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## Psychological Trauma of Women in Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps*

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### **Abstract:**

Anita Nair, an Indian Writer in English, deals with the conditions of women in India. Her novels reflect the struggle and conflict they need to undergo for representing themselves. Her language in the novels is contemporary; she tries to connect with the contemporary readers. The concepts, ideas and plot of Anita Nair's novels are somewhat different from the other fiction writers. Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* takes us to the life of ten women characters of various ages and social background. Nair excels at creating different women characters, their problems and how they overcome it. This research paper titled 'Psychological Trauma of Women in Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps*' presents the identity and struggle of the six women characters. The Protagonist and the narrator of the novel Sreelakshmi, another Protagonist a woman in her 30's Urvashi, a young school girl Megha, a social media prey pussy mouth Liliana, mother of a mentally challenged son Maya and an acid attack survivor Najma.

**Keywords:** Agonies, challenges, criticize, disapproval, explain, independent women

The novel begins with the Protagonist Sreelakshmi, who killed her in the year 1965; it is about a writer, her life, ambitions and contradictions. Sreelakshmi is a thirty-five-year-old unmarried woman, an award-winning author and Zoology lecturer who describes herself as "Kerala's Virginia Woolf". People who attended the funeral explained her death as "She had an incurable disease. She was in love with a married man. She was in love with a man who dumped her. She was pregnant. She was depressed. Something humiliating happened at the college which

led to this.” (1) The story behind the title of the novel *Eating Wasps* is explained as the protagonist, Sreelakshmi eats a wasp mistaking it for a bee filled with honey. She is the girl who ate a wasp hoping to flood her mouth with honey. She is the independent woman who shelved marriage for her higher studies. A woman who wrote bold love stories for a local magazine. Her writing was criticized by the society as it was against the societal norms. When the third part of ‘Letters to a Man Never Met’ was published in *The Weekly*, the society turns against her. Even her mother disagreed her writing “You should have thought about that when you published your obscenities.” (248) Her brother-in-law’s, in rage and reproach questioned her “Don’t you have any shame? Do you think you can write any rubbish and no one is going to mention it?” (250) When all her relatives, friends and her mother criticized her stories about sexual desires, this societal disapproval and her affair with a married man Markose made Sreelakshmi to commit suicide. The piece of bone in the right-hand index finger is stealthily picked up from her cremation pyre late at night by her clandestine lover Markose. He placed the bone, her soul into a secret compartment of a cupboard. When time passed, the cupboard was moved to another place, some distance away from his home. Sreelakshmi’s soul was alive in the almirah but Markose who kept the index finger forgot her totally. “ But when I died, I was reduced to a forgotten bone, a ghost of her former self, and I may have stayed thus for the rest of eternity, locked in that pen-case and buried in that secret compartment, but for a child.”(4) Sreelakshmi, through the index finger is thus carried through the stories of several women who are facing their own challenges in life.

Megha is a six-year-old girl, who begins to join school for Class 1. She was the pet of her mother until her brother Suraj came home. Suraj would tease her and Megha’s mother’s care shifted to Suraj. Megha was traveling to school in the green army truck. A little metal ladder was attached to the rear of the truck and a man to assist the children stood by the ladder. Megha’s heart beat was faster as the line went up the steps. Megha was the last one while returning from school in the truck. Her brother Suraj cycled to school because children stood like monkeys in a cage. Uncle Prem, keeper of green army truck asked Megha to sit by his side. Megha felt happy as she got place to sit and Prem called her pretty as no one called her pretty until then. When Suraj passed the truck in his cycle, he asked uncle Prem is his sister naughty? He told “Naughty? No, she is such a bommakutty?” (27) He seated her on his lap and plucked a handful of plump jamuns when they reached the jamun tree. Megha sticking her tongue out at him, crossing her eyes and growling she told “Look Prem Uncle, I am a Monster.” (27) Prem Uncle pinched her cheeks again and said

“You cannot be a monster. You are a princess, Princess Megha.” (27) The next day she carefully copied her name on the first page of the diary as Princess Megha. Megha’s class teacher Mrs George showed her notebooks and diary to her Mom. Suraj too complained her Mummy that she sits in the lap of the keeper. Her father thought that her mother was overreacting to the situation. Her Papa spoke with the truck keeper to make her daughter sit inside the truck. Her Mummy Chaya advised her not to sit on stranger’s lap, not to take sweets or gifts from people that she doesn’t know. A few days Prem Uncle didn’t turn at her side. Megha felt very sorry for the situation. The truck keeper misused the small girl’s affection. One day when all the children got down from the truck, he asked Megha to kiss him pointing his lips. He pressed her against his lips. He asked her to give many kisses the next day. Now Megha understood his intention. Megha bite his hand the next day until she tasted blood in her mouth and escaped from him. Suraj complained that Megha bit the man in the truck as he tried to stop the fight of Megha with a girl. Her father asked Megha to apologise to the girl she fought with and with the truck keeper. They asked her to travel in the truck the day after; her mom would take her to school from the next day. Megha asked Sorry to Prem, Anita Nair completed Megha’s episode as “Then show me you are sorry,’ he said, pulling her to the back of the truck.” (38) “She stood still, knowing there was no escape.” (38)

Urvashi is a smart and promising political journalist, is at the resort in Kerala called Near the Nila to get away from an extra-marital affair she has left far behind, but the man does not want to end the relationship. Urvashi was a happily married journalist with grown up children. Her marriage lacks chemistry and she was performing only the role of wife. She joins a dating app for fun, but gets sucked into a possessive relationship. They have sexual chemistry, and soon she realized that the relationship is only dependent on sex. She showed it in a thousand ways that it had ended, but the man is not ready to accept. He keeps on sending him threatening message and phone calls. Finally, Urvashi decided to be courageous “I am not hiding from you anymore’ (205) He picked the phone on the second ring and said “I knew you would come back to me” (205) A thin line of steel inserted into her spine and entered Urvashi’s voice “I was never your prisoner, to escape. You are just a silly boy throwing a childish tantrum. But I am not your mother to indulge you. So, listen to me: it’s over. You and I are finished, no matter what you think. Nothing you say or do is going change that.” (205) Nair portrays the present dangers like online stalking and social media exposure is shown in the character of Urvashi in the novel. In contrast to Sreelakshmi,

Urvashi boldly opposes the man who tortures her and lives a life. She accepts that “Life would continue to surprise her, one way or another. But there was no running away from it.” (205)

Liliana who is nicknamed as pussy mouth as she draws whiskers in either side of her mouth like a cat in the eyebrow pencil and with dark lipsticks crawled on her knees towards F. Liliana is a dancer who returned home to Italy after a tough year at Cambridge. Someone took the mobile video of her and shared it to her ex-boyfriend in Sheffield and he forwarded it to his school, university and work groups. The views of the video hits 2 million. Liliana mouth became her identity rather than her hair, her legs, the curve of her waist, the upward tilt of her nose, her thoughts, her feelings. She felt shy for this act. Anyone she come across called her pussy mouth, Dhanya one of Liliana’s friend in the dance school uttered to her “Liliana, they did an internet search on you this afternoon. Its Tara. Until you arrived, she was the teachers’ pet. She was the girl who had moved from Calcutta to study here. But you moved countries. She is jealous. Don’t let it bother you” (177). She was criticized like Sreelakshmi for her behaviour but she is courageous to face the society instead of ending her life. Sreelakshmi who lived in 1960’s saw the tremendous change of world wide web expressed her views about Facebook, Twitter and Instagram as “Facebook was no more than a village well where daily updates were shared and Instagram was the bathing spot n the river where either you looked or were looked at. As for Twitter, it was no more than an extension of the tea shop where men gathered more for news and debate rather than for the tea and parippu vada. The only difference between then and now was that men and women bathed together, and men fetched water from the well while women sat on the narrow benches in the tea shop with their knees crossed and discussed politics and world affairs.” (180)

Maya yet another woman with grief in her life. Her son Naveen who is thirty-nine years old but his mental age is just six years. She felt bad when a stranger eyed her 95 Kg son as if he was an ungainly animal or a baby hippo. At first, the fretful baby kept awake the full night. She asked all the questions to God, “Why me? Why us?” (193) The paediatrician asked her to add little water to the flour mixture, a little at a time to form a soft dough. This is the way Maya need to deal with Naveen. Even a loud noise would disturb him and he would hurt him. He slaps his own face. Her husband Vipin lost his temper with Naveen. Vipin had turned to alcohol to numb his pain. He divorced Maya for this reason. Maya understood that Men will not take the responsibility, they will leave that to the women, Maya became Naveen’s shadow. After many years Maya met Koman,

a Kathakali dancer. Koman was in love with Maya and he accepted Naveen as his son. Koman died after a few years of their togetherness. Once Maya decided to end Naveen's life on his thirty ninth birthday because she was afraid of Naveen's life after her death. She made badhushah's with rat poison. Maya was unable to end his son's life "She seized the tray and walked back into the kitchen. She tossed the sweets into the bin and offered him a giant chocolate bar instead" (202) "In the morning, they would find something new to do." (202)

Najma, a young Muslim woman her ammi named her so as it denotes star, because she believed her daughter was destined for great things. Najma's mother never forced her to wear a burkha or get married. Her Ammi worked as a kitchen help for a catering company that specialized in Hyderabadi cuisine. Najma was working as a teacher in a school run by Muslim charity in Bangarpet. Najma thought of renting a house in Bangarpet after her job becomes permanent. Until then, she would commute by train. A man named Imtiaz met her in the train introduced her that he was the man she has to marry. Najma said "It's for my Ammi to decide that" (61) Later she came to know that he worked in the same catering company like her mother as a helper. Her Mother asked him "My daughter deserves better. She is a teacher. Why would she marry a lowly kitchen help like you?" (61) Again, one day he came to see Najma in the train, she was not afraid as the train was full of people. They would reach the station in five or six minutes. Imtiaz took out the bottle of acid and flung it in her face. Her life is shattered by an act of toxic masculinity. As Najma refused to marry him, his selfish nature made him to do a worst thing. Najma, who falls victim to an acid attack but refuses to hide her face and emerges a winner. It is admirable that Nair presented Najma's mother too as a strong woman with no education and financially underprivileged.

Anita Nair's women characters in the novel undergo both physical and mental struggles. Sreelakshmi being a middle-class woman is very sensitive to the social pressure, her brother in laws complain that her behaviour might affect their daughter's marriage and what sort of alliance might come to them as she (Sreelakshmi) being her aunt. The only thing made everybody to criticize her she doesn't have a man in her life. Being a writer, she couldn't express her views. Even her mother complains that her father died earlier or she might have killed him through her writings. Sreelakshmi was unable to face the society in spite of her writings and takes a decision to commit suicide, whereas Urvashi takes a bold decision to live a life with all her agonies. Urvashi is a woman of modern age; she believes that marriage is no more than a commitment. At one point,

she got fed up with the household chores and children. She considers that husbands are not a divine creature, plan to live an independent life. Although her next affair is also not successful which she found through a dating app, she throws away the next man also. Nair presents Urvashi with all her flaws, which shows that the present generation women are not more sensitive like the previous generation women. She has a strong rebellious nature in her character which makes her to mention boldly to the Man that everything is finished between them.

Megha, a small girl child longs for love and becomes a prey to the keeper of the truck. The anecdotes of Megha is what we come across in the daily's and newspaper how small girls are being misused and killed by men of all ages. In Urvashi's case we may say that development of Technology is the challenge of women but when we compare the incident of Megha it is not the same because a small child never knows the meaning of Technology, she knows only the people whom she meets in her life. Najma, doesn't need to hide her face inside the burkha even though it looks ugly with the acid attack. Her courage to face the world with her new face is remarkable. Najma's character shows her psychological sickness how she became the reason for the boy to treat him. The story of Najma is not only her story but the fate of many girls who come across such terror in their life. Anita Nair has shown her readers the face of an empowered women who is ready to survive with all the hardships. Liliana's character reflects present day situation of online bullying. Liliana from across the continent who is apparently at the resort for a dance residency, but in reality, to escape the shame thrust on her. She was unable to cope with the emotions involved with her experience of online comments in the social media. Maya's character is the continuation of Nair's previous novel *Mistress*, not only Maya but also Radha, Shyam, Naveen and the resort Near the nila was also taken from her novel *Mistress*. Nair presents Maya's psychological pain of a mother, how she tackles her son Naveen as a single parent. After her husband's betrayal she manages to live with her mentally challenged son. All the women characters come from different background, religion, caste and class but their mental struggle is the same. The conversations of the characters show us how much they got affected by the societal norms and pressure. Women should be allowed to live their lives without any apology, without being made to feel inferior. Nair allowed the readers to draw their conclusions for all the tales of *Eating Wasps*. Each character gives us different aspects of women's lives. Nair describes the defeats, disappointments, miseries and traumas of the women. She focused on all the women characters not only the protagonists each one of them is admirable.

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