



Broadening the Feminist Discourse: Feminine Awakening in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

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Abstract

This paper analyses feminine awakening in Anita Nair novel *Mistress* (2005). As a feminist writer she portrays her persona from the feminine perspective. The paper focuses on female subjugation and suppression in male dominating society. The paper deals with representation of Awakened-women in her novel. The paper highlights inequalities and injustices in society's mistreatment of women their fearless voices.

Key words: feminism, patriarchy, gender inequality, identity

Post-independence, a slew of female authors with excellent educational and intellectual credentials stepped up to provide psychological depth to female characters. These female novelists develop compelling characters that successfully challenge society's persecution of women Anita Nair, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Ruth Pawar Jhabvala, Nargis Dalal, Shobha De, and Bharathi Mukherjee, among other Indian English women novelists, take steps to highlight the role of women in society. These writers' primary concern has been the delineation of inner existence and nuanced interpersonal ties. They reveal the hidden secrets by emphasising the value of showing women as individuals rebelling against traditional roles, breaking free from the chains of exploitation and tyranny, awakening with a sense of identity, and asserting their individuality. In their writing, female authors reshape the concept of femininity. Anita Nair, among other female novelists in Indian English literature, occupies an exceptional place. Anita Nair's characters emerge from their challenges in their search for identity in her stories. Earlier Indian women novelists viewed women as voiceless suffering, defenders of traditional values

and ethics, embodiments of tolerance and patience, role models for their successors, and a being with no room for love, Simone De Beauvoir Remarks: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or Economic fate determine the figure that the female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (Beauvoir 295) Literary feminism concerned women's authorship policies and the literary portrayal of the condition of women. In securing women's laws, the feminist and feminist writers have succeeded but more must be done in the social sphere. Today, feminist writers pride themselves on their cause of femininity through their works. The Indian literature area is audacious in representing feminism in the hands of well-known writers, whose view of women and actions have turned from a theoretical topic into historical and cultural reality. The novels of the twenty-first century demonstrate a wide range of opinions toward the imposition of tradition, with some analyzing the family structure and the caste system as fundamental parts of patriarchal social The Indian woman is extremely dependent on traditions and

conventions and assumes the duty of being the guardian and prestige of the family. It is often recognized that families are the dominant environment and form women's primary identity. The document determines and sets forth the societal roles' women play in the family: daughter, wife, and mother. This makes the family the main site for the oppression of women. In this 21st century, an Indian woman still has to seek identification as a human being with equal position in her family and in the family she is married to. The oppression of women is based in Indian society itself - in both customs and religious doctrines; it may be in the fields of education, law and family. Women traditionally have major responsibility for their families' well-being. However, they are routinely discriminated against and denied access to resources like school, health services, jobs, training and so on. The works of Anita Nair illustrate the frustration and deception of women who face their families' subjugation. Anita Nair's main focus is on the psychological examination of Indian women's inner selves. They also reinterpret mythology by employing new symbols and subverting canonical interpretations. Though the term "feminism" has been misinterpreted by the majority of society as a campaign against all men, it is actually a political and social movement in support of anyone who want to break free from a gender-biased society. The literary rules have been exploited by female writers in the twenty-first century to demonstrate literary parity, and there will be many more to come.

Anita Nair's portrayals of women characters shatter the shackles of society, resulting in the dispersion of society. They defy social conventions and do not limit themselves to the limitations that women face. Female characters in Anita Nair's works come from various religions and cultures. She uses real-life situations to depict the assertiveness of female characters in her novels. Women are known for being outspoken and powerful in their thoughts. It's a slam against a patriarchal society dominated by men. "Anita Nair is a powerful writer, who through this tender story shows great understanding and compassion for all women and for the choices and regrets they cannot avoid. She portrays women as not totally cut off

from familial social ties but women who remains with those orbits and protest against injustice and humiliation" (Kalamani143)

Anita Nair, with her feminine sensibility and psychological insight, penetrates deep into the inner psyche of depressed women and brings out their concerns, which are primarily due to psychological and emotional inequities. Women have been oppressed and subjugated both outside and inside their families since the dawn of time, and this is reflected in the struggle for self-identity. This search for identification leads to self-discovery, which is explored in Anita Nair's chosen novel. The novel *Mistress* by Anita Nair revolves around this quest for self-discovery. In the novel, the female character are oppressed and dominated by their families. Anita Nair is a courageous, unassuming author. She tries to show the quality of a woman's strength. Nair adds that strength is often not regarded as a woman. Ultimately, her styles are different from the others. She's a feminist with difference, in other words. It traces the true position of women both in households and in the company. In the society of male tyranny, she has produced ribs by seriously taking women as women. It is remarkable to show her character's plight, worries, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions.

Anita Nair novel *Mistress* (2005) is the narrative of women in a man dominated society searching for freedom, women's situations. The novel explores whether Indian Women should be limited to their responsibilities as women and women only, living under repressive patriarchal structures in connection with cultural resistance. The novel revolves around the lives of travel writer Christopher Stewart, a Kathakali dancer named Koman whom he meets in Kerala, and Koman's niece, Radha, who is trapped in the typical housewife's role. The novel gradually reveals Stewart and Radha's love for each other, as well as the perplexing condition of Radha's spouse Shyam and Koman's life storey and relationships. The title of the *Mistress* novel itself emphasises the doubtful status of a woman who has been excluded from the lead. The novel *Mistress* depicts women's subordination and suppression in current Indian society and delves into the depths of Shyam and

Radha's relationship. Radha's job as a wife restricts her independence in their relationship. The novel portrays the current state of women in society through her expression. The novel depicts the reality of the suffering women's lives. The novel focuses on a range of issues, such as Art and Adultery, new love thrill, traditional biases, squalor and ugliness, abuse, shattered hopes, and dark secrets in the family. It is a book dealing with the enthusiasm and passion over the religious, married and legitimate gulfs of traditions. The report also addresses pre- and post-marital sex thoroughly. Most of the things which develop come with a whiff of unpleasantendings, such as the Nila River, which rarely has sufficient water to reflect the shallowness of Mistress's life. Mistress depicts the patriarchal society's husband and wife relationship. As a result, marriage was the ultimate objective for all Indian women at the time. Radha in Mistress struggles in her typical marriage life because of this presumption. By her father's coercion, she was forced to marry Shyam. She had a pre-marital affair before being married to Shyam. She was dissatisfied with her life as it was. Her spouse and his older sister, Rani Oppol, fully dominated her life. The patriarchy existed in various ways at the start of her marriage, such as her inability to conceive even after eight years of marriage. As a result, she was dubbed "Barren" by society. In patriarchal society, calling her name barren had an effect on her. Despite the fact that Shyam was impotent, Radha was clearly blamed. The entire society is ready to point the finger at Indian women. Shyam's dominant nature, on the other hand, puts an end to all her plans. As a result, Radha responds with:

"I hope that is not going to undermine your standing in society. Is there anything I can do that won't? I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools and you said it was too much work for too little money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a crèche and you said you didn't want the house filled with bawling babies. So I thought I would find something else to do which didn't involve making money, but even that isn't right. Don't I have to an

opinion? I am your wife. Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfil your sexual needs and with no rights". (Mistress 73)

The main female character Radha's marriage does not provide assurance of her safety or identity. She controls her existence to the usual feminine aesthetics of maintaining a distorted relationship with her husband, governed by the framework of the society's set rules. The powerful personality Radha is a personification of self-assurance and bravery. She does not believe in certain pointless, irrelevant cultural customs that are oppressive to women in India. She opposes the unnecessary cultural impositions on her and the status of an orphan. Shyam's wife is an unhappy businesswoman who owns the Nila restaurant. Radha has committed adultery with Chris Stewart. Radha has been portrayed as the woman who revolts against patriarchal society's servitude. Shyam, like any other male Chauvinist, seeks to dominate her by commanding her to follow his whims and fantasies. She attempts to break away from the constraints of being a responsible wife.

Radha dares Shyam and asserts her status as an individual without any control on her. She becomes an embodiment of indignation and vengeance, hates being dependent on her husband confining her role to that of a mediocre housewife. Anita Nair through Radha condemns the marginalization of women in order to overcome the conventional prejudices. Radha revolts against Shyam's claims of ownership of wife's body as sexual object disgusting and irrational. The novel depicts the unpleasant reality that, despite claims of emancipation, women continue to be exploited because patriarchy and conservatism continue to stifle the development of a woman's personality. "from their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are drawn to the enigmatic young man with his cello and his incessant questions about the past" (13). Radha realises that her husband's love is simply a Shyam and that her marriage has no value. When Chris arrives at the couple's vacation, we observe the differences between the two men via Radha's eyes. Radha's uncle Koman notices that she is head over heels in

love with Chris. He sees her through the lens of Sringaaram, or love, which reveals the lack of desire Shyam." Her face is radiant. Her eyes throw him a sidelong glance. Chris turn to her. His smile gathers her in his arms. I think of Nala and Dmamayanti, of lovers in kathakali who embrace without actually doing so..... Chirs, I see, desires Radha, and she, him" (29)

As she gets closer to Chris Radha's contempt for Shyam grows. It is an intimate and conflict-ridden connection. The battle can be observed on several levels: patriarchy against feminism, bondage against liberation, stereotypes against self-identity. "Shyam is asleep. His arms pin me to the bed. His bed. I think that for shyam, I am a possession. A much cherished possession. That is my role in his life. He doesn't want an equal; what he wants is a mistress". (53).

Radha rejects both men, her husband and her lover, because they are both domineering and patriarchal in their own ways. She frees herself from the roles of wife and mistress by rejecting Shyam and Chirs. In her life, she progresses toward becoming a "mistress" of her own self. As According to the narrative:

The child in Radha grows. A child who fills every step and hour of hers with wonder. She loves it already, and it is this love she wears as a talisman. She leans back in her rocking chair. She has time enough to think of what she wants to do with her life. She has time to count her joy and blessings. She has time. She rests her hands in her lap. And she rocks herself ever so gently. (426)

As a result, she made the decision to live her life according to her own desires. She is looking for her own uniqueness. The patriarchal culture had an impact on the entire occurrence that occurred in Radha's life. As a result, she despises tradition and society, and thus defies it. Traditions of the family and limitations

In *Mistress* Nair introduces the second female character Saadiya, she is likewise enslaved by the masculine philosophy, Sethu's dad and

lover/husband are against Saadiya. Saadiya is fighting hard throughout the narrative to escape masculine tyranny. Saadiya, a Muslim who disobeyed her community to live with Sethu, a Hindu person. She soon realised that religion was constrained in her relation. She chose to leave him and her child behind, after an encounter with Sethu. The Patriarch since the Conservative the Company did not take her back to the community, it drowned and became the mistress of self. That's how she showed her contempt of patriarchal society. Therefore Saadiya's father is Kazi himself, and he must set an example for others, thereby brutally punishing and leaving his daughter. Saadiya is of a conservative Muslim family and the world out there is hardly known. She is the outcome of her ignorance as, like others, she has been the subject of a life of ghettoes. Like Hindus, Islam also regards women as lower than men, subjecting women to stringent regulations. She is harshly penalised if she disobeys the rules. As Neeru Tandon notes:

Violence against women has been accepted and even condoned throughout history. More than 2000 years ago, Roman law gave a man a life and death authority over his wife. In the 18th century, English common law gave a man permission to discipline his children and wife with a stick or whip no wider than his thumb. Feminists claim that men are more likely to use violence to keep their dominant position. While society claims to abhor violence, we often make heroes of men who are aggressive (Tandon 140-145).

Thus, novel has demonstrated us the image of female subjugation and marginalisation in family circles with an emphasis on male pride, inconsistent marriages as the true reasons behind oppression and exploitation of women as a conventional norms of conduct and a patriarchal system of the social system. This work highlights the situation of women in society today. It is a truth that men worldwide victimise and enslave women. She has to comply with the masculine standards as a submissive sex.

Thus, Anita Nair's novels depict both women who suffer silently from patriarchal oppression and women who rebel against it. Saadiya and Radha each have their own way of opposing it. Saadiya rebels against her father as well as her husband, who refuses to allow her son to be raised in the manner she prefers. And Radha rebels against patriarchy on her own volition, disregarding patriarchal moral and social norms. The concept of women being educated and financially independent in contemporary day life, yet the cord in their lives is still in the hands of men, was very obvious to Nair. Women living in Orthodox society, where marriage is the fate of their own husbands, have the duty to obey them and serve their own masters to give birth to the husband. Radha and Saadiya are both depicted as passive characters in the novel. They both want to know the truth and want to break free from patriarchal mentality, so they fight it in their own manner. Radha and Saadiya are rebellious against patriarchal domination. They seem to challenge patriarchal and moral conventions, which are predominantly against women. These are women who have gained liberation and who challenge the moral orientation of men. Anita Nair is a modern Indo-English novelist who has depicted the condition of Indian women. This novel is about the clash of tradition and modernity in contemporary India. Anita Nair exemplifies the subservient position of women in the orthodox tradition — bound Indian women society. She has addressed topics of gender inequality and women's social conditioning. The husband-wife relationship, as well as women's oppression and sexual exploitation both inside and outside of the marital framework Marriage is seen as the ultimate aim for girls and women must shape and modify them to fit the interests of their masculine counterparts suppress their sense of self-identity. Mistress also depicted the women struggling side by side for patriarchy, but she gave them a sign of resistance of patriarchy at the end of her work. Her women's characters are usually portrayed as intellectual, brave women who have not satisfied themselves with the injustice or rebellion of men. The women of Nair are looking for a positive thing. She has depicted a dreary scenario of Indian life due to

social, economic and political changes. However, she believes that mutual understanding and coexistence can create a meaningful existence for humanity. She depicted strong women who in each of her novels are ready to confront life's obstacles whatever they can. Anita Nair's writings represent the awakened feminine awareness of India today. In her works, she traces the journey of a woman from self-sacrifice to self-realization, self-denial, self-affirmation and self-denial. Thus, Anita Nair's raises the issue of patriarchal way of life and view it not only as their house but also as the place of oppression in society.

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