

A FEMINIST PERCEPTION IN ANITA NAIR'S SHORT FICTION

Savita Gill

Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chattishgarh.

Dr. Parul Singh

Assistant Professor, Dept., of English, Kalinga University, Raipur, Chattishgarh.

Abstract: Post-colonial feminist literature has always carried the heavy burden of dealing with layers of misinterpretation of traditions and religions. At the centre of this dilemma is the role of woman and her dependence, economically and socially. The more traditional a postcolonial society is, the more problematic the question of women's emancipation is. Therefore, the more passionate its women novelists like Anita Nair raise what many readers might consider taboo questions about the role of woman in contemporary post-colonial India. Many feminist women writers who have contributed literature to the society wrote chivalric novels. Most of their novels had women protagonist and were based on the glory of women in the world. Feminist women writers still strive to uphold the rights of women through their works like poems and novels. Anita Nair is an Indian bestselling author of fiction and poetry. She always had an affinity towards writing and the courage to pursue it under all the situations. Nair relates to the many roles in women play in their lives and it is reflected in her work too. She writes with great energy and creates amazing works at ease. In this paper I am presenting critical study of the feminist perception in the short stories of Anita Nair from the feminist point of view.

Anita Nair's feminist perceptions are also noted in her short-stories, which present a variety of women. In her story "The Witch wife's Tale", Saro's experiences boredom with her mechanical, humdrum life and escapes it. Her yearning for love makes her leave her husband, Sushil. Despite her adverse situation she emancipates herself without creating any ill-feeling.

She flouts tradition and the constraint of marital life. In her story, Anita Nair presents the problem of married middle-class families situated in the foreign country. It is the story of Saro's misadventure as she gets involved with a blonde and attractive married man, getting into extra-marital affair. It reveals the change occurring in the image of the Indian women. It is an example of an empowered woman in a colonized country. Saro's underlines the problem of married middle-class families in a foreign country. Another story, *The Heart of a Gerund*, presents Norah as a forsaken wife, who is not economically independent. But she tries to live her life with dignity. She is financially hard up, yet she does not show it. Norah is traumatized as she is abandoned by her relatives. She belongs to a middle-class family. When her mother dies, her relatives leave her alone, refusing to look after her. The parish priest advises her to join an old age home. Norah appears to lose her identity, as no one knows her or calls her by her name. She is just inmate No; 62. She has to live among senile, old men who are destitute. She tries to draw satisfaction from the fact that she did not come to London to be a nurse. When she looks at the life of the senile and old people grouped together, she does not feel that she could live at this place. She appears to lose her identity, and is recognized as only a number 62. She is different and not like those senile, old people. She had come to this place as her own choice. Nora is disillusioned when she looks at her clipping from a newspaper and finds herself to be an ugly, pathetic woman. She feels betrayed and begins to feel her age. This leads her to self-realization. She does not want to be treated as a pathetic creature. She feels she is gerund in a grammar book having no function of its own.

Sarah in "A Thanks Giving Tale" is a lonely widow after the death of her husband Jacob. She expects that her neighbours would invite her for the thanks-giving eve. Sarah has not come to terms with life after the death of her husband. She feels life empty. Her neighbours were not her friends now to have a social life like old days. She is being ignored, which troubles her mind. She is rendered as a shadow flitting around. Life of a widow is rendered empty and it is

challenging for her to accept this loneliness. She feels alienated and distressed. A widow like her is desperate to have social contact but she feels rejected. Like Norah, she too becomes a pathetic destitute woman. She cannot do anything to alleviate this feeling. She feels that her former neighbour, Mike, would invite her for the “Thanksgiving Eve”, but she is disappointed. She feels her life to be empty and hollow. Sarah becomes mentally distressed. Sarah’s story is the example of what is in store for those who grow old and have lost their life partner. We have an example of, Mukundan in *The Better Man*, who finds hope in his possible union with Anjana, but otherwise his life is lonely. Mukundan has hallucinations about his mother’s ghost; the dead of his house. It is the result of his guilty conscience. Like Sarah, he also felt his mind splintered. His loneliness gives him nightmarish experience. Even Prof. J.A. Krishnamurthy (JAK) or Kitcha also undergoes nightmarish experience at night when his father abandons the family, and after the violent accident of his daughter, Smriti, he undergoes the same traumatic feeling.

Anita Nair deals with the life of a prostitute in her story “*Mistress of the Night*”. Lisa, the protagonist, escapes from the world of the prostitutes, and narrates the agonizing experiences, the horrors and brutalities the prostitutes have to suffer. She liberates herself from the horrors of this life. A prostitute, as Simone de Beauvoir describes, is a scapegoat for a man to vent his feelings. A man longs for a change after an exhausting day, and he finds this change in someone like Lisa, A prostitute; who says (Nair, Satyr, 1997):

Every morning when I wake up, I think the day is
going to be different. I pour myself a glass of
orange juice. I nibble on a slice of toast, too
restless, too excited. I can feel my destiny tugging me in a new direction

(63).

She suggests how tiring all this is. When there is war, there is increase in the prostitution because hardship drives women to increase the income. Lisa is very much distressed by her routine life as a prostitute. She dreams of meeting her prince charming one day, but by the end of the day she is very tired. When Lisa moralizes on her profession, she says (Nair, Satyr, 1997):

Men with twisted minds. Men with broken souls.
When they leave us, they go back healed for the
moment, feeling complete and little less tortured.
Isn't that what a philosophy does? Make a person
feel less confused, less troubled? (64).

Lisa seeks freedom from this on her own terms. When a man proposes to marry her. She tells him (Nair, Satyr, 1997):

I

want somebody who will put me first. See in me
some truth he has been seeking all his life. I don't
want a man looking for a cause to give meaning to
his life. I don't want a man avenging himself on
society by taking up with a whore. I don't want
heroes or saints. And you are wrapped up in
yourself for my liking in all this time we have been
together (65).

Lisa would like to find out for herself a man who really loves her, and not driven by his philanthropic impulse to rescue her from her plight as a prostitute.

A desire to be independent of men makes women develop bonding with other women. This bonding would help them to deal with men from the position of strength. Malini in the story “Mercury Woman” is a well-educated woman, who shares her room and her life with another woman as she lives in an alien land. Women activists would emphasize this bonding of women with each other to be strong and be independent of men. Malini does not feel ashamed of her lesbian relationship. Women who are afraid of the male or resent male superiority indulge in lesbianism. In another short story titled “Two out of Three Ain’t Bad”, Anita Nair presents the story of Ha, a thirty seven years old lady who remains unmarried waiting for a man of her choice to arrive in her life. She finds it difficult to get a man of her choice because of the typical patriarchal attitude of men. Ha would like to have an understanding bridegroom, but the men she comes across wanted girls with „Slender haunches and dewy complexion“ and dependent on them to show them the world; a typical patriarchal attitude. In the story “Consider the Tree”, Anita Nair presents the character of Amma, the mother of three children, who drives her husband out of the house because he has an affair with another woman. She brings her children cooking idlies from some canteens. She believes that God has made women with special ingredients to go on in their life whatever the odds there are. She is the typical example of femininity, a lover of nature and the provider for her children.

All these women, Saro, Amma, Malini, Norah and Lisa, show how they turn out to be self-dependent and free of men’s dominance. They are victims of patriarchy, and find a way to live their life independently, free of men. Sarah breaks away from her husband as he looks at her as an object for his sexual gratification. These women assert themselves by breaking taboos, enduring poverty and showing their self- dependence.

Conclusion:

Anita Nair's female protagonists, whether in her novels or in the short fiction, fight against the patriarchal oppression. Some of them, like Paru-Kutty, Saadiya, Smriti in the respective novels, struggle but cannot win against patriarchy, but Meenakshi, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Akhila, Radha, Meera rebel against patriarchal injustice and attain their freedom. Similarly, the female protagonists in her short stories, as mentioned above try to assert themselves in their life. They are modern women, who are aware of their selfhood and achieve their emancipation. Anita Nair, through her novels and stories, shows new possibilities and mutual adjustment in relationships in the marital life. She shows how women have to be aware of their self-hood. The fiction of Anita Nair, by and large, deals with the life of the female protagonists from the feminist point of view. The female protagonists in her fiction try to assert their individuality and try to fulfil their ambition not ignoring their responsibility. In summing up, the researcher would like to say that Anita Nair has been very bold and frank in her depiction of the family life of the middle-class women, and their struggle to define their life in the by and large patriarchal set-up of the Indian society.

REFERENCES:

- Shyndy, Evelyn. Evolution of an Empowered woman in Anita Nair's Lessons in Forgetting. Home Maker Turned World Maker, Eds. Jessica Selwyn, Selvi and Jenefa Kiruba. Tirunelveli: Sarah Publications, 2012, 197- 202. Print.
- Allen, Walter. "Introduction to Pilgrimage." Pilgrimage. Ed. Dorathy M Richardson. London: J.M. Dents & Sons, 1967. Print.
- Baral.K.C. Sigmund Freud – A Study of His Theory of Art & Literature. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers Pvt. Ltd., 1995. Print

De Beauvoir, Simon. *The Second Sex*, New York: Penguin Books, First Printed (1949)
Translated (1984), 694-695. Print.

Devi, Indra. "Women in Postcolonial India: A Study of Anita Nair's *Ladie's Coupe*." Proceedings of the UGC Sponsored National Conference on The Postcolonial Novel Themes and Techniques. Eds. Albert V.S, Joseph and John Peter Joseph. Palayamkottai: St. Xavier's College. 2009. 219 – 221. Print.

Ghosh, Anita. "Woman on Top: A study of Feminist Consciousness of Modern Indian Women Novelists." *Feminism in Indian Writing in English*. Ed. Prasad, Amar Nath and Paul. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2006. 32-45. Print.