



MAN-WOMAN RELATIONSHIP IN "MISTRESS"

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ABSTRACT

Anita Nair is a novelist, poet, travel writer, essayist, short story writer and writer of stories for children. Her novels enforce cross cultural endeavors. They enlighten experiences having transcendental and inexhaustible diversity of forms such as barriers of language, cultures and identities. She is popular female writer who depict the present condition of women in society. She uses wit and humour. She has an exceptional and quite beautiful art of storytelling. She dives deep into human psyche to lead the reader to a wonderful journey. Her novels contain a very nebulous world which absorbs readers to a great extent. Her novels have stories of colorful and unique characters. She weaves experiences from day-to-day life into her charming stories. Her third novel 'Mistress' deals with human relationships, man-woman relationship and analyses pre-marital, marital, extra-marital relationships and estrangement between husband and wife.

KEYWORDS : Human psyche; Pre-marital; Marital; Extra-marital; Estrangement

Anita Nair has several revolutionary ideas to give vent to in her novels about marriage and man – woman relationship. To her, social consciousness of today is leading us to the point where conditions for better growth of two complementary components, man and woman, would be ensured by their separate and individual development. Her main stress is on development of personality and genius and she thinks that it is quite difficult to achieve. We cannot deny economic dependence of woman for her better secured life. Economic independence is incidental and not only important factor in man – women relationship. The most significant factor is the importance of surroundings and environment. She proposed a new philosophy about man-woman relationship in the context of modern times. She firmly affirms that social and conventional basis of marriage is to be eroded. Marriage is to be associated with simple ceremony. She further adds that this would ultimately bring out to a situation where marriage may not be solemnized or performed at all. Recently the supreme court of India has recognized the right of individuals to stay together without getting married. This is called live-in relationship. Man – woman may live in mutual companionship. The relationship may be going on as long as they trust each other and as long as the basic emotional bonding subsists, too.

There is a changing view about man woman relationship in the present day society. We can find in the novel named "Mistress" that she depicts the changing relationships of husband and wife in society. Her concept of a free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom. However, she is in favor of mutual man-women relationship. She relates to her mental and emotional attitude and wellbeing. "Mistress" is a grand saga of relationships. The novel deals with several themes including art and adultery, excitement of newly discovered love, ennui in conventional relationships, squalor and ugliness of love, abuse, dashed hopes and dark family secrets. It deals with infatuation and obsession across the gulfs of religion, marriage, legitimacy and conventions. It takes into account extensively with pre-marital and post-marital sex. Most of the affairs that develop come with a whiff of bad endings. It is just like the river Nila, which rarely has enough water and symbolizes the shallowness of the life of the main characters of Mistress. The novel, "Mistress", on pre-marital is the way on pre-marital, non-marital and extra-marital sex. The author binds it with Kathakali, a popular and rigorous dance form of Kerala. The principal protagonist is a Kathakali artiste of international repute. The different cases of interplay between the characters are expressed through Navarasas, that is, the nine phases of human emotion.

In the words of Maya Vinay, "Though Anita Nair is classified as

stay-at-home writer by the literary circles and academic institutions, Nair's fiction strongly exhibits the diasporas consciousness. Born in Shornoor, a small town in Northern Kerala and brought up in Avadi, 22 kms. Away from Chennai her heart holds a fond longing for her native home state, Kerala. This longing is evident in the glowing terms in which she describes the landscape and the obeisance she pays to the rich cultural heritage of Kerala in her narrative"¹

She tries to find out the reason of the above discussed problem. She thinks that the problem is a result of the loss of identity amidst the new culture besides nostalgia which prevents an individual from adapting himself to the new surroundings. It raises questions as to the existence of him. It is observed that fear engulfs making him lose the ability to think. More importantly, the fear of future often disturbs the migrant in facing the challenges. The individual's power to live props up from the conditions he was habituated to. The habitat Complexities in Art and in Life has been portrayed in Anita Nair's Mistress which provides comfort with the proximity of all the facilities that the new environment doesn't offer and urges that they be acquired. The struggle for existence and the insecurity resulting from the displacement can also be reason for the migrant's melancholy that affects the confidence levels. Though religion is a way of life, it becomes a complexity owing to the deviations made and the essence construed by the mankind. Religion is made for promoting peace; it became a shield for a human being to safeguard his ego and weaknesses. In this way it has resulted in chaos presently. The conflicts among the people are often considered to be the result of the injustice by the hands above in the distribution of resources and craving for power over the other. On the other hand, the way of the world becomes the culprit in a sociological structure that accommodates people. It becomes difficult for a large entity or a group to value the ideas of individual. As man's instinct craves for identity there will always be an individual who tries to move away from the large entity for establishing a separate group. When two groups operate in the same region, the will to win over the ideology of the opponent group arrives. It is also seen that leaves the world in a catastrophe. The idea gets projected when the Doctor objects the marriage of Sethu and Saadiya. Sethu makes a comment in frustration saying, "I believed that you would find it in you to offer us some of the precious Christian charity of spirit you talk so much about. But then, you always draw from the Bible what suits you and ignore the rest"²

Anita Nair portrays the same issue when she says about the living conditions of Saadiya and her family. She clearly mentions that the natives built alleys exclusively for women to protect them from the evil intentions of the foreign inhabitants.

She insulates the idea of religion with its customs as a reason behind the imposition of the rule that forbids women from moving in the open. Sethu and Saadiya face the conflict when they beget a child. Religion becomes the bone of contention externally but it is the unrest created in their minds owing to the other factors that contribute to Saadiya's death. The words of Saadiya's father when he comes to know about her trespass reveal the issue of Patriarchy and insecurity but not religion to which such causes are attributed to. He says, "This is a lesson for you as much as it is for me, that it is unwise to give girls even a little rope. That it isn't in women to understand the nuances of freedom"³.

Saadiya is alone and she has insecurity. She is away from her family resulting to contribution to the possessive nature and she fights with Sethu for all the above reasons. She has been brought up in a confined space and has always wished to set free herself and walks into the open alley. Her wish gets revealed as she feels, "There is singing in my head that says, there is so much to see, so much to do, so much to know. It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want, see and do whatever you like, and I am expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys"⁴.

Saadiya's insecure feeling and her position in the depressed state are owing to the frustration she might have faced in her inability to establish a border between the reality and the dream world. In the words of Dr. Shanmugam and Saravana Kumar, "Saadiya's motivation is not difficult to trace, as it is mentioned quite explicitly several times; whatever she does, is motivated by the longing for freedom and the "familiar sense of despair" she feels every time she contemplates her life within the walls. How important her need to follow her decision is, is apparent from how far she goes when pursuing it. The need to experience true freedom is a stimulus that makes her take one step after another until she meets her limits. Saadiya's faith becomes more and more important to her. Crossing the limits of the external laws helps her to find her internal limits. It leads her to yet another infringement of the rules. When she realizes that her faith brings her more freedom than she could possibly ever experience on her own merit, her life limits the experiences of her faith. Then she takes a decision that is supposed to free her from both the freedom that limits her soul and the limits of faith that bring freedom to it. To reconcile the two longings she experiences she aims at the freedom that death brings. This is, however not a mere search for the ultimate freedom; it is a new violation of another set of rules, a whole set as in order to do so, she has to abandon her son and her man.

Saadiya violates the rules being motivated by the longing for freedom. It eventually brings her back to follow the rules. Her reputation has been damaged and the limits will consequently be harsher. In this context, her breaking the rules can be understood as a bi-product of her search for freedom. Finding the freedom she was actively seeking, she paradoxically abandons everything that it offers. Anita Nair in "Mistress" tries to present the different perspectives of the East and the West. When Radha and Chris make a conversation, they discuss their interests and issues about the world. The issue of Saddam Hussein trial perpetuates the difference in opinion when Chris justifies the invasion of Iraq by the Bush government. Radha supports the interest of Saddam Hussein saying that it was for the UN to decide whether Saddam was a threat to international peace. Chris comments on India's stand in being neutral to the issue giving the name tolerance in place of laziness. In the words of Chris, "Tolerance is just another word for Complexities in Art and in Life as portrayed in Anita Nair's Mistress laziness. To have an opinion and to stand by it necessitates making an effort, and you don't want to make that bloody effort"⁵.

Now further we find that Radha retaliates saying that the

concept of tolerance is beyond the comprehensive ability of the Westerners. She clarifies saying that India has no right to intrude into the interests of the other country. In the words of Radha, "What do you want me to say? That Bush and Blair and the coalition are right and we are wrong? Please understand. I am not justifying what Saddam did. All I am saying is, one country does not have the right to take away the sovereignty of another. That is all"⁶.

Women writers of Indian Writing in English are good in analyzing complex issues like complexities of human relationships, man-woman relationship, woman's psyche and her potential. The changing pattern of man-woman relationship has been presented in her novels and the same has been presented in films and television serials also. Mukherjee, Meenakshi in her book "Between Spaces of Silence: Women Creative Writers" writes that bold themes and diverse issues are now being taken up by the media. The mosaic of stories highlights the fact that man-woman relationship is a very complex and subtle issue.⁷

Other women novelists, too, have brought out the phenomena and substantiate valid ideas to make the readers aware of it. In almost every novel Anita Nair is preoccupied with the woman's search for freedom and Self-realization. She believes in freedom at all levels. She has full trust in peaceful existence as well. The women characters of Anita Nair's fictional world have come out of the shackles of bondage in their struggle to regain self-identity. In these women characters there is a deep longing for self-fulfillment through self-expression. A woman in our society is a non-person, an appendage, a slave to the master-man. Women in our culture are not individuals in their own right but objects through whom man aspires for self-affirmation and self-relationship. The culture that created a Sita and a Savitri has denied the rights of existence to woman save as daughter, sister, wife, mother etc. she is yet to achieve individuation and an authentic self-identity.

So far we have been discussing about main concern of the author on man-woman relationship in general and with special reference to her novel, Mistress in particular. The characters are the Navarasa, the main facial expressions of Kathakali, and the stage on which she rests her entire novel. Kathakali is an ancient form of expressive dance in India, and the inspiration for Nair's story. It is an art form which uses music and expressive acting and dance with a view to conveying the greatest Hindu stories. We must admit that it's the backbone of her characters and is like the river running through her novel. Koman is a vesham, an actor of Kathakali and in his old age he is visited by Christopher Stewart, an English writer having an interest in hearing the life story of Koman and his dance. Another character is Koman's niece namely Radha, who is drawn to Chris, away from her unfulfilling marriage to Shyam. Nair's narrative leaps between these four, and into Koman's past as well. The novel is literally divided by the Navarasas, in which each new chapter starts from a lyrical explanation of the emotion, the expression, that will reign over our little cast of players. Nair describes Karunam (sorrow):

In "Mistress" she expressed the struggle and conflict of Radha who loses her husband by a terrorist attack. It further deals with her miserable and terrible life that she leads. Women writers in the contemporary world are excited because of the freedom to highlight their capacity as well as to fulfill the task without disguise. They have raised their opinion not only against women harassment but also in favor of the emotions and practical difficulties faced by the women in the world. In addition, their works highlighted the struggling of women to survive in the patriarchal society also. Women have to face various problems such as their individuality of nation, familial, educational and abundance of status etc. Women's

individuality is completely different from the opposite genders. "Women and fiction remain, so far as I am concerned, unsolved problems."

We should take into account some of major characters of this novel to understand the viewpoints of the author regarding the topic undertaken. The interesting character as well as the narrator of the novel is Sheela. She is a girl of fourteen years old and very familiar with her family members like grandmother, mother and father. Her grandmother teaches her the practical life. She becomes much attached with her grandma and this has developed maturity in her life. She seems to be a matured woman among others. The reader could find the three generation in her those are herself, her mother's and her grandmother's too. Her grandmother also teaches the attitude of men. Her father treats like a kid or a child when she tries to show her maturity, and completely controls her. Next character is Prabha Devi. On her birth, her father comments her as a bloodstained annoyance. Her father is unhappy whereas her mother feels the other extreme. She turns out to be conventional wife. She loves swimming. Through that she finds herself very happy with freedom and identity. The most important character apart from Akhila is Marikolunthu who is abused by the society as she is an Indian woman from rural background. It concludes by saying that most men are making use of woman's illiteracy, isolation, annoyance etc.

CONCLUSION

It is a well known fact that the entire life of an Indian woman is fully dedicated to her husband and to her family in Indian society. One can find an up gradation in the status of women as there are certain laws for their betterment and a wave of women empowerment is there but in reality their condition is still same even in contemporary society. They are not self dependent or able to live their own life, they are always under the control of their parents and of their husbands after marriage. They are not supposed to think about their own freedom they still feel themselves trapped under the chains which emotionally, physically and intellectually affect them. Nair explores that every women should try to be cautious about their rights and for the expression of their individual capability. Finally speaking, through her work she gives vent to her feeling that women want to make themselves free from the restraints of tradition. She wants to live a free life in male dominating society. This novel induces women to imagine in relation to their strength and about their self-identity. She tries to integrate the chronic female occurrence in her writing. To sum up we can say that Anita Nair is Indian English novelist who with her impressive technique of novel-writing gives a real description of women's wretched condition in Indian society. She takes interest in exploring women's agony and she suggests a number of ways to fight back against their low graded situation in the society. She does so as wants to make their life a fruitful and peaceful one. Her women characters are not weak; they are courageous and possess an impressive audacity. She wants to make them powerful to fight back against social evils. Anita Nair's novels are to be considered as a microcosm of female world.

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