Chapter 4

The Sexual Pathologies of Conjugality:
Marital Violence in *Agnisaakshi* and *Daraar*

In the previous chapters I have moved towards locating some of the ideological underpinnings of domesticity and the expectations placed on women’s sexuality and modes of behaviour within that sphere. As we have seen, discourses on the “correct” conduct of/within the domestic sphere, and the consequences of not adhering to those norms are available in abundance. Not so easy to locate are representations of what one may call “disruptions” of the domestic space. References to any such disruptions are generally posited as originating outside the domestic sphere. While they impinge on the domestic sphere and disturb the functioning thereof, structurally they are a contingent, not necessary, aspect of domesticity. In other words, left to its own resources, the domestic sphere and its economies would flourish. I am interested in this chapter in disruptions that arise from the very form of the domestic and from the gendered structure of that domestic. If so, what possible resonances would these disruptions have on the whole field of the domestic space and, in addition, how would they affect the subjectivities of women living within that sphere?

I want to treat “marital violence” as one such disruption. The violence that women face
within the confines of the family and in the situation of marriage, mainly at the hands of their husbands, is a fact that is now being made increasingly visible. It has been the experience of the women’s movement that the secluded and sacred position given to the family, the sense of privacy that it nurtured, and the general apathy towards women within the family made it difficult for women to acknowledge violence and almost impossible for them to address it. In fact, this silence is an effect of the kind of power that is inherent in the domestic structure. The concealment is part of the working of the hierarchy within the family, not only for the efficient functioning of the power structure, but, as Michel Foucault, writes, for its acceptability:

Power is tolerable only when a good deal of its workings are concealed. Its efficacy is proportional to the degree of that concealment. For power, secrecy is not an abuse but a necessity; and this is not only for its greater efficacy but also for its acceptance (1980: 181).

Women, as carriers of family pride and honour, are socialized into a sense of responsibility towards the family that forbid them from speaking about the family and its oppression in a public forum. The silence around the issue of domestic violence, then, was not surprising since marriage was, and to a large extent continues to be, seen as the logical and natural culmination of a woman’s life and the family as her only legitimate sphere of activity. Trapped also by their extreme powerlessness and resourcelessness, it was in the interest of women that they keep quiet about the violence done to them. The notions of failure, shame, and the perceived fall in self-esteem that women experience function as surveillance strategies of a society that has already defined the characters of domesticity.
Domestic violence is, I want to point out, characteristic of an everyday sexuality as it is played out in normal, intimate, everyday relationships, the expression of which may range from blatant violent acts to subtle and latent forms. Rather than being characteristic of the individual man who is violent, it points to an attribute inherent in the "peculiar economy of desire and violence" that contextualize sexual relations within the domestic sphere.¹ What I propose to do in this chapter is to engage with the question of sexuality in the context of domestic violence in contemporary India.

One crucial category for analysis in the deployment of sexuality within the sphere of intimate relationships is the conjugal couple. In the Indian context, a study of considerable length on the couple is that of Sudhir Kakar (1989). Kakar's categorization of the couple is based on what he considers the cultural impact on psychosexuality in Indian marriage. It is to be noted at the outset that as with many of Kakar's psychoanalytic formulations which are based on generalizations of the Hindu way of life (what Bhargavi Davar has called "Hindu psychoanalysis"), his formulation of the Indian couple is based on the analysis of Hindu marriage. Recasting the classical Oedipal complex onto the Indian scene, Kakar holds that the fear of female sexuality rules intimate relationships in India: "The mother-whore dichotomy or, in its Hindu version, the mother-whore-partner-in-ritual trichotomy, is crucial for understanding the culture's public and official attitudes

¹ I borrow this phrase from Mary E. John. Studies on sexuality, says John, have generally moved in two trajectories: the radical line of reasoning has seen sex and violence as "inherently coterminous," whereas the liberal positions have sought to transform women from a position of the object to the subject of sex. If the first position strives to eschew sex in favour of asexual relationships which are seen as more egalitarian, the second one considers sex as an isolated and repressed entity. What John sees as necessary, then, is to take stock of the peculiar relation between desire and violence even as we talk about the specificity of sexuality. The attempt then is to look at sexuality as an intimate, subjective, bodily experience, without losing sight of the "wider" network of historically situated social relations and their underlying institutional supports." See "Globalization, Sexuality and the Visual Field: Issues and Non-Issues for Cultural Critique," in Mary E. John and Janaki Nair, eds. A Question of Silence (1998): 369-370.
toward women and wives” (17). The absent sexuality of the mother, the threatening sexuality of the whore, and the sexuality of the partner which is in constant need of control are three aspects that comprise the sexuality of the wife. The relationship of husband and wife is, according to Kakar, defined by a fundamental antagonism nurtured by a society that culturally and officially holds “a general disapproval of the erotic aspect of married life, a disapproval which is not a medieval relic but continues to inform contemporary attitudes” (20).

Kakar casts women as the protagonists in this drama of antagonism. The cultural disapproval of the erotic aspect of married life causes the woman to be driven by the need for intimacy with her husband. Kakar writes:

The desired intimacy, forever subduing the antagonism between husband and wife, inherent in the division of sexes and culturally exaggerated, is the real sasural—the husband’s home—to which a girl looks forward after marriage and which even a married woman keeps on visiting and revisiting in the hidden vaults of her imagination (23).

The fantasy of constituting a “couple” within the wider network of the rest of the extended family, the dominant theme running through women’s lives, actual and fictional, is, says Kakar, generally fated for disappointment. The conjugal relationship of the couple then is ruled by this play of desire and the frustration arising from its unfulfillment.

Kakar’s codification of the couple centralizes desire in the field of an everyday sexuality, but his theorization leaves it an abstract category, the ambivalence of which renders insignificant the conflictual relations of the experiential, cultural and behavioural norms
that men and women bring differentially into conjugality. It obscures the role of power as it defines marital and familial hierarchies. Violence within the conjugal relationship becomes physically invisible and analytically insignificant in this scheme of things, apart from being a symptom of frustrated desire. This is evident in Kakar’s analysis of the two novels—Rajinder Singh Bedi’s *Ek Chadar Maili Si* and Krishna Sobti’s *Mitro Marjani*—that, according to him, have “considerable potential for generalization” about women’s attitude within conjugal relationship. Violence in this scenario becomes the result of the eternal tug-of-war for supremacy that goes on between the husband and the wife, defined more in terms of the wife’s desire to “emerge triumphant,” which she does through taunting the husband “to do his worst as far as physical battering is concerned” (12). In the absence of fulfillment of the desire for intimacy, the woman invites upon herself the violation of her body by her husband which, in Kakar’s understanding, not only denotes the consummation of marriage but the only access to intimacy in conjugality.

Elsewhere Kakar allows that “oppressive inconsistencies” in social institutions do exist but maintains it important to focus on “adaptation rather than conflict,” and chooses to elaborate on “the ‘fit’ between psychological themes, cultural style and social institutions” (1981: 10). Mapping this onto his formulation of the couple, violence becomes an adaptive strategy to maintain conjugality and women accept violence to obtain the fit between their inner self and the social order outside. Thus violence becomes not an issue but an endemic character of the maintenance of a rational social order, and oppression not a question of power and ideology but an insignificant fall-out of the functioning of society.

In a study that critiques the theory and practice of psychoanalysis in the context of
women's mental illness in the Indian setting. Bhargavi Davar has commented that Kakar's text is exemplary of the "perceptual blackout" noticed in other scientific forums as far as feminism and the questions raised from within the women's movement are concerned.²

The pertinence of this comment becomes evident when we consider Kakar's theory of adaptation which completely wipes out the markers of gender, class and caste in the construction of an adaptive identity and morality. Kakar seems to consider immaterial not only the critical trends that have developed within the field of psychoanalysis but the theorization of desire, sexuality and violence that have come up from the experience and activism of the women's movement in India.

The understanding that woman is under threat not only on the streets but also inside the home where she may be harassed, tortured or killed was basic to the campaigns around domestic violence. In India, the campaign was in a major way triggered off by the public protests against dowry harassment and murder. The problem of dowry and the violence that it caused within the sphere of marriage, highlighted the vulnerability of women within homes. The political strategies that developed over a period of time as the campaign gained momentum, involved direct confrontation with society as a whole and more specifically with the community of neighbours and relatives. People were forced to acknowledge public responsibility in a realm which had been, until then, closed off from scrutiny.³

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². For Davar's critique of Kakar's psychoanalysis, see her book *Mental Health of Indian Women: A Feminist Agenda* (1999), pp. 165-176.

³. The attempt to understand the practice of giving and taking dowry which was essentially a feudal custom throw up two major theoretical positions which had important repercussions in rethinking family and marriage. The first of these positions saw dowry as part of a larger influence of capitalist economy on a semi-feudal society. Thus, the exploitation of women was seen as a part of the total exploitation of men and women by the feudal bourgeois system which rules our country (Randive, 1986). The taking of dowry was seen as part of a process of accumulation of wealth, which then set up an unequal power relationship
The discussions around dowry harassment enabled critiques of the sanctity of marriage which arose from different positions that saw it 1) as a way of reducing the family’s economic liability, 2) as a method of the regulation of sexuality of both men and women, and 3) as a custom imposed by the society whereby the society discarded its responsibility towards its women and left them to their fate. One of the important outcomes of the campaign against dowry and the anti-rape campaign which resulted in the reworking of the rape law was the realization of the need to acknowledge the existence of an everyday violence, both latent and manifest, within the sphere of the domestic. This led to the problematization of other forms of domestic violence. Thus wife-beating, which was hitherto considered more or less as a natural part of the husband-wife relationship, was addressed as an act of violence against a woman’s body and being. Wife-beating was not visible as a “hard fact” since it was hidden away among the many layers of patriarchy, romanticism, sexuality and the ideology of the private that defined intimate relationships between husband and wife. This made it a difficult terrain to venture into.

Addressing domestic violence as issue-specific was one way of bringing it into the public forum of discussion and action. Politicizing violence and, through it, the private sphere, made it part of a public sphere of the State and state formation as well. The critique of violence did not constrain itself to the critique of the family. It addressed, at least in some contexts, the State directly by centralizing its role in perpetuating the ideology of the family through, for instance, women’s property rights. One significant example is

between the families of the bride and the groom, and between the woman and her husband (Mies, 1986). This, in essence, was the economic explanation for dowry. The second theoretical position saw the practice of dowry as a bribe to hand over the responsibility of a grown up daughter to another family, thereby setting up a power structure which, in many cases, eternally places the woman and her family at a receiving end of injustices (Kishwar, 1986). Both these positions, to a certain extent, aided in disturbing the age-old presumption of marriage as an unproblematic and most important natural event in a woman’s life, and highlighted the potential of oppression within the relationship.
the experience of the Bodhgaya land struggle in Bihar. The close affiliation of the patriarchal institutions of the State and the family was addressed by landless women in Bodhgaya from within the struggle for ownership of land. The Chhatra Yuva Sangharsh Vahini (CYSV) which was formed to organize landless peasants in Bodhgaya found itself having to address the "women's question," especially that of domestic violence. CYSV's women's camps became the platform for active discussion around issues of women's subjection to injustice and discrimination both within the family and the community, the social origins of their subordination, degradation and dependence, and the family's role in creating and maintaining ideologies and structures of subordination by the systematic resistance to involving women in decision-making. The State was considered as the main source of violence against women since it ideologically supported the violence committed against women both within the family and in the workplace, and did little to restructure relations of authority in the family. In an article dealing with women's participation in the Bodhgaya land struggle, Govind Kelkar and Chetna Gala summarize the crucial questions that arose from these discussions: "What had the state done to transform its class, caste and gender-based social relations? Had it changed its legal norms for possessional rights of men over women, or its rules of legitimacy of offspring, all of which reduced women to the level of mere objects?" (1990: 97).

With this background, a consensus was formed which insisted on the importance of ownership of property, in this case agricultural land, by women. For a poor peasant woman, access to land meant a reduced risk of absolute poverty not only for her but for her family as well since the running of the household was always the woman's responsibility. Further, owning land meant a substantial rise in the woman's social
position and status and made her less vulnerable to violence since her status of total dependency also changed. Women pressurized the State to issue at least 50% of the land deeds separately in the names of women. This idea was strongly resisted by the State officials in charge of distributing land, but women were united in their demand.4

The explication of domestic violence either as issue-specific, as in the campaign against dowry harassment or wife-beating, or through broader frameworks of people's movements, as in the Bodhgaya land struggle, pointed to the structural aspects of violence in patriarchal contexts. The awkwardness of stepping into a very personal and private realm was not difficult to overcome, as the experience of the women's movement showed, once the extent and intensity of violence was exposed, though the strategies of doing so were not easily formulated. This complexity speaks volumes about the hold that domestic ideology has over societal relations and over oppressed women themselves. The inability or the lack of space to speak about violence made it seem as if violence was a freak incident in the lives of some unfortunate women. This silence around the issue was broken and a space for articulating the trauma of violence was created not only through activism but through autobiographical writing also. Women from within the movement started writing about their experiences of violence. Flavia Agnes, a feminist lawyer who works primarily with women enduring violence, writes in her remarkable and very significant book, My Story... Our Story of Rebuilding Broken Lives that the writing of the book "reaffirmed the fact that there is nothing so 'personal' or 'individual' about the experiences of getting beaten," and that the universality of the experience was not realized.

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4. The Bodhgaya land struggle is one of the many examples of people's movements which addressed women's problems directly, but is unique in the centrality given to domestic violence and the State's role in directly or indirectly perpetuating it. For a historical account of other movements and women's participation and articulation of women's issues within them, see Ilina Sen, A Space within the Struggle (1990).
since women’s lips were sealed (1990: 83). Flavia’s book has become one of the landmarks in the writings around the issue of domestic violence not only for its touching personal narrative of a woman’s struggle to survive, and surpass, a violent marriage but for its insightful analysis of violence itself and for the strategies of dealing with it. Flavia’s narration deals with women’s sense of humiliation in being beaten up, the fear of violence and for the children’s and one’s own well being, the confusion arising from the desire to leave the marriage and the internalized values that prompted one to endure it, and the sense of dejection when no one—neighbours, police, priests, doctors, counsellors, courts—offered to intervene. For Flavia, it was work within the context of the women’s movement, which proffered a space for sharing experiences with other battered women that finally gave “the confidence to emerge from the psychological paralysis [she] had been trapped in all these years because of a feeling of guilt and shame.” This confidence also helped, writes Flavia, to look at violence as “not just a ‘personal’ problem or a psychological ‘behavioural’ problem but a far more complex ‘social’ problem” (37). The writing of the book and its reception, especially by women in similar situations, and the work in the Women’s Centre, Bombay, which Flavia helped establish in 1981 to provide support to battered women enables her to draw on the historicity of the experiences of violence that women from different social backgrounds undergo, and point to the structural aspect of violence embedded in the institutions of marriage and family and the social status of women. This historicity in addressing

5. Flavia examines “experience” as an analytical category which has been de-valued over the years. She writes: “A woman who was battered or going through a divorce had the scope to channelize her energies towards creating a space for other women by sharing experiences or working in a centre. ‘Today the same experience would disqualify her as she would either be ‘too preoccupied’ with her own problems or ‘not be detached’ enough” (81). If the earlier years of the women’s movement had strived hard to break the concepts of ‘social work,’ they are being re-established now. This, says Flavia, sets up a hierarchy of rescuers over victims. What Flavia is pointing to, it seems to me, is that the social worker/victim distinction will create a categorization of women into those who are oppressed and those who are not, which will, in effect, make oppression not systemic but incidental.
violence squarely places the State and its law-making agencies in the position, if not of the perpetrator, at least of abettor, and seeks redressal through legal measures. She sees the legal system as “an important force that a battered woman has to reckon with” and considers the engagement with it important in dealing with violence. This engagement, Flavia says, need not be confined to the court rooms, but should also mean “understanding its limitations, finding the loop holes, demystifying it and making it more accessible” (83).

Drawing on her experience of working with the Women’s Centre, Flavia critically examines the various strategies that have been evolved by the women’s movement for exposing domestic violence and for dealing with it. Her major critique of the women’s movement is that it has not been possible to evolve any real alternative to the biological family, which points also to the failure to create support for a woman within her own community and to make the man accountable for his actions in his neighbourhood or work place. In other words, this would mean that although the structural aspect of violence has been, in some ways, acknowledged, there has been no structural solutions to it.

One other line of inquiry following from the experience of activism in the women’s movement has tried to look at violence as symptomatic of the sexuality of everyday life. In her article, “On Bodily Love and Hurt,” based on the experiences of working with battered women at Snehidhi, Chennai, V. Geetha tries to examine this sexuality for what it says about men who hurt women (1998). Geetha critiques much of Indian activism and scholarship around the issue of violence for almost always considering violence as an aspect of social structuring—either of kinship, caste, class or community, which has,
according to her led to a side-lining of the question of sexuality. She makes clear her inclination toward theories from western feminism which have attempted to account for the intentionality of violence. According to Geetha, violence represents a point of intersection, of trajectories of hurt, touch, love, fear, hunger and shame. It seemed to inhere as much in the grime of everyday life, in habitual tone, gesture and touch, as it did in the particular or determined act of violence. In short, violence and battering existed as inalienable aspects of conjugal love, markers of the conjugal bond (308).

Conjugal love, and this is Geetha's central argument, is defined by the masculinity of the husband, and violence is a definitional trait of masculinity. Geetha calls for a radical critique of the patriarchal family and underlines the need to deconstruct heterosexuality itself. Violence is the form assumed by sexual love in a conjugal context. In heterosexual conjugality, masculinity plays itself out through a complex of acts and statements, which has to do with loving and controlling, desiring as well as hurting, relishing and possessing the body of the wife. "Suspicion and sexual love, possession and desire, authority and affection: by exhibiting these traits in tandem and often acting on them, husbands spoke and enacted a language of love which was also, simultaneously, a language of terror" (310). Suspicion and possession are seen as expressions of sexual love and desire which marks the wife's body as erotic. Authority is seen as affection for this erotic. Geetha seems to suggest a complex bind between the erotic and violence. Suspicion and

6. Referring to the writings of feminists like Catherine MacKinnon, Adrienne Rich, Andrea Dworkin, Kate Millett, Mary Daly and Susan Brownmiller, Geetha holds that this corpus is invaluable because "it forces masculine behaviour, thought and action into the public realm in an insistent sort of way, and is fearless in its conviction that while patriarchy is a complex and uneven structure which implicates men and women in its workings, it yet allows, at every level, the routine and habitual violation of the female body" (309).
possession arise from the possibility of violation of the wife's body. The more violatable the woman's body, the more erotic it is. This in turn increases suspicious and possessive behaviour which might act itself out as violence.

The eroticization of the woman's body and the masculine reaction to it, characterized by suspicion, possession and authority, serve to induce a sense of guilt in women, since the onus of safeguarding the honour of the family is with women. This sense of guilt serves as a surveillance strategy and makes them silent about the violence they may have to undergo, and ensures that they remain committed to the ideology of the family. In a sense, this surveillance itself rescinds the claims of the patriarchal family to its naturalness and universality since "if it needs to be shored up by active acts of surveillance, then, obviously, it conceals at its very core an illegitimacy, a fiction, which, as it happens, has writ itself large . . . on the substantiality of the female body" (315).

Geetha's critique of heterosexuality and the monogamous patriarchal family, one might expect, will point towards a structural understanding of violence. But the instances of violence that she analyzes give causes—like suspicion, sexual jealousy, etc.—which make violence incidental rather than structural. If for Sudhir Kakar conjugality rested on the negation of the erotic, for Geetha it seems to be completely defined by an erotic which has the woman's body as the location and the man as the primary actor. Violence seems to arise only out of the incontinence of this erotic. The erotics of heterosexuality is not the only problem that is inherent in the patriarchal family. Structural aspects of kinship, caste, class and community—precisely those that Geetha critiques in feminist activism and scholarship—have a significant role in the formation and consolidation of
masculinities. A structural understanding of violence will have to take into consideration the social degradation, dependence structure, proprietorial rights that men hold over women, their economic and social conditions, and so on, all of which are made insignificant by Geetha's overarching theory of the violence of masculinity.

What is it that makes a woman remain in a violent relationship even after repeated threats to her person and her life? This question, which still continues to arise, moves the field of inquiry into the mental aspects and effects of violence on women. Most often, the interventions made, even by the women's movement, remained at an individual level, tackling cases in isolation. At a theoretical level too, the understanding of domestic violence remained in need of a good deal more clarity. Usually, the attempt was to locate violence within the psychological make-up of the man, or in the social relations that he maintained. Drunkenness, poverty, influence of friends, and the woman's own character were commonly seen as the cause for violence. The number of women who were willing to seek professional and legal help has increased, and so have the number of shelters for battered women and other systems of support. The theoretical rigidity around the concepts of conjugal relationships, marriage and family has been questioned and alternative life-styles suggested. Still, by and large, the definition of domestic violence remains confined to physical violence, with a comparatively feebler attempt at dealing with mental violence and harassment in general. It has been even more difficult to arrive at conceptual clarity in terms of understanding the "pathology of domesticity" in supposedly normal, everyday relationships.

The couple as a political category forms the centre of the shift from a joint family
structure to that of the nuclear family. This shift is one of the distinct features of the organization of the private in capitalist societies. Contract theorists like Rousseau consider the organization of society through a series of social contracts as the first step towards the consolidation of modern civil society. In this mode, paternal power and contractual freedom are placed in an oppositional relationship and the new social order of contractual relationships is put in place after the overthrow of paternal power. This realm of social contracts is logically possible, as Carol Pateman argues, only with a prior sexual contract (1988). The sexual contract is not a contractual agreement between the man and the woman who would form the couple, but between men who would all agree to each other’s right to a space of sovereignty. The couple then becomes the “political subject” that would organize the modern state free from despotism, by the rearrangement of societal relationships through the transition from the rule of the father to the rule of brothers.

This transition is marked in the change-over from the structure of a “clan” to that of a nuclear family, and is, as elaborated by Hegel, befitting the ethical life of the modern state. In India, the transition from the feudal joint family to the nuclear family that has the couple at its centre is in no way a complete phenomenon. As yet, the modern state in India remains one among several patriarchal authorities. The authority of the State is in constant conflict with that of the patriarchal feudal family. The couple, then, is not a completely formed idea, but an idea in flux, constantly being imagined through various ideological institutions. These imaginings of the couple are importantly underpinned by the various articulations of the sexual politics of desire and violence.

The shifts in the formation of the couple as a political category is better pursued in the
field of the visual image, specifically that of cinema. Madhava Prasad, citing Raymond Bellour, says that the cinema, emerging in the historical space of the modern, is committed to "the endless reproduction of the couple, in narratives that bring about or restore the conjugal scene" (1998: 95). Since the State in India remains in a structure of constant conflict with the authority of the patriarchal feudal family, and the feudal family itself in a state of flux marking a transition to the nuclear family structure, the reproduction of the couple and the restoring of the conjugal scene in Indian cinema are marked by narratives that are constantly pulled into an embedded authority and power of a feudal and a modern patriarchy. As Prasad indicates, "in the dominant filmic narrative the drive towards the affirmation of conjugality is reined in by the restoration of the clan to its position of splendour and power; the couple, in other words, is repeatedly reabsorbed into the parental patriarchal family and is committed to its maintenance" (95).

The dominant textual form of the popular Hindi cinema was the feudal family romance. Consolidated in the 1950s, this form enjoyed pre-eminence until the 1970s. It was also the major form that had at its centre the romantic couple. State or the law enforcing

7. The relationship between visual representation and questions of sexuality has long been established. Cinema, in many ways, constitutes the sexuality of the spectator through the chanelling of libidinal energy by the management of her/his perceptive and auditory senses. The particularities of this management was then addressed by Laura Mulvey in her famous article "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" where, using Lacanian psychoanalysis, she tried to establish that the active male spectator and the passive image which objectifies the female body replays the established equations of social constructions of gender (1989). Mulvey's article opened up a considerable interest in studying the relationship between the visual image, modes of representation, and the gendered spectator. What is important here is that female sexuality was seen as a major point of focus in feminist film criticism and theory.

8. For a history and evolution of the feudal family romance, see Madhava Prasad (1998): 30-31. Taking off from the Parsi theatre which popularised the "romance" genre, Hindi cinema adapted it to include various characteristic elements like a version of the romantic narrative, a comedy track, a number of song sequences, as well as the repeated use of familiar character types. The feudal family romance also gave space to discussions of topical issues, and narrative closure usually consisted of the restoration of a threatened moral/social order by the hero. Prasad cautions that the form "should not be thought of as being necessarily and completely a bearer of feudal values, even though the overall narrative form is derived from romances of the feudal era" (31).
agencies mostly came secondary, since narrative resolution mainly rested with “the traditionally given authority of the exemplary subject(s) of the narrative”, which quite often made agents of modern law comically redundant. The tale of romantic love, embedded as it is in the feudal family romance, also looked for resolution within the granted space of the feudal family. In the late eighties, a group of films appeared, beginning probably with the remarkable success of the film Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak (Mansoor Khan, 1988), where some of the formal characteristics of the feudal family romance was revived. The narrative in these kinds of films revolved around the couple’s love being threatened by the disapproval of, and often the enmity between, both the families. But, love always triumphed, be it with the subsequent approval of the families or with their disapproval, or be it with the couple being able to build a life together or die in the end.

In the mid-nineties, Hindi Cinema saw an increase in the number of films based on the love story genre. The difference in the telling of the story was that these films thematised the joint family structure and emphasized the need to uphold the tradition that made an individual’s needs and desires secondary to that of the joint family. The family’s honour and happiness were the most important and individual aspirations were only secondary. One could say that the film Hum Aapke Hain Kaun? (Sooraj Bharjatya, 1994) in some ways pointed to the departure from the eighties love story which thematised the lovers’ need and attempts to overcome the family that threatened to disrupt their dreams. Hum Aapke Hain Kaun, and later films like Dilwale Dulhaniya Le Jayenge (Aditya Chopra, 1995).
1995) upheld the lovers' readiness to sacrifice their love for the sake of the family, and this sacrifice was rewarded, in the resolution of the films, by the family realising their sacrifice and setting right the wrong it might have done by parting the lovers. Both the above mentioned films ran to full houses and went on to become huge box-office successes.

The pattern of *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* and *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge* has in some ways set the form of the staple Hindi cinema of the nineties. The hit formula of the nineties films had love as the main narrative theme, the lovers and their families as citizen-subjects who have a direct claim to the nation and its modernity,\(^\text{11}\) sets and scenes recalling an affluent feudal structure also clearly marked by modernity, an almost singular attention given to songs and their picturisation (probably also because of the parallel growth in the music video market and the prominence given to them on television).

Alongside the tremendous commercial success of these films, there were films which centred around the conjugal couple. Here too, the couple was defined within a feudal/rural set up, though these films took them away from this set up and placed them in an urban, conjugal space. I have in mind films like *Roja* (Mani Ratnam, 1992) and *Bombay* (Mani Ratnam, 1995). Here too, nation was the primary preoccupation and any threat to the nation was also a threat to the couple. The configuration of the tension that would threaten the couple in films like *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun* or *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, a threat that would come from a familial space was here recast with threats of a "political"

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\(^{11}\) *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge*, as opposed to *Hum Aapke Hain Kaun*, set up the nation as one of the central preoccupation of the love story. The desi-pardesi conflict, the desi as the villain and the pardesi (the NRI, western brought-up, yet "essentially" Indian) hero as the more eligible nationalist, was centred around the question of who has a better claim over the heroine, and hence the nation. A more recent film, *Pardes* (Subhash Ghai, 1997), again explored a similar theme, where the woman protagonist was specifically selected as the pardesi hero's wife for the purpose of "taking India to the US."
nature, of class, community, or terrorism, issues in the present context occupying national attention as factors that might disrupt the very existence of the nation.

In all the films mentioned above the space of the romantic or the conjugal couple is invaded by a threat that is located on the outside. What these films did not do is to explore the space of the everyday existence of the couple. It is here that the appearance of a group of films that were produced simultaneously with the above mentioned general trends in Hindi cinema, all in some ways indebted to the Hollywood film *Sleeping with the Enemy* (Joseph Ruben, 1991), become significant. These films thematized the threatened space of the conjugal couple, the threat here stemming from the peculiar economy of desire and violence I mentioned before that characterize intimate relationships as they are lived on an everyday basis. The central theme of these films is the violence that the husband unleashes on his wife, the terror of that violence as it is felt by the wife and her attempt to escape that violence. In effect, these films tried to grapple with the question of sexuality in the context of an everyday violence.

The first of this group of films was *Agnisaakshi* (Parto Ghosh, 1994). *Agnisaakshi* had a conventional trade record, though it managed to attract some attention from the critical quarters. This film was soon followed by two more films of the same theme—*Daraar* (Abbas-Mustan, 1997), a more faithful though “Indianized” version of *Sleeping with the Enemy*, and *Yaraana* (David Dhawan, 1995). Both the later films bombed at the box-office and hardly generated much interest in conventional film criticism.

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13. The only reference to these films as a group that I have found is Shoma A. Chatterji’s brief treatment in the section “Manic Obsession within Marriage” of her book *Subject: Cinema; Object: Woman* (1998). Attributing the three successive remakes to the adherence of the industry to “formulas,” Chatterji also blames the “aging” actors for the failure of these films in the box-office.
Analysing feminist influence on the media, Wendy Kozol writes: "When the media bring the "private" into public discourse by representing family problems as in popular Hollywood movies such as *Sleeping with the Enemy*, the narrative frame typically conforms to cultural expectations of domesticity instead of offering a subversive point of view" (1995). I want to look at these films not in search for any specific subversive point of view that they may be offering, but to highlight the questions that they raise, both through the treatment of the story and through the representation of characters and of violence itself. These films, though strictly adhering to the conventions of the commercial Hindi cinema, nevertheless raise issues that are key to the theorization of domestic violence and thus to the question of sexuality itself—of loving and hurting, of desiring and destroying, of relishing and possessing. The husbands in these films, in fact, spoke and enacted what V. Geetha calls a language of love which was also, simultaneously, a language of terror (1998:310). This complex relationship between love and terror, between desire and violence, is, as I intend to show, important in understanding the nature of the domestic sphere which is defined by its own norms of privacy and normalcy, and also demands women to remain in a constant state of negotiation with the rules of the domestic sphere. What the films do, in their own restricted and obviously conformative mode of articulation, is to make a feeble yet significant pointer to the fact that there can be a way out of this state of constant negotiation.

Despite the particular twists in the plots and differences in the treatment of the subject (which I will be dealing with later), the three films follow a general theme. All three films, as in the original film *Sleeping with the Enemy*, show at close quarters the life of
a husband and wife in an isolated existence, both spatially and socially. I will be dealing here with two of the three films, *Agnisaakshi* and *Daraar*. The husband is a "normal," hard-working, rich man who loves his wife to distraction. It is only at a slow tempo and subtle ways that the violence involved in the relationship becomes evident. The visual representation of violence involves both blatant acts like beating, wounding, and sexual aggression, and more subtle forms of social isolation, mental torture through adherence to obsessive norms of cleanliness, order, jealous reaction to outside associations and so on. After a period of such terrorized existence, the wife runs away from the husband who assumes that she is dead. She picks up the thread of her life at a different locality, under another name, almost like a new person. Here she meets another man, who, unlike the husband, is genuinely caring and loving. At the brink of a new life with this man, the existence of the wife is discovered by the husband, and he resumes his efforts to bring her back to him. The rest of the film again deals with the husband terrorising the wife's life, this time magnified by the fact that she has almost reached "freedom". The film ends with the husband dead, and the wife hopeful of a new and happier life with the other man.

A "normal" loving husband. A beautiful, submissive wife. A rich, upper middle-class, urban life-style. Where does violence figure in this scenario? In *Daraar*, for example, violence surfaces through 1) the husband's obsession with order and neatness, and 2) the depiction of the husband's jealousy. This obsession is set in place very early in the marriage. The towels in the bathroom have to be hung just so, the bottles in the kitchen shelf have to be arranged at a particular angle with labels synchronized. The effect of
this obsession on the wife is nervousness which compels her to be on the guard all the
time. The effect of his jealousy and possessiveness is even more terrorizing. She is
forbidden from talking to other men, from saying anything nice about other people, or
even from standing on the balcony since that would be an invitation to other men.

The depiction of the obsessive sense of order and neatness and the husband's (Vikram)
unceasing efforts at reinforcing it, in Daraar, lays out the ground for portraying him as
not wholly rational. In fact, by the time we see him in his jealous rage he is completely
pathologized. This pathology is reinforced when his rage turns from violence against
his wife to the murder of the doctor who, he thinks, is having an affair with his wife.
Interestingly, it is the killing of the doctor that finally makes up the wife’s (Priya) mind
to leave the husband.

What happens in Daraar, then, is the pathologizing of the husband and thereby his
violence. He is given all the characteristics of a psychotic—irrational jealousy,
possessiveness, manic-obsessive tendencies. In a sense, his violence is endorsed as part
of an irrationality that he has no real control over. The violence that he unleashes,
including at least two more murders, after he traces his run-away wife is symptomatic of
a mind gone completely insane. What the film does then is to place violence within a
realm of pathology that seems far removed from “normal” healthy relationships. And
the understanding, caring lover—the man with whom the wife is about to build a new
life—is posited as the representative of good, rational, real domestic life.

In Agnisaakshi, the husband’s (Vishwanath) violence is given a concrete reason—a
traumatic childhood. The couple exist in a completely closed-off world. Even the
wife’s (Madhu) father is not allowed to visit. The conjugal space is closed-off not because Vishwanath is jealous of his wife’s relations, but because it is his belief that the couple is under threat in the outside world. This is a lesson from his childhood, since both his parents broke out of their conjugal space and went with other partners, leaving him an orphan. Thus, it is the sexual excesses of the outside world that Vishwanath wants to keep away from. Vishwanath’s violence, mostly, is more subtle when compared to Vikram’s. The only scene of blatant violence is when he finds his wife practising dance at home. The use of the body for sensual purposes is, according to him, only for the “natchwalis” who were in many ways responsible for the disruption of his childhood domesticity.

Vishwanath does not take recourse to blatant violence, unlike Vikram, when he traces Madhu, now living an almost another new life as Shubhangi and already married to Suraj. Instead, he calmly goes around trying to convince Suraj and his family that Shubhangi is his wife. He is very sure of his rights over his wife. Here again, Vishwanath is the lone crusader against the bad outside world, trying to prevent the imminent disruption of his domestic world.

Violence against the wife, in Agnisaakshi, is then presented as the only weapon of a man wronged by the whole outside world. We are told that Vishwanath’s growth from the orphaned boy to the businessman dabbling in millions is made possible solely by his strength of will and hard work. The acquisition of a beautiful wife also seems to be part of acquiring a certain position in society. After having accomplished this, he will now

14. Vishwanath marries Madhu, we are told, because Madhu’s father (Alok Nath) had run into loss in business and owed money to Vishwanath. In place of the money, Madhu was married off to him.
go to any extent to protect his world from the destroying hands of the outside world.\footnote{15} His violence against Madhu is part of this scheme of things. And so, unlike Vikram, he is not pulled into a blind rage when he finds Madhu again, married to Suraj. Instead, he is baffled, and can only insist on his love for her and make her go back with him. Whereas Vikram is constantly in doubt of Priya's love for him, Madhu's love seems to be hardly a concern for Vishwanath, since for him, the only thing that matters is his own love for her. So also, if Vikram works on "if you are not mine, then I won't let you live" mode, Vishwanath will systematically close down Madhu's avenues of escape and go to any extent to prove that Madhu and Shubhangi are the same person.

So, what is the picture of violence that we retrieve from these two films? 1) Violence is used by men who are "not wholly right," who, for one reason or the other, are threatened by an outside space which, they fear, might encroach upon their lives at any point. Violence definitely is not given as part of a larger working of men's and women's interaction within the sphere of marriage and domesticity. It definitely is not "natural." In fact, it is deviant, especially when juxtaposed with Priya/Madhu's second relationship with Raj/Suraj. Raj and Suraj are the "normal" men, who will offer Priya/Madhu a normal, happy conjugal life. 2) This violence is placed within a completely closed-off sphere. Both Vishwanath and Vikram have no family, no friends, no roots, so to speak. We know nothing about Vikram's family, and Vishwanath, as I have said, is foresaken by his parents and his history is rooted in resentment for his deviant family. Priya has a blind mother and Madhu, an inadequate father. It is only the other men, Raj and Suraj,

\footnote{15}In one scene, Vishwanath walks into a birthday party in his neighbour's house and shoots down all the loud-speakers. He calmly tells the shocked guests to stop all the noise since it is affecting his sleep. For Vishwanath, this is a natural thing to do since no one has the right to encroach upon the serenity of his space, not even voices.
who are placed firmly within “normal” families. And it is only these men, the narrative shows, who can in turn reproduce “normal” domesticity. Here again, the conjugal space is only fully functional when subsumed into a larger patriarchal and feudal structure.

3) The conjugal space that allows this violence is pervaded with not only the man’s psychopathic situation. The other major threat that looms large over this space is the woman’s sexuality. In fact, the man’s situation is in some sense produced by the fear of this sexuality. And hence, violence is also a surveillance strategy for reining in this sexuality. Let me explain.

Vikram’s jealousy is in many ways defined by Priya’s beauty. And this beauty is threatening to him since it is available to other men for appreciation as well. In one scene, Priya is hauled inside the house from the balcony after a friend casually mentions to Vikram that she is a beautiful woman. She is now confined totally inside the house. Jealousy, and the suspicion that arises from it as a matter of routine is in some sense a manifestation of the erotic itself. In the context of the work done with battered women, V. Geetha writes: “Often, we found that suspicion was an exhibition of sexual love. . . . It was as if it cajoled into existence a particular vision of the erotic: the more violatable the wife’s body, the more the enhancement of conjugal excitement and pleasure” (1998: 310).

In *Agnisaakshi*, Vishwanath flies into a rage when he finds Madhu dancing. Saying that the sound of anklets is anathema to him, he accuses her of trying to fall into the trap of sexual invitation which is what dancing connotes to him. The wife is then set up in an

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16. Suraj’s is a full family with father, mother, brother and his fiancée, all of them concerned with the safety of the new bahu, Shubhangi (Madhu). Raj’s only relative shown in the film is his mother. Nevertheless, his is a really feudal set up, with the valet-friend-servant Harichand, and several other servant figures who are almost family.
oppositional terrain from the "natchwali," who is, for him, the symbol of all immorality that can break the bounds of correct domestic relationships. He punishes her by beating her with a belt. After having punished her, and this is for me one of the most horrying scenes in the film, he forces sex on her, heedless of her protest. In a fundamental level, this is his way of assuring the power that he has over her body and the use of it. This is the same body that he is shown adorning, with jewellery and make-up, beautifying it. The violence and the cherishing that he does to the wife's body is also the assurance to himself that what the wife's body can offer is his by rights. In the film, this claim is not made overtly, but is evident in the fact that Vishwanath proclaims his love for his wife several times, though not even once does Madhu do so or Vishwanath expect her to do so. Hence the articulation of desire is available to him whereas she is denied of desire itself by not having the choice to express her sexual likes and dislikes.

How do the women react to this violence? Both Priya and Madhu run away seizing a chance accident as their opportunity. Until then, they are unable to even raise their voices against the violence. Completely imprisoned within the house, there is no one to protest to, no access to any services. Priya goes away with her mother to Simla, where she starts working and slowly sets up a new life. In Madhu's case, there is a complete transformation. She takes on a new identity as Shubhangi, a new persona as a dancer who conducts stage shows—a complete reversal from what Vishwanath has taught her to be. It is only quite a while later in the film that we even realize that Madhu and Shubhangi are the same person.

The only time that the wife confronts the husband directly is when she is driven into a corner by him after he traces her. Priya is badly beaten up and Vikram smashes her face
into a glass pane, cutting it seriously. He then taunts her by saying that now that her beauty is ruined, she will have no one except him to turn to, she will no longer be a "woman." This is the point where she retaliates for the first time, attacking him. More than the physical attack it is her words that seem to have a stronger effect on him. She questions the very root of his masculinity which makes him use violence against her for imaginary offences. She tells him that if he had been open to her dignity as a woman, if he had seen that woman also gets wounded, bleeds, hurts, she would have given him her life. But his violence makes him not a man, but an emasculated person, a naamard. This is a powerful word not only in the context of the film, but in the context of understanding violence also. A masculinity that naturalizes the use of violence is deflated of that ego.

Whereas Priya focuses on the masculinity of Vikram as a point of retaliation, Madhu, after having decided to go back to Vishwanath in order to save Suraj and his family from more trouble, confronts him on the phone. Here, instead of a direct attack on his masculinity, she tells him that even if she is going back with him, it is only her physical body that will be accessible to him. She is denying him her femininity, her sexuality which, she says, she will leave with a "real man," Suraj.

Before dealing with the resolutions that the films offer, let me examine the pathological explanations that the films offer for violence itself and for Vikram and Vishwanath as individual men. Psychology looks at violence in terms of the construct of "aggression." 17

17 For an insightful critique of the definition of violence in psychological terms see Bhargavi Davar (1999): 98-121. Ethological theories of violence are elucidations of aggression in terms of the "warrior instinct" of the original homo sapiens, struggling for survival in the food gathering and hunting societies. "Dominance," for these theories, is an ethological construct, where some individuals of groups take over leadership roles for the survival of the group. These explanations, argues Davar, see violence as a clinical
Most studies have understood aggression in terms of “the quality of the home environment, negative parenting, having a history of childhood mental illness, being brought up in an environment of violence, not learning the socially appropriate cues, sub-normality, maternal depression, childhood (sexual) abuse, sexual precocity and promiscuousness” (Davar, 1999: 112). In these clinical approaches, the violent man is seen as someone who deserves our pity. Feminists, on the other hand, have been extremely skeptical of the biological and ethological explanations. The slowly unfolding data on the prevalence of domestic violence makes one agree with Kaufman, Jr., when he says that when “behaviour is that widespread you can’t very well call it pathology unless you want to say that the whole perpetrator class is sick”18. What the pathologizing of domestic violence does is to overlook the intentionality and recurrence of the violence. It also does not take into consideration the fact that, for women, violence is not an aberration, but a pervasive fact to which all of them are vulnerable. From this point of view, then, violence is criminal behaviour which needs to be freed of its clinical explanations and analyzed in social and political contexts of power and dominance.

What both Agnisaakshi and Daraar do is to make domestic violence into an exceptional phenomenon and the violent men aberrant. This is reinforced by the resolutions of the films. In Agnisaakshi, all attempts to fool Vishwanath into believing that Madhu is really dead, that Shubhangi is another woman, fail. In the last scene, Vishwanath shoots

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himself, but not before he makes it clear that he is the victim of a selfish and unkind world: “My father left me for another woman, is it my fault? My mother married again and went away, is it my fault? Now my wife has also married another man, is it my fault?” His death then is a renouncing of a world not fit to be lived in. The closing shot captures Suraj and Shubhangi around the dying Vishwanath, his head resting on Shubhangi’s lap. At no point in the film does the narrative require the viewer to lose sympathy for Vishwanath. In fact, Agnisaakshi is one film where it is extremely difficult to identify completely with the agony of any one character. We are equally caught in Madhu/Shubhangi’s terror, Suraj’s helplessness, and Vishwanath’s trauma.

Daraar, on the other hand does not place us in so intense a dilemma. It is easier to see Vikram as a mad man who is cruel and ruthless. But this madness is the explanation for his violence also. And it is only in the relationship with his wife that he is defined mad. Chasing Priya down a railway track, his foot gets caught in a junction. The terrorized, wounded, bleeding Priya does not make use of this moment to escape into safety. Instead she tries to release his foot and save him from being hit by the train. Upto the last possible minute, Vikram terrorizes her when he catches her and mutters, “now I shall release you from all misery.” It could well have been a murder and suicide in one, but in the only redeeming act that Vikram is shown doing in the film, he pushes her aside and lets himself be overrun by the train.

The death of the deviant husbands, the films seem to suggest, is the death of violence itself, since the women are now left with “normal” families which will ensure them a sphere of de-pathologized domesticity. The terrifying space of the conjugal couple, as I
suggested earlier, is now subsumed into the larger feudal structure. At a literal level, this is a going back of the nuclear family into that of a joint family. But more than that, it seems to connote the re-establishment of a domesticity that is the "legitimate" sphere of the control of the excesses in the relationship between the couple—a domesticity that will rein in the violence of an individualized pathology.
Conclusion

The effort in this thesis has been to examine the redeployment and circulation of refurbished ideas about the family, the domestic sphere and the private domain in the 1990s India. I have traced the specific form of these institutions through the postcolonial Indian history and attempted an analysis of the structure of the private domain in a) the colonial, b) the nationalist and c) the post-independence periods. The women’s movement of the 1970s and the 80s, I have suggested, critically addressed these formations in a series of initiatives centred around questions of sexual and domestic violence, development and modernity. Questions of the family and the private sphere have reappeared significantly in the 1990s. My thesis has been that these concerns have engaged with the issues raised the women’s movement, but the rearticulations of these concerns have deflected analysis away from the political input and critical charge of the movement, and rechannelized them into an endorsement of the Indian family. In the body of the thesis I have explored some of these rearticulations in detail through an analysis of three concepts: domesticity, conjugality and privacy.

In effect, I have been looking at three models of the domestic sphere. And these three models are based on three kinds of characterizations of women. The way in which the Rameezabee rape trial took place and the representation of Phoolan Devi in the film
epitomize them as the antitheses to the rightful occupants of the realm of the private that is designated as the "respectable." This particular realm of the private, I have argued, is based on the exclusion of certain women, depending on the ways in which their sexuality is seen as controllable. Thus, Rameez’s and Phoolan’s sexuality, caste, class and life history portray them as outside the realm of the respectable. In Rameez’s case, this reading of what is respectable is used to deny the crime of rape committed on her. She is not seen as an individual with a right to demand the protection of the State. As for Phoolan, her insistence on protection of her right to privacy, I have argued, is an attempt to lay a strong claim to a realm of the respectable. This claim is made not just because of a desire to "turn respectable." It is made, as I have shown, because the realm of the respectable gives her a legitimate location from which to voice her protest against a particular representation of her life. The location of the woman, the identities of class, gender, sexuality and caste that mark her are, as the experience of the women's movement shows, important in political activism. I have not attempted to "resolve" the dilemmas of political intervention, but have only pointed out some of the issues, both strategic and ethical, involved in it.

The reading of rape narratives, then, sets out the characters of a private realm that underlies assumptions about "proper" domesticity. In the next chapter I have examined some narratives of the transgression of this domestic space. These transgressions, I have argued, are predicated on the sexual conduct of the women within it. The rebellion of the fully modern, fully humanized, individuated heroines (Rahel and Panna) of the two texts that I analyze are marked by the sexual transgressions of their mothers (Ammu and Gayatri Devi). In many ways, these texts illustrate the modes of popular engagement
with feminist issues that I have laid out in the introductory chapters. They demonstrate how issues that have been the concern of the women’s movement are expropriated and rechannelized into an “endorsement” of the Indian family. One way of doing this is to deflect analysis away from the critical insights that the women’s movement has employed, and to underplay, or even completely negate, the political and collective relevance of these issues. The question of the sexuality of the modern Indian woman, which is what the texts are in one way looking at, is denuded of its socio-cultural implications and placed in a realm which is “essentially” private. The narrative resolutions of these texts, I argue, point to a realm of complete autonomy, a realm which is “purely private,” personal, individual. The transgression of the domestic sphere, then, becomes a symbolic act of asserting this autonomy, an autonomy which is granted to the modern woman who is beyond the corruption of the collective.

What we have so far, then, is the picture of a proper domesticity and some possible transgressions of the domestic sphere that arise from the “improper” conduct in that sphere. In the final chapter, I have gone on to look at some representations of disruptions in the domestic sphere which can be read as “intrinsic” to the form and structure of that sphere. Analyzing domestic violence, I argue that the configuration of the conjugal couple contains in itself the potential of danger, which might move us to ask questions about the assumption of propriety in the realm of the private. These questions will demand a re-articulation of the concept of domesticity itself, and the actual and everyday circumstances in which women and men live in it. The two films that I have analyzed deal with domestic violence centrally. I have argued that, despite the acknowledgement of the centrality of the question of violence in conjugal relationships, these films try to
cast it as the result of deviant behaviours. This is accomplished, I have demonstrated, in two ways: 1) Through the ways in which disruption is represented—the violent husbands are shown as pathological; their violent behaviours a result of tendencies almost beyond their control. 2) The rationalizations used to explain this violence—the result of an improper childhood, manic obsessive tendencies.

The sexuality of the wives in these films, I have argued, is central to the way in which violence of the husbands is depicted. The husband is extra cautious of the sexuality of the wife. But this is seen as unnecessary since the wives are already in control of their sexuality. These complexities are resolved (and I stressed that this is the only possible resolution that the logic of the narration allows) by the putting back into place of a “real” and proper domesticity, epitomized by the lovers that the women find in their second life. But even this proper domesticity can be put in place only after the death of the deviant husband.

What I have followed, throughout the thesis, is the ideological underpinnings of the concepts of the family, the domestic sphere and the private space. The methodology has been to follow through the conceptual ramifications of the notions of domesticity, conjugalinity and privacy. Finally in conclusion, I want to point out another strand that runs through out the thesis. The thesis offers the analysis of a series of women: Rameezabee, Phoolan Devi, Urmila, Rahel, Panna, Ammu, Gayatri Devi, Priya and Madhu/Shubhangi. All of them are, in one way or the other, representatives of the women of the nineties. The analysis of the familial and domestic ideology that this thesis offers makes possible to see who among them is/are “Indian(s),” the subject of a “real Indian” modernity.