

DOMESTIC SPACE AND SOCIAL ALIENATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GHACHAR GHOCHAR AND NECTAR IN A SIEVE

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ABSTRACT

The social reality which is reflected in Indian Writing in English, using spaces that are the base of human relations and their identity itself. Domestic space thus emerges as an important site of negotiation and engagement with power and alienation and moral decay among these. The paper compares and contrasts Ghachar Ghochar by Vivek Shanbhag and Nectar in a Sieve by Kamala Markandaya in order to understand the functioning of domestic spaces as fields of social alienation. If Shanbhag depicts the contemporary, urban middle-class household as a prison of moral obligation, Markandaya imagines the countryside as an area decimated by poverty and socio-economic forces. By a close reading of the text the paper elaborates upon the fact that the family environment, the division in gender and the economic demands turns home into a space of psychological and sociological alienation. Using a sociological and realist perspective it holds that both texts uncover the fragility of domestic harmony under the constraints of socio-structural inequalities, despite being found in opposing settings. This comparative reading reveals how domestic spaces reflect broader social tensions and critical understanding of marginalization, silence, and survival in the Indian context.

KEYWORDS: Domestic Space, Social Alienation, Marginality; Indian Writing in English; Comparative Literature.

Article History

Received: 15 Jun 2025 | Revised: 17 Jun 2025 | Accepted: 20 Jun 2025

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between space and social reality has always been a recurrent theme of Indian English literature. The domestic appears as the centrepiece of spatial formations that act at once as a physical space as well as a symbolic domain where social values, power dynamic and emotional relationships are constructed. The family home, which is perceived as a place of security and belonging, is often redefined in literature as a site of conflict, disconnect and moral crisis. This shift in domestic space represents sweeping social and economic changes in Indian society

This article examines the relationship between domestic space and social alienation in two significant works of literature, *Ghachar Ghochar* by Vivek Shanbhag and *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya. Both novels focus on the personal dimensions of family life with an emphasis on how socio-economic pressures disrupt the family environment and individual identity. Through mirroring the representation of domestic spaces—physical, emotional, or socio-cultural dimensions—the research aims to accentuate how these contained spaces are seen as sites of tension and estrangement.

Ghachar Ghochar (2015), brought to the English side of the English spoken in Kannada, paints a chilling picture of a middle-class family whose newfound financial success corrupts their moral compass and emotional bonds. The cramped apartment where this family lives serves as a metaphor for moral stifling, oppression, and complicity. *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954) in contrast illustrates rural domesticity shattered by colonial modernity, industrialisation, and endemic squalor. Rukmani's home, which is at first a site of survival and optimism, is slowly a setting of loss and detachment, as external influences interrupt the equilibrium in the house.

This paper is a comparison of these two texts to examine the ways domestic spaces are employed as sites of social alienation. The study contrasts the urban middle class and rural farm homes in illustrating continuities and differences in the depiction of the domestic alienation of Indian English literature. It also contends that though *GhacharGhochar* demonstrates urban middle-class struggles in a small family unit within the intimate circle of family, *Nectar in a Sieve* is illustrative of wider rural struggles and colonial and postcolonial economic changes. Together, these narratives provide a nuanced understanding of how domestic spaces reflect and influence social alienation in various socio-historical milieus.

Theoretical Framework: Domestic Space and Social Alienation

The meaning of domestic space in literary studies goes beyond the architectural realm to encompass emotional, psychological and social dimensions. The home is the site of memory and intimacy; Gaston Bachelard on the same in *The Poetics of Space*. The domestic space has, however, the tendency to lack its protective qualities through socio-realist narratives, and instead becomes a mirror for social tensions and alienation.

In fact, as theorized by people like Karl Marx and later sociologists, social alienation is all about the disconnection of people away from their activities, relations and their self-concept in society's economic structure. Alienation often appears at the domestic level, notably within Indian literature during an age of economic inequality, patriarchy, and industrialisation. With *Nectar in a Sieve*, *Ghachar Ghochar* and how material conditions have reshaped how household structures in the way that the domestic relations will come about, through emotional withdrawal and moral disarticulation.

Marginalization within the home encapsulates the dynamics of exclusion, powerlessness, and invisibility experienced by certain family members in the domestic sphere. This marginalization is often shaped by intersecting factors such as gender, economic status, caste, and social expectations, which manifest differently depending on cultural and historical contexts.

In the context of the novels *Ghachar Ghochar* by Vivek Shanbhag and *Nectar in a Sieve* by Kamala Markandaya, the concept of marginalization within the home crystallizes as both a locus of personal struggle and a mirror to the broader socio-economic realities of India. Though these novels emerge from different temporal, regional, and socio-economic milieus —*Ghachar Ghochar* set in contemporary urban Bangalore and *Nectar in a Sieve* situated in rural mid-20th-century India—both expose how the home, ideally a space of security and nurture, often becomes a site of oppression and marginalization.

Domestic Space and Moral Suffocation in Ghachar Ghochar

Urban Middle-Class Household as a Closed Space

It is a Domestic Space in *Ghachar Ghochar*; the family apartment is a closed and cramped space where there is none except for the silence and unspoken guilt. The narrator's family also gains financial independence via the spice business, but that success fails to lead to emotional fulfillment. Instead, there is a moral paralysis in the home where no single member takes on injustice.

“The tangled coil of guilt, silence, anger, and love was ghooched together, knotting tighter every day”
(Ghachar Ghochar, p. 37)

Repetitive domestic habits — sharing meals and living space and only talking to one another in limited amounts — breed stagnation. The domestic space reflects the family's moral inertia, reaffirming the social alienation of the household. Without open lines of communication, the home becomes a space of repressed violence.

Gendered Alienation and Silence

Gendered Alienation in *Ghachar Ghochar* is gender-based to the greatest extent. Anita, the narrator's wife, sets foot in the family home as an outsider and ultimately becomes its most vocal critic. Still, her critique of family values results in her exile and even obliteration. Domestic space, instead of protective, is complicit in silencing dissent.

We live in the same house, but we're strangers. The rooms hold our voices, yet silence separates us.
(Ghachar Ghochar, 2017)

It becomes more complicated in the house when mothers come into control there in the household. Financial and decision-making of her control is, therefore, power and control structure where all emotional response are discouraged. The home can therefore be considered as a context in which silence is the norm, and moral degradation is perpetuated.

Domestic Space and survival in Nectar in a Sieve

Rural Home as a Field of Survival

In *Nectar in a Sieve*, home-space itself is first a point of resistance and continuity at first. Rukmani's mud hut, if modest, represents steadiness in agrarian life. The home acts as a house in which familial bonds are nurtured, even under poverty.

Home was a place of safety and refuge and, more importantly, the place where we could carry on living
(Nectar in a Sieve, p. 15)

This domestic tranquillity is disturbed, however, by the intrusion of industrial forces on the domestic stability. As an early example of socio-economic change, the tannery near the village changes livelihoods and family relationships. The home slowly becomes less safe, mirroring the decay of traditional rural life.

Poverty and Gendered Responsibility

Rukmani's sense of domestic alienation is rooted in gendered expectations. As a wife and mother, she bears an emotional load of maintaining the household in scarcity. The loss of her sons and the decline of domestic order show the profound distance between people in poverty, and people that are already socially excluded and trapped in their households.

The house might crumble, the family might be scattered, but the spirit to survive would remain rooted in our memories of home. (*Nectar in a Sieve*, p.67)

Whereas *Ghachar Ghochar* is quiet, Rukmani's narration does display resilience expressed through articulation. But for all her voice, the home has the capacity to be attacked from without, with no personal fortitude being spared in the glare of structural oppression.

Comparative Analysis: Domestic Space as a Mirror of Society

A central contrast between the two texts is their portrayal of reactions to alienation. In *Ghachar Ghochar*, silence symbolizes complicity and the erosion of morality and in *Nectar in a Sieve*, endurance is a resistance to socio-economic struggles. Yet both reactions underscore the absence of real comfort of the home.

Urban and Rural Dimensions of Alienation

The urban domestic space in *Ghachar Ghochar* is characterized by material plenty at the expense of ethical vacuity. In contrast, the countryside home in *Nectar in a Sieve* is characterized by lack of material abundance, but also emotional endurance. Indeed, though these are in different worlds both show how economic order comes into the life of the home and causes alienation.

Marginalization within the Home

Both texts centre marginalized people in the home. Anita and Rukmani are strata of society but experience alienation derived from gendered power relations. The stories themselves reveal the constraints these women face in a male-centred environment.

CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of *Ghachar Ghochar* and *Nectar in a Sieve* shows that Indian Writing in English is a complex domestic space in which social alienation is created and replicated. Shaped by sudden affluence or long-suffering poverty, the home becomes a fragile space susceptible to socio-economic forces. Shanbhag's study of an urban middle-class household critiques moral complacency and the de facto normalization of silence, while Markandaya's portrayal of rural domestic life highlights resilience to structural inequality. The texts together articulate that alienation in domestic spaces knows no boundaries either to class or geographic place, and provides a searing analysis of what it costs a society to transform itself in the name of a social transformation and what this costs us as human beings in India.

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