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Upward Mobility and the Naturalization of Household Norms in Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar*

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Modern Languages in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Bachelor of Arts in English

Department of English and Modern Languages

Independent University, Bangladesh.

December 2025



Declaration

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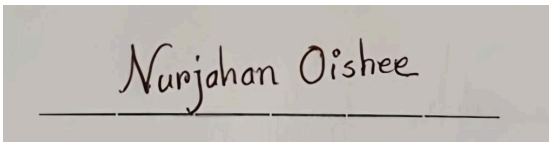
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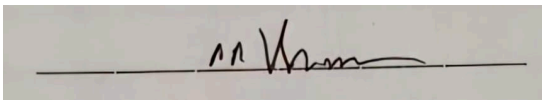
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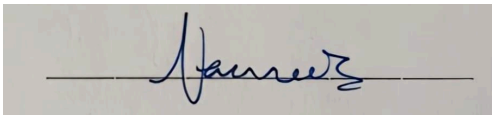


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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to those whose unwavering encouragement and support formed the foundation that guided me throughout my scholarly journey. Above all, I express my deepest and most heartfelt gratitude to my beloved mother, whose unconditional love, support, endless sacrifices, patience, and constant prayers have been my greatest source of strength and resilience. Her faith in my abilities sustained me through every challenge and made this work possible. I also extend my sincere gratitude to my parents, whose support, trust, and encouragement have continually motivated me to strive for excellence. I am equally thankful to my professors and mentors, whose guidance, insight, and constructive feedback shaped not only this thesis but also my intellectual and personal growth. This work would not have been possible without the love, support, and belief of everyone who stood by me throughout this journey. Oishee is thankful to you all.

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Upward Mobility and the Naturalization of Household Norms in Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar*

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Vivek Shanbhag's *Ghachar Ghochar* (2015, translated into English by Srinath Perur) is a novella that portrays a family's rise from poverty to prosperity and uses the transition to examine the consequences of social mobility in liberalized India. The title itself , "ghachar ghochar" is a made-up phrase in Kannada used to describe something that is entangled beyond repair (a metaphor for the family's relationships). The novella is told through the voice of an anonymous first person narrator, who subtly reveals how the family's established order is fundamentally disrupted with the influx of new money. Financial security may bring comfort but it comes with deep relational strains. The text draws a connection between material advancement and the corresponding changes in belief and conduct by illustrating how prosperity can generate moral confusions, detachments, and reordering of authority within the household.

This thesis examines these transformations through a Marxist lens, with special emphasis on how economic change reshapes ideology; what characters take to be normal,

right, and necessary. It mobilizes Marx's base–superstructure model to connect altered material life to altered values; uses the concept of alienation to explain the narrator's loss of purpose and the thinning of intimate ties; and draws on Althusser's account of ideology, interpellation, and the family as an Ideological State Apparatus to show how the household teaches and stabilizes the new order. Overall, the study argues that in Ghachar Ghochar economic advancement is inseparable from ideological transformation, re-coding care, duty, and respect in ways that reshape both the material and immaterial life of the family.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The novella suggests that changes in material life do not remain limited to improved living conditions or consumption, they are accompanied by a shift in their core beliefs. It reshapes authority like who holds power and why; what is expected of each individual, and what is deemed as 'proper' behavior within the home. The central problem this thesis addresses is what appears like ordinary adjustment is in fact an ideological shift, where new patterns of thinking emerge and gradually pass as the new normal within a household that appears externally cohesive.

The novella forces us to consider the mechanism by which wealth alters moral judgment, normalizes hierarchy, and turns compliance as a marker of family loyalty often without open force or conflict. It is also concerned about how such changes are sustained through everyday practices. This study addresses these issues by examining how economic change shapes ideology within the family, emphasizing on shifts in authority, morality, and everyday conduct.

1.3 Research Question

The primary research question guiding this study is: How do economic transformation and class mobility influence a family's identity, perceptions, moral values, and relationships in *Ghachar Ghochar*?

1.4. Hypothesis

My hypothesis is that the family's transition from poverty to wealth fundamentally alters the economic base that in turn reorganizes the family's power structures, moral judgements, individual role and daily routines. Applying Marx's base-superstructure framework, this material change produces forms of alienation, which is particularly evident in the narrator who increasingly develops a profound sense of purposelessness. Furthermore, drawing upon Althusser's idea of ideology and the family as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), the analysis shows how the family naturalizes obedience and suppresses dissent. While they keep the external coherence, their moral language is reworked to justify control, presenting class mobility as an ideological transformation that brings stability but comes at the cost of deep moral and emotional erosion.

1.5 Research Methodology

Methodologically, this is a qualitative research which is primarily centered on close reading and textual analysis of Shanbhag's novella. The core of the research involves a detailed examination of how the sudden rise of the family's economic conditions triggers a comprehensive transformation in their beliefs,identity morality and relationships with a particular focus on the narrator's internal conflicts and the shifting power dynamics within the household. Additionally, I have reviewed several scholarly articles that provide Marxist, psychoanalytic, and cultural identity perspectives on the novella. Key scholarly works, such

as those by Himani Bannerji, Nisha Paliwal, Abha Tripathi and Gabriele Lazzari, who's valuable for their insights into the intersections of consumerism, class mobility, and family identity helped me understand novella better. The research combines some theoretical frameworks to explore how economic change affects family dynamics. Most sources were accessed via JSTOR, Google Scholar, and IUB e-databases.

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

Ghachar Ghochar is less about money itself and more about what money does to people: how it changes their habits, their beliefs about who they are and even their sense of right and wrong. A Marxist approach is a good fit because Marxist theory asks a simple but powerful question: how do economic conditions shape the way we think, feel, and live?

This chapter uses three linked ideas. First, Marx's base-superstructure model explains how a change in the "base" (the family's material situation) pushes changes in the "superstructure" (values, roles, and daily life). Second, Marx's idea of alienation helps describe the narrator's growing emptiness and the family's fraying relationships after meaningful work and purpose are removed from their lives. Finally, Althusser's account of ideology and the family as an Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) helps show how the household itself teaches and enforces new rules once money reorders power structures at home.

The way I structured the analysis follows a clear progression: from economic structure to individual and relational changes to ideological reproduction, a path that maps onto the novel's tight domestic plot perfectly , narrated by a young man whose sense of self gradually thins as wealth insulates him from productive activity. In short, the novel's story of sudden class mobility gives us a clear field to watch these theories at work. Marxism is useful here not to judge the family morally, but to clarify the underlying machinery drives their

moral shift. As Marx and Engels put it, “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life.” When material life shifts, so does what feels normal, just, or loving (*German Ideology* 14 -15).

2.1. Base and Superstructure

In the “Preface” to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx sets out the classic formulation: “In the social production of their existence, men… enter into definite relations of production… The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society… on which arises a legal and political superstructure… The mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political, and intellectual life” (4). The base consists of productive forces and relations (such as property, control, labor), while the superstructure comprises legal, political, and cultural forms that stabilize and render intelligible the base. Marx’s claim is not crude one-way causality; rather, base and superstructure interact dialectically, with the superstructure reflecting and helping reproduce the base while lagging behind or mediating conflicts that emerge within it (4).

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels reinforce this point by rejecting idealist starting points: consciousness is “from the very beginning a social product” (18). Their method “starts out from the real premises and does not abandon them for a moment,” (14); meaning that ideas are historically bound to one’s life-activity and its material arrangements. As they famously invert idealism: it is not consciousness that determines life, but life that determines consciousness (14). So, the core idea is Marx’s base - superstructure model says than the mode of production, how people make their living, lays the groundwork for social institutions and ideas. A change in that base tends to bring changes in law, culture, and everyday beliefs as well. In his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx writes that people’s “social existence” determines their “consciousness,” and that

transformations in the economic foundation eventually transform the "whole immense superstructure" (4).

This framework illuminates *Ghachar Ghochar*. On the surface, the plot is simply an uncle's spice business prospering, a move from frugality to comfort, and the relationships within the house shifts. In Marxist terms, however, this is a base change with a series of cascading superstructural effects. The family's quick rise in income changes the house itself, its routines, moods, and rules. The mother's authority grows, the father's role shrinks, the narrator's work disappears, and Anita's arrival is judged in terms of how she "fits" the new order. From a perspective, this is a textbook superstructural shift following a base change. Marx and Engels describe this general linkage clearly: the production of ideas and morals is "interwoven with material activity," and as people alter material production, they "alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking" (14-15). The base- superstructure model does not reduce everything to economics; rather, it shows how a new position in the relations of production (as owners, distributors of resources and favors) leads to an intelligible transformation of values.

Two nuances are key. First, the super structure feeds back to stabilize the base, especially through everyday institutions to protect and solidify their new wealth and class position (the Base) (*Contribution* 4). Second, consciousness does not float freely; it is the "direct efflux" of material life and practical activity (*German Ideology* 13). In the novel's domestic sphere, this shows up as selective transmission: sanctifying behaviors that protect the new class position while filtering out threats(like Anita). So, the base has shifted and the family's superstructure adjusts. Now, the ultimate conceptual move is to ask what happens to the subject living inside them? Marx's theory of alienation precisely addresses this.

2.2. Alienation

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx describes alienation as a set of splits: from the product of one's labor, from the act of working, from other people, and from one's "species-being" (one's human capacities and need to create). Estranged labor, he writes, leads directly to estrangement from other people: we meet each other "in accordance with" our roles under the system rather than as full humans (32).

Although *Ghachar Ghochar* is not a novel based on factories, the narrator is conspicuously not a worker, but Marx's analysis remains incisive for the inverse pathology of insulation from labor. In the novel. The narrator's problem is not poverty or overwork; it is his purposelessness. After the family's upward mobility, he is insulated from any need for productive activity, causing his inner life to turn vague and tense. He becomes a person whose value is set by the family's new status. Marx notes that when labor is alienated, the worker's activity becomes "a torment," and the benefits accrue to "some other man" (33). In the novella, that "other" is not any external capitalist; it is the family itself, which now defines what matters.Marx's point is that when life is mediated by property and status rather than by creative, meaningful activity, the self becomes estranged, from its capacities, from others, and even from its own narrative of becoming. Alienation also spreads through relationships. Marx says estrangement in work shows up as estrangement "from man," making our ties transactional, conditional, and guarded, entirely shaped by the fear of losing the newfound wealth and status(32).

Marx and Engels explain why the narrator's weak ethical alarm rarely becomes an action: material life determines consciousness and one "starts out from the real premises" and remains bound to them *(*14). He knows something is off, but the new material forms of the household render that ethical knowledge impractical.Thus He recognizes himself most securely in roles of the loyal nephew, the peacekeeper, that the household's material order

incentivizes.. From the narrator's hollowed inner life, the argument now turns to how such emptiness is stabilized and naturalized by ideology through everyday practices within home. If alienation describes what wealth does to people, ideology explains how the family makes those changes seem obvious, necessary, and right.

2.3. Ideology, Interpellation, and Ideological State Apparatuses

Louis Althusser argues that the system(capitalism) reproduces itself not only through Repressive State Apparatuses like police, courts (indicates force) but through Ideological State Apparatuses (family, school, church, media, culture) that "work" by shaping subjects at the level of everyday practice and belief. Ideology is not simply false beliefs; it is the unquestioned imaginary relation of individuals to their real conditions of existence; lived as obvious, embodied, natural. Through interpellation. Ideology "hails" individuals as subjects like when a police calls someone "Hey, you!", and they recognize themselves in the call, voluntarily taking up roles that reproduce the system (301).

The narrator's calm compliance reads as interpellation.He recognizes himself as the "good son/nephew/brother" and acts accordingly. Household's unwritten scripts("adjust," "keep the peace," "fit") are the physical rituals that make this new order feel completely obvious(303). His unease rarely matters because the role already makes sense to him as a subject.

According to John Fiske, ISAs are the institutions where ideology lives; such as "the family, the educational system, language, the media" (307), which "produce in people the tendency to behave and think in socially acceptable ways" while presenting themselves as neutral (307). Culture as a whole is part of this process: "culture is ideological" and dominant meanings try "to 'naturalize'" themselves as common sense (306-07). Though each ISA

seems “relatively autonomous,” together they are “overdetermined” by a shared network that keeps pointing subjects in the same direction (307).

Ghachar Ghochar centers the family as an ISA where the new economic order is enforced and made to feel natural. What looks like family harmony is really ideological training that naturalizes control (Fiske 306 -07).

Altogether, these frameworks give this thesis a clear route from structure to story. Marx’s base superstructure model explains why the family’s sudden rise in the relations of production reorders everyday life. Marx’s idea of alienation then names the human cost of that reordering: the narrator’s drift into purposelessness and the thinning of intimate ties. Finally, Althusser’s account of ideology, interpellation, and the family as an Ideological State Apparatus shows how this new order sustains itself through ordinary rituals, so that most of the time the house “works by itself.”

In the discussion section, I apply these concepts scene by scene, tracking how shifts in money map onto shifts in mood and rule, how alienation surfaces in the narrator’s voice and choices, and how ideology is performed in the family’s daily routines. The goal is to show, through textual evidence, how Ghachar Ghochar dramatizes the chain: from material transformation to psychic and relational consequences to ideological reproduction.

Chapter 3

Literature Review

3.1. Literature Review

Research on contemporary India, particularly Sara Dickey’s ethnography of urban South India shows gaining wealth does more than just increase consumption. It drastically

reshapes everyday norms and what is considered "proper" behavior.Drawing on interviews about marriage, display, and respectability, Dickey highlights the immense pressure the middle class feels to constantly “stretch beyond its limits” to finance what looks respectable, while a watchful “community” polices performance (588-589). She shows how classed habits operate as “potent class signifiers,” and because fashions shift, families face “repeated opportunities for failure in performance” (583). These insights are useful to analyze the novella.

Dickey also emphasizes the anxiety that follows mobility. A “fear of downward-class mobility” remains even when assets exist, because the “sense of precariousness remains acute” (589). This helps explain why the household in *Ghachar Ghochar* clings to control and conformity even when money is no longer scarce: precarity is ideological as well as economic, and the response is discipline within the home.

Himani Bannerji extends this picture by showing how neoliberal change fortifies patriarchal authority and the moral vocabularies that present themselves as common sense. She describes “the violence of patriarchy, in conjunction with the penetration of the market,” which normalizes control over life and labor (13). While Bannerji writes on a broad scale, her point clarifies the domestic politics of *Ghachar Ghochar*: prosperity brings not only goods but a language of duty, protection, and propriety that licenses the concentration of power in the hands of the breadwinner and his allies. The result is not open debate about values but the quiet naturalization of who decides and who adapts, exactly the ideological settling I track inside the family.

Some direct criticism of the novella supports my study . Nijamol K. N. characterizes the narrator as living “a materially comfortable but emotionally hollow life,” with a “lack of agency” linked to his inherited wealth and rigid social expectations.(1009). The article also

highlights a “cultural shift where ambition is replaced by complacency,” resulting in a “ loss of existential purpose”(1009). Seeing through marxist lenses, it shows how a change in the economic base removes meaningful work from the narrator and then fills the void with an ideological role -–obedient son/ peacekeeper even if it empties him out. Nijamol describes the protagonist as “devoid of purpose,” yet “stuck in relationships and structures” (1111) supports my argument on ideological change.

Nisha Paliwal centers her argument on gender and domestic control arguing that the novella “represents the clash between the traditional moral values and modernity,” tracing “the moral decline of the family members who have found financial gain overnight,” and the “patriarchal control that the women … have to deal with” (178). Her focus on restricted “voice or desire”helps me read the treatment of Anita as a test case for the family’s rules. As long as she adapts to the new hierarchy, she is tolerated. My analysis extends this by showing that such control is not merely traditional; it is renewed and justified by the family’s altered material situation.

Gabriele Lazzari places the novella within a global framework that structurally reflects the contradictions of neoliberal globalization. He argues that the novella’s concise, claustrophobic narration and restricted focus are themselves formal reflections of the ideological fog surrounding the family’s sudden rise to wealth. For him the narrator’s claim that “money ruined us” conceals a deeper truth: their newfound wealth depends on an integration of familism, patriarchy, and entrepreneurial violence.(127). Together these studies offer an integrated backdrop for my argument.

3.2. Research Gap

The existing scholarship on the novella is limited in focus. While the critics often read the novella through consumer culture, neoliberalism, or family ethics, they do not explain

how economic change produces an ideological shift within the household. Some studies do acknowledge class mobility, Marxist theory is rarely used to show how shifts in material conditions harden into new norms of authority, duty, and moral judgment. This thesis addresses the gap by offering an integrated Marxist reading that connects the changes in the economic base to changes in their ideology, focusing on the characters' changing attitudes, perspectives and routine practices; it shows how the family internalizes and preserves a new moral vocabulary. And in doing so, it clarifies how upward mobility in the novella becomes an ideological transformation rather than just a material one.

Chapter 4

Discussion

4.1. Mapping the Base Shift

This section examines how the family's material "base" shifts. In Marx's terms, the "totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation" on which forms of consciousness rise (Contribution 4). The novel miniaturizes this principle inside one Bangalore household.

Marx insists that "the mode of production of material life conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life" and that it is "social existence" which "determines… consciousness."(4) In *Ghachar Ghochar*, the success of Sona Masala fundamentally rewrites the family's social existence. The narrator and his family used to live in "one of those teeming lower-middle class areas of Bangalore" in a cramped, ant-infested four-room home (Shanbhag 27). In that lower-middle-class neighborhood, the narrator

describes their condition as “small houses, all packed together” and their home as “four small rooms, one behind the other, like train compartments.” (27). The family shares cramped rooms, stacked mattresses, and a damp storeroom where the parents sleep. There was a front wooden bench where Chikkappa (narrator’s uncle) slept, a window that let in neighbors’ cooking smells, and mats on the floor instead of beds (27). There was so much scarcity of space that everyone’s movements were audible. The mother’s morning sweeping becomes the alarm clock of survival (28). The appa (father) is a salesman of a tea company who goes out everyday morning to sell tea from shop to shop, then restaurants home at night and spends the rest of his day doing his accounts (27). Their everyday life is shaped by shortage and by Amma’s constant war against ants. Money is tight and every single expense is carefully considered. Children are “trained to wash cups and plates as soon as we [they] were done with them” because discipline, cleanliness, and frugality are basic survival skills here. Money is tight and every single expense is carefully considered. This is the “material activity and… intercourse” out of which, as *The German Ideology* puts it, ideas and habits grow. “The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material inter course of men” (13).

Then one day, Appa loses his job because the company decides to outsource. Chikappa comes up with a spice business plan. After that business Sona Masala succeeds, the family moves into a quite different material world. They move to a new house in the upmarket area and is “huge in comparison,” with “two storeys” and “a room for each person”. Old objects that once organized their life “couldn’t make a dent in this expanse” and are scattered or pushed out to the backyard and balcony (Shanbhag 34). This spatial enlargement signals the new financial surplus; but also signals a changed relationship to things: where once they guarded every cup in fear of ants, now the house is quickly “crammed with expensive mismatched furniture and out-of-place decorations” and a TV

because “Everything we’d[they] brought from the old house appeared more worn, even unrecognizable in this new place” (34-35). Consumption has shifted from careful accounting to casual accumulation.

The narrator marks this change in money habits very directly. He recalls that earlier “we’d been painstakingly frugal… We consulted each other when money was to be spent, gave precise accounts” (35). The family imagined itself as “interdependent”: spending meant taking from others. With Sona Masala’s profits “all that changed overnight. There was enough now to buy things without asking for permission or informing anyone” (35). From collective restraint to individual impulse, the basic money rule is moved. In Marxist terms, the relations of distribution within the household have altered, producing the new“forms of social consciousness” .

At the same time, the novel carefully shows a transformation in conduct and authority. In the present, “the central figure in our[thir] household is my [his] Chikkappa… the family’s sole earning member,” the one who “has a weakness for work, and is at it night and day”(9). His labor in the spice trade: ordering bulk stock, running the warehouse, maintaining client networks, becoming the single pillar of the family’s new class position. His meals, bath times, and even the mess of his clothes are surrounded by “all the domestic privileges accorded to the earning male of the family” (9). It can be called an example of material production and symbolic honor are tightly linked. With the change of material base, authority and decision rights are likewise redistributed. On paper, Appa is a 50 per cent partner: after he offers his VRS and provident fund, as the narrator says, “My father today owns half of Sona Masala’s considerable assets” (Shanbhag 16) But in daily practice, power flows to the uncle who runs the business and controls cash. It is now he who “set aside some money for buying furniture” and tells Amma and Malati, “You don’t have to worry about the price. Just pick up whatever

you feel like. I'll pay for it all later" (34). This apparent gift actually confirms his authority. Not only he authorizes spending, but also defines the limits of other members' choice. In chapter three, the narrator describes the days when Appa used to be the unquestioned authority of the house as he was the sole provider. He used to work relentlessly and his discipline, routine and financial control positioned him as the economic backbone (17). But that authority was not tyrannical, but earned through labor, responsibility and sacrifice. Back then, the family's mindset was collective. There was no anxiety over inheritance which now is clearly evident, as the narrator says, "Our only fear now is that he might lose his mind,....writes a will asking for his assets to be poured down the drain of some noble cause and dies?"(16) In Appa's hold, wealth was not something to be exploited; rather to be earned and used carefully. In the present, he no longer functions as an authority, as the narrator notes that with new money, "Appa's hold on the rest of us slipped," and "we lost hold of ourselves too" (34). The family's attitude towards him is no longer rooted in respect. Their fear of losing the newfound status exposes the moral collapse within the family.

The narrator's own reflections show how this new money regime reshapes consciousness. In one of the novel's most explicit moments, he observes: "it's not we who control money, it's the money that controls us… Money had swept us up and flung us in the midst of a whirlwind"(36). It echoes Marx's claim that social existence determines consciousness. Even though the narrator experiences this base shift as a loss of control, it is treated as inevitable and external, allowing the new hierarchy to stabilize

Even marriage choices now follow the same material logic. After Malati's failed marriage, Amma warns, "Let's not get entangled with rich people," and choose "the daughter of a college lecturer in Hyderabad" (48). So,what now counts as the "right" marriage is one that fits the household's new economic rank while keeping authority within the household. In

Marx's terms, changing material life rearranges the social relations through which choices are made; "the mode of production of material life" conditions the forms of family cooperation and judgment that follow (*German Ideology* 14).

Finally, the control of space inside the house condenses gendered authority. Amma still "clings on to the kitchen" even though "there's a daughter-in-law at home" and "a daughter who's left her husband and set up camp here" (Shanbhag 44). Food choices like Amma buying beans Anita hates, become routine ways of her asserting authority. The narrator knows that a harmless-sounding line like "I've made avarekaalu upma because you like it" carries "explosive power" in this house (because Anita can't stand avarekaalu) (44). That power is secured by the stability given by Sona Masala's profits and the new house. As Paliwal argues that the upward mobility intensifies rather than gendered hierarchies (182).

Together, these scenes show a coherent base shift that results in altered money flows, loss of productivity, reorganized domestic space and authority. When Marx and Engels say that "consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product," they describe exactly what the novel dramatises: once these new material arrangements settle in, the family's sense of what is normal, right, and necessary changes with them; preparing the ground for the darker choices that comes after it.

4.2. Alienation in Voice, Conduct, and Ties

As explained in chapter 2, that according to Marx, under certain material arrangements, a person becomes estranged from their product, their activity, other people, and even their "species-being." In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, he explains that alienated labour "does not belong to his essential being" and that the worker's activity becomes "torment" while it produces benefit primarily for others (33). The narrator's

insulation from meaningful work produces exactly this condition. He becomes purposeless. It is the result of structured alienation produced by the changed economic base traced in Part I.

4.2.1. Alienation in the narrator's idle, ritualised days

The clearest form of alienation is visible in the narrator's daily routine. He goes to the warehouse only to "attend," he does not contribute anything. He openly admits that he receives a salary"for doing nothing" and states, "Who will work when they get paid for doing nothing?". He wonders he has not even realized when he has started earning. His daily routine: bath, breakfast, Coffee House, reading three newspapers, a nap, more coffee, and signing papers "wherever Chikkappa jabs his finger" turns him into a beneficiary of capital rather than a producer (48). It resembles Marx's description of labour becoming "external" to the worker, something he "does not affirm but denies himself" (*Manuscripts* 32–34). Though he outwardly resembles "any other office-goer," his days are spent "killing time with great dedication" (47) in the office or coffee house where he "spends his days sitting in cafes soaking in the uneasiness of spending someone else's money," as Nijamol notes (1110). This uneasiness is exactly what Marx calls the torment of alienated labour, here not because he labours, but because he consumes without labouring. The narrator "eased [him]self out" of ordinary work. In chapter 6, he explains that a position was created for him at Sona Masala, with a complete office, yet he admits bluntly, "Nor did I work at Sona Masala. I didn't work at all." His visiting cards say he is "the director of this firm," but there is a gap between title and actual labor. In Marx's language, he has been repositioned in "definite social and political relations" that follow from how he does, and does not, produce.

His idleness is not freedom but constraint: he is trapped in a structure where any real work would disrupt the family's hierarchy. The Coffee House is a place of freedom for him. His "attendance record at the warehouse could match that of the most assiduous of

employees," he jokes, and "my[his] attendance was equally impressive" at the Coffee House (65). In Marx's words, he is estranged from his "life-activity," which should be conscious, free, and self-directed. Instead, his days are filled with what Nijamol calls a "materially comfortable but emotionally hollow life" (1109). As Marx writes, a person can become estranged even from their own human capacity for self-directed activity, losing the "free conscious life-activity" that defines species-being. The narrator is alienated from himself as well. He looks back, wonders and asks himself, "How did I slip into this way of life?" His life feels as though it happened to him rather than being chosen by him (47). The pressure to study well and find a job slowly eased with the influx of new money; with that, the expectation of a clear purpose in life has also disappeared. He understands that he just has to simply exist under the shadow of Chikkappa admitting "It was clear from the very first day there that they had no real need for me."(47) Money makes it worse. The monthly deposit he gets is justified as a way of preserving his self respect. Yet this respect is hollow. He is paid precisely so that he does not have to work. So, his question "Who will work when they get paid for doing nothing?" is ironic but also revealing. It also exposes how financial security removes not only necessity but meaning.

4.2.2. Alienation in voice: the narrator as "peacekeeper" and silent witness

A second form of alienation lies in the narrator's inability to speak when it is necessary. During the tense masoor dal incident, Anita questions the family's cruel treatment of the woman who brought food for Chikkappa. In that situation, the narrator knows what Anita is saying is right, and his family is in the wrong. He describes himself "moving in [his] chair" and feeling he "should say something," but remains silent (69) and ater he admits that he only uttered, "Stop it now, Anita," when nothing meaningful could be changed.

This silence and inability to speak up is alienation in Marx's third sense: estrangement "from man" (*Manuscripts* 32), meaning loss of genuine human contact. The narrator cannot act out of moral conviction; he acts out of role expectation. His speech or reacting is shaped entirely by the need to maintain the familial order. His mother's weapon: "Am I doing all this for myself?", is a reminder that the emotional economy of the household demands loyalty, not honesty (Shanbhag 69).

Critics see this same pattern. Lazzari points out that the family is governed by "selective acts of blindness and deafness" that maintain a fragile hierarchy (13). The narrator participates in this blindness, his role is reduced to that of a peacekeeper, an identity shaped entirely by the material dependency on Chikkappa's income, not by personal conviction. Alienation has completely shrunk; his conscience is muffled. He does what feels right to protect the benefactor and the source of the family's wealth.

4.2.3. Alienation in ties: affection and approval as conditional, rule-bound

Alienation appears in the narrator's personal relationships, especially his marriage as well. Initially it seems like a genuine connection, but soon it becomes transactional and conditional on role performance. He gets gratified when Anita shows "regard for my[his] money" and asks him to pay shopkeepers: "Give him thirty-five"; "Two hundred here" (Shanbhag 65). Their closeness allows him to fulfill the patriarchal script of the provider. Marx notes that alienation makes relationships serve external expectations rather than human connection. Here, the narrator's affection deepens not through mutual understanding but through Anita's enacting the role of a dependent wife.

Yet when Anita expects him to be a genuine worker and as she was disappointed to learn that the narrator had no role in the family business, their bond strains. Anita's sense of marriage is shaped by her mother's labor: "up before dawn… breakfast for everyone…

lunchbox for her father" (56). She expects the narrator to mirror that ethic. But since he is alienated from work, he cannot fulfill these expectations. Their marriage becomes a field where each partner performs inherited roles rather than forming new ties.

Even domestic peace depends on strict compliance with household expectations. During the family conflict, Anita's attempt to speak the truth is treated as betrayal. As the narrator says, " It's an unwritten rule that all members come to the family's aid when it is threatened. Anita had broken that rule. She should not have" (14). She becomes, in Paliwal's words, a threat to the "ideological foundation of the family" (181). The narrator, who is tied to the family by economic dependence, cannot support her. As a result, his tie to Anita collapses into the narrower tie of son-brother-nephew —roles that overpower the role of husband. Alienation, then, is not only emotional emptiness but the reduction of ties to role-bound obligations that override human connection. This is the ideological consequence Marx predicts: when estranged from meaningful work, a person becomes estranged from themselves and accepts narrowed forms of life as "right" and "necessary." The narrator's drift, his quietism, and his compliance are not personality traits; they are the effects of a material base where someone else works, someone else earns, and someone else decides.

In short, *Ghachar Ghochar* shows how alienation shapes voice, conduct, and ties. It produces a man who lives in comfort yet feels hollow, who thinks deeply but acts rarely, and who belongs to a family yet remains unable to protect the one relationship that might have offered real mutual recognition.

4.3. Family as ISA: Interpellation through Rituals and Speech

In Ghachar Ghochar the family works like what Althusser calls as Ideological State Apparatus. As he says, it teaches the new class order through everyday actions that look harmless. Althusser says ideology has a "material existence" in "practices governed by rituals" rather than in pure ideas (296-98). In the house, these practices include staying silent and loyal to family even when they are wrong, stands against what appears to threat to the family etc., and these practices are governed through rituals. Through everyday roles, each each person is pushed into a fixed role, as Althusser puts it, "all ideology hails … concrete individuals as concrete subjects" (301). Fiske's account of ISAs as institutions that make people "behave and think in socially acceptable ways" while appearing neutral (306-07) helps show how some particular scenes are not just simple domestic drama, rather a training in obedience.

One clear site of this ideological training is the ritual of meals. After Amma and Malati drive away the woman who brought masoor dal curry for Chikkappa by humiliating her, "silence descended on the house". Describing Anita's refusal to participate in the act, the narrator states plainly that Anita "felt that an injustice had been done," yet immediately frames her response as impractical, even self-destructive, "But does doing justice necessarily entail shooting oneself in the foot?". This rhetorical question already signals the ideological horizon within which the family operates. Justice may be not dismissed outright but it is redefined as dangerous when it threatens collective survival and class security. That is why Anita's dissent is evaluated on the grounds on if it disrupts the family's cohesion. Her dissent reveals that what the family experiences as instinctive loyalty is in fact ideological discipline. Amma then starts to fill the void with loud instructions to the housekeeper about how to season a dosa pan and tend the jasmine creeper (Shanbhag 14). Her detailed lecture on the

"procedure" of preparing the pan turns into a performance of authority: the one who knows the proper way to cook and to care for plants also knows the proper way to guard the family. The others sit, eat, or withdraw into their rooms, accepting without comment that Amma will speak, direct, and also decide which visitors can be violently expelled. The ritual of serving and supervising food thus becomes a material practice that embodies ideology: it is through this everyday "ritual" that Amma exercises power and that the others learn what counts as loyalty to Chikkappa. In Althusser's terms, the family ideology "acts" in this practice, making Amma and the narrator subjects who act "according to [their] belief" without needing explicit orders (298). Fiske's claim that ISAs present their norms as simple "socially acceptable" behavior is visible here: Amma's intrusive voice sounds like common-sense housework, not like political discipline, yet it stabilizes a sense that protecting the male earner is "normal, right, necessary."

The second cluster concerns speech permissions and the narrator's job as peacekeeper. After the masoor dal incident, he tries to defend himself to Anita: "'I didn't abuse her,' I pointed out." She replies that "It's enough for a man to simply stand there and watch. It's worse than shouting at her yourself."(Shanbhag 15) What Anita calls out is not only cruelty but the ritual rule that the younger men must remain silent whenever the household closes ranks around Chikkappa. Earlier the narrator describes how the family survived its precarious years by "walking like a single body across the tightrope of our circumstances,"(15) a memory he uses to justify his silence. Nijamol reads this passivity as part of a "materially rich but emotionally anxious cocoon" in which the narrator becomes "bereft of agency, as an observer in one's own life" (1110). The ritual of keeping the peace trains him to accept that being a good son, nephew, and husband means absorbing conflict rather than questioning it. Althusser notes that subjects usually "work by themselves," freely inscribing the ideology in their own actions (303). The narrator does exactly that. No one orders him to stay quiet, but

he experiences speech itself as dangerous. Fiske's point that culture is ideological because it constructs meanings and identities that seem obvious is useful here: the narrator experiences "peacekeeping" as a natural moral duty, not as the effect of class and gender power inside the ISA of the family. As a result, the boundary of what can be said shrinks, and the ideological order is protected from critique.

The third cluster is the "fit" testing of Anita, where the house openly evaluates whether she adjusts to these rituals. In the same chapter, we are told that "It's an unwritten rule that all members come to the family's aid when it is threatened. Anita had broken that rule. She should not have" (14). "Ideology is 'constantly up against forces of resistance' and must be continually reproduced" (Fiske 311). Her refusal to join the attack marks her as someone who does not "fit." Lazzari notes that Anita is constructed as "central discursive and ideological threats" to the household because she exposes the "unspoken consensus, based on 'selective acts of blindness and deafness'" that keeps Sona Masala intact (11). Later, Anita names Amma's investment in this consensus: "You can't stand the thought of anyone else entering this house and challenging your authority" (69). Her language directly contests the moral story the family tells about itself; as diligent, united, and justified in its violence. Paliwal reads Anita's fate as proof that "the threat to the balance of the family has been taken care of by destroying the element that threatens it," and shows how women like Amma and Malati "defend and protect" the patriarch for reasons of "social and financial security"(182).

Seen through Althusser's lens, Anita's failure to adjust is a failed interpellation. The family ideology hails her; through Amma's advice, Malati's sarcasm, and the narrator's pleas to "keep the peace" into the role of dutiful daughter-in-law. When she refuses to respond in the expected way, she exposes the mechanism itself. Althusser stresses that we experience our subject positions as primary "obviousness," the feeling that "that's obvious! that's right!

that's true!" (300). Anita's dissent interrupts this obviousness, which is why it appears "suicidal" even to the narrator (Lazzari 13). Fiske adds that ISAs such as the family present themselves as neutral spaces of love and care while they in fact organize "social positions for power."

Thus, the scene shows the family ISA in full operation. Not participating in the collective act is identified as a threat, speech is weaponized to restore order, and care is transformed into discipline. What seems like normal a morning routine id actually an ideological rehearsal in which loyalty to capital and patriarchal authority is reaffirmed.

4.4. Synthesis and Answer to the Research Question

This thesis has asked how *Ghachar Ghochar* represents the making of a new middle-class subjectivity through the intertwined forces of economic change, alienation, and family ideology. Section 4.1 showed how the shift from scarcity to Sona Masala wealth reorganizes the "base" of daily life: money flows, work obligations, domestic space, and decision rights all move around Chikkappa's business. The old habits of collective frugality are replaced by individual consumption and dependence on a single earning male, creating the material ground on which new forms of conduct and belief will grow. Section 4.2 traced the resulting alienation: insulated from meaningful work, the narrator drifts through idle, ritualised days, loses a sense of purpose, and relates to others primarily through the roles of son, nephew, husband rather than through mutual recognition. Section 4.3 examined the family as an Ideological State Apparatus, where rituals of serving, seating, speech, and "adjustment" interpellate each member as a subject who keeps the new order in place. Across these stages, the household produces an ideological transformation: a revised moral vocabulary of what is "right" and "necessary." Protecting Chikkappa's reputation becomes more important than fairness; keeping the "peace" matters more than naming violence;

"adjusting" is praised, questioning is punished. These are not abstract ideas, but lessons learned in concrete practices. Under the pressure of the new economic base, the family's rituals teach everyone to accept complicity as common sense. The conclusion will consider what this representation suggests about contemporary Indian middle-class life more broadly: whether there is any way of living "well" within such knots, or whether, like the title, our ethical life under neoliberalism is fated to remain *ghachar ghochar* hopelessly entangled.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

5.1. Conclusion

This thesis analyzes how upward mobility in *Ghachar Ghochar* is presented not merely as material improvement, but as an ideological transformation that reorganizes families at the level of moral judgements, values or authority . Reading this novella through the lens of Marxist theoretical framework,his study demonstrates that the changes in economic conditions recalibrate what is perceived as normal or right. Instead of bringing harmony, prosperity often reorders the structure of authority, erodes meaningful individual autonomy and naturalizes forms of control within family through everyday practices.

Following Marx's base-superstructural model, the analysis traces how the success of Sona Masala (spice business) introduces a decisive change in the family's economic base. And this shift reconfigures the nature of work, the flow of money, domestic space and decision making power as it redestributes the authority within the household. As wealth gives new power and social standing, practices that were once emerged from scarcity, are replaced by individual autonomy. Unity is replaced by boundaries. These changes in material base

cause corresponding changes in values, perceptions and moralities; proving Marx's claim that social existence determines consciousness.

The concept of alienation explains the human cost of this transformation. Separated from any meaningful labor, the narrator drifts onto aimlessness. His silence, refusal to face problems and moments of indecisiveness are not his personal failures, rather they are structural outcomes of an economic system that displaces agency in favor of maintaining comfort.

Finally, Althusser's theory of ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses further explains how this system sustains itself without any overt force. Through daily ordinary activities, the family teaches its members to internalize obedience and control as common sense. Though these practices appear as caring and reasonable, Anita's refusal to accept these roles exposes the ideological process; her dissent is precisely why she appears dangerous to the family members. Altogether, these frameworks show that *Ghachar Ghochar* is not a story about individuals' moral decline, but about the quiet normalization of complicity under conditions of class mobility.

5.2. Limitation of the Study

While this study provides a deep insight into Ghachar Ghochar, it has some limitations as well. The analysis is limited to a single literary text. Although it has a detailed look at the changes experienced by one middle class family,it cannot be generalized to represent the vast and diverse range of class experiences across contemporary India or broader literary contexts. Second, this study is predominantly grounded in Marxist theory. While this framework is highly effective to examine the link between wealth and ideology,

the other theoretical lenses such as feminist ethics, trauma studies or affect theory could reveal additional layers of meaning of the text.

5.3. Direction for Future Research

The findings of this study suggest that economic mobility should be studied as more than just an improvement in living standards, it is a process that restructures everyday norms, moral reasoning and personal bonds. Future researchers could apply the Marxist frameworks utilized here; particularly the concept of base and superstructure, ideology and alienation, to other literary texts featuring families experiencing sudden economic transitions. By comparing the findings across various literary works, both within or beyond the Indian context, scholars can determine if the ideological patterns observed in *Ghachar Ghochar* such as the acceptance of silence, compliance, and morality tied to defined roles are common consequences of upward mobility within modern capitalist systems. Future researchers also could involve interdisciplinary frameworks combining Marxist approach with feminist or psychoanalytical perspectives that would allow them to better understand how economic change directly impacts subjectivity, agency or resistance.

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