



Thrown Into The World of Women To Understand A Woman – A Dasein Study of Aita Nair's Characters

KEYWORDS

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Simon de Beauvoir relates in *The Prime of Life* (Simon de Beauvoir's autobiography written in the year 1960) how Sartre saw phenomenology as a means for philosophy to describe the perpetual experiences of everyday life. Husserl's view of human beings is as 'Dasein' or 'thrown-into-the-world'. As every being is a composite whole of present, past and the future, it is an attempt to stand out of these and analyse the influence in a self. As we can never 'just exist' in the present moment because the past, present and the future are deeply enmeshed in our decision to act.

The woman being "a woman" or the man being "a particular kind of a man" has its roots embedded in his past present and future. There is a drastic change in the kinds of men and women found in this today's culture. These changing patterns of man- woman relationship can be traced in the works of Anita Nair. She has shown how the modern Indian woman attempts to free herself sexually and domestically from the bondages sanctioned by the past. The male and female characters in her novels try to grapple with their interpersonal problems, with or without success; often ending in some kind of a truce which mostly is not appreciated or accepted by 'male conditioned society'. The novelist like the readers seems to know that there is no logical analysis of emotion or an equivocating function in most relationships. The focus is often on the emotional fulfilment in man-woman relationship.

In *Mistress*, *The Better Man*, and *Ladies Coupe* the characters crave for emotional solace but this is denied to them owing to which there is incongruity in human behaviour. Superficially, these are the basic problems that one will be able to see. But, for any problem there must be a root cause too. And to reach those roots some basic questions are to be raised and answered like why is there so much emotional imbalance in people be it woman or man. Why woman in particular are so much craving for emotional support? It may sound that the realm of psychodynamics getting touched. The fact one is to understand is that in every aspect of life's psychodynamics one's knowledge of the environment, understanding of self in relation to others or vice versa and fearless application of human principles of life (all put together as consciousness) to what one discerns as truth matters. Phenomenology being the study of consciousness has more definite ideas related to human psychology.

In order to find answers to the above posed question, one has to consider the entire panorama of cultural evolution to have a comprehensive understanding of the human behaviour in the post modern contemporary society. Novels are mostly looked upon to be a performance of the very reality in which one lives, and today's reality has its roots in the past of yesterdays called tradition. And this tradition

is unfortunately a male text and marginalizes women in the name of "Angel of the House". So in order to understand the cultural shifts that we are living through today, the recognition of those cultural changes are to be scrutinized and then by applying it to literature the cultural shifts of the past may be understood ; one way of doing this is through the exploration of the myths of the past. While making such a study one is likely to come across not just one voice but many, a polyphony of voices will be the end result contending with the traditional recognition of the one ultimate truth..

Beyond the threshold of her house a woman finds life insecure and confusing due to her hitherto social and cultural seclusion. Whenever women have stepped out of their confines, they have had to struggle against prejudices and dual standards prevalent in society. An Indian woman has been either venerated as a goddess or rejected as a siren.

The modern woman has to compete against these two extreme images. She is striving to lead the life of a normal human being with normal desires. She does not wish to succumb to the pressures of patriarchy, marginality, and helplessness. In her desire to establish a viable relationship with the people she works with, the Indian woman must break free from the bondage of conventions and subordinations inbuilt in patriarchal societies. An equitable man - woman relationship can only be established if women get rid of this traditional image. Venerating and worshipping a woman only serves to isolate her further.

Literature as a vehicle allows one have glimpse of such apparent or latent change which take place in the minds of people at the perspective level or practice level. Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* lends credence to this hypothesis. Writers have taken this kind of an exploration in order to observe and understand the human mind and their working both at the psychological, political and cultural levels.

One such writer is Anita Nair who has understood the way in which systematic or pervasive political and cultural structures are enacted and has recreated it through her characters and events –in short, her plots. How ostensibly personal situations are clarified through the phenomenological perspective and particularly the humanistic perspectives has been her primary focus and hence the prime intention of this research. In the beginning it was quite difficult for the researcher to understand whether Ms. Nair is more a feminist or a humanist or a moralist or a feminist critique but a closer study of her work leads one to the philosophy of human consciousness as understood by the principle of phenomenology (which again is a male theory and the primordial principle of women writers is to rewrite if not reject male theories, as opined by the principle of woman as

reader and writer in the Showalterian sense. It should also be noted that Ms. Nair's works show a lot of scope for different kinds of interpretations and theoretical applications to Anita Nair's novels focus on the nature of individual's subjective experience. The characters like Bashi, Koman, Shyam, Akhila, and Radha are not stereotypes. They keep growing from one state to the other. In fact they nearly fall into the category of the protagonists of the bildungsroman. Phenomenology sees humankind as being intrinsically good and self-perfecting. People are seen as being drawn towards growth, health, self-sufficiency, and maturity. And thus this is a very optimistic perspective which focuses on people's latent potential.

Historically, the psychological insights into phenomenological perspectives can be first traced to Wilhelm Wundt who is often considered as having conducted the first formal psychological research in the 1870's. Wundt had people "introspect", or concentrate and report on subjective conscious experience. Introspection was seen as lacking in scientific rigour and as not having any particular application.²² Interestingly though, in the 1950's and 1960's, a sense of political and personal freedom, the importance and interest in subjective experience, came into existence and thus psychology became more pertinent again. Throughout, the base for all these studies and also to this research is Sigmund Freud's theory of psychoanalysis. Freud believes that human beings are motivated by powerful innate forces, to which he gives the name *Triebe* (instincts or drives). According to Freud, the basic objective of all human behaviour is to achieve pleasure and avoid pain. Anita Nair in her novel only tries to underline these finer instincts resulting in conflicts between this pleasure seeking mind and the cultural barriers it encounters.

The next question which is relevant to this discussion is in what way is phenomenology going to help understand Ms. Nair's stand? Well, for that the first question to be answered is what is phenomenology? According to Maurice Natanson, Phenomenology is a science of beginnings and comprehending facts through one's consciousness or awareness. To begin, in this sense, is to start from the primordial grounds of evidence, from oneself as the center (not the sum) of philosophical experience. Such self-centeredness is the opposite of philosophic hubris; it is a confession of humility: the admission that, unless the inquirer has turned to himself in full awareness of his life, he cannot claim to have sought, let alone found, the truth. The genuine beginner is, then, the most sophisticated of all thinkers,... he is unwilling to admit as taken for granted that which impinges most heavily on his outlook as a man in the world: the root assumption that, though we may be ignorant of philosophic truth, we are, after all, beings in a real world in which philosophic doubt emerges as something worth bothering about.

So it becomes inevitable for a being that whether he is aware of certain philosophies or not whether he understands the way his or anybody's psyche works or not he is constantly only living with them. And Maurice Natanson's definition for phenomenology helps one to understand that phenomenology helps to see the truth without being held by any prejudice, without any mask, and it makes one see that there is a 'self' which is changing and growing. For example the basic problem everybody has is about the misrepresentation and the misunderstanding of a problem. For years now everybody has talked a lot about the influence of patriarchy. Patriarchy is one way of thinking, and another way of looking at a problem; a set

of assumptions that has been translated into various structures and ideologies which decided to confer on males the power of authority. Males are considered to have individual destinies; they are promised domination, a surrogate godhead, transcendence over the natural world through power in heroism, sainthood or some other form of transcendent paternity- founding a dynasty, an institution, a religion or a state or creating an enduring work of art. Feminists think of the entire scenario of patriarchy as hierarchy, a structure designed to maintain and transmit power from the spiritual father to spiritual son, a form which absolutely excludes females. The concept about the difference in every individual, the importance and the latent presence of unique self in every living body, is completely missing in the patriarchal way of looking at the world which is the root for all the feministic perspective or the feministic interpretations.

Everyone's self is unique. It has a beautiful and unique form. Irrespective of the gender and species difference, once one provides a nurturing outer and inner environment, growth towards one's higher selves occurs naturally. Humans have an enormous potential, possibility, and choice owing to which what emerges is the uniqueness of individuals. We view the world from our own unique perspective and our subjective experience of reality is very important and phenomenology means "the subjective experience of individuals" this is the philosophy applying which one can understand any complex subjective experience of an individual. Every individual is an entire being with so many experiences, and mostly each experience varies at the approach. To view each experience in the way the hierarchical system asks one to, is a very monotonous way of looking at life and also it would never render the complete truth about it. In *Mistress* the writer employs a particular narrative method to enhance the way to understand how each individual's perspective of the same situation is. Each one looks at life based on his/her consciousness. Each consciousness is striving to exercise its freewill: wanting the world to act the way it prefers. Establishing one's own consciousness and curbing the other's consciousness and eventually no possibility for any kind of empathy or understanding between people.

Some of the basic ideas which are predominantly found in the contemporary English literature, especially in Indian women writings are that we can and must exercise our free will. Some people think that they do not have the capacity or ability to make life happen for them. Or, they believe that past problems are insurmountable. Or, they spend so much time regretting the past that they are blind to the possibilities of the here and now and the future. This perspective takes the view that this is due to people losing sight of the free will they possess and not recognizing their own potential for change. But what freedom does a woman in Indian society have? Does her free will get respected? And in order to voice herself, what strategies is she to employ? Is she as liberated and simple as she is projecting herself to be? How hard or easy is her survival against the man made world? Some glimpses are seen in the *Ladies' Coupe* with certain examples of the different kinds of strategies employed by women. Akhila in the *Ladies' Coupe* tries to understand the consciousness of the other women in that compartment. They all serve as a representative of different classes of the society. She doesn't go by their mere appearances she takes the chance of getting deeper into their consciousness and understands their real experience. And most importantly all these aspects are dealt both by the writer and the characters very intelligently: they have said it all with a slant.

The end of all the novels by Anita Nair would make one realise that every character has the possibility of evolving into a better being only through expanding one's consciousness, by understanding the other human being's situation and mind and by letting oneself thrown into the other's life. Mere struggle for survival and the ensuing employment of evil will not lead to a better world. The struggles and fights for rights shall subside once understanding starts dawning.

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