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Family makes house a home: A study on Lakshmi Kannan's Going Home and Rojin Thomas Malayalam Movie Home

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Abstract---Home is where the heart is and has reverberated across history for ages. A home is a place where everyone finds their true self. With the shifting cultural and socioeconomic circumstances, the home has become a place of dysfunction among the different generations. The clear demarcation between gender roles in the home is often attributed to the separate domain concept that society imposes. It has also been suggested that the home as a metaphor merges with thematic substance and plot to disclose the character's innermost thoughts and mind. This paper aims to illustrate how the repressive characters in the home struggle to preserve their emotional equilibrium. It also depicts the possibility and impossibility of fighting the dominant ideology "Angel in the House," not only through the female characters but also through the inversion of masculine characters. The writers also aims to portray the connection of the people with their dwelling places and explore the spatial relationships through third space theory.

Keywords---home, family, society, quest identity, third space.

Introduction

Family is the most fundamental and universal social institution, as well as the foundation of society. All family members receive psychological, social, and

financial support from the home. For some, home is the place where they can freely express their emotions, and for some others, it's a place where they suppress all their feelings and emotions. One's life starts at home, for a child, it's the first school from where they learn the important lessons of their life. In Lakshmi Kannan's *Going Home* and Rojin Thomas's Malayalam movie *Home*, two types of generations were presented, both this generation has different perspectives on 'home'. Lakshmi Kannan's *Going Home* presents the lifestyle of two women who were trying to develop a third space of their own in order to escape from the rules of the conventional patriarchal system. The novel raises an important question where lay an actual home for a girl, a hybrid kind of identity is developed. The concept of third space theory was introduced by Homie K. Bhabha, this concept is related to cultural third space and that comes from the post-colonial concept. It is compared to cyberspace that is neither there nor here somewhere in between. It's not easy to articulate this space, a lot of struggle is required. Here in the third space, various identities that are different from the first and second cultures merged together, as a result, multiple identities are simultaneously formed. The work, which is written in two sections and spans twenty years, eloquently portrays the futility and agony of modern, metropolitan reality. Lakshmi Kannan in this novel shows how women and houses both are interconnected to each other. In Rojin Thomas, Malayalam movie *Home*, he presents the life of an old man Oliver Twist who is not aware of the cyber world trying hard to develop a space of his own not only in society but also in his home. The story follows Oliver Twist and his family, which includes his wife Kuttyamma and their two sons, Antony and Charles. Mild-mannered Oliver Twist longs to connect with his older son Antony who is a film director but finds it difficult. He discovers that a smartphone can only go him so far. Oliver chooses to upgrade to a smartphone in order to communicate with his sons. While the phone allows them to maintain a transient, ephemeral connection, the father still lacks respect and appreciation in the family. Apart from the obvious statement about the influence that digital devices have on people's lives, *Home* makes several other points, including how we form frustrating relationships online while missing out on the actual and 'amazing' stories around us. The old man is trying to find an identity of his own not only in society but in his own home. It also implies that no one else can truly alter us; we must work on it ourselves. Finally, at the climax of the film, Oliver discovers his own third space through which he regains his space at home. The physical and mental space of old and new generations in a home is discussed in both works. The old generation always tries to develop a space of their own. The new generation of pupils without any proper aim lead a meaningless life they even don't know the importance of family or relationships. The characters like Girija, Aravind in the novel and Antony Oliver Twist, Charles Oliver Twist in the movie are good examples. The comparative study of these works shows both men and women have equal importance in shaping a family which then turns a house into a home.

Going Home

Going Home, a novel by Lakshmi Kannan was first published in Tamil and afterward translated into English by Disha Books in 1999. This novel is a translation of the Tamil novel *Aathukku Poganum*. It illustrates the feelings of loneliness, ennui, existential difficulties, and anxiety that are prevalent among

metropolitan Indian women. Through this novel, Lakshmi Kannan shows how women and home are interconnected with each other. Home plays a vital role in determining the identity of women. The traditional patriarchal society believed that the most secure place for women is 'Home' but it's actually a trap to keep them inside the house. A home is a safe place for women but it's the same place where they are taught to suppress their feelings or emotions. George Bernard Shaw in his work *Man and Superman* says that "Home is the girl's prison and the woman's workhouse" (Shaw 212). Women are always torn between freedom and identity. Women are subjected as daughters and later as daughters-in-law, they are crushed between two homes and two identities. Gayatri and Rama, two major female characters in the novel try to develop a third space of their own. Lakshmi Kannan through this novel portrays the picture of social inequalities and the hybrid identity developed by women based on social conditions. The author appears to have tackled a fundamental societal issue in her book, namely the denial of property rights to girls, and has even detailed several unfortunate and troubling examples in the novel's preface. She has demonstrated how such denial makes women reliant, and vulnerable to servility and patriarchal dominance at the hands of their family members by citing various real-life examples. Gayatri, the main protagonist of the novel belongs to a wealthy and educated family who had a good childhood and family support. Meanwhile, Rama, Gayatri's friend is not happy in her own house and in her in-law's house too. Lakshmi Kannan's question towards the audience is very relevant to 'where the lay actual house for a woman'? Before marriage they have to be with their parents where they develop their first culture after some time they need to shift to their in-law's house, a second culture that is different from the first is developed. It's clear that being a woman one have to play various role without proper stability, identity, and culture of their own, "women are often regarded as the second gender which denies them of their full potential due to the gender stereotyping" (Santhosh and Nair 268). Gayatri while playing with her friends repeatedly utters the sentence "I am going home", her childhood belief was that home was her safe zone where she feels comfortable and safe. But after her marriage "Home" the comfort space in her life turned into a "Mouse-trap":

Right. It is going to be a mouse- trap, I quite agree. But suppose we don't even have that? Gayatri, another mouse-trap or not, at least it will be ours. And that will make all the difference. This feeling of dislocation, these misgivings, the restlessness, they'll all disappear. Look at that sparrow. See how it folds up how its wings once it is in its nest. Look how peacefully it rests. (Kannan 16)

The spacelessness Gayatri described here is not the physical space but space becomes a metaphor for Gayatri's freedom, the freedom she craves to build her identity. Gayatri who is nostalgic about her childhood and maternal house struggles to create her own identity in urban society, she is trapped between the first and second culture and struggles to develop a third space of her own. As per Homi K. Bhabha, second space doesn't allow one to articulate first space identity. The third space is not geographically located, it's an imaginary space where this second culture interacts. Gayatri develops the third space through her childhood memories, she recollects her experience and feels nostalgic.

Rama, another important character in the novel is Gayatri's friend and a writer. Her husband Dorai is a perfect example of male chauvinist society, very dominating, indifferent, and a man of false identity. Home remains an elusive dream for Rama's talent, there is no time and place for her to write. Rama had a cramped existence in the house and was also a victim of discrimination not only in her in-laws but in her own home, she yearns for mental and physical support. It is important to balance the demands of domesticity that is personal aspiration and space. Rama's novel title *Driftwood* becomes a point to show how she herself floated in life always drifting. Rama's life is completely filled with emptiness and nothingness, she fills the gap in her life through writing.

You ask me why I write?" said Rama, on one occasion. You know, sometimes there are these intervals, a period of blank spaces filled with a nothingness so empty that I can almost hear echoes. Then I feel like filling in that void with something, so I write," she said. (Kannan 152)

Gayatri and Rama, both were the victims of traditional patriarchal society but rather than sitting back they transformed their mental traumas and start to develop a third space that is different from the first and second cultures in order to regain their identity.

Gender Space in Going Home

Gender is defined as "the state of being male or female," and it is usually used to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones. Social construction is anything that does not exist in the natural world but is created by society. Social conceptions are created by cultural practices and norms, and they are reinforced by society. Spaces are sharply defined as masculine and feminine. The space inside the home is identified with the women and the outside world is an exclusively male sphere. Men are reluctant to approve the efforts of women, they even don't like to merge their identities with that of their wives, "female identity from time immemorial is linked to the men in a woman's life" (Santhosh and Indu 325). Dorai was one among them, who don't like people addressing him with his wife's name; "Namaste, You must be Rama-ji's husband" "Hmm. You could also put it this way, don't you think, that Rama is my wife?" said Dorai, curtly" (Kannan 43). Gender discrimination or male supremacy is something that is seen from time immemorial, because of society's patriarchal mindset, there appears to be gender bias in the gender roles mandated by society. The term "self" can be described as knowledge of one's own existence, "I am," or "the immaterial non-spatial consciousness within oneself." There is a distinction between the terms self and self-concept in psychology. However, in a patriarchal culture, a woman's inner self has been suppressed and neutralized throughout history. In her short stories, Lakshmi Kannan addresses problems such as the preference for a male child, the gendering of a girl child, the celebration of a woman's self, and the exploitation of female professors at academic institutions, among others. This attitude paved the way for the feminist worldview, which rejects women's subjugation in the home and society. As stated in the blurb of *India Gate and Other Stories*,

the women in these [Lakshmi Kannan's] stories are unforgettable – in their struggle towards self-realization, their commitment to a special feminine sensibility, and the way they seek to define their space in a traditional society that defines them as sharply as it restrains” (Kannan 162).

Male progenies always had a space of their own in society and family. Women were considered to be inferior to them. Society and laws were against the right of women. As per the Hindu Succession Act, women don't have any right to their ancestral property. Gayatri's mother, the only daughter of her parents after marriage denied the right to have their ancestral home, Gayatri was angry with her mother for this, “It is a house that slipped through the Meenakshi's fingers, my mother Meenakshi who is the daughter of the house. Naturally, it slipped through my fingers too, being the daughter's daughter (Kannan 10). Gayatri as compared to Rama had a supportive family. Rama, not only in her in-law's house but in her own house is considered to be a burden. Rama's mother gives more importance to her son being a woman, she too avoids her daughter. Her mother-in-law is worried about his son's health and career:

Hmm...but how is Dorai, poor boy? You must tell me about him. I believe Rama leaves all the housework and childcare to Dorai and takes herself off in the name of work. And I'm told that she now has this itch to write and become famous, ha...ha!" he laughed, exchanging glances with his wife. (Kannan 67)

Rama is an empowered woman who keeps an equal balance between her personal and professional life without anyone's support. At the end of the novel, Rama's friendship with Damodaran refreshed her and she starts to get a good companion who listens to her and supports her. Rama is of the opinion that society considered a woman as an object that fulfills all needs of the family. It's the responsibility of women to build a home considering all other member's likes and dislikes but no choice of their own, Rama says,

But when it comes to women, even this very normal attempt to grow turns out to be an ordeal. Because she has to create her space. Even this thing called 'home' is something she has to 'create, work hard at. And when she finally creates this home around herself, it somehow becomes an arrangement that offers all the conveniences to the man of the house and the children but never to herself! It doesn't ensure her the space she wanted, in the first place. That's the way our society is structured. (Kannan 22)

According to Gayatri home is something that cannot behold, she has been seeking a space of her own. For Gayatri's husband Shankar, Gayatri is his home, as per him only a woman can turn a house into a home, “Only a woman actually, only a wife can make it a livable hearth, Gayatri, he said, suddenly breaking into English, his face suffused with emotion. Gayatri, only you can make a home out of a house” (Kannan 86).

Gender discrimination and the identity crisis of women are not something new to society. There is a famous Victorian image of the ideal wife or woman that is “The Angel in the house”, she was expected to be devoted and submissive to her husband. This image suits Gayatri and Rama, they are empowered women but

still, they are under the shackles of traditional patriarchal society. Gayatri's daughter-in-law, Girija who is opposite to Gayatri remains inactive and does not have a proper aim in life. Girija's parents, a typical example of patriarchal society believe that a married girl should lead a simple life looking after her husband, there is nothing else she can do. Shankar states this inactiveness or lack of interest as a new disease affecting old and new. Girija, a woman of the new generation doesn't like the concept of the joint family she prefers a nuclear family but when she starts to build a family of her own, the difficulties or responsibilities become a burden for her, at that point Girija understood the value of Gayatri and importance of joint family.

The novel *Going Home* deals with the issues of freedom and identity of women. The meaning of 'home' is revealed through the portrayal of many women. Home is the place where men can freely express their emotions and frustration but for females, it's the place where they should hide all their feelings. They were entitled to "Homely girls", this phrase is actually a trap to keep them inside the nutshell, it's not easy to break the nutshell. Murthy in this novel says, "My wife work? God forbid! She'll never neglect the house for such temptations, sir Bless her, she's such a homely type," (Kannan 42). According to a man, a woman who is obedient and dutiful to their husband is praised by society and they were given the tagline "homely girls". The term homely means the one who will make a house into a home. This phrase creates some misunderstanding among the people. But the fact is that the Home is not only connected to women, all members of the family are responsible for the development of the house into a home. Home is the place where all the members happily share their sorrows and worries with equal rights and freedom. The place where one can find real happiness is the actual home.

Masculine Inversion in *Home*

The discourses around 'home' created to date have been, essentially, feminine. The history of sexist stereotypes and the symbolic significance of the home as a safe and supportive environment have both been topics of discussion in recent years. The rejection of the middle ground permeates our ideologies, politics, and economics, which significantly limits the flexibility of definitions to adapt to shifting circumstances. The law of the excluded middle describes the concept that everything can only be categorized as either feminine or masculine. The outdated normativity and binary logic theories that continue to dominate modern cognition are compatible with these archaic Aristotelian precepts. It is believed that the women make a house 'home' and the well-being of every household member is viewed as being entirely their responsibility. They associate freedom and liberty with the physical space of the home. Every attempt to criticize these notions has been met with hostility due to how firmly ingrained they are in society. The impression that comes from reading male tales of the home is that, contrary to what a manly culture has built, males are incapable of completing tasks outside the home. This contradicts the idea that men identify with the outside world of work while women are attached to the emotional world. In order to maintain this concept in various spheres, essentialist reasons were utilized to convince men and women of the legitimacy of their pre-existing positions. These are strengthened by the ideological state apparatuses. The strategy in this regard was

developed by men for men, and the values they espouse are shaped by ideas associated with men.

The different cultural identities are created, transformed, continually in the process of it being in this “in-between” space. Artists working in “the third space” speak of a creative edge that comes from the experience of being in a space that is home and away from home. The third space is an expressive language for various subject positions. It is not a reflective environment that opens up new possibilities, but rather a constructive one. “It is, in Bhabha’s (1994) postulation, An “interruptive, interrogative, and enunciative” space” (Bhabha 54). It creates new forms of cultural significance while blurring old ones. Long-held cultural and identity categories are being challenged. They belong to the past, present, and future in equal measure. Furthermore, they are always reforming their formations. As a result, they’re negotiating their cultural identities in the third space. Bhabha’s in-between might be defined as:

The creative, malleable indeterminacy involving feelings of simultaneously repulsion and desire that exist at the interface between self and other, or between the polarities of unequal World that we still inhabit, of what Bhabha calls the ‘ongoing colonial present. (Boehmer 355)

In order to understand the masculine subject in home space narratives, one must delve into issues that are undermined by a number of wide discourses or themes that are difficult to debilitate but inexorably relevant to tap into. Mass media like movies handles such issues differently, to be acceptable to the public. The showcasing of male in the female realm contradict the patriarchal ideologies in society. The contemporary narratives on home space pose a particular challenge to regendering because they are modeled after the narratives of domestic life and are associated with femininity. The narratives of domesticity include women in their constricted space and intrigue people to know how a man’s presence in their domain alters this genre.

Home is the essence of the family, and it functions as its own mini-universe, separate from the outside world and regulated by its own set of rules. In the home, it is believed that males who manage the household have low self-esteem. The Malayalam movie *Home* directed by Rojin Thomas portrays the unfamiliar relationship of men with their home. The film's spatial approaches to home reinforce generational preconceptions, indicating that traditional hegemony is propagated not only through identity but also through space. It is evident in these lines where Oliver was ridiculed by his son, “I, Oliver Twist”, I used to run a shop I had to close it down because I couldn’t change with the times. I sit idle these days looking after the terrace garden What more can you write? It can’t fill even half a page” (Antony 2021). The family runs in the allowance of Oliver’s wife. The entire family meets the day-to-day needs from the retirement fund she gets.

The expression of cultural differences begins in the areas in-between. “The space for creating methods of individual identity – confinement or collective – is provided by these in-between areas,” which develop new forms of identity. New indicators of identification emerge as time and socio-cultural differences blur. In this environment, pre-existing cultural codes and ethnic characteristics are re-defined.

Tradition shapes cultural differences, but they're also negotiated and reinvented. Oliver's fictional world serves as a queer space in the film, where he negotiates with his true identity. It is reflected as a third space that operates as an intercultural medium, as well as a space for introspection and mediation. The company with the psychologist made Oliver to create a space of his own. In the cyber world, no one has time to listen to others, in that case, Oliver with the help of the psychologist develops a third space and his identity. Oliver is determined to seek psychological help and to find out how he can bring changes to his life. For Antony, seeking the help of a psychologist is nothing more than humiliation. Social fame or publicity is something important for the modern world and in the midst of the race they fail to understand the importance of family. Antony picks up every opportunity to blame his father. He finds his father an ordinary man without any achievements in life. He mostly relied upon his high-achieving future father-in-law, though his own decision lead him to choose the right path. The father's attempt to win his love was ever appreciated which is very evident when the father says "That's the problem with his story". He only wins back his affection and respect when he is convinced by an extraordinary act he performed in the past. It questions whether an extraordinary deed determines the worth of a father. A man is considered to be worthless if he is not recognized in society. Initially, the protagonist Oliver is shown as an unsuccessful family man. Antony values his identity more than his responsibilities in the family. Once his fame starts to diminish, he loses his sanity. He even refuses to share his problems with his endearing family and lives in his own utopian world.

A new image of male sexuality is presented in the movie to communicate the possibility of transcending gender stereotypes. Despite his ignorance of modern technology, Oliver Twist upholds expectations throughout the movie by adhering to conventional values and seeking happiness within the boundaries of his four walls. Through Oliver, the movie clearly communicates the optimistic and pessimistic side of transgressing the gender codes. This is further demonstrated with the progression of the movie. He is a man unlike an imposing patriarch who lives modestly in his small world, 'Home', and finds happiness in every little thing of life. The writer focuses more on the identity crisis of the father Oliver twist, tackles an important question where does the status of men lie in a so-called space of 'patriarchy'. Oliver's lack of knowledge regarding the technological world creates space between him and his sons. Oliver says that he sees Antony in a jovial mood when he calls someone on phone and before all the family members he just responds with grunts. The aquarium and fish inside the house symbolically represent Oliver who is trapped inside the four walls of the home. The distance between Oliver and his elder son Antony increases, Antony being a director who is supposed to make a new movie yet is stumped by a creative block after his debut movie and deadline. In the beginning, he leaves his home assuming that it will remove the clutter in his mind and he can design the best climax for his film. The very first meeting with Antony, which takes place in his filthy flat, itself reveals his muddled-up mind without any proper aim in life, which puts a pigsty to shame. He is not ready to find a space of his own that resonates with the inactiveness of the new generation. The physiological quest of the individuals is depicted through the spatial imagination of space. It is even said that the character's dwelling spaces reflect their inner emotions and thoughts.

Masculinity is the name of the gender with social expectations. When a man gets embedded with feminine qualities, he is transformed into fatherhood. The traditional gender relations are being projected and subverted in this movie which clearly portrays the reversal of gender roles. Oliver's character in the film contrasts dramatically with that of his son Antony, who is visibly affected by the male essentialism in the narrative. He appears to be a man who disregards his responsibilities and gets caught up in the world of technology in a number of sequences throughout the film, which serves to illustrate his masculinity. Because of his preconceived notions about what it means to be a successful man, Antony had enormous admiration for his future father-in-law, Joseph Lopez, but he was prevented from forming a strong relationship with him because of these preconceptions. The portrayal of Oliver Twist serves as an example in the film of how prejudices can be overcome. In the book *Masculinities: Male Roles and Male Involvement in the promotion of Gender Equality*, the compiler states that:

Men are urged to excel. They are supposed to grow up to be powerful and not to show weakness; they are preferred, valued and encouraged more and prepared better for careers than females. They are expected to be independent, demanding and aggressive (Women's Commission 218).

This is exactly seen in the character of Antony in the movie. He is aggressive towards his own father which shows that he is giving importance to society and status rather than his own family. When the actor denies his script, he put the blame on his innocent father, his virility is clearly shown when he shouts at him. It is the way he expresses his aggressiveness. Men are by nature aggressive and self-centered. If a man does not obtain the desired level of social recognition, it is assumed that he has failed miserably in life. Oliver in every aspect is a man who denies such stereotypical norms of society. Oliver's deliberate choice to speak with a psychologist opens the door to leaving his inert stage of life and to rekindle the lost intimacy with his sons. His family never supported him in going to the therapist instead, they found it embarrassing. His eldest son particularly held him responsible since he felt guilty in front of his future father-in-law, who just happened to watch Oliver attending the psychologist. They even believe that Oliver lost his sanity at some point of time. He never tried to change his naturally feminine traits; instead, he embraced them since he valued empathy and gentleness as virtues. He was in a state of euphoria when his son Antony asked him to compose a letter without disclosing his intentions, which exemplifies his compassion for his son. Antony purposefully made Oliver write the letter for him as he feels Oliver is responsible for his current situation. He failed to understand that the smartphone addiction causes him all the trouble to his mental health as he sees the achievement of others which creates unnecessary fear and ego within him. It also affects the bonding among the family members. The instability and liminality that any gendered identity displays are illustrated through the dilemmas and confusion experienced by Oliver. The self and others are united as it always gets interrupted by the constructed image developed and maintained by the society.

In Indian culture, it is socially expected that the oldest male or female will have more responsibilities. Men who lack this kind of authority are viewed with the lowest respect by society. According to society, when hegemonic masculinity takes

the role of a father, the man has to change as per the societal expectation. The effeminate nature of Oliver Twist is highlighted in this discourse. Most men experience a nature transformation upon becoming a father. *Home* also explores the positive reality that can exist between generations, notably between a father and son. The father repeatedly tries to speak with his son in the movie but is met with his son's apathy. These emotions can be seen in closer facial expressions, which range from grief to hopelessness, as well as in monologues. The routine family relationships that we take for granted, as well as a novel viewpoint on mental health and its importance in a society where it is stigmatized and mocked.

Conclusion

In the society we live in, it is believed that women make the house a home, and men are supposed to be in the public sphere. This construction of gendered spaces and stereotypes propagated should be abandoned. It is everyone irrespective of gender makes a family and a home. Though the resistance against patriarchal standards and quest for identity is a common thread in the taken discourses, the gendered spaces bring the plot down to the sphere of understanding of the struggle that takes place at the home. Both the discourses unanimously present gendering of home and oppression within a family. Every member in a 'home' is living in their own world without having a physical connection. Members of a family who live in the same house are separated from one another, eating meals at the same table but their hearts and thoughts are elsewhere. The women in *Gong Home* and the men in the movie *Home* both through a third space developed their own identities which helped them to regain their positions in the family. This study attempts to demonstrate that, whether male or woman, they are not just constrained to one single identity. Gender equality is defined as society's equal valuation of men and women's similarities and differences, as well as the roles they play. It is built on women and men working together as equal partners in their homes, communities, and societies. They can carry the attributes of both feminine and masculine traits and it creates harmony and happiness within a family. It is every member within the family who makes a house 'home'. As Ralph Waldo Emerson says, "A house is made with walls and beams, A home is built with love and dreams".

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