting education and raising their voice against male authority, the traditional situation prevails mainly in villages. Majority of women are treated as housewives and confined to the home and kitchen. This is all that patriarchy demands from women.

In traditional Hindu society, women are dominated, discriminated and repressed by the male-dominated society. Hindu males take their wives as their assistants and commodities. Incest, rape, child marriage, domestic violence of other forms of gender discriminations are very common in the society.

Recently, there have been encouraging trends with regard to women's place and position in the society. In urban areas males are liberal towards women. Women are gradually becoming independent and getting education like men but rural areas are still lagging behind. Despite these positive signs, buying, selling and brutalizing women are still prevailing in the third world. In spite of all the expansion that has taken place in the formal educational system, the vast majorities of third world women have remained outside the reach of literacy and education.

Within a short span of time, third world women have occupied almost all sectors of education, employment and economy. But still there is boundary for women. Hindu women do not have full freedom to make a choice, a choice of enjoying life fully. Women should understand they must be aware of liberating themselves and live a respectful life.

### Chapter 3

#### **Domination of Female and Resistance against It in *French Lover***

This research is concerned with the female experience in India and France in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*. Females are largely confined in the role of familial relation such as mother, daughter, and wife. But as an individual, Nila belongs nowhere. She is capable of creating her own space as dignified human being. Nila's mother Molina and Nila are compelled to come under traditional roles. However, Nila comes through it to become an independent woman by ascertaining and revolting against the patriarchal dominance. Nila bears double alienation of both traditional and western world. On the one hand she defies carrying out the role of south Indian Hindu housewife as expected by Kishanlal and On the other hand, she defies Benoit in the western land.

This novel launches on a direly racist note at the airport in Paris as newlywed Nilanjana has to go through the rough and tough time due to the colour of her skin and her passport which are "not white enough. . . not of a rich country" (10). Nila's external exile starts from here, but her internal with her flashback. She was supposed to do the things regardless of her aspiration, personality, dignity, preference, prospects, precedence and so on. Her dress codes, accessories, bodily postures, choices about motherhood, right to use her body to please her own soul, and almost everything have to be retained according to the patriarchal standards of femininity. The novel states, "Her father, Anirban, insisted on her wearing her wedding sari and jewellery on the flight-perhaps men knew best what would appeal to other men. Kishan was her closest friend, he was her husband and she'd have to spend her life making him happy" (11). Thus, patriarchal society sets a variety of restrictions and modifications for women. She is compelled to surrender her personal happiness for

the sake of her husband.

### **Patriarchal Domination and Female Submission**

After reaching Paris with the dream of therapeutic exploration of life, Nila washes away her “sindoor on her forehead and the dark circles around her eyes” (14). But her new look and sense of cheerful moment cannot last for long as Kishanlal yells at her, “what’s this. You’re bride; you can’t dress like this way. Wear a sari and jewellery people will come to see you later this evening” (14). Though he is also a groom (if Nila is a bride), he does not have to wear accordingly for the simple fact that he is a male, a lawmaker. As declared already, she has to become an idle woman so as to make him happy. Moreover, she has to drape a sari, wear gold bangles, heavy gold earrings, a gold necklace, brush some powders on her face, draw a line of kohl around her eyes, wear a sindoorbindi on her forehead and draw the sindoor in the parting of her hair and apply some dark lipstick. Now, Kishanlal is in his high spirit to call her his bride but for Nila, it is “a different kind of death” (15). It evokes Nila’s gross deviation towards the so called custom and rituals of marriage. To which, she compares it with the death of her own individuality.

Kishan impounds (or has the right to impound) her within the closed doors of his apartment because he is her husband, slave’s master. He has this right not to permit her to take a job, and to live the sovereign life. And the rationalization was reasonable enough: “After all, he is your husband” (74). She cannot go out, until and unless Kishan gives her the key to utilize it on one condition only if the house was on fire. In that case, she was allowed the freedom to run outside and save her life. It means Nila finds an uncomfortable life to be inside the house. She denies to be trapped by her husband who closes the door arresting her sovereignty and freedom.

The case with Molina is not similar with that of Nila, and Anirban Who is

more hard-hearted and cold-hearted than Kishan. Kishan appears to be polite to Nila as long as she acts accordingly. On the other hand, Molina lives a typical housewife without any protest. She tried very hard to please her husband in vain, “That’s how it was until Nila left the country and Molina this world” (215). These lines further strengthen the argument that women are having very difficult days especially in the third world.

Kishan regards women as ‘natural cook’. He believes that cooking or other domestic jobs are naturally assigned to them. He is swollen with pride to announce that he is not good at cooking or other household chores. But, when Nila asks if she has to be the expert, he says, “You do. You’re a woman. . . how can you be a woman and not know how to cook?”(18-20). According to Kishanlal, She has to sacrifice her desire for non-veggie Bengali food because she lives with the veggie non-Bengali husband. And she has to learn to accept this fixture as universal truth with an expression, “Oh, that’s true” (40). That is with food. This proves how the identity of women is associated with their male counterpart. When a woman gets married to a man, her identity is attached with her husband. The society imposes her dependent identity and refuses the independent one.

Woman’s soul is not often venerated. It has been developed habituation that giving her the corporeal things alone pleases her or should be pleasing to her. She is an object and giving her another object is enough to value her existence. Nila tries to express this somber issue to her mother in this manner, “We are almost prisoners of these things, aren’t we? I’ve seen you too-if Baba bought you two saris you’d be over the moon” (54). This is a woman. This is all about being her.

Nila is not supposed to speak up, to argue or to give logic simply because Indian woman should be “patient, tolerant, competent and generous to a fault” (270)

and Kishan has the same opinion. If Kishan's essence has to be pleased, she has to transform herself into "a dumb girl who'd silently do the housework and never protest at anything, who doesn't have a soul to call her own and cannot read or write, who didn't have her wits about him and didn't dream a single dream" (56). She should not live or act like a 27-year-old mature adult who can go out alone, have tea in a café or visit a museum or a bookstore and explore Paris all on her own because Kishan takes her as a small child. Since Nila is his wife, he takes her to be his property, his wealth, and that her life all is in his hands.

Nila takes a job to build her own independent existence in spite of all the obstacles her husband imposes on her. She wanders through the streets to explore that world; she starts to resist against his domination and chauvinistic attitude to relocate her mind and self. And the resistance attains the extreme of bidding farewell to his house. No longer can she take his attitude to any further extent. And she has to resist because she has to demonstrate that she exists, and her existence is solely her private property regardless of anybody else who denies her as an individual existence:

This I, who has evolved over so many years, have to give up her habits, her language, her culture, her nature, and fit herself into your mould. You know that I haven't done anything wrong. The main reason why you are angry with me is that I haven't obeyed you. I cannot survive within so many restraints and strictures. (79-80)

Thus, she begins to explore her space against the patriarchal society. Her battle for existence in her conjugal life should have ended here, but the struggle for existence has still a long way to go too.

She may have de-patriarchalized herself from Kishanlal, but she still has to de-colonize her South Asian existence from 'superiority complex' of the western culture.

Now the West wants from her the cost of breathing and living there. And the cost is again the disconnection of her mind and heart from her body. The cost is again the forgetfulness of 'self'. And it inaugurates with Nila's very first night at her only asylum, white girl Daneille's room where the former has to bear the latter's "hungry fingers" and "coracious tongue every night", for she has nowhere else to go in that alien land (104). The extent of exploitation ranges not only to emotional but also to the level of physical extremities.

Kishanlal wants her to change her patterns for him. She is expected to quit drinking water during the meal because West drinks wine, "This was shameful, not drinking wine-this won't do at all. Nila decided she'd have to get used to drinking wine and save her face" (84). She has to wear dress for dinner when she is easy in jeans because Westerners have decided; Jeans are for the daytime and for the workplace. Just because she used to get petrified of unfamiliar dogs back home, she cannot get scared of dogs here among Westerners because they have never "seen anything as strange as someone screaming instead of hugging dogs" (89). It is easily perceived that there is gap between western and eastern mindsets.

Nicole (the host), Rita Cixous, and Maria Svenson (Swedish) are actually concerned about Nila (the guest) there. This group of feminist friends of Danielle may think that men perceive women nothing more than just an object, but, for Nila, these White women are no different than the men of their discussion. They talk in French revealing their knowledge of feminism. Then, "Danielle had said that they'd decided to speak English for Maria's and Nila's sake. But if Maria wasn't there, Nila knew they'd have spoken in French because it wasn't a discussion in which Nila could even participate" (93). With all these feminists around, Nila starts sweating heavily for it is warm inside, "with the warmth of people, animals, culture and pride" (90). It reveals

that there are differences of sensibilities of women in different geography.

Nila's decision to break away from the mismatched marriage and her refusal to accept the life offered by Benoir and her self-discovery as an individual reveals that a female self can discover as an individual if it really wills so. Nasreen introduces Nila as an apostle of liberation movement, advocating freedom from the tradition bound Indian woman. Nasreen generalizes her opinion and makes the reading public aware that the liberation of woman should start from one's mind. Nila's resistance towards her male partners, expresses her inner urge to retain her individuality against the destructive forces that questions, challenges, threatens and subjugates her 'being,' is a representative character of the thousands of unexpressed, repressed women's voices under patriarchy. The physical as well as psychological journey Nila goes through depicts the metaphorical topsy and turvey a woman goes through in a male dominated society.

'We' and 'other' attitude is everywhere in the air. Her being a foreigner in Paris and some other Westerners being foreigner there is completely a different thing. Nila realizes that she is from the East, which is other of the West. When Benoir calls Picasso as ours, she retorts that Picasso is not of Paris but of Spain. Then Benoir declares, "Oh, all the same; the West's nonetheless" (269). Nila cannot put her proposal or discontent on the Western documentary on India, her own country, or say 'no' to what West has to say about her land because the poor and non-Whites are not expected to question Western representation, no matter how hackneyed, jaded and faded, regressive and off-putting it is. "T.V. channel wouldn't be interested in the rich people of India! If they want riches, they'll show Bill Gates. Besides, it's good for India if they focus on poverty. She'll get more aid" (97). Yes! Non-West is getting alms from West. So they should keep quiet although they are dissatisfied with the



partial representation being taken as the intact representation. Nila has to be geared up to hear the heart-rending words from Danielle and Benoir, eventhough they claim to love her. Every time she wants to pacify their strain by offering a dine.

Just because Monique, a rich French woman, liked Calcutta and resided there, Nila is estimated by Danielle to like and have a high regard for Monique even after witnessing that she cannot trust her Indian servant with dog food. As she suspects “they may not feed the dog . . . they’ll eat the food themselves” though they have not done anything as such before (158). But suspects because of their poverty. And Nila is expected to admire this French woman who does not “truly respect the people of Calcutta” (172). Just because this rich French woman is living in poor country, though for her own pleasure, she becomes wonderful person for Danielle, “It was so dusty, so crowed and so filthy and yet she loved Calcutta and stayed in there. She helped the poor generously. She had a big heart. No one else loved the Bengalis more than she did” (172). The cultural difference experienced in the western land does not satiate her.

As Nila was coming to a realization that she cannot have a fine- tuning with both the conjugal home and foreign land, she gets news about her sick mother and comes back to Calcutta. There she realizes that there needs no huge reason for a female body to be in exile. The female body is in exile in and among her own parental home, as well as her own female species. It is not only Anirban or Kishanlal who commands her to wear the things that she does not wish for, but there are the women who will not let her dwell in her comfort zone. It is not man alone who thinks woman should decorate herself with regard to her husband’s state (deceased or not deceased), no matter if the same rule does not apply on the reverse gear. The novel narrates, “Molina’s cousin sister held up Nila’s wrists and asked, ‘Look at this-bare hands.

Why have you taken off all your jewellery and why aren't you wearing the red and white bangles and sindoor? You're looking like a widow" (135). The perceptions of women in traditional society are submerged in such a way that they do not feel exploited. They take the rituals and norms of the society very naturally.

Another episode happens upon Mithu during her stay in Calcutta. Mithu is four years older than Nila and whoever comes to see her for a conjugal match, she gets rejected for her dark skin. And to marry off Mithu, her father does not have the money to offer a fat dowry. She is a B.A passed educated woman but what counts to claim her right to exist with dignity. She is forced to take herself as a burden and to know "what a crime it is in this society to stay unmarried" for a girl (136). She has requests Nila to get her a man:

I don't want marriage for my own sake, Nila. I can't scarcely look at my parents these days-dark and hopeless. I see my skin colour on everyone's face. This is such a big crime of mine. Nila, if someone marries me and then treats me like servant, I don't mind - at least please marry me. If you find someone, old, mad . . . . (137)

In conservative society, marriage is essential to the women. If they do not get married, they have to bear any kind of humiliation.

Mithu's confession shows the ground reality of Indian patriarchal society which believes that women can have stable life only after marriage. That is why Mithu is so desperate for not being able to get married, not for herself or for her physical need but for her parents and social need. As Nila can give no concrete hope, Mithu goes away with the fear still on her face.

Few days later Nikhil, Nila's brother, informs her that Mithu had hung herself with her sari and committed suicide the night before. The narrator describes:

Nila saw Mithu's mother wailing. She wailed, but there was a tinge of relief in it. Mithu's father, Sadhanbabu, was wiping his tears with his shirt. The worry lines on his forehead were gone. Now there was no need to worry about Mithu. But it was just the burning ghats, the pyre and ashes. Mithu would be wiped off the face of this earth. No one would be hassled about her black ashes of her dark body. Mithu herself escaped from the humiliation of being dark. But her suicide brought even greater relief for her parents, her brother, who could now marry a suitable girl for a huge dowry. (154)

The rigidity of culture becomes blind at the sorrow of women like Mithu. She sacrifices her life into the altar of traditional assumptions.

Though not hearty acceptable, Mithu's suicide, undoubtedly, is morally acceptable to her parents. A daughter staying in parent's house, without marriage or after marriage, is on no account welcome rather she is taken as a saddle. Her existence is in exile in her own parents' home. Her being servile to her man at any cost is the only option left for her; her parents too, think so.

At least this is what Nila's father thinks and forces Nila to be servile to Kishan:

I spoke to Kishan the other day. He said, if you behave yourself, keep your husband happy like most women do, do as he says, then he's prepared to forgive you and take you back . . . If you want to stay in this society, you have to do what everyone approves of. Either you go back to Paris, or kill yourself like Mithu and let us off. This is my word. (137-55)

Her father becomes so rude towards Nila. He feels that his masculinity is being

threatened when she does not accept the traditional values. Returning to her father's house would dishonor the family name, so she could have stayed anywhere in her parental city. Nila stands in between conformity or negligence of the culture. On the other hand, she could lead a lonely life, abandoning the oppressive society, but that would be a risky decision once again because someone must be prying on her.

All these conditions apply on woman only. Although himself being dark, Nikhil has rejected five girls for his match because all five were dark. Kishanlal himself is dark and has got a long beard. Still he can possess a woman.

There was a mark from a long-ago cut on Kishan's chin. Nila had never said that it detracted from his looks in any way. But Kishan often scornfully commented on the tiny mark on her forehead, which was usually covered by the fall of her hair, and said that her fiery beauty of the old had gone. With all her experiences till this date, Nila is compelled to pronounce, "That's true, it doesn't matter if the man is dark, ugly, grotesque, corrupt, a lout, a rascal, a monster or a debauchee" (272). Nila distates him and regards Kishanlal as a mean person.

Throughout their life, Mithu and Molina's souls are forced to suffer, to feel crestfallen. All her life, Mithu is discarded calling her names, making her believe that she is unsightly because she is dark. All her life, she was given this pessimism about getting decorated and valuing her 'self' by making her believe nothing can help to do her up. But after she died, they constructed the brides of praises around her: "She was dressed in a red sari . . . ." People who came to see her said, "Oh, what a perfect face, what a sharp nose! Such long hair! The mole on her chin made her face even more appealing" (154). They could have seen this appeal before she died.

They could have seen and cared for the suffering of Molina's soul before she breathed her last. But after mother's death, when Nila decided to leave Calcutta

before Molina's *shradhh*, they admonished, "Your mother's spirit will suffer. Don't behave like this" (955). This double standard attitude is slaying the essence of humanity and compelling the existence of female body to be in exile.

Nila is forced to anticipate, glumly, the reasons behind the dumping of one Indian girl by her parents after she was born: "It was because you are dark. No one marries women who are dark. Or perhaps your mother was unmarried and it is a great sin to be an unwed mother. Or perhaps because you are a girl. No one wants girl children; they need a dowry and maybe your parents were poor and already had few girls" (191). The fate of the girl in the traditional Indian society is very miserable. The girl child is supposed to be bad-omen to the family. To take birth in female body, in this patriarchal society, it provides enough reason to be in exile. There is tendency of men to look female body as an object of desire. That is why, they want women to beautify their body. Women, who are not physically beautiful, face the danger of lacking femininity. In Indian society, fair skin is desirable and if they have dark colour, it is very difficult to get married. Besides that, there is also the pressure of dowry.

Financially, woman is forced or at least expected to be in exile. She is not expected to be economically emancipated. She is not expected to earn on her own, and is not allowed to inherit. She is denied of the inheritance that son (easily, normally and always) gets from his parents. When Nila's parental relatives, her own father and brother knew about her getting 20 lakhs rupees from her mother (the only thing Molina did, though not for herself, without caring about pleasing Aniraban), all of them tried, shamelessly, to snatch it away from her with every word possible:

Leave that money behind; we have a lot of expenses coming up. The house is old and it needs work . . . When have you ever heard of a girl

taking her inheritance? They usually give their share to their brother.

Although girls go away to their husband, they don't forget their father and brothers. They'll die for them. They never covet their father's property; if they did, people don't approve of them. (156)

This shows how difficult position women have regarding the possession of wealth.

Physically, or quite precisely, sexually too, female body is in exile in a gigantic manner. Like in most of the games, woman is conventionally not supposed to participate enthusiastically in the sex-game, or at least, not expected to win the game by using her body like the way she wants or reveal the satisfaction after the game. Man uses (or misuses) her body to quench his sexual thirst or to get solely 'his' inheritor - that is not strange. But she is not supposed to use her own body, leave alone using (or misusing) his. Nila was used to lying flat and passive. She thought that was the rule of the game, the woman would lie with her eyes shut and the man would climb on her body and take his pleasure. If the woman got anything out of it, "well and good. If not, too bad!"(184). Most of the people, especially in India, believe sex is mainly for the man and all that the woman would get out of it is children. Her contentment, she is used to thinking or made to think, does not count. It seems like people are used to calling 'his' masturbation as 'their' sex. Man does not need her willful participation.

Kishan had no objection to Nila sleeping. But she should not move her hands, legs, mouth and head so that he could get his work done easily. Nila wondered if Kishan really needed a live female body to satisfy his hunger. She lay there still and motionless as Kishan's heavy body did its own work upon hers. He had been right about one thing: she did not feel a thing.

Sunil, whom Nila took as her nearest kin in the whole world, raped her, and

“Speechless, powerless, Nila lay there watching this ugly scene . . . Nila didn’t even touch him to push him away. She stared at the blank wall fixedly . . . Life is so ugly” (199). She is born in a female body, and that is enough for a man to use it to accomplish his gratification. He is used to using her body; he does not require making love to her. She does not need to participate physically enthusiastically; instead, he confidently takes her glancing at him as the license to use her body to satisfy his sexual requests.

No matter, how many women, men sleep with, the same sleeping (no matter whether willingly or unwillingly) makes woman a disreputable character. Rather than Sunil, Nila is blamed, “Sunil raped you? Lies. You slept with Sunil and lied to me. Your world is limited to three inches below your navel. You are a slut” (290).

It is really hard to tell the place where any woman is secure; it is harsh to deny if female body does not start to get raped emotionally, or psychologically or physically too, from her own natal home; it is tough not to say female body is in exile everywhere. Once in her childhood, Danielle was raped by her father.

It is a tragic irony that the value of woman is limited and degraded to the level of no more than a sex object. If a woman is perfected in the role of a sex object in the eyes of a man, she is given a space in the man’s life otherwise discarded to the intensity of committing suicide. And if she has to be received as somebody’s match, her parents should be able to offer the fat dowry to grant her the chance to serve the man who, in turn, will sleep with some other woman who is the perfect sex object in his eyes.

Molina’s father could offer fat dowry to Anirban who always returned after sleeping with Swati and “crashed on his neatly made bed and snored the night away” (133). To the severe extent, when her dying mother Molina was screaming in pain,

Nilá saw her father Anirban sitting on the sofa in his comfortable clothes, the newspaper on his lap, his eyes fixed in the TV, watching the nubile heroin's undulating hips. She adds,

No one had taken Molina and Mithu for sex object. No one had reached for them in lust! Yet, they had spent each moment of their lives in an indescribable pain. Nila felt sexuality was a kind of asset. It was because sexuality existed and because she could give him the gratification, that Benoir loved Nila. Without that, Nila would have had to spend her life in the vacuous loneliness of Molina or end her life like Mithu. Benoir would have rather caressed Wanda than Nila, if latter didn't have breasts and thighs and if he didn't get immense pleasure in her pelvic circle. Nila was hungry for love and sexuality was important to get that love. (280)

Benoir manipulates women as an object of sexuality. Nila, there or thereabouts like every other woman in the story, is identified no more than a womb, an ovary, a body, a sex object or a passive object without any autonomous connection with mind and self, without any direct authority over her own body. Initially she lets it happen, unwillingly, to herself. She wears the clothes, decorates herself, eats, sits, and uses her body, the way any masculine figure covets in 'ladylike' female.

But a 'rebel' in her does not let her live this fashion for long enough. An element called 'rebel' was always there inside her from the very beginning, and the 'self' that enthuses her to perceive things in unconventional manner was constantly there in her. But it initiates to get fostered in this comparatively free land Paris.

This is the place where most of the girls of sixteen or seventeen leave home and stay alone or with a boyfriend without marrying because "These days no one



marries and even if they do it's not until much later-after living together for five or even ten years or after children come along" (47). Kishanlal adds:

Over here they believe in enjoying life, in whatever way . . . . Do you know when these girls lose their virginity? At age five or six when they play doctors and nurses. Even before they're twenty they must have bedded hundred boys. There are no principles, rally. If they love someone today, tomorrow they leave him-there are no enduring ties. They don't know how to settle down, when and with whom. They don't know it and they can't do it. (47)

The attitude of sexuality in free land like Paris is different from eastern society.

Nila is now introduced to the land where people do the things because they wanted to do so. A girl has got her eyebrows, lips and tongue pierced because she wanted to. A man has dressed like a woman because that is his wish. Now Nila thinks of her own life. She never could do what she wanted to, even with her own body restrictions were all over. Patriarchal legacy has stipulated her to wear those uncomfortable clothes, and she has to look so-called feminine to satisfy those eyes (both men's and women's) blinded with patriarchy. "If she ever tried to go out in trousers, Anirban would bear down upon her. She would always have to change into something more feminine" (82). But this relatively liberated life is giving her the prospect to explore the life on her own terms. She starts to wear the things without bothering about how she might give the impression to somebody else's eyes, without caring about looking agreeable to them.

Not only with dress codes, she is not expected to sit or make bodily postures like the way she wanted as well because patriarchal social order considers it unladylike for a woman who is using own body freely. But eventually she resists

against such designation of female body, and denies being in exile anymore. When Kishanlal reprimands her for sitting like a man with her feet up, she counters, “Who says it is like a man? I have put my feet up in true female style” (70). She denies accepting only men allowed her implicitly. She starts such privileges as swearing, which is also an expression of the extreme emotion and rage.

### **Decolonizing Woman’s Body**

Nila becomes radical or has to become radical because she has to draw patriarchy’s attention toward her. When patriarchy denies acknowledging her existence, this woman exercises this strikingly radical way. When her father and brother were not paying deserved attention towards her dying mother and were not listening to her, she has to say, “Fuck your oncologist . . . Fuck yourself” (145). At home, Nila was forbidden to scorn what she detests. However, she finds western women swearing all the time. It is an act of emotional discharge.

Benefiting herself with Beauvoir’s fight for legality of abortion, Nila aborts Benoir’s child, without his consent. She denies to make her womb the medium to “sow the seeds of dreams” of Benoir, just because his daughter from his wife Pascale wants a brother (253). She cannot let her womb be the place to sow the sole dream of Kishanlal, just because he wants a child. She denies celebrating the self-sacrificing womanhood. In patriarchal economy, the womb has always been, viewed as a site of reproduction through which patrilineal descent is perpetuated. But Nila denies it and de-establishes the patriarchal function of womb utilization for perpetuating proper male descent. She denies assuming womb as a signifier of male control and patriarchal continuity. She denies taking her womb to be the site of reproduction only, but of confrontation too.

Nila’s foes may cry foul and moral chaos when Nila wants to shake the entire

structure of patriarchal justification but she rejects the patriarchal imperative of self-sacrifice in the face of moral duty because she realizes that ethical womanhood and morality defined by patriarchy are pillars to perpetuate female subjugation. She does not let patriarchal definition of womb and the question of morality come in between her and her exploration of the free life. She explores it emotionally, intellectually, financially, physically and sexually. Nowhere in the whole novel, she betrays or backstabs anyone, so she never quits or surrenders. So, she has no regrets upon any of her actions even after receiving their undesirable reactions. And yes, she is an anarchist, if seen through the conformist eyes, for she never regretted her wanderings, her exploration of life on her own terms.

Nilā sleeps with four men and one woman throughout the novel and does not repent for it. She does not make it a morality issue. Rather, while she was serving like the housemaid and letting Kishenlal use her body to satisfy exclusively his sexual needs, she regretted within:

Nilā took the dirty socks into the bathroom and thought that at night she'd have to be the perfect whore and sell herself just as they sold their bodies for some money. Nilā wondered if there was any difference between a prostitute's client and a husband. The only difference she could find was that the client can get away only after paying off the prostitute whereas the husband can get off the hook without ever paying his wife's dues. She felt the prostitute actually had more freedom than the wife in more ways than one. A mother, a sister and a prostitute-were they the three roles which a woman had to play to hilt or were they merely the three persons that a woman was born with. (28)

Women are means of gratifying males' desire be it at home or outside. Here, Nila is repenting over the role of woman in man's life. There is no way out for freedom. She interrogates at the role of women provided by the society.

Sunil raped her, but she did not take it as the lifelong humiliation and deny going through the mental trauma, like the patriarchal definition of femininity demands. She takes all the episodes of life, the failures, the stumbling as the stepladder to attain knowledge: "time is never wasted. This time was spent in acquiring wisdom and I needed it. Or I would have spent my life under a misconception" (291). Nila now is an enlightened woman.

The primary stair to build her own space, to relocate mind and self, and to connect mind with own body is to surmount the mystification, the ambivalence. And to triumph over the ambivalence, one should be able to be balanced on her/his judgements, appraisals, and criticisms. Nila, all through the story, strives to be genuine in this attitude. She never takes absolute side of any land, whether foreign or natal. She was not harbouring the hatred towards men all the time. To Danielle's statement, "If not Kishenlal, then Sushanta. All men are the same. They all exploit women," she answers, "Not all men are the same, Danielle. Some of them know how to love" (118). Even with all the nuisances in her dealings with Indian men, whether that is her father, brother, ex-lover, husband, she keeps the optimism.

Initially, she thinks that land makes the difference in personal attitude. There is no difference between modern Kishenlal and Benoir. Kishenlal has transformed a lot when he comes to Western society. But later after being raped by her nominal brother Sunil and her experience with the egotistical Benoir, she comes to a comprehension that land is not the major concern, it is all about her stance. As far as she concerns the male, she finds them similar, irrespective of land, culture, etc.

There comes Benoir, who admires her no-white colour while she was on her own land, where everybody has got more or less same complexion. Poor Mithu has to die for being dark. Benoir makes his own coffee which Anirban or Kishenlal had never done: proves her belief that for woman, rule of the game that “lying flat and passive” (184) was wrong. Eventually Nila pronounces Benoir her own recognition:

You are no different from my father Anirban, my lover Sushanta, my husband Kishenlal and that Sunil. Of course, you appear to be different from them, you speak sweet words of love, kiss me every now and then, you say “ladies first” and make way for them or hand a flower or two, help in the kitchen, push the pram on the road; but deep inside, all of you have some things in common. (286)

The outward of each male might be different but at deeper level, there is all the same.

Benoir was no different from Anirban for all he cared is his own physical pleasure. He was different from Anirban only in a way that the latter never said sweet words about Molina for not complaining about his affair with anybody else. But Benoir did about his wife. Though the tone is divergent, as Kishenlal’s demanding and Benoir’s alluring, their attitude towards a woman not being complete without motherhood is identical in both. Kishenlal cannot be buttery in his words. Romantic in his bed, and cannot show Nila, though ephemeral, but enticing dream. Otherwise Benoir is no different in his philosophy of womanhood, “Don’t you want a child, Nila? A baby who’ll play in this room and we’ll watch, pretty, lively? Your life would be complete, giving birth to a child, an innocent child” (227). It seems as if he is in the philanthropic mission of making woman’s life complete: first he did it with Pascale, and now with Nila.

The fantastic image of White-Western-French-Rich-Educated-Male Benoir

who takes Nila as his “Madame Butterfly” all sinks in the last episode when he goes inconsistent in his words about Nila in an instant. While begging her to go on staying with him, he goes down on his knees, “No one is as good, as honest, generous, loving, patient and selfless as you. You are the greatest woman on earth; nobody can be like you. You are incomparable. You don’t know just how great, noble you are; I know it. You have brought light into my mundane, modest life” (287).

But when he realizes that there is no way he can make her stay, his words alter in such a manner that confuses whether he is talking about the same Nila:

You are a greedy, selfish, horrid, lowly, rotten woman . . . a big zero, a vacuous being . . . worse than worst of them . . . ugly, dirty and revolting . . . object of ridicule . . . lesbian, a disreputable character . . . slept with Sunil and lied to me . . . slut . . . you wanted to fool me into marrying you! Thank goodness I could unmask you before it came to that . . . I’ll kill you . . . I won’t dirty my hands by killing a worm like you. You’ll rot here by yourself. (289-91)

When Benoir is satisfied with his desire, he does not mind scolding women of his love.

Till the end no Indian men looked so pathetically comical than this Prince Charming. Nasrin makes the readers come to an understanding that land makes no difference; it is all about an approach of a man towards a woman. Besides it is not only in India, but also in Western land, if husband’s last names were not the same it would be disastrous for wives. It created problem for Nila too when Nila had deliberately not taken his name in the airport in Paris.

Materially, Non-West might be shoddier than West, but spiritually the latter is not better off. Who cannot deal with their not-worth-mentioning sort of problem on

their own, as shown in *French Lover*. They require psychiatrist for every petite mental or emotional crisis. With very first fight with Nila, recently after first meeting, Benoir was so distressed that he even toyed with a knife. Then Pascale takes him to the doctor, upon whose advice, he arrives to Nila with Baudelaire's books and one rose.

Nicole goes to psychiatrist to treat the agony of Pipi, her cat, for not peeing.

Danielle goes there because:

[. . .] she wanted to get over the misery at Nila's impending departure to Calcutta. Nila assumed that the man who dozed was probably there because he hadn't slept well a few nights and the one who spoke in whispers was probably there because he normally spoke too loudly. The sixteen-year-old girl who sat gazing out the window, Nila was sure, had come because she was having trouble with her lover. (129)

Danielle is distressed and wishes Nila's company so that she can have a soothing talk.

In Paris, spring is the season of suicides. All summer long lovers walk hand in hand, have fun and those who are alone feel even lonelier when they see so many happy couples. The distress drives them to commit suicide in spring even before summer arrives. They kill themselves as they do not have a lover and would not be able to enjoy the next months. Nila thinks that it was dangerous than visiting the psychiatrist, "The Third World also has a heart . . . it isn't made of stone . . . I have never heard of our people going to a doctor to cure themselves of sorrow" (130). It is not because Third World cannot think higher and cannot understand that food and clothes are not everything.

Westerners have made up their mind that all Easterners are conservative for the former have mistaken the latter's spiritual strength for superstition. That is why, Benoir is, undoubtedly, amazed to know that Nila does not believe in heaven and hell

because she believes that they are not far away as scribed in scriptures rather they reside in center of man. Westerners declare Easterners to be superstitious, irrational and unscientific and what not, but here is this Westerner who goes to an astrologer who wants Benoir to “take one kilo of corn and scatter it in some woods. Two weeks later do the same with two kilos of corn”, and Benoir does it accordingly (232). When Nila had fever, Benoir brought the bottle that was etched with trees and plants, which he called medicines. Her head starts to throb, not because of the fever but to see all this. She throws away those bottles and her fever subsides on its own, in seven days:

In Culcutta she had seen the illiterate, uneducated people have these medicines, those who went to quacks, got cheated and died painfully. Nila, the champion of logic and reason in the Western world, was amazed to see that here people were looking elsewhere for succor; the eyes of the educated upper classes were turned towards dark, irrational. (254)

Nila comments on the activity of Benoir as he brings a bottle of spellbinding medicine.

Nila initially thought that it was only the cities like Calcutta where “five lusty men or a bunch of robbers would pounce upon a girl and snatch away her money, jewellery, honour or even life” (47). But when Benoir, living in so-called decent and civilized posh area threatened her with her life, her closing lines of the novel became the crux of the novel:

Is it only the unemployed people who rob and steal? Those who have jobs, get fat salaries, don't they steal? So what if it is a chock full of black people. Don't the white people do drugs? Murder? Tell me, is there a good place on this earth? Where would you say there is total



safety? Aren't there addicts in Manila? Robbers, murderers? There is poverty, sorrow and superstition here, as it is here. This country has racism, so does India, Women are raped in Calcutta, and it's the same here. This Rue de Vouyere, where only white people stay, do you think murders never happened just today! (293)

Crimes do not have any background.

Another ambivalence and misconception vanished. Anyone can be superstitious and irrational, criminal, thief, murderer and drug-addict; and anyone can be rational and decent regardless of their land or the colour of their skin. There are loads of deserving sides that one must learn from Westerners to stamp out own problems. But one indubitably has to be convinced that they have to award their land, their people the dignity, they actually deserve.

One episode of Nila's visit to Rita Cixious, who wanted to make documentary on foreign woman, is remarkable to put here. Nila wore sari and bindi on Rita's request, completely like a Bengali girl. Rita did not like the bindi magic. She would have been happier if a permanent, red marriage mark was tattooed onto Nila's forehead. These Westerners wanted to confirm their negative stereotypical images of Non-Westerners, which this Easterner does not let them do. Westerners were upset, as simple as that – "To tell you the truth, Rita isn't happy with your interview" (127). Westerners want to affirm their belief and attitude towards the eastern.

On one of her early dating with Benoir, Nila demands to pay the bill that the waiter placed before him "because he felt she wasn't capable of paying: black and a woman" (182). Just because Nila is a woman from a poor country she does not make her a pauper. Sometimes pride comes with a price, which Nila is always ready to pay.

Once, Nila invites Danielle to come and see her as she has been ill, but

Danielle turns down this invitation at her face for she sees no point of coming then, when she is sick. She tells Nila to get well and she will come one day to chat with her: Nila came to her senses. This wasn't India where people dropped in on you when you were sick. Get well, get lively, overflow with life and I'll come and drink some of you. And if you fall sick and die, I'll come to your funeral in a black dress, drink to you and dance a little. That's it (252). Nila criticizes the western culture to be very rude and formal.

Taslina definitely does not mean to embarrass the West and dignify the East or vice versa but she intends not to pursue the West blindly or demonstrate the worshipping attitude just because it is told they are civilized, and everything that contrasts them is barbaric. They have, undoubtedly, freer society in many ways, but that definitely does not mean that they are the measuring rod and the absolute point to attain. Like already mentioned above, it is all about learning each other's deserving sides and quitting own contemptible sides.

Paris is the land which teaches Nila more about human rights (and woman rights) about individuality; about "giving people their due credit" regardless of their better jobs or not; and much more (86). Indians make Mithu die and Molina suffer all lifelong due to their dark complexion, while the French man for her same colour admires Nila. Nila imagines about Morounis, Indian orphan girl adopted by French couple that if her parents had not thrown Morounis into the rubbish heap so cruelly one night, she would have grown up in Culcutta, spoken Bengali and wore a sari. She was dark and no one would have married her. Like Mithu, she would have had to hang herself. Nila further compares Morounis's present life in Paris with her 'could be' hypothetical orphan life in Culcutta:

Like all other French people Morounis would also lie around in the

sun and darken her already dark skin; she hadn't learnt to use sunshades, to wear lotions and creams and sit around all day long to make herself fairer. . . . If she had lived in Calcutta, perhaps she wouldn't have known her alphabet, or got two square meals and she could have died from starvation and a hard life or ended up in a brothel. There too, she'd have had less customers because she was dark. (192-93)

This means the concept of beauty is different from one land to another.

There is no optimism of one marginalized receiving their privileges until they learn to revere next marginalized. To dishearten such daunting, immoral and apathetic atmosphere, this world needs 'someone', who is proud to be the one, one actually is, who knows every person has equal right on human dignity regardless of anything above the earth and under the sun. And that 'someone' in *French Lover* in this Nila who self-confidently "poured more champagne in Modibo's glass and said, 'I have' (275). She deliberately adopts the western culture.

Since birth, people are taught to perceive things as 'opposite' rather than 'distanced'. This understanding of the world is fundamentally wrong. And this is the root cause of the whole problem. People are taught that man is opposite to woman, light- dark, rich-poor, heterosexual-homosexual, literate-illiterate, east-west, mortal-immortal, moral-immoral, etc. This attitude has created such pessimism among each group to the extent that they can hardly stand other's existence. If people had learnt to accept it as a distance, they would have learnt to perceive that if whiteness is continued to be taken away from the colour white then it will turn black and vice versa; if it would be opposite, then sex change could have been never possible. It has become possible because though the things lie at far distance or poles apart, they can

meet after crossing the distance.

How much ever people cry the slogan of humanity, brotherhood and sisterhood has been never possible because people have been taught to perceive the things as opposite. 'Opposite' should have been limited to the word only; it should not have dominated the philosophy of perceiving the humanity, the human world. And this is the thing perceived by Nila, which makes it possible for her in her assessment of crossing the distance and adopting the deserving side of any colour, any race, any country, any concept, any gender, and any sex. She does not take the absolute stance in adoring and abhorring, revering and deriding any sides. She is balanced, not ambivalent.

By and large, Nila exemplifies decisive, unconfused, sure in mind -New Woman. She is about to accomplish the dream of the de-colonized and de-patrichalized New World. She denies to be silenced by both the colonial and indigenous patriarchal power, and overall the concept of opposite.

### **Nila's Attempt of De-naturalizing the Socialization**

"The sun doesn't rise in the east or west. It stays put in one place and makes everyone else dance to its tune" (272). It is the statement that many have not grasped so far. It is all about the vantage point supplied by one's geography, and most of the principles and beliefs are wrought by the way one is socialized since birth. consequently mind-sets, ideas, impression, concepts, cultures, and traditions are determined. It is received as the universal truth, and love to forget that it has to be changed along with time. People do not bother to stamp out the ill happenings until it does not propel direct affect on them rather some take it as fun to see their continuation:

'Dada, tell me the truth: do you really believe in all these rituals and

rules of Hinduism?’

‘Does one ever believe in them?’

‘Then why do you do it?’

‘There’s an element of fun in it.’

‘Fun? I see no fun in a bunch of illogical rules and pointless emotions.’(159)

It is further illustrated by the conversation between Nila and Elder brother Nikhil. It is not fallacious to say this very attitude is the foundation behind the catastrophe that those who dub themselves educated, logical and rational cannot rescue the victims (for whom these rituals are from no angle a ‘fun’) from supposed ‘naturally offered destiny’.

Till the end, Nila comes out as the sole survivor with an unshakable spirit to de-naturalize this objectionable position of socialization. Otherwise there is no dearth of those men and women who believe that just because of the differences of the gender, complexion, geography and others, it is natural that one has the right to rule and another has to be ruled. The latter has to do everything with to the please the former because he has the right to live the life and latter has to live as per the will of male. It is not only men who think woman is born not to live for her own ‘self’ but to A-D-J-U-S-T, rather women themselves are dogged to trust it.

As Nila sees no clue of having any sort of fine-tuning with Kishenlal, she tells that she does not feel like going to Kishenlal. As an effect to this decision, “Chaitali’s voice was hard. ‘Women have to do many things they don’t feel like doing, Nila.’” (176). Later on, when Chaitali senses that her husband Sunil is cheating on her, she cannot leave him at once to start on her own but continue to live with him with loads of discontentment. If only she could have believed that she deserves everything like

the way her husband deserves, continuing to live with such a swindler would have been intolerable.

Pascale, Benoir's wife, is not different, rather proving her love for him by letting him go and sleep with another who is giving him a taste of difference for a long time. If she would not have accepted the female body just as a womb to give him his heir, or a sex object to gratify his sexual needs, she could not have tolerated Benoir, who "often said, the Indian woman's body was more mysterious, it had a different feel to it. And this difference gave him a pleasure that Pascale never could" (268). She cannot wander from one man to another man for the divergent taste but she, sorrowfully and helplessly, has accepted that he can.

These are the cases with modern-day, educated, earning women living in Western land, let alone Molina and Mithu. The only difference is Molina can neither show dissatisfaction like the way Chaitali does to Sunil, nor tell. But they all are identical in crucial way for none of them can stand up and say like the way Nila does. She speaks it loud and clear in her disapproval with Benoir, "You have had your fill of the exotic, enough in fact, I had no self-esteem or self-confidence and that's why I came this far for your love. Now you must let me go. I cannot spend the rest of my life in tears. . . . No, I am not ready for that" (286). Nila's refusal to marry Benoir, her decision to abort his baby and her changed self to stand all the blames Benoir threw upon her makes her a transformed woman from a vulnerable victim. She tolerated all the atrocities but come out as triumphant against all the odds. Her resistance liberated herself in a remarkable way.

They all are born and brought up in the culture of naturalizing the socialization which says womanhood is complete only after the wifhood and motherhood. Though both Pascale and Chaitali tell their husbands to stop dallying and no to "neglect them

so much” (248), both of them are confirmed that it’s their husbands’ right to choose the woman. If he, the cheat, is ready to take her back, she is happy to be chosen.

Though differently but both of them are socialized in the manner that a woman needs a man to lead her life. They are socialized in their manner to take Molina luckier than Mithu. It is because for Molina, at least, could get a husband though to be his slave.

They are socialized in such a way to take Mithu’s suicide morally acceptable to think that she never gets the lucky opportunity to be a servant of her husband. Because they believe that it is naturally offered destiny with one other alternatives that women have to do many of those things they just do not feel like doing.

That is not all, some of them also take it as a matter of pride that her life achieves its meaning if she could put herself into the service of her man under each circumstances, twist and turns, ups and downs, thick and thins,. It is not only a man alone but also a woman who she thinks cooking is naturally assigned job to a woman. When Anirban denies to eat anybody else’s cooking but his wife, Molina gets up and cooks despite her fever, “Not only did this satisfy Anirban; it gave great pleasure to Molina as well” (30). There is a cultural assimilation where both Anirban and Molina are happy with each other. Not in the sense that Molina has freedom but she entertains it.

Woman is taught from her childhood to get prepared to be married off. She is socialized to judge every aspect of her life and her ‘self’ in relation to her marriage. Marriage is, undoubtedly, a fundamental project for both daughter and daughter’s parents. If not married, she is a burden devoid of human dignity and finally she attempts to commit suicide. Symbolically, Mithu is killed every moment by everybody; literally she has killed herself one day for she herself started to perceive her own self as a burden. If not so, then why did Mithu kill herself and Nikhil didn’t?

Why was Mihtu rejected by every man for being dark and Nikhil, who is dark himself, rejected five other dark girls? Why do only men have right to choose and women, only to wait to be chosen? Why is it only woman who has to accept? And if she has to suffer by remaining silent and enduring, it is nothing new. Because she “is used to suffering and her spirit will also be able to take it. This is nothing” (155).

Women have been suffering for long.

Women are taught, since their birth, that they do not have god-given right to choose men or make their own way to live without ‘one’ man to direct her. Therefore she has to remain silent to each of their discriminations and tortures. This is an attitude handover by mother generation to daughter generation that what on earth happens; men are needed to be pleased for they are the only hope after all. But Nila denies to get inherited with this very standpoint. Unlike every other person, Nila is the one who is determined to believe that there is nothing natural about the patriarchal definition of femininity and masculinity, but every dresses, bodily postures, lifestyle that comfort her without disturbing others’ way of living is from top to bottom a “true female style” (70). She knows it is only her right to choose what suits her. She does not let anybody else to take her out from her comfort zone.

The women, who do not believe in the possibility of pleasant life without man to guide her no matter how much strays himself, are brought into discussion. This novel reveals that a woman not only denies serving men but also wants to alter the traditions and live independent of men. Danielle forgets that everyone cannot be homosexual like her by choice. She forgets that being attracted to another sex is as much natural as being homosexual. Almost all animals are attracted to the sex mate to continue the species. Danielle thinks that “These are rules created by men . . . and for sex, the day women say they don’t need men, will be the day men finally lose. Not



before that” (118). Like patriarchy, Danielle (who loves to call herself a feminist) too is muddling up nature with socialization. She is forgetting that to make her dream of equality come true, the world needs to exist and for the world to exist, women ignoring men will not do like the way men ignoring women. This is not the case with gender alone, but also with any colour, any country, any class, any caste, and everything.

Women getting their rights are not enough; everyone getting their share is the ultimate point to be achieved. Women do not win by making men lose. If men lose, it is about creating another marginalized group. World does not enjoy it. Self-style supremacy of patriarchy (from all genders’ mind-set) should lose, not men. As change is the only ageless truth of universe, it is appalling enough to hoard those jaded and faded old beliefs that exist only to create discomfort among human beings themselves. And as a sign of hope within these prevalent hopeless attitudes, Nila emerges with the moral fiber. Change is inevitable and never stays easy. But that’s the only ‘naturally granted alternative’. This is nature. Nila certainly is the postcolonial de-colonized New Woman who emerges to stand up, pointing at the female roles designed by patriarchy that girls should be unselfish, unstinting, unspoiled, uncontroversial, unalloyed, undefiled, unassuming. . .” (156), and shout-these are not the roles women are born to fill.

Male versed patriarchal social system, attitudes, communications and norms become an obstacle on the path of women’s progress, dignity and prosperity. They also instigate men to dominate, discriminate and exploit innocent women and perpetuate the suffering of women. To balance the universe, belief in co-existence represents versatility; singularity gives monotony. But the tragedy is that everyone is busy in creating monotony with their trails to give space only to their kind of

'species'. One should not overlook anybody whether men or women. Only 'rose' does not make the garden beautiful, you need lily, chrysanthemums, marigold etc. This world is beautiful only because it has darkness, light, men, women, minority and the gorgeous veracity of versatilities. This is nature. Change is the only truth that existed since eternity in time and space. And as earth and universe change their existence from mortal state to immortal and vice versa, it is extremely uproarious, comical, disgraceful, reprehensible, and discreditable of the people who take it as a pride to have certain colour and certain organ.

## Chapter 4

### Resistance to Patriarchal Domination

Nila, a representative of New Woman, is battling for her dignity regardless of any differences. She realizes that this is the time to unravel the truth behind the discourses put forward by men that women are inferior to men. Initially Nila was impounded by the self-asserted superiority of patriarchy and later on she faces double alienation in the foreign land. She realizes that being a female, she has to face both internal and external exile forever. This realization sparks her rebellious path.

Nila understands that change is inevitable truth but she also knows that sometimes one cannot wait for the evolution to take place, rather revolution is a must. She is forced to be a rebel or anarchist who acts to de-establish the patriarchal discourse that femininity is the exact 'other' and opposite of masculinity. Woman is not born demure, substandard, fragile, or dependent or in sari, salwar and skirt. There is no natural relationship between femininity and masculinity and their respective definitions. Nature has already given some bias less biological differences between human beings to continue the race. These pervasive unnatural designations are the outcome of the prejudiced bigoted socializing process. If nature is given its genuine position, equality becomes the only human tradition, humanity and religion. Nila has understood and realized it and is determined to act according to this understanding and realization. She decides to live according to her desires, dreams, priorities and expectations. She denies being the slave of her body in both literal and metaphorical sense.

Nila admires and adores the commendable edges of the West, but rejects being in service of gratifying the Western soul by remaining silent about their jaded-faded negative stereotypical representations of Non-West. She also denies taking a life long

profession of satisfying the soul of another equal being named male. She has not backstabbed anybody; so, she does not regret. Her sovereign self apprehends when Anirban, Sushanta, Kishenlal, Sunil, Nikhil, and Benoir show self-given right to choose woman for their life. Nila is confident that she is not different in terms of her rights. If they can decide their body, she, too, can. She does not let men use her body as the medium to gratify their sexual needs, and her womb as the medium to sow the seeds of their dream of having solely 'his' heir. She is not in the mood of becoming Molina, Chaitali, Mithu or Pascale who accepts the life time company of that man who shoutingly or silently declares himself as her 'swaami', her lord, her decider, her superior but not her friend, her equal. She is also not in favor of the men who lose and the way Danielle wants her. But she rather believes in dignified co-existence of all species. Unlike Danielle, she does not mind the human race to continue.

Nila is strikingly noticed or called fallen for she claims over woman dignity to the extent that has not been sanctioned by patriarchal legacy. But Nila could not allow this attitude as the only truth just because it has existed for long. Surrendering to patriarchal definition of femininity and seizing natural from the grasp of socialization is the must to create her own space, to relocate her mind and self, to claim the sovereign autonomy over her own body, and to rescue the entire race of female body from being exiled.

Despite mammoth external pressures, Nila knows that she cannot halt her humane odyssey of establishing the natural veracity that one cannot be exact opposite of another, but it is all about the distance to be crossed. As Nila is marching on a new racetrack, judging her as right or wrong, winner or loser with the same old rules and regulations, terms and conditions that is not done. She needs the de-patriarchalized, and de-colonized avant-garde version of criteria; be it a revolution or anarchy. By and

large, Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* explores the same criteria, with original protagonist. Nila is the trail to rescue the female body from being exiled and to redefine, recuperate and redraw the stale patriarchal definition of femininity and body with the innovative and natural philosophy of humanity.

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