

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVRESITY**

**Female Body in Exile in Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover***

**A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English, T.U.  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts in English**

**By**

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**Letter of Recommendation**

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## **Abstract**

Despite of mammoth external pressures, Nila knows she can't halt her humane odyssey of establishing the natural veracity that one can't be the exact opposite of another, but its all about the distance to be crossed. As Nila is marching on a new racetrack, judging her as right or wrong, winner or looser with the same old rules and regulations, terms and conditions is not done. She needs the de-patriarchalized, de-colonized avant-garde version of criteria; call it a revolution or anarchy. By and large, Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*, the exploration of the same criteria, with original protagonist Nila, is the trial to rescue the female body from being exiled and to redefine, recuperate and redraw the stale patriarchal definition of femininity and female body with the innovative and natural philosophy of humanity.

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## I. Ostracized to Create Own Space

Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* has got this central protagonist Nila who is obligated to live with an exiled existence, until the end advances. But eventually, whatsoever trials and tribulations she has to march through, she declines to sit back, as she spots that even if she chooses not to revolt, her existence will be in exile. So, she opts the other way round: to be ostracized explicitly but to put herself into action to redefine, recuperate and redraw the patriarchal definition of a female body by claiming the autonomous authority over both literal and metaphorical sense of her body.

*French Lover's* story starts with Nila's migration to Paris after getting married to Kishanlal, the businessperson, for whom her existence stands nothing more than a "red, juicy piece of meat", who will look after his domesticity, assure his all natures of corporeal requirements and award him his inheritor (11).

Almost everything that has also or solely to do with Nila, for instances, which food to cook at home, her clothing, her job taking, their sexual relation are determined by her lord, her husband Kishanlal. Her taking a job without his consent had already started to hyper this megalomaniac man's temperature, but when she cooked "fish and meat" in this veggie's home for her two white girlfriends, the mercury level bursts out of the thermometer (78). And the 'rebel' in her, in due course, detects that she is not the woman to confine herself to the life of vacuum cleaning, cooking, sitting at his feet and untying "the shoelaces with her slim fingers and took off his socks ", and serving herself to Kishan as the last dish of the day to be eaten voraciously (28). As the water's surface level rises above the head, even for Nila, she dumps his domicile to live with her co-worker Danielle, who later on that night turns out to be a lesbian to ignorant Nila and whose "rapacious tongue licked her for the rest of the night" (99).

While living this never anticipated, yearned and not her cup of tea kind of life, she gets the news of her dying mother for which she goes back to Calcutta. As Nila wasn't having fine-tuning with both her husband and foreign land, she decides to stay back in Calcutta. But like the way most of the girls are not heartily accepted in natal home without marriage or after marriage, she was also not received in her own parental home.

On Nila's way back to Paris, she meets Benoir Dupont, "a blond, blue-eyed, pink-lipped", six feet three inches tall French man and is swept off her feet. He introduces her to the streets, the cafes and the art galleries of Paris (163). Actually, he makes her dream come true. But this passionate sexually liberating relationship between Cinderella and Prince Charming comes to the finish line as Nila realizes that Benoir, who claims to love her wholeheartedly, actually loves only himself: "You love yourself, Benoir, your own self. No one else" (286). With her whole episodes with her father, her brother, her ex-lover, her nominal brother, her husband and her present lover, she is made to pencil in a conclusion "I feel men, of whichever country, whatever society, are all the same"; and with her experience with all the lands, whether that is her natal land or the foreign one, Nila, champion of logic and fine sensibilities, is forced to say, "do women ever have a land of their own or a motherland? I really don't think so" (291, 292).

*French Lover's* vital protagonist Nilanajana's initial alienation and exiled existence, and her eventual decision and determination to relocate her mind and self, and her constant persistence to grab the autonomous connection over her body, mind and emotion can be related to Ketu Katrak's Third World women writer's body politics. Female body is in state of exile, says Katrak. But that's not all, sometimes it



also strives hard to strike back, and this striking back involves a sense of resistance to the domination.

Taslina Nasrin, the most talked about postcolonial feminist, presents Nila who wrestles to deny own self as the passive receiver but to be confirmed as an active agent. Nila's de-colonizing and de-patriarchalizing efforts can be vividly seen till the end of the show in a full swing. Had she elected to be back to Calcutta, she could not be identified with Katrak's concept of internal and external exile of female body. That would rather indicate that though treated inferior and alien, woman could get shelter only in her paternal land. But as female body is everywhere in exile, it needs to create its own space; Nila realizes that it brings no point at all to be back to India.

Though on the surface level and if viewed with the old traditional, regressive patriarchal eyes that cannot imagine a woman with no man to lead her, the final chapter "This is the End" (285) definitely forces to perceive Nila as the forlorn, desolate character who gets her share for being "ugly, dirty and revolting" (289). But if seen with the progressive, time-suiting de-colonized and de-patriarchalized eyes, the story will seem like ending with the optimistic note because her road to self-discovery has just begun.

Nila's instinct seems to be on a mission to emancipate female body from being exiled, in every possible ways, whether it is from patriarchy or this new form of colonialism. She happens to be among those women who don't lament and are not petrified to live the life in female body rather lavish and glorify it with dignity. Though at every point of life, she is enforced to disconnect her sensible and logical mind, and her craving and desirous heart with her own body, she is the woman who does not accept it as the destiny offered to any women, rather crosses through every ordeal to be the sole master of her own body. She is neither in the mood to perceive

the fact of being sexually molested as the lifetime humiliation nor in the mood of taking it as a matter of disgrace to blurt out the fact of sleeping with four men and one woman, and taking pleasure in some of them. She is not in the stance to take wifhood and motherhood as the only preferences left to fulfill the aim of womanhood. Overall, she is not in the mood to confirm them precise who say woman is not total without man to lead her, master upon her and reign over her. She is rather in the mood of aborting the child just because she does not feel like having one. Nila practically lives the dream, words and fight of Beauvoir. She denies being the slave of her own body. She denies not living to please her soul. She denies not being the master of her own. She denies crying inside just to be sanctioned by, and agreeable and digestible to patriarchal legacy. She chooses to live the life not the age.

It was in Paris that Simone de Beauvoir had fought for abortion in the fifties. She had rented a small house in the sixth arrondissement and helped women abort illegally. Her battle resulted in the legalization of abortion. Nila felt happy that she was going to enjoy the fruits of that revolution in the same city. (292)

Beauvoir says that woman being economically emancipated is not enough to make her an emancipated being or at least as emancipated as any man under normal circumstances. She needs to be given a past, a present and a hope for a future like any man is normally guaranteed with. She is not just a womb and an ovary. And Nilanjana represents those women, who are politically incorrect and fallen in the eyes of patriarchy but the only options if women are to be taken as, what they actually are, the combo of heart, mind and body, the combo of emotion, intellect and physique. Perhaps, that is the reason why, people (both men and women) blinded with male chauvinism label her as an anarchist.

Being a postcolonial woman, Nila's job was not only to de-patriarchalize, but also to decolonize West's (White's) hegemonic domination over non-Whites. While talking about Third World women's problems, the Third World Feminists should also counter the "superiority of Western culture", says Uma Narayan (135). Nila, in many ways, is true to these words. Nila nowhere in the novel surrenders to West though she praises their justifiable sides that Calcutta lacks. She is balanced on her criticisms and appraisals. She does not kneel down before the Western representations with the negative stereotypes of Non-West just to satisfy Western soul.

With the backing of Fritjof Capra's words concerning the law of nature and women movement, it is reasonable and reliable enough to claim that it is the idiocy of patriarchy to expect the female body always to undergo passively through all unjust and inequity, when science has by now proved that even a 'dead' piece of stone or metal is full of activity. The very battle of Nila is as natural as the very truth of the existence of the universe. She is acting only according to the natural law of the universe that nothing remains inert and static.

### **Taslima Nasrin: Rebel, Fallen or the most Disadvantaged one**

Taslima Nasreen, "thorny dissident" (Mairin par.1), "daughter of freedom" (Swarup par.6) as Mulk Raj Anand considers her, an ex-physician turned author, and for others a "fiery feminist" (Boustany 4) and for herself the secular humanist, is in a great deal influenced in her writing by her own experience of sexual abuse during her adolescence and her work as a gynecologist where she routinely examined young girls who had been raped. Her scanning eyes that scan out each of those inhumane happenings prevailed around do not let stop her from starting this humane journey. But Nasrin's revolutionary odyssey that according to her is "necessary against all evil forces, against religion, with no compromises" has, of course, never been an easy task

to perform (70). Her name topped a “hit list of secular Bangladesh intellectuals” (Chazan par.2), and she started to collect the death threats by Islamic militants, who “offered \$2,000 dollars to anyone who killed her” (Ahmed par.9). But as judged against to Rushdie’s \$1,000,000, this price tag on her head, melds with the message of the poems in the volume *The Game in Reverse*, “that life, especially a woman’s life does not count much in her country, and yet there are people who would kill (literally and figuratively), even for a small amount. “So that if he wishes, he can string me up and hang me.”” (Parameswaran par.1). Nasrin is also sometimes dubbed as “female Salman Rushdie”, which, needless to say, is not considered by Nasrin as kind words for she knows that as a woman, she faces both religious fanaticism and misogyny, and it also belittles her “accomplishments to label them in male terms” (Cockburn par.7).

She received fatwah, or Islamic edict calling for her death that made her went into exile first in August 1994. “Since then Taslima has been in exile. She says: “I have no country of my own. It is like bus stop here. All the countries are like bus stops. I am waiting to go back to my homeland but I may not get a bus that will take me there.”” (Swarup par.5). In Nasrin’s words, life in confinement has left her “half-dead” (Dam par.1).

With the continuous banning, she “sees her work as produced under the gaze of ‘furious wrinkled brows’” (Zafar 415), but all Nasrin says, as an answer to this attitude is, “I will not let myself be reduced to silence” (Wainwright par.8). She will “call a spade a spade, come what may” (Gupta par.11). Meredith Tax addresses the same mind-set of hers, in this manner, “. . . if Nasrin had worried about such things, she would not have become a human rights case. She tried to knock down every taboo in her society, writing about religion, ethnic violence, sex, all at the same time, crash! And she is still doing it” (34).

In one interview, Nasrin says, “. . . religion and freedom of expression, religion and human rights, religion and women’s rights, religion and democracy, religion and freedom cannot coexist. That is impossible” (71). The truth, as Nasrin has dared to utter, is that not all the traditions are worthy of keeping, that not all long-held principles are equally valid, and that not every word of holy book is indeed holy. But those, who blame Nasrin for her trials to improvise patriarchal Islamic world as ‘Western influence’ and her feminism as a ‘Western import for the women’, must know “Not every attempt to bring enlightenment to the shadows of ignorance can be dismissed as ‘cultural imperialism.’” (Nahai par.11). Some says her rebel, some fallen, but Christina Mairin, a film maker, has some unusual standpoint towards her, “Nasrin came of age as one of the most disadvantaged people on the earth: a girl in Bangladesh. When she found her voice, she decided to take on religion – all of it, everywhere. And, amazingly, she’s made a tiny dent in it. That’s extraordinary” (par. 14).

Stylistically, Taslima’s deliberate and bold use of the first person narrative against the embarrassing happenings, phenomenon, trends, and observable and unapparent facts of Bangladesh patriarchy sets her apart as a writer. Saiyeda Khatun, about same style of Taslima, says:

The threat is that if a female physician/writer can speak in the first person, it will enable other elite women to come out and speak in the first person about their shame, their experiences of male oppression.

As a result, the middle class home will turn into a site of confusion and undoing of the male. (par.55)

Overall, she becomes a woman both of controversy and spirit, seeking to heal not only physical pains but also social ills, regardless of their origin.

### Nasrin's Words: Blessing or Curse on Bangladesh

No one has ever been able to give a writer his or her deserved share of introduction. Still, trying to talk about Nasrin without mentioning some of her works would be, undoubtedly, an unsatisfactory, undeserved and insufficient know-how. *AmarMeyebela: My Bengali Girlhood; A Memoir of Growing Up Female in a Muslim World*, the first volume of Nasrin's autobiography, where with her strong, wavelike words, she undercuts, resists and rejects the generally accepted idea that "Nice girls don't think like this, much less say these things; if men do, as they do sometimes, the rules are always different for them" (Barat 219). Her condemnations can sound repetitive and sophomoric, but they come from within a muslim society merging from "the puzzling contradictions of postcolonial South Asia" (Boustany 4). "Amar Meyebela" is a radical assault on the normative cheleyebela (boyhood) that is used to describe the childhood of both girls and boys. While being an accurate translation, "My Girlhood" fails to carry the cultural and political reverberations of the Bengali \_expression" (Ghosh par.12). Sometimes, inevitably much is lost in the process of translation.

*Lajja*, "the real shame afflicting the sub-continent" (*The Times of India* par.2) earned Taslima both fame and fatwah. It describes the torture of the minority Hindu community by muslim people. Albeit, Nasrin meant to support the cause of "non-communalism" (Nasrin par.7) in her writing, government said that their reason for banning the novel was that its meaning would be misinterpreted by the two religious communities and would incite violence between them.

*Fallen Prose of a Fallen Girl*, another startling work with the startling lines, "The first condition for purification of a woman is to become 'fallen' (in the eyes of this society). Unless a woman becomes 'fallen,' there is no way she can liberate

herself from the clutch of this society. She is the real sane and admirable person, whom people call ‘fallen.’” (21). And while talking about the famous issue regarding being fallen, she says that according to her, the primary condition for a woman to be pure is to be a so-called fallen angel and among all the awards that she has hitherto collected, she considers the title of ‘patita’ or fallen woman to be the highest. She also declares that this very title is an achievement of her long-struggling life as a writer and as a woman.

About *Dwikhandito*, another banned autobiography, she said that she just wanted to show that Islam and the Prophet are not infallible and “the pre-Islamic Arab world, women had far more independence and importance, and that independence was taken away from them by the establishment of Islam” (par.3).

Her poetry *Was a poet ever kept in house arrest?* states such banning, death threats and accusations all as the outcome of the childish religionism, the merciless politics and ends with an asking to give her the only way to console her soul, “O man, tell me, all who suffered in house arrest/ Most of them were poets, a big consolation will that be,/ It will relieve the burden of my aloneness” (par.5).

Giving an irritating stance towards the continuous banning of her books, in *Homeless Everywhere: Writing in Exile*, Nasrin writes on the basis of an absolute literary freedom ideally available to a writer, “Who creates these definitions . . . and sets our limits? I decide what I should write . . . . Should I wait for instructions from X, Y, and Z . . .? Should I wait on them to tell me what to write, how much to write?” (456-461).

Excerpt from her newspaper column *Women and Cattle* starts with an old proverb, “A lucky man’s wife dies; an unlucky man’s cattle die” and is note worthily striking in its way of ironically presenting the points to prove the proverb, “If your

wife dies, you can get another wife. But if you lose cattle, you do not get free cattle. For new cattle you have to pay hard cash, whereas a new wife brings some cash. You can neglect your wife, but you should never neglect your cattle. No wonder, cattle are more valuable than a wife” (332).

No wonder, Nasrin’s another politically incorrect work *French Lover* with an unconventional protagonist Nila has received scores of prickly criticisms. But along with this, there are also the numbers of those critics who love and admire her for her dare-to-speak attitude.

There are also those critics who are, in no ways, satisfied with the portrayal of male characters, where most of the male characters’ villainous edge is presented, whereas most of the female characters are either raped, or ditched, or something as such, but in every case, knowingly or unknowingly victimized. Sudipta Datta writes, “All the men in the book are scoundrels, the women are victims of a patriarchal society, so much so that the propagandists Nila is moved to conclude at the end: . . . Do women ever have a land of their own or a motherland? I really don’t think so” (11). Her dissatisfaction seems to be targeted towards the manner men are publicized as the creepy, villainous figure in the mask of father, brother, husband, lover or every relations possible and female characters being shown as ‘forever victims’, no matter whatsoever they do, “we-are-all-sisters-in-trouble” (Barat 217).

As Susan Chacko’s last look at Nila makes her perceive Nila as penniless, jobless and friendless, she says, “Based on her earlier experiences, it is hard to feel optimistic about her future” (146). But while saying Nila friendless, Chacko might have meant man-less, because the friends Nila used to have are still there, only people not having in her life are the men who ditched or hurt her. Besides, Sudhir Kumar finds *French Lover* as the matter of disappointment due to its “cheap parody of



lesbianism and fashionable feminism” (par.3). While commenting about *French Lover*’s aestheticism, some critics conceive Nilanajana as a marketing gimmick, and novel as unaesthetic, but quite the right recipe for a populist following. As a counterattack to such comments that intend that Nasrin is an overrated writer and her books sell because of their explicit discussion of sex and sexuality, Shohini Ghosh declares, “Usually such an allegation says something about the reader but nothing about the writer” (par.12).

Likewise, Sreejata Guha, the translator of *French Lover*, about the novel, says, “Bold in concept and powerful in execution, *French Lover* is a fascinating glimpse into the workings of a woman’s mind as she struggles to come to terms with her identity in a hostile world” (par.2).

Eyesore and controversial queen for some and an eye candy for others, indubitably, Taslima Nasrin is one of the most talked about postcolonial feminists with a gutsy attitude of speaking her mind who dared to pen some erotica and dared to write about women who enjoy sex.

With the helpful references to all these critical responses forwarded by various critics, it is meaningful to inspect the exiled existence of the protagonist and her battle to carry the definition of female body towards the reverse direction from the standards implanted by patriarchal ideology. Initial exiled existence of the female body and its postcolonial use to de-colonize it from the clutches of both patriarchy and so-called superiority of Western culture is the central issue of my thesis. With a confidence that this is strongly a different concern from other outlooks, I claim my research a researchable one.

The very first part of this thesis is the overall introduction of: the novel and its writer; central issue raised in the thesis and theorists Ketu Katrak, Simone de

Beauvoir, Uma Narayan, and Fritjof Capra's words applied to prove it; and literature review and my point of departure. The second part is the extended introduction of the above-mentioned theorists and some other writers' idea that has the strong and inevitable important connection with the central issue of this thesis. The third part is textual analysis based on the second part. And the fourth and final part is the findings of my thesis.

## II. Rescuing the Female Body from being Exiled

### Female Body in Exile

Ketu Katrak, in *Politics of Female Body*, declares, “female body is in state of exile including self-exile and self-censorship, outsidersness, and un-belonging to itself within indigenous patriarchy” giving:

. . . literal and metaphoric connotations of exile, as well as the concept of internal exile of the female body from patriarchy, and external exile as manifest in migration and geographical relocation necessitated by political persecution, material conditions of poverty, and forms of intellectual silencing in third world societies. Female protagonists undergo what I term “internalized exile” where the body feels disconnected from itself, as though it does not belong to it and has no agency. (378)

While talking about metaphoric expression, ‘female body’ has to do with female desire, female identity, female dignity, land and property to claim as her own, her choices, expectations, marriage, priorities, career, education and what not. And literally, it means their dress codes, accessories, postures, and their right to choose motherhood, sexual partners, and sexual freedom. They are not allowed to have a sovereign connection with their body, and not supposed to decide about the stuffs related to their own body. For instance, “women who remain single or childless by choice have marginal networks of support” (386).

In Katrak’s opinion, female body is not only the site of oppression but the weapon for resistance as well. They always tend to seek to have an autonomous connection with their bodies and communities, for which they have to resist against the domination and their forcibly made exiled existence. “In resisting exile they often

use their female bodies via speech, silence, starvation, or illness. At times, resistances fail and fatal outcomes result in murder or suicide”, the price they pay to relocate their mind and self (378).

When women writers, someplace in their work, raise the female issues with the chief concern, it will be sufficient for this patriarchal crowd, to shackle all those women writers under the single umbrella name ‘feminists’. But men writers are not pigeonholed under the single term ‘manist’ or ‘malist’ or ‘masculanist’ or likewise, though most of the times, their whole work revolves around the male world and most of their protagonists are males without even having the significant number of female characters. Rather their (men’s) works are often considered as the work dealing with the universal theme. Except this, if women writers use their artistic freedom to portray about the sexuality in their writings, it is abhorred and condemned as vulgarity, whereas if men writers use the same right, then, in the eyes of critics sickened by chauvinism, it often has to do with aestheticism. To accept such writings of women is to question his so-called masculine morality. But in private, he too enjoys each of those ‘vulgar’ words like the way he enjoys men writer’s ‘aestheticism’.

When women writers do receive critical attention, it is often on level of “insults and naked slander” remarks Aidoo, “veiled ridicule and resentment . . . or condensation.” [. . .] Aidoo argues that women writers are not “looking for approbation. What we have a right to expect though, is that critics try harder to give our work some of their best in time and attention, as well as the full weight of their intelligence just like they do for the work of our male counterparts”. (Katrak 395).

Fritjof Capra, in his book *The Turning Point*, talks about how in “our culture women have traditionally been portrayed as passive and receptive, men as active and creative”, tending to delve into the foundation of this attitude:

This imagery goes back to Aristotle’s theory of sexuality and has been used throughout the centuries as a ‘scientific’ rationale for keeping women in a subordinate role, subservient to men. The association of yin with passivity and yang with activity seems to be yet another expression of patriarchal stereotypes. (19)

Aristotle claimed women as a naturally inferior being, and he is not alone to say something as such, rather there are scores of them. But it is, of course, a tragedy for whole woman (and human) race that they are claimed as the ground breaking great philosophers or the gifts of humanity even after giving such prejudiced and parochial opinions. Each of the holy scriptures has dared to delineate women as an inferior to men (their lords). And these holy scriptures, without making any correction or reevaluation, are still taken as the foundation of humanity in any religion. In this epoch, where most of them, who love to be entitled as modern beings, know well enough in their ‘rational’ brain that it is nothing more than the definitions given by male chauvinists. But no! They won’t initiate to claim these chauvinists as the bigheaded ‘malists’; rather they’ll continue to shove all those women, who believe in and demand for equality, under the single umbrella termed as ‘feminist’. And to the severe level of misfortune, this same single category where women writers can fit in is also not respected enough.

Women writers are forced (by situation and the life she is given) to be feminist, and they are mocked at, hated, punished, looked down with pity, and only at the rare cases loved and revered for being feminist. Some of the factors behind the

feeble mockeries and ruthless punishments given by chauvinists are: guilt on the part of male for their dealing with women but their inability to undo them due to superciliousness; intense case of artificial, ignorant and ill-bred philosophy about the humanity; fear that what will happen of them when women will get their deserved share; feeling of insecurity; men's fallacious impression that what women are endeavoring to attain the dignified future is rather women's hallucination which will never come true. Here, it would be appropriate to quote some lines of Charlotte Bunch from Uma Narayan's book *Dislocating Cultures*:

Feminism has been ridiculed and stereotyped worldwide, and the issues we have raised have usually not been taken seriously by the media. But, remarkably, despite this bad press, feminism has continued to grow. Women's groups all over the world, but especially in the Third World are taking up issues ranging from housing, nutrition, and poverty to militarism, sexual and reproductive freedom, and violence against women. (191)

It's a mistake to claim that giving education, alone, is well enough to make women's rights equal to any of the human rights. If it would be so, then there would not be the "documented cases in India of educated women's inability to step out of dangerous marriages where dowry demands lead to women's murders" (Katrak 386). In the South Asian contexts, there is a "grave dearth of options for a woman who leaves her husband's home" (386). Apart from some objective factors, there are the psychological and subconscious holds of woman being conditioned through "mythological stories and cultural norms that define a woman as not only belonging to her husband but as not having an autonomous self that can make a life outside of a marital sphere"(386). And if she dared to step outside the boundaries established by

the “cultural code of *pativrata* (literally translated: husband as god), can be severe as in the woman’s ostracization in overt and subtle ways” (386). “Socialization patterns combine to have a hold on women even after education, migration, re-location out of the original family and coded structures of morality and behavior” (385).

It might sound vulgar enough to say and shame to accept, but is one of the worst truths that even for many of the girl’s guardians, it is more ‘morally acceptable’ that their daughters get tortured mentally, emotionally and even physically to the extent of death in the conjugal house than their living separately or in parental home. Morally acceptable should not be mistaken with heartily acceptable. But if it would not be morally acceptable too, then there wouldn’t be extreme cases of the domestic violence against women each day. Katrak writes, “Often, her parents, her only refuge, encourage a married daughter to put up with physical and emotional abuse, until sadly, she might pay the ultimate price of her life” (386).

‘Tradition’, one of such weapons, forwarded by the patriarchal norms and values, is often used to define the resistance of women towards any injustice against them as a sinful act and to make women themselves believe that it is happening the way it has to be. Tradition is nothing but the way of creating the hegemonic domination over women and to justify it arrogantly. Traditions such as “dowry, polygamy, that in fact control the uses of the female body are mystified as social custom with the weight of ancient, at times, scriptural authority” (390). We’ve also got the present of killing or persecuting women in the name of witch and the past of “sati (widow immolation)” (381). This system of physically burning alive (with husband’s pyre) is, of course, no more alive, but that single woman is burnt alive emotionally and psychologically every moment, her entire life. She is not allowed to remarry and has to live her entire life in white mourning dress or if more, then other

kind of dull-colored clothing. We still have the sati system alive, though in different manner, but with the same degree of ordeal.

While talking about 'exile', it required to talk about its both levels, i.e. internal and external. This is relatively an evident debate that how woman's existence turns from a subject to an object after becoming 'a good wife', 'a better half' of her husband. She becomes his mere earthly portion and an object through which he "displays his power before the world" (Beauvoir 207). But it would not be fair to stop right here while talking about her exiled existence and to plant all the blame on the shoulder of wedded house alone. Whether that is her parental home or her conjugal, whether that is her parental nation or the foreign territory, she belongs nowhere. Both before and after her marriage, she gets the feeling of being an alien in her own parental home. Before marriage, this 'being an alien' has the sense of 'being a burden', whereas after marriage it appears as 'being only a guest'. And revolting to get her genuine existence means being ready to get questioned about her so-called morality (which is one of the M-U-S-Ts to define her femininity) and to get ostracized (either emotionally or physically too) from both places.

In this postcolonial scenario, when the world is highly ruled by the concept and practice of globalization, women (especially from once directly or indirectly colonized land), who are migrated abroad after marriage, face double alienation. On the one hand, she has to be a traditionally 'good wife' and 'good daughter-in-law' to satisfy in laws' needs and expectations. And in contrast, she has to adopt westernization to fit in the outside world. Both places are the ones she is not used to adjusting with, and that's not all, but also she has to impress these both to create some space for her living. But this place could only be a 'fake space'. The place, where one has to act, one has to be somebody else, can never be a real space. Both of them are



her “alien homes”(388). Everything she does that contrast with the western values will be viewed as barbaric ones. She is confused between the meanings of the modernization and westernization. She is tucked between the expectations of her conjugal home and the western values. Eventually, she will start transforming herself to suit the colors of these alien homes, by hugging the label of ‘inferior’ once again.

It’s often supposed that woman’s aptitude of adjusting and converting according to any new atmosphere is higher than man, and she is trained to take this flexibility as a matter of pride. She is expected to have fine-tuning with any environment, because she has no exact place to claim as her own; has to adopt with any identity because her only identity is expected to be her fluid personality with no autonomous self, no agency; has to wear any type of dress she is given and any kind of food has to be palatable to her mouth; her tongue has to adjust with producing any degree of formality; and has to be used to with obeying, suppressing her instincts, and forgetting her self. Beauvoir says, “. . . women are always trying to conserve, to adapt, to arrange, rather than to destroy and build anew; they prefer compromise and adjustment to revolution” (613). Her ‘self’ or ‘ego’ should not revolt and has to A-D-J-U-S-T, because that’s the only option, she is recommended, left for her to keep living. That’s why, though usually unexpressed explicitly, female body has been in exile at all times, far and wide.

### **Slave of Her Own Body**

WOMAN? Very simple, say the fanciers of simple formulas: she is a womb, an ovary; she is a female – this word is sufficient to define her.

In the mouth of a man the epithet *female* has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature; on the contrary, he is proud if someone says of him: ‘He is a male!’(Beauvoir 35)

The very first lines of the book *The Second Sex* written by Simone De Beauvoir, around six decades earlier, communicate nothing much different than what this decade, actually, is eye witnessing. Years, decades and centuries are fleeting, things are altering, but the stance towards women, at least, as experienced by women, is the same – ‘The Second Sex’.

It usually sounds trifling enough to have a discussion about how women’s attire and accessories, “customs and styles are often devoted to cutting off the feminine body from any activity” and are “intended less to accentuate the curves of the feminine body than to augment its incapacity”(190). But if we ever bother ourselves to assume about all those so-called trivial stuffs and their sum total gift to deprive woman from becoming a free being, then we would be compelled to confess that it is not the trifling stuff anymore to be shunned away with the careless frown on our faces. Woman, just because of our this very attitude of ignoring everything as trifles until we create any huge problem out of the heap of these same petite things, is enforced to be the slave of her own body.

The remark ‘ladylike’ may outwardly give the impression of a compliment to a woman, but deep inside one must realize the fact that so-called definition of ‘ladylike’ or ‘feminine’ is so much ill-advised and erroneous that if the girl tends to be the lady of the patriarchal designation, she’ll be damned to squander her life in the uncomfortable, void, dark, identity less, selfless closed space. She is even morally restricted of doing those small things that men are easily allowed to do or, at least, can be expected to be doing. Patriarchal society considers it ““unladylike” for a woman to use her body too forcefully, to sprawl, to stand with her legs widely spread, to sit with her feet up, or to cross the ankle of one leg over the knee of the other”(Henley and Freeman 468). She is deprived of these bare minimum stuffs (nonsensically

considered to be the taboos for women), which are finally also the positions that are the ones of strength or dominance. Nancy Henley and Jo Freeman write:

. . . men are allowed such privileges as swearing and sitting in undignified positions, but women are denied them. Though the male privilege of swearing is curtailed in mixed company, the body movement permitted to woman may be circumscribed even in all-female groups. (468)

Ladylike high-quality women are expected to wear feminine clothes, which doomed her to circumscribe the use of her body. “Depending on her clothes, she may be expected to sit with her knees together, not to sit cross-legged, or not even to bend over”(468). These kinds of cloths (and restrictions) are designed in the manner that they have to flirt or exploit her curves. She has to wear these clothes and if she enjoys the flirtations of clothes, she is condemned and ridiculed by comics or comical T.V. shows. Quite precisely, in our context of Nepal, ‘Gaijatra’ is one of the most suitable examples. In the name of ridiculing and harassing the anarchy, bad system, bad conduct and likewise, it also ridicules and harasses most of those New Women, who are trying to do everything according to their ‘comfort level’ and to please their own ego. Their body is so much misused in those cartoons and words used there that they are emotionally and intellectually raped and finally whole world laughs and enjoys seeing her being raped. And no law can do anything against this whole act because this manner of raping has been sanctioned by our law.

When Susan Griffen wrote, “I have never been free of the fear of rape,” she touched a responsive chord in most women. Every woman knows the fear of being alone at home late at night or the terror that strikes her when she receives as obscene phone call. She knows also of

the “mini-rapes”-the pinch in the crowded bus, the wolf whistle from the passing car, the stare of a man looking at her bust during a conversation. (Herman 20)

Woman cannot go out on the eve; cannot feel secure in the crowd of men and cannot feel secure without the company of the same men; and cannot feel secure among women themselves as most of the brothel houses has women as the head person. Darkness, silence, crowd and finally what not, everything scares her. Herman further adds Griffon’s words, “Rape is a kind of terrorism which severely limits the freedom of women and makes women dependent on men”(20). And she also writes one agonizing but true statement that woman live her life “according to a rape schedule”(20). Carole J. Sheffield defines “rape, wife battery, incest, pornography, harassment, and all forms of sexual violence” as “*sexual terrorism* because it is a system by which males frighten and, by frightening, control and dominate females”(3). She further writes:

The right of men to control the female body is a cornerstone of patriarchy. It is expressed by their efforts to control pregnancy and childbirth and to define female health care in general. Male opposition to abortion is rooted in opposition to female autonomy. Violence and the threat of violence against females represent the need of patriarchy to deny that a woman’s body is her own property and that no one should have access to it without her consent. (3)

Here, it would be appropriate to remember the chief intention of Beauvoir’s fight for the legality of abortion, which suggests that to deny the woman contraceptive and abortion is to deny her the freedom she deserves and make her the slave of her own body. “Contraception and legal abortion would permit woman to undertake her

maternities in freedom” (510). And now, when a woman is, technically, competent to choose her autonomy, her fulfillment of sexual desire, her fearless wanderings, after the legalization of abortion, New Women should fight against that unwanted, wasteful burden of so-called Morality off their shoulder. “Woman is doomed to immorality, because for her to be moral would mean that she must incarnate a being of superhuman qualities; the ‘virtuous woman’ of Proverbs, the ‘perfect mother’, the ‘honest woman’ and so on” (492). So, rather than making her scared of the body she owns and teaching her the outdated lessons of so-called morality and immorality, she should be helped to get acquainted with the consequences of her every action, and to face every consequences whatsoever path she chooses to follow.

If the term ‘rape’ is not viewed as only physical but also the psychological procedure, then one must admit that a girl, at first, get raped at her own guardian’s house. It might echo impolite enough to charge protector as attacker, but it’s so much true for her own guardians view her as a sexual object, enjoyed, used and misused by others. She can’t have late night outings. Why? Because some bad intentioned M-A-L-E can molest her physically. Her late home coming over and over again has to be defended and justified by her, by making them believe that she will never do anything W-R-O-N-G to cut her parent’s nose, which, actually hints that she has not slept with any man yet and has no such intention till they find any man for her to sleep with and to dignify them by giving them their grandchild (quite precisely male child). This might sound really rude and crude, but this attitude is one of those unarticulated truth that only few will dare to articulate. Her late home coming often worries her guardians to hell and finally her arrival gives them the sigh of relief: ‘Thank god! She is well, not raped or killed yet’; and they’ll sit her down to remind her about ‘what a narrow definition her dignity has to do with, and how carefully it has to be maintained

on the sharp edge of the knife. A single, small mistake and her whole world is crashed, no matter whatsoever she has done and will do in her entire life'. That's why, it won't be iniquitous to say that though she may not be physically raped but every relation has raped her psychologically because, for her entire life, she is perceived merely as a sex object.

According to the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the definition of rape is "to force sb to have sex with you when they do not want to by threatening them or using violence"(1248). Carole J. Sheffield, extracting the words of Susan Brownmiller, writes that the rape is "nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which all men keep all women in a state of fear"(6). In the context like ours, it is taken as the precise synonym of 'robbing somebody's dignity (particularly girl's, though facts of boy's getting raped are also there)'. Now this means, her dignity lies entirely on her body and what's more is, saving it or not lies entirely on man's intention. This way of perceiving the concept of 'rape' has done severe impairment to the girl being raped rather than that small number of molesters who are finally penalized.

Rape, if were understood without any prejudice, would have been defined as the psycho criminal's masturbation as it is done without victim's willful involvement. And this abuser must get his (at the rare times 'her') deserved share of punishment, since in this masturbating process, the abuser has done the extreme case of crime by molesting, misusing, abusing, disturbing abused one's emotion, mind and body. But in our case of understanding, taught by the patriarchal education, this abuser's masturbation has all to do with abused one's pride and dignity, which actually has no real and natural connection. If we would understand the natural definition of the term 'rape', a woman wouldn't be morally and emotionally punished daily for this

undeserved humiliation and burden, and wouldn't be raped daily, as discussed earlier, because of the attitude of taking her as a sex object being enjoyed by others or with others. But the attitude, perception, and concept, we are hanging on till now, is forcing the normal guiltless person to go through the mental trauma and suffer for the entire life, whereas this psycho criminal, even if punished, will be out of it with little chastisement than he deserves. But in most of the cases, that psycho is never punished and he'll live forever with the pride of being a real M-A-L-E. "Child molesters, incestuous fathers, wife beaters, and rapists often do not understand that they have done anything wrong. Their views are routinely shared by police officers, lawyers, and crimes of sexual violence are rarely punished in American society"(Sheffield 6).

Until the day, woman will not be perceived more than just a body with the glamorous curves or sex object or womb and ovary, till that date, it will be nothing but the huge insult on her humane existence. And even if she has to be perceived only as a body, everybody should have, actually, been acknowledged with the pain that a woman has to go through during pregnancy, or menstruation, or hormone and ovary problems. But why nobody tends to concentrate, with the genuine concern and the seriousness, about the problems only woman goes through? Why do not they make an effort to feel from the core of their heart about the problems their mother is going through, their sister, their wife and their daughter are going through? But why don't these men (except the rare cases) ever let their heart feel that pain? Why don't they let the worry and care take over the insults and disgust they are giving any women till this date? WHY? They may, outwardly, pretend to care about it to get the praises and the big applauses from the crowd, but in real and in their heart, they do not feel disgrace to crack jokes about it with the sigh of relief that all these pain do not belong to them. To a massive extent, patriarchy has translated each of her naturally given

unique qualities like pregnancy (according to the Adam and Eve story) as a punishment; and menstruation as the result of the sin she did in her pre-birth and she has to live the life as the disgusting untouchable object for that 4-5-6-7 days out of every 30 days.

It is a burden: worn away in service to the species, bleeding each month, proliferating passively, it is not for her a pure instrument for getting a grip on the world but an opaque physical presence; it is no certain source of pleasure and it creates lacerating pains; it contains menaces; woman feels endangered by her insides. (Beauvoir 630)

What if the same insult, suppression and depression finally turn into an aggression and make the women decide to deny the motherhood forever through various means easily available today? For her unique quality of giving birth, her womb was rather supposed to be respected, prized and appreciated. But her womb, the very first place of creation where any man (himself) would get his existence, is insulted; her womb has been drawn into the discussion as a proof to unnaturally prove her as a naturally inferior being; and to close her inside the closed doors and to molest her physically, psychologically, emotionally and intellectually. Until the day, woman will be insulted, shunned, ostracized for her being as unwed mother, or a sex worker, or a sexually molested girl (which most of the times needs the participation of male too), till that date people will be quoting the initially mentioned very first lines of *The Second Sex* by Beauvoir.

It is indubitably a tragedy that “rape has become a central metaphor of our culture – rape of women, minority groups, and of the earth herself” and people, so called rational beings are still not endeavoring to undo it (Capra 28). What a disgustingly done insult on creation!!!



### **Ambivalence prevalent in Postcolonial New Women**

I remember my mother's anger and grief at my father's resort to silencing "neutrality" that refused to "interfere" in the domestic tyrannies that his mother inflicted on my mother. The same mother who complained about her silencing enjoined me to silence, doing what she had to do, since my failures to conform would translate as her failings to rear me well. (Narayan 7)

Narayan might have chosen, without confusion, to speak up. But this is not the case with all. New women have been caught between the confusion of silence and speech, and puzzled whether to surrender or protest, whether to remain still or move ahead, whether to be the one that patriarchal society demands her to be or the one she actually is. And this confusion, actually created by this patriarchal society has thrown her into an empty space to live the life of an exiled existence. Women are confused about which path to follow, which destination to go for, and which career to choose. It was, of course, not trouble-free for woman, in the past as well to be a woman. But it has become more difficult for these new women to find a solid ground to stand on.

Woman is lost. Where are the women? The women of today are not women at all!' we have seen what these mysterious phrases mean. In men's eyes – and for the legion of women who see through men's eyes – it is not enough to have a woman's body nor to assume the female function as mistress or mother in order to be a 'true woman'. In sexuality and maternity woman as subject can claim autonomy; but to be a 'true woman' she must accept herself as the Other. (Beauvoir 291)

Options given to a woman about her identity, by patriarchy, is whether 'the second sex' or 'the lost sex'. "What is certain is that today it is very difficult for women to

accept at the same time their status as autonomous individuals and their womanly destiny” (292). So, it should not be objectionable if said that patriarchy or a male chauvinism is like a mental disease. It’s like the mentally challenged person who would carry on to look for her/his thumb of leg to scratch even after losing both legs in an accident. Women have proved themselves to have a caliber like that of man (though its inappropriate always to compare woman with man as if he is the measuring rod of superiority), even in biased and extremely hard-hitting situation like this. But mental state of patriarchal worldview is so parochial, puny, and pathetic that it still wants to authenticate women as the inferior sex, the second sex, and in this era, when women are denying to be labeled that way, patriarchy is trying to prove them as ‘the lost sex’ by creating confusion about their femininity and by recurring social pressures for a “return to femininity” (Henley and Freeman 468).

Beside this confusion about own ‘self’, women are made confused about their stance towards male species. Woman imagines to disgust male species for their misbehavior and treatment towards women as inferior, but wants to look fair, dainty, and delicate like a Barbie girl to mesmerize the same male species. They love to claim own self a mystery (as they are taught that femininity does not lie in opening up) and finally they blame for not being understood. Yet, it will be extremely unfair, if this attitude is taken as pretence alone for they themselves are confused about what they really want. This whole confusion, either so-called trifle or massive, has to be eliminated, if women are to be given their space they actually deserve as a human being.

Man doesn’t dress up ‘only’ to impress women, but his own comfort level, will, and desire come first in his priority list. But generally, woman’s case is just reverse. She thinks she has to feel comfortable in the most uncomfortable clothes,

shoes, accessories and make-ups because these things look splendid in the eyes of men. Man uses his personality, his career, amount of materialistic comfort he can provide, his physical strength, his knowledge and intellect, his superiority and likewise to attract women. But this whole 'woman attracting' process not only succeeds him to attract this women species alone but also helps him to maintain his position as so-called superior sex. Concept of being modern, for most of the women, is confused with looking so-called beautiful. It's only so-called beauty because true beauty cannot have a single definition. And even if it has to have a single definition, then human beauty lies only on the human dignity, human capital, human value, and human glorification. But now, the term 'beautiful' has started to be narrowed down on the single definition of 'fair complexion, tall and thin figure, certain size and shape of eyes, nose, lips and what not'. This certainly does not mean that only women are loitering in this labyrinth, but again comes the question of which comes first and which comes second on the priority list for men. This way, marginalized ones are often made to postpone their revolution by making them invest their time and energy in such unproductive business.

Especially in this New World, where multinational companies are playing so much of the dominant role and where their invisible hands are hovering all over the human world, the level of confusion is also mounting, alongside. The concept of 'modernization' is being confused with 'westernization'. And this whole confusion has pushed the people to the road, which leads nowhere. Women are diverted to focus more on their physical existence. Due to the pressure created by the multinational companies (the new version of patriarchy, as direct rule of patriarchy has started to become impotent, ineffective, hopeless and unpopular), their conscience, time and energy is divided between their career, family (marriage) and so-called physical

perfection. Most of the New Women are, in fact, yoked between these three. This is one of those reasons why, even in this new era, when slogan of woman equality is so much on the air, and even after reaching to the sky-scraping level of rationality and reasonableness, she has to endure others to treat her as second-rate.

As this Postcolonial scenario, too, is not completely free from the attitude of colonization, Non-West is still hegemonically dominated by the West, though not directly. So, one of the growing confusions created in this epoch, of New Women of Non-West, who wants to rise above their submissive ways of living, is that which part of the world's culture, trend, and way of living to be adopted even in the case of being happy with what they have in their own, and are trying to fit in Westerner's shoes, though, in sometimes, they are comfortable in their own. Because what they have learnt till this date is 'West is zenith of civilization' and everything that contrasts with that measuring rod is barbaric, uncivilized and immoral, and has to be changed. But, as some silver linings around the gloomy cloud, there are some of them, who are trying to raise their hands above those hovering hands and trying to unravel the complete power games and falsify the "superiority of western culture" (135).

I am also aware of the danger that my discussion of issues such as dowry-murders may be heard as nothing more than evidence for the "superiority of western culture." . . . many Third-World feminists have developed strategic skills that enable them to counter "Western stereotypes" even as they continue to develop feminist analyses of problems women face within communities. (Narayan 135)

That's not all, but Narayan also talks about how she often try, when she talks in "Western contexts about the problems that affect the lives of Indian women, to point to parallel or related problems in Western contexts" (135). But before realizing this

strategy, first of all, Non-Western feminists (and other women) themselves has to be convinced with the fact that they are giving their land the dignity, it really deserves. To take West or any land as the zenith of civilization is to extremely underestimate own place. No land is perfect. Its only about adopting the good things other's have, and saving and respecting own deserving aspects.

Besides, regarding women rights, western history also does not go farther back in comparison to non-west's context, but only to 1960s, when women issues, markedly, had started to be responded positively. And it itself has a long way to go in the case of human rights. So, making west as the only target is to stop own self at some point before reaching the genuine destination. For instance, west has also got the concept of woman-witch but not man-witch. They also demand woman to take husband's last name after marriage. They also address married woman as 'Mrs. 'husband's last name' rather than 'Miss', whereas man remains 'Mr.' forever. They claim kitchen as 'only women territory' though most of them also have their own individual outside career. She also earns money for living but only 'he' gets the pride of being a breadwinner.

Male bosses dictate while female secretaries bend over their steno pads. Male doctors operate while female nurses assist. Restaurants are populated with waitresses serving men. Magazine and billboard ads remind woman that home maintenance and child care are her foremost responsibilities and that being a sex object for male voyeurs is her greatest asset. If she is married, her mail reminds her that she is mere "Mrs." appended to her husband's name. When she is introduced to others or fills out a written form, the first thing she must do is divulge her marital status, acknowledging the social rule that the most

important information anyone can know about her is her legal relationship to a man. (Henley and Freeman 466)

That's why, it's all about West helping Non-West and Non-West helping West to attain what it has already achieved. West has tried its luck through materiality and East has done through spirituality. Nature is complete only through the understanding and combination of both spirit and matter. But as matter has mortal form and can be perceived easily than the spirit with the immortal form, most of the people are running after Westernization, Americanization and materialization in the name of modernization. But that's nothing more than the delusion of 'success and satisfaction' because modernization, in real, is the balance between the spirit and matter. "Our progress, then, has been largely rational and intellectual affair, and this one-sided evolution has now reached a highly alarming stage, a situation so paradoxical that it borders insanity" (Capra 26). That's the reason why, only after blurring the line between the so-called polar opposites and perceiving them as the distance only that can be crossed with the genuine effort, the equality and humanity will be our only tradition, only religion. Only then women, along with other prevalent marginalized groups, will get their share, their part. For this, our New World definitely needs the New Woman, who can just stand up, pointing at the female roles claimed by patriarchy, and shout 'these are not the roles we are born to fill'.

### **Patriarchy's Attempt of Naturalizing the Socialization**

One of the most recurring and highly thought of statement of those women and men, who are barging their heads against patriarchal wall, is, "ONE is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (295). Beauvoir describes female according to this patriarchal mentality as "intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (295).

Patriarchal ideology has always shamelessly dared to define women as the naturally inferior sex, and to prove this point they are trying to naturalize the socialization from very the moment any baby girl came into existence, in the womb. They are aborted, in most of the societies, just because they take their existence in the form of female gender. And even if not murdered, the treatment towards the woman pregnant with female child is poorer, in those very societies, than to the woman pregnant with male child. But from the moment she is born, and after she starts to respond to the environment around, she will face the prejudice and has to accept it as the gift she is given as she grows up. The tendency of differentiating and discriminating, though sometimes unintended, starts from the very early childhood socialization.

From the minute a newborn baby girl is wrapped in a pink blanket and her brother in a blue one, the two children are treated differently. The differences starts with the subtle tones of voice adults use in cooing over the cradles, and it continues with the father's mock wrestling with his baby boy and gentler play with his "fragile" daughter. (Weitzman 160)

Even the attitude of parents towards the 'female thing' and 'male thing' is so biasedly implanted in their brain that they start to perceive them very differently since the moment when there is actually no apparent difference in them except for the difference of certain organ. But "Both parents described daughter as softer, finer featured, weaker, smaller, prettier, more inattentive, more awkward, and more delicate than sons. Sons were characterized as firmer, larger featured, better coordinated, more alert, stronger, hardier" (160). And that's not all, but baby girls are offered a doll (sign of fragility and daintiness) to play with whereas baby boys are offered a train (sign of

vigor and dynamism). In this way, wittingly and unwittingly, parents are encouraging and reinforcing sex appropriate behavior, and what we called ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ is nothing more than the extended form of the same little girl’s and little boy’s response to parental encouragement and rewards. “So, little boys may “learn” to be independent, active and aggressive while their sisters may “learn” to be dependent, verbal, and social” (161).

By age five most boys, and a significant minority of girls, say they prefer the masculine role . . . both boys and girls have learned that it is more prestigious in our society. Thus, it is preferable . . . . They know which sex gets the best chair in the house, and which sex is expected to do the cleaning. (168)

As they reach their youth, marriage is started to be taken as the urgent “destiny traditionally offered to women by society” (Beauvoir 445). Marriage is measured vital, no doubt, for both men and women. But the huge disparity lies on the fact that girl is prepared from her childhood to get married. Her every activity is judged in relation to her marriage; her moral character, her attitude and style, her complexion, her dressing sense, her catering capacity, and almost everything have to do with her marriage. Her whole world revolves around one thing called ‘marriage’. Her position, though not explicitly claimed, is no more than and different from the biscuit that has to meet up the label of ‘perfection’ to get sold. Likewise, she must be medalled by the label of ‘perfection’ to get married (to get sold). Compromise becomes her only option, no matter what, to get married, as patriarchy’s attitude towards the ‘single woman’ is so wretched that it will leave no stones unturned to make her life hell-like. “... a great many adolescent girls – in the New World as in the Old – when asked



about their plans for the future, reply as formerly: 'I want to get married'. But no young man considers marriage as his fundamental project" (Beauvoir 451).

But it is the fundamental project for girl's parents on top. For them, no matter what she has to go through after that, marrying her off means taking the huge burden off their shoulder with the long-deep blissful breathing of relief. Even while investing money on their children, parents are more proud to invest money on son's livelihood (plus marriage and parental property), which makes his independent life brilliant; whereas, not to prove own selves stingy on the eyes of society, they invest some capital on their daughters too (to marry them off). But quite contrary, latter one's life will be doomed to the dependency, brilliantly.

Mary Frank Fox talks about those sex-biased process prevalent in Higher education, which many people may often subside as the nonsense blabbering of feminists, but it is one of those small discriminations that have added a lot to make the things graver and much more complicated.

Faculty members promote and reinforce the invisibility of female students by subtle practices such as calling directly on males but not females, addressing men by name more often than women, giving men more time to answer a question before going on to another student, interrupting women more frequently or allowing them to be interrupted and crediting the contribution of male more often than female students. (244).

Fox intends that these "practices help to convey the negative messages about women's value and status in the classroom, and signal their exclusion as significant members of the college community" (245). This very attitude, another way of socialization, serves to depress women's intellectual development, demoralize their

confidence, “dampen their aspirations both in and out of school” (245), and prove them naturally inferior in their intellectuality.

The concept of education being taken as the synonym of enlightenment is often in question because in the name of civilization and culture, by letting fakeness and artificiality rule over us so hard, we are forgetting that finally what makes any natural creatures lead the normal and harmonious life. Same thing can be applied in the case of women subordination. “Further, colonial educational policies collude effectively with indigenous patriarchal norms” resulting the cultural alienations for female subjects and controlling female sexuality (Katrak 391).

Education as an important aspect of socialization is mediated, complicated and complex, often paradoxically empowering and disempowering for women. Women’s texts explore female resistances to a contradictory empowerment through education whereby protagonists face ostracization from family, community, and at times, from their own bodies. Education does not lead necessarily to women’s personal liberation. (391)

The more we try to pretend ourselves as an civilized (well-educated) being, the more women are burdened with new kind of patriarchal norms and values in the name of morality and femininity. Education is not needed only to produce another generation of scientists, engineers, doctors, specialists, teachers, artists, academicians or likewise, but, first and foremost, a good human being with the sense of humanity inside. But, the courses we are revering as our moral and social backbone are extremely outdated. Decades have passed, but we are by-hearting the same lines till this date, when women are reaching the space, exploring the marine life, climbing the Mount Everest and what not. But no! We are busy by-hearting the same old lines ‘mother cooks food

and father goes to office' as our education; "young girls are "cooled out" of science and channeled into more traditionally feminine fields" (Fox 184). What type of wisdom this style of schooling can be expected to be granting the growing children (the next generation), except than training them to confine women inside the closed doors of house and the four walls of kitchen, once again. And this very another generation of women workers and competitors, "many of them, such as mothers and housewives, are not paid at all" (Capra 29). We are creating yet another generation of women who are far away from the independency and individuality.

Women, no doubt, want to be successful in their career and they work hard to strive for that success. But that very success does not come along with the feeling of satisfaction alone like the way it comes to any male; rather it comes along with fear. Professional or careerwise success is often perceived as the 'masculine thing' or 'only man's territory' and if any woman attains it then she fears it as the 'loss of femininity' and this "anticipated consequence sets up a conflict that prevents them from achieving" (202). Wittingly and touchingly, Capra has put this issue of success, competition and job roles that has been, in an imbalance manner, distinguished between men and women, this manner:

Aggressive, competitive behavior alone, of course, would make life impossible. Even the most ambitious, goal-oriented individuals need sympathetic support, human contact, and times of carefree spontaneity and relaxation. In our culture women are expected, and often forced, to fulfill these needs. They are the secretaries, receptionists, hostesses, nurses, and homemakers who perform the services that make life more comfortable and create the atmosphere in which the competitors can succeed. (29)

If the unmarried daughter attains or chooses to attain more than common success, then it becomes the additional burden on shoulder of parents to find the more or at least equivalently successful man for her. Successful woman are often predicted to be “unpopular, unmarried, and lonely” (Fox 202). Ambivalence leads a girl to take ‘like a boy’ whether as a guilt or an admiring comment, because masculinity is often a prestigious thing in the society but at the same time, the label of ‘tomboy or unladylike’ is a threat to lose the probable male suitors. And, of course, they are taught that a woman cannot live without a man to lead her. Besides, man also loves to love, care, pamper his woman, but what he hunts for in her is not an equal being but the inferior one, the child. “I do not love in equality, because I seek in woman the child” (Beauvoir 235). It’s on no account agreeable to man to acknowledge a woman as his equal. He is a wage earner, a breadwinner, a protector, a savior, a decision maker, and a master; so how can a passive being, the second sex can be his equal after all! But that’s not man’s fault all alone.

Patriarchal values have trained man to view woman as no competition for him. Traditional society, which has implanted patriarchal norms and values, has also given certain conditions (to act superior to women) to him to live a normal life. Nevertheless, all men should not be defined the same way. There are also few of them who want to be the father of strong daughter, brother of a capable sister, husband of an independent wife and son of a mother with all these traits, like most of the women want from men relatives. So, its not women alone who does want to be said and treated equal, rather some men are also on their side. No levelheaded person wants to befriend with inferior being or superior being but only with an equal being. And that reasonable person knows well enough that superiority and inferiority is only the biasness of mindset, but naturally, only equality exists. This way, some men, with the

humane horizon of perspective, will cut the parochial patriarchal viewpoint, just like the popular saying ‘iron cuts iron’. Consequently, through whichever ways may patriarchy’s definition of femininity try to prevent women to achieve success, young women have already begun to discover that “success is sexy” (204). While talking about success, Fox gives the positive note:

. . . it increases rather than decreases their attraction to the opposite sex. Just as in the past many women have been attracted to powerful men (even though they were not necessarily “handsome”), it is likely that in the future more men will find dynamic and powerful women attractive. (204)

Beauvoir pronounces that women’s being “economically emancipated from man” (691) is not sufficient to compose their “moral, social, and psychological situation identical with that of man” (691). Beauvoir declares, “The majority of women do not escape from the traditional feminine world; they get from neither society nor their husbands the assistance they would need to become in concrete fact equals of the men” (690). Any single dish needs the whole required ingredient to give the palate complete satisfaction; likewise women are to be demanded and provided, like any men under normal circumstances, to make the former genuinely an equal being. Except for the education, women need equal faith, confidence, support, dignity, schooling, equal right on family property, right to choose the type of future they want, right to use their body the way they like, right to take the unnecessary burden of morality off their shoulder. Beauvoir puts the same matter this way:

The way she carries on her profession and her devotion to it depend on the context supplied by the total pattern of her life. For when she begins her adult life she does

not have behind her the same past as does a boy; she is not viewed by society in the same way; the universe presents itself to her in a different perspective. (691)

The attitude of perceiving woman as an inferior being and the second sex, though extremely disgusting, unnatural and untrue, is ruling as the leading idea since the thousands of years back.

What we do know is that for the past three thousand years Western civilization and its precursors, as well as most other cultures, have been based on philosophical, social, and political systems 'in which men – by force, direct pressure, or through ritual, tradition, law and language, customs, etiquette, education, and the division of labor – determine what part women shall or shall not play, and in which the female is everywhere subsumed under the male.

The power of patriarchy has been extremely difficult to understand because it is all-pervasive. It has influenced our most basic ideas about human nature and about our relation to the universe – 'man's' nature and 'his' relation to the universe, in patriarchal language. (Capra 10-11)

Nature has not differentiated like this, rather its all the outcome of so-called 'rationality' of patriarchy. And as often said, if the same lie is told for hundred times, eventually it becomes a truth, all these baseless mystified concepts are infused in our heads in such a manner, through religion, science, philosophy, ethics, moral education and everything, that women themselves have started accepting it. Women are said (demanded) to be delicate, dainty, tender, adoring, kindhearted, and fragile crybabies. Being weak is a huge insult on the part of men, but for women it is 'it's okey-dokey, never mind' kind of thing. Moreover, the generation of a woman and suffering is

nothing new, uncommon and evitable in the eyes of patriarchy. “‘Women are born to suffer,’ they say; ‘it’s life – nothing can be done about it’” (Beauvoir 613). And if not in anything else, they are expected to be ‘naturally’ superior to men in enduring the pain offered to them.

If the trend since ages, would have been just reverse, then men would be the ones among the human species to be represented as being pleased (after a fight with his women), after getting jewelry or new sari, or equivalent, in T.V. commercials, serials, movies and likewise; men would be the ones in movies to cry for his women while surrounded by lady villains and women would be carrying her man dancing around the trees as women would have pressure of being robust and men would be going under the dieting program and aerobic classes to reach the ‘size-zero’ figure; women would be riding tough machines and men would be the ones to be used for most of the beauty products’ ads; other women personalities, perhaps, would be in the place of Socrates, Jesus Christ, Buddha, Einstein, Hitler, Stalin, Mussolini, Stalin, or likewise; men would be married off to women’s house; daughters would claim parental (maternal) property; women, compulsorily, have to be the breadwinner, the protector, savior, and if they would fail to do so, that would question their femininity; and finally men would be celebrating ‘men’s day’ shouting for the equal rights.

But if humane trend would be the prevalent fashion, then everyone would get his or her deserved share, quite unlike today, when masculinity and femininity are being defined quite artificially. That is the reason why, everything has to be changed; everything needs genuine transformation, in the definition of the femininity, if women, genuinely, are to be provided with the equal dignity and status like that of men. But the definition till now is so pathetically dreadful that it says, “Whereas it is

required of woman that in order to realize her femininity she must renounce her claims as sovereign subject” (691). In her concluding chapter, Beauvoir asserts:

To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less exist for him *also*: mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an *other* (740).

The day woman will be given the liberty and autonomy to explore herself and the world, to define herself regardless of men, and to halt living the life like an exiled existence anymore by unveiling the conspiracy of patriarchy which has disgustingly dared to prove women as an inferior sex by attempting to naturalize their biased fashion of chauvinistic socialization, that day will be the day when the world will get the ‘emancipated woman’ rather than ‘the second sex’. But rather than heeding over the issues raised by the women, seriously, “Instead they continue to wonder that feminists make such a mountain out of such a “trivial” molehill” (Henley and Freeman 475).

But this irresponsible attitude can’t last long. Law of nature itself won’t let it go on. Threat to the patriarchy and male chauvinism has already begun and will be increasing in each day to come. Change “is a natural tendency, innate in all things and situations” (Capra 19). “We have come to realize that there are no static structures in nature. There is stability, but this stability is one of dynamic balance” (79). Balance, synchronization, and co-existence can only hold this world together: whether macroscopically between different planets, stars, galaxies (to hold the universe together), or microscopically between the different versatilities of human being themselves (to hold the human world together). Anyone, trying to overlook and disregard this fact and starting to be pompous enough to call own self a superior



being, will create nothing but a disaster. Patriarchy is mulishly daring to do so. It is expecting a female body to be passive and patient to each of their unjust and imbalance, while science has already proved that even “a ‘dead’ piece of stone or metal . . . is full of activity” (78). Female body will be in action because she knows the notion of inactivity or inaction doesn’t really exist. Change and co-existence is must. This, actually, is the law of nature. The words of Capra regarding the patriarchy and its both ‘revolutionary and evolutionary’ disintegration are important and significant enough to put in here, “The feminist movement is one of the strongest cultural currents of our time and will have a profound effect on our further evolution” (11).

### III. Female Body in Exile in *French Lover*

Devoid of any concrete foundation beneath one's feet, female body is, in real, constantly in exile and *French Lover* is an exploration of the same fact along with female body's obdurate uprising attitude to relocate its mind and self. Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover* orbits around the woman who never tries being a feminist, yet left no stones unturned to free the definition of South Asian femininity from the grasp of patriarchy and colonial mind-set. And furthermore, for creating the revolting, offbeat women character, which respects individuality regardless of men, like Nila, and challenging the establishmentarian attitudes and inequities in the name of religion and tradition, the writer Nasrin herself is named vulgar and unaesthetic and has to face the attitude of misogyny and life of exile. This is the way how women combating for women's deserved rights are taken: "Oh no, feminist functions. They'll merely crib in their smooth voices, we want this, we want that; they can never be satisfied. Just a bunch of gay and ugly women getting together" (279).

Compromising breed of woman may possibly confer the impression of being given a space, but at the deepest level, she belongs nowhere; whereas revolting woman perhaps appears to be ostracized outside, but deep inside, she is the only one who is able to create her own space. Molina, Nila's mother and initial Nila belong to the former case whereas eventual Nila can be defined under latter category. Above and beyond, initial Nila faces double alienation. In Paris, on the one hand, she witnesses the world around which stipulates her to adopt westernization (not modernization) and on the other hand her Swami, her lord Kishanlal wants her to be traditional archetypal South Asian Hindu housewife.

The very novel launches on a direly racist note at the airport in Paris as newly wed 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).

Nilā’s external exile starts from here, but her internal exile begins with her flashback.

She was supposed to do the things regardless of her aspiration, her persona, her dignity, her preference, her prospects, her 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 has to be retained according to the patriarchal standard of femininity. “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).

After reaching Paris with the dream of therapeutic exploration of life, she washes away her “sindoor on her forehead and the dark circles around her eyes” (14). But that easy-in-skin and light-on-feet moment cannot last long as Kishanlal yells at her, “What’s this. You’re bride, you can’t dress this way. Wear a sari and jewellery – people will come to see you later this evening” (14). Though he is also a groom (if Nilā is a bride), he doesn’t have to wear accordingly for the simple fact that he is a male, a lawmaker. As declared already, she has to idle away her life making him happy. And 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 sindoor bindi on her forehead and draw the sindoor in the parting of her hair and apply some dark lipstick. Now, Kishanlal is in high spirits to call her his bride but for Nilā, it is “a different kind of death” (15).

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, to live the sovereign life. And the rationalization was

reasonable enough: “After all, he is your husband” (74). She can’t go out, until and unless Kishan takes her. Kishan gives her the key to utilize it on one condition only: if the house was on fire. On that case, she was allowed the freedom to run outside and save her life. “But if there was no fire, the question of saving her life didn’t arise” (27).

The case with Molina is much more aching than Nila, and Anirban, Nila’s father is more hardhearted and coldhearted than Kishan. At least, Kishan appears to be polite to Nila as long as she acts accordingly. But till death Molina lives like Typical –Non revolting- Traditional- South Asian Hindu- Housewife and “tried very hard to please her husband, but she failed miserably each time” (63). Her soul is bumped off “even before she dies” (143). “That’s how it was until Nila left the country and Molina this world” (215).

Like the way Aristotle called woman and slave ‘naturally inferior’, for Kishan women are ‘natural cook’ or at least cooking or other domestic jobs are the naturally assigned jobs. He is swollen with pride to announce that he is not good at this inevitably needy but ‘not-worthy-to-be-mentioned job’ 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). She has to be ‘naturally a cook’, not for herself but for the man she lives with. Her craving for non-veggie Bengali food does not count, for she lives with the veggie non-Bengali husband. And she has to accept this ‘my wish never counts’ fixture as universal truth with an expression, “Oh, that’s true” (40). That is with food. Now comes perfume. When she wants to buy Givenchy’s Organza, he votes for Christian Dior’s Poison. “So, which one should they buy? Easy – they’d buy Poison” (52). Because her individual identity and existence has already halted to subsist, since “she had one identity –that she was Mrs Lal, Mrs Kishanlal” (67).

Woman's soul is, often, not venerated. It has been developed into the 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 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 woman. This is all about being her.

Nila isn't supposed to speak up, to argue, to give logic simply because Indian woman of their dream is "patient, tolerant, competent and generous to a fault" (270) and Kishan has the same opinion: "Indian wives can't talk like this" (55). 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 her and didn't dream a single dream" (56). She shouldn't live or act like 27 years 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 says, "To me, of course, you are a small child" (54). Since Nila is his wife, his property, his wealth, "her life was in his hands" (51).

But after all this, Nila takes a job to built her own independent existence, she wanders through the streets to explore the world, she starts to resist against his domination and mastery attitude to relocate her mind and self. And the resistance level attains the extreme of bidding farewell to his house, when he misbehaves by ignoring two of her white girlfriends, just for the simple fact that in his house she was not allowed to cook non-veggie, which she did because her guests "don't eat anything but fish and meat" (78). He just wanted her to renounce non-veggie food because he

doesn't take it. She could not 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, has 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)

Her battle for existence in her conjugal home may have ended here, but struggle for existence in the foreign land has still a long way to go. 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, heart from body. The cost is again the forgetfulness of 'self'. And it inaugurates with Nila's very first night at her only asylum, white girl Danielle's room where former has to bear latter's "hungry fingers" and "voracious tongue every night", for she has nowhere else to go in that alien land (104, 108).

Kishanlal wanted her to change her patterns for him and West land is no poles-apart from 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, the workplace" (87). Just because she used to get petrified of unfamiliar dogs back home, she can't get scared of dogs over here among

Westerners because they have never “seen anything as strange as someone screaming instead of hugging dogs” (89).

Nicole (the host), Rita Cixous, Maria Svenson (Swedish), actually no one is concerned about Nila (the guest) over there. No one notices Nila, another human being like every one else there, exists. 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 in 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 woman feminists around, Nila starts sweating heavily for it is warm inside, “with the warmth of people, animals, culture and pride” (90).

‘We and Other’ attitude is everywhere in the air. Her being a foreigner in Paris and some other Westerner being a foreigner there is completely a different thing. Nila realizes she is from the East, the exact Other of the West. When Benoir calls Picasso as ours, she retorts that Picasso is not Paris’s, but Spain’s. Then Benoir declares, “Oh, all the same; the West’s nonetheless” (269). Nila can’t 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 poor and non-Whites aren’t expected to question Western representation, no matter how hackneyed, jaded and faded, regressive and off-putting it is. No one would concern that the South Asia doesn’t just have all the poverty but there are many rich people and many middle-class families. Because “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 howmuchevery they are dissatisfied with the partial representation being taken as the intact representation. Nila, South Asian non-white woman has to be geared up to hear the heart-rending words from Westerners Danielle and Benoit, howmuchevery they claim to love her, every time she wants to pacify their strain by offering a dine: “Eating is no big deal to me, it may be to you. There’s nothing more valuable to you than rice because half your country starves to death” (229).

Just because Monique, 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 Monique can’t trust her Indian servants with dog food as she “suspect they may not feed the dogs . . . they’ll eat the food themselves” though they have not done anything as such before (158). But she has the right to suspect because they are poor. And Nila is expected to admire this French woman who doesn’t “truly respects 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 crowded 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).

As Nila was coming to a realization that she can’t 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. She realizes female body is in exile in her own parental home, among her own female species. It’s not only Anirban or Kishanlal who command her to wear the things that she doesn’t wish for, but there are these women themselves who won’t let her dwell in her comfort zone. It’s 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 doesn't apply on the reverse gear. "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).

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

I don't want marriage for my sake, Nila. I can 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 a servant, I don't mind –at least please marry me. If you find someone, old, mad. . . . (137)

As Nila can give no concrete hope, Mithu goes away with the fear still on her face. Some days later Nikhil, Nila's brother, informs her that Mithu had hung herself with her sari and committed suicide the night before.

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. Now 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 the 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)

Though not heartily acceptable, Mithu's suicide, undoubtedly, is morally acceptable to her parents. A daughter staying in parents' house, without marriage or after marriage, is on no account welcomed rather she is taken as a saddle. Her existence is in exile on her own parents' home, who are the one and only reason for her existence, as she never begged them to give her this existence. Her being servile to her man at any cost is the only option left for her even by her parents. At least this is what Nila's father seems to be determined about:

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 . . . . After marriage your husband's house is your home. There lie all your rights. Girls come to their father's house for a short while, not to stay . . . . 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 last word. (137-155)

If returning to her father's house would dishonour the family name, she could have stayed anywhere in her parental city. "She could always take a job and live alone. But that would be a horrible life, she knew. A woman who had deserted her husband was a fallen woman, she was a slut and lusty men would pounce on her in no time at all" (176).

But all these species of conditions apply on woman only. Nikhil, himself being dark, has rejected five girls for his match because all five were dark. He didn't commit suicide, rather he is confident about himself –“It doesn't matter if a man is dark” (272). Nila herself wasn't let to drink tea much for that may turn her “darker” (42); she couldn't sleep till late for that can make her “fat” (266). But Kishanlal can confidently be the possessor of “thick black moustache, beady eyes, pockmarked face . . . fat stomach threatening to burst through the shirt buttons”, simply because he is M-A-L-E (23-73).

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 soulfully 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. (50).

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).

All their life, Mithu and Molina's souls are forced to suffer, to feel crestfallen and when they are departed, a little showed off worth is offered to them. 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 construct the bridges of praises around her.

. . . She was dressed in a red sari, floral garlands around her neck and decorations on her forehead. She had perhaps never dressed up so much when she lived.

People who came to see her said, ‘Oh, what a perfect face, what a sharp nose! Such long black hair! The mole on her chin made her face even more appealing . . . (154)

Wish they could have seen this appeal before she died. Wish they could have seen and cared for the suffering of Molina’s soul before she breathed her last breathe. 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” (155). This double standard attitude is slaying the essence of humanity and compelling the existence of female body to be in exile. Her experiences and witnessing of Mithu and Molina, and most of them forced Nila 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 a few girls. (191-192)

To take birth in female body, in this patriarchal society, itself provides enough reason to be in exile.

Financially too, woman is forced or at least expected to be in exile. She isn’t expected to be economically emancipated, if she doesn’t earn on her own, and isn’t allowed to inherit. She is denied of the inheritance that son (easily, normally and always) gets from his parents. After all is said and done, 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 Anirban), all they tried, shamelessly, is to snatch it away from her with every words 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 husbands, they don't forget their father and brothers. They'll die for them. They never covet their father's property; if they do, people don't approve of them. (156)

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's 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 believed sex was mainly for the man and all that the woman would get out of it was children" (254). 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 shouldn't 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 didn't feel a thing. (42)

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's enough for a man to use it to accomplish his gratification. He is used to using her body; he doesn't require making love to her. She doesn't 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. "I thought you wanted it too. When you read Joy's poetry, you were giving me looks, weren't you?" (200). No matter, how many women, men sleep with, the same sleeping (no matter whether willingly or unwillingly) makes woman a disreputable character: "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). Once in her childhood, Danielle was raped by her father: "Mother had gone out on an errand and I was alone at home playing with my dog. Father picked me up and put me down on the bed and raped me. He stuffed his shirt into my mouth to stop my screams" (106). It's really hard to tell the place where any woman is secure; it's harsh to deny if female body doesn't start to get raped emotionally, or psychologically or physically too, from her own natal home; it's tough not to say female body is in exile everywhere.

Emotionally, psychologically, economically, culturally, socially, intellectually, and physically and sexually, both implicitly and explicitly, and both internally and

externally, female body is, or forced to be, or at least expected to be in exile now and then, far and wide.

*Nilas Denial to be the Slave of Her Own Body*

It is a tragic irony how the value of a 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 then surfacically, 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, but if he couldn't have, like Mithu's father, Molina had to hang herself like Mithu. Wanda's, Benoir's dog, existence, Nila thought, is more valuable than theirs. Anirban 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, Nila saw her father "Anirban sitting on the sofa in his comfortable clothes, the newspaper on his lap, his eyes fixed on the TV, watching the nubile heroin's undulating hips" (144). Taslima put this naked truth in a very ironic but tragic language:

No one had taken Molina and Mithu for sex objects. 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 that 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 love. (280)

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 doesn't 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 entices her to perceive things in unconventional manner was constantly there in her. But it initiates to get fostered in this comparatively free land Paris, when she witnesses the "streets bustled with people, women walked nonchalantly. There wasn't a trace of terror and their steps didn't falter" (46). This is the place where most of the girls of sixteen or seventeen leave home and stays 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 himself, with his words, introduces Nila to this side of the world not recognizing the 'rebel' inside her waiting to come out:

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, really. 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)

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's his wish" (83). And she 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. "Nila had quit wearing all that long ago and she had no intention of starting again" (134).

Not only with dress codes, but she wasn't expected to sit or make bodily postures like the way she wanted. Because patriarchal social order considers it unladylike for a woman to use her own body freely. But eventually she resists against such designation of female body, and denies being in exile anymore. When Kishan reprimands her for sitting like a man with her feet up, she counters, "Who says it's like a man? I have put my feet up in true female style" (70). She denies accepting only men are allowed, though implicitly, such privileges as swearing, which is also an expression the extreme emotion and rage. She becomes radical or has to become radical because she has to draw patriarchy's attention towards 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).

Benefiting herself with Beauvoir’s fight for legality of abortion, Nila aborts Benoir’s child, without Benoir’s consent. She denies to make her womb the medium to “sow the seeds of dreams” of Benoir’s, just because his daughter from his wife Pascale wants a brother (253). She can’t let her womb be the place to sow the sole dream of Kishanlal, just because he “want(s) a child” (75). All she has got to say is, “Oh yes, the other day you said you need a child. I have to give you an heir. I have to because you want it, as if it has nothing to do with me, and everything to do with you. We could have both wanted it together” (79). She denies celebrating the self-sacrificing womanhood. The womb, has always been, in patriarchal economy, 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 doesn’t let patriarchal definition of womb and the question of morality come in between she 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”

about any of her actions even after receiving their undesirable reactions (214). And yes, she is an anarchist, if seen through the conformist eyes, for she never regretted her wanderings, her explorations of life on her own terms.

Nilā sleeps with four men and one woman throughout the novel and doesn't repent on it. She doesn't make it a 'morality issue'. Rather, while she was serving like the housemaid and letting Kishanlal 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)

Sunil raped her, but she didn't take it as the life long 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).

### **Ambivalence Overcome by Decolonized New Woman Nila**

The very primary stair to build 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 judgments, 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 wasn't harbouring the hatred towards men all the time. To Danielle's statement, "If not Kishan, 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's her father, brother, ex-lover, husband, she keeps the optimism. Initially, she thought land makes the difference in person's attitude. She found Kishanlal (Indian man living in West land) better than Anirban (Indian man living in India), and Benoir (Western man living in West land) better than Kishan. But latter 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's all about the stance. "I feel men, of whichever country, whatever society, are all the same" (291).

Kishan admires Nila's cooking even when she knows the cooking isn't up to scratch. But Anirban never did that to Molina. He would never eat the food cooked by their housemaid. Despite her fever, Molina had to get up and cook and only then did he eat. Still "Anirban would always criticize Molina's cooking" (30). Kishan buys Nila some gift, which Anirban never did. Once, Anirban bought the sari wished by Molina (for herself) for Swati, "who wore it and went to Simla with him" (133). Kishan never beds next woman during Nila in his life, which Anirban did without

caring about Molina. But is that bounty enough for a woman to stay somebody's wife? Is that enough to exist as a woman?

What did Kishan do –did he beat you?

No.

Did he have an affair?

No.

Was it the Immanuelle issue?

No.

Then what?

Nila gave a wan smile and set off into the misty morning. (114-115)

Because she knows that being a woman means something more, because she gets enlightened that being a woman doesn't mean being a mother, being a sister, or being a wife who would look after husband's household and satisfy his sexual gratification.

Then comes Benoir, who admired her not-white colour and thought "That's what makes it so beautiful" (183), while in her own land, where everybody has got more or less same complexion, poor Mithu has to die for being dark; who "made his own coffee" (223) which Anirban or Kishanlal had never done; who prove her till hitherto belief that for woman, rule of the game was "lying flat and passive" (184) wrong; who sit "with a guilty look on his face until late in the night because Nila didn't have an orgasm and he explained over and over" (253), quite contrast to Sushanta and Kishanlal. But again, is that all what woman deserves? Eventually she pronounces Benoir her one recognition:

[. . .] you are no different from my father Anirban, my lover Sushanta, my husband Kishanlal 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)

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 Anirban never said sweet words about Molina for not complaining about his affair with somebody else. But Benoir did about his wife:

She is a very good girl, Nila. . . . I haven't seen a better woman in the whole world. . . . She is my best friend, Nila. She loves me very much and because she loves me, she doesn't stop me from doing what I want to do. Have you seen a greater sacrifice for a loved one? Only Pascale can do it. I love her and respect her. (255-256)

Pascale has to tolerate him to another woman to supply verification of her love. But like Anirban, Benoir couldn't have done the alike for his wife or lover to attest his love or to be a better man in the whole world.

Though the tone is divergent, as Kishan's demanding and Benoir's alluring, the attitude towards a woman not being complete without motherhood is identical in both. Kishan can't be buttery in his words, romantic in his bed, and can't 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). 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 (286). 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 alters 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. (289-291)

Till the end no Indian men looked so pathetically comical than this Prince Charming. There, Taslima makes the readers come to an understanding that land makes no difference, it’s all about an approach of a man towards a woman.

Besides it’s not only in India, also in Western land, if husband’s “last names were not the same it would be disastrous” for wives (7). It created problem for Nila too, in the airport in Paris when Nila has “deliberately not taken his name” (7).

Materially, Non-West might be shoddier than West, but spiritually the latter is not better off. They can’t 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” (257). Then Pascale takes him to

the doctor, upon whose advice, he arrives to Nila with Baudelaire's books and one rose. "Nila was afraid, perhaps one day the doctor would say to Benoit, 'Go and live happily with Pascale,' and that's exactly what he would do" (258). Nicole goes to psychiatrist to rid herself of the agony of Pipi, her cat, 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)

In Paris, spring was 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 suicide in spring, even before summer arrives" (128). They killed themselves for they didn't have a lover and wouldn't 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's not because Third World can't think higher and can't understand that "Food and clothes are not everything," but because materially West might have accomplished higher but spiritually they still have a long way to go (129). Nila wondered, "The people of the First World couldn't have their mind in a less-than-perfect condition. It had to be a hundred per cent fit. The body may well be a little weak, but the mind had to be in the pink of health" (129).



Westerners have made up their mind that all Easterners are conservative for Westerners have mistaken Easterner's spiritual strength with superstition. That's why, Benoir is, undoubtedly, amazed to know that Nila doesn't believe in heaven and hell for she believes that they are not far away as scribed in scriptures rather "In midst of man resides heaven and hell, both" (265). Westerners declare Easterners 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). And here is this Easterner Nila who "felt uncomfortable . . . burst into laughter"(232-233) inquiring him, "You believe that if you scatter corn to the winds, you won't get sacked from Alcatel" (233). When Nila had fever, Benoir brings the bottle that was etched with trees and plants, which he called medicines. Nila's 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 Calcutta 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 succour; the eyes of the educated upper classes were turned towards dark, irrational. (254).

Nila initially thought that it is 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, the White –Westerner –rich man living in so-called decent and civilized posh area threatened her with her life, her closing lines of the novel became the general intention 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 there, 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 happen here? Of course they do. One could have happened just today! (293).

Another ambivalence and misconception was 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, Western woman, who wanted to make documentary on foreign woman, is remarkable to put in here, where Nila wore sari and bindi on Rita's request, completely like a Bengali girl:

. . . 'Tell me, Nila, that symbol you have tattooed on your forehead is a mark to indicate that you are married, right?'

'No.' . . . 'This is not a mark of marriage. Most women wear bindis even before marriage, because it looks good.'

'Isn't it a permanent mark on your forehead?'

Nila laughed and took the felt bindi off. 'See, it comes off. Here now, gone next.'

Rita didn't like the bindi magic. She'd have been happier if a permanent, red marriage mark was tattooed onto Nila's forehead.

'I've heard that you have left your husband. Will you tell us why?'

'Because I don't get along with him.'

'But why not?'

'We are two different kinds of people.'

'But your husband is also Indian. Why do you call him different?'

'We don't think same way.'

'I've heard that your husband tortured you. Tell us what he did to you.'

'He's not really done anything that'll qualify as torture.'

'Your husband beat you –what did he use, whip, sticks or his belt...?'

'My husband has never laid a finger on me.'

'You must be in touch with other Indian women like you who have also left their husbands. What kinds of torture did their husbands inflict on them?'

'I don't know anyone like that.'

'So when your husband dies, you'll have to jump into his pyre, right?'

'That is an ancient custom and it was banned in the last century.'

'Tell us more about your married life –you had to do all the housework, right?'

'Yes.'

'What did you do?'

‘Cook, clean, do the laundry and the dishes.’

‘Which of the chores at home did your husband do?’

‘Nothing much.’

‘Did your husband ever cook?’

‘No.’

‘Clean the house?’

‘No.’

‘What did he do when he came back from work?’

‘Watch TV, drink...’

‘And? What else did he do?’

‘What else? He ate and slept.’

‘Both of you contributed to the household income, right?’

‘No, I didn’t. My husband paid the bills.’

‘But your husband didn’t want you to work’

‘No.’

‘So your husband kept you locked in, didn’t he?’

‘He didn’t want me to go out. But he didn’t really lock me in. I had a set of keys as well.’

‘Your husband didn’t let you eat fish and meat. He forced you to eat according to his wishes, didn’t he?’

‘That’s true. He was vegetarian and he wanted his house free of meat.’

‘But if you disobeyed him what did he do –beat you up?’

‘No, he’s never beaten me.’

‘Did he abuse you?’

‘No.’

‘Then what did he do?’

‘He’d be upset.’

Cut. (123-126)

That obviously doesn’t satisfy the Western souls of Rita and Danielle who want to make documentary about women and how they are exploited.

Nilá had more questions. ‘Which women? Any women, even French women?’

‘I’ve already told you that, it’s foreign women.’

‘Foreign? German, Swiss, Belgian?’

‘They don’t come to live in France. It’s about those who come here to stay.’

‘So it’s women from Rwanda, Mali, Somalia, India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan, right?’

Danielle was silent for a long time. (126)

These Westerners wanted to confirm their negative stereotypical images of Non-Westerners, which this Easterner doesn’t let them do. Westerners were upset, as simple as that - “To tell you the truth, Rita isn’t happy with your interview” (127).

On one of her early dating with Benoir, Nilá demands to pay the bill that the waiter placed before Benoir “because he felt she wasn’t capable of paying: black and a woman at that” (182). Just because Nilá is a woman from a poor country doesn’t make her a pauper. Sometimes pride comes with a price, which Nilá was always ready to pay. Once, Nilá invites Danielle to come and see her as she was ill, but Danielle turns down this invitation at her face for she sees no point of coming then, when she is sick. She tells Nilá to get well and she’ll come one day to chat with her.

Nilā 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 off 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)

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

Paris is the land which teaches Nilā 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). In Paris, "No one poked their nose in our business; it was against their nature to impede the others' wish" (207), while among Indians it often happens –"Nilā must have become a juicy topic of discussion among the Indians in Paris: Kishan's wife has run away, ha ha ha" (111). Indians make Mithu die and Molinā suffer all life long due to their dark complexion, while the French man for her same colour admires Nilā. Nilā imagines about Morounis, Indian orphan girl adopted by French couple, that "if someone, her parents, hadn't thrown Morounis into the rubbish heap so cruelly one night, she would have grown up in Calcutta, 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" (192). Nilā further compared Morounis's present life in Paris with her 'could be' hypothetical orphan life in Calcutta:

. . . 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. The Frenchman must have told her a million times, 'What a beautiful colour you have, Morounis.' . . . She had studied philosophy in Sorbonne and perhaps one day she'd be a great philosopher. 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. (192-194)

There's no optimism of one marginalized receiving their privileges until they won't learn to revere next marginalized. "Modibo, with his large, pitch black, illegal, immigrant eyes and rounded nose, stayed in the background like Tracy Chapman. . . . Sanal spoke in crisp Hindi. 'Who has invited this monkey here?' His comment brought a gust of laughter from Mojammel and Jewel" (275). 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 have equal right on human dignity regardless of anything above the earth and under the sun. And that 'someone' in *French Lover* is this Nila who self-confidently "poured more champagne in Modibo's glass and said, 'I have.'" (275).

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 and 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 then would have learnt to perceive that if whiteness is continued to be taken away from the colour white then it'll 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. Howmuchevery 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 shouldn't have dominated the philosophy of perceiving the humanity, the human world. And this is the thing perceived by Nila, which make 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, any sex. She doesn't take the absolute stance in adoring and abhorring, revering and deriding any sides. She is balanced, not ambivalent.

By and large, Nila exemplifies that decisive, unconfused, sure in mind New Woman who is at least a step further in accomplishing the dream of the de-colonized and de-patriarchalized New World as she denied 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 the west. It stays put in one place and makes everyone else dance to its tune" (272). This is the verity that many haven't grasped so far. It's all about the vantage point supplied by one's geography, and most of our principles and beliefs are wrought by the way we are socialized since our birth. But our misfortune –we believe those mind-sets, ideas, impressions, concepts, cultures, and traditions the way we like to believe that sun rises in the east and sets in



west. We take it as the universal truth, and love to forget that it has to be changed along with time.

‘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)

Above is the conversation between Nila and her elder brother Nikhil. These lines witness the fact that people don’t bother to stamp out those evil happenings until these happenings don’t propel direct affect on them. Rather some take it as fun to see their continuation. It’s not fallacious to say this very attitude is the foundation behind the catastrophe that those who dub themselves educated, logical and rational can’t 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 etcetera and etcetera, it’s natural that one has the right to rule and another has to be ruled. Latter has to do everything with regard to the pleasures of the former, is what they say; former has the right to live the life and latter has to live the age is what they believe. It’s 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 Kishan she tells that she doesn't feel like going to Kishan. 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 the story, when Chaitali senses that her husband Sunil is cheating on her, she can't 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 no different, rather proving her love for him by letting him go and sleep with another who is giving him "a taste of the different for a long time" (286). If she herself wouldn't have accepted the female body just as a womb to give him his heir, just as a sex object to gratify his sexual needs, she couldn't 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 can't wander from one 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 was Molina can neither show dissatisfaction like the way Chaitali does to Sunil, nor tell Anirban "to stop dallying and choose one of the two relationships" like the manner Pascale says to Benoir (271). But they all are identical in crucial way for none of them can stand up and say like the way Nila does, "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). Because they all are born and brought up in the culture of naturalizing the socialization which says womanhood is complete only after the wifeness and motherhood.

Though seems modern but both Pascale and Chaitali was telling their husbands to stop dallying and not to “neglect them so much” (248). Both of them were 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 woman needs a man to lead her life. They are socialized in the manner to take Molina luckier than Mithu 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 for Mithu never gets the lucky opportunity to be a servant of her husband. Because they all believe that it is naturally offered destiny with no other alternatives that women have to do many of those things they just don’t feel like doing.

That’s not all, but 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 and every circumstances, twist and turns, ups and downs, thick and thins, though not vice versa. It’s not man alone who thinks cooking is naturally assigned job to a woman but woman herself has accepted it that way. When Anirban denied to eat anybody else’s cooking and Molina got up and cooked despite her fever, “Not only did this satisfy Anirban; it gave great pleasure to Molina as well” (30).

Woman is taught from her childhood to get prepared to 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, then she is a burden devoid of human dignity and “Finally suicide!” (286). Symbolically Mithu was killed every moment by everybody; literally

she killed herself one day for she herself started to perceive own self as a burden. If not so, then why Mithu killed herself and Nikhil didn't? Why Mithu was rejected by every man for being dark and Nikhil, who is dark himself, rejected five other dark girls? Why only men have right to choose and women, only to wait to be chosen? Why is it only woman who has to accept –“Beggars were not choosers” (230)? 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 are taught, since their birth, that they don't have god-given right to choose men or make their own way to live without 'one' man to direct her. She is taught this way. 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: “‘Don't say anything to your father. In times of trouble, he will look after you.’ Molina's voice was tired, broken” (139). But Nila denied 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's only her right to choose what suits her. She doesn't let anybody else to take her out from her comfort zone.

Up to this point, except for Nila, the women who doesn't believe in the possibility of pleasant life with no man to guide her no matter how much strayed he himself is, are brought into discussion. But this novel also comprises that species of woman who not only denies serving men but also wants to alter the traditions and wants every woman to do without men. Danielle forgets that everyone can't become

homosexual like her, by choice. She forgets that being attracted to another sex is as much natural as being homosexual almost all animals felt attracted to the next sex, mate with them and that's how the species continued. Rather 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, 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' is not enough; everyone getting their share is the ultimate point to be achieved. Women don't win by making men lose. If men loss, it's about creating another marginalized group. World doesn't need it. Self-styled supremacy of patriarchy (from all genders' mind-set) should lose, not men.

To balance the universe, belief in co-existence is the M-U-S-T. Co-existence represents versatility; singularity gives monotony. But Tragedy: Every one is busy in creating monotony with their trials to give space to only their kind of 'species'. Whether men, or women, or anybody, one shouldn't overlook –only 'rose' doesn't make the garden beautiful, you need lily, chrysanthemums, marigold and all. This world is beautiful only because this world has darkness, light, men, women, third sex and third gender, and the gorgeous veracity of versatilities. This is nature.

. . . man is one species among many others. In this universe, man lives on a planet in one solar system among many in one galaxy among many others. You are like a dot, even smaller. Can you feel your existence anywhere in this vast system? Or your mother's? That mud-

eating tortoise lives longer than man. That is nature and we cannot conquer it. We come and we go; thus we float away. Man's life is over in a blink of an eye. Just think, for billions of years so many things live and die on this planet. Once the dinosaurs ruled, and now they are no more. One day man will no longer exist; man's history will vanish in this vastness . . . (152)

Before discussing over above lines from the novel translated in English, it is important to remember that translation of the word meant 'human' in Bengali might have been translated as 'man' in English here. Otherwise the writer who challenges such sexist language everywhere and quite precisely in her autobiography 'Amar Meyebela' may not have written sexist language herself. But leaving this hypothetical assumption for a moment or two, it is also important to discuss the intention above lines carry. Change is the only truth that existed since eternity in time and space. And as earth and universe itself changes its existence from mortal state to immortal and vice versa, it is extremely uproarious, comical, disgraceful, reprehensible, and discreditable of the people who takes it as a pride to have certain colour and certain organ.

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 –It's never easy, change never is. But that's the only 'naturally granted alternative'. This is nature.

Nila, certainly the postcolonial de-colonized New Woman, 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 we are born to fill.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

This world, which has replaced 'natural' with socialization in more than ample extent, and which has inherited patriarchal worldview as the only alternative left for humankind, has given exactly no particular reason for a female body to be in exile. Here, to exist as a female body is a sufficient foundation for that. Everywhere, every time, amid everybody, female body is, emotionally-economically-psychologically-physically-sexually-socially-culturally-intellectually, in exile. Furthermore, she is in exile among her own species. Its not men alone who consider she should live pertaining to the consent and taste of men, but women themselves have implanted the same standpoint.

But the odyssey of a female body always doesn't end in here. At times it goes further and strives to strike back. It strives to relocate mind and self, and to have an autonomous connection and authority over own body. When this rebel genus of female body disallowed to be labeled as a 'second sex', patriarchy tried to create confusion about her 'self' tagging her a 'lost sex'. But that generation has passed, now the patriarchy has labeled the rebels as 'fallen' for they denied being both inferior and confused. This generation is battling till it acquires what any human deserves – a human dignity regardless of any differences. Nila, the postcolonial New Woman, belongs to this generation of rebel and calling her fallen can't make her quit or surrender. In the course of novel, Nila realizes that now is the time to undo and unravel the bogus that has been told and retold since thousands of years back that woman species is inferior.

Initially in the novel, Nila was impounded by the self-asserted superiority of indigenous patriarchy and still existing hegemonic colonial power. She was facing double alienation in the foreign land – from her conjugal home and Western

surroundings. Even after knowing all about the hard-hitting situations Nila was facing there, she wasn't permitted a space in her own natal home, natal land as a morally unacceptable person. Then she realizes: being a female body, if yet again she look for the consent of patriarchy, she will persist to face both the internal and external exile forever. And, the rebellious spark in her starts to become manifest.

Change is the inevitable truth. But Nila knows that sometimes one can't wait for the evolution to take place rather revolution is the must (which, in turn, is also the part of the evolution). Revolution has never been easily accepted by the conformist eyes without calling it politically incorrect or anarchism. And so is Nila, call her a rebel or anarchist. But all she is endeavoring to do is to de-establish the patriarchal definition that says femininity as 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 connection between femininity and masculinity and their respective definitions. Nature has already given some biasless biological differences between them to continue the race. These pervasive unnatural designations are the outcome of the prejudiced bigoted socializing process. If nature were given its genuine position, equality would have been the only human tradition and humanity, our only religion (justice). Nila has understood and realized it and is determined to act according to this understanding and realization. She decides to live 'her' desires, dreams, priorities and expectations. She denies being the slave of her body in both literal and metaphorical sense of it.

Nila admires and adores the commendable edges of West, but rejects being in service of gratifying 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 hasn't



backstabbed anybody, so she doesn't regret. Her sovereign self apprehends if Anirban, Sushanta, Kishanlal, Sunil, Nikhil, or Benoir has self-given right to choose woman for his life, Nila is confident, she is no different in terms of her rights. If they can decide about both the literal and metaphorical sense of their body, she, too, can. She doesn't 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 isn't in the mood of becoming Molina, Chaitali, Mithu or Pascale who accepts the lifetime company of that man who shoutingly or silently declares himself as her 'swaami', her lord, her decider, her superior, not her friend, her equal. She knows if perceived equally, 1 and 1 makes 11. But the tradition till now is subtracting 1 from 1 making it a zero; and even if more, then by showing off to be ideal enough, all they can do is add them and make it 2, not treat them equal to make it 11. Nila is fighting to make it 11, the equal. She neither takes the stance of making the men lose like the way Danielle wants for Nila believes in dignified co-existence of all species. Unlike Danielle, she doesn't mind the human race to continue.

If any male character would be in place of Nila, then it wouldn't make a big deal or perhaps it would have been bigger deal than Nila. A man fighting to claim over male dignity? How is it possible? It's like asking for a thing you are given continuously since your birth. Nila is strikingly noticed or called fallen for she claimed over woman dignity to the extent that hasn't been sanctioned by patriarchal legacy. But Nila couldn't allow this attitude as the only truth just because it exists since then. Surrendering of 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 authority over her own body, and to rescue the entire race of female body from being exiled.

Despite of mammoth external pressures, Nila knows she can't halt her humane odyssey of establishing the natural veracity that one can't be the exact opposite of another, but its 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 is not done. She needs the de-patriarchalized, de-colonized avant-garde version of criteria; call it a revolution or anarchy. By and large, Taslima Nasrin's *French Lover*, the exploration of the same criteria, with original protagonist Nila, is the trial to rescue the female body from being exiled and to redefine, recuperate and redraw the stale patriarchal definition of a femininity and a female body with the innovative and natural philosophy of humanity.

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