

## FEMALE IDENTITY : ANITA NAIR'S VISION

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Four archetypes exist within the female psyche- the virgin, the mother, the companion to men and the sibyl. Amongst these Anita Nair focuses on the third one. She probes deep in the problems of female identity in relation to woman's relationship with men. The nature or feminine instinct itself propels women towards union with men. Though most of the unions result in marriage and proves hazardous owing to women's subordination in men's world. Thus her novels deal with the negative impact of heredity and patriarchy on female identity.

The researcher has made an attempt to study Anita Nair's vision of female identity through this research paper. Her novels namely *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress* and *Lessons in Forgetting* are under study. Nair unfolds her all characters slowly and never forgets to show their thought patterns which are set in childhood. Secondly, the family plays an important role in this development of a character. Thus the study of the individual conscience in its relation with the collective is urgently required. *Ladies Coupe* and *Mistress* established her as a mature and outstanding novelist. These two novels are the most compelling works of fiction. The female characters such as Akhila, Radha, Saadiya, Marikolanthu, Angela etc, show their journey from inaction to action, from detachment to attachment and from illusion to reality. It shows the struggle of the individual to seek a way out of the intricate labyrinth of life which one passes through.

Anita presents before readers a strange new species of woman. She is modern and uncompromising. This urban middle class woman is sure of her place in the world. She earns her own money and has her own superior mind set; a woman who is able to judge the men around. In this process one identifies a shriek of melancholy in most of her women. They justify that the sadness and melancholy are the basic elements in this drama called life. But all these women have a strength of their own. As soon as the circumstances demand, it comes out and change their life styles. In an interview Nair expresses her aim:

"see, it's not really an issue. I'm trying to answer.  
Only that I try to understand what disturbs me,  
be it things in me or things and people around me and by the time,  
I finish writing a book, I know there are some answer  
that I'll have."(Nair, Financial Express)

Exactly this mindset of the author is able to reproduce the true to life women in search of self identity. Akhila of *Ladies Coupe*, Radha of *Mistress* and Meera of *Lesson in Forgetting* stands at the pinnacle. They take out of box decisions as they are harassed by their male partners. Though victimized, they do not surrender or give up. The victims of maladjustments, these women are forced into situations of severe contestation. The extreme states of conflict emerge as soon as they search for their identity. As a result these simple,

polite individuals turn into cultural schizophrenics. Margaret Shanthi is one such queer wife of a dictator husband Ebenezer Paulraj. She proposes a saga of revenge over her husband. The smugness and philistinism of the eccentric husband is avenged by the chemistry teacher Margaret. Righteously she ponders: "Am I being unfair? Am I letting my hate cloud my sense of shame? If so, let it be" (*Ladies Coupe*, 132). This wife could regain her strength and identity only by fattening her dominating husband. She makes him dependant, who needs her like he had never needed before. Thus he becomes an amiable creature as compared to his earlier behavior.

Pratha Devi is another lady who could navigate her loving and caring husband to her petty wishes and then to the greater ones. As soon as the intensity of love between the two diminishes and she identifies that her husband has turned to reprimanding master, she decides to learn summing. Thus she triumphs over her innate timidity and gains peak experiences. Most of her protagonists suffer the narratives of exile and displacement. Their stories frequently combine a sense of disquiet with their nostalgia and longing. Saadiya of *Mistress* suffer from the stringent laws of Arabipattanam culture. The strict laws of the village establishes a dependence syndrome in her psyche, which she unleashes by eloping with Sethu, only to reach a dead end. Saadiya could attain the sense of individual identity as soon as she thinks of her new born baby. Childhood impressions of Islamic religion forces her to fight tooth and nail with her beloved husband. Her suicide on the issue of self-esteem is a remarkable point displaying self-identity of a woman. Though one cannot claim its righteousness, her insult by her husband is the true cause of this accident. Simon de Beauvoir is of the view that the history of humanity is a history of keeping the women in subjection and silence. Anita Nair deprecates such masculinity and patriarchal dominance over the women. Though her novels she exposes the cause of women and denounce everything that circumscribes the liberty of women.

Radha's love for Kathakali and Meera's love for cookery books is a source of satisfaction and delight for these women. It is a kind of fertilizer with a boosting action upon their behavior. The pungency of Anita Nair's satire becomes particularly marked when she describes Margaret, the chemistry teacher of *Ladies Coupe*. The novel machinery to tame her over smart husband is unique in literature. She fattens him by over feeding and finally keeps him under control, in school as well as at home. His lust for food is punctually fulfilled by the wife. Here in this couple Anita Nair is able to display only the probable situations and happenings, which is a necessary element of realistic literature. Thus her novels are characters are a testimony of the feminine identity and its attainment.

Nair has entered various complex problems of modern life which she deals in her novels. As a woman novelist she stands at the vantage point as she could survey; from infertility to lesbianism, from rape to infinitude and so on.

Sujata Akka invents a deadly weapon of lesbian relation with Marikolanthu as soon as she is cautioned by the lizard touch of her husband, Sridhar. Secondly, she also allows Marikolanthu to be a concubine of her beloved Sridhar. This is a new woman, who learns from family history and saves her own marriage. Apparently, the character of Sujatha Akka seems improbable to real life, but Nair has painted individuality and readers are assured of its

truth. This scheme by Sujatha seems highly imaginative and romantic. But if we go into the cause and effect of the same we realize the new identity she has attained. Eventually she not only win but also leads a happy conjugal life. In this process she renounces the individuality of another woman, without a prick of her conscience.

Marikolanthu, a rape victim plays multiple roles. She is a proxy to Sujatha and mistress of Sridhar. In the afternoon she is a lesbian partner of Sujatha and during the night plays mistress to Sridhar. She demands nothing and gives everything. Ultimately she is charged of using black magic and has to abandon the Chettiar household. Without giving any clarification she moves on. Her real identity is revealed when she refuses to take money from Sridhar for her operation. Because it would make her a prostitute. She mortgages her son in a factory for few months. Apparently, it's an almost cruel role of a woman to mortgage the son born of rape. But it's the strange and strong woman Nair could sketch. This new woman could shatter all womanly archetypes fixed upon her.

Lesson in Forgetting also showcases the catastrophes in the lives of men and women. These elite class characters are equally fragile before the schemes of the fate. Though they are reluctant for separations, these women find new mates and live a carefree life. These women feel strangled in the life, but slowly and surely they find the way out. Meera too makes friendship with JAK and begins afresh. Meera's rich friend Vinnie clarifies her view and self identity as; "... a woman needs to be loved, not understood." (Lesson in Forgetting, 103) and represents a novel ideology of love and extramarital affairs. Hunger for flesh and enjoyment of the momentary pleasures are on the top priority. She represents the high class society and its feminine identity.

Anita Nair could depict the age old women's suppression at the hands of men. In its contrast she could portray the modern woman who could fight against the marginalization of her gender. She does not philosophize on theories of feminism and liberty of women, neither does she portray die hard feminine characters. Her women are not against male, but against the male attitude towards woman. Thus she succeeds in giving artistic as well as true to life expression to women's identity. While on the crossroads on tradition and modernity these women do not fall prey to cultural fragmentation. They are acutely aware and sensitive and endeavours to counterbalance the portrayal of women.

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