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Marriage as Misalliance in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

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Abstract:

Anita Nair is a popular Indian-English writer. She is considered as a bold and straightforward writer. Her novels depict the real life of her characters without hiding anything to the readers. The other point is that her novels reveal the effect of social conditioning on women. Nair has portrayed some of her protagonists are economically independent women but they do not have control over their own life. Because major decisions of their life are taken by others. She has clearly brought this concept to the light that women in modern Indian may be educated and financially independent but still their life is in the hands of others. This article focuses on how her female characters commit adultery and sacrilege and they delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. They are entangled in their suffering and rebellion born of pain, and convey a message of hope, through the change that is out there and can become possible through one's courage and initiative.

Keywords: marital relationship, male domination, suppression, exploitation and subjugation.

Introduction:

Indian writing in English today has come to occupy a respectable position and the credit for it goes to a good number of women writers whose pens have split much in bringing to light the various aspects left untouched and ignored by their male counterparts. Widely considered as feminist writers, these deities describe not only their family fluids and their inferior status but they depict the sores in their souls and their agonies as individuals. Indian women by large try to maintain family ties under pressures, and it is hoped that they will not create situation in failure, where men and children suffer and they themselves are not at peace. Actually it is women who have all along respected and adhered to family values and were

responsible for the contribution of culture. On the other hand, women themselves should become more self-reliant and seek opportunities that make life more meaningful and worth living.

Marriage is still a necessary event in the society, where women can get security and respectability from men. Domination is the significant in an analysis of the man-woman relationship. The male characteristics are ones coupled with mental thought and positive activity, at the same time as the woman is regarded as basically submissive and her role to be respectable of male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species. In the past, the woman was completely traditional, uneducated, superstitious and confined. Being lived in such atmosphere women had become narrow and controlled. Anita Nair is one of the finest writers in Indian English Literature. She has much insight into the concerns of studies, family, love and striving for fame and fortune. She has portrayed such a life in her recent novel *Mistress*.

Anita Nair is an Indian English writer and the living writer of this century. She is proficiency and scholarly panorama. She is regarded as one of the leading novelists in Indian English Literature. In her works, Nair mainly focuses on the real women condition on the earth. At the same time, she is artful in interweaving her stories in the Indian scenario. She is unique in presenting her conceptions and innovative in sharing the experience of language. Anita Nair's novels display an awe inspiring depth in her narration and the main thrust of her novels is the confrontation between the self-actualization and family responsibilities of individuals. Almost all her novels are embedded in Indian culture and the characters and settings are inherently Indian.

Anita Nair mirrors the society in her literary endeavors. Her writings delve deep into the contemporary obnoxious condition of human beings. She explores the colossal proviso of human experiences and expresses them with full flow of her emotion. In addition, her works are a mixture of realism as found in Indian culture with universal appeal. As a novelist, her spirit lies in ushering the everyday reality in her writings.

Anita Nair was born at Mundakottakurissi near Shoranur in Kerala on January 26, 1966. She studied B.A. in English Literature at NSS College, Ottapalam. Due to her father's work in the ordinance factory at Chennai, she spent her childhood days in a suburb called Avadi near Chennai. She has presented in her novels modern Indian women's search for survival of relationships that are central to women. As a women writer, she wants to give voice to women's concern and be branded as a women writer. Nair reveals that her concern in with the exploration of human psyche.

Nair portrays some of her protagonists are economically independent women but still they don't control on their own. She being woman penetrates deep into the inner mind of the depressed women by virtue of her feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings to light their issues which are the outcome of Indian women's psychological and emotional imbalance in a male dominated society. Therefore male dominated society and its anti-women ideology is the root cause of women's backwardness and their sufferings and victimization.

The characters of Anita Nair's novel involved in committing adultery and sacrilege as depicted in *Mistress*. They want to break the social norms and they do not like to surrender themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident to fulfill their desires by going against the society. Many of her characters experience sex before entering into the life of marriage and indulge in extra marital affair which is strictly against the Indian society. It is proved that Nair breaks the chains of society in portraying her women characters which will lead them to its fragmentation. She never hesitates to tell the truth although it would be bitter and at the same time she forces us to think on the importance of removing adultery to save family life.

Anita Nair acknowledges that the borrowing of her latest novel's title from Emerson's "Art is a jealous mistress". It gives an opportunity to a reader to read and comprehend her novel *Mistress* in the light of this statement. According to her, it is a metaphor that underline the possessive nature of art and its moral nature. To Anita Nair, writing the novel has been as affair during which she felt 'possessed' or 'mistrusted' by her art of writing the novel.

Anita Nair's mistress which revolves around Koman who is a kathakali dancer, Radha, his niece, the wife of Shyam who likes another man, Christopher, a travel writer who comes to India to write about Koman. Anita Nair has used some techniques which is interweaving the dance of kathakali in the novel and its mythical character and the story of Radha. She has married to Shyam which is full of unhappiness and ill-matched marriage which makes her to find the solace into the hands of Chris who is an American writer.

The novel culminates in Radha who wants to find her own voice and decides to live independently without any disturbance of Shyam. The settings of the novel are situated in the bank of the river Nila in Kerala where the dance of kathakali formed. Koman, a kathakali artist and Radha receives Chris in the railway station in the beginning of the novel which is the turning point in the life of Radha.

Shyam is the remarkable characterization in this novel depicted as modern, educated and Indian but he finds hard to follow the traditional as a man. Nair portrays Shyam to be given his voice as a first person narrative which will bring the reader straight into his mind. Shyam is a successful business man. He is never reluctant to turn any opportunity into a money making venture. His only failure in his life is his misunderstanding of his wife who is treated as an individual and has a mind on his own. He treats her as another possession and his business ventures. He always calls her "my Radha" which seems his ownership. Marriage will make the way for understanding and meaningful relationship but Shyam wants an unequal relationship which will make Radha his possession. Simone de Beauvoir talks about this masculine trait in *The Second Sex*:

... subordinated economically and socially to her husband the good wife is the man's most precious treasure. She belongs to him so profoundly that she partakes

of the same essence as he; she has his name, his gods, and he is responsible for her. He calls her 'better half.' He takes pride in his wife as he does in his house, his lands, his flocks, his wealth and sometimes even more; through her he displays his power before the world: she is his measure and his earthly portion. (207)

Shyam thinks that the idea of marriage is only to keep a pretty wife and indulge in her wishful fancies and want to make her to be dependent on him. He does not an assertive wife. There are a lot of differences between them which makes incomparable in many ways. Radha feels suffocated in her marriage. She compares herself with butterfly because she caught and pinned to a board as part of biology project in school and feels that "Somewhere within a little heart beat, yearning to fly" (54).

When Radha meets Chris, she feels that he is match to her and shares her sensitivity and her taste for art and literature. Being a mistress to a stranger like Chris may have its justification in her dissatisfaction in her sexual life with her husband Shyam who is not only medically unfit but also too calculative and commercial in his attitude to life unlike his wife Radha. Koman understands this love through his knowledge of kathakali. As a master of kathakali, he knows the subtiles of the functioning of eyes and voice and read Radha's eyes. He reports;

Now Radha's gaze follows mine. I see that, like me, she cannot keep her eyes away from him. She walks forward. 'Do you need any help?' There is a lilt in her voice. Where has the discontent seeped away to? There is no need for Abraham. Her face is radiant. Her eyes throw him a side long glance. Chris turns to her. Her smile gathers her in his arms. (29)

As Shyam suspects Radha's affair with Chris, he feels jealousy. Shyam knows very well that he cannot rule her mind. So, he wants to rule her body. He fills with frustration and anger and he shows his forces on Radha and gives the explanation for that:

The resentment I felt for being tolerated rather than loved, the yearning I had suffered, the loneliness of these eight years, all fused to become a consuming desire to possess her. To make her mine. To reach within and tear down that film of indifference that coated her eyes each time I took her in my arms. (163)

Later on, he feels satisfied with that and arrogantly says, "Women like to be made to feel like women, dominated and put in their place. Even my Radha. So I was't wrong, after all" (164). Shyam shows his arrogance which spoils her dignity, her control over her body and she has the rights to say "no." Radha feels shocked on seeing the behaviour of Shyam and his attack on her body. After the incident Radha says: "Two nights have passed since Shyam plundered my body, seized and took away my right to say no. Time hasn't made it better, only worse..." (164).

To understand the character of Shyam, it is important to reiterate the fact that Indian men, or for that matter, men from other cultures, look at women in their as their property. When a woman is indifferent to her husband and turns another man for love, it is directly for the virility of the husband. In this case, Shyam wants to show his ownership on Radha and 'mark the territory.' He wants to prove that he is her husband and he has every right to overcome her whether she likes or not. It shows that Shyam is like an animal like drive to prove his virility and assert his position as the husband.

Shyam does not care for the feelings of Radha. Nair discusses another important issue with regard to Shyam in the novel, which is his sterility. When Shyam knows that he is not the reason for the pregnancy of Radha and keeps it from her. Shyam thinks: "How can I have an infertility problem? Women were infertile not men" (204). He wants Radha to look at him as a "full-bodied, red-blooded alpha male capable of fathering a hundred and one children" (205). Here it seems that an Indian man feels less of a man if he is incapable of giving birth to a child. That's why in the end of the novel, Radha decides to leave him that he reveals the facts to her.

But the narrative resolves the dilemma in an entirely novel way, with Radha realizing the flaws of and in a sense, also the similarity between Chris and Shyam. As she puts it, "When I think of Chris, what I see is the shadow of Shyam. And when I think of Shyam, what I see is the possibility of escape with Chris. I know for certain that I cannot live with one or other" (398). As the novel ends, Radha is in a dilemma when she thinks of returning to Shyam for support: "It is fear that makes me seek him, not regard for him... I cannot continue to play wife merely because it frees me of worries" (426).

For Radha, the main motivation to violate the rules that limit her life is to find the freedom she is looking for and the expression for her life as she wants to live it. However, most of the individual violations are empty attempts to achieve this goal. Never being really able to find her place in the society, being first a lover of a man who did not appreciate her fully, then a wife to a husband she did not love, she is trying to retrieve her true self. It is only through struggles and arguments with her husband and an affair with a stranger that she finally manages to determine her future and gathers the courage to realize it. So Radha is called "a new Indian woman" in the modern world.

At the end of the novel, Shyam wants to get the sympathy from the readers that he lost all his possession in his life, namely Radha. It may be a question whether Shyam is a victim in the social conditioning as discussed earlier. It may be believed that Shyam is superior to women and his high-handed behaviour but it cannot be overlooked that he fails as a civilized human being.

Shyam can be considered as a representative of the modern Indian male, one can come to conclusion. The modern man has not completely shed his traditional grab is obvious. It is also apparent that the construction of the Indian male identity rests on the wealth he acquires and the

status he acquires. The Indian male is threatened by the great strides that women have taken in recent time.

Nair has brought about to the fore the issue of marital relationship which is discussed above. Women have been living in silence and pain for ages as victims of male dominance. The life of a woman is considered a public affair, her personal revolts are consequently revolts against the society as a whole, and the punishment is given for their responsibility. It is also very important to accept the attitudinal change which is happening among educated urban Indian men who have given respect to women and they learn to treat them as individuals with their own minds. It should be spread everywhere. Because everyone is a victim in the social norms or other but it is very for the people that they should not allow the beliefs which would suppress them and they have to avoid such practices.

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair focuses on sexual domestic violence. Her works contain a wide range of interests which makes her a multifaceted writer of the present generation. *Mistress* is an intensive novel full of deep, mysterious, complex emotions that are very true in life. The story of each character unravels slowly and in the end culminates in a passionate story of life. All of the characters in the novel have a passion in life and in some way or other it decides the course of their lives, and it becomes a demanding mistress. In *Mistress*, she closed the realms of kathakali performers come alive; she paints a poignant picture of the segregated cloistered Muslim village.

The novel ends in that her stories delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. They are entangled in their suffering and rebellion born of that pain, and convey a message of hope; through the change that is out there and can become possible through one's courage and initiative.

A society must work towards a balanced gender equation in which both men and women are able to find their own rightful place. It would be apt to conclude in the words of Shashi Deshpande: "A world without frightened, dependent, trapped, frustrated women is a better world for all of us to live in" (85).

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