



**“FEMALE PROTAGONISTS IN THE  
NOVELS OF ANITA NAIR:  
A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE”**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO

**BHARATI VIDYAPEETH DEEMED UNIVERSITY, PUNE**

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**SUBMITTED BY**

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COMMERCE, PUNE 411 038

**AUGUST, 2017**

## **DECLARATION BY THE CANDIDATE**

I hereby declare that the thesis entitled “**Female Protagonists in the Novels of Anita Nair: A Feminist Perspective**” submitted by me to the Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Pune for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in English under the faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce, is original piece of work carried out by me under the supervision of Dr. V. A. Rankhambe. I further declare that it has not been submitted to this or any other university or Institute for the award of any Degree or Diploma.

I also confirm that all the material which I have borrowed from other sources and incorporated in this thesis is duly acknowledged. If any material is not duly acknowledged and found incorporated in this thesis, it is entirely my responsibility. I am fully aware of the implications of any such act which might have been committed by me inadvertently.

Place: Pune  
Date: / 08 /2017

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## **CERTIFICATE OF THE GUIDE**

This is to certify that the work incorporated in the thesis entitled **“Female Protagonists in the Novels of Anita Nair: A Feminist Perspective”** submitted by Ms. Poonam Dnyandeo Patil for the degree of **‘Doctor of Philosophy’** in the subject of English under the faculty of ‘Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce’ has been carried out in the Department of English, Bharati Vidyapeeth Deemed University, Yashwantrao Mohite College of Arts, Science and Commerce Pune, from the period September, 2013 to August, 2017 under my direct supervision/guidance.

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## **CERTIFICATE**

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Place: Pune

**(Prin. Dr. K. D. Jadhav)**

Date: / 08 /2017

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If by some mischance, I have failed to acknowledge where I should have done so, I hope those concerned will accept my sincere apologies.

Place: Pune

Date: / 08 /2017

**Ms. Poonam Dnyandeo Patil**

(Research Scholar)



**Anita Nair,**  
**Born: 26 January 1966**

## Abstract of the Ph.D. Thesis

### Female protagonists in the Novels of Anita Nair: A Feminist Perspective

#### A. Fiction of Anita Nair:

In this thesis I am presenting critical study of the female protagonists in the fiction of Anita Nair from the feminist point of view. Anita Nair is one of the post-modern women writers of the Indian English Fiction. She has written novels, short stories, poems, essays, stories for children, plays travelogues, and has edited works since 1997. She is best known for her novels *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe*.

Anita Nair was born at Mundakottakurissi, near Shoranur in Kerala. This is the locale she has used as a background for *The Better Man* and other works. Her novels have been translated into 21 languages. She studied in Chennai before moving back to Kerala, where she graduated in English Literature. She worked as a Creative Director of an advertising agency in Bangalore. It was here that she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories titled as *Satyr of the Subway*. It was appreciated and she got a fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. In 2002, she published a collection of poems under the title *Malabar Mind*, and the second collection was *Where the Rain is Born* published in 2003, which were writings about Kerala edited by her. Her second novel *Ladies coupe*, published in 2001, became a great success and it is widely read even now. Her *Good Night and God Bless* is a collection of essays, which are about her happy experiences, recommendation for good books to read, etc.

Her first novel *The Better Man* presents a male protagonist, but there are episodes dealing with female characters like Anjana, Meenakshi, Valsala, who contribute to Mukundan's turning into a better man. Her novel *Mistress* (2005) is mainly about Radha, and her uncle Koman who is the Kathakali artist. But in the first part of the novel we come across the teenage Arab girl, Saadiya, her emotional love affair and the tragic end in her suicide. Koman is Saadiya and Sethu's son. Rest of the novel is about

Radha's life of love and marriage, her marriage of convenience with Shyam, her love affair with Chris, and her reconciliation with Shyam.

In her *Ladies Coupe* there are stories of women, the fellow travelers, who narrate their stories to Akhila, the protagonist, contributing to her education. Akhila is the middle-aged spinster, who has spent her life so far caring for her family. She rebels against her sponging sister and brother and seeks freedom, emboldened by the stories of other women.

In *Lessons in Forgetting* there is the story of Meera, the abandoned wife of two children. She finds a job with Prof. J.A. Krishnamurthy, (JAK for short), and there appears to be a fresh beginning for Meera. There are, however, episode of Kala and Karpagam, the women who chart their own way of life.

Anita Nair's, *Cut Like Wound* (2012) is a psychological thriller, a crime story, presenting Gowda, a middle-aged investigating officer, amid his own domestic problems and non-cooperation of his colleagues in the department. Her next novel, *Idris*, is a novel of adventure and romance.

## **B. Aims and Objectives:**

This thesis has tried to present study of the female characters in the fiction of Anita Nair has portrayed the life of women, on the background of Indian social and family life, in which her female characters undergo a variety of experiences, often painful, under the patriarchal oppression in the family. They face physical violence, obstruction of their career and abandonment. The writer shows how women in her fiction emotionally suffer in the patriarchal system, and have to shoulder responsibility of their children also.

Anita Nair does not claim to be the feminist, but her female protagonists show courage and face their situation after initial shock they suffer. The women in her novels face injustice, male-dominance, physical violence and yet they try to fulfill their domestic responsibility. In her *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair has presented women from different strata of society, but all of them suffer under patriarchal domination.

### **C. Methodology and Technique Used:**

The thesis presents description and analysis of the life and experience of the female characters in their domestic life. The characters and their social situations are presented with comments on the social and family background of each female character in the novels. The researcher has first analysed the primary sources and the themes in them on the background of the social life of the characters.

The researcher has then stated the secondary sources, the books and critical articles as well as reviews appearing in the journals.

### **D. The Kinds of Conclusions Expected and their Possible Values:**

Novel, as a form, is concerned with the presentation of men and women, and their life from the observed reality, and the social as well as family background affecting the life of these individuals, and focusing on the social issues arising out of this observed reality. Anita Nair, as a post-modern novelist, has been known for her minute observation of life, especially in Kerala, of men and women in the middle-class as well as high-middle-class life in the metropolitan cities, her female characters are shown to be sensitive to their own social situation and family life, and their own problems in this life. Novel is an imaginative presentation of the social life of the characters in it. Yet, this imaginative presentation is based on the writer's minute observation of men and women in the real life situations Anita Nair has mainly focused on the life of women in the modern Indian Society. It mirrors the life of women as they face it in their families, and the aspects of changing marital relationship. Whether in a village life, like a village of Kaikurusi presented in *The Better Man*, or the life in the metropolitan city presented in *Lessons In Forgetting*, Anita Nair shows how women are oppressed by the age-old patriarchal social practices, indirectly criticizing the society and introspect about it.

## **Chapter I:**

### **Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction:**

This chapter gives brief survey of Indian English Fiction, which arose in the field of Indian literature on account of the introduction and spread of English education in India; when India was under the British rule. Within this historical account, it also traces the contribution made by the women writers in the development of Indian English Fiction.

## **Chapter II:**

### **Theoretical Framework:**

This chapter presents Feminism as a movement, which started in the West, especially in England. It states the aspects of Feminism, social and political, as they have been explained in writings of the thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir, and others. It traces the development of the Feminist thought giving brief account of Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism and the Leftist Feminism. It also traces the influence of Feminism of Literature, and the development of the feminist literary theory by the women thinkers like Elaine Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and others. It also takes into account the Feminist criticism of literature, as the women thinkers felt that male critical theory does not do justice to the female point of view.

This chapter also traces the development of women in the social and cultural life of India from the Vedic period to the present. It also briefly states the contribution made by Anita Nair to the Indian English Fiction.

## **Chapter III**

### **Female Protagonists in Anita Nair's *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe*:**

In *The Better Man*, there are episodes in which there is a female character at the center of it. Similarly, in *Ladies Coupe* there are independent episodes dealing with the life of women and the way they fought the patriarch oppression in their life, and won their independence.

## Chapter IV

### **Female Protagonists in Anita Nair's *Mistress*:**

This chapter presents the episodes concerning different female protagonists interwoven in the novel *Mistress*. These are Saadiya, Radha and Maya. Saadiya, a deeply religious Muslim girl, barely sixteen, falls in love with a Hindu young man, and her life ends in tragedy, illustrating the theme of religious oppression of women. The other story is of Radha, who explores woman's search for independence and does not like to abide by traditional notion of woman as a 'pativrata'. Another female character in *mistress* is Maya, a married woman, who breaks the bond of tradition, and keeps relationship with the dance artist, Koman, whom she admires.

## Chapter V

### ***Lessons in Forgetting* and the Short Fiction:**

*Lessons In Forgetting* explores marital relationship in the high middle-class society, Meera, the female protagonist is a well-educated house wife, who is left alone with her children by her husband, and faces hardship. She finds a job to bring up her children on her own. But, there are stories interwoven, of Kala who is forsaken by her husband, and a teenager Smriti, who is raped and rendered unconscious, on account of her fight for protection of the female foetus. There are also the accounts of female protagonists in the short fiction of Anita Nair, the women stranded in their life either left or betrayed by their husband; and seeking their self-hood.

### **Conclusions:**

Anita Nair's novels mainly deal with the life and experiences of women, who face subjugation and traumatic experiences in their family life. She has dealt with issues such as subjugation of women, female infanticide, and prostitution, lesbianism and rape. Her fiction mainly presents the ethos of the middle-class women in the Indian urban life. Women in her fiction belong to the post-independent India, educated and conscious of their individuality, and who try to find their place in the family

and the society. They appear to challenge patriarchal oppression, and show the possibility of these women seeking independent life of their own. However, Nair shows how even educated women sometimes find it difficult on account of their social conditioning. Nair has very realistically presented her female characters. They are not meek sufferers, and struggle for their individuality and freedom. They assert their individuality, but at the same time they show the awareness of their responsibility.

The researcher has also in mind the pedagogical significance of this research. In India, through the spread of education, there is a lot of change in the life of women. This thesis underlines the importance of education in bringing about the social change. The thesis focuses on the life of women in the modern Indian society and the family; which is pedagogically important to make the readers, and the boys and girls in the colleges, aware of the changes in the society, and need to rethink of the age-old practices in the family life. The study has pedagogical importance from the point of view of reading fiction keeping mind a point of view, and study characters and situations in the fiction critically to see how it is successfully presented by the writer. This analysis, of especially the female protagonists, in the novels can also be helpful to the students of literature in practical criticism of the literary works.

This research does not claim to have dealt with all the aspects of the fiction of Anita Nair. There is a scope for further research in terms of socio-psychological aspects of the life and characters presented in the fiction of Anita Nair.

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## **Chapter – I**

### **Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction**

#### **I.0 Introduction**

#### **I.1 Women Novelists in the Indian English Literature**

#### **I.2 Anita Nair's Contribution to the Indian English Literature**

## Chapter-I

### Emergence and Development of Indian English Fiction:

#### I.0: Introduction:

It is a historical fact that novel as a genre of literature was introduced in the Indian literature in general, through the English education in India under the British rule. There was of course, the Sanskrit tradition of prose fiction such as *Kadambari* by Bana Bhatta, and the narrative of *Dasakumar Charita* by Dandin together with imaginary stories in prose called '*Katha*', which are some of the instances of ancient prose fictional narratives. However social realistic fiction dealing with contemporary life was introduced in India only after the familiarity with modern English Literature, especially the English fiction of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Indian English Fiction made its entry in India with Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* published in 1864; which presents life of a middle class Indian woman oppressed by an autocratic husband. This was followed by a spate of historical romances such as *Lalun, the Beragan* (1884), T. Ramakrishna's *Padmini* (1903) etc. With the English education spreading in India, novel as a form of literature caught the imagination of the newly educated Indians. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century a number of new writers appeared in the field. Ram Krishna Pant's *The Boy and Bengal* appeared in 1866, followed by Lal Behari Day's *Govinda Samant* (1874), Yogendra Chattopadhyay's *The Girl and Her Tutor* (1891), a serialized novel by B.R. Rajan Iyer's *True Greatness or Vasudev Shastri*, and so on. There were also historical romances such as *The Slave Girl of Agra* (1909) and a fantasy like *Verdict of the Gods* (1905). The theme such as the effect of the Western Education also led to the novel like *Thillai Govinda* (1916), and a very effort on the theme of caste in his novel *Nanda, the Pariha who Overcome Caste* (1923). Until the emergence of Indian English proper, there were thus a number of writers who wrote romances, historical fiction as well as stories on the East- West encounter.

Indian English fiction of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was deeply influenced by the socio-political atmosphere of the freedom movement generated by Mahatma Gandhi. For example, K.S. Venkatraman's first novel *Murgugan, the Tiller* (1927) presents a hero, Ramu, a Gandhian hero contrasted by Kedari, a materialistic person. His second novel, *Kandan, the Patriot* (1932) is written on the background of Mahatma Gandhi's civil disobedience movement. Tamil writer K. Nagarajan's two novels, *Athavar House* (1937), and *Chronicles of Kedaram* (1961) are different in the sense that they are written as family chronicles, dealing with the family life of the characters for generations, taking into account the tumultuous atmosphere of Gandhian movement, along with the manners and morals of the families in a small township. Then came on the scene the major novelists of this epoch, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. They explored various possibilities of novel as a form. The fiction of Mulk Raj Anand shows the influence of the Western, specifically the British Fiction. He exposed the casteist and fossilized Indian social set-up. For example, in his first novel, *Untouchable* (1935) he presented the life of a sweeper boy, Bakha, the protagonist of the novel, whole story exposes the unjust social practice of caste- ridden Indian society. He also puts forward in this novel new idea of mechanized sanitation to do away with the manual carrying of the toilets. His second novel, *Coolie* (1936) he presents the contrast between the rural and the urban life in India, in the story of Munoo, an orphaned village boy, who lands in the city seeking a job. He and his other coolie friends are exploited by the industrial and capitalist society. Anand's other novels are *Two leaves and a Bud* (1937), *The Village* (1939), *Across the Black Waters* (1941), *The Sword and the Sickle* (1942) and *The Big Heart* (1945). He has also written two novels in a biographical mode, which are *Seven Summers* and *Morning Face* (1970).

Anand's contemporary, R.K. Narayan's fiction is different in the sense that R.K. Narayan dealt with the middle-class life in a typical township of Malgudi in the South India. His first novel, *Swami and His Friends* (1935) presents the life of a school boy, his pranks and delightful account of his school life. Narayan's second novel, *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) presents a middle class hero, Chandran, who is torn between love and marriage. He is

frustrated and becomes a 'Sanyasi', but returns home and gets married in a traditional manner. Narayan's *The Dark Room* (1938) is a rather tragic story of a woman, a middle class Hindu wife, whose husband is untruthful to her. *The English Teacher* (1946), is also a novel about the middle class life of the protagonist, Krishnan, a college teacher, whose wife dies, but he makes contact with the dead wife's spirit. Narayan's other novels are *The Financial Expert* (1952), *The Man-Eater of Malgudi* (1982) and *Mr. Sampat* (1949). However, his latest novel, *The Guide* (1958) made him internationally famous. It won him Sahitya Akademi Award in 1960, and it was also turned into a film. Raja Rao, the youngest in the group of the three novelists, was greatly influenced by the Hindu Adwait Philosophy, and had done research in the Western mysticism while in France. His *Kanthapura* (1938) is written under Gandhian influence, the freedom struggle and the Satyagraha Movement of the time. His novel, *The Serpent and the Rope* (1960) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1963. The hero of this novel, Ramaswamy, marries a French history lecturer in France, but he is torn between the East and the West divide. His views change when he meets Savitri, with whom he experiences higher kind of love. Raja Rao's *The Cat and Shakespeare* (1965) is a funny story, but it is metaphysical in its treatment.

Babhani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, Khushwant Singh were the prominent Indian English writers whose career belongs to the period after the independence. Babhani Bhattacharya's novel *Shadow from Ladakh* (1960) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1967. Earlier, he had published *He Who Rides a Tiger* (1952) satirizes superstition and how common people are exploited on account of it. In his novel *A Dream in Hawaii* (1973) has the theme of the East West encounter. His novel *Shadow from Ladakh* won Sahitya Akademi award in 1967. Manohar Malgaonkar's fiction is mainly on Army life and the life in the states of India before freedom. His novel *Princes* (1963) is known to be the best novel, and a realistic novel in the Indian princely states. He had first-hand experience of the life in the states because his father was a minister in a princely state. It reflects the time when the princely states were being merged in the Independent India. His *The Devil's Wind* (1972) is based on the mutiny of the Indian Sepoys in the British army in

1857. He projects in it mainly the characters of Taty Tope and Rani Laxmibai as well as Nanasaheb.

Khushwant Singh, in his novel, *Train to Pakistan* (1956) deals with the horrors of the partition of India in the wake of the Independence. He narrates in it the story of a border village, Mano Majra in Punjab, caught in the turmoil of the communal violence. During this period a number new Indian English writer emerged, among them S. Menon Marath, Balachandra Rajan, and Sudhindra Nath Ghose. The most remarkable writer of this period was, however, G.V. Dasani who wrote an experimental novel *All About H. Hatter* (1948), which presents the story of the hero's spiritual quest of the meaning of life. It is a very funny comedy, since Hatter is an eccentric character, who is, however, in search of the meaning of life.

During the sixties and seventies, Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal emerged as the novelists of remarkable talent. Arun Joshi was perhaps the first Indian English novelist to treat the theme of Alienation. In his *The Foreigner* (1968), his protagonist, Sindi Oberoi, styles himself to be detached, but actually he appears to be squeamish about committing himself to any bond of relationship. Arun Joshi's other novel is *The Strange Case of Billy Biswas* (1971) in which its protagonist is alienated from his family and starts living in the forest among primitive people.

Chaman Nahal exploited different themes in his fiction. In his novel *Azadi* (1975), presents the story of the Partition of India, in which Kanshi Ram and his family from Pakistan migrate to India during the most violent times of the partition. In his novel, *Into Another Dawn* (1979) he treats the theme of East/ West encounter, in which the protagonist, Ravi Sharma, a Brahmin youth from an orthodox family, goes to American woman, a wife of a business man. He elopes with her, but Ravi finds he has cancer. So he comes back to India to die. The novel, however, fails to give succinct account of the theme of the East/ West encounter. Chaman Nahal's, *The English Queen* (1979), is a love story of Rekha, the daughter of an army officer, who falls in love with a poor musician who lives in a slum. The novel is partly romantic and partly supernatural, as the musician is revealed to be the avatar of god Vishnu. However the genre of novel in Indian English really was established by the three great Indian English novelists, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja

Rao. In the post-independence era there was a new generation of novelists, that included Babhani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgaonkar, and Khushwant Singh who contributed to the fiction of social realism, while Subhin Ghose, G.V. Desani, M. Ananta Narayanan tried their hand at the experimental fiction following Raja Rao. During late sixties and seventies significant contribution to Indian English Fiction was made by Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal. Arun Joshi's fiction deals mainly with the theme of alienation as his protagonists are mostly highly educated westernized young men escapists and self - centered. Chaman Nahal's *Azadi* (1975) dealt with the social turbulence of the partition of India and its aftermath. During 1980s and 1990s we come across a number of new novelists, among them we have Amitav Ghosh, Farrukh Dhondi, Boman Desai, G.J.V. Prasad, Kiran Nagarkar, Vikram Chandra, Vikram Seth, Rohinton Mistry, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Anurag Mathur, and others.

### **I.1 Women Novelists in the Indian English Literature:**

Novel as a form of literary expression has appealed greatly to the women writers in India, and quite a large number of them turned to writing fiction. Writing fiction has given women writer an opportunity to create and express their social experiences and their experiences in the family life. Fiction writing gave them an opportunity to create a world of their own where they could be free from the interference of men. Similarly, women writers could create a readership among women who could experience and explore their own life identifying themselves with a variety of characters and the conditions of their existence. Women writers chose fiction for their expression because novel had acquired prestige and popularity among the educated classes in India. Through the familiarity with the 19<sup>th</sup> century English Literature, the educated women in India realized the importance of this literary form and its power to influence the reading public.

The English education was responsible to introduce fiction as a literary form in India, and newly educated women found a means to manifest their creative urge in its Novel being a powerful social form attracted women writers to find in it the means to expose the social ills and exploitative social practices concerning women in the predominantly patriarchal Indian society. Women in India had lost their identity for ages, and they found fiction as the

powerful tool of expression to voice their feelings and expose patriarchal oppression. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Novel form had become the most powerful form in literature, which was still evolving and had scope for experimentation. Indian women writers in English found it as the most suitable form to express themselves and underline their problems through this form.

The first woman novelist in the Indian English Fiction is said to be Kirupabai Sattianadhan, whose *Kamala* (1894) can be called the first novel in Indian English. It presents the story of a Brahmin woman, married as a child, lives life as mother and later a widow. Her life shows social and historical changes. She also wrote *Saguna* (1895) an autobiographical novel, describing Indian woman's narrowing experience.

The Women novelists in the Indian English Literature started making significant contribution to the fiction in the Second half of the 20th Century. Kamala Markandaya, who lived mostly in England wrote her novels about the life in India. Her novel *Nectar in the Sieve* (1954), presents the story of exploitation of a rustic couple and its migration to the city. In her novels *Some Inner Fury* (1955) and *Possession* (1963), she presents the theme of East-West encounter on the background of the Indian freedom movement. She also presents the sufferings of rural illiterate women. She also presents in her fiction the conflict faced by women in inter-culture marriage. She focuses women's issues in her fiction and gives voice to their mute sufferings. Her female protagonists face challenges and fight for equality but in the process they are psychologically disturbed. Her characters exercise their rights within the family and try to find meaning for their life. Markandaya reveals deep insight into the life of middle-class women, and their fight against oppressive conventions.

Nayantara Sehgal, the niece of Jawaharlal Nehru wrote Political fiction and at the same time her novels reflected the theme of Indian woman's search for her own identity and sexual freedom. In her novel *A Time to be Happy* (1958) her protagonist Maya seeks escape into extra-marital relationship, and her novel *The Day in Shadow* (1971) deals with the theme of broken marriage. She was the first woman novelist writing fiction on political issues as in her *The Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) and *This Time of Morning* (1968). In her novel *Rich Like Us* (1985) her heroine is a brilliant I.A.S. officer,

who goes abroad for higher education. She would like to escape the Indian arranged marriage. She is presented as a new woman. There were other women novelists such as Santha Ram Rao, Nergis Dalal, Venu Chitale (now Mrs. Leela Khare), Attai Hussain and others who contributed to the Indian English Fiction.

During this period Anita Desai, the diaspora writer, made the most significant contribution to the Indian English Fiction. Anita Desai focuses on the interior, so far unexplored region of women's psyche by exploring variety of aspects of their marital life. She portrays women's sufferings in the patriarchal world. She faithfully presents how women have for a long time suffered subjugation and indifference in the patriarchal society. Her protagonists are mainly women, who are introvert and suffer from their psychological problems and emotional traumas. In *Where Shall We go This Summer* (1975), her protagonist, Sita, feels stifled in the callous city life and tries to escape to an island home of her father who is no more. Desai's female protagonists are mostly alienated from the family. In *Fire on the Mountain* (1977), Nanda, an old widow and her lonely grand-daughter Raka are both alienated and lonely. In her novel *Bye-Bye Blackbird* (1971) she deals with the theme of East-West encounter in which the characters try to establish their identity in the alien western society in England. In *Fasting and Feasting* (1999) again there is the female protagonist Uma, a spinster, who feels trapped in the smothering atmosphere rendered unbearable by her overbearing parents in the alien American Society. Kamala Das (1934-2009) brings out in her fiction suppression of women in the family life. Even in her autobiography, *My Life* (1977) she shows how life was a constant struggle for freedom, fighting male-domination. She wrote two novels, *A Doll for the Child* (1977) and *The Alphabet of Lust* (1980), which present the theme of woman's quest for identity in the male-dominated society.

Among the contemporary women novelists we have Shashi Deshpande, whose novel *That Long Silence* (1988) won the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1990, which presents the life of middle - aged woman who has to face instability in her life after her husband loses her job being charged with a fraud. Her novel *Roots and Shadows* (1983) won a prize of Thirumathi Rangammal for the best Indian novel of the years 1982-1983. Her latest

fictional works are *A Matter of Time* (1966), *Small Remedies* (2000) and *The Stone Women* (2000). Shashi Deshpande's fiction carries on the tradition of the social realistic fiction exploring the problems of human relationship and emotions. She presents in her fiction the women in the typical Indian middle class families struggling to survive in their family adhering to the norms of respectability. The protagonists in her fiction rebel against the norms of the predominantly patriarchal society and try to find their way out of the claustrophobic family life. Her women appear to merge their individuality in carrying out family responsibility, but they also try to find their independence.

Shashi Deshpande's female protagonists are brilliant and contemplative by nature, besides they appear to share the responsibilities of their family more than their husbands. She explores the feelings of guilt and loss, loneliness and alienation in the life of young married women caught in the incompatible married life facing barriers of tradition and cultural bonds. Another contemporary women novelist is Bharati Mukherjee, born and brought up in Calcutta, who acquired her graduate and post-graduate degrees in English and went to the USA to the University of Iowa on a scholarship. She wrote short-stories and won awards for them. She wrote six novels *The Tiger's Daughter* (1972), *Wife* (1975), *Jasmine* (1989), *The Holder of the World* (1993), *Leave It to Me* (1997) and *Desirable Daughters* (2002), apart from her short story collection. In her fiction she mainly presents the cultural, religious, racial and social difference and tries to portray the human problems arising out of globalization.

Another dominant woman writer of the Nineties is Gita Hariharan, who won Commonwealth Writer's prize for her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), which tries to give new dimension to woman's identity. She looks at mother - daughter relationship from a new point of view. Her second novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994) presents a retired school teacher who faces problems in his teaching job. Her novel, *When Dreams Travel* (1991) resembles *Arabian Nights* retold from feminist perspective; looking for the feminine power in the male world. Her novel *In Times of Siege* her fourth novel, is critical of Hindu chauvinism. The novel is set in two universities in Delhi showing what happens when the people championing liberal ideas find themselves in a tight corner.

We must note here the contribution of a Tamil Dalit woman writer, Bama, whose fiction has been translated into English, French and other Indian languages. Her fiction gives voice to the sufferings of Dalit women, their sexual exploitation at the work places. Her women protagonists rebel against the oppressors break the taboos and become revolutionaries.

Manju Kapur, who won Commonwealth Writer's prize in 1999 for her first novel *Difficult Daughters* (1998), is a professor of English Literature in Delhi University. Her other novels are *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2006) and *The Immigrant* (2008). She presents in her fiction, women struggling to find their own way through the family life dominated by conventions. She tries to explore the problems faced by the young educated Indian Women who have to fight against traditional practices.

Arundhati Roy, who won the well-known Booker Prize for her first novel *The God of Small Things* (1997), deals with the theme of class antagonism and exploitation as well as evil face of patriarchy. Roy has underlined in her novel the problem of untouchability theme of incestuous relation between the twins and she also exposes brutal police administration. Shobha De is one of the most popular writers in the contemporary Indian English Fiction. She edited popular magazines like *Stardust, Society and Celebrity*. Her first novel, *Socialite Evening* (1989) is a best - selling novel. This was followed by *Starry Nights* (1990), *Sisters* (1992) *Strange Obsession* (1992), *Sultry Days* (1994), *Snap Shots* (1996), *Second Thoughts* (1996), etc. Her latest novel is *From Incredible to Unstoppable* (2008). Being a graduate in Psychology, she knows how to present the psyche of her woman protagonist and the problems she faces in the Society of gender discrimination. There is significant difference in the portrayal of women protagonists in the fiction of the women writers of the late twentieth century. While writing about Shobha De's female protagonists, N.K.Neb (2006) says:

---De has not only concentrated on the presentation of strange and startling world marking the emergence of recent trends in society but also shown her concern for the

problems faced by contemporary high Society Women---  
(158).

Her female protagonists do not take their oppression docilely. They fight back. De's female protagonists mostly belong to the elite class of the society. Though they are educated and belong to high middle-class, they suffer from trauma, insecurity and agony that are hidden behind the facade of the pomp and show of their life. De shatters the myth that these women of the elite society really enjoy their life.

Kaveri Nambian, who did her F R C S at the Royal College of Surgery in England and who works in the rural area in India, has also emerged as a creative writer in fiction. She at first wrote for women's magazines and for children. Her first fictional work is *The Truth (Almost) about Bharat* (1991), which is the story of a young medical student, who goes on a cross-country tour on his motor - bike. It is a campus novel written in a satirical vein. *The Scent of Pepper* (1997), *Mango-coloured Fish* (1998), *On Wings of Butterflies* (2002) and *The Hills of Angheri* (2005) have been published by Penguin. Her recent novel *The Story That Must Not Be Told* has been selected as one of the 21 books on the list of Man Asian Literary Prize 2008.

Shauna Singh Baldwin, who belongs to Sikh Community, migrated to India from Canada. She is a prolific writer contributing to literary magazines and anthologies in the U.S.A, Canada and India. Her first novel *When the Body Remembers* (1999), which won her Commonwealth writers' prize for Best book in the Canadian Caribbean region. Her novel *The Tiger Claws* (2004) was listed for Giller Prize. Another woman novelist during the late 20<sup>th</sup> century is Suniti Namjoshi, who wrote a magic realist novel *The Mother of Maya Diip* (1989), which is a feminist Utopia, in which boys are used for obtaining sperms and then they are killed. She is a magic-realist writer, who appears to be influenced by Rushdie and the British dystopia writer Angela Carter. Nina Sibal, a Sikh writer, also tried her hand at magic-realistic fiction in her novel *Yatra* (1987). But her next novel, *The Dogs of Justice* (1998) is a regional novel dealing with the Kashmir problem. Gita Mehta is yet another significant name among the late 20th century women writers. Her first novel, *Karma Kola* (1980), deals with the social classes in India under the colonial era. The novel is in the form of narrations by several characters. Her novel,

*Raj* (1989) presents the life of a royal family in India, in the form of an autobiography of a girl in the family, leading to her emancipation.

Prema Nandkumar wrote a campus novel, *Atom and the Serpent* (1982) critically presented academic life in an Indian University affected by internal wrangles for grants and foreign trips.

Rani Dharekar's *The Virgin Syndrome* (1997) deals with the issue of female sexuality. It is a bold novel on this theme rarely attempted by women writers. Her novel was recommended for the Commonwealth Prize for the Euro-Asia region in 1997. It is an unusual love story of a young man, Siddarth, who falls in love with a woman of more than forty years old. Dina Mehta in her novel *And Some Take a Lover* (1992) presents the love story of a Parsi girl who falls in love with the follower of Mahatma Gandhi. The love story has the background of the freedom struggle of the period of 1940s. Rohini the college girl is the first person narrator of the story. Discrimination between a boy and a girl into Indian family is a recurrent issue in women's fiction in India. Mrinal Pande's *Daughter's Daughter* (1993) underlines this issue through the first person narration of Tinu the girl in the family who notices how her cousin Kuki her uncle's son is treated as a special child giving him preference over others. The same discrimination against women in the field of Journalism is presented in her second novel *My Own Mistress*, showing how in the field, women journalists are specifically told to deal with only women's issues such as cooking, interior decorations, etc.

In the women's fiction of the late 20th Century and beginning of the 21st Century now increasingly reflects female sexuality women's struggle for expression of their individuality and their alienation as well as regeneration. In Uma Vasudev's novel, *Shreya of Sonagarh* (1993), the protagonist Shreya has dual relationship with her husband and her lover. Shreya is not a good-looking girl but she is an ambitious girl. The novel has a very bold theme asserting supremacy of true love over sexual values of common life. Shreya who at first experienced alienation now attains self-identification.

Jumpa Lahiri is an expatriate writer who has acquired important place in the Indian English Literature. She won the Pulitzer Prize for her fiction. Her first novel has a loose form of a collection of short-stories for which she was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1999. Her story *Interpreter of Maladies*, has won

O'Henry Award and also the best American short story. Her novel *The Namesake*, deals with the theme of migration and the problems arising out of it. Immigrants in the United States face variety of problems such as alienation search for identity, loneliness and the problem discovering oneself. Her novels are autobiographical. She deals with her experiences with her parents and friends and relatives in her Bengali community. In depicting this milieu, she appears to stress Indian marriage system, as well as joint family system. She is enchanted by the Indian way of life in which there is love and respect for the members. She also portrays in her novels the Indian women's struggle for better life and their search for self.

Anita Desai's Daughter, Kiran Desai, made debut with her first novel, *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* (1998), which is satirical novel dealing with superstition and gullibility of common people who are cheated by a so-called holy man. She writes with a sense of humour and ironical presentation of the common Indians. Her novel *Inheritance of Loss*, which is about the rights of Gorkhas, who suffer as they are deprived of their labour where they had worked for the whole of their life.

There are women writers, who have earned reputation with the publication of their single novel. Among them is Rama Mehta, whose *Inside the Haveli*, presents a Mumbai-educated girl in a middle class family, who is married into an aristocratic family in Rajasthan. Haveli her new home, is like a fortress the doors of which are closed. The orthodox family members, though kindly, do not understand her. She has to work with patience to bring about change in this family where custom rules.

Sunetra Gupta has so far written four novels and has won Sahitya Akademi Award for her fiction. Her first novel, *Memories of Rain* (1992) has a young Bengali girl as a protagonist, who falls in love with an Englishman visiting Kolkata. She is, however, disillusioned by his unfaithfulness, as she finds that he has a new girlfriend and comes back to India with her child. In her second novel, *The Glass Blower's Breath* (1993), the story takes place in three cities London, New York and Kolkata, which presents a young Indian woman who is in search of ideal love. Her third novel, *Moonlight into Marzipan* (1995) narrates the story in present tense. It is about the hero, Prometheus, whose experiment leads to important scientific discovery.

In the last decade of the 20th century, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni made significant contribution to the Indian English Fiction. The heroine in her novel, *The Mistress of Spices* (1997), is stranded on a remote island as her ship is wrecked. On this island she comes across a mysterious, ugly woman who possesses skill of producing spices which are used for more purposes than only cooking. In her second novel, *Sister of Heart* (1999), there is a family only of widows, the girls' mothers and the aunt. The novel gradually unravels dark secrets of the past revealing discrimination against women in the Indian families. Radhika Jha's novel *Smell* (1999) presents a story of a girl who has to go to Paris to live with her uncle because her father is murdered by the natives in Kenya, where he used to run a shop. Leela is a fine cook because she is gifted with a fine sense of smell. This sense of smell itself becomes the cause of her undoing. She is afraid that she herself gives out bad smell. She, therefore, drifts from one lover to another. Smell in this novel is used figuratively to indicate cultural differences.

There are several women novelists who have published their debut novels in the last decade of the 20th Century. Among them we come across Kamalini Sengupta's *A Seasoned Couple* (1994), Meena Alexander's *Nampally Road* (1991), Manorama Mathai's *Mulligatawny Soap* (1993), Anuradha Marwah Roy's *Idol Love* (1999), Suhail Abdulla's *The Mad Woman of Jagare*, and others.

Women Writers in India have, thus, made quite sizeable, qualitative and varied contribution to the Indian English Fiction. Their fiction reveals complex vicissitudes in the life of the Indian women and illustrates their struggle to establish their identity and achieve their freedom. The women's fiction in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century clearly shows emergence of new woman, who has learnt to assert herself and to be bold enough to chart the course of her life in the face of social criticism.

The women novelists, most of them, try to express their concern for women's predicament in the largely patriarchal set-up of the Indian family life. In the post-independent India, through their education and their entry into the job-market women have discovered their identity and the role they can play in the family as well as in the social sphere as independent individuals. Their active participation in the social and economic field has given them a voice,

and desire to seek their identity and fight against injustice. Yet, the age-old patriarchal system and its conventions, as well as religious practices still result into their subjugation. However now the women writers have tried to bring out the predicament of women, their physical and mental suppression, through their fiction. Women activists in the Indian social and political field have also created awareness among women, which is reflected in the fiction of the women writers. Shanta Kumari, (2006) for example observes:

It has allowed them to set the conditions to exist free from the direct interference of men. Similarly, why many women have taken to read women's writing is because, they can explore a wide range to experience the world from which they can identify themselves with a wide range of characters and a variety of existences. That is why women's writing has occupied a significant and central place in women's lives (23).

Women have discovered that fiction is the most effective form of literature to express themselves and to bring to light the plight of women in the family and the society. In the West, women creative writers have very effectively used this form to expose the feminine point of view and the sufferings.

The Indian women novelists have tried to show how Indian women have to face patriarchal oppression and resultant psychological crisis in their life. Only women novelists have been able to express the emotional and physical sufferings of women in the highly male-dominated social structure in India.

We can see that the Indian writing in English has enjoyed a prestigious place in the Indian English literature in general. It has really served as a window to the world to peep into Indian culture and tradition. Though the tradition of fictional writing is not new to the Indian language, since fictional narratives have ancient tradition in India in its epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata, etc., novel as a secular social imaginative fictional form is introduced in India by the English novels of the 18<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. As

India became colonized by the English, the modern English literature was introduced to the Indians through the English education. Indians adopted English for modern education as well as for literary expression, which enabled them to build bridges to the Western countries and their socio-cultural life. Besides, within India, a multi-lingual country, English became a common source of communication and cultural as well as national cohesion. Creative writing in general in English was instrumental to bring about integration in the diverse native tradition of Indian life and literature. English for Indians, became a language for inter-state and international communication as well as a language that introduced new literary forms such as secular novel, social drama and free verse. Indian English Writing proved to be the means of cohesion and mutual communication between the native languages and literature as well as fine arts. The history of Indian writing in English has the span of about four hundred years. Several universities in India have now Indian Writing in English as a special paper, which covers Indian English poetry, prose, fiction as well as drama. Novel, of course, remains the most popular form of Indian Writing in English. Being a social and secular form, the Indian English novel reflects multicultural society of India and a variety of themes related to the social and religious practices. Indian English novel of the modern period handle a great variety of themes. There has also been novels' dealing with historical aspects and freedom struggle of India.

The Fiction writers in the Indian English have acquired world-wide reputation, which is the result of their effort to present the themes and situations which are universal, which can appeal to people all over India.

It is noted by B.R. Agrawal and M.P. Sinha (2006) that:

The post-independent Indian English novelist had to appeal to the heterogeneous community, people of diverse ethnic-religious and cultural backgrounds. For this purpose he chose themes and situations that had more or less the same validity all over the country. These themes emerged to form recurrent patterns and major trends which were more easily discernible in Post-

Independence Indian society than in that of Pre-independence India. That is why the range of the novel widened and the various features of Indian society, economic, political, religious and cultural, were exhaustively covered by it. Hence the Indian English fiction already well-established and growing both in variety and statues not only retained the momentum of the Gandhian Age, but also flourished to its fullness with wider ramifications (6).

As noted above, the recognition won by the Indian writing in English, especially its fiction is also due to the contribution made to it by a number of women writers. Their esoteric experiences not dealt with by the male writers made their contribution unique. They were not overtly feministic ideologically, but their fiction did bring out the predicament of woman in the predominantly patriarchal Indian society. Women writers have focused on not only the sufferings of women, but also the emergence of new woman in the post-modern Indian society as a result of education and their economic independence.

### **I.2 Anita Nair's Contribution to the Indian English Fiction:-**

As already stated above, this thesis is concerned with the study of female protagonists in the selected fiction of Anita Nair. It is therefore necessary here to briefly state her contribution to the Indian English Fiction.

Anita Nair began her literary career by publishing a collection of Short stories titled *Satyr of the Subway*, which acquired for her a fellowship from the Virginia Centre for the Creative Arts. Her first novel, *The Better Man* (2000), and *Ladies Coupe'* (2001) which followed it made her best-selling author. These two novels were translated into 21 languages. *Ladies Coupe'* was declared to be one of the five best novels in India. The novel is mainly the personal narratives of women of different ages and family status as they are travelling together in the ladies coupe. Nair has also published collection of poems *Malabar Mind* (2002) and *Where the Rain is Born* (2003). Her novel

*Ladies Coupe'* was elected as one of the five best novels in India. The personal stories and experiences narrated by the women of different ages and of social status which underline women's plight in the male-dominated society. Her novel *The Better Man*, presents a male protagonist but he proves himself a better man under the influence of Anjana, the woman he loves who is bold and frank enough to tell him he is a coward. It is she who helps him to make up his mind and transform him into a better man.

Anita Nair's *Mistress* (2005) shows how the dance art of Kathakali influences the lives of Radha, the Kathakali artiste and her uncle Koman. Both of them are attracted towards Christopher Stewart who arrives in Kerala to meet Koman. Chris plays on his musical instrument, cello. He is a mysterious young man, who has a number of questions to ask about the past. Radha and her uncle both are more and more involved with him, and Radha's husband Shyam is excluded from the relationship of this trio. Radha is greatly attracted towards Chris. She, however, does not go with Chris. She is full of remorse for what she did to Shyam. She feels yearning to rest on Shyam's shoulder and feels comforted when she does it. It is the story of relationships made and un-made in the life of the Kathakali artist.

In her earlier novel *Ladies Coupe*, there are narratives of women who try to win strength and independence in the man's world. There are five women initially and the sixth one that joins them later in a ladies coupe' on the train. Akhila the protagonist is the middle-aged unmarried woman in her forties who has spent her life so far caring and earning for her family of brothers and a sister. She undertakes this train journey to seek escape from the oppressive routine which has smothered her own desires. Like Margaret whom she meets in the *Ladies Coupe'*, Akhila rebels against her oppressive family and seeks escape from the conventional life and expectations of the family.

In her *Lessons in Forgetting*, the protagonist, Meera, is abandoned by her self-seeking husband, and is saddled with the responsibility of her children as well as her mother and the grandmother. She comes across Prof. Krishnamurthy, a cyclone-studies expert who has to look after his nineteen years old daughter Smriti, who is comatose after an attack on her at a beachside town where she was holidaying with friends. Meera and Prof.

Krishnamurthy come together through coincidence and there appears a fresh beginning in Meera's life.

*Cut like Wound* (2012) is a different kind of fiction written by Anita Nair. It is a crime story a brutal psychological thriller. Yet Anita Nair has created in it quite a few unforgettable characters. There is a killer on the move and inspector Gowda who is investigating the crime notices that there is a pattern in the murders; there, is a serial killer afoot. But inspector Gowda the middle-aged investigating officer faces domestic problems as well as non-cooperation and ridicule of his colleagues in the department. The latest fictional work of Anita Nair is *Idris* (2014) a novel full of adventure and romance, giving insight into the life in the seventeenth century.

Apart from the major fictional works Anita Nair has written story books for children, *Adventures of Nanu*, *The Skating Squirrel* (2006), *Puffin Book of World Myths and Legends* (2004) and *The Magical Indian Myths* (2008). Her very first book, *Satyr of the Subway* (1997) is a collection of short stories.

Anita Nair likes to be anonymous in her writing, as she herself says in an interview by Bindi Menon, who interviewed her on *Ladies Coupe'*. She says, "The best thing about being a writer is to be anonymous in one's writing, being genderless, ageless, and classless. It's challenging writing about people completely different from me and my kind of life".

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**Chapter – II**  
**Theoretical Framework- Western Feminist**  
**Movement the Beginnings**

**II.0 Suffragist Movement**

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## Chapter II

### Theoretical Framework - Western Feminist Movement the Beginnings

#### II.0 Suffragist Movement:

The term feminism came to be used in 1910, which indicated a movement of women for their rights and freedom. Before that in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century England there was a movement of women for civic rights, social freedom, higher education, social welfare and right to vote. These women were called Suffragists, who were involved in welfare activities for women as well as in a movement for a right to vote. The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Women's movement related to equal opportunity in education and employment, and rights to property. Women then had no opportunity in education and employment. They did not have property rights in England. The suffragist movement became international in the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In England, Women activists held street demonstrations and mass marches. They disrupted the meetings of male-politicians, leading to explosive clashes with the police. In the jails they refused to eat and resorted to hunger strike. The women's movement which thus started to gain social and political rights developed an ideology which was labeled Feminism. As movement Feminism wants to change the role of women as secondary citizens and win for them equal status with men. They took Mary Wollstonecraft the democratic theorist to be their guide, who in her life had defied norms of sexual life. The Movement of Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century was for the advancement of women for their political rights and for higher education. They also wanted jobs to have their own income. Their movement was then called 'Women Movement' which sounded rather awkward. Therefore in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the term Feminism came to be used. This new term with its 'ism' suggests that there is an ideology. Feminism does not restrict itself to getting a right to vote. It seeks to win for women equal status in every walk of life.

The feminists now demanded not only the political rights, but also removal of social and economic discrimination practiced against them. They discarded the title 'Woman Movement' as an old sounding name and called

themselves Feminists for whom vote was only a tool, but their real goal was complete social revaluation which should enable women express themselves fully, without any psychological, social handicap. They would not like double standard of morality, one for men and the other for women. They should have opportunity to achieve success in every sphere of public life. In the West it is generally believed that women are fighting for equality, which really means abolition of sex hierarchy in the male-dominated society.

### **II.1 Feminism: Its Emergence and Development:**

Simone de Beauvoir in her treatise *The Second Sex* (Trans 1949) attempts to target the problem of Women's 'otherness' and to discover the means by which women can find means to fight against the secondary status given to them by the patriarchal society from the time immemorial. Her effort was to win for women all those privileges which men have arrogated to themselves. Since then the exclusion of women from history and from philosophical thought has been the most important point for the feminists to fight against patriarchy. How to fight against this exclusion is a crucial problem before the feminist thinkers, because the patriarchal ideas have become part of our social and political structure, and even our everyday life. It is not only women but the social minorities also have suffered for centuries as a result of this male-oriented and hegemonic social system. The very structure of language has also been affected by this hegemony. For example, the noun 'man' subsumes 'woman' in its generic reference. Beauvoir also reacts to Freudian psychoanalysis which is based on masculine model and has become the basis for male-domination. She disputes the idea that the girls experience their difference from male child as a lack. In fact, the girl, she says, "finds herself situated in the world differently from the boy" (Beauvoir, 272). Beauvoir characterizes the otherness of woman using a phrase "Woman is a womb", which is the basis of her theory of alterity. Woman's being treated as inferior to man is the result of looking at woman merely as a sexed being. Beauvoir says, "---she is simply what man decrees, thus she is called 'the sex' by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as sexual being. For him "she is sex ---absolute sex, no less" (Beauvoir, 15). She is defined and differentiated with reference to

man and not he with reference to her, she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the man as essential. "He is the subject, he is the Absolute she is the other." (Beauvoir, 272). The masculinity is characterized here as an absolute human type while woman is supposed to be a derivative of man. Woman is characterized as peculiar being having ovaries and uterus, while with man there is no such peculiarity. If there is distinction made on the basis of caste, race, etc. then one class or race is eventually reduced to the secondary position. In a patriarchy, therefore, woman is reduced to the inferior positions, which leads to woman's oppression. Thus this dichotomy of self and other leads to the oppression of the other class. Woman is a natural condition of the other by virtue of her physical condition not on account of some external factor like social, historical and political change. On account of this natural condition in the male-oriented social structure from a male point of view woman is denied what Beauvoir calls a full membership in the human race. This position of woman's inferiority is only in the context of patriarchy. It is not a static state, and it need not continue. Beauvoir notes, "--- Whether it is a race, a caste, a class or a sex that is reduced to a position of inferiority, the methods of justification are the same." (Beauvoir, 35). In a patriarchal society the values are imposed on women characterizing them to be submissive. A woman is supposed to play a role as prescribed by the dominant ideology of patriarchy. She notes the peculiar condition of women as they are dispersed among men and influenced by the male ideology. As they are dispersed (in the families) they do not have means of organizing themselves.

## **II.2 Liberal Feminism:**

The women thinkers like Wollstonecraft had asserted during the enlightenment period in the West that women also possessed innate capacity for reason and they should therefore be granted equal citizenship. In her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (Wollstonecraft, 1792) she powerfully argued that women's capacity for rational thinking was suppressed by their lack of education. She was the earliest feminist to challenge the male view that women do not possess the rational virtues of human nature. It was argued by male theorists that women were not capable

of rational thinking as they were hampered by their bodily functions such as reproduction, that they have no mental capacity. She argued that women could not actively participate in the socio-political process because they were largely restricted to home and hearths, and were not given opportunity to have education and develop intellectually. She holds men responsible for women's follies which were the result of their oppression.

Liberalism in the West restricted itself to public life and did not interfere with private life of people. However, women badly needed state intervention to safeguard their interests. The feminist activists and thinkers were still fighting to get recognition to the basic fact that women are human beings. The National Organization of Women (NOW) was fighting for getting recognition for women's true potential in public life. Liberal Feminist thinking holds the rights of women, but it is up to individual to win the rights through merits, i.e. personal efforts. This thought utterly ignores the social and cultural factors which blatantly hamper such efforts.

### **II.3 Radical Feminism In The West:**

During the late 1960s, Radical Feminism came up in groups, which had their own manifestos and strategies. They did not have identifiable leaders and did not subscribe to one common political thought. They took up issues which closely affected the personal life of women. Radical Feminists were primarily concerned with female oppression. They focused attention on individual experiences of women, who wrote communicating their own painful experiences. The radical feminists believed that sexism is the root cause of the oppression of women. The Radical Feminists also believe that their main problem is men. They are the potential oppressors, who are privileged in the society. They believe that all forms of knowledge even the use of language is male-oriented and therefore they would like to examine it. They think that they must work for female revolution in their consciousness. The women must become aware of their secondary status in the male-dominated society. They maintain that male supremacy is revealed everywhere as in sexist jokes, television commercials, movies and so on, as Robin Morgan points out in *Sisterhood is Powerful* (Morgan, 1970). In modern feminist thought Imelda Wheleham (Whwlwham, 1995, 71), says that women should become

politically active and develop strategies to oppose oppression. They ask women to narrate their personal experiences which are then analyzed in terms of feminism which again is followed by self-help groups, organized protests, child-care centers, etc. They combine theory and practice and fight for social change. They try to forge alternative life style which can be effective substitute for patriarchy. They tried to establish communes, businesses, women's festivals and women-only programs to give opportunities to women to give scope to their identity. The feminist writers like Shula Smith *Firestone* (1979, 12) assert that patriarchy exploits women's biological incapacity and it is therefore necessary to remove this handicap to bring about change in the social order. She says that monogamy and heterosexuality are established as norms by the male-dominated societies, which are factors of women's oppression. She advocates the need to remove biological bond between mother and child by establishing childcare centers and domestic arrangements to do away with the role of parents. Earlier the feminist writers like Kate Millett in her *Sexual Politics* (1969) had violently criticized the use of sexual imagery about women in novels by the male novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. For example, she points out that the male characters in the fiction of D.H.Lawrence and Henry Miller are shown to be repressive and exploitative. In literature as well as in films there is negative stereotyping of women. (Sehgal, Doris Lessing, 33).

Radical Feminist activists especially in the USA, worked at the grassroots level maintaining support networks for women, rape-crisis centers, women's aid etc, but they were not involved in academic field. They emphasized cultural awakening rather than engaging themselves in scholarly debate.

Kate Millet is quite justified in saying that personal and political cannot be separated because the treatment of women in the public sphere is the extension of the way they are treated in the private sphere. Kate Miller claims that there is relationship between sex and power and it is this power relation the Radical Feminists would like to change.

#### **II.4 Leftist Feminism:**

Since women activists saw themselves to be the oppressed class like the workers they were naturally drawn towards Marxist thought. As these activists in England were involved with the left wing politics, they used the broader term 'Socialist Feminist'. They were mainly concerned with the women workers in the industry. But like the Radical Feminists they also felt the need to politicize the personal life of women as they argued that the women are enslaved in the patriarchal system. They, of course, saw that this exploitation of women had a longer history than the emergence of labour force under capitalism. Like Marxist or Socialist Movement, the Feminist Movement was also concerned with stopping exploitation and oppression of others. But the Marxist fight was mainly against the class, while the Feminist struggle was against patriarchy. It was therefore difficult to find place for the feminist program within the Marxist Framework. The fight of the feminists was in the private life of women, within the family against the patriarchal power relations. On the other hand, the leftist movement was involved in the fight against capitalist power. The feminists looked upon women as the unpaid workers and would like to be included in this fight. But Women's work was unproductive in the sense of the Marxist definition of work. Women's work was procreation (child bearing) and domestic work like cooking, washing etc. It could not be equated with the wage-earner's work in the factories. Women were being exploited in the family on account of sexual difference, and at the work place again by the division of male- female labour where they were being paid much less than men. Within the family itself there is exploitation as under the capitalist system because there is inequality based on sex. It is assumed that when the class is abolished the sexual inequality will also disappear (I. Whelehan, 1995, 47).

The Marxists and the Feminists have, thus, different goals, the Marxists have to abolish class, while the feminists have to abolish patriarchy. The Feminists focus on the patriarchal power relation within family, where Marxism has no role to play. Marxists exclusively paid attention to the paid labour in the industrial sector and ignored domestic labour of women. Marxism totally ignores women's role in reproduction of human race, caring and nurturing children within the family relationship.

And yet the Marxist Feminists have tried to construct a framework to incorporate women's domestic labour of reproduction and for maintaining workforce needed for production, which is necessary for the benefit of capital. The women's relation to production is distinct from men in the sense that they produce the labour force. The Women were mostly engaged in low paid jobs, and they were always there as a labour force, but now women, being educated have entered every sphere of job market and still there is sexual division of labour. Since Women have additional work at home, of domestic work and child-care they accept part-time work and low pay. In spite of legislation stipulating equal pay to the women employees the employers often ignore it. Again there is a concept of 'family wage', which is based on the assumption that man's pay is enough for the family and the woman's earning is only for additional luxury. But it is ignored that only very few families have the male earning sufficient enough to maintain the family, while there are single female parent families in which the woman's earning is the sole support of the family, where the male may be unemployed. It belies the idea of a man being the sole wage-earner. There is a general misconception that women normally remain at home and only the man in the family works as a bread-winner for the family. This Marxist supposition is not acceptable to the feminists. It ignores domestic labour and disregards sexual division at work. Barrett (1988) says:

In assessing the factors which might account for the position of women as wage labourers, it is impossible to escape the conclusion that family structure and the ideology of domestic responsibility play an important part (157).

If there is discrimination against women by the trade-unions which affirm the right of man as the wage-earner, the industries will exploit female labour paying cheap wages, and it would create dissatisfaction among female labourers. Though the feminists tried to pave their way through Marxist or socialist ideology, their effort to set themselves apart as a class was odd for the Marxist ideology, because for the Marxist, class was a unified category.

Working-class men and women were treated by it alike. The Feminists, however mostly belonged to middle-class whom the socialists or Marxists regarded as bourgeois. For the Marxists gender oppression could not be mixed with the oppression of class.

Feminist movement cannot restrict itself to class and production as desired by the Marxists. The feminists are concerned with the issues of racial difference, sexuality, and cultural differences which arise out of age-old practices of patriarchy based on the power of men over women. The feminists pay increasing attention to problems specific to women's lives in male-dominated society which naturally creates rift between their actual practice and the function of the Marxists for whom only the economic base is the main consideration. On account of their preoccupation with class struggle the socialist feminists keep themselves aloof from other non-socialist feminist programs. There were therefore independent ways of the Feminist Groups publishing their own manifestos and carrying on activities of their own.

### **II.5 Feminism and Literature:**

It became necessary for the feminist thinkers to develop their own methods and theory based on the study of their own literary texts. The literary theory and criticism in the West is mainly male-oriented as well as oriented to the white race. Elaine Showalter in 1978, suggested the term 'Gynocriticism' to the study of women's literature in general. In 1977 she published a study of the 19th and 20th Century women writers, titled as *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). The women critics like Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their *The Mad Woman in the Attic* (1979) presented detailed rereading from feminist point of view of Harold Bloom's theory of anxiety of influence<sup>9</sup>. They describe how the 19th Century woman writer felt anxieties in the patriarchal literary culture. For example, George Eliot had to take a male pseudonym to publish her novels. A lot of literature was created on individual women writers and the tradition of women writers' right from the middle Ages. The women writers had to face subordination in the main stream literature and they had to protest against it. The gynocriticism paid attention to the analysis of literary works of the female writers showing how women's writings differed in the presentation of the literary genres their

structure and plot. The female critics assume that the gender influences literary production. Women cannot deny that their lives have been influenced by being women. Sandra Gilbert (1986) for example, asks.

If a writer is a woman--- how can her sexual identity is split from her literary energy? (28).

The feminist critics naturally challenged the critical conventions of the male-dominated critical theory. The conditions which dominated the creativity of women writers must also dominate the female critics in their literary criticism. But it is also true that women critics did make use of the interpretative tools, being used in the literary criticism in general. The gynocritical studies of literary texts have also been charged for their exclusive preoccupation with the writings of one sex i.e. female writing only. (Gerald Graff, 1986, 117) But this charge is not valid because we can then say the same thing of American fiction, Russian novel, Indian English Literature and so on. There are publishers who have promoted feminist writers and these writers have got publicity through the reviews, through the articles of the literary critics and the teachers at colleges and universities. All these have helped to form the Feminist literary canon. It is not just about woman, but about marginality of women within the dominant social set-up. Through the feminist movement, women have acquired a group identity, which is necessary for political action. One interesting development in the Feminist criticism of literature is the emergence of male-feminist critics in 1980s. The male feminist critics tried to master feminist criticism and to show how it was inadequate.

Feminist criticism emerged when women themselves became teachers and writers, and founded their own publishing houses. They became increasingly aware of the secondary status given to the female characters in the fictional works. The educated women became aware of representation of women in male literary texts. Similarly, they noticed how history and literature ignored women writers. These issues made feminist scholars study cultural anthropology as well as linguistics, and disciplines like psychoanalysis, etc. They noted how in the field of literature women were

excluded or mistreated by the male critics. Feminist Criticism tries to show how women writers have tried to develop a female idiom and stylistic features of their fictional works. This idea of specific feminine style in writing is yet to be studied systematically.

Feminism in literature has tried to establish female literary tradition focusing on the themes and genres, and discovering feminine styles. The women writers, who were ignored, in the literary history by the male historians, were studied to establish female literary tradition. The women writers ignored by the male reviewers and critics were rehabilitated by the feminists. Women writers in their fiction dealt with female social experiences, the anguish women experience in the male-dominated world, the experience of child birth, rape and domestic violence and so on. Feminists went to the length of stating Lesbianism to be a valid relationship between two women. The Feminist movement, and the literature produced by the women writers have successfully awakened the conscience in women. The feminist studies have influenced the literary studies in the Indian languages in general and also in the field of Indian English Literature.

## **II.6 Post-Colonial Feminism in India:**

Post-Colonial theory on the post-modern scene has also addressed the complex relationship in the field of feminism and cultural as well as literary studies. The feminists in the post-colonial period would like to explore the aspects of the life of women within the colonial frame work. They argue that women are doubly oppressed in the colonial subjugation once politically and then by gender discrimination. As claimed by Boehmer (1995):

Colonized women were as it is called, doubly or triply marginalized. That is to say, they were disadvantaged on the grounds not only of gender but also of race, social class, and, in some cases, religion and caste (224).

Women, as a result of the spread of education, became aware of their individuality in the post-colonial Indian society. They began to speak for themselves, and in their writing also their subjugation in the patriarchal

society became a focal point. The Indian feminist scholars, having studied the feminist ideology developed in the West, developed the idea of femininity. But, though Indian women became educated and developed awareness of their own individuality, the tradition of age-old culture still dominated them. As Richard Lannoy (1971) points out:

In this 20<sup>th</sup> century, Indian women...have proved themselves more equal to their, as yet, only partially, accomplished emancipation, and have not lost their essential femininity. Even when they become highly competent in professional life, Indian women show no sign of acquiring those masculine traits of behavior which are familiar in their counterparts in Anglo-Saxon countries. Their sense of power is already sufficiently deeply rooted in, and identified with the family--- For them to feel no need to resort to the kinds of excessive assertion which is intensely competitive, male dominated Western societies demand (130-131).

As a result of these women thinkers begin to feel the necessity of new cultural awareness among women. In India, some women writers presented everyday life of men and women, their customs and traditions. They mostly presented realistic picture of Indians suffering poverty and oppression in the unjust social system. It is a male point of view that woman's nature is fundamentally different from that of man. Women feel connected with things, while men develop a sense of detachment. Consequently, a woman tries to have cohesive relationship. This view about women, that they are fundamentally different from men, is a typical patriarchal view, which indirectly states how it is natural for women to be involved in the home and hearth and their children.

Feminism involves fighting against such patriarchal notions about women, and creates awareness among women about their oppression and exploitation, within the family and also at the work place. Feminism demands equal rights for women and their liberation from the subordination in the

patriarchal system. It tries to give voice to women, who have suffered injustice for ages. Colonialism and the patriarchy are seen by female thinkers as the same in terms of exploitation. Nirupama Dutt (2007), for example, says:

In patriarchy all women in the world are second class citizens (38).

In India, the colonialism came to an end after the British left the country, and India became politically independent, but women's colonization continued under the patriarchal system. In the ancient India, women were greatly respected as there were a number of goddesses representing seats of power. The idea of 'ardhanarineshwar' indicates equal status enjoyed by women with men. But, the mythological stories of Seeta, Draupadi, Ahalya and others show how this changed, and woman was depicted as secondary to man. The present status of women in the Indian social system is still, by and large, secondary to a male in the house. In India the fight of women even now is the fight for survival in the heavily patriarchal system. There are still feudal values ruling the Indian household. Though many of them have jobs, they carry the burden of homely duties along with the jobs they do; and there is, in addition, child-bearing, mothering and following social conventional practices. They still have to face the male ego women have been discriminated against in every field. The women writers were not taken seriously in the literary criticism and history by the male critics. This influence the female literary critics to develop structural feminism. It involves subversion of the male literary theory. The feminist critics tried to expose the patriarchal notions and presentations in literature, showing how images of women were constructed.

The feminist thinker Elaine Showalter has categorized women's writings into three phases of development. The first phase Feminine Phase, in which the feminist critics use the findings of Marxist and/or structuralist discipline. In the first phase, the feminist critics try to use the findings of Marxism and structuralism. The feminist thinkers, at this stage, had also to contend with Freud's delineation of woman's image, as Betty Friedan points out in her *The Feminist Mystique* (1971),

Because Freud's followers could only see woman in the image defined by Freud---With no possibility of happiness unless she adjusted to being man's passive object--- they wanted to help women get rid of their suppressed envy, their neurotic desire to be equal. They wanted to help women find sexual fulfillment as women by affirming their natural inferiority (119).

This was the phase in which women writers imitated the male literary production. But, in the second phase, the female writers tried to explore the female life in the social sphere and tried to reconstruct the female experience which was till now suppressed. In the third phase, which is called 'female phase', the women writers tried to discover the essential female experience, and created a new field of their writing. It amounted to their self-discovery. Feminist criticism began to question the assumptions of the so far prevalent male critical theory such as literary value and the tradition. It also questioned the norms of patriarchal critical theory. Feminism militated against all these social institutions which, directly or indirectly led to the oppression and subversion of women. Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1992, 45/47 print) also maintains that women's writings should explore female experiences in its own right. Feminist critics should study the tradition of women's writing.

It was necessary because, as Neeru Tandon (2008) says:

Feminists considered that male authored texts have obtained double standards in their treatment of male and female characters. In male authored text women are performing only those activities by which they can keep male happy. While male has been represented as owner who distorts women by regarding them as mere sexual objects (24).

Women represented in the Hindu myths, such as Sita, Draupadi, Ahilya, etc., are the silent sufferers of injustice done to them, and these are the models

praised by the male writers and, which rule the imagination of the patriarchal society. Women in these 'puranic' models are shown to be passive sufferers. Women writers in India have taken up the themes related to the sufferings of women, and the problem of woman's status in the family to influence the mind-set of the society. Women writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande have shown how women are not only materially but even psychologically oppressed. Women are always seen as daughter, wives and mothers, hardly as the entities beyond these roles, the real ones can hardly emerge as they are weighed down by responsibility at these stages of their life.

It is claimed that in ancient India women were given high status and they were respected. The Vedic literature before Manu is full of female deities such as Usha (Dawn), Prithvi (the Earth), Saraswati (the river) and so on. Lakshmi in the Hindu tradition is the goddess of wealth, and Saraswati of learning. Woman is also worshiped as Shakti. But this Vedic thought appears to have been ignored later. Woman is looked upon as a dependent being, performing secondary role in the household. The concept of 'Pativrata' (her fidelity to the husband) women being given as a gift (Daana) to the bridegroom show the secondary status of women. The girl child in the Hindu household is believed to be meant for someone. In practice, a married woman is called 'ardhangini' the half of man. Manu, the great law giver, has said, 'Where women are worshipped, there reside the Gods.' but this same Manu has also ordained that woman need not be given freedom because she is protected by her father, then by the husband and in the last stage by the Son. It is also true that in the ancient India, girls were educated like boys. This was, of course was restricted to girls belonging to the high castes. There were women scholars mentioned in the ancient texts and Puranas. But the same Manu, who talks of worshipping women, says in Chapter IX of Manusmriti that women in general are licentious, that the creator has given them

Carnal desires, greed for ornaments, dishonesty and malice and bad conduct (Chapter IX, Verse of Manusmriti)

Manu has ordained that woman must remain devoted to her husband---and after his death she

should not think of any other man. Manu further says, even though the husband be of bad character, and seeks pleasure elsewhere, he must be constantly worshipped as a God by a faithful wife" (Verse 154).

If a wife commits a mistake, Manu has prescribed a punishment of beating her with a rope or a short bamboo stick (VIII. verse 299)<sup>16</sup>. A widow must not marry, but a widower can marry again. This is a drastic change from the status of women in the Vedic period. There are names of women seers and scholars from the Vedic period; Gargi, Maitreyi, Arundhati, Lilavati, etc. who were learned scholars. All this, however, changed and woman was reduced to a secondary status in every religion of the world. Even Buddhism does not favour woman. According to the Buddhists, woman is a hurdle in the development of man's spiritual powers. The Buddha tells his disciples "That women are easily angered, they are full of passions and they are stupid." (Quoted in A Feminist study in comparison by Nayantara Sahgal and Doris Lessing, 14). Manu of course, mentions how wife is absolutely necessary in the performance of religious rituals and ceremonies. But here again she sits by the side of the husband touching his hand as he performs the rites.

Woman is idealized in the Indian mythical stories. But He also says that woman is as a secretary (sachiva) for the husband in the household work, a companion in the conjugal relationship, a dear student in the study of arts, in actual practice in life woman is harassed. Even in this 21st Century, there is female infanticide practiced in India. Woman is supposed to submit herself totally to her man's wishes, which is supposed to be her highest virtue. However, the spread of education, and gainful employment of women in different fields have brought about change in women's life in India. There is Women's movement in India, which raises voice against crimes like rape, wife-beating and atrocities against women. There are still dowry-deaths in India, alcoholism and violence. But this is not feminism in the sense it started in the western countries. In England, women struggle for right to vote. But in India, women got right to vote without asking for it, as a result of the Indian constitution. Women can contest election and hold position of power at

different levels from Gram-Panchayat to the parliament and the ministries. But this was the result of the reformist thought of the political leaders like Gandhiji, Nehru and others. Social reformers like D.K. Karve and Mahatma Phule had already taken up problems of women's education and the widow marriages. Though there is democracy and women have a right to vote as well as get elected to the highest posts, the Indian womanhood has yet to go a long way to achieve equality and freedom in the patriarchal society that is very much a part of Indian psyche. The social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda and Mahadeo Govind Ranade as well as social organizations like Arya Samaj introduced social reforms. Indian National Movement as well as the Indian National Congress contributed to social reforms and gave women equal status in all the fields. It is true that women in India are still struggling to bring about change in the basically patriarchal society in India, because mere political reforms cannot bring about social change.

In the Post-Independence and Post-colonial India, there was an emergence of new woman, even among the lower classes, who is aware of her own rights. However, there was still the weight of tradition which tries to crush her or put her under the thumb. There is still conscious or unconscious cultural politics, supported by religious practices, which somehow maintain male hegemony. Women writers in India show through their stories the life married women are fated to live after leaving their father's, house, sometimes at a very early age, they are sent to a house full of strangers, who expect them to perform duties according to their own tradition and way of living, which is unfamiliar to the girls. In the joint Indian family, each member has some expectations from the new member ushered in the family. In the Indian family life, women are supposed to remain in the background, playing a secondary role. Women have to suffer mutely and carry on their duty in the household, where they are often subjected to sharp comments, anger and insulting remarks against her parents. Indian English fiction, especially by women, realistically narrates the plight of women in the Indian household in general.

All this leads to the question, has there been Feminism and the feminist movement of India's own to fight against injustice, or at least to

prevent and redress the wrongs done to women? As a theory feminism ought to be universal. However, there are in the world literature Western Feminism, African Feminism, etc., which underline typical regional problem the feminist movement has to deal with. Indian social situation is very complex in the sense that Indian society comprises several castes and creeds, which have their own age-old patterns of family life, man-woman relationship, and power-structures in the family. Indian Society has been by and large a patriarchal society. Indian feminist theory cannot ignore this pluralistic social situation. For example, the Dalit or Bahujan Samaja women are doubly oppressed in their community, being Dalit and then being women. Indian feminism has to take special note of their situation. The Dalit women, though oppressed in terms of caste, enjoy greater freedom than the women in the high-caste society, because they have to go out for work in the field as farm-labour or for jobs as sweepers, household workers, etc. On the other hand, the high-caste women, who have no jobs, are confined to the household work solely, and are at the mercy of the male-members of the household.

One has to agree with Sunny Singh, the Indian English novelist, that we need 'homegrown version of feminism'. It is because in India women have their own typical problems, though women all over the world, in a patriarchal society face some common problems. Even women serving in metropolitan cities and those in the small townships or rural areas have some common problems as well as the particular idiosyncratic problems faced by them in the local situations. So far as the life of women is concerned, there is great diversity in India on account of different castes, social backgrounds, the roles they have to perform and multiple relationships in the family. In comparison, in the West there are only a few relationships. In the Indian family life a woman, whether educated or uneducated, rich or poor, has to meet certain expectations from the new family and the society. Indian theory of feminism has to take into account the typical problems women face on account of their family obligations, new relationships and taboos. They face oppression and suppression on account of the age-old social practices arising out of practices in the family set-up. Indian feminism has to take into account the age-old obligations that women have to face

within the family and the society. There are some key concepts like chastity, the 'Pativrata Dharma' (meaning fidelity and total surrender to the wishes of the husband), and the ideals of womanhood exemplified by the stories of Sita, Savitri, etc from the Hindu mythologies. Even in this 21<sup>st</sup> century these ideals are at the back of the mind when the Indians think of man-woman relationship in the married life in India. And they are being used even now to treat women and judge them by these standards. One has only to watch how women are portrayed in the daily soaps on the television in India.

As a result of the spread of education among women, their entry into the world of employment and business and also in the state politics, there is considerable change in the status of women in the family as well as in the society. There are laws to help women if they are oppressed. And yet there are customs like dowry, infanticide, bride-burning, etc., which appear to be in practice in many parts, though punishable by law. Feminist movement in India, which started during the 1970s, has been concerned with these ills of society. Though there is law guarding the women's interest, it needs social action to fight and eradicate these ills in the society. Indian feminism needs to fight against these social ills, and to prepare the mind-set of Indian womanhood not to succumb to such practices.

The Indian English Fiction, especially by the women writers, reflects the struggle of women protagonists to win freedom and the rightful position in the family and the society. Shashi Deshpande explains how Indian myths have influenced the attitude to women in Indian social life. Shashi Deshpande (2003) says:

How we see ourselves collectively or individually depends greatly on myths. They are part of the human psyche, part of our cultural histories. The myths present role models and images that women are expected to adhere to: 'to be as pure as Sita, as loyal as Draupadi, as beautiful as Laxmi, as beautiful provider as Annapoorna, as dugged in devotion as Savitri, as strong as Durga' these are all the ultimate role models we cannot

entirely dismiss---the examples are, it seems, held out only to women. It seems odd that it took us women so long to realize this truth, to understand why this is so.

What Shashi Deshpande says is true as even in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the myths of Seeta and Savitri hold a sway on the minds of women, and even the highly educated women observe the ritual of 'Vat Savitri', which they pray for the long life of the husband and to have the same husband for the coming seven births. Shashi Deshpande also notes how there are misconceptions about feminism and being a feminist in India. It can be noted that for women writers fiction became a powerful medium to challenge and fight patriarchal practices and gender-based oppression in the Indian society. With the rise of women writers and the awareness among women about injustice and discrimination against them, feminist thought has been reflected in their fiction even if indirectly. There are modern Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Anita Nair, Manju Kapur, Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Shashi Deshpande and others who have voiced aspects of women's colonization. The female protagonists in their fiction are shown to be struggling to find their own space and identity and meaning of their existence. These writers have tried to draw attention to women's trials and predicaments of women in the Indian family life by presenting women protagonists and their sensibility. Some of these writers probe psychological aspects, the inner minds of the Indian women. These writers, being women, can probe deep into the minds of their characters and the inequalities they suffer in the male-dominated world. Women's search for self, their awareness of their position in the family and the society, is reflected in the fiction of these writers.

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**Chapter – III**  
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## Chapter III

### Female Protagonists in Anita Nair's *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe*

#### III.0 Anita Nair's *The Better Man*: A Brief Introduction

It must be made clear here that in Anita Nair's fictional works she has presented episodes that delineate the stories of female protagonists.

Cambridge Dictionary defines 'protagonist' as "ONE of the MAIN characters in a story or a play". And in Anita Nair's novel we come across women as leading characters in their episodes facing their own problems.

In Anita Nair's fiction we come across episodes, each presenting a female protagonist, her experiences and struggle in the patriarchal world around her. For example, in *The Better Man* there are stories of female protagonists interwoven in the whole narration. Anjana's story delineates her sufferings and betrayal at the hands of her husband, and how she finds liberation, becoming economically independent. Meenakshi is another female protagonist, who faces life independently when betrayed by her artist husband, and brings up her child, running a crèche, and later also looks after her ailing husband. Valsala, the youthful wife of an old husband, tries to find her own way out of the unhappy marriage. Paru-Kutty, Mukundan's mother, rebels against her husband when he brings in another woman, and compels him to live separately. All these female characters are at the center of their stories and they have the initiative of action. In *Ladies Coupe* also we have several stories in which a woman is at the center, each story presenting the life and experiences narrated by themselves in first person, while men in their life are marginal in their stories. In *Mistress*, again, the episodes are woven around the female protagonists like Saadiya, Radha, Angela and Maya, who are at the center of the episodes and have initiative of action. In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair has presented female protagonists like Kala and Meera betrayed by their husbands, and who chalk out their own life. Thus, Anita Nair's fiction presents the struggle and experiences of female protagonists, while the male characters are at the margin, the female protagonists are at the center of each episode.

*The Better Man* (2000) is apparently a male-oriented novel, because its protagonist, Mukundan undergoes regeneration from his psychological state caused by his dominant father. But there are episodes dealing with life and experiences of women protagonists like Anjana, Mandakini, etc. Mukundan is an elderly bachelor and a retired government servant, who returns to his native place, Kaikurusi, an imaginary village in northern Kerala. Mukundan, at the age of eighteen left his village to escape the tyranny of his father, Achutan Nair. Mukundan, in his boyhood had lived under the fear and domination of his father, which he feels even now at the age of fifty. He is also deeply affected by the feeling of guilt of abandoning his mother, when she piteously asked him to take her with him to the city to escape the harsh treatment at the hands of his father. His father had a mistress then. His mother is said to have slipped and fallen from the stairs and died, but this story of accident might have been cooked by Mukundan's father.

The novel narrates the life and experiences of Mukundan, though the female characters in this novel are the protagonists of their own episodes, and they are significant in the sense that they live in a male-dominated family set-up, and are victimized by the tyranny of the men in the family. These women protagonists are at the center of these episodes and show initiative of action.

Mukundan, after his retirement, returns to Kaikurusi forced by the circumstances. He is still under the psychological domination of his father, who lives across the main residence with his mistress. His father was a stalwart personality in the village community until he was active. As Mukundan was absent from the village for a long time, he has no role to play in the village community after his father. The leadership of the village has now passed on to Power House Ramkrishnan, an ordinary man, who has turned into a millionaire by winning a lottery. Mukundan has, therefore, no role to play in the affairs of the village community. Mukundan who has a guilt feeling about his mother, and the fear of his father, has developed a psychological state from which Bhasi rescues him. Bhasi is popularly known in the village as a house-painter, but he practices a system of medicine evolved by himself and also Homeopathy. Bhasi cures Mukundan of his psychological anguish through his herbal cure. Despite Bhasi's successful treatment, Mukundan betrays him, when power House Ramkrishnan vindictively tries to oust Bhasi

from the village to acquire the plot of Bhasi's house. Mukundan falls prey to Ramkrishnan's strategy of including him in the village committee organized for building a community hall. Mukundan realizes this later and tries to make amends by offering Bhasi a house in his own estate.

Mukundan's story is intertwined with the story of Anjana, a married woman, who is a victim of patriarchal notions and practices. Her husband, Ravindran, only used her body. Anjana, who was brought up in a liberal atmosphere, enjoyed her independence in her father's house. She was educated and city-bred, and had expectations from her husband. She wants to give her best to her husband when she marries. She expects her husband to talk to her, to include her in his affairs, confide in her. But, Ravindran would not respond to her small talk about the house, the trees around etc. There was hardly any conversation between them. His love-making in bed was brutish, hardly any emotion in it, except lust. He talked to her only when he wanted to quit his job and decided to start his own business, the business of Agarbatti products. He gave up the house and took Anjana back to her parent's house. He did not stick to one business. He left Agarbatti and started selling mattresses, then red oxide floor colouring, industrial stapler and so on. He failed because he was not good at all at talking to people, convincing them, treating them socially. He used to beat Anjana. Her father sternly warned him against this violence, since he frequently absented from the house. Anjana took up a job of teaching, which changed her life. She had to suffer her husband's cruelty, and she never felt like a married woman during eight years of her married life.

Though *The Better Man* is mainly a story of Mukundan, and his regeneration, there are very significant female characters portrayed in the novel. Their life is very much a part of the social and cultural ethos of the village in Kerala, where everyone knows everyone else, and personal lives are, one way or other, affected by the social milieu. The impact of patriarchal notions is felt rather strongly in the village and small townships than in the city. The life of women in Kaikurusi is naturally controlled by the patriarch in the family. There are mainly two types of women portrayed in this novel, those

honoring their wedding bond, fulfilling their role of a wife, a mother; and those trying to flout the wedding bond that has become oppressive for them.

### III.1 Paru-Kutty: Awakening of Her Self-hood:

As pointed out above, in *The Better Man*, Anita Nair has presented two types of female protagonists, those honoring the wedding bond, remaining with their autocratic husbands, and doing their duty inspite of their husband's infidelity.

Paru-Kutty, Mukundan's mother, lived in fear of her domineering and violent husband, Achutan Nair for the whole of her life. When Achutan Nair had to go to Burma, Paru-Kutty very much wanted to go with him. But she was pregnant, and often threw up and felt tired very often. Her husband said (Nair, 2000):

I can't be saddled with an invalid for whom

I'll have to be responsible every minute of the day  
(68).

Paru-Kutty was in tears, and tried to plead with him. But her husband would not take this liability with him to a foreign land. Mukundan had the first glimpse of his father when he was four years old. His father came back four years later unannounced. Even Paru-Kutty did not know of his arrival. This shows that Achutan Nair hardly communicated with his pregnant wife when abroad, and was not interested whether he had a son or a daughter. Even after four years of separation he did not have a kind word for his wife. He growled at her and scolded her for the timidity of the child, Mukundan, as if bringing him up was only her responsibility. Achutan Nair was used to vent his anger on others, especially his wife. She was the victim of his autocratic behavior. She tries to shield her son also from the anger of his father. Whenever Mukundan draws the ire of his father, she tries to console Mukundan saying (Nair, 2000):

He is not angry with you. He just wants you to grow up to be like his, strong and capable. When you have a son of your own, you too will find that you want him to be like you (17).

Paru-Kutty is afraid of her husband. He is like a despot ruling the kingdom and not a loving husband or a father. Achutan Nair is the epitome of patriarchy.

Achutan Nair formed extra-marital alliance with Ammini, who used to sell butter-milk to him on his round in the fields. And finally, he bluntly told Paru-Kutty (Nair, 2000):

I'm tired of having to visit Ammini in her house. The whole village knows about Ammini. So I might as well bring her here (74).

Paru-Kutty, for the first time, opposed her husband saying 'no', prohibiting her husband from bringing Ammini in the house. She sternly told her husband (Nair, 2000):

I'm willing to live with the shame of your taking a mistress. But I'm not going to let you flaunt how little I mean to you. I am your wife and I insist you treat me with the respect due to me (74).

and she threatens to kill herself if he tries to enter her house with Ammini. She was the rightful owner of the property, which Achutan Nair had almost forgotten. He had no other way but to live separately with Ammini, his mistress.

Paru-Kutty had always lived in fear of her domineering husband. She wanted her son to do what he liked. Mukundan liked to read and imitate the way the writers wrote their stories. He was found writing passages in imitation of Dickens; his father accused Paru-Kutty for 'this vagrant streak' from her family, and warned her (Nair, 2000):

No one in my family has ever had any pretensions of artistic ability. And let me tell you how glad I am about that. We are a family of capable hardworking men. Not namby-pamby creatures rattling away lines of useless poetry or drawing pretty pictures or strutting around towns and villages bleating (16).

Paru-Kutty however encouraged Mukundan. But Mukundan knew she was very much intimidated by his father, and was always the target of his anger and violence.

When Mukundan was going to Trichy for his job, Paru-Kutty piteously appealed to her son to take her away with him saying, "Take me away with you, son. I am so unhappy here." (31) But her son was squeamish about it. He made excuses, but he was really terrified of his father. When Mukundan came back to Kaikurusi, after thirty-seven years, he hallucinated about his mother, who accused him (Nair, 2000):

Where were you when I needed you? You could have rescued me, but you chose not to (31).

Mukundan felt guilty of not helping his mother. His mother's ghost thrust her face towards him showing him the caved in temple of the right side and the smashed skull, when his father pushed her down the stairs. The ghost said, (Nair, 2000)

I want you to know the fear I felt when a hand smashed into my back, pushing me down. I want you to know what I saw when the floor reached out to slam my life away. I want you to feel the anguish I felt as I realized I was going to die before my time (32).

Paru-Kutty was thus the victim of the tyranny of the patriarchal tyrant, who dictated what his son should or should not do and when he found another woman, pushed his wife to certain death. Mukundan's mother was the victim of callous patriarchal tyrant, though she tried her best to honour her wedding bond, remaining with him to the end of her life. As Krishnan Nair remarks, (Nair, 2000)

Your mother could have prevented what was happening to her. The heartbreak, the humiliation. But she chose to remain victim (44).

Paru-Kutty is presented as dependent woman, and her life is the representative example of the life of women in the middle class families where women have to carry the burden of tradition in which women mutely suffered the tyranny and unfaithfulness of the husband. Paru-Kutty is a passive sufferer. She feels insecure in her husband's house, but she cannot escape this life. She is a typical example of women subjugated and helpless in their family on account of their lack of education and means of earning livelihood. She is a typical example of Indian women in their married life, pinned down to the house and the hearth, totally dependent on their husband, suffering insults and indignities and even brutality. She represents Indian women who are the worst sufferers of patriarchy on account of their illiteracy and economic dependence. She is also partly responsible for her sufferings. She does not protest against her husband's unjust actions. She cannot defend even her son. Only when Achutan Nair brings in Ammini, she puts down her foot and opposes sharing house with her. As pointed out above when Achutan Nair proposes to bring Ammini home. Paru-Kutty opposes it. She tells him point blank that she would not allow him to flaunt his mistress in her face and she herself means little to him. She also tells him that if he brings Ammini in her house, (Nair, 2000)

It'll be over my dead body. For as long as I'm alive, I  
will decide who live in this house and who doesn't  
(74).

She reminds her husband that she is the rightful owner of the property. After this, Achutan Nair had to buy a piece of land in front of Paru-Kutty's house and he built a house there for himself and Ammini. She takes revenge on her husband by not allowing Ammini to store paddy on the palm-leaf mats in her yard. The incident of her husband bringing another woman in the house awakens self-respect in Paru-Kutty. From a fearful timid wife she changes into a bold and defiant wife, who opposes her husband's tyranny. Paru-Kutty asserts herself by razing to the ground the almond tree planted by her husband. She invites Devayani, her cousin, and Devayani's husband to her house in defiance of Achutan Nair, as he does not at all like them, and takes

revenge on him. But, Paru-Kutty's life is tragic because not even her son helps her and she dies a mysterious accidental death.

### **III.1.2 Meenakshi: Her Self-hood and Sense of Responsibility:**

Meenakshi was Mukundan's childhood friend. Together they went up to Pulmoorth Mountain, when he was a mere boy in a pair of khaki shorts, and Meenakshi wearing a skirt and a shabby pink blouse. She was then Mukundan's companion, a soul-mate. They went to school together, played together and when they grew up, they were prohibited from spending time together. When Mukundan went away to become a lower division clerk in an explosive factory in Trichi, Meenakshi turned to be a Naxalite activist, inciting labourers, setting ablaze haystacks, and attacking people like Achutan Nair, who represented the system. Meenakshi fell in love with Balan, a handsome young man and a Kathakali dancer. She married him, but he went away on a tour and promised to come back to fetch her. But he never came back. He went to Europe to give performances, came back and became a teacher for dancing, and never even once contacted Meenakshi. She had a child by him. She stayed with her mother, to look after her and to bring up her child. She ran a crèche and later became a shop-keeper, selling bangles, ribbons, embroidery material, note-books, eggs, etc. her husband Balan had pleaded with her to forgive him when he was bed-ridden suffering from Tuberculosis of the spine. As he could neither dance nor teach, his employers abandoned him. He had turned into a decrepit old man, weak and lonely. When Mukundan said her husband was going to be only a burden to her, and she had a choice to say 'no' to him, Meenakshi gave a characteristic answer. She could have said no, but she said 'yes'. Meenakshi appeared to Mukundan a woman of strong character. Her straight back and the head held high indicated her defiance. If she was heart-broken, she did not show it. She was taking her husband to the Ayurvedic Centre for his massage. When Meenakshi came to Mukundan's house, he had expected her to be a woman with 'no strings attached'. He pretended to be reading when she was at the door. He expected her to be easy to approach, that she would easily be in his arms. But Meenakshi said in a very matter-of-fact way, 'I haven't met the

targets for this year. I was wondering if you could help me" (Nair, 2000, 66). Mukundan was taken aback by this business talk and could not control his surprise. Meenakshi was clever enough to read his feelings. She plainly told him, (Nair, 2000)

---but I have been faithful to my husband, and I'm not going to change that, not even for you (66).

Meenakshi's blunt response brought Mukundan back to reality. He realized how she must have been slandered through her life and regretted his own contribution to it.

Meenakshi, in spite of her husband's infidelity, honours her wedding bond. She not only forgives him, but in his serious illness she tries her best to help him, taking him to the Ayurvedic Centre for treatment. Meenakshi looks after her mother as a dutiful daughter. She alone brings up her son, and when her unfaithful husband is seriously ill, she takes care of him. She could have married Mukundan, but she does not take an easy way out.

Paru-Kutty and Meenakshi both try to honour their wedding bond despite the unfaithfulness and highhandedness of their husbands. Paru-Kutty reacts to her husband's unfaithfulness by prohibiting his entry into her house, but remains faithful to him. Meenakshi chooses to oblige her husband by taking care of him as he is approaching death by T.B. and she has to shoulder responsibility of her son, while her husband roams free all over the world. Paru-Kutty also has to take care of her son who too is oppressed by the highhandedness of the father, who imposes his ideas on the son.

Meenakshi and Paru-Kutty honour their wedding bond by sticking to their respective husbands. Paru-Kutty pleaded with her husband to allow her to accompany him to Burma, but she was then pregnant, which gave him legitimate excuse to leave her alone. She is uneducated and the husband's house is the only place in her life. She cannot even think of leaving it. Meenakshi, once married, lives for her son and cannot think of divorcing or remarrying. She faces social criticism and false sympathy and looks after her child doing small jobs. This is the reality of Indian Women, who, once married, are buried in their household. Paru-Kutty and Meenakshi fulfill their primary

responsibility of bringing up their children. Despite their fidelity to their husband and the family, they have to suffer betrayal by their husband.

Meenakshi does not crave for the sympathy or help from the people of the village. Being educated she was able to run a nursery school. She was able to prepare the children for admission to a primary school, teaching them alphabet. She is a new woman, who can be self- dependent, and proves that a woman can be independent setting aside narrow social considerations. She presents a woman who can carry out her domestic responsibility and also earn her own livelihood. She is a new woman in the sense that she accepts reality and faces life, successfully carrying out her responsibility. Meenakshi belongs to a middle-class family of the post-independence era, and represents an emancipated woman of the period, who is instinctively traditional but at the same time she has her own views of life and ability to shoulder responsibility. Meenakshi does not meekly accept her fate, she faces her circumstances, controlling her life and being active, confronts her problems successfully.

### **III.1.3 Flouting the Wedding Bond: The Case of Valsala:**

Valsala appears to others as an enigmatic woman, who is married to the aged Prabhakaran. It was her eyes that Mukundan noticed first, (Nair, 2000)

A dense black, remote and devoid of any emotion.  
A sort of one-sided glass, blurred, inviolable and  
unreachable, behind which she hid, unwilling to let  
anyone glimpse the real her. ---the voice of a  
woman who had no more dreams, no more  
expectations from life. Each syllable bore the  
hollowness of emptiness, a blankness that  
matched her opaque eyes--- (126-127).

She is, however, very beautiful, 'a lusciously plump woman with a blooming complexion and a head of jet-black curly hair' (p/126). Valsala invited attention of men. But, she has an unhappy marriage with an older man, feeble and

discontented. It is quite evident that there is hardly any pleasure in her marital life. All her womanly emotions appear to have been dead. There is a pala-tree in her yard, which has burst into flowers sending out overpowering fragrance, awakening desire in her. Her mother had warned her (Nair, 2000):

Tie up your hair and stay inside. When the pala tree's fragrance fills the night sky, the Gandharva come prowling, looking for virgins to seduce. Once Gandharva has spotted you, there is no escape. He'll make you his slave with his soft voice, gentle caresses and sensual magic. No mortal man will ever be able to satisfy you then (128).

Valsala was emotionally and physically starved. She craved for the tell-a-tale Gandharva to materialize in her life and seduce her, caress her, and satisfy her hungry body. She meets her Gandharva in Sridharan, who has bought a plot of land adjacent to her house and was planting coconut saplings there. Sridharan visits her under the pretext of making a telephone call or a glass of water or to borrow a newspaper. Valsala also occasionally asks him to do something like changing a light bulb. Valsala is happy to welcome him and Sridharan also spends more and more time with her, dining and praising her cooking, telling her silly jokes. He makes Valsala feel that she is a desirable woman. She realizes how Prabhakaran's house has held her captive and how she is gradually wasting her youth. Sridharan awakens desire in her. Her husband is a contrast to vivacious Sridharan, who praises her looks, her cooking and makes her feel like a woman she really is. Prabhakaran puts restriction on her refusing to subscribe to the Asianet, DD-4 and the Zee TV, channels. Prabhakaran was blind to her beauty and unaware of desires in her, the love she craved for. He is preoccupied with his own ailments, his indigestion, and often slept leaving Valsala awake in bed, dreaming for a demon lover to make passionate love to her. She would not like to grow old without experiencing the ecstasy of married life. Valsala had never experienced the sensual pleasure a married woman enjoys, which then results into happiness of the birth of a child. The fragrance of the Pala-tree

flowers which awakened senses in her made her crave for the companionship, which her old husband could hardly understand. When she was just a girl, her mother had told her that the fragrance of the Pala-flower was the favourite of the Gandharvas, who come in search of the girls to seduce them. The Pala-tree is symbolic here in the sense that like it, the woman would also like to bloom, which is her natural desire, but in her case it is thwarted.

When Valsala meets Sridharan and their clandestine affair blooms, there are great changes in Valsala's cooking, which become oily, rich with spices and meat and fish. This is, of course, due to Sridharan, who awakens desire in her. Valsala tried to look glamorous to attract Sridharan's attention. Sridharan also realizes how Valsala is starved of love and sensual pleasure. The intimacy between her and Sridharan grew and they began to meet more frequently. Valsala could not think of running away with Sridharan because she would not like to forego the land and the house, which she would automatically possess after her husband's death. Besides, Prabhakaran would get retirement benefits when he retires after three years. There was also his LIC policy. Valsala could not think of losing her claim on all these benefits after twenty three years of married life. The only way to have all these benefits was to take Prabhakaran out of the way.

Valsala and Sridharan together plan Prabhakaran's murder, and bury him under the coconut saplings in Sridharan's land. Unfortunately for them it was Mukundan's letter to the police-station, which resulted into the police-investigation. Mukundan wanted to help Valsala to find her absconding husband, hardly knowing that she and her lover boy were responsible for his disappearance. Mukundan wanted to help Valsala because he knew from experience how his own mother suffered when her husband was away for years. Mukundan was unwittingly responsible for Valsala's tragedy.

Valsala is no doubt wronged by her aged, unromantic husband. She is also the victim of the patriarchal culture in which a girl child is to be married off as soon as possible. Valsala is sexually starved as we can see from the state of her mind in the following lines (Nair, 2000):

All night, for the first time in many years, Valsala tossed and turned in her bed, breathing in the scent of the pala flowers. Strange sensations coursed through her. Her nostrils flared, her lips parted, her eyes became a little less murky, every pore in her body opened, greedily seeking to fill their depths with this unique fragrance (129).

She entreated Gandharva to come to her and seduce her, make love to her. She was ready to be enslaved by the mythical Gandharva. In reality she discovered her Gandharva in Sridharan. For him Valsala was an easy prey. He discovered in his first few visits how Valsala longed for secret pleasure. And Valsala also opened up to his advances, cooking for him, laughing, enjoying his jokes and his indirect praise of her beauty. If Valsala had divorced her husband and married Sridharan, it would have been quite defensible action. But, Valsala wanted Sridharan as well as Prabhakaran's money and property. From feminist point of view, she had every right to find a suitable companion for her life. And her husband, Prabhakaran was not a suitable partner for a young, beautiful wife like her. Socially, she could have been criticized for abandoning her husband, but morally it could have been defended. What is not defensible is her resorting to criminal action. Her feeling that she would not like to be pushed into old age before it is time is quite legitimate. She needed passion and ecstasy in her life, which her old husband could not give her. But Sridharan with his "muscular chest and pillar like thighs" would give her this joy of life. And to get this she participated with him in a ghastly criminal action.

From the feminist point of view, Valsala has been given a wrong deal in her life. There was no pleasure in her marital life. She had no hope of fulfillment that a woman expects in her married life. The Pala tree, its fragrance is symbolic of carnal desires awakened in her, which her old, sickly husband could hardly satisfy. She says (Nair, 2000):

I am just forty years old. I don't want to be pushed into old age before it is time. I want to live. I want

passion. I want to know ecstasy, she told herself,  
night after night (131).

This is quite legitimate expectation of any woman. But what she does to gratify her desires is unlawful. It can hardly be condoned as 'New Sexuality', as A Sasi Kala defends (2013) it in her article 'A New woman in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*.' Valsala resorted to crime to escape a wedding bond, when she could have divorced her husband quite lawfully and married Sridharan, who was quite well-off to support her. Her sexual relationship with Sridharan is defensible but not the crime she commits for it. This cannot be called feminist attitude or a new morality. Her action cannot be described as a rebellion against patriarchy, because it is a criminal action. It would have been legitimate for her to forsake her husband, his property and join Sridharan. She coveted Prabhakaran's property and wanted to lay claim on the retirement benefits he would get, as well as his LIC policy. She appears quite mercenary in her intentions. She can be contrasted with Meenakshi, who does not resort to crime, nor does she form new relationship when her husband abandons her. She looks after her child and when her husband is sick and abandoned by others, she accepts him and looks after him, though she could have said 'no' to him. Valsala's criminal action cannot be defended in terms of feminism, which does not promote crime.

#### **III.1.4 Escaping the Wedding Bond: The Story of Anjana:**

Anjana's case can be contrasted with Valsala's story. She too was dissatisfied with her husband, Ravindran, who treated her very badly. She had to suffer cruelty in spite of her loving and caring attitude to him. When her marriage was settled, she was happy (Nair, 2000):

---like the Bethlehem lilies she nurtured in pots, her  
secret hopes blossomed. A quiet unfurling of  
dreams fed by the loneliness that leafed within her.  
Furtive silent desires that only the breeze, the  
moon and the bats that prowled through the night  
skies glimpsed (224).

After her wedding she went with Ravindran to Kozhikode. Anjana was very excited about the new city, her new house. The house had a little garden in

front, with two coconut trees, a papaya tree, a small well, roses, etc. which excited her. She started a small talk with her husband about the garden, but he was hardly eager to start conversation. He was disdainful about her cooking. She would like to know his likes and dislikes and wanted to please him. For eight days he did not touch her and then one night she experienced his brutish love. Even after three months of marriage he was a stranger to her, because he hardly shared his thoughts and plans with her. He would take her neither to the beach nor for shopping. When Anjana's mother had an accident, they went to her parents' home and Anjana had to stay there, because he wanted to quit his job and start a business of his own, an Agarbatti factory. He failed in it because he hardly had temperament of a businessman. He could not talk to his customers properly. He jumped from one business to the other. He remained unsuccessful on account of his inability to talk to strangers animatedly. He used to beat Anjana. Her father who saw this, warned him (Nair, 2000):

When I gave you my daughter's hand in marriage, it was with the hope that you would love her. Cherish and protect her for the rest of her life. If all you intend to do is hurt her and make her unhappy, then there is no need to such a relationship. My daughter can manage very well without a husband like you. If you ever hurt my daughter again, I'll throw you out of this house. Do you understand? (232).

Though Ravindran did not beat her any more, he was brutish in bed. Her father got her a teaching job, which she enjoyed as she had a social life with new friends. Anjana acquired a transistor radio and bought books, which became her friends. After her parents died, Anjana started wearing starched cotton saris, dull of colour, locked up her jewellery. But she could not do away with her rich black hair.

Anjana began to feel drawn towards Mukundan, whom she found gentle and caring but afraid to confess his love for her. Anjana tells Mukundan

how her husband never respected her, and treated her brutally. She says (Nair, 2000):

Just because we are man and wife in the eyes of law, he thinks he can treat me as he pleases. As far as he is concerned, I am merely a servant who doubles as a whore--- I think a prostitute has more rights than I have in this marriage. At least she gets paid for her service, and she can say no if she wants to. I have no choice in the matter (243).

Mukundan ran a library and took care of his books very meticulously. Anjana liked the way he took care of his books. Mukundan confessed to Bhasi that he loved Anjana. Bhasi encouraged him to talk to her, confess his love for her. Mukundan could not find courage to approach Anjana and propose to her. But one afternoon he got a call from Anjana asking him to come right away. Finally it is Anjana who proposes to him. She told him that she felt married only when she was with him. She would speak to her lawyer and start a divorce proceeding. Mukundan, like a good man, tells her (Nair, 2000):

Anjana--- I know you think I am a good man. A gentleman. Someone you can depend on completely. I don't know if I am that man you make me out to be. My mother begged me to rescue her and take her away. But I didn't. I was afraid of my father and so I made excuses--- That is the kind of man I am. A weak and undependable creature. Do you want to be a part of such a man's life? (244-245).

Anjana assured him of her love. She appreciated his moral courage to confess his weaknesses, which she says is very rare. And she tells him her love for him is right. Mukundan had, of course, misgivings about Anjana being married, though she says that she never felt like a married woman. But she assures him that she has spoken to her lawyer and has asked him to start divorce proceedings. Mukundan has another nagging feeling. 'I'm so much older than you' he says. But Anjana assures him saying (Nair, 2000):

I don't care about how old you are or what the world thinks. If you will have me that is all the happiness I need (244).

Anjana who very much wanted to be a good wife, was greatly disappointed in her married life. Her resolve to marry Mukundan and divorce her former husband was not instantaneous. She had suffered long, for eight years, waiting for her husband's love and care, his concern for her. But she was reduced to a mere sex object by her husband. Her wedding bond was meaningless and oppressive. Her decision to escape it came after a long and patient waiting on her part.

Anjana as presented by Anita Nair, is a new woman, educated and capable of earning her own livelihood. Her father is on her side. When he finds that his daughter has a bad deal in the marriage, he finds her a job as a school-teacher. Anjana has expectations from the husband and the married life. She would like her husband to talk to her about his business, his plans and expects love and caring attitude from him. But, she is greatly disappointed in all this.

He does not have decency to appreciate his wife's first day of cooking. Anjana submits to his whims, but there is no pleasure in her marriage. He is a failure as a husband, as a businessman and even as a human being. Anjana, on the other hand, shows positive attitude in her married relationship. She becomes financially independent, acquires her own identity and she shows how a woman can be self-dependent. She loves Mukundan because she finds him honest, confessing his own failings, and she knows he really loves her. Anjana, through her experience, has grown into a mature woman. When even Mukundan fails to communicate with her before her divorce, she keeps her cool and does not impose herself on him. When Mukundan rings her up, she is cool and thinks of his own interest when he wants to bring her to his house before divorce. Anjana is the new woman who can be self-sacrificing, but who can also fight for her independence and take her own decisions.

Anita Nair, in this novel, has presented independent episodes of the women, who, as protagonists of their stories, show their independence and self-hood. Not all women can be the victims of unjust treatment by men. Nair

has presented here a story of a college girl, who practices duplicity and cheats Bhasi, then serving as a college teacher. The following point illustrates how, Omana, tries to take advantage of Bhasi leading him on, though what he wants is to turn out to be a scholar who can win name for the institution.

### **III.1.5 Omana: A Seductress**

Before undertaking house-painting and medicine as his profession, Bhasi was a college teacher. As a teacher, he was much more attentive to his B.A. English class. At B.A. part I there were about thirty students and Omana was one of them. English was not a particularly sought after subject in his college, and only students who did not find admissions to economics or history came to this class. He discovered in Omana a bright student who attempted to tackle her answers all by herself instead of learning by rote. Bhasi, who hardly paid attention to the girls, fell in love with Omana on account of her essay which was exemplary. Bhasi started courting her, and it did not go unnoticed by other students. He used to quote lines from love poetry and his eyes followed Omana while discussing those poems in the class. Bhasi thinks he has discovered a superior intellect in Omana. He thought he could make an example of Omana by turning her out to be the scholar gathering the university honours. Bhasi's love and ambition for Omana made him blind to the reality. Omana deliberately encouraged him just enough to keep some hope alive in him, keeping him guessing whether she loved him or not. She had a friend in Dubai and she was going to get married to him. One day she requested Bhasi to meet her after the college. She told him how students talked about their affair everywhere. She told him that she was afraid of this gossip reaching his fiancé's ears; that she was getting married in a few months' time (101). When Bhasi referred to her brilliant essay, her intellectual ability, she said she had copied the essay by a professor Kurup from other university. Bhasi felt betrayed and fooled. She told him how students were laughing at him privately. Enraged, Bhasi grabbed her arms and kissed her ferociously, saying (Nair, 2000),

Take this as a gift from a teacher to a pupil. A wedding gift. A congratulation gift for having made such a prize fool of me (102).

Bhasi's disappointment in love and his violent action against the girl made him decide to leave the private college. He learnt the trade of painting houses. Then one day he caught a bus and landed at the last stop to a place totally unknown to him, the Kaikurusi City, a small village. His one-sided love affair ended in his exile from the city of Shoanur as well as from the teaching profession. Omana represents a new woman in a sense that she is quite practical and not swayed by emotion. She is conscious of the power of her beauty and exploits its influence on Bhasi. She feels no inhibition in taking advantage of Bhasi's weakness or his infatuation with her. She deliberately leads him on, with a devastating climax at the end, which crushes Bhasi morally and emotionally. As a result he leaves the profession of teaching altogether and becomes a house-painter.

### **III.1.6 Emergence of New Womanhood:**

Female characters in Anita Nair's *The Better Man* are happy or unhappy depending on the marital circumstances. They are part of a village or township community. They are subject to the moral dictum of patriarchal society which is stringent in a small locality. Valsala, who is tied down to an old husband, has to suppress her natural feelings, which find a way out in the company of Sridharan. She could not protest against a marriage with an old man. Parents of girls hardly think of the life of their daughter after the marriage. Valsala's marriage with Prabhakaran is tragic because there is hardly any pleasure in it for her. Moral taboos compel her to seek pleasure outside the bond of marriage. Her parents are equally responsible for the tragedy of her life.

The marital life of Anjana shows that marriage in a girl's life is a gamble. It is difficult to predict how it will turn out. On the face of it, Ravindran appeared to offer independent household to Anjana. But in marital life it is not enough. In the Indian tradition, marriage is described as two bullocks yoked to one cart. But in the case of Anjana, she is the one who is yoked, while

Ravindran feels free to roam and come back when he liked. Anjana took eight long years to get out of violent and uncertain marital life. Women are the worst sufferers if there is tragedy in the married life. Mandakini's husband dies in an accident. Widowhood in the Indian community can turn out to be very unhappy. A widow is looked upon as a bad omen. Mandakini is lucky to get Bhasi to rescue her from the widowhood. Mukundans's mother had to languish and suffer unhappy existence with her unfaithful husband living across the house with another woman. Meenakshi remains faithful to her husband but has to suffer social criticism, especially from women, in spite of her fidelity and independently bringing up her son. In general the women portrayed in the novel give us a realistic picture of a patriarchal society in which women suffer tyranny of the dominant male in the family. It is interesting to see how women folk also show false sympathy and draw pleasure as they talk about the suffering women like Mandakini. For most women, as described in this novel, marriage is the destiny and their happiness in the marital status entirely depends on their husband, his whims and fancies, as we can see from the example of Ravindran. Anita Nair has revealed in her novel, the mind-set of depressed women living in the four walls of their house. Anjana, being educated, escapes this mental state, but Parukutty comes to a tragic end. Among these female characters only Anjana and Meenakshi have been able to preserve their autonomy, because they are educated and self-dependent. S.Suganya (2013) says:

Anjana's positive attitude towards life, work, financial independence and self-identity help her to go ahead in her life--- she proves that women can achieve autonomy.

It is true as A. Sasi Kala (2013) also says, that "The male prejudiced outlook usually disregards the passions and aspirations of women-folk and labels them as unnatural. Women are trained to gratify the needs and demands of the males. When a demands (the same), she is treated as a wicked woman." This appears to happen in the case of Anjana as well as Valsala. But Anjana ends her unhappiness by divorcing and remarrying, and Valsala resorts to

clandestine relationship with Sridharan, ultimately being a party to a criminal conspiracy. The women in *The Better Man* represent a new womanhood in a sense that they try to fight back and seek answer to their own problems. Even Paru-Kutty of older generation takes a stand against her domineering husband. Meenakshi is not crushed when her husband forsakes her, and Anjana becomes self-dependent taking up a job. This is new womanhood finding answer to the problems and depending on their own.

### III.2 Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*:

The feminist perspective in the fiction is marked by patriarchal hegemony in the structure of Indian family. In patriarchy, women are colonized, which results into the relationship of inequality leading to injustice. India won freedom, ending colonialism but women in India are still colonized. Indian tradition, through its mythology and religious literature, has presented woman to be the epitome of patience and silent suffering. Restricted to the household chores, she has suffered humiliation, suppression and abandonment. Now, in the modern world, through education and political rights, her lot appears to be improved, but patriarchy has still got its hold in the domestic life of women. They have yet to struggle to assert themselves through self-discovery and self-reliance. Akhila, the narrator of the story, is in search of strength and independence and escape from the responsibilities saddled on her after her father's death. She is in search of strength and independence, which she cannot find as she is caught in the daily routine of her life. She would like to look for answers to the questions her life has presented before her. But, she is one of the women who have to struggle to discover their self-hood, their identity. Anita Nair, the writer, uses the device used by Chaucer in his *Canterbury Tales*. The fellow-travelers in a ladies' coupe is the device the writer uses to bring together women from different family background, and narrate their stories.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* presents the life of six different women, travelling together in a ladies' coupe, narrating their life-stories and experiences. These women, with flash back, recall their experiences and narrate their life-stories, their typical experiences as women in the contemporary Indian society. Each one is the protagonist in her story. Each of

these six women faces different problems in their family. They are accidentally together in the train in a *Ladies Coupe*' and like, Chaucer's pilgrims, narrate the stories of their own life. Akhila, the protagonist of her story, is not a married woman, but from the other married fellow-travelers, she comes to know the variety of experiences of these married women, the problems they face and the way they try to find their way out of their tight situations.

### III.2.1 Akhila: Groping For Identity:

Akhileswari or Akhila, being the eldest child in the family of Pattabhi Iyer, has to shoulder the responsibility of her family of the widowed mother, two brothers and the younger sister. The tragedy of the accidental death of her father turns her into a premature adult, and she takes up a job of a clerk in the Income Tax Office. She has to meet the needs of her younger brother's education, her younger sister's marriage and establish them in their life. Akhila has to play multiple roles such as a daughter, a sister, an aunt and the head of the family to meet the needs of all. No one asks her what she wants. Even her mother does not realize that her eldest child, must also get married. She cares for her family but her own needs are ignored by the members of the family. She becomes 'Ammadi' for the mother, 'akka' for the sister and brothers and 'madam' in the office. But, no one cares for Akhila-Akhilandeswari as an individual, a girl who must get married, that she has her own needs, her future. She is the bread-winner of the family, yet she cannot be the head and occupy the central position in the family, because patriarchal system reserves this place for a male-being. If there is no father, even a younger brother, a male-being, occupies that centrist position. She is the dutiful daughter, who must meet the needs of the family, while her own needs, her future, and her own dreams are suppressed. Even her mother keeps quiet about Akhila's marriage. Her younger sister gets married, her brother also gets married but no one talks about her marriage. She is forty-five years old. She has discarded her rose- coloured glasses and puts on glasses with metal-frames. She puts on starched cotton saris. The writer says, Akhila is (Nair, 2001):

Forty- five years old. Sans rose-coloured spectacles.  
Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming  
of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience.  
Aching to connect (2).

Her family, including her mother, always tries to convince her that she, being a woman, cannot survive alone and it would be a hell for her if she tries to do so. Akhila also accepts this. The members of her family sponge on her. They cannot think of Akhila getting married or going away alone. Her sister, Padma, married and with two children, is always suspicious of her elder sister going alone anywhere. Akhila is thus enmeshed into her family, every member saddling her with their expectations and trying to keep the situation status-co. Doris Thomas (in *Quest*, June 2006) candidly describes how Akhila is exploited by her family, including her mother.

Manning the responsibility of the family begins to eat into her vitals. Her needs are taken for granted when her own siblings thrive like parasites on her. They milk every opportunity to bolster their lives at the expense of their eldest sister. Even her own mother does not spare a thought for her well-being (46).

Akhila's decision to go away to undertake journey to Kanyakumari, to the farthest end, was made up after a lot of brooding over her life and then one morning after her breakfast, she broke the news that she was going away on an official work for a few days. She is severely thwarted by the patriarchal set-up, and must cross cultural boundaries by undertaking a journey. Her displacement would help her to be unfamiliar and to restructure her identity.

She had booked herself a seat in a Ladies Coupe' on the train. The French word Coupe' signals the meaning of a restricted area, and its association with the English word coop also strengthens this association. A woman, especially in her married life is placed in a coop, in a narrow confine limiting her freedom in every way. It also suggests how Akhila's life is severely restricted by her family's demands on her. The ladies, who travel with her in the coupe of the train, are also severely constricted in their life one way or the

other. They are all subjected to the limitations imposed on them by the social and family relationships. The Indian women are expected to be chaste, pure. The restricted area of the coupe symbolizes Indian woman's life. Anita Nair, the writer herself had experienced at a railway station how women are given a secondary status clubbing them as weak. In her interview, she says (cafedilli.com):

Some years ago, I was buying a ticket and I found this special ladies' line clubbed with the handicapped and senior citizens. I was a little disturbed by the blatant inequality and wanted to write about it. Either you discuss it or write essays. In my case, whenever things perplex me, I write fiction.

Akhila's story is her effort to seek independence, to try to live by herself without any marital bond. It is also seeking an answer to a question whether a woman can do whatever she likes to do without any apprehension of social sanction or approval. In a community that puts so many constraints on women, Akhila's story raises a question about woman's freedom, and seeks emancipation of woman from age-old social practices and norms to control woman's life. Akhila's mother is a typical example of a Hindu house-wife, who follows the ideal role of 'Pativrata' catering to every need of her husband. She eats only after her husband finishes his meal. In an orthodox Brahmin family a woman has to observe the rules very strictly. When her father dies, Akhila as the eldest child has to assume the responsibility of the family. She was only nineteen year old, when her father died; turning her into the provider of the family, as her brothers and the sister were too young. She had to take up a job leaving her education. Akhila had to accept the responsibility out of compassion for her younger sister and brothers. Her brothers get married without little thought of the elder sister. Her sister, Padma, also gets married. Her mother and her siblings, thus, completely ignore Akhila's future. Her sister and brothers appear to be utterly selfish sponging on her and no one (even her mother) gave a thought to Akhila's marriage. Over and above this, though she is the bread-winner of the family, her interests are always sidelined

because she is a woman, and only a male-being can be considered important in any decision making. The members of her family, selfishly, ignore her feelings, her need to get married. The writer poses questions about who Akhila is in her own household (Nair, 2001):

So who was Akhilandeswari? Did she exist at all? If she did, what was her identity? Did her heart skip a beat when it saw mango tree studded with blossoms? Did the feel of rain on her bare skin send a line of goose bumps down her spine? Did she sing? Did she dream? Did she weep for no reason? (84).

This suggests how poor Akhila almost lost her individuality being saddled by the responsibility of her family. She went to see a film along with her mother. The film was about the story of a girl like Akhila, who became a workhorse for her family and sacrificed her life and love. Akhila's mother avoided looking at her and did not have moral courage because Akhila has the same fate as the film's heroine. But she knew little about what was in store for her in future. Ten years later, when she undertook her journey in the ladies' coupe, she was trying to find answers to her questions. Like Nora in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*, she decides to educate herself and do something for herself.

In the ladies coupe she travelled with five women, the companions in the compartment. Akhila's decision to go on this journey was prompted by a question that worried her; 'can a woman live alone?' In the ladies' coupe she meets the other female passengers: Prabha Devi, Janaki Devi, Margaret Shanti, the young fourteen year old Sheela, and Marikolanthu. All these women are of different age-group and their economic, cultural and social background is also different. But being women, they have a common concern; as all of them in one way or the other have been thwarted in their life being women. Akhila poses a question before them, whether a woman can stay unmarried, live on her own, or as her mother says, whether a woman needs a man to complete her life. Akhila's question is answered by the five women in their own way from their experience. Margaret's answer to Akhila's question is, perhaps the most apt one. She tells Akhila (Nair, 2001):

You should trust your instincts--- you have to find your own answers. No one can help you do that (21).

Akhila is in fact, troubled by many questions a single woman would face. Like most girls, Akhila had never spent even a week independently away from her family. To live independently involves running a household, managing home, coping with one's own problems without anyone's help. Akhila's predicament is quite common because girls, especially from the middle- class life, are dependent on their parents or other elderly male persons in their household. Akhila has taken up this train journey as if to discover herself, to find out if she is mentally and practically equipped to lead an independent life. Margaret's answer drives her back to herself. Janaki the oldest of the group, has lived forty years of married life, never alone, can hardly be able to answer Akhila's question. But even Janaki confesses that she once felt an urge to end her psychological dependence on the family, a necessity to prove herself to be a good wife and mother. She was tired of being a 'fragile creature'; dependent on others, however, Janaki even in her self-dependent role, would like to have her husband with her. Janaki was brought up by her mother to be an ideal wife. She was brought up to believe that for girl's marriage was the destination in their life. She was, therefore, groomed by her mother to be a traditional Indian woman, who carries out her domestic duties as an obedient housewife, who worships her husband. As Simone de Beauvoir says:

Marriage is the destiny traditionally offered to women by society (445).

The Indian patriarchal tradition, through its mythology, has portrayed ideal woman who mutely, without question, follows her husband and submits herself to his wishes. Her husband for her is her god, as exemplified by the mythical characters like Savitri, Shakuntala, Sita and others. A woman is traditionally destined to fulfill her duties to bear children, bring them up, cook and do household duties. Zhumpa Lahiri has generalized Indian woman's role in the words:

Women are solely responsible for cooking and doing household chores, as well as becoming completely domesticated with the arrival of children. (qtd in Padmavathi, 21)

Janaki is, thus, completely engulfed in her marital life, in bringing up her children and doing her domestic duties. Janaki does feel like revolting against this subjugation as she once shouts at her husband saying: "you want she everyone to do your bidding" (30). But like a traditional Indian Hindu wife she sacrifices herself by doing what her husband wants her to do. She says to Akhila (Nair, 2001):

Why should a woman live by herself? There is always a man who is willing to be with her? (21).

As she tells this to Akhila, she almost paraphrases Manu Smriti (Nair, 2001):

I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and my brothers, then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son, waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves (22-23).

Janaki's example shows how women, knowingly or unknowingly, are subjected to domestic slavery in a patriarchal society. This is so because man being an earning member in the family, enjoys a superior position, and woman's labour in the household duties is ignored as it has no monetary value.

### **III.2.2 Can a Woman Live Alone? :**

Akhila is in search of an answer to questions such as 'can a woman live alone?' can she stay unmarried, or does she need a man to

protect her, to look after her? Can her life be complete without a man in her life? Akhila, who was the earning member of her family, was plagued by these questions because in a patriarchal society, especially, an orthodox Hindu society, the existence of a single woman is anomalous. A woman at every stage of life must be looked after by one or the other male member. But, in the case of Akhila, she is the one looking after, feeding and clothing, the members of her family, doing a man's job. Her mother replaced her husband making Akhila responsible for the family's daily needs. She lost her individuality and became Akka, Ammadi at home and madam in the office. She has to perform the roles of a daughter, and a sister and an aunt, but essentially she remained a woman secondary to a male- being in the family. Akhila's awareness of self-reacts against this, and she undertakes the train journey to find an answer to the question 'can a woman live alone?' Akhila heard. Janaki's story, which made out a case for a woman to live within family. But she was not sure about how it can apply to her life. Janaki had a husband, and the story reveals that they did care for each other. Prabha Devi rightly says that Akhila cannot draw conclusion from Janaki's story (40). It is, however; true that Janaki's narration makes Akhila a little unsure of her plan to live alone. It is noted by Margaret, who herself believes that, "A woman needs a man but not to make her feel whole" (Nair, 2001, 45).

Margaret is a married woman, but she has proved in her life, "That a woman doesn't really need a man. That is the myth that men have tried to twist into reality" (Nair, 2001, 95).

This leads to Margaret's story of how she wrests her freedom from her domineering husband. Margaret is a gold-medalist in chemistry at her M.Sc. degree. She wants to do her Ph.D. and go to America. It was her dream to do her research, but she falls in love with Ebenzer and her husband thwarted her ambition making her a teacher in his school. Thus all her desires and ambitions are defeated by her autocratic husband. She does not realize this as she is self-deceived. Her love for him blinds her. The writer Anita Nair, tells us how love affects Margaret. She says (Nair, 2001),

Love is a colourless, volatile liquid. Love ignites and burns. Love leaves no residue, neither smoke nor ash. Love is a passion masquerading as the spirit of wine (104).

She tells Akhila (Nair, 2001),

It was as if someone had clamped a gas mask over my face and made me inhale chloroform" (104).

In the early days of their marriage, she did not realize how she is being enslaved in the name of love. She feels thwarted and suffocated by her domineering husband. She tells Akhila (Nair, 2001):

The truth as I know it and as I live it is that a woman needs a man but not to make her feel whole. (95)

Margaret is treated by her husband as a door mat. She is well qualified and a school teacher, but he becomes the head of the School and gathers around him a group of sycophant teachers, who boost his ego. Ebe is an egoist by nature and does not tolerate opposition. He makes Margaret abort her first child. He belittles her in the company of his assistants whom he invites at his house every month. He insults her in front of his coterie when he invites them for dinner. He even belittles her subject 'chemistry' saying "Frankly, if you want my opinion, when I think of chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs---" (Nair, 2001, 130). He makes Margaret slave at the house by making her dismiss the maidservants. Margaret who first adored Ebe, her husband, realizes what a tyrant and selfish person he is. He does not leave any opportunity to belittle her. He makes her abort her first child, because he thinks of his own pleasure. He makes her cut her long hair. He doesn't allow her to do her research and makes her take up a teacher's job under him. She begins to hate him. Ebe is an opinionated man. He loves only himself. He makes Margarate sacrifice her own career, and her ambition

to do research. He makes her lose her individuality. She has to cater to his needs and hardly had an opportunity to express herself. She appears to have lost her ability to think of herself. Margaret, in the beginning, agreed with everything he said. Like a dutiful wife she tried to give him pleasure. But, she realized how he systematically imposed his ideas on her. He wanted her to abort her first child. She was shocked when he told her to do it. She wanted to do her research, but Ebenzer forced her to do B.Ed. She feels frustrated, as he more and more dominates her life. He demeans her among his assistants, finds fault in her household work. Margaret tries her best to save her marriage, compromises for the sake of her parents. She almost loses her individuality, and also her aspirations to make a show of harmony in her married life. She is forced by Ebe to play the role of a model wife. It appears that saving a marriage is the burden only of a wife. A woman has a subordinate role in the married life, and if she accepts this then the married life is considered harmonious and successful. In other words, woman must accept subordination. Margaret is utterly disappointed by the way her husband enslaves her to his wishes and his ideas. She says to herself (Nair, 2001):

What about me? I wanted to ask. Don't I have a right to have any expectations of him? Don't I work hard as well? Why do you think he is busy and I have all the time in the world? He never has any time to devote to the house! (120).

In her married life she hardly has any option but to follow the life style of a conventional wife yoked to her husband in the patriarchal set-up, as a submissive wife. Her own family was an ideal before her, because in it no one had divorced, and it was, therefore, considered respectable family in which women worked very hard to preserve the family. But what is interesting in Margaret's story is the way she gains her freedom remaining within her married life.

Margaret, the student of chemistry, knows how food brings about change in the body and the health. She feeds Ebe rich breakfast, lunch and

dinner. In about six months' time, Ebe turns into a fat man. He cannot walk fast any more. He develops a second chin, a round belly and gasps as he goes up the stairs. His rounds in the school corridors and on the ground altogether stop and there are no more parties at home with his sycophant assistants. He becomes a quiet man, easy to handle and he needs his wife Margaret more and more for everything. Margaret, the chemistry scholar brings about this change, tells Akhila (Nair, 2001),

When you add water to sulphuric acid, it splutters at first. But soon it loses its strength, it loses its bite. The trick is when to add it and how much (134).

This is an object lesson for the wives to tame the husband, which Margaret cleverly practices. But this, of course, does not apply to Akhila's life. It, however, illustrates that women can win their freedom within their married life, triumphing over autocratic husbands like Ebenzer Paulraj. Margaret's story, in a way, contributes to Akhila's education making her see how one must fight against oppressive family situation. Margaret shows Akhila how her husband tried to destroy her, by belittling her subject chemistry, destroying her baby, and spoiling her ambition to get her doctorate abroad. Margaret finds her self-esteem destroyed by her husband. This leads to the cunning measures she employs to turn her husband into a fat man, who loses all initiative and grows dependent on her. The example of Ebenzer Paulraj illustrates the truth of what Simone de Beauvoir says (*The Second Sex*):

Marriage incites man to a capricious imperialism; the temptation to dominate is the most truly universal (483).

Like Margaret, Prabha Devi too is a married woman of the same age as Akhila. Prabha Devi was groomed to be a good wife under the tutelage of her mother. She married Jagdish, and she enjoyed all comforts and luxuries. She performed as a daughter, then as a wife, and the daughter-in-law. Her

own expectations and desires came next. But this equanimity of her mind changed when she visited the US with her husband, and noticed how the women enjoy their freedom and take care of themselves. The exposure to the American women's life style, their 'Swinging hairs and a confident stride' was a revelation to her. They seemed to know exactly where they were going and once they got there, what they had to do. Their lives were ruled by themselves and no one else. Such poise, such confidence, such celebration of life and beauty.' (Nair, 2001, 177)

She wanted to be like these women in New York, who knew exactly what they wanted and lived accordingly. She wanted to have freedom of expression, her own choice of dress and the same confidence.

### **III.2.3 Prabha Devi's Experiments with Independence:**

Prabha Devi transformed herself, practicing the walk, wearing a three inch pointed heel, visits to the cosmetic counters, and learning to apply make-up. She practiced mannerisms from the talk-shows and soap-operas and began to wear silky cottons with embroidered designs. Her mother-in-law also appreciated it, but advised her to drape a towel or something over the bosom in the presence of men. She even decided not to have a baby just yet. She moved around confidently, proud of her beauty and was conscious of the admiring gaze of people, but pretending to ignore them. She, however, made a mistake, when she coquettishly invited the attention of Pramod, her husband's friend and he felt encouraged by her. He visited her at her house and made his advances towards her. She then realized her mistake. That day she decided to lock away the gay-spirited woman, who had caused her such anguish (183), she would withdraw herself from the social life and she would become a woman beyond reproach and suspicion (183). This experience made her unlearn the coquettish mannerism she had acquired. She decided to be happy with what she was offered, and withdrew herself from the public life.

But, Prabha Devi, gradually, overcomes the sense of fear and guilt it caused by Pramod episode. She started learning swimming, staying afloat on water. As Varalakshmi comments (Nair, 2001),

She triumphed over her innate timidity and gained peak experience of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband as well (169).

Thus her learning to stay afloat in the swimming tank is symbolic of her achievement of self-hood, her triumph over her fears, making her bold.

Prabha Devi was consciously brought up by her mother to be a good wife. This is typical of a patriarchal system of family life. A girl-child must be brought up in a particular way. As Suresh Kumar and Leena Rose note; it

particularly shows its ugly face from cradle to grave.  
(49-52)

When Prabha Devi was born, her father was displeased because a girl-child is seen to be a liability and a girl would not be of any use in his business. He expressed his displeasure saying to his wife (Nair, 2001):

Has this baby apart from ruining my business plans, addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance (169).

Prabha Devi's mother is happy with a daughter because this daughter would take her recipes to the in-laws' house, treasure her jewellery and people would say she learnt this from her mother. She makes Prabha play the typical games like cooking and baby-sitting, and participates with the daughter in the games playing the role of a girl-child. This is generally the expectation in a patriarchal family that a girl child should be groomed to properly suite the role of a good wife and a good daughter-in-law. Prabha Devi of course, is not satisfied with this expectation, which would turn her life monotonous. After the initial shock of her flirtation with Pramod, she learns her lesson. She achieves her self-hood by learning to swim on her own. In Prabha Devi's story the writer shows how Prabha Devi achieved her self-actualization, conquering her timidity. Her learning to stay afloat in the pool of water helps her to feel very happy. The question is what Akhila can learn from Prabha Devi's story. Though Akhila is not married, she can see that a woman has to be very

guarded in her behaviour, which otherwise can lead to a great misunderstanding.

#### **III.2.4 Sheela's Education:**

Sheela boarded the train at midnight. Akhila was awake. Sheela was a teenager, doing her schooling. In portraying Sheela, Anita Nair brings out the issue of child abuse. When Sheela went to her friend Hasina's house, Hasina's father, Naazir, reaches forward, wipes the sweat on her lips, with his fore finger, (Nair, 2001):

The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time---. Another time, the bows on the sleeves of her blouse had come undone and up. Hasina and her mother watched Naazar knotted the bows, slowly, meticulously (166).

Naazir's attentions to Sheela hurt Hasina and her mother. Sheela herself was unable to protest against Naazir's unwanted touching. She feels disgust and is ashamed of this physical abuse, but she is unable to say anything. She, however, decides never to go to Hasina's house again. At the age of fourteen, Sheela is an emancipated girl, and the credit for it goes to her grandmother. She tells Sheela (Nair, 2001),

The only person you need to please is yourself.  
When you look into a mirror, your reflection should  
make you feel happy (67-68).

Her love and respect for her grandmother make her decorate the dead body of her grandmother. She, in this way, rebels against the old tradition. Akhila, who is looking for mental strength and to gain self-esteem, learns from Sheela's story how to assert her individuality, and gain the spirit of self-hood. Sheela's grandmother shows and develops it in Sheela also by her own example.

### III.2.5 Marikolanthu's Self-Realization:

All these women, young and old, belonged to the upper-middle-class families. But the last person left in the compartment with Akhila is Marikolanthu, who is from a poor family and has served as a maidservant. She is at first rather curt to Akhila's personal questions, but slowly opens up. She says (Nair, 2001):

I'm not telling you that women are weak. Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally (209-210).

Marikolanthu is from a peasant stock, and hers is a pathetic story because she has been oppressed by men in her life since she was merely sixteen. When Marikolanthu was just nine year old, her father died. Her mother had to go for work in the Chettiar House, the rich landlord. Marikolanthu's education stopped because there was money enough to send only her brother to town for education after the fifth. Then she had to go to Chettiar House to help her mother. Her job was to look after the infant child, Prabhu-Papa, the son of Sujata Akka, whom she admired and almost worshipped. Sujatha Akka sent Marikolanthu to the town because she was no more a mere girl and she saw how dangerous it was to keep her in the house with young men around. In the town she had to live with two lady doctors and eventually she learnt to read and write English. She would have done her SSLC privately. But her mother fell down and cracked her bone, so she had to go back to the village. She also had to go back to Chettair House to take her Amma's place there for cooking. It was here, during the Holi festival that Marikolanthu got raped by Murugan the poor relative in the Chettiar House. Rape changes the life of Marikolanthu. Lisa Ernst, commenting on rape, says:

Rape is a man's right. If a woman doesn't want to give it, the man should take it. Women have no

right to say no, women are made to have sex. It's all they are good for. There is nothing more in them. Some women would rather take a beating, but they always give in.

Marikolanthu hated the child, the son born to her, and would not even look at it and suckle it at her breast. Marikolanthu was discriminated against in her family by her mother. When she completed her fifth standard, she was not set to town for further education. She tells Akhila what the mother said (Nair, 2001):

you understand, don't you? We'll send your brother to the town school when the time comes but how can I send a young girl by herself? It would be impossible to send you to school by bus every day. There is too much at risk. I didn't understand what risk is (215).

But the inevitable happened even at the village. It is case in point how, in India, male children are given preference over the girls in terms of education and other facilities. Most girls in the patriarchal society have seen the victims of this mentality, despite the fact that these male children, the sons, may prove to be ungrateful to the parents and may not even benefit from the opportunity given to them. Anita Nair shows how this discrimination against a girl child continues and the girls are often neglected.

Marikolanthu had to go through a variety of experiences before she could discover herself. She is subjected to a lesbian relation with Sujatha Akka, while Sujatha Akka's husband Sridharan also exploits her sexually. She served others to make them happy and sacrificed her own happiness. But, even Sujatha Akka blamed and deserted her when she discovered Mari's sexual relationship with her husband, Sridharan. It was not her fault because Sridharan was the master, and she was a poor employee. But Sujata Akka was annoyed and she was sent away. She, at first, tries to avoid her son, born

out of rape. But in the end, at the funeral of her oppressor, Murugan, she relents and decides to accept him.

The story of Marikolanthu is a pathetic story of a woman in an humble and poor peasant family. She is the victim of male oppression. She could have been sent to a town for her further education, but her mother feels (Nair, 2001):

It's not just money but how can I send a young girl  
by herself--- there is too much at risk (215).

When she is raped by Murugan and becomes pregnant, the landlord Sridhar is reluctant to do anything against his relation, Murugan, and says (Nair, 2001):

The girl must have led him on and now that she is  
pregnant, she's making up a story about rape  
(245).

Her mother believes that husband is the protection for a woman's life. But, Marikolanthu knows very well from the examples of her mother and even from Sujatha Akka that husband's protection is not of much value. She decides to depend upon herself. She is neither educated nor rich, but it is exemplary that she decides to chart the course of her life confidently. She is almost disowned by her brothers, who feel ashamed of her and her son. But she defies the laws and gender roles of the patriarchal society and fights back and emerges as a strong independent woman. Indra Devi (2009) observes "In the end she decides to measure happiness as Muthu's mother." Though she had earlier mortgaged her son in a silk factory in return for five thousand rupees, it is the death of Murugan, her oppressor that changes her feelings towards her son. She decides to gain happiness in being the mother of Muthu. She saw Muthu, her eight year old son, collecting firewood for burning the dead body of Murugan. She feels pity for him and decides to accept him. When she calls him, the boy's face is full of joy when he sees her. He had no grudge against his mother. She was sorry for having used the child for venting anger against Murugan. She tells Akhila (Nair, 2001):

What happened then was that for the first time, I wrested control of my destiny. I wasn't going to wage wars or rule kingdoms. All I wanted was a measure of happiness. All I wanted to be was Muthu's mother (268).

It proved to be the turning point in her life, when she saw her son reduced to a "Chandal" tending the pyre, she was shocked that she herself reduced her son to this state. Even though she had almost sold him to the silk-worm factory, the boy looks at her and smiles with joy, without any feeling of anger or hostility for having left him.

Marikolanthu's story is her education through self-sacrifice and attaining self-realization. She finally asserts herself and decides to follow her own feeling as seen in her final resolve to live independent life and bring up her son, Muthu. Her story is that of social and economic repression. Her family would not allow her further education because she is a girl. She and Sujatha Akka find solace in their lesbian relationship but Sujatha Akka cannot tolerate Marikolanthu's sexual relation with Sridharan, her husband, and she punishes her but not her husband. She thus, experiences how she is exploited and thrown off. She emerges to be a great woman on account of her struggle to achieve her emancipation. Her life of oppression and exploitation teaches her in a hard way to be self-reliant.

What Akhila learns from Marikolanthu's story is that a woman ultimately has to be self-reliant. She must decide how she wants to live and what for. Marikolanthu comes to this decision through a lot of suffering and disappointments. Akhila must look at her own life and decide for herself how she should shape it and live it.

### **III.2.6 Akhila's Emancipation:**

*Ladies' Coupe* is essentially a story of Akhila's emancipation from the psychological bondage. It is a story of her discovery that she can win her independence that, being a woman, does not compel her to remain under the control of some male being, a father, a brother or a husband. A woman can

achieve her physical and emotional freedom, and she need not be tethered to a family structure dominated by a male being. She learns her lesson from Karpagam. Karpagam is Akhila's schoolmate. After many years she meets Akhila in a supermarket. Though a widow, Karpagam does not look like a widow. She wears kumkum and puts on colourful clothes, eats samosa and other things with relish without caring what others would say. She tells Akhila (Nair, 2001),

I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much rights as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me, didn't we as young girls wear colourful cloths and jewellery and bottu? It isn't a privilege that marriage sanctions. The way I look at it, it is natural for a woman to want to be feminine. It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these laws and why? Some man who couldn't bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men (202).

Karpagam, after the death of her husband, did not choose to lose herself in grief and shun ordinary pleasures of life. It is an object lesson for Akhila, who allowed her family of parasites to enjoy at her expense, little caring for her own life. Karpagam advises Akhila to (Nair, 2001),

--- live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first. Tell your family to go to hell or whatever (202).

Akhila learnt from Karpagam how to cock a thumb at the world, which guided Akhila in her future course of life. It was after this that she undertook her long journey to Kanyakumari and met a variety of women in the ladies' coupe. Like Marikolanthu, she also wanted to wrest control of her destiny. Karpagam is an unconventional widow, who has shaken off the burden of tradition. She tells Akhila that femininity does not necessarily involve being

married or being a widow. Karpagam, in her own widowhood, does not bother about the legacy of the code. She is a new woman, who is not concerned with what other think. She continues to put on 'Kumkum tilak' on her forehead. She enjoys hoteling. Akhila remembers lines on the greeting she had sent to her by Anglo Indian friend Katherine, which advise women to choose their own life to be happy, that happiness is being loved and having someone to love.

After her encounter with Karpagam, Akhila decided not to allow her family to use her any more. She discovered the woman in herself, who was dormant so far, and under heavy burden of responsibility, and the notion that a woman cannot live on her own. Karpagam is presented by Anita Nair as a strong character who achieves freedom of self-expression. She opposes patriarchal notions about widowhood.

### **III.2.7 Akhila's Achievement of Autonomy:**

Throughout this novel, Anita Nair, the writer, poses a question through her protagonist, Akhila, whether a woman can stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete? There are different answers provided by the women she meets in her journey through the ladies coupe on the train. Janaki, the oldest woman in the coupe, through the account of her life, illustrates the necessity of man, the husband, in a woman's life. She is an example of a woman who is looked after by her husband and then, after him, by her son. In *Manu Smriti* there is a dictum that a woman is looked after by the father, then by the husband and after the husband's death, by the son, therefore the woman does not deserve freedom "na stri Swatantryan arhati" (a woman does not deserve freedom). This is what Janaki says (Nair, 2001):

I am a woman who has always been looked after  
First there were my father and my brother, then my  
husband. When my husband is gone, there will be  
my son, waiting to take off from where his father  
left off. Women like me end up being fragile (22).

Margaret and Prabha Devi, both married women, try to win their freedom remaining within the patriarchal set-up. It is only Marikolanthu who emerges as a really strong woman, who decides finally to live for her son, Muthu.

From each of these characters Akhila meets, she learns how women have to struggle to win their space within their family life dominated by the male beings. She learns from their account that she must fight the patriarchal notions and find her own space, assert her individuality. Anita Nair has created a world of women in the *Ladies Coupe* to reveal the emotional and practical problems faced by women in a heavily patriarchal society in which women cannot even think of leading an independent life. Akhila's mother, her sister Padma and the ladies who gather around Padma, all think it impossible for a woman to live without a father, a brother or a husband. But, all the women Akhila meets in the ladies' coupe' reveal how women chafe against the male-dominance and try to win freedom in their own way. Even a teenager Sheela realizes and respects her grandmother's personal womanly feelings, and she carefully dresses her dead body, the way her grandmother would have liked. The male members of the family resent it but cannot undo it.

Akhila, however, learns self-assertion from her school friend, Karpagam, who gives new point of view to Akhila, telling her how to be independent and how to throw away the yoke of responsibility she has been saddled with, and the expectations of the selfish members of the family. Akhila is most disturbed by the realization that she has no identity of her own. She is known only as someone's daughter or sister or an aunt. She cannot do what she wishes to do for fear of how it will affect the others in the family. It is interesting to note how Padma, who is heavily dependent on Akhila, criticizes Akhila, her elder sister and supporter, telling the neighboring women that Akhila does not do any house work. She says (Nair, 2001):

Why, my seven year old Madhavi is better housekeeper than she is. I have to do everything for my sister, Cook for her. Iron her clothes even sew on the missing buttons on her blouse (163).

Padma tries to show how Akhila is of no use at home and she is the one who takes care of her. Padma tells the neighbors how Akhila is not even a practicing Hindu (Nair, 2001).

She won't light the lamp in the Puja room or go to the temple or observe any of the rituals we Brahmins do. When she has her periods, she continues to water the plants and if I object, she bites my head off (164).

And when the neighboring women ask her why she should live with her Akka, why she does not move and leave her, Padma, a hypocrite, assumes the role of a martyr and says (Nair, 2001):

I would love to do just that. But she is my elder sister and a spinster, if we abandon her, she will be all alone---. No matter how badly she behaves, I have to do my duty. That is what our scriptures teach us (164).

Padma is not only selfish, but shrewd enough to create an impression that it is Akhila who is dependent on her and she cannot leave her; and how lucky Akhila is to have such a sister. When Padma's husband, Murthy, comes home, Padma would send her daughter to Akhila's room and destroy her privacy. Akhila was then subjected to listen to the caressing sighs and reined in breath and a whisper "She, she'll hear us---" (Nair, 2001, 165). Padma's nagging and insults make Akhila take a decision to leave Bangalore. Until she became forty five, she did not have a chance to live a life of her own. When she leaves Padma's house, she is really free to live her own life. She finds herself free of not only the bonds of family, but also of the social conventions and expectations of the family. She is now free to take her own decision in her own interest. She becomes aware of her own needs, of her self-hood.

These moments remind Akhila of Hari; and she regrets having left him, letting him go. Akhila met Hari on a train. She usually sat on a window seat, but when she came a little late, her window seat was reserved putting a handkerchief on it. This is how she got to know Hari, a young man about

twenty-eight years old, employed in a railway engineering department as a draftsman. Hari's problem was how one can marry a girl by just looking at her. And every time his parents brought a proposal for him, he could not make up his mind and say 'yes'. Akhila met Hari every evening. Hari confided in her all his worries. Akhila began to think of Hari. His memories filled her mind, the way he told jokes, cracked his knuckles, the way he smiled and so on. She began to miss him, if he did not turn up at the station. But, she realized that it was silly of her to get so much involved with a man much younger than her. Hari one day told her that he loved her and she should not treat him as a younger brother. He plainly tells her (Nair, 2001):

--- should start seeing me as a man. As a man who is interested in you and in love with you (144).

Akhila responds to this negatively, which is totally against her own feelings. She asks him to forget this conversation. Even then Hari requests her to think about his proposal. Next day, it was total strike because the popular leader, Thalaivar, was dead, and she could not go to the station and to her work. She thought of Hari and worried about him. She had neither his address nor his telephone number. Akhila realizes how she loves Hari, and when they meet again, in the train, she sits by his side. To celebrate his birthday, they go to a beach and live together in a hut for two nights. Though Akhila enjoys being with him, she cannot ignore the remarks of others on the beach. They look at her and Hari not as a couple, but a young man having an affair with an elderly woman. Then she decides to say goodbye to him.

Akhila is in search of her identity and her freedom. She would not like to be an extension of someone else's relation. When Karpagam asks her what happiness is, she defines happiness in the following words (Nair, 2001):

Happiness is being allowed to choose one's own life; to live it the way one wants. Happiness is knowing one is loved and having someone to love. Happiness is being able to hope for tomorrow (200).

This feeling of being independent and having someone to love drives Akhila to undertake her train journey. She derives her strength from the life story of Marikolanthu, who suffers in spite of her efforts to serve and give pleasure to Sujatha Akka and even her husband. This teaches Akhila to take control of her destiny. "She throws her head back and voices her triumph" (Nair, 2001, 275).

The female protagonists in the stories narrated in this novel are all victims of the strict patriarchal pattern in which it is taken for granted that women are inferior to men and they must be dependent on the male in the family. Akhila's mother is an example of this conservative point of view. She never takes her own decisions. For her, whatever the husband says is the best. Akhila's mother says (Nair, 2001):

A good wife learnt to put husband's interest before anyone else's, even her father's. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he did. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is so much easier and simpler to accept one's station in life and live accordingly (14).

Akhila's mother represents all the old generation women, who remained at home doing household duties and did not think of taking up a job. Akhila's mother does not like her friend, Karpagam's mother taking up a job of a dance teacher. Her husband, Akhila's father, had clearly told her after the marriage that he wanted his wife to take care of him and his children. Sarsa Mami's example shows how women have to go to any length to sustain their family. She resorts to begging or borrowing a handful of rice, and this action is described as revolutionary by Akhila's mother.

In a patriarchal society men often use violence against women to make them feel inferior and terrorize them. It is often seen in the Indian family life

that women are subjected to violence for stepping beyond the boundaries fixed for them socially and culturally and to instill fear in their mind. It is a strategy used by men to ensure subordination of women. This is what Ravindran tries to do against Anjana in *The Better Man* by Anita Nair. Girl child in India is particularly brought up to be an ideal housewife later. We can see this from the example of the story of Prabha Devi, who is made to play childhood games such as playing with dolls, cooking and playing house and mother games. She should learn how to cook and practice recipes taught to her. Traditionally, women have no say in choosing their life partner. In *Ladies Coupe*, Valsala, an eighteen year old girl, is married to an old man, Prabhakaran many years her senior. Birth of a girl child is frowned on by the father because a girl is seen as a liability, the one who cannot help in the family business, which only the son can do. In Indian family life, women are not supposed to talk about or discuss sex. When Prabha Devi, after returning from New York, suggests that her husband could use condom, he is shocked, because sex is not supposed to be a topic of discussion between the husband and wife. She is supposed to mutely accept what the husband does. In Indian social situation woman's priorities are to look after her husband and her children. She is virtually treated as a second class citizen. Prabha Devi, for example, meets her friend, Sharmila, in the airport waiting room, who was brilliant student in the school and could have become a doctor or an IAS officer. But, she gets married, and in performing the role of a wife and a mother, she had to give up her studies. And now she is reduced to think what she should cook, rice or chappatis for lunch. Under the patriarchal system, women's lives are ruled by their narrow-minded husbands. Only the lucky ones find a husband who allows them freedom of their career. This is how, as noted above, Margaret Shanti's career was ruined by her chauvinistic husband.

### **III.2.8 Plight of Widows under Patriarchy:**

Anita Nair has presented plight of women in different social conditions and marital status. Married women presented by her undergo male or

patriarchal oppression and some of them, being educated, try to face this oppression and win some freedom or happiness as we can see from the examples of Prabha Devi, Janaki and Margaret. But, the condition of widows in the Indian, rather Hindu, community is very pitiable. Widowhood is looked upon as a stigma. A widow is not welcome to come forward in any auspicious ceremony in the house. There are restrictions on her movements, her eating and dressing. She cannot put on colourful clothes, and 'a kumkum tilak,' on her forehead. In the modern Indian society, educated widows who also have their own income, flout social restrictions. But, in general, widows in the Indian Hindu community are treated as an unwelcome sight.

In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila's mother is lucky to have her elder daughter to take care of her. Akhila takes her mother, to a restaurant occasionally, where she eats the dishes of her choice without any inhibition. But, Anita Nair has narrated the tragic story of a widow, Sarsa Mami, who lives only two streets away from Akhila's house and is a family friend. Akhila used to go to her house sometimes to help her in making the 'vadaam' of the sago. Akhila used to borrow books from Sarsa Mami, who had a trunkfull of novels of James Hadley, Chase and Harold Robbins and others. Sarsa Mami's husband Subramani Iyer, was a very sensitive man, who loved his wife and his children. His son Srini was blind. He was a happy man, though he had grownup daughters and a blind son. When Subramani Iyer died, Sarsa Mami became helpless. She sold jewelry but when there was nothing to sell, and she must feed her children, she used her eldest daughter, Jaya. She sent Jaya to cook for the men in the bachelors' quarters, which was really a front for Jaya's illicit occupation. The neighbours and the whole Brahmin community criticized her, but no one had come forward when Sarsa Mami had pleaded them for work, and would tell lies when she came to ask for some help. She went to every house and was ready to work as a maid. Sarsa Mami said, defending her daughter (Nair, 2001):

If I was younger, I would have sold myself to keep my family fed and clothed. But this is tired flesh. No man has any use for it. And it isn't as if she is

consorting with several males. There is just one man regular. And she is happy (82).

But, the Brahmin neighbours would not understand Sarsa Mami's helplessness. Akhila's mother would have been reduced to the same condition but for Akhila's job and support to the family. She, however, disdains Sarsa Mami like others. Akhila plainly tells her mother that she and her Brahmin friends are really being unkind to Sarsa Mami. Anita Nair has explored variety of problems that the women encounter in the typical Indian Society with its age-old conservative practices. Sarsa Mami's story glaringly puts forth the tragic fate of widows in a patriarchal society in which moral standards are imposed on women only, while men are free to flout them. The stories of Sheela, Sarsa Mami, and Marikolanthu are the worst examples of patriarchy. Suresh Kumar and Leema Rose say (2009),

Patriarchy shows its ugly face from cradle to grave (49-52).

It is a patriarchal mine-set which makes men crave for a male child. The Indian parents appear to be more concerned about the boys than the girls. When Prabha Devi was born, her father was unhappy because, this girl, he thought, would contribute nothing to his business.

The women protagonists in Anita Nair's novels appear to struggle for establishing their identity asking themselves questions like "Am I an individual in my own right?", 'Do I have an identity of my own?' Akhila, for example, is troubled by this realization that her recognition is mostly as her mother's daughter, as 'akka' the elder sister, as aunty, and so on and hardly as Akhilandeswari. Women appear to be just what others want them to be. In *Ladies coupe*, the women portrayed by Anita Nair appear to try and discover their identity, fight dominance and overcome it, as Margaret and Prabha Devi do. Every one of them may not succeed in this fully, but they do realize the need of it. Even Janaki, who is traditional, appears finally to think of this need of self-realization. Each of them has a quest for establishing their identity in their household.

### III.2.9 Conclusions:

In conclusion, we can say that, in *The Better Man* as well as in *Ladies Coupe*, the life and experiences of women are presented on the backdrop of the heavily male-oriented social structure. Though, *The Better Man* is a male-oriented novel, there are very significant female characters whose sufferings are effectively portrayed by the writer. Mukundan's mother as stated above, is the victim of her husband, Achutan Nair's, open betrayal and infidelity to his wife. He still remains a respectable figure in the society of the village and no one even hints at his immoral action. She does not get support either from the community or from her own grown-up son. Society appears quite oblivious of injustice the women have to face. Under patriarchy as Sally J. Scholz (2010) says:

The domestic sphere or private life was commonly understood as a sort of mini-kingdom. (Certainly there are many colloquial expressions that unfold this understanding: 'A man's home is his castle' and the sanctity of the home). Even in contemporary law enforcement, police have long been reluctant to intervene in familial disputes of any kind. The home is a protected space and the various branches of the state, it was presumed, ought to stay out (148).

Meenakshi, the faithful and dutiful wife, jilted by her husband, a Kathakali artist, remains true to him and takes care of him when he comes back in a decrepit state. Only Valsala, the young wife of old Prabhakaran, stoops to a heinous criminal action being complicit in the murder of her husband. She has suffered injustice, and no one can blame her for sexual relationship with Sridharan, but her criminal action and her selfish plan of inheriting her husband's property cannot be justified. She is selfish and cunning and merciless. She can be contrasted with Meenakshi, who remains loyal to her husband, and brings up her son, herself running a shop and a crèche.

Similarly, Anjana remains loyal to her husband, but when he himself forsakes her she has no way but to seek divorce from him. Anjana and Meenakshi are, thus, the victims of patriarchy, the male-chauvinism and dishonesty.

In *Ladies Coupe*, we have a typical example of the life of Margaret Shanti and Ebenezer Paulraj. Ebenezer methodically thwarts Margaret in her career. She wanted to do her Ph.D. but Ebenezer made her a school teacher. She is belittled in front of other teachers. Her subject; chemistry, is very interesting but she is ridiculed about it. She cannot complain to anybody. Even her mother says to her (Nair, 2001):

--- it is woman's responsibility to keep the marriage happy. Men have so many preoccupations that they might not have time or the inclination to keep the wheel of marriage oiled (112).

Margaret, employed as a teacher, is not economically dependent on him. But socially she is thwarted because of the social and moral burden imposed on women in general in the patriarchal society. Margaret seeks her way of escape from the patriarchal subjugation by rendering Paulraj ineffective to function as a tyrant. Similarly, we can see from Prabha Devi's example, how she too gradually succeeds in asserting her own wishes and desires. In *Ladies coupe*, the writer presents a variety of women, who, one way or the other, succeed in winning their freedom in a patriarchal society. Marikolanthu is from a poor, rustic family. Her father being dead; the mother has to serve as a cook in a landlord's house. Marikolanthu, as we saw above, was victimized by Murugesan, making her unmarried mother. Hers is the more radical example than others because, as an unmarried mother, she finally owns the responsibility of bringing up her son without depending on the support of any male being.

From the stories of different women in the *Ladies' Coupe*, Akhila realizes that she cannot choose a way of her life out of the stories of these women. She thought their problems could serve as a guide for her. But, on listening to them, she realized that, 'she was doing it all wrong'. "She was treating other people's lives as though they were how-to books that could help

her find clear-cut answers to what she needed to do next.”(Nair, 2001, 40) Akhila's story is her search of her own space, her individuality. Her action to undertake a journey is to find herself. Her travel in the ladies' coupe' is supposed to help her find a way to discover her own identity. Akhila finds her own self by undertaking a train journey. To begin with, she is full of doubts, unsure of where this journey would lead her, but from her encounter with the women, she realizes how each woman has a problem, and she must find a way out of her own troubles.

*The Better Man* and *Ladies coupe*, thus present female protagonists who face tyranny of patriarchy, a male domination, and try to circumvent it in a variety of ways. These examples reveal how education and economic independence greatly matter in the life of women, if they have to withstand the evils of life in a heavily patriarchal society shown in these two novels. Anita Nair has portrayed women who are victims of male-domination, but they are not silent sufferers. In *The Better Man*, even Paru-Kutty of the older generation asserts herself when her very existence is in jeopardy. In *Ladies' Coupe'*, there are independent episodes of women fighting for their own space, and winning their battle against male-domination and injustice. There is an example of Karpagam, a widow, who refuses to lead life of a widow cloistering herself in four walls, and enjoys hotel food, puts on Kumkum Tilak without caring for what anyone would say. The story of Prabha Devi shows her ability for accommodation and acceptance. And Margaret Shanti quietly uses her knowledge to subdue her tyrant husband. Modern woman is, thus, ready to fight the evils of patriarchy.

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## **Chapter – IV**

### **Female Protagonists in Anita Nair's *Mistress***

**IV.0 Introduction**

**IV.1 Saadiya's Quest for Freedom**

**IV.2 Radha's Search for Selfhood**

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**IV.5 Radha: Resolution of her Emotional Crisis**

**IV.6 Conclusions**

## Chapter - IV

### Female Protagonists in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

#### IV.1 Introduction:

There are five different female protagonists in the episodes in Anita Nair's *Mistress*, who appear to take their life in their own hands and try to live it on their own terms. They have their own individuality and they are strong enough to follow the dictates of their heart. Even Saadiya, a teen-ager from a very orthodox Muslim family, follows the dictates of her heart and makes ultimate sacrifice for the decision she takes. Nair has given agency, strong individuality to every one of these female characters, showing how they take their own decisions and are ready to face the consequences.

#### IV.2 Saadiya's Quest for Freedom:

To begin with, we come across Saadiya, the teenage daughter from the Muslim family, in Arabipattanam. Her father, Vapa Haji Najib Masood Ahmed, (Vapa for short), one of the six Chiefs of the Muslim town and the most respected man, impressed on the mind of his daughter that they the Arabs of the town, were of the pure Arab stock, the descendants of the prophet himself. And he had firm belief that he and the other Arabs must safeguard the bloodline, the pure Arabic blood.

Saadiya is impatient of being pinned down to the twenty by thirty feet sky above her head, as the Muslim women are confined to their homes, and to the street in the alley, never allowed to venture out on the main road where they might come across and be seen by the other men. The main roads and the sea-shore of Arabipattanam were only for the men. The women were not supposed to see and be seen by other human beings. Saadiya, the youngest daughter of the family hankers after freedom which the men enjoyed. She also wants the see and do and know so much. In her heart, she nurses discontent that only men are allowed to do whatever they like, and go wherever they want to, but she must remain contented to watch a patch of sky above her room, and only the maze of alleys. Saadiya is the youngest daughter. She is allowed to remain unmarried though she is fifteen. Normally, the girls in the Arab families are married off at the age of eight or less. She is

also allowed to learn Arabic, and a tutor is appointed for this. She is supposed to marry Akbar Shah's second son, who is to come from Hong Kong. Saadiya, who listened to the stories of the sea-faring people, of the distant lands, is not content only with the stories. She wants to see the reality and experience it. She yearns to visit the far off places, the green hills and gardens without walls. Saadiya has heard the romantic stories of Arab prince riding a stallion 'like an incomparable Malik' of her dreams. Saadiya hankered after the pleasures of life. She wanted to know more and have more. Her philosophy was based on the concept 'the Plank of Avidity' (Nair, 2005).

The life demand, of us that we have a Plank of Avidity. How can we have more if to we don't raise our expectations? How can we be content with just what we have and know? (100).

But the four walls of her house have become her world. Saadiya hankers after the world beyond these four walls. From her small room (Nair, 2005):

Saadiya stared at the square of blue over her head. Twenty feet by thirty feet. That was the measure of her sky, the peripheries of her life. She touched the grey walls of the terrace roof. Even if it stood a solid six feet and two inches high making sure she would never see what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone. Saadiya felt what was by now a familiar sense of despair. Would she like her sisters and every other women born here, live and die hidden by these walls? Was there never to be a way out from here? (99).

It is this hankering after reality, the desire to have sense experience of things that drives the teen-ager Saadiya to venture out of her house. She is not satisfied with the pictures she found of the exotic places and people in a

book in Nadira's house. Her quest for the real compels her to escape stealthily out of the house, covering her face with the black cloth, but flinging it on her shoulder once she is out. Saadiya's action is prompted by the discrimination that the religion has drawn between men and women. She would like to complain to her father about this injustice, the wrong being done to women. She would like to say (Nair, 2005):

It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want, see and do whatever you like and we are expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys (99).

Saadiya was not content with mere imagination or the stories. For her, reality was important, (Nair, 2005):

Reality to be able to see, to touch, to hear, to feel, to sense, to know, to experience (101).

Saadiya, therefore, wants to explore the world around to see things for herself. This curiosity makes her go out. The stories she reads from the picture books awaken in her the dream of the prince, who would come and take her away on horseback. She is suppressed in her ghettoed life. The pictures of the blue seas, green hills, the roads endlessly going somewhere and the gardens without walls enchant her. She thinks she can discover these pictorial landscapes in reality. Saadiya's unquenchable quest drives her out. Being in her teens, and also adventurous, she dares out. She does not know what is beyond the streets. But she has no fear and she is not aware that she is transgressing. It is this adventure that gives her the first glimpse of Sethu, who has come to Arabipattanam along with the doctor. Saadiya's face colours as she finds Sethu looking at her uncovered face, and she feels hankering after the unknown hero. Saadiya is smitten by that single glance of Sethu. Saadiya is doubly inhibited in her short life. She is born in a very orthodox Muslim family, her father being a Kazi, who must adhere to the Muslim religion and cultural tradition. Muslim women are not supposed to have

participation in education and also in the economic sphere of the family and community. Saadiya is singularly lucky in the sense that she is taught to read and write at home, while other women in the house were not allowed this facility. The Muslim women, some of them, were allowed to read but writing skill was not considered necessary for them. Haji Najib Masood was a very strict man, who considered man to be responsible to maintain the family, and the good women were to be obedient to him without a question. When there are such strict laws, there is a human tendency to go against naturally reacts against this oppressive rule, and dares to take a walk in the common alley. As she walks to Nadira's house, she thinks (Nair, 2005):

Life: Life in so many colours and shapes. Life that  
breathed and walked. Life that chewed and spat.  
Life that screamed and shouted. Life that mumbled  
and tumbled, hissed and crawled. Life that waited.  
Life that never be hers (102).

Saadiya walked on, uncovering her face, and at this fateful moment Sethu saw her. Saadiya's face flushed with colour, which created feeling in his mind. This momentous action of uncovering face changed Saadiya's life. Saadiya dreams of Sethu whom she names as Malik. The passion in her creates a strange longing in her, as she confesses to herself (Nair, 2005):

My bodice feels thighs. My insides quiver with  
queer churning, my breath quickens, I do not  
understand me any if this Vaapa, you ought to  
have branded me so that I could never dream  
again (131).

Saadiya's love-lorn state is responsible for her tragedy. Her spontaneous falling in love over rides her religious spirit. In fact she never thought Sethu could be someone other than a young are Muslim man. Strict religious laws and her love for her Hamid clash resulting into tragedy.

Saadiya's obstinacy brings about her tragedy. Even when she learns who Sethu is, she insists on calling him Malik. She tells him (Nair, 2005):

You are Malik. The incomparable one who came from across the seas. Strong and straight, a leader among men, one who could be trusted to brave the ocean and winds and unknown ways. You are my Malik. Don't see? (185).

When Saadiya's father fixes the match of Saadiya with Akbar Shah's second son, Salim, who is to come from Hong Kong, Saadiya was resolved like a mutineer to oppose this proposal of her marriage. Her father tries to ignore her, but she threatens him saying (Nair, 2005):

Vaapa, you can pretend that you don't hear me. But I will tell the Kazi that I am not willing to marry the man you have chosen for me (144).

Saadiya is punished for this transgression by her father, who brands her with heated iron rod. Yet Saadiya stubbornly denies to marry Salim.

Saadiya is smitten by the single glance of Sethu. She does not know his name, but she thinks he is 'Malik'. She tells her elder sister as much. When Doctor Samuel visits Saadiya's house to treat her elder sister who is pregnant, Sethu also accompanies the doctor as his assistant. Like Saadiya, he too is affected by that first glimpse of Saadiya's face. He has to prepare a sterile pad for dressing Saadiya's burns, caused by the hot iron rod with which her father punished her. Sethu realizes how Saadiya is punished and feels pity and anger. When the doctor, advises Sethu, to turn his head to the wall when next time he happens to see the women in the alley, Sethu says (Nair, 2005):

Are you asking me to close my eyes to the beauty of the moon? How can I? (135).

Saadiya listens to this as the doctor is treating her burns and her face reddens, she also smiles covertly, which Sethu takes as an acknowledgement of his feeling towards her.

In Saadiya's story, Anita Nair tries to reveal gender discrimination observed in the name of religion. Women in Arabipattanam are not allowed to go out of the four walls of the house. They have to remain without education. Though Saadiya's father loves his daughter, he severely punishes her for her transgression. In Saadiya's story, it is revealed that the girls are not sent to school. Saadiya is made an exception in that a tutor comes home to teach her. Women have not seen the sea, though they live close to it. There are questions in Saadiya's mind (Nair, 2005):

Though we live so close to it, we don't get to see it ever. All the men in Arabipattanam went to beach every day, like they went to the mosque. It was a part of their routine. We were allowed out, perhaps once a year. All other times, we knew the sea existed only when the breeze set in at early noon, bringing into our homes a whiff of salt, and on hot days a brackish odour, part fish, part decay, part mystery (138).

Saadiya escapes this ghettoed life when Razia is to be taken to hospital for child birth. She goes, along with Zulekha, to the hospital in Nazareth. A house is rented there for their stay to keep company to Razia and to take care of her. There is a sort of inevitability in Saadiya's story, in her relationship with Sethu, as the doctor's house is in the neighborhood, where Sethu also lives. For Saadiya, it is a romance, a great hope, as in the stories she heard from her father, Vaapa. She is torn between her love, her romantic hankering on the one hand, and her Vaapa's anger on the other. Saadiya's transgression is known when her wandering in the alley and her meeting Sethu, comes to light. Her father loves her, but his respect for his religion is stronger than his love for his daughter. He punishes Saadiya branding her thigh with heated iron rod. But this punishment does not stop Saadiya from

loving Sethu. There is a kind of inevitability in their love story as Saadiya has to accompany Razia to hospital, where Sethu again meets her, in Nazareth

No one knows who this Sethu is because Saadiya calls him Malik. When Saadiya stubbornly faces all punishments and still maintains her decision to marry her 'Malik', Kazi finally confesses his daughter's transgression before the assembly gathered for the prayer, and as a punishment, decides to disown her. He instructs Suleiman to convey the message to Saadiya that she must take her final decision by the dawn next day and if she does not change her mind, she must go. Saadiya, who is now in Nazareth, appears at the door-step of Sethu at twilight. Sethu is taken aback. The doctor, who comes back later, is also angry and full of objections to Saadiya coming to his house like this, because he is rightly apprehensive of the anger and tension this would create in the community where he practices his profession. Saadiya, like eve in *The Paradise Lost*, commits first disobedience going out of the house and venturing into the forbidden street. Her second disobedience is to fall in love with a man, of a different religion, though she does it unknowingly. She trespasses by going out of the house and then falling in love with a stranger. Her tragedy results from her craving for freedom but at the same time remaining staunchly attached to her faith that is built in to her by her family and her community. She is proud of her being the descendant of the original Kahirs of Arabia. She tells Sethu (Nair, 2005):

I am a descendant of the original Kahirs. In me is the purest of Arab blood. Islam, as we practice it, is a religion that demands sacrifice. In your village, the Muslims are converts. No matter what, they will never know what it is to be a true Muslim. Everything is compromised to make it acceptable. My son is not a convert. He has my blood (227).

In spite of her staunch faith in the Islam and its teachings, Saadiya longs for freedom, and follows the dictates of her heart. Being an inexperienced teen-ager, she does not understand the complexities of the

world outside the ghetto created by her family and the community dominated by the male members. She takes Sethu to be 'Hamid' because she is familiar with only one religion and one community, which for her is the world. She does not realize the consequences of marrying Sethu. In this marriage, she finds freedom, but when she realizes that it conflicts with her faith, she embraces death. Saadiya's tragedy results from restrictions imposed on women by the highly patriarchal society, and its religious fanaticism, which compels women to live in a restricted area without any exposure to the world outside. The notion of purity is imposed on women while men are free from it. Saadiya hardly has an idea that there can be people of different religious faith outside her ghetto. When she looks at Sethu, she takes him for a Muslim.

For her delivery, Saadiya is brought to Dr. Samuel's hospital. She felt great pain as she lay in the hospital. Her suffering, she thought, was the penance for a crime she had committed. Saadiya and Sethu lived on the sea-shore, for now Sethu was in the service with James Raj, a Christian businessman. They lived idyllic life until Saadiya was pregnant. Saadiya suffered physically as well as mentally. She felt contempt of the neighbours. She is not even properly married. She is worried about her child (Nair, 2005).

What kind of life would it have any way? With no ancestry to speak of, no family, not even a religion or a god to call its own? (197).

Sethu brought for her books of all religions ---Christian, Muslim as well as Hindu. Sethu tries to console her saying the child is God's gift for them, the approval of God for their marriage. Saadiya decides to bring up her baby as a true Muslim She tells Sethu that her Child must know her God. Sethu agrees because Saadiya is in a very sensitive mood.

The conflict between the inter-religious marriages is inevitable, if both, the husband and wife, have staunch religious faith. Sethu is very much annoyed when Saadiya haughtily maintains that her child must be brought up as a true Muslim. She names the child 'Omar Masood', and then says, there

is just one ritual to be performed, which, she says, is 'the Khitan', (meaning circumcision). This becomes the bone of contention between them. Saadiya is bent upon bringing up her son as a true Muslim. Such conflict between the interreligious marriages is inevitable if both, the husband and the wife, have strong religious feeling. Sethu reacts angrily, saying (Nair, 2005),

Over my dead body (227).

Saadiya tries to convince him, telling him about five acts of cleanliness in Islam (Nair, 2005),

'Shaving the pubic hair, plucking the hair under armpits, shaving the moustache, clipping your nails and circumcision. Only then is Fitra achieved. Fitra is the inner sense of cleanliness, which will make him a good Muslim (227).

Sethu objects to this, saying that so far as circumcision is concerned, it must be left to the child. He should decide when he grows up, when he knows his mind. He would not allow circumcision. He also tells her that 'Sunnath' is performed on pre-adolescents, and asks her to wait for it. But Saadiya maintains of her being the Muslim of the purest of Arab blood, and her son is pure Muslim of her own blood. Sethu is annoyed and tells her the child is his son also, that there is his blood in him. He blames her of being a fanatic. But, Saadiya reacts saying (Nair, 2005),

I made a mistake. I can't allow my son to make the same (228).

Sethu becomes cold, he feels hurt as if someone has hit him in his ribs. Sethu, in his anger, tells her to go back to her family and to her religion if she thought she made a mistake. He also disallows taking away the child because the child would remind her of her mistake. Saadiya could not go to her father's house, nor could she live now with Sethu. She thinks she is responsible for bringing into the world her child, the son, who is now going to be infidel. She chooses to go into the sea to her final rest.

Saadiya's story turns out to be a tragedy because in her innocence she takes Sethu to be Malik. Merely sixteen year old, and living a ghettoed life, she is totally ignorant of people of other faiths who could exist around her in her small world of the back alleys of Arabipattanam. She is brought up as a devout Muslim, but she is ignorant of the world outside. She tries to adhere to her faith, and would like her son to be brought up as a true Muslim, hardly unaware of the complexity of her life created by marrying a Hindu. There is a clash of faith, which triumphs over the love between Sethu and Saadiya.

There is also a feminist angle to Saadiya's tragedy. In a patriarchal system, the husband claims his right over the children. The Children are named after the father. Even the wife has the name of her husband, replacing her father's name. Saadiya tries to claim the right of naming her son and deciding what religion he should belong to. Sethu cannot acknowledge this right to her, and claims the child as his own when he tells her to go back to her father's house. Saadiya could have lived for her son, but Sethu does not leave any excuse for her to live with him. She commits suicide by drowning herself into the sea. In Saadiya's story there is gender discrimination marked by religion. Girls are not allowed education. They are pinned down to the back alleys and they must cover themselves fully in black cloth, while men are free to go anywhere and do what they like. Saadiya's protest here is not to get equality, but only freedom to go out and see the world with her own eyes, to know people and places. She does not know there are other people in the world with different faith and religion. Her tragedy results from her cloistered life, her ignorance and inexperience. In presenting the story of Saadiya, the writer tries to show how in a conservative society women are denied basic freedom even by their loving parents. Saadiya's father is himself a Kazi, and he must set an example for others, so he severely punishes his daughter and finally abandons her. Saadiya belongs to very orthodox Muslim family and hardly knows the world outside. Her transgression is also the result of her ignorance as she is, like others, subjected to a ghettoed life. Like, Hindus, Islam also looks upon women as the beings inferior to men and has subjected women to strict rules. When she disobeys rules, she is severely punished. As Neeru Tandon observes (2008):

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 18<sup>th</sup> 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 (140).

This is what makes Saadiya's father punish her and banish her. Saadiya knew that walking out of her alley to the prohibited area was transgression, a disobedience her father would not approve. But she did not know the reason behind such strict rules only against women. She did not know that there are people of other faith. Her father repents for giving his dear daughter 'a little rope' to wander about. He must punish her because he might risk his honour in the society, he being himself a Kazi. Religion everywhere imposes severe restrictions on women and discriminates against them. Men enjoy all kinds of freedom, while women are subjected to severe discipline. It is not the case that Saadiya was against religion. She would like to bring up her son as a true Muslim, and she finds it impossible, she embraces death. Her tragedy is the result of patriarchal religious domination as well as her ignorance about the world beyond her house. It is not, therefore, acceptable that she consciously rebels against her father and her society. She believes Sethu to be Hamid, the Muslim hero, and does not know there is a Hindu religion or community around. Her rebellion is not with the full knowledge of the world around, and then taking a decision. It is her ignorance that lands her in trouble.

#### **IV.3 Radha's Search for Selfhood:**

Unlike Saadiya, Radha is well educated, and has an awareness of her strength. Being away from home, and having a job, she has developed a sense of Independence at twenty-two, she is aware of the 'adult possibilities'

of life, and wants to live life in her own way. She worked in a company, where she fell in love with a senior manager, much older than herself. It was not actually falling in love. But at a Cocktail party organized by the HR department, under the influence of drink, she yields to him, a married man, and continues to be in relationship with him for two years. It was more an infatuation than love. In fact, the man uses her as a playmate, and she goes with him to the pubs and restaurants. When his wife makes Radha aware of his deceitfulness, she is ashamed of herself. Radha's sense of selfhood lands her in trouble. She realizes how she is taken advantage of, but she has to face the consequences. She becomes pregnant, and gets herself aborted pretending to be separated from her husband. Radha's father, who is aware of what she has gone through, finds a bridegroom for her. She agrees to marry Shyam, who loves Radha, but he is a poor relation and cannot hope for her hand. Radha's father obliges him, and he agrees to marry her. But Radha does not love him. It is a marriage of convenience for her. Shyam loves her but they are an incompatible pair emotionally as well as culturally. As De Beauvoir says, the institution of marriage has marred the spontaneity of feelings, between the husband and wife by "transforming freely given feelings into mandatory duties and shrilly asserted rights". (Beauvoir, 1953, 445).

Radha is an educated modern girl, who is conscious of her individuality. Like Prabha Devi in *Ladies Coupe*, or Akhila, she would like to explore possibilities in her life. Though she is married to Shyam, it is a marriage of convenience for her. She is forced to become a housewife, and has to play the role of a traditional wife. Umesh, (2012) for example, comments:

Radha impresses him (Shyam) with her self-contentedness and is willing to follow many of her decisions, e.g. the diet she decides that they follow, yet still he is not able to accept her personality as a whole. Thus Radha finds herself in between her longing for independence, which is acknowledged to a

certain degree, and the traditional role that she is to play.

Radha accepts her married life, casts herself in the role of a traditional wife, but she cannot love Shyam. She does not protest whenever Shyam makes love to her. He says (Nair, 2005):

When she responded to my touch, and I knew that she was trying to block a memory, I closed my mind to it (123).

Shyam finds her reading a book on which there is a blurb on the back which says (Nair, 2005),

The story of a woman's search for strength and independence--- (123).

This is a clue to Radha's complex life, her dissatisfaction in her married life, and her infatuation with Chris. She cannot feel love for Shyam. Shyam is a domineering husband. He does not like Radha interfering in his business affairs. He has several business projects going on, but he does not think of making Radha a part of any of them, nor does he allow her to visit them. His attitude is patriarchal in the sense that he thinks a wife should always be inferior to her husband, so that she can be easily controlled. But, Radha is well-educated and culturally she is superior to him. He would not allow Radha to interfere in his business matter, because, like an arch patriarch, he would like his wife to busy herself in home and the hearth, and not question him about what he does or seek freedom to do anything on her own. Radha expresses her discontent telling him (Nair, 2005).

I wanted to teach in one of the primary school and you said it was too much work for 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. Si I thought I would find something else to

do which didn't involve making money, but even that isn't right (73).

Radha thus, makes her grievances quite clear. In the Indian society a woman is not supposed to express her sufferings or her complaints against the husband openly. But, Radha is an educated New Woman, who has her own aspirations. She could not tolerate Shyam's chauvinistic attitude and his habit of saying no to everything. Shyam was using her only as a sex object, and never thought of her individual aspirations. Their tastes differ, what Shyam watches on T. V. and what he listens to is disgraceful according to her. Her taste in reading or music does not match with Shyam's taste. Shyam treats her merely as a woman to fulfil his sexual desire, and though she turns to him in bed, she does it as a part of her duty. Radha does not get love and respect from Shyam, as he treats her only as a partner in bed, a mistress, and not a life-partner. When Christopher Stewart arrives from London, Radha feels drawn towards him. She has been married to Shyam for eight years, but she didn't ever feel desirability for Shyam as she now feels for Chris. She says (Nair, 2005):

I don't understand what is happening to me, a married woman, a wife. When I married Shyam, I swore never to flout the rules of custom again. How have I become so disdainful of honour, so contemptuous of convention? (54).

Radha's marriage of convenience propels her into the relationship with Chris Stewart, who comes to Kerala to interview Koman, the Kathakali artist. She, at first, has misgivings about forming an amorous relationship with Chris. But Shyam's callousness drives her to Chris. She complains to Shyam about how he defeated her every effort to engage herself in one way or the other. Shyam objects to her working, teaching, starting tuition classes or running a Crèche. She impatiently says (Nair, 2005):

Don't I have a right 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 (73).

Here Radha is protesting against typical patriarchal domination of a husband, who decides what a wife should or should not do. Kate Millet, for instance, says ( *Sexual Politics*, 1972) :

under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop symbols by which she is described. As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture in regard to the female were also of male design. The image of woman as we know is an image created by man and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from the fear of otherness's of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which female is 'other' or alien (46-47).

When Radha expresses her desire to start a business on her own, he shouts at her that he has a status in the society and she must behave as a wife to him and not to spoil his name in the society. She does not like his domineering and superior attitude. Shyam, in fact, does not like Radha to show her talent and her intellectual ability. He is aware of his own inferiority in this respect. So he opposes every proposal where she can show her intellectual ability. He is quite aware of her social and intellectual superiority, though he loves her very much, he feels a kind of insecurity in allowing her to exercise her talent. She even complains about being taken to his friends and their wives, who are small town people, 'with small minds and even smaller lives.'

Radha is also impatient with Shyam's sister, Rani Oppol, who very bluntly tells her not to come for the Seemanthan ceremony of a pregnant woman (Nair, 2005):

I don't think you should come with us. You know how people are. They think a married woman who hasn't had children for so long is a macchi. They won't like it. It is inauspicious to have a barren woman at such functions---. The evil eye, etc. (114).

This rejection makes Radha cold towards the family in general and Shyam in particular. If she had any inhibition about going to see Chris, it begins to vanish, and she is drawn towards Chris as she feels she has a chance of happiness with Chris. And she begins to think seriously why she should throw away this chance and repent for it twenty years hence. Chris is playing his cello holding it between his knees, and Radha sees herself in his arms in place of the cello. Radha, thus, appears to be driven to Chris. She, in fact, is not a barren woman as Shyam's family believes. She already has an abortion. Radha's father tries to defend her saying it was an innocent relationship. Shyam, who was already in love with Radha agrees to marry her, but Radha is suspicious of Shyam's readiness to marry her and asks him if her father had offered money to him to marry her. Radha had plainly told him before the marriage that she was not a virgin. Her confession was expected. Radha would not keep it secret. There is quite plain speaking between Radha and Shyam in this matter. They were honest to each other, but Shyam did not tell Radha that he really loved her. Radha is also not aware of Shyam's love for her. She thinks she is only a possession for him. She says (Nair, 2005):

--- 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. Someone to indulge and someone to

indulge him with feminine wiles---. I think of the butterfly caught and pinned to a board when it was still alive, its wings spread so as to display the markings, oblivious that somewhere within, a little heart beats, yearning to fly. I made that butterfly now (54).

Radha, despite her antipathy towards Shyam, cannot help but submit to his needs as a husband. Shyam loves her, but he does not say so because he is aware of Radha's escapades. Shyam is impatient with her, when Radha ignores him and resists his advances in bed. When Radha comes home after watching Kathakali performance, late at night, Shyam forcibly makes her yield to his physical pleasure. He resents Radha's attitude towards him. He feels she simply tolerates him and ignores his yearning for her. For eight years of their married life, all his efforts to possess her, to make her his soul-mate, have come to nothing. He feels her indifference even when she is in his arms. When he forcibly takes her, Radha broods over this 'plundering of her body' and finally comes to a decision that she would pretend as if nothing has happened; she would not allow him to feel pleasure of having imposed his will on her. But Shyam interprets her normal behaviour as the right way to treat her. She pretends gaiety but nurses great pain in heart of which Shyam is quite unaware of. Radha broods over the word 'rape' and feels 'sore and bruised, invaded and robbed. [P/165]<sup>27</sup> Shyam is aware of Radha's antipathy towards him, and how she mechanically responds to him in bed. He is an aggressive husband and is rather crude in his thinking and behaviour. He thinks that by raping her he has made her feel low about herself. He feels this is the way to treat a woman like her, and thus he can prove his dignity. He thinks he has attained victory over her. He tells her in a very blunt manner (Nair, 2005):

you are my wife. I have my rights---

"Don't I have the right to say no," she demanded  
(163).

And then he brutally rapes her. Radha then decides what to do. Her mind is prepared by this incident to flout the notion of loyalty in the marital relationship. She says (Nair, 2005):

If I can give this attack a name, I will know how to deal with it. My mind was made up. I would pretend that nothing had happened. I would cheat him of the pleasure of having imposed his will. Shyam might think he owned me, but he didn't. I was never his. And I never will be. All day long he had expected anger, but I felt no anger. Revulsion, yes and disgust. But not anger. Shyam thought all was well. I let him believe it. For there was Chris now (166).

This incident makes up Radha's mind to disobey moral norms and form alliance with Chris, an extramarital affair. Her affair with Chris is, thus, a relation for the tyrannical behaviour of her husband.

Shyam's high handedness drives Radha to Chris. Whatever moral compulsion she felt before vanishes, and she defiantly goes to meet Chris when he rings her up inviting her for dinner. She resorts to lying to the servants that she is going to meet Uncle Koman while she really goes to Chris. The rape makes her determined to ignore the social norms which held her back, and she starts thinking of Chris as a reaction to her husband's tyranny.

Radha has strong self-awareness, and she cherishes herself to be an independent young woman. But when her notions of independence land her in trouble, she meekly accepts a family set-up. Her marriage with Shyam is a marriage of convenience, but she takes it seriously. As Umesh, notes (2012):

Radha impresses him (Shyam) with her self-contentedness and he is willing to follow many of her decisions, for example, the diet she decides that they follow, yet still he is not able to accept her personality as a whole. Thus Radha finds herself in

between her longing for independence which is acknowledged to a certain degree and the traditional role she is to play.

#### **IV.4 Radha's Infatuation with Chris:**

Though Radha tries to be a traditional wife sans love for her husband, and submits to Shyam's physical needs, trying to forget her past, she cannot. Shyam's touch reminds her of her former love affair. She stiffens when Shyam touches her.

She tries to fulfil her marital duty towards Shyam, but she cannot repress her feeling to escape. She is driven to Chris not only by the callousness of Shyam but also by the attraction she feels towards Chris, who makes her feel respected as an individual. On the other hand, Shyam uses her merely to fulfil his sexual needs. She feels that Chris understands her and appreciates her opinions on arts, politics etc., while Shyam does not allow her to take part in any of his business activities. When she, on her own, goes to the factory where women are working, and tries to do something for them. Shyam resents it, as he is worried about social status. Shyam ought to have become aware of her need to define and assert her individuality. She would like to be respected as well as loved, and create the image of herself. This is the reason why she is drawn towards Chris, who appreciates her needs and respects her individuality. Shyam, in his physical relationship with Radha, behaves quite brutally with her, 'Rape' is the word that comes to her mind.

Radha is very much hurt by Shyam's highhanded behavior. She feels 'sore, bruised invaded and robbed.' (Nair, 2005, 165). But, she decides to pretend that nothing had happened. She would not like to give him pleasure of having imposed his will on her. But she finds another way of punishing him. Her affair with Chris, to begin with is more a revenge rather than infatuation. She is a woman of independent spirit, and would not accept meek submission to the husband like Shyam. When Shyam is on a tour, Chris invites her for dinner, and in that night she submits herself to physical intimacy with Chris.

Radha draws solace from this relationship with Chris. As she picks up her clothes, she looks at him and feels (Nair, 2005):

He is a painting, I think. A portrait of satiation, of a night of abandon. A moment of languor frozen. I feel a joy; he is mine (172).

Radha's marriage with Shyam is a compromise, but at one stage she is aware of her duty as a wife. She has to be loyal to him. But circumstances of her marital life, Shyam's overbearing nature, pushed her into the arms of Chris. She comes to Uncle's cottage, telling a lie that Uncle is ill. When Uncle asks her bluntly about her affair with Chris, she reacts saying (Nair, 2005):

I know, Uncle, Very well. I know the world would think it is wrong. There is no justification for adultery, I will be told. But I love him. He is a fire in my blood (207).

She believes Chris shares the same feeling for her, that he cares for her in the same way. When Uncle warns her that Shyam's servants will tell Shyam about her affair, Radha is defiant and reacts vehemently (Nair, 2005):

I don't care. My marriage is dead. And Shyam means nothing to me (207).

Uncle tries to warn her, reminding her that she has been married to Shyam for eight years, and she just cannot say she does not care for Shyam. But Radha is in no mood to listen to the Uncle's, warning.

Radha is attracted towards Chris because she feels that he is the one who has culture, being an artist himself, while Shyam is a materialistic boorish person. Chris, she thinks, understands her and appreciates her opinions. There is a book on Radha's bedside table, which has a blurb on it declaring, it is --- (Nair, 2005)

The story of a woman's search for strength and independence (123).

It shows that Radha needed someone who could help her find her own strength and independence. Radha's affair with Chris is motivated by her desire to find a man who would give her this independence and also appreciate her, to help her realize herself. She thinks, that her affair with Chris would help her find meaning of her life, her self-realization. For this she breaks social conventions of married life. She does not think of consequence of her intimate relationship with Chris, which suddenly dawns on her when she discovers that she is pregnant. She is very uneasy. She knows that adultery's beast is lust, but does not think that her relationship with Chris was lust. Yet, she feels cheated by him. She thought she could find her independence with Chris, but did not realize that breaking social conventions of married life cannot help her. When she became pregnant, she felt guilty (Nair, 2005).

She happens to see Shyam, 'Sitting on the toilet seat, his head in his arms and tears in his eyes'. I knew then that he knew about Chris and me. All along when I lied and deceived and lay in Chris's arms and he in mine, I hadn't ever felt that I was committing a crime---. But I cannot erase from my mind the sight of Shyam as I saw him that night.  
(397)

Radha knows that she herself is responsible for robbing Shyam of his pride, that she has been cruel to him. Radha does not want to remain now with Shyam, nor would she go with Chris. She realizes that her relationship with Chris was nothing but wild physical passion. She feels disgust for herself, for her affair with Chris, for her lies and deception and for turning Shyam into a broken and humiliated man. She decides to leave Shyam. She would not go with Chris also. She tells Shyam that he can have his parental right when her child is born. But Shyam flatly denies to have anything to do with her child and prepares to leave even her house. But, finally she remains with Shyam, who also accepts her baby yet to be born.

Radha, a well-educated woman, is quite aware of the fact that for Shyam she is a possession, 'a much cherished possession' (Nair, 2005, 53). This is what a woman has meant for man. Simone de Beauvoir comments (Nair, 2005):

Subordinated economically and socially to her husband --- the good wife is a man's most precious treasure. She belongs to him most 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 his better half. He takes pride in his wife as he does in his house, his lands, his flock, his wealth and sometimes even more; through her he displays his power before the world; she is his measure and his earthly portion (207).

What Beauvoir says about the condition of a wife in a traditional family is experienced by Radha. She feels like a butterfly pinned to a board.

She does not like to be subjugated to the aggressive husband that is Shyam. P. T. Kurian remarks about this feeling of the educated women like Radha, who do not like male domination whether it is father or a husband. He says:

Cruel fathers overtly and vehemently reject and terrorize their children. They rule the family with a firm grip and become verbally and physically violent with their wives and children. They are aggressive men who dominate the lives of those around them (173).

We have come across this picture of a dominant father in *The Better Man*, the novel, in which Anita Nair has created the character of a violent patriarch in Achutan Nair, who turns his son, Mukundan into a timid man, unsure of himself, and who is responsible for the death of his wife, Paru-Kutty.

Indian women, whether educated or otherwise, are all supposed to be subjected to the man, a father or a husband. It is necessary for a woman to be married. A girl unmarried for long is looked down on. Such gender discrimination and the authority of male over female is very oppressive for women. Shyam, as a husband, also has such stereotypical ideas about women. A wife should look beautiful appealing, and she should be dependent on the husband. He would not allow Radha to take active part in his business. He makes Radha suffocated in marriage though he thinks he loves her. He wants to rule every aspect of her life. In this Shyam is a typical husband a proto-type of Indian husband. Radha, of course, is partly responsible for her subjugation because she landed herself in trouble by her thoughtless and wanton love affair with a married man.

Radha appears to be the new woman, a woman liberated from the traditional notion of a wife, loyal to her husband. She feels no guilt for her pre-marital pregnancy and abortion. She feels no gratitude for Shyam, who marries her despite her escapade, and saves her pride. Instead, for her Shyam is an insufferable man; a burden to her. She does not feel inhibited in flouting social norms and traditions. She is described by critics as rebellious, but she appears willful and stubborn. She is impulsive in her actions, as we can see in her relationship with Chris. On the other hand, for Shyam, Radha is a cherished possession. He loves her, but he would not like her to interfere with his business. His tastes in reading, in cultural matters do not agree with hers. Radha and Shyam are married for eight years, but they remain an incompatible pair. He loves her but she hates him.

Radha is Anita Nair's post-modern heroine, who is torn between the need for freedom and the compulsions of traditional morality, she breaks the norms of marital life as she would like to be independent, but her husband, Shyam, appears to control her life. As Neeru Tandon (2008) says:

Her protest is not for equality only, but for the right to be acknowledged as an individual capable for intelligence and feeling. She does not look for freedom outside the house, but within too. She is new in the dimension of time by being a rebel

against the general current of the patriarchal society.

It apparently seems that Radha is rebelling against the patriarchal domination, as Shyam is a domineering husband, who feels that Radha should not interfere in his business affairs. For him Radha is a possession. Just as he would like to possess the elephant, Padmanabhan, he would like Radha to be his pretty possession. Radha remarks (Nair, 2005):

He prefers a glossy, silly wife to a homely, practical one. Glossy silly wives are malleable (61).

Radha also feels repulsive about Shyam's brazen admission of his ambition to be rich, to make money. She once tells Shyam that money isn't everything, and points out how Uncle is happy with his art, which is enough for him. She opposes Shyam's materialism. He has no taste for art. Radha and Shyam are an incompatible pair in many ways. Shyam does not like her to take active interest in his business. He would also like her to keep her distance from the women workers in the factory. He is class conscious. Radha, therefore, feels drawn towards Chris, and finds pleasure in her affair with him. However, later she has differences with Chris also. When she argues with Chris about American politics about Iraq, she vehemently opposes Chris's taking American side. She says (Nair, 2005):

Yes, I want to tell him. Our opinions, even when they are about a world that has no direct bearing on our lives, are us. And yes, I do think that you have taken away something that is mine. You invaded my mind, my body--- What do I have now? How am I to function without your support? I am a country that has to rebuild itself from nothing. I am a country that has to face recriminations and challenges and I don't know where to begin. Worst of all, I don't even know if you will be there to hold

my hand through the rebuilding process. So wouldn't it have been best to leave me alone? (293).

Radha here is impatient with Chris's attitude because part of her mind is suspicious about the free or equal relationship with Chris. She clearly feels disturbed by Chris's westernized approach whether it is the case of Iraq or the personal relation with her. It shows her infatuation with Chris is short lived, and she realizes that she is guilty of adultery. She says (Nair, 2005):

I have no love left for Shyam. That I cannot love him, I can live with. But I have robbed him of his pride. How could I have done that to him? It was cruel. Far worse than the fact that I had never loved him (397).

She, therefore, decides to leave him. She realizes that her affair with Chris was only an act of defiance. She also finally realizes that her love for Chris was only lust. She asks herself (Nair, 2005):

Do I really think I can make a life with Chris? What do I know of him except that our bodies respond to each other and that first when we were together, the rest of the world ceased to exist? Once it was enough. Not anymore (397-98).

Radha's and Chris' love for each other was only a need. Radha uses the metaphor of metronome. Just as it had wound itself out so was their love or need for each other. It was ( Nair, 2005)

An act of defiance for me, an interesting encounter for him. Loneliness and funneling need that had exploded into unbridled passion (399-400).

Her affair with Chris, thus, ends abruptly. Radha realizes she cannot go with Chris, nor can she live with Shyam. But, finally it is her child, the love for

it is her talisman. She is a new woman in the sense that she is liberated, and pursues her dreams without any inhibition. She breaks traditions, flouts social norms and feels no remorse for her actions. She does feel sorry for the way she has treated her husband. They are an incompatible pair, yet in the end she feels yearning to lean against a shoulder and thinks only of Shyam. But there is a guilt consciousness that she has wronged him.

Radha is torn between Shyam and Chris, but finally, in the Chapter 'Shantam', she appears to have resolved her problem. She would live neither with Shyam nor with Chris. She would live with her child. As Meena Devi (2012) says:

She finally decides firmly that she should lead a life of her own with her child, leaving both Shyam and Chris. She knows that both the men will be hurt by her decision. But both Shyam and Chris accept her decision silently ---.

Nair, while narrating the infatuation of Radha with Chris, makes Radha remind herself of the mythical Story of Ahalya (the wife of Rishi Gautama), from the epic Ramayana. She narrates the story of Ahalya to Chris, as an episode in the Kathakali dance performance, but suddenly becomes aware of the relevance of this story to her own life. She also transgresses like Ahalya, by embracing Chris. The only difference is that Ahalya was deceived by the disguise Indra uses of her husband Gautama, while Radha is fully aware of what she is doing. Narrating this story to Chris, Radha ponders over it, realizing how Indra got away with his moral crime with some embarrassment, but poor Ahalya fully bore the brunt of the curse of Gautama. She was turned to stone. Radha thinks that it should be a reminder to her. Ultimately, it is the woman who suffers. As her marriage was a matter of convenience, Radha thinks that she has been imprisoned in her married life. She compares herself to a butterfly. She says (Nair, 2005):

I think of the butterfly I caught and pinned to a board when it was still alive, its wings spread so as

to display the markings, oblivious that somewhere within, a little heart beats, yearning to fly. I am that butterfly now (54).

But, she herself is responsible for her condition. Her wayward affair with a married man, her pregnancy, and then marriage with Shyam out of necessity are all due to her own self-created problems. Her married life is sans-love, yet, to begin with, she casts herself into the role of a good housewife. She says (Nair, 2005):

I can't say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no highs, there are no lows, either. Some would call this content, even (53).

She knows that for Shyam, she is a possession. Shyam does not allow her to visit his factory or dabble with his business. She resents that Shyam does not treat her as an equal. She is for him a 'mistress', a 'cherished possession, someone to indulge him with feminine wiles' (Nair, 2005, 53).

As Radha is socially and culturally superior to Shyam, his tastes are boorish in her opinion. Since her marriage with him is a marriage of convenience, she is drawn towards Chris. She questions herself in her introspective moments about this feeling, her attraction for Chris. She broods over it (Nair, 2005):

I do not understand what is happening to me, a married woman, a wife. When I married Shyam, I swore never to flout the rules of custom again. How have I become so disdainful of honour, so contemptuous of convention? (54).

Radha tries to fight her attraction for Chris; she resists it reminding herself of Shyam, 'who has endured much' for her. In spite of the warning of her conscience, she surrenders to her fatal attraction for Chris.

Shyam and Radha are in contrast in their likes and dislikes, and their tastes. Shyam is very orderly. His musical collection is arranged properly in

alphabetical order. His clothes are neatly arranged in his closet. Radha is different. She is chaotic. Her closet and bedside table are heaped up. Shyam is fastidious about putting things in order. He puts newspapers properly folded; he does not allow candles to drip, and puts clothes properly on Shelves. Everything about him is perfectly arranged. He is also ambitious about making money. Radha finds his ambitious nature repulsive, his 'frantic chasing to amass wealth.' Gradually, Radha found that she could not agree with Shyam on anything, and as a result there was no conversation between them.

Shyam has typical 'male' attitude towards 'female' field of action. When Radha visits his factory and tries to introduce the women workers to literature of writers like Tolstoy and Kafka, Shyam objects to it. What really troubles him is her encroachment in his affairs. He bluntly tells her (Nair, 2005).

You are my wife and you have a place in society.  
When I ask you to show some interest in what I do,  
I mean just that. Display interest and not hobnob  
with my employees or share meals with them (72).

Radha is taken aback realizing that Shyam was secretly snooping on her. Radha is impatient with this snobbish attitude of Shyam, who accuses her of erasing lines between the employer and the employee. Radha finds her individuality and initiative of action curbed by Shyam's attitude. He objects to anything she wants to do. He would not allow her to teach in a school, start tuition classes, start a crèche and so on. She is impatient with him as he appears to treat her as merely a beautiful doll, 'a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfil your sexual needs and with no rights" (Nair, 2005, 73). Radha is, thus, increasingly estranged from Shyam. His refusal to allow her to use a car independently, and bluntly telling her so, annoys her very much. He curtly tells her (Nair, 2005):

Your family may have left you many things, but  
they didn't leave you an oil well. Since I pay for

the fuel, I will decide if we need one vehicle or two (73-74).

This overbearing attitude of Shyam epitomizes male-domination, and pushes Radha into the arms of Chris as a reaction to patriarchal oppression.

Another problem that worsens the relationship between Radha and Shyam is that even after four years of their marriage there is no child in the house. Shyam, is suspicious that Radha is deliberately preventing conception. She says she is not on contraceptive pills. But Shyam is not happy. He secretly keeps record of her menstrual periods. When Radha finds it out she is very much annoyed. Shyam's sister, Rani Oppal advises Shyam to consult a specialist. When Radha knows the reason why Shyam keeps record of her periods, she tells him bluntly (Nair, 2005):

I was pregnant once. So it isn't that I can't conceive.  
Perhaps you need to find out if you can father a  
child (257).

It is interesting to note that in the Indian family, if a woman does not give birth to a child, she is blamed and even divorced. But, the husband is never blamed or examined for fertility. In modern times, there is a medical device of fertility test, but in olden days women's life was made miserable for no fault of theirs. Shyam, here, is quite oblivious that there could be some problem with himself. He is very confident that there is nothing wrong with him, that he is a man enough to help pregnancy. Radha's blunt admission that she was pregnant once is a furious reaction to Shyam's keeping record of her menstrual periods. She is a revolutionary woman in the sense that she is not afraid of her affair and pregnancy before her marriage with Shyam. She is motivated in this by her desire to demolish Shyam's pride of being a man.

Shyam's meeting with the fertility expert reveals that he is the one who lacks sperm count to father a child. Radha feels more and more estranged from Shyam.

#### IV.5 Maya and Koman, Platonic Love-Relationship:

Anita Nair has portrayed different types of female characters in her fiction. The sixteen year old Saadiya is intensely religious, but also steadfast in her love, though she discovers that her 'Malik' is actually a Hindu 'Sethu'. Radha, a new woman, has no moral qualms about her relationship with a married man, or an extra-marital love affair with a foreigner. Maya, the friend and admirer of Koman, is a married woman. Maya is married, but she does not feel guilty of her relationship with Koman. Koman takes her to the marriage pandals at the temple of Guruvayur, where couples get married with a simple ritual of exchanging of garlands. On an impulse, Koman asks Maya if she wants to get married. Maya refuses at first, but when Koman points out no one there would know that she is already married, she likes the idea. It is a simple ceremony of exchanging garlands before god. Koman, who had never thought of marriage seriously, tells her how, at this stage, he feels his age. He would like to belong to someone. He says (Nair, 2005):

I want to know that someone else has a stake in my life and well-being. For the first time I was beginning to feel lonely (257).

Koman is drawn towards Maya because he suddenly realizes that his art does not need him being advanced in his age: He needs Maya as he fears being lonely.

Maya is not troubled by the question of morality when she, without any moral qualms comes to meet Koman and lives with him as if in a conjugal relationship. Maya is drawn towards Koman as she is the admirer of his art. Koman, earlier, when he accepted Angela as his student developed relationship with her, and went to London with her, with a hope to find scope and disciples for his Kathakali art form. But he is very soon disillusioned and comes back to India. This is not so with Maya. He knows Maya is married, yet he depends on her for psychological support. Maya realizes that Koman feels lonely at the stage of his life when his art cannot need him. Theirs is a platonic relationship.

Maya is a married woman, but she has a crush on Koman and she really appreciates him as a great Kathakali dance artist. She tells Koman that she needs to be with him. And Koman himself has been in love with Maya for ten years. But he also knows there is nothing definite about his relationship with Maya. Theirs is more a platonic kind of relationship. Koman draws great comfort in her company, and Maya also shares this feeling with him. Koman asks Maya what held her back in their relationship. Maya has children, and this may be her reason holding her back. But she also wonders why she couldn't be more kind to herself (Nair, 2005, 218). Koman makes her an offer that they can still be together. But Maya chose to continue the way they were, to keep their relationship from being dull. Between Maya and Koman there is no room for pretensions. Koman freely talks to her about his past relationship with Lalitha. Their informal marriage in the temple is for the sake of Koman's feeling of loneliness, as he feels his age and would like to belong to someone like Maya; that someone has a stake in his life. The marriage was not going to be registered, so there would not be any legal problem for Maya.

#### **IV.6 Radha: Resolution of Her Emotional Crisis**

Anita Nair has divided her novel into nine 'Rasas', (the emotional states). The 'Sringaaram or 'love' rasa' is manifested by Radha's desire for Chris, whose bodily strength, long fingers, his unhurried smile and natural indolence, the softness of his mouth appeal to Radha and create desire in her mind. Compared to this, she feels contempt for Shyam, and derides his tastes and opinions, which reflects the 'Haasyam rasa'. When Radha falls in love with Chris, she becomes aware of her adulterous, sinful desire, and feels remorse for it, leading to the 'Karunam rasa'. When Radha comes back home after meeting Chris, and shows reluctance to Shyam's desire for sex, he is furious, and rapes her; which is the 'Raudra rasa'. Shyam's rough behaviour angers Radha. She is furious, and feels passion for Chris, and rebelliously forms alliance with Chris in defiance of Shyam, which is the manifestation of 'Veer rasa'. The 'Bhayanak rasa' is manifested when Shyam discovers Radha's adulterous relationship with Chris. He saw Chris and Radha being

driven in a car by the driver, Shashi. It was a horrible feeling for Shyam that his wife Radha was cheating on him. 'Beebhatsa-Rasam' is the feeling of disgust or abhorrence one feels. It is a feeling of revulsion. The 'Adbhut Rasa' is the feeling of wonder. Radha wonders about who her father really is and so does Chris. Radha thinks her mother 'Gowri' had an affair with Uncle Mani, but Uncle Koman says that Gowri, Radha's mother, had an abortion, and later she became pregnant. He tells Radha, how her father, Babu, loved her even before she was born. Finally, the 'Shantam Rasa' shows discipline of mind, the detachment and an absence of desire. It signifies coming to terms with life. This is what Radha does finally, realizing her mistakes. She feels calm, saying (Nair, 2005):

All the passions I burnt with, the contempt I felt for my life, all the sorrow I knew for chances wasted, the anger I felt at being trapped in an existence so stifling, the fear of what lay ahead, the disgust I felt for myself, the yearning, the deceiving, the worrying, the aching, the whirling, twisting chaos has settled into this quietness that floods me (397).

She remembers looking at Shyam 'A broken man, hurt and humiliated', and she confesses to herself that she was responsible for causing such anguish to him. She is horrified at her own callousness. She robbed him of his pride. She also realizes how 'adultery's beast of lust--- (Nair, 2005)

--- stretched its claws, ran a pointed rosy tongue over its lips and draped itself on a vantage spot. When lust pounced on you, it tore away every ligament of restraint away (398).

and finally realizes that her attraction for Chris was merely physical (Nair, 2005),

A funneling need that had exploded into unbridled passion. That was all it was. And as is the nature of

such things, it died as it was born. Abruptly (399-400).

This is how her affair with Chris ends. Though Radha feels torn between two men, she finally realizes that her attraction for Chris was nothing more than an act of defiance for her, and for Chris it was just an interesting encounter. Radha, sitting in a rocking chair, thinks about her past, her wayward decisions and realizes (Nair, 2005):

All my life I have stumbled from one thing to another, persuading myself that this is how I should be. I have never made a decision. I have let myself be swept along. Isn't it time I assumed some responsibility for my life? (402).

Even in this pensive mood, Radha would like to lean back against a shoulder to be comforted, and she thinks of Shyam. But she is undecided because she is doubtful if she can play wife any more. She is undivided about what she would do, but she has her child now.

## IV.7 Conclusions:

In the delineation of the characters of Saadiya and Radha, Anita Nair tries to bring out the aspects of patriarchal domination. In the story of Saadiya, it is quite overt in the sense that her father very plainly admits that he should not have given freedom to Saadiya. He says (Nair, 2005):

It is a lesson for you as much as it is for me, that it is unwise to give girls even a little rope. That it isn't in women to understand the nuances of freedom. Hence forth, these welts on your calf will help you remember your place (130).

Here the Kazi does not mince his words when he underlines his opinion that woman should not be given freedom, that woman does not deserve it at all.

In Radha's story also patriarchal domination is quite revealing in Shyam's attitude towards Radha. He asserts his right over her as a husband to have sex with her. He does not allow Radha to interfere with his business. He keeps record even of her periods. He would not allow her to use his vehicles to go anywhere because he suspects that she goes to meet Chris. Anita Nair has portrayed in her novels women who silently suffer patriarchal oppression, and also the women who rebel against it. Saadiya and Radha rebel against it in their own way. Saadiya rebels against her father and also against the husband, who would not allow her son to be brought up the way she likes. And Radha also rebels against patriarchy following her own will, flouting the moral and social norms of patriarchy.

In Saadiya's case patriarchy ruthlessly controls her life disallowing a freedom of choice to her. And when she makes her choice stubbornly, she is banished from the house. Her transgression, in fact, is the result of her ignorance of the world outside her ghettoed, and cloistered life. For her, Sethu was Hamid, a Muslim hero of her imagination, because she had no idea that there can be young men of other religions around. The ruthless patriarchal society keeping women ignorant and helpless, entirely dependent on the male-members of the family, is responsible for the tragic end of Saadiya. Radha, on

the other hand, belongs to the affluent society. She is educated and is quite aware of her own desires. Even then, once in a marital bond, she is expected to be controlled by her husband's desire in social sphere as well as in her physical relationship with him. She chafes against it, and when, as a reaction, she tries to have extra-marital alliance, she has to be secretive about it. Her marital bond requires her to be the obedient wife, and follow the husband's wishes. Thus, both Saadiya and Radha are controlled in their marital life by the stringent patriarchal tradition and taboos. What is freedom for Saadiya and Radha, is a transgression for the patriarchal family, and, therefore, punishable.

Saadiya's action to exercise her freedom finally leads to suicide, to end her life as there is no going back for her and she would not make any compromise with her faith. Similarly, Radha's transgression lands, her back into the traditional patriarchal relationship, and as she tries to transgress it again, she is on the brink of disrupting the marital bond and live alone. Her quest for freedom ends in the feeling of remorse for her actions, and she questions herself if God (Nair, 2005),

Punishes us for our sins or does he leave it to us to  
punish ourselves (426).

Whatever be the answer to this question, she feels she is undergoing punishment for her action. Radha faces the same question that Akhila does in Nair's novel *Ladies' Coupe*, 'Can a woman live alone?' and be happy. Radha decides to be the mistress of herself and bring up her child. In this novel, Anita Nair has dealt with extra-marital affairs, beginning with Sethu and Devayani, Koman and Angela and finally Radha and Chris. Radha, here, is the strongest character, who tries to liberate herself from the restrictions of marital life. Her marriage is, of course, a marriage of convenience. Though she breaks her relationship with Chris, she is going to be the mother of his child. She appears to find her identity through being a mother.

In Anita Nair's *Mistress*, the female protagonists of the stories, Radha, Saadiya and even Maya are shown to be the rebels against patriarchal domination. They appear to challenge the age-old norms of the patriarchal conventions and moral dictum, which is only against women. These are

emancipated women, who assert their freedom and challenge male-oriented morality and hegemony. These female protagonists have a conviction of what they need in life. Saadiya rebels and marries her 'Hamid', but when she realizes her mistake, she makes a supreme sacrifice. Radha finally decides to bring up her child on her own without being dependent on Shyam or Chris. Maya agrees to perform a simple marriage ceremony with Koman just to make him happy, though she is married. These women are dynamic personalities, the new women, who are aware of their 'self', their individual.

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## **Chapter – V**

### **From Bondage to Emancipation: *Lessons in Forgetting and Short Fiction***

**V.0 Introduction**

**V.1 Kala: Victim of Patriarchy**

**V.2 Smriti's Battle Against Female Foeticide**

**V.3 Anita Nair's Short Fiction: A Feminist Perception**

## Chapter V

### From Bondage to Emancipation: *Lessons In Forgetting and Short Fiction.*

#### V.1 Introduction:

Anita Nair's *Lessons in forgetting* (2010) explores marital relationships in the high-middle-class family along with the problem of parenthood in the context of family life in the corporate world. Educated women in India try to assert their individuality, though they are constrained in their family life by the traditional patriarchal culture. They are also constrained in their quest for freedom when there are children to look after, since they think that children are their responsibility. Meera, in this novel, is a well-educated housewife, married to a corporate husband and has two children, a daughter and a son. Meera is the writer of cook book and guides for corporate wives. She is also a typical Indian middle class wife, who is happy to be dependent on her husband. Evelyn Shyndya (2012) aptly defines Indian womanhood as she says:

Women in India who feel proud that they are well protected by their husbands without realizing that they are making themselves helpless.

Meera feels like a queen in her domestic world. She is blissfully unaware of her own individuality, her selfhood, her own independent world. She is married to Giri, who hails from a comparatively poor social background. Giri was enchanted with the Lilac House, the garden around, and Meera in her white nightie chasing the geese away. He came as a model coordinator to assist shooting for a film, and was enchanted by the house as well as the girl, Meera. Giri was impressed as he had never known the high- middle-class culture the ladies and their house presented. He hailed from a poor family, but he had done his IIM in Ahmedabad and secured a job in the corporate world. Giri married Meera under the impression that the family owned the beautiful Lilac House, which, in fact, was only on a lease with them.

After the marriage, Meera's grandmother and mother, even Meera, expected Giri to move to his house, his apartment. But Giri refuses to move out of the Lilac House. He persists in his wrong idea that Meera owns the Lilac House, and Meera fails to tell him it is not. Like Zeus, the king of Greek gods, Giri is unfaithful to his Meera-Hera. Giri desperately wants to sell the Lilac House, and Meera keeps opposing it, but she does not tell him the truth that the house is on a lease with them.

Meera does not have big dreams. She would not crave for designer clothes or ornaments and expensive holidays. She is happy with 'the enough' she gets. But, she realizes very painfully that her husband is not satisfied with 'enough'. And one day Giri vanishes from her life, leaving her with her children. Meera feels the sorrow and pain of being betrayed. When she suspected Giri of having an affair, she tried to console herself thinking that Giri (Nair, 2010) ---

---isn't a compulsive philanderer, merely a middle-aged man who has his head turned (39).

She thinks he would come back. But she is disenchanted when Giri comes to see her finally and refuses to see her at home saying (Nair, 2010):

Not with those old bats listening to every word and interfering (74).

Meera is taken aback at this expression of hatred. Even her daughter, Nayantara, turns against her. Her life, so far, was like air-conditioned room, but it suddenly was open to scorching heat. Meera is responsible for her family, her children as well as her mother and grandmother. Meera was entirely dependent on Giri, psychologically as well as in the management of the house. She was so dependent on Giri managing the household that she now feels helpless. In fact, she is well-qualified with a post-graduate degree in English. She had never tried to realize her potential. In the words of Ajanta Partha Sarthy:

The soft and cozy shell of matrimony which most Indian women snugly fit can break any day and leave the couple exposed to horror and trauma (127).

Here, it is Meera alone who is paralysed as she worries about how to face this new responsibility of the household. Indian women, who take the security of their married life as granted have to face this traumatic experience of the dissolution of their marriage. They are not mentally prepared for this experience. She used to go to parties because Giri liked it as it gave him a chance to mix with the social elites in such parties. While with Giri, she had to think of her appearance, of her physique, to look well among the women who thronged the parties. She is now at a loss to know how to react to the rejection, being abandoned by Giri. She does not know how to face this situation, in practical life (Nair, 2010).

She wants to pull the quilt over her head and burrow herself in a warm, dark place where nothing will change and all is safe and restful (99).

Meera is really an outstanding and self-sacrificing wife, as well as an excellent mother. But she is not careful about her looks, as she does not make extra efforts to look beautiful. When Giri suddenly left her, she became aware of the change in her. Meera's love left her, but she had to look after her family. Like Hera, the Greek goddess, she too was betrayed by her husband. Meera's marriage ends with Giri abandoning her. She had to economize on everything, telephoning, newspapers and magazines, lights and fans. The leftovers were to be reheated, and her face wore stern expression. Lily advises Meera to take care of herself, take her own decisions. Meera was disturbed by the tall trees in the garden. She could not get them trimmed because Giri wouldn't like it. But, when there is no Giri, any more she can do as she pleases. Lily tells her (Nair, 2010):

If they bother you so much chop them down (269).

Meera does not know how to react to her situation. She had never thought of her own desires, except for becoming a perfect housewife for Giri. In personal relationships, as Bhaskar A. Shukla says (2010);

--- there are three fundamental “affects” that can exist between the self and the other attachment, frustration and rejection.

Meera’s life is affected by all these factors which came in the way of her self-realization. She became so much emotionally dependent on Giri, that her own self was almost forgotten. She lost her self-identity becoming dependent on Giri and ignoring her own likes and dislikes, as a dutiful wife. Being a post-graduate in English she could easily have carved a career for herself. Now, with Giri abandoning her, she becomes aware of herself and becomes a changed woman. Her mother and grandmother notice this (Nair, 2010).

They looked at each other, Lily and Saro. This was a Meera they didn’t recognize. A Meera with home economies. A button a call. The pink papers and news magazines cancelled. No more half loads in washing machine. Lights and fans switched off when not needed. Reheated leftovers. And a measuring spoon that didn’t brim anymore. But they said nothing. The stern cast of her face alarmed them more than Meera realized (84).

In the beauty parlour, Meera asked the woman to cut her hair short. When Giri went out of her life, she wanted to become a new woman. She went to a party without a companion. When her friend, Vinnie, asks her if she could have taken a companion, she tells her plainly (Nair, 2010),

No, there isn’t anyone I want to bring with me (183).

Meera tells Vinnie that she badly needs a job. She now realizes how things changed between Giri and herself. She was averse to change. Giri once accused her about the perfume saying (Nair, 2010):

The problem with you, Meera, is that you want everything to stay as it is. You have to allow room for change, for me to change. I find it boring. Old fashioned with no zest at all (106).

But this was not the only point of difference between them. Giri wanted to sell the house which he thought to be the property in the name of Meera. He is angry when Meera refuses it, but she is unable to tell him that the house is only on a lease of ninety nine years and cannot be sold. She is afraid that Giri wanted to marry her because of the house and he would not have married her if she had told him the truth. She says (Nair, 2010):

It wasn't that I chose willfully to hide it from him. At first when I brought it up, he didn't want to know. He kept shushing me. Then later, I was much too scared. I knew that we came together as a package, the house and I (111).

Meera now realizes that Giri's choice to marry her was dictated by the prospect of selling this beautiful house, and not really the love for her. She now emerges as a new woman. When Giri abandons her, she has to become the bread-winner for the family. She finds a job as a research assistant to Professor J.A. Krishnamurthy, or Jak, the cyclone expert, who comes to Manjikapuram. He has really come to find out why his daughter, Smriti, had come here, and what really happened to her.

Meera has gone through an identity crisis in her marriage with Giri. She is basically conservative in the sense that she cannot enjoy the party culture of the high-middle-class society. She tries to become a corporate wife merging herself into the life of her husband. But, when Giri leaves her abruptly, she is at a loss to know what to do with herself. There is deep crisis in her life, as she had merged her identity into her married life. Giri banked

upon selling her bungalow, which he thought she owned. And when he realized she would not sell it, he abandoned her. Meera had compared herself with Hera, the spouse of Greek god Zeus, and her Zeus was Giri, who finally deserted her. So far Meera had seen herself as the corporate wife, and willy-nilly she had tried to merge herself into the corporate life. Meera, in her life, performed the role of a daughter, a wife and a mother, the roles imposed on her by the circumstances, and never thought of her own individuality, her own self. Like the Greek goddess Hera, she controlled the rebellious multi-headed Hydra in her mind, which wanted her to do something for herself. But she had deliberately shut this rebellious thought and fully submitted herself to being a housewife Giri wanted her to be. When Giri abandoned her, Meera had to take up the role of a bread-winner for her family and take care of the members of the family. Meera, at first, feels emotionally paralyzed and cannot realize her own strength, because she, until now, has been fully dependent on her husband, and trusted her husband fully to look after her well-being, feeling happy in this dependence. She is well qualified, having a post-graduate degree in English, but she was happy to be a corporate wife, looking after her children, and occasionally going to parties. She had virtually merged her 'self' in her family. To begin with, she feels emotional trauma when Giri suddenly leaves her and cuts himself off from her and the children. Her cosy family life is shattered by his selfish action. She is emotionally paralysed. All the while she had deceived herself that Giri would always be there for her and children. Meera had cast herself in the role of a corporate wife though she did not like it. She tries to maintain her physique because Giri wants her to look like those elegant party women. Meera's self is threatened by the attachment she has for Giri and other members in the family. She is frustrated when Giri rejects her. Her attachments were the barriers for the realization of her self-hood. She is emotionally unsettled by the feeling of grief, sense of betrayal, anger and fear of how to cope with the responsibility. Her first reaction to her tragedy is to go home, lie down and pull the quilt over her head. But, she realizes that she has to take up the responsibility of her family. She must face this adversity boldly. Meera emerges as a new woman as her marriage is

splintered on the rock of the infidelity of her husband. As already quoted, according to Bhaskar A. Shukla, Meera has gone through the stages of attachment, and frustration and now experiences rejection from Giri, who turns out to be a selfish and self-serving husband.

Meera feels all these affects which hinder her discovery of her own self. She was so much swallowed in her life as a corporate wife that she found it difficult to realize her own self, her individuality. She must now shoulder the responsibility of her mother, grandmother and her children. Moreover, she is at a loss to know how to react to this abrupt desertion of Giri, leaving her to fend for her family, her children. She (Nair, 2010) ---

Gropes within herself, searching for some clue that will tell her how to react. Grief. Betrayal. Anger. Fear. Loss. Resentment. Hatred. What is she to feel? (73).

She, for the first time, realizes that she has to look after her family, that she has to be strong and not reveal her state of mind to the members of the family and must acquire empowerment to sustain it. How is she supposed to do it? Meera took up the challenge. She started economizing on everything. Her mother and grandmother also realize this. They started forsaking the facilities they were enjoying. Lily, for instance, said (Nair, 2010):

I don't need a cell phone, Meera. Anyone who wants to reach me can call here. It is too much of a nuisance really! All kinds of strangers calling at strange hours, wanting to sell you things you don't need (84).

And Saro was prepared to share a bottle of marmalade with others, instead of having one only for herself. Her publisher, who, otherwise never tried of singing her praises as a, his best-selling cookbook writer. But now he says he is not sure he would be able to publish her new book. He, in fact, complaining that her second book *The CEO Lunch*, has not sold well. He has come to know that Giri has abandoned Meera, and this has changed his manner of

talking to her. She repeated that she did not make the publisher sign a contract for two books. Now, all she can do is to reduce expenses.

Meera decides not to get disheartened by such experiences. A thought occurs to her (Nair, 2010):

if you love your life, you are lovable. If you hate  
your life, you become hate worthy (82).

She decides to put aside cursing her life and her predicaments and decides to face life with love. She takes up a job of a research assistant with Prof. JAK, who is a cyclone expert. This would enable her to cater to the needs of her family. She starts reducing the family expenses.

Apart from such severe economizing, Meera also transforms herself, with short hair-cut and wearing starched cotton saree. She tells the woman at the saloon to give her a new short hair style. She transformed herself into a new woman. Meera realizes what it means to be a single woman, a woman forsaken by her husband. Alone at the party, she is asked by Vinnie if she could have brought a man with her, and she tells her, 'No, there isn't anyone I want to bring with me.' (Nair, 2010, 183) She is, however, often afraid of giving way to Soman turning against herself. At a weak moment, she does allow Soman the physical pleasures, but feels guilty about it for cheating her own self. She curses herself at such weak moments, and says (Nair, 2010):

This is the false Meera. Like there once was the false  
Hera. I am the false Hera. None of this is really  
happening to me. It is happening to another woman,  
the woman he thinks I am. What, whether she was  
Hera or Meera, could remain unmoved when a mouth  
trailed a line of wet kisses down her spine? (221).

Meera transforms herself from being this weak woman and becomes an enlightened self. Her decision to accept the job as a research assistant of Prof. Jak, in his studies and household responsibilities gives her confidence. She loves her job and also the companionship of Jak, and his comatose daughter Smriti as well as Kala Chithi, the housekeeper. Now, as a secretary

to Jak, Meera decides to be on her guard about how far she can go in her relationship with Jak and his household (Nair, 2010).

She will be there for him, Meera decides. But to keep herself alive, she will need to dredge all the selfishness that lies deep within her. That she also will ensure that Jak does not swallow her up, as once Giri did. So Meera does what she can. She rests her head against his arm. This is all she has to offer for now. Perhaps one day there will be more. And a thereafter (326).

Meera has now become a cautious woman. Betrayal of Giri has also empowered her in the sense that she has become emotionally independent and also economically responsible for herself and her family. She is on her guard in her relationship of Prof. Jak, though she knows that he is a good man and needs emotional support in the case of the tragic state of his daughter. She lends him emotional support. This is new Meera rendered wiser and empowered by the betrayal of her husband. She becomes aware that the failure of her marriage and her sense of desolation should not come in the way of her responsibility towards her family. Meera is an example of a new woman, the result of the growth of educational and employment opportunities. She is also the emancipated woman, who has grown beyond social, economic and emotional dependence on a patriarch, a traditional husband. Initially, Meera felt suddenly helpless, especially when even her daughter, Nayantara, accused her by taking side of her father. But, Meera rises to face the problem after the initial trauma. She is an educated middle-class woman in an urban area, who can avail of employment opportunities and can be self-dependent. As Meera Shirwadkar rightly says (1979):

As women received education, they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male dominated ideas

of morality and behavior problems at home and at place of work in our society- all come up in a welter of projection (8).

Meera, who has a post-graduate degree to her credit, can now realize her potential, and launch herself as a career woman, shaking off the trauma she felt as a housewife. Anita Nair has used the myth of Hera and Zeus to describe the relationship between Meera and Giri. Like mythical Hera (the Greek goddess), Meera too was dependent and afraid of Giri, the Zeus in her life. Now, on her own, she is no longer Hera under the power of her Zeus. She realizes how her life as a housewife had deprived her of her identity and made her subservient in every way, and the kind of life she lived with Giri could hardly do justice to her abilities and also her needs. She now learns a lesson not to be emotionally swallowed by anyone. She discovers love again in Jak, the love born of the sympathy she feels for him the tragic state of his daughter. She is there for him, lending her support to him, in his intense sorrow.

## **V.2 Kala: Victim of Patriarchal:**

In the patriarchal set-up, whatever happens in the man-woman relationship, it is the woman who is universally blamed. When Sarada's husband leaves her to become a 'Sanyasi', her father blames her. Kala, Sarada's sister, is also the victim of the patriarchal attitudes. Her husband is enamored of her long hair which reaches down to her ankles. Kala knows that she must keep her husband happy. And her husband is happy with her long hair. Her father also did not allow her to cut her hair short. But her voluminous hair was the cause of her neck pain. Even the doctor often advised her father to make her hair short, but her father thought her long hair was her asset in the marriage market. Kala often complained to her mother for the pain her hair caused her. She often fell ill on account of it. She angrily said to her mother (Nair, 2010):

What am I to do then? Live with this pain till I die?  
(194).

But, her mother would not listen to her complaint, she would say (Nair, 2010):

Besides, there is much greater pain waiting for us women in our lives. How can you be cowed down by something so negligible? (194).

According to Kala's mother every woman has to undergo some sort of plight and pains in the life. It can be 'a warning to her about her forthcoming marriage.' Her prospective groom and his family were impressed by her long hair. Kala, when she got married to Ambi, was named as Vaidehi (one of the names of Sita), and she was supposed to be the ideal wife. Her autocratic husband ordered her not to touch (in the sense of cut) her hair without his permission. This is typical patriarchal attitude that dictates a woman what to wear, where to go, and whom to befriend. Taking care of her hair was a big job for all the members of the family. Kala had to suffer headache constantly, but even after the doctor's advice her husband would not allow her to cut her hair short. Her husband would not bother about her headache. It was Kitcha, the boy, who advised her to cut her hair to find relief from her headache. Kala cut her hair short, but when Ambi, her husband, came home, he was mad at her, that she betrayed him. Ambi did not speak to Kala for eighteen months as a punishment, though he ate and slept with her. He ignored his duties as a husband. Marriage makes husband and wife as one unit, a couple. A woman's existence is incorporated in man's existence. She is, therefore, not an equal of man, in practice, she is believed to be inferior to him. Even her mother-in-law was angry with her. As a result of Kala's action to cut her hair, and her remaining childless even after seven years of married life, Kala's husband decides to marry again. This is another patriarchal trait. If a marriage is childless, the blame lies with the woman. Kala decided to leave her husband, because in a patriarchal society the childless woman has no say, and when her husband remarries, her life becomes unbearable and she has to leave. Kala decided to leave her husband, cut her hair short up to the neck, plaited her hair with jasmine and other flowers and left her house to live her own life. She was not willing to share her life with another woman. Kala goes back to her parents' house, cutting her hair short, and ready to face her life

sans husband. As a wife of Ambi, she had suffered willingly the burden of her hair, but she could not accept another woman in her house. She decides to leave her husband and defies her tyrannical behaviour. She sets an example for modern women by asserting her individuality.

Life of a girl is controlled by many inhibitions and do's and don'ts when she is married, her personality, her own self is thwarted by the demands of the husband and his family. Kala did not have a child even after eight years of marriage, for which again she is blamed. A husband is not blamed for a childless marriage. In a patriarchal Indian society a woman is to carry the burden of any failure. Kala, after the abandonment by her husband, becomes an independent, strong woman, and is able to think of her own life. She would be different from her mother who was self-sacrificing obeying her husband's wishes for the whole life. She tells her father in plain words (Nair, 2010):

I am going back. And I will never grow my hair again--- If you force me to, I will leave home, I will be a whore but I won't be a wife. And don't call me Vaidehi ever again. I am Kala, do you hear me?  
(206).

Jak feels very sorry, because he was partly responsible for Kala's broken marriage. But, Kala tells him no one is responsible for what happens to anyone, that one must accept it. J.A.Krishnamurthy's mother, Sarada Ammal, is another example of a woman asserting herself. She was, in fact, the perfect wife carrying out her duties, observing rituals meticulously, performing Puja and even played the Veena on the Puja day. She accepted her home religiously playing the part of an obedient wife. But even such a traditional religious and docile wife faces the abandonment by her husband. He leaves her because he wants to become a 'Sanyasi'. He had married as his father wanted him to produce children (male) and continue the family line. Sarada Ammal sets an example for abandoned women. She marries a physics teacher from Hyderabad and migrates with him to Tanzania, and starts a new life. This is what Anjana does in *The Better Man*. Even Akhila, Sheela and Marikolanthu are the examples of empowered women. Though

disillusioned in their marriage, they start a new life confidently. They are the example of the emergence of new womanhood in the post-independent India.

Meera and Kala also go through the same situation. Kala and Meera, face the same fate in their marital life. Kala shows the strength of her mind when she decides to leave her husband and lead independent life. Meera takes time to come to terms with her new responsibility. Her grandmother, Lily, is comparatively a strong character, when Saro, (Lily's daughter and Meera's mother) dies, Lily feels lonely, and decides to take part in TV series. She is quite determined about it. She has her own views, and as an actress, she can still work. Her age is no barrier for it, because she is an old national award winning actress. She tells Meera in plain words (Nair, 2010),

I am not asking you for permission I am informing  
you of my decision (273).

Lily advises Meera not to be despondent, take her own decision and start her life newly. Meera's mother, Saro was also a strong personality. Saro, at the swimming pool, scolds the children splashing water in the swimming pool, Giri challenges her to show how to swim. Saro hates water for some reason, but she shows how she is an excellent swimmer. Lily tells Meera (Nair, 2010),

The first thing you do is to be honest with yourself.  
Meera, listen to me, all of us need our dreams  
(275).

Meera is comparatively weak. Once she expresses her wish to pursue her research work. But, Giri would not allow her, saying, "the children need you, I need you. Isn't that more important?" (Nair, 2010, 276). Meera is not strong-minded enough to insist on what she wants to do. She succumbs to Giri's wishes. Meera and Kala both were, thus, thwarted in their life by their husbands. Meera's friend, Vinnie, on the other hand, is bold enough to lead her life independently, leading 'a dual life of wife and mistress' (Nair, 2010, 168). Vinnie supports Meera and tells her that she has her own life and needs. And Meera also admits to her, saying (Nair, 2010):

But it would be nice to be seen as a woman. I get lonely too, Vinnie. But no one likes me to admit it. Neither my children, nor my mother or grandmother. It is as if the woman in me had to die when Giri left (171).

Vinnie's thinking is different. When Meera says she is not 'that' sort of a woman, Vinnie counters saying (Nair, 2010):

We don't, Meera. Not even I. I know you think I switch lovers like I change the chopsticks in my top knot. But I am not available. You know what we are? Vulnerable! (173).

Meera had not paid attention to herself, without changing anything because she wanted to keep everything as Giri wanted it. Now, Meera tells her beautician to give her a new look, a new hair style, trimming her hair. Meera gradually acquires confidence, when she takes up a job with Prof. Jack. She has a liaison with Soman, but she is not sure about him, because he has yet to know the truth about her as a forsaken woman. She is mentally not prepared for such rejection. She would not like to get involved with him, and cancels the lunch-date with him. He, however, turns up at her house. Meera does not feel guilt about her relation with Soman as Giri has left her.

Meera gives emotional support to Jak in his investigation about Smriti. She goes to Manjkapuram with him. Jak is emotionally shattered as he listens to Chinnathayi and the way Smirti was involved in the illicit medical practices of Dr. Srinivasan. Meera decides to be with Prof. Jak to console him. But Meera is no more a sentimental Meera. She feels sympathy for Jak, but she would not be swallowed by love for him, as Giri swallowed her up. Meera realizes how she and Jak share (Nair, 2010):

The very nature of their slaking of need: two desperate people clinging to each other. Is that all we will ever have? Will it ever become something

else? A more enduring bond. A more sustaining love (325).

But, all that Meera does is to rest her head against his arm. Though she cannot give him the assurance he needs, she would gradually reassure him of her love. Her children, however, foresee what would happen. A new Meera emerges from her lessons in forgetting her past and ready to embrace her future.

Anita Nair has focused in this novel the attitude of the male protagonists like Giri, who think of pinning down women to the household duties and never allow them to achieve independent entity. They would like to acquire the right to the property of their spouse just because they are the head of the family, thinking as if the women have no right to hold property. Anita Nair shows how husbands like Giri can be selfish and overbearing in their attitude. Giri would not allow Meera to take up a career in teaching. He would not like her to be self-dependent. She must look after children, the household, which is typical patriarchal attitude, which gives husband the position of the head of the family, though the wife is equally capable of earning livelihood. Even JAK's father was irresponsible and merciless in his act of forsaking his wife and son because he got married against his own will, obeying the father. JAK's, father left the wife and child. His father, Appa, never wanted to have a family life, the Griheshthashrama. But, as his parents insist on having a heir to continue the family line, he agrees to marry, and after the son is born, he forsake his wife and son, who is then fourteen year old. JAK's mother remarries and migrates to Tanzania with her new husband, a physics teacher. JAK goes to US for studies after his mother's death, and becomes a cyclone expert. His wife, Nina, divorces him as he is too much preoccupied with his work. It can be seen how the married life of Meera and JAK, both, results into a failure affecting their children adversely.

### **V.3 Smriti's Battle against Female Foeticide:**

Anita Nair also brings up in this novel the issue of female foeticide. Smirti, the daughter of Prof. Jak, would like to do something for her country,

India. She is the feminist at heart, and believes that women should fearlessly express themselves and fight wrong practices going on in the country, especially the gender bias in India. She is aware of the clandestine practice in the medical profession to abort or terminate female foetus in the womb of the mother itself. Some doctors secretly carry out ultrasound scans to determine if the foetus is a boy or a girl, and if it is a girl, the doctor, with the complicity of the parents, particularly the father, undertakes to kill the female foetus aborting it; which is a rampant illegal practice in India. Smriti, who is working for Shakti Forum, wants to be of use to the women there. She tells Rishi (Nair, 2010):

What is needed is awareness. To make the women realize that the girl foetus has to be given a chance. That they can find joy in their daughter too. It's going to be hard work, thankless too (285).

Smriti has come to Manjikapuram for this very purpose. But, Rishi has other plan in his mind. He has brought Smriti there to leave her there and go away alone. He wanted to tell Smriti about this, but Smriti, at the sea-shore jumps and gets hurt landing on the broken glass pieces. Rishi and Smriti go to the nursing home where they notice a large crowd. Smriti meets with a woman there, whose daughter has already two daughters and is pregnant for the third time. Her husband would not like third girl child. Smriti comes to know from the woman that the scan doctor tells the sex of the baby. The pregnant women have come there from different places because the doctor ascertains the sex of the foetus, and if it is a girl, it is aborted by the doctor at sizeable fees. Men there do not want a girl child, as girls mean huge marriage expenses. The opinion of women is not at all taken into account. The abortion might result into the death of the woman. The men there threatened Rishi, when they came to know what Smriti was doing. They told him to take Smriti away because she was interfering with the work of the doctor. Rishi was afraid of leaving Smirti there alone. Smriti would not listen to Rishi or any one in matters like these. Jak knows (Nair, 2010):

She was never good at giving up on things or people. And she was a great one for causes (296).

She would not listen to Rishi, who knows she is in danger. He decides to stay with her. Rishi tries to warn her, but Smriti would not listen to reason. She is not allowed to enter the hospital to get the proof of what is being done about the pregnant women admitted there. But, she stops outside and records how many pregnant women are there. Rishi does not want to get involved in the affair. He is the one living in a make-believe world, and hardly knows how to face reality. Smriti does not give up her cause. She meets Chinnathayi, whose daughter died in the hospital during the abortion. Chinnathayi's daughter died when she was being operated for abortion. Smriti collected documents from Chinnathayi, and told Rishi to do packing as soon as she got necessary proof. But Rishi was attacked at the room by three men. He left the place without meeting Smriti. He does not have an idea what happened afterwards. Jak and Meera come to know about it when they meet Chinnathayi at Manjikapuram: Smriti had planned a meeting with Chinnathayi secretly. But, her granddaughter Kanaka, talks about it to others. Chinnathayi was ready to talk to Smriti about her daughter's death. When she learnt that her granddaughter had revealed this news to Dr. Srinivasan's men. Chinnathayi pleads with Srinivasan not to hurt Smriti. But, when she goes to the sea-shore to meet Smriti, she finds there Smriti and three men. Smriti is sexually assaulted by those three men, and she is terribly wounded. Two days ago she had sent a photograph to Jak saying that she and her four team members were going to Manjikapuram to campaign for 'Save the Girl child programme' as she came to know about the racket there of aborting a female foetus. Rishi tried to tell her about how the situation in the village was dangerous, but Smriti would not listen to him. She told him (Nair, 2010):

I can't be like you, I can't see and pretend that I haven't seen (295).

Rishi tried to tell her about the risks involved, that India is not America, how the people there are dangerous. But Smriti would not listen to him and instead, asked him to leave the place. Her plan was to prepare a report with

the help of Chinnathayi. Rishi was then attacked and was to be hospitalized. Rishi did not know what happened with Smriti. But Chinnathayi tells Jak and Meera what happened. Smriti was attacked by four ruffians, the henchmen of Srinivasan, who were more animals than human beings. Chinnathayi was horrified and mutely watched what they did to Smriti. Those three beasts tortured Smriti. At last (Nair, 2010) ---

Panting. Heaving. Sobbing. Seeking to escape. The booming treacherous sea waited, but nothing was better than what these predatory beasts could do to her. And then the monster king of the rubbish--- the giant twisted log that lay on its side, then rose with the wave and came to slam against her head (318).

Smriti became victim of the doctors and the father who villainously practiced female foeticide. There are a number of forms of brutal treatment of women in India. The killing of the female foeticide is perhaps the cruelest because this foetus cannot protest in any way.

In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair has presented women, who have been the victims of patriarchal hegemony and oppression. Meera suffered the same fate as Jak's mother had to suffer. The only difference is that Meera's husband, Giri, proved to be crass self-seeking, crude husband. Kala was also the victim of patriarchal whims. Jak's mother had said to him (Nair, 2010):

I am cursed Kitcha, that's what I am. Neither a wife nor a widow (17).

Jak's mother, Meera, and Kala all represent the universal plight of women in the patriarchal society. Giri proved utterly insensitive husband, as he walked out of marriage without caring either for Meera or for children. He had never cared for children even in the marital life. All his interest was in selling Meera's house and getting money for his own plans. He never cared what would happen to the children when he walked away. He was also hypocritical the way he presented his side to his daughter, Nayantara. Though

Meera decided to chart the course of her own life, she could not forget the emotional trauma that Giri's desertion caused her. The novelist describes it in the words (Nair, 2010):

She doesn't talk about Giri anymore. But she thinks often and though it is with a rancor that stings, she misses him a thousand times a day. It creeps upon her rather abruptly, that moment of irretrievable loss, the emptiness, a cruel hand squeezing her heart with a cold clutch and causing a whimper in her (169).

The writer uses the Greek myth of Hera to describe Meera's experience of her married life. Like Zeus, Giri proved a tyrant husband, self-seeking and cunning. The writer has made use of the Greek goddess Hera, because Hera is a complex character as a woman, combining in herself a number of traits of character. In an interview with Meena Kandasamy, Anita Nair states her reasons for using the myth of Hera (2010):

I failed to find an Indian goddess who was the composite of good and bad, strength and vulnerability, love and hate, naivete and manipulation all at the same time. Our myths tend to depict a woman as either a goddess or a she devil. The only one I could think of was Draupadi, but she wasn't a goddess and her story wouldn't have fitted Meera's as well as Hera did. Or even suited someone like Meera who did not see herself as the queen of the world, her world at least. While there may be some character in our Puranas, who would have been as apt as Hera perhaps, unless one was a myths expert, the chances of stumbling upon a goddess as human as Hera is very unlikely. And Meera isn't that so it would have been a flaw in

characterization for me to have used such an Indian parallel.

However, there cannot be a perfect-parallel between a mythical character and the reality in typical socio-cultural life. Hera was not an abandoned wife like Meera was. Yet, whether western or Indian society, the myths or the mythical stories are almost all male-dominated. Indian cultural ethos is greatly influenced by the Puranic stories in which male god reigns supreme; and goddesses have to perform penance to win the love of male gods. In Indian social and family life, in the observance of religious festivals, there is male-oriented culture. In India, the role-models for women have been Seeta and Savitri, who sacrificed their well-being to follow their husbands. Such myths in India are patriarchal and can hardly serve as models for the kind of situation Anita Nair has presented in her fiction. Women are deified in the Puranas, and there is goddess for wealth, for learning and so on. But in reality women's education became vogue only in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after the independence of India. Women are not treated as independent human beings, having their own rights and view of life. There is mostly a stereo-typical presentation of women in literature. She is a docile being, always submissive to either the father or the husband.

Like a traditional good wife, Meera is worried about her looks, because she thinks Giri is attracted towards some other woman on account of her looks. When Kala cuts off her long hair, her husband loses interest in her. He blames her for her childlessness, but does not think of the possibility of his own deficiency. Jak's father abruptly decides to renounce the family life and go to some Aashram becoming a Sanyasi. A woman is supposed to keep herself attractive, desirable otherwise the husband would lose interest in her. This is what Meera fears. A woman is thus, worried about keeping her husband's interest in her. Apart from doing the household work, looking after the children, she must keep herself trim and desirable. As noticed in the case of Smriti's fight against female foeticide, the men obsessed by their desire to have a male child, are prepared to sacrifice the woman's life, to abort the female foetus. Anita Nair has explored all these aspects related to women's life in India.

Anita Nair has presented in this novel the modern corporate world, the habits of men and women in it, and their changed value system. The men and women in this world go to parties, and they are habituated to eat junk food such as pizza, calamari rings, tartlets, etc which is a very expensive food. They are aware of how this food adds to their fat deposits, and yet they go crazy for it. Giri, as a husband, is the product of this corporate culture. He is guided by the values of this corporate culture, and would like to rise in it by any means. All his decisions are calculated to benefit himself. He has love neither for his wife nor for his children. Page three parties of this society are the obligatory part of its culture. Only the sophisticated families of the big industries go for it. The novel presents how people dress for these parties, especially the women, and put on fake smiles and striking poses for photographs. Meera attends these parties because her husband likes her to be there and mix with those people. One cannot get traditional drinks or food in this culture. It is Colombian, Brazilian or Kenyan coffee, or coke. The traditional south Indian coffee has vanished. Anita Nair has presented in this novel, the modern corporate men and women who change their dresses to suit variety of occasions, to appear young and fashionable. Meera, though she does not like it, wears chiffon skirt for a brunch. She says to Giri (Nair, 2010):

I have a daughter who's nearly twenty years old. It looks silly for me to dress like she does (107).

To look more fashionable, women of this corporate culture do not wear long hair, they wear coloured short-cut hair. Meera also gets her hair cut short at the advice of her friend Vinnie. Vinnie is also another aspect of this corporate culture, which has given rise to sexual promiscuity. For Vinnie, Marriage is just for appearance. She maintains marriage because she thinks marriage to be a kind of security. She says (Nair, 2010):

It is the circle of security that has us engaged (185).

Anita Nair exposes the degeneration of values and morality in the corporate life as she shows how, from Vinnie's example, young boys in the city have liaison with married women, for money. Vinnie's lover, Arun, is an example; as he takes advantage of her lust and loneliness. Anita Nair points out (Nair, 2010):

All of it is a slaking of lust and loneliness. It was what he and every fortune cookie knew but her husband didn't, a woman needs to be loved, not understood. Vinnie clutched her purse tight. In that mature voice of his when he asked for money 'only a loan, you understand. I'll return it as soon as my transfer comes through.' Did she love him? She didn't know. But she needed him and was petrified of losing him. And yet, to give him the money would be changing the trajectory of 'the thing, whatever it is', as he called their relationship (103).

Vinnie is a typical example of the women in the corporate world and its eroded value system. Even Meera appears to succumb to it, though she is driven to it by Giri's unfaithfulness and his desertion of her, which has disturbed her emotionally. She takes Vinnie's advice about it, Vinnie tells her (Nair, 2010):

I've been through it. So what I am saying is, this thing that's sprung between you and Soman, you have to give a chance, allow it to be born before it can die (215).

Meera's liaison with Soman begins with her feeling to find a way out of emotional vacuum she feels after the estrangement with Giri (Nair, 2010).

The spill of loss that makes Meera throw all her apprehensions over her shoulder. She needs this a pinch of salt to safeguard herself from years of

desolation. Meera lets Soman lead her into a room (220).

Anita Nair has presented here how the moral norms have changed in the modern corporate life. There is disintegration of values in the family. Even Jak was not averse to indulge in extra-marital sex. He never imposed it on a woman, but if a woman proposed it he did not say no. Jak becomes aware of his wrong attitude when he finds his daughter having such relation with a young man. We find moral values eroded in the modern society almost in every profession. We implicitly believe in a doctor whose is a noble profession, and who is like god for us. But in the modern world it is money that dictates values of life. There is a doctor practicing against law to reveal whether the foetus is that of a girl or a boy, though he exhibits a board on the door saying (Nair, 2010)

Sex of the child will not be revealed here (297).

This money-minded doctor blames Jak for leaving his daughter alone, unaccompanied. He says (Nair, 2010):

You NRIs. You don't understand the grown up girls need to be with their mothers. You think this is America. You send your daughter back filled with all the permissive ideas you teach them in the West and then when something goes wrong, you blame India for it. She was here with a man, I hear. A man---. A group--- would any Indian girl be so bold? They may have been classmates, but she was alone and who knows what transpired? Didn't you or her mother teach her what to do and what not to do? (54).

The young men like Shivu and Rishi also express their contempt for the NRI girls like Smirti, who carried money with them and spent it in India. No one appears to care for Smriti's zeal for social work, her concern for the birth

of girl-children. Even Rishi, who was close to Smriti did not realize her genuine concern for social work, especially the problem of killing a girl-child even before it is born. Rishi tells Jak (Nair, 2010):

She (Smriti) was used to flinging around money. I mean, she was this typical NRI type! She drank mineral water and kept moist wipes and hand sanitizer in her bag. And I was just a middle class boy. The truth was, I couldn't afford her (265).

Whatever Smriti did, it was natural part of her day-to-day life. She was brought up that way. She was not at all making a show, and was genuinely concerned with social evils in the Indian society. Rishi and others, though native Indians, appear to be insensitive to these problems.

This insensitivity, in fact, pervades the whole corporate world which revolves round money economy. Giri's marrying Meera is dependent on the value of Lilac House she possesses, and which eventually he can sell and use the money for his career. He wants to quit his job and start a business of his own for which Lilac House can be sold to raise the capital. He is hurt when Meera does not respond to his plan. He is annoyed with her (Nair, 2010):

Does she for a moment understand what I have to put myself through, day after day? Does she know what I have to do to keep my place on the corporate ladder? The endless dents to my self-esteem? The fear of being made redundant or, worse, passed over for a promotion? What does she know of any of this? (41).

Giri, who married Meera for her riches and social graces, actually belonged to the lower middle-class and quite unaware of the style and grace of living of the high class society. Giri fell in love with Meera's social graces rather than Meera herself. He married Meera willy nilly to look modern and respectable (Nair, 2010):

He thought of the riches laid out before him. A bride with social graces and a beautiful old home. A grandmother who referred to Sir Richard Attenborough and Satyajit ray in the same breath. A mother who breathed finesse. Giri had never known such people before. He thought of his father in his yellowing banian and dhoti in Palakkad. He thought of the old decrepit house and relative as stringy and penurious as his father (37).

When Giri could not bring into reality his intention of selling Meera's house he lost interest in her and left her another woman. Meera's condition was like Jak's mother, neither a wife nor a widow. In a patriarchal society woman's existence has meaning in terms of a father or a husband and later a son. She has no meaning of her own. She had suppressed her 'self' for the sake of her husband and her children. When her 'self' tried to rear its head and she wanted to do something for herself, the mythical Hydra in her mind accused her of being selfish, and she had to mould herself as Giri's obedient wife or her children's dutiful mother. She became a typical wife, subordinating herself to every wish of the husband unquestioningly. Jean Baker Miller has described this mental state in the following words (Nair, 2010):

Subordinates are described in terms of, and encouraged to develop psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant groups. These characteristics form a certain familiar cluster: Submissiveness, passivity, lack of initiative, inability to decide, to think and the like--- If subordinates adopt these characteristics they are considered well adjusted (6-7).

Meera has willfully subordinated herself to the whims of her autocratic husband. When Giri left her, she found her freedom to put down the multi-headed Hydra and assert her own wishes. She emerged as a new woman, cautious, independent and aware of her own self. Her decision now to be with

Jak is based not on subservience but equality. With him she finds her own identity, with Giri, she had the role of subordination, a slave to his wishes. But, Jak treats her as an equal, a woman in her own right, and he finds in her a moral support as well as a shoulder to lean on when he suffers emotionally.

Meera's sufferings and the failure of her marriage result from the patriarchal social norms in which the husband claims rights not only over her being but on her property as well. A woman, in a patriarchal set-up, must be loyal to her husband and obey him in every respect. Anita Nair, in her fiction, illustrates in creating female characters like Meera, how most women think that an ideal wife should be happy with the protection provided by the husband to her and her children. These women are shocked when they come face to face with reality. In *Ladies Coupe* there is Janaki, who enjoys this sense of security and basks in the sunshine of her husband's love. Most women are so sheltered that they hardly know anything beyond their married life. Women like Akhila even, though they are financially independent, are sometimes doubtful if they can live life comfortable without a man in their life. We can see from Janaki's example, how women are trained from the beginning to be a housewife and to be self-sacrificing in this role. Meera herself, though highly educated, has a typical mind-set of a housewife. She likes to depend on Giri, and goes to parties even though she hardly enjoys them. Women's individuality, their intellectual power is thwarted by imposing on them the role of a housewife and child-bearing. Their sense of self is, thus, crushed. In Meera's example, we see how she herself is responsible to cut down wings of her freedom and yokes herself to household work. Meera virtually falls prey to Giri's patriarchal and selfish attitude. She forgets her likes and dislikes. She even succumbs to his wishes to wear skirt for the parties, though she does not like it. She, thus submerges her individuality in her married life. Her likes and dislikes are those of her husband's. She blindly believes that Giri loves her. Being a wife involves being pinned down to the household duties, bringing up children and be faithful to the husband in spite of his disloyalty and violent treatment to her. Anita Nair's Meera is an educated and also a talented woman, but, to begin with, she is weighed down

by the Indian patriarchal tradition. She breaks down when Giri leaves her, but she emerges as a woman out of this tragic experience of her married life.

There is another aspect of the vitiated marital relationship in the cities like Bangalore where corporate world has affected lives of men and women. Page three parties of this culture has eroded morality of the family life. These are parties for sophisticated corporate families. Meera attends these parties because her husband, Giri, wants her to be there, to be part of (Nair, 2010):

The beautiful people with their heads pertly held, fingers wrapped around glass stems, striking poses as photographers foxtrot from group to group, clicking, capturing beautiful moments. Eventually they would all meet and play at the upper epidermis of emotion. That is the nature of such parties. You network with a drink in one hand and a smile on your face, clasping hands (2).

In these parties, traditional food and drinks have been replaced by pizzas, caldari rings and coke, etc. coffee is no more filter south Indian coffee, but Columbian, Brazilian or Kenyan coffee. These modern corporate people put on dresses to match different occasions. Meera has to wear chiffon skirt at Giri's instance though she is forty year old. She protests to Giri (Nair, 2010):

I am forty years old, Giri. I can't dress like I am twenty. Mutton dressed as lamb, etc. I have a daughter who's nearly twenty years old. It looks so silly, for me to dress like she does (107).

But she has to submit to Giri's wishes because he wishes to belong to this social group. This culture has also encouraged sexual promiscuity. This is highlighted in Vinnie's example. For Vinnie, marriage is just a matter of convenience. Her husband knows that she has sexual relationship with a young man called Arun. Vinnie advises Meera to give a chance to her (Meera's) relationship with Soman, "allow it to be born before it can die" (Nair,

2010, 215). And Meera accepts this advice to balance with the loss of Giri in her life (Nair, 2010).

The spill of loss that makes Meera throw all her apprehensions over her shoulder. She needs this: a pinch of salt to safeguard herself from years of desolation. Meera lets Soman lead her into a room (220).

Meera's case is, of course, different from Vinnie's. Meera's husband, Giri, has betrayed and forsaken her. Even Jak is a party to this promiscuity, though he does not take initiative in such relationship. He does not say 'no' to it if a woman approaches him. But Meera has moral qualms about such extramarital relationship. When Giri leaves her, she once allows Soman into her, but she is ashamed of her weakness. She describes herself as false Meera, like false Greek goddess Hera, who also once indulged in such relationship. Anita Nair purposefully uses Greek goddess Hera as a metaphor as there is, according to her, no suitable example from the Indian mythology. Meera feels the conflicting emotions of Hera in her relationship with Soman, as she says (Nair, 2010):

This isn't her, Meera, she tells herself. This is the false Meera. Like there once was the false Hera. When Ixion, the ingrate planned to seduce Hera, to pay Zeus back for his perfidies, Zeus created a Hera from a cloud. It was this Hera whom Ixion pleased and sought pleasure from while the real Hera lay untouched elsewhere. I am the false Hera. None of this is really happening to me. And then on its heel, another thought, what of the real Hera? What woman, whether she was Hera or Meera, could remain unmoved when mouth trailed a line of wet kisses down her spine? (221).

Meera, was a dutiful, loyal wife all her life so far, was overwhelmed by her feeling for JAK. Her husband, Giri, was like Zeus, ever demanding and never asking for her willingness. Now, she decided to pay attention to her own demands. Anita Nair has used the metaphor of cyclone to the catastrophic events in the life of both Meera and JAK. Just as the intensity of the cyclone is unpredictable, the events in the life of Meera and JAK are sudden and catastrophic. It is an unexpected disaster for JAK about his daughter, Smriti, and for Meera of her husband, Giri's, betrayal. It was for both of them as unpredictable as a cyclone storm. It was without any real warning as a wave that begins to gather up quietly, turns counter clock wise. This is how despair strikes Meera when she is suddenly confronted with Giri's desertion. She feels utterly helpless, and cannot think of any explanation or reason why this happened. She hardly had any premonition of this cyclonic disaster in her life. Both, Meera and JAK, experience this unpredictability of cyclonic storm in their life. JAK implicitly believed that Smriti was safe in India, and Meera too, deeply in love with Giri, never thought of his deception (Nair, 2010).

He didn't go looking for it but he didn't disdain it  
either when it came his way (13).

The relations in the corporate world are affected by the feelings of tension, love, betrayal, competition, ambition and greed, etc. and the life of Meera is vitiated by this. The feeling of insecurity makes Giri selfish and he betrays Meera. He is panicked by the uncertainty of maintaining his place on the corporate ladder. This insecurity makes people selfish and self-serving in the corporate world, which results into loss of values. This atmosphere has affected the children as well. Meera's daughter, Nayantara, takes to smoking, but her mother is afraid of asking her about it, as the daughter resents such questioning. This is an example of how the corporate world has affected socio-cultural life and has caused its degradation. In this novel, Anita Nair has tried to show how life of the middle-class in the modernized cities has changed, becoming callous, with the loss of tradition and culture.

#### V.4 Anita Nair's Short Fiction: A Feminist Perception:

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 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 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 neighbor, 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 feel 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 year 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.

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 self-hood 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.

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**Chapter – VI**  
**The Conclusions**

## Chapter: VI

### Conclusions

Anita Nair's novels mainly deal with the experiences of the women protagonists, who face traumatic situations in their family life. Subjugation of women in the predominantly patriarchal family life in India, female infanticide, prostitution, lesbianism and rape are the issues she has projected in her fiction. Her fiction mainly presents the ethos of the middle-class Indian life. The men and women in her fiction are influenced by the modernity, but at the same time they appear to be unable to disentangle themselves from the traditional way of life and the social customs. Anita Nair is able to deal with this dilemma, especially faced by female characters, as she herself hails from a middle-class family.

In an urban middle class life, women find themselves entrapped in a male-dominated world. They are assigned a secondary position in the family as a result of the social customs, and traditional values assigned to an ideal womanhood. In a family life, essentially in India, a woman is forced to occupy a secondary status even if she is an earning member of the family. It is not her femininity, but the age-old social tradition and the control of education by men which are the factors contributing to the subjugation of women in their family life and the society in general.

Anita Nair does not claim to be a feminist, but all her novels are predominantly concerned with feminist perspective in delineating the life and struggle of the female protagonists in her fiction. In her *The Better Man*, though apparently the central character is Mukundan, the man, there are episodes on female characters like Parru-Kutti, Meenakshi and Anjana, who are the protagonists of their own stories, and who struggle for their self-hood. Anita Nair's feminist preoccupations are seen in the presentation of her female characters. They are not only aware of their individuality, but they also effectively express it in their life presented by the writer in her fiction. In *Ladies Coupe*, for instance, Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher, asserts her individuality by

taming her husband, who tries to thwart her and emotionally dominates her. Similarly, Marikolanthu in this novel faces injustice even at the hands of her parents, who would not spend on her education because boys of the family must be given priority for education. And then, she is victimized by the landlord, and sexually exploited as she belongs to the lower strata of the society.

Anita Nair shows through the example of Akhila, how there are anti-feminist practices and attitudes deeply impregnated in the minds of men as well as women. Akhila's mother would feed her husband first and then others would eat. Akhila, as illustrated in the earlier part, is the earning member of the family, but she is not the decision maker. Her brothers, though younger and dependent on her, are supposed to take decisions about her, grant her permission to go out, etc. Akhila emerges as a post-modern woman, refusing to marry, but in choosing young man Hari as a mate, she exemplifies her radical femininity.

Similarly, in *Mistress* the female protagonist Radha, is not allowed by her husband, Shyam, to visit his farm and the factory where she tries to educate the women workers. She is a woman, and therefore, she should not participate in his business affairs. Anita Nair shows how patriarchal domination affects freedom of women in family life as well as in the public sphere. Her every novel presents the female protagonists undergoing patriarchal oppression, and the way women rebel against it, or find a way out of it. In *Ladies Coupe*, the writer has presented a female character, Karpagam, who is a widow, but emancipates herself from the conventions of the Hindu patriarchal society, which restricts life of widow's prescribing rules for what they should wear and eat, and not allowing them to wear colourful cloths, and the Kumkum mark on their forehead. They are also not allowed to participate in the marriage ceremony or festivals intended for married women whose husbands are alive. But this restriction is not imposed on the father, the man, who, in fact is responsible for a woman being childless. In the novel, *Lessons In Forgetting*, Meera is the victim of Giri's patriarchal attitude. Men like Giri implicitly believe that after the marriage the husband automatically gets a right over the wife's property. Anita Nair shows this feminine predicament

as a result of the husband automatically gets a right over the wife's property. Anita Nair shows this feminine predicament as a result of the socio-cultural practices which give right to men over what women own. The tradition of this kind triumphs over even the law. When Giri realizes that he cannot sell Meera's house, he forsakes her. In her feminist perspective, Anita Nair shows how women are socially and economically oppressed by the husband. Women like Meera who are emotionally and in practical life totally dependent on the husband, break down and suffer traumatic experience when the husband suddenly leaves them.

Anita Nair touches a variety of aspects related to feminism, emanating out of the family life in India. One very serious aspect is female foeticide; killing the girl child even before it is born. In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Smriti, the activist (and the daughter of JAK), is victimized by the 'goons' hired by the doctor practicing female foeticide. In *Ladies Coupe*, Prabha Devi's father is very much displeased when she is born, because he expected a son who would be useful for his business. In Akhila's family, the father is lionized by the mother. He must eat first his choicest dishes, and then the women folk in the family would eat. Akhila is expected to ask for permission of her younger brothers before going on a journey, because they are the 'male' members of the family. Anita Nair meticulously reveals these social practices which underlie anti-feminism in the Indian households. Feminism involves creating awareness among women about their own social conditions, their role in the family, the secondary treatment they get, and the violence they have to face in their families, as well as restrictions placed on their movements whether they are married or unmarried. They are discriminated against, if there is a choice to be made about who should go to school or college, a boy or a girl. Marikolanthu is deprived of education after the 10<sup>th</sup> standard because her brothers must be educated.

In India, political rights have been given to women by the very constitution of India, but socially women still have secondary status in the family and society despite their ability. We see this reflected in the case of Akhila and Margaret

Shanti (in *Ladies Coupe*), Radha (in *Mistress*) and Kala (in *Lessons in Forgetting*). In *The Better Man*, Mukundan's mother, Paru-Kutti, dies an accidental death (or death managed to look as an accident), but before it she had opposed her husband's tyranny. She visits Mukundan as a spirit of revenge, and in her we see the beginning of feminism. She reminds Mukundan of the injustice done to her by her autocratic husband, Mukundan's father. She had rebelled against her husband when he tried to bring in another woman, and compelled him to live outside. This is the awakening of the feminine spirit in her. Sarada Ammal in *Lessons in Forgetting* is deserted by her husband and goes to Rhisikesh to become a 'Sanyasi'. She is victimized for no fault of hers. Her education enables her to rise above the disruption of her marital life. She takes up a job as a teacher and empowers herself. She claims her independence by achieving her self-hood and coming out of the initial trauma. Anita Nair's fiction, thus, presents feminist point of view by highlighting the problems women face in their marital life. Anita Nair's fiction presents female protagonists mostly from the middle class, who undergo patriarchal oppression but fight against it, expressing their feminine identity. They are dynamic in the sense that they do not remain meek sufferers, but react to their situation positively and find a way out of it. Anita Nair's novels contain episodes devoted to the delineation of several female characters who struggle against patriarchal oppression. They are, thus, the protagonists of their own stories exemplifying their struggle against patriarchal oppression. In *The Better Man*, all the female characters presented in their episodes are the victims of unjust marriage and male domination. Paru-Kutti, Mukundan's mother, is victimized by her husband, Achutan Nair, who brings another woman in the house as his paramour. She strongly opposes the entry of another woman in her house, and her husband has to find another place for his fiancé. Paru-Kutti is, thus, presented as a rebellious woman. She would not allow her husband to use even the verandah of her house to stack the grains. She is not ready to leave her house and allow another woman in it. She is ready to leave her husband, and implores her son, Mukundan, to take her away with him.

Paru-Kutti is, thus an example of the emergence of a postmodern feminist character opposing her husband's tyranny. Her spirit haunts Mukundan, her son, which is a metaphorical implication of radical femininity.

In another episode, Meenakshi is presented as a strong character, who is abandoned by her artist husband, but who confidently leads her life, bringing up her son, and later even helping her ailing husband. Anjana in *The Better Men*, after traumatic experience of her brutal husband, starts her new life. She divorces her husband, and gives meaning to her life deciding to marry Mukundan. In another episode, Valsala tries to escape her unjust marriage to an old man by a clandestine love affair with a young man. She has every right to escape her unjust marriage, but she wrongly indulges in a criminal activity and she is punished for it. All the female characters in *The Better Man* are victims of either unjust marriage or of irresponsible and autocratic husband. As a result some of them are driven to extremity like Valsala, while others like Meenakshi chart their independent life.

*Ladies Coupe* presents stories of five different women, who undergo different experiences under patriarchal oppression. Akhila is the recipient of all the stories drawing her own conclusion from them. Each story exemplifies search for feminine identity in a patriarchal society. Each woman finds her way out of the circumstances she is placed in. Janki, after initial escapades, finds pleasure in her marital life. Even Sheela, a teen-age girl is sensitive enough to understand her grandma's desire to be well-dressed even in her death, as she believed that a woman has to be physically attractive. Sheela understands the wishes of her grandmother, and in spite of the displeasure of her father and others, she dresses up the corpse of her grandmother. Sheela, through her action, challenges patriarchal authority, and from her grandmother's example she learns that she has to look after her own wishes and pleasures in her life.

Margaret Shanti is presented as another victim of patriarchy. Her autocratic husband wilfully thwarts her career by pinning her down to a job in the school and her household duties. He even makes her abort her child for his own

pleasure. Margaret is given a secondary treatment in the presence of others, and her subject of study is ridiculed in front of others. Being a modern woman, and a scholar in chemistry, she finds a way to escape the tyranny of her husband, Paulraj. She starts feeding him rich food, which eventually dulls his activity turning him into a fat, lazy man.

Gender inequality is a typical phenomenon everywhere, and more so in India. The wife must try to please her husband and obey his wishes. Indian women, whose minds are influenced by the age-old tradition and myths like Sati, Savitry, cannot easily think of divorce. A divorced woman is looked down upon though she is not at fault. The narratives of Prabha Devi, Janaki show how the birth of a girl child is frowned upon by the father, which is the result of social practices in the Indian community, especially in the middle class families.

Marikolanthu in *Ladies Coupe'* is an example of socially and economically marginalized woman right from her adolescent stage. She has to be a maidservant in the Chettiar House, where she is victimized by Murugan, a male member of the aristocratic family. She is sexually exploited by the landlord and has also lesbian relationship with the lady of the house. But, Anita Nair presents her as a woman who finally emerges as a strong woman and takes care of her illegitimate son, who otherwise would have no future. Anita Nair has portrayed women from different social strata, but has shown how women everywhere are subjugated and even maltreated in the Indian family life. Marikolanthu is marginalized not only as a woman, but also as one who belongs to low strata of the society. For no fault of hers, she is driven away from the Chettiar House. Her desire to learn further is defeated, and even her brothers criticize and blame her.

The stories of women in *Ladies Coupe'* illustrate how women in every strata of the Indian society are marginalized and even oppressed by the patriarchal set-up of the society. Even a woman who earns for livelihood of the family is subjected to the patriarchal norms. In the novel *Mistress* there are mainly two stories, one of Saadiya, and the other of Radha. In her father's house Saadiya, like all other women in the Muslim families, is subjected to a ghettoed

life. She is supposed to cover her face, and cannot wander about beyond the lane of her house. Saadiya flouts the patriarchal rule by wandering beyond the limit, and even baring her 'burkha' revealing her face to Sethu, and falling in love with him. Her transgression lands her into conflicting religious situation resulting into a tragedy of her life. She cannot bring up her son as a true Muslim as the Hindu father claims his right by patriarchal tradition. She decides to end her life and drowns herself in the sea. Radha is presented as a new woman, who defies the traditional notions of typical Indian femininity. She does not wear jewellery or adorn her hair with flowers or use make-up. She is not a domestic kind of woman, but an urban, educated, high middle class woman, who is very conscious of her own identity. She is attracted towards Chris because she finds how he appreciates her needs and respects her individuality. Shyam, on the other hand, snatches physical pleasure, brutalizing her body. She flouts the traditional moral code in an effort to realize herself. In her, Nair has created a bold, modern woman, who would fulfill her desire by flouting marital bondage and get physical gratification. Anita Nair has tried to present in Radha a rebellious woman seeking freedom, but in this attempt Radha does not fully succeed. As a lover of a married man, she is left disappointed, as a wife she does not love her husband. Her affair with Chris is a kind of protest, but even in this relationship she cannot find a space for herself. Radha, like Akhila in *Ladies Coupe*, has to find an answer whether a woman can stay single. She has at least her child now to bring up and stay alone. Radha invites tragedy of her married life by challenging the moral code, forming relationship with Chris. The title *Mistress* signifies Radha's transition from being a mistress of Chris to being a mistress of herself. She would bring up her child independently. Radha appears to reject the traditional notion of femininity. She is not a domestic type, though she is very tender about her child yet to be born. She is a new woman in the sense that she is against subversion and domesticity. She is a new urban woman, who is educated and quite aware of her own individuality and the place in the society. Nair's female protagonists are bold and independent enough to flout the wedding

bond and enjoy physical intimacy with other men without inhibition. But, despite her independent spirit, and her violation of moral code, Radha has to struggle to find her place in the society. Like Akhila, Radha also goes against the traditional norms imposed by the patriarchal society. Similarly, like Akhila, Radha too finally faces the question 'can a woman stay alone and be happy, or does she need a man to feel complete?' Radha, like Akhila, decides to be independent, a mistress of herself. In *Mistress*, we come across Saadiya and Radha as two female protagonists. Saadiya is also a rebel in the sense that she tries to assert her claim to her son in bringing him up as a true Muslim. But, when she realizes it is not possible, she commits suicide. Her radicalism thus ends in a tragedy. Radha's marriage with Shyam is, for her, a marriage of convenience. They are incompatible as a pair because Shyam, a typical patriarchal husband, would like to control her life, while Radha seeks expression of her individuality. When she is thwarted in it, she is drawn towards Chris.

In characterizing her female protagonists, Anita Nair has presented two kinds of female characters. There is Radha, who is quite aware of her individuality and sense of independence. On the other hand there are women like Janaki in *Ladies Coupe*, who would like to enjoy security remaining in the shadow of the husband, and who would not feel comfortable without her husband. It is so because women like Janaki are brought up to play the role of a traditional wife, looking after the husband and the children with a self-sacrificing attitude. Women like Janaki are prone to be exploited in the patriarchal family life. They are psychologically dependent on their husband, and can feel very helpless without him. Akhila's mother is a typical example of it. This psychological dependence can cripple woman if husband leaves her.

Meera in *Lessons In Forgetting* is such a case presented by Anita Nair. She performs the role of a wife who is self-sacrificing. She merges her personality into her family life so much that she is hardly aware of her own self in her family life and she is hardly aware of her own likes and dislikes. Her happiness, her likes and dislikes depend on Giri, her husband. She implicitly

takes it for granted that her husband loves only her. She is shocked and rendered helpless when she discovers that it is not so, that her husband covets her property and when he learns he cannot benefit from it, he leaves her. She is at a loss to know how to lead life without her husband. She emerges as an independent woman after this traumatic experience. But she emerges out of this disabling experience, and tries to take hold of her life. She is, in fact, a writer but as a middle class woman she finds empowerment of herself as a challenging task. Like Akhila in *Ladies Coupe'* and even Anjana in *The Better Man*, Meera struggles to reorganize her life without a husband. She takes care of her children and her mother and grandmother. Kala, in *Lessons In Forgetting* is another victim of patriarchal oppression. The burden of her hair gives her severe headache but her whimsical husband frowns at the cutting of her long hair, and when she does it, she has to face breaking of her marriage. She is the new woman, who overcomes her inhibitions and asserts her individuality. Sarada Ammal is another example of empowerment of women. She studies hard and qualifies herself to be a teacher after the disruption of her marriage. Smriti, the teen-age daughter of prof. JAK, is also brutally victimized by a doctor's goons, because she was an activist trying to save the girl child and campaigning against it.

In a male-dominated world, the father frowns upon the birth of a girl child. In *Ladies Coupe*, Prabha Devi's father strongly disapproves of the news that there is going to be a girl child, and says a daughter is a bloody nuisance, though he already has four sons. In her novel *Lessons In Forgetting* also, Anita Nair shows how, in the Indian society, the birth of a girl child is frowned upon. And in this novel again we have an example of Sarada Ammal, who is victimized by her husband. Her husband deserts her, but through her example, Anita Nair shows how a woman can boldly face the breaking up of her marital life. She studies and takes up a job as a teacher. She marries again, but now she is an empowered woman and enjoys autonomy.

Anita Nair has given expression to her feminist preoccupation even in her short fiction. Saro in *"The Witch Wife's Tale"* flouts the constraints of marital life.

Similarly, Norah Webber in the story "*The Heart of a Gerund*" asserts her individuality though she is not economically independent. In "*Mistress of the Night*", Anita Nair deals with the life of prostitutes. In "*A Thanks Giving Tale*" she describes the miserable life of the aged people, who suffer loneliness and neglect. In another short story '*Mercury Woman*' Nair deals with the lesbian relationship of Malini, who has inhibitions about conjugal relationship with men. It can be seen that even in her short fiction, Anita Nair has tried to give expression to a variety of problems faced by women in a predominantly patriarchal society.

Women writers in India, in general, do not claim to be the feminists, but their fiction, by and large, centers round the trials and tribulations of women in the Indian patriarchal society. Feminism is really a global phenomenon and it has created awakening among women about their problems in the family and the social life. There are social practices and traditional beliefs and religious views which together result into the subversion of women. Naturally, in the fiction of modern writers like Anita Nair, we come across themes such as patriarchal domination, sexual objectification and exploitation, oppression, secondary treatment in the family and social life and so on. Feminism opposes inequality between women and men, as it inevitably leads to social injustice. Anita Nair shows in her fiction how gender difference leads to social inequality and subversion of women. Women are made to suffer injustice as we have noted in the case of characters like Paru-Kutti, Meera, Kala and others. Women's lives in the Indian social structure is conditioned by religious beliefs, cultural practices which have conditioned the mentality of male beings; and women are perceived to be merely an adjunct of the male counterpart in the family. We see how in Hindu religious ritual, a woman simply touches the hand of the husband, while he is the one who performs the ritual. The woman is portrayed, traditionally, as undemanding and forgiving by nature, and willing to suffer for others. Nair's female protagonists illustrate this, but as a modern novelist she also shows how women are ready to fight their subversion and win their position in the social and family life. The text is said to be the battle ground for the feminists, because

through the text they can show the power relations between men and women. Anita Nair uses her fiction to represent life of women in Indian society and show how woman is treated as an adjunct to the male person. In other words woman's identity is subsumed under that of the male. Anita Nair highlights this in delineating the character of Meera as well as of Radha. Anita Nair explores the psychic dilemma faced by the female protagonists, and shows how the modern women emerge out of it fighting for their individual freedom. Nair's female protagonists experience pain as they try, to find a way out of the stultifying traditional constraints.

Anita Nair has presented the life of her female protagonists in the post-independence India, in which women have begun to be conscious of their individuality and need to find their own place in the family and the society. In *Ladies Coupe'* and *Mistress*, the writer tries to show that the traditional view of woman is not any more acceptable. Akhila in *Ladies Coupe'* illustrates the problem of how to stay alone in a male-dominated society. Anita Nair poses questions before the society in portraying the life of her female protagonists. Her female characters appear to challenge the patriarchal system and show the possibility of existence of woman as an independent entity. Her novels also show how this is difficult for women on account of their social conditioning. For example, even educated Meera is socially conditioned to play a secondary role in her family life with Giri. In the Indian social system the traditional image of a married woman is that of a quiet, enduring wife, who submits to the wishes of her husband and her in-laws. Paru-Kutti, to begin with, appears to fit this role, but she rebels when her husband transgresses the moral code.

Nair's female protagonists are the women of flesh and blood, not the mute, long-suffering tradition-bound women. They are human beings aware of their own individuality and aspirations. When they find themselves in oppressive patriarchal bondage, they struggle for freedom and achieve it. They appear to challenge the patriarchal moral code and the role prescribed for women. They

are strong characters, who are determined to fight against injustice. Nair's Akhila undertakes a journey with an intention of the patriarchy and find strength to assert themselves after initial traumatic experience. Nair's female protagonists onerous responsibility of living alone. She selects a man of her choice quite spontaneously, as she is sitting on a beach. It is the action indicative of her freedom. She liberates herself from the bondage of family relations as well as moral inhibitions. Akhila, however, does not convert such relationship into marriage for fear of what would people say, because she is much older than the man, Hari, who insists on marrying her. Akhila knows it would be entirely unacceptable to the society.

Anita Nair's female protagonists like Radha, throw away social pressure, and show willingness and strength to realize their own individuality. They appear to defy the traditionally imposed 'pativrata' role on them. In their extra-marital relationship they do not suffer from any sense of guilt. Women in the Indian society have been marginalized for ages. The modern women writers like Anita Nair have created a new woman in their female protagonist, who challenges the tradition of the male dominated world. In her novels, Anita Nair has exposed the ills in the society in relation to women. Her female protagonists do not appear to accept limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal system. As they are educated and have become aware of their self-hood, they would like to destroy the myths of womanhood established by the mythical stories of ideal women. Women protagonists like Akhila, Radha, Anjana appear to bring in new social order in which women can ensure their independence and bring to an end their subjugation. Radha's decision to lead her own life and bring up her child, Meera's decision not to get totally involved in her relationship with JAK are the instances of their new awareness to live their life with dignity.

Even in her short fiction Anita Nair has dealt with feminist preoccupation of her female protagonists. Saro in the story "*The Witch Wife's Tale*" breaks the marital bond flouting tradition, highlighting the problem of married women in the middle class families. In "*The Heart of a Gerund*", Norah is forsaken, yet she

asserts her dignity and lives life stylishly in spite of economic hardship. In the story "*Mistress of Night*" Nair presents the story of Lisa, a prostitute, who liberates herself from the exploitation. And Amma in the story "*Consider The Tree*", pleads for the rights of women. She helps other women also in their predicament.

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 fulfill their ambition not ignoring their responsibility.

This researcher very humbly states that she has tried to do justice to the topic of the research, but there is scope to undertake research in the areas such as the theme of motherhood and feminist consciousness reflected in Anita Nair's fiction. They can also undertake comparative study of feminist consciousness reflected in Anita Nair's fiction and the fiction of other female writer of Indian English fiction.

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.

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