

## VOICES OF THE MARGINALIZED: PORTRAYAL OF SAADIYA IN ANITA NAIR'S *MISTRESS*

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### ABSTRACT

Marginalization is the subjection and exclusion experienced by a group, resulting from a discrimination of power of possessions and power structures within society. Feminism argues that woman is marginalized due the patriarchal structure of society. The patriarchal marginalization of women started from family and filled all over the world. The perfect women were portrait of qualities that remains to family responsibilities. Certain passive and unquestioning tendencies were defined as indispensable aspects of womanhood. The rebelliousness of this patriarchal forte would result in opprobrium and public humiliation for women. Hence, women were confined to the domestic spaces and forced to stick on to duties as obedient mothers, sisters and wives. The patriarchal concepts of literary preservation also worsen the condition of women. Ethical and religious sacredness of society was valued in relation to the feminine body. An aggressive patriarchal prejudice is found in the view of 'femininity'. Women are meant for nurturing, emotional, irrational, subjective, passivity, dependency, and many more. To build a strong nation for woman, women writers of twentieth century dealt with themes of marginalization and domestic incarceration. Anita Nair belongs to the category of novelists who have focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. Her novels, presents the image of a suffering woman preoccupied with her inner world, her sulking frustration and the storm within: the existential predicament of a woman in a male dominated society. In *Mistress*, Anita Nair depicts the changing relationship between husband and wife in the society. Husband – wife alienation resulting from lack of communication and unpredictable compatibility forms the theme of *Mistress*.

**KEYWORDS:** Marginalization, Patriarchy, Alienation

### INTRODUCTION

Free bird,

How do you hope to be happy with the cage?

Imprisoned, you have forgotten your own speech

And you speak the words of others mindlessly. (Sarkar, *Hindu wife: Hindu Nation* 46)

The earth functions in binaries. Men and women are two separate poles which remain the world going. The social order has always been beneficial to men and dogmatic against woman. Even though worshipping them and comparing them with the figure of Goddess is a prehistoric fact but in doing so, women have been deprived of a voice, a persona. The society we live in is a patriarchal society subjugated by men. In such a society, women have been afforded with a lesser amount of breathing space to live independently and even lesser space isolated for her opinion. Her view and voice has always been censored. The unfair and cold-blooded treatment makes her a subaltern who cannot voice out for herself.

Women who constitute half of the world's population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are subjugated, suppressed and marginalized in the issue of sharing the available chances for accomplishment of their lives, although the reality that each woman slaves for the progress of her family, her husband and children. This tormenting picture of woman is not somewhat new or restricted only to India. This is the predicament of women all over the world. Indian women-writing in English is prominent for the extent to which it has challenged patriarchy and the State and opened numerous ways of questioning and interpreting social life. In the present-day world the suppressed people come forward from their marginalized position and try to voice out their concerns. This in turn has a remarkable strength on the writings of this age. The awareness of the writings has also become multi-dimensional where a character is imaginary and is offered with all the follies as well as noble qualities.

A close look at the contemporary literary development illustrates the actuality that the spectator's point of view is getting out-of-date, and writings about marginal people having power to denote level whereas the writings by the suppressed people restate the actual experience that becomes a work of fine art, for an effort of art should be exact to life and close to life. Hence, the challenge prior to the modern writer is to shape the unwritten through denaturalizing the natural, for in the traditional set up typical is not accepted but it is the formed as an experience of culture or tradition. Writers all over the world have started questioning the so-called traditionally holistic ethnicity of life through their works of art. Women writers not only present the vindictive authority of the dominant set-up that proceeds upon their folk but also demands the need to redraft the past which ignored their existence. The female protagonists of the women writers of this century are the real women who realize their status in the patriarchal society.

Anita Nair is one of India's popular female writers. She depicts through her expression, the present day condition of women in society, with wit and humour. She delves deep into human psyche and allows the reader to enjoy a wonderful journey by presenting fascinating stories that have vivid and inimitable characters. She evokes experiences that are drawn from everyday life and her approach over and over again facilitates the readers to suspect the character to be one of their neighbour's or of a friend. The book is set on the banks of the river Nila, there could not have been a better setting. Just like the river the plot is a journey to self-realisation.

Anita Nair acknowledges the borrowing of her latest novel's title from Emerson's statement "Art is a jealous Mistress". It gives an opportunity for a reader to read and figure out her novel *Mistress* in the sparkle of this statement. To her, it is a metaphor that underlines the possessive nature of art and its amoral nature. To Anita Nair, writing the novel has been an issue during which she felt "possessed" or "Mistressed" by her art of writing the novel. The whole plot of the novel is spread over Book 1, Book 2 and Book 3, and chapter number nine is based on nine Rasas embodied and displayed the dance form of Kathakali is Srangaaram, Haasyam, Karunam, Raudram, Veeram, Bhayanakam, Beebhatsam, Adbutam, and Shaantam, suiting the feelings and emotions of the plot to the specific Rasas of human life.

As the novel is split into three parts, Nair tells a spell binding tale of Saadiya, Koman's mother. The novel begins in Arabipatnam, it is a place meant only for Muslims. The men in the village are permitted to utilize the main entrances and the streets. The narrow passageway is built for the women to use, which connects a side door or a kitchen door. As the word narrow suggests that the condition of women in the village are pointed down to the restrictions. The only freedom accessed for women in Arabipatnam is that no strangers are allowed inside the streets. Saadiya in this novel is the second most imperative female character and she is the daughter of the leader of Arabipatnam. She belongs to Muslim community, where women follow the traditional pattern of society. It is expected that she may remain follow and obey the community

customs of traditional society and no matter what her own wishes are she must behave as her other sisters. Her father wishes to marry her to a boy of his own community. Being a modern woman she questions, is it the rule that all women born here have to live and die hidden by these walls? She desires to voice out her longings but her community never allows her to speak out about the condition and her voice is muted.

Culture and patriarchal constraints played active roles in confining Muslim women's educational and economic contribution. The situations of these women were gone so bad that many Muslim women are subjugated in Islamic Societies. They are denied of schooling and other fundamental rights. These are not unjustified allegation. But one must understand that these oppressive practices do not originate from Islam, these are the part of local cultural traditions in various countries. The reason for the general assertion is that, there is no need of education to the Muslim girls, only reading is satisfactory for them since they are kept inside the houses. The same conventional system follows in case of Saadiya.

Her father Haji Najib Masood was one of the six chiefs of the town and also the most respected man in the society. Since his father was a very strict man she has no daring to tell him what is right and wrong because in her tradition only men are the maintainers of women and also the social set up is that the good women should be obedient and do not seek a way against them. It is common for all the human beings to break the laws in certain aspects in the same way, Saadiya is thoughtful to see the world and prepares her to walk into the common alley which was restricted street for women in Arabipatnam. On the way to Nadira's home she grasps,

**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 would never be hers. (*M*: 102)

When she felt the fragrance of life in the street coincidentally with her unveiled face she gazes Sethu. Sethu is a Hindu orphan, trained as a health inspector before he moves to Nazareth, a small town. He starts work under Dr Samuel. Attracted towards the beauty of Saadiya, he is drawn into features of her and his feeling was kindled and in turn the same thing happened to Saadiya, which is quite natural. Saadiya in search of her beloved, Akbar Shah's second son Salim now replaces Sethu. Saadiya's family is very conventional and reputable, as a result of her courageous action she is acknowledged with the red hot iron on her calf by her own father for audacious to break the rules laid down by him. Her offence being that she had just stepped out of the margins set down by him in order to have a quick look of their town.

Marginalisation in tradition bound countries like India often results in discriminating torment for sensitive folks and especially women, according to M.Rajeshwar, in his book *Preface to Indian women Novelists and Psychoanalysts* admits that women happen to be the most terrible victims as the social norms and moral codes have been so enclosed as to be particularly prejudicial to them. Men can do anything and get away with it, but the moment a woman does something wrong or something parallel, or wishes to getaway of the shackles and claims her rights, she's the target of disdain ridicule, and perhaps the worst kind of established or physical aggression. It is the state of Muslim women in Arabipatnam. The purdah system ordained by Islam prohibited women from participating in public affairs or pleasurable pursuits. Their lot was restricted to strive for the family and for afforded pleasure and leisure to men. This double standard targeting women was in accordance with the then prevailing social dispensation. A feeling of lack of confidence drenches and women were secluded as a measure to defend them. They were expected to be dedicated and passive, submissive and charitable. Even so, they were not secure from torture, oppression and ill-treatment in every possible way.

Woman in this community has been always kept in 'Purdah' literally and characteristically which serves as a curtain between the real world and the made-up world of make-belief where women have been set aside for prolonged, not allowed toward the indoors of men. This is the status of women in Muslim community. Infact, Saadiya is not only penalized by her father that is the male society, but also she is damned by her own Ummama and Zuleika, that is even women are against women. Women in the similar group also repress her. All the women in her community have to undergo the same circumstances and they have their limitations. Saadiya thinks of her guilt for the action that has caused anxiety to her family.

I, Saadiya, good girl, with the purest of Arab blood in my veins, branded by my Vaapa and a glance, lay awake. I did not know what it was that nagged at my flesh so. Was it the imprint of Vaapa's anger? Or was it your burning gaze? Or was it the thought that in a day or two I was to be allowed to glimpse the world that existed outside the gates of Arabipatnam? (*M*: 136)

The complicated circumstances pierce in the life of Saadiya at a premature age as she feels affection for Sethu. Her Vaapa arranged a nuptial for Saadiya with Akbar Shah's second son Salim. For the first moment in her life she prepares herself to voice out her thoughts to her Vaapa about her Malik, Sethu. Saadiya christened him as Malik. Her Vaapa didn't expect this from his daughter. Everyone in the family appealed, convinced, yelled and tormented her to depart Sethu and to marry Salim but Saadiya was strong enough in her choice.

In Islam, Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men, a term that includes traitor, ex-Muslims, other monotheistic (Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian), non-theistic and polytheistic men (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and others). Further, a Muslim woman, either by birth or after conversion is not allowed to leave Islam to marry a non-Muslim, because leaving Islam is a religious crime of the rejection of a religious or political belief or allegiance punishable with death. The Quran allows Muslim men to marry women of any religion, but the woman must be virtuous. Hard punishments are also set for women who marry non-Muslims on their own harmony. Saadiya being aware of her religion is ready to live with a non-Muslim and ready to face the consequences.

She considers Sethu to be a Kaafir. Saadiya like her Vaapa was not ready to give up her Malik. Going against the orders of her religious conviction and family, she moves in with Sethu, only to be distressed it soon. When Saadiya leaves home against her tradition, she has luminary in her eyes and admires Sethu. She insists on calling him Malik.

'But it is!' Saadiya whispered. 'You are my 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 you see?' (*M*: 185)

Sethu and Saadiya start living as one, devoid of the formal restrictions of wedding. She makes up to be busy with her household doings. Things are very happy to commence with, he went to work, and she waited for him at the doorway in the evenings. This was the typical duty of the wife in Arabipatnam and so it was easy for her to survive. One day when she was alone in the house she realizes that all the ties between herself and her family are broken. She starts delving deep into herself and her family.

The smooth life is interrupted when a problem arises between Sethu and Saadiya when she demands him to get the Koran. He answers back angrily by getting her not only the Koran, but the Holy Bible, the Thirukkural and the Ramayana. When she persists that she will not ignore the Koran, since it is more than a book, and a way of life, Sethu

reacts by mentioning that Hinduism too does that and was an older religion. Saadiya caught between two cultures, that is Muslim by birth and Hindu by marrying Sethu finds even more alienated, lead a marginal life that takes her nowhere. The clash between her loyalty to a dominant tradition and her forceful need to break through the conservative fence has left her in a dual construction of mind where feelings of hesitation and loneliness, and thoughts of confidence and affirmation, alternate with each other. Here she faces unparalleled restlessness and alienation which leads to a severe identity crisis.

The crises in their perfect life begin when she, the wife, shows that she has a mind of her own and embarks on, when she tries to work out her will. She wants her needs to be confessed. As the outcome to this thinking, the battle of her independence has started by her during her young age and now she takes it again with full spirit. Soon after the marriage Saadiya gets disillusioned about the human nature in general. Sethu denies her self-fulfillment and the marriage life leads to the collapse. The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But this relationship between Saadiya and her husband is an epitome of failure and an emblem of disgust, disappointment and depression. This is so because there was no love between them. Sethu finds hard to understand the attitude of Saadiya and they drift separately without love. Discontentment leads Saadiya to rebelliousness and restlessness. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation don't encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of esteem in facing the challenges of her life.

When the time comes to name her son, again a problem arises. Saadiya completely gets dejected with the male ego allowing the nation bleed with violence, murder and damage to other's faith in the name of religion and God. Saadiya decided to name her son as Omar Masood. She wants to bring up him as a good Muslim. When Sethu protested, both quarrelled finally he asked her to leave him and his child and go to her native. Saadiya was silent and for five days she didn't get out of the room. She feels that unless she comes to terms with the separations that exist in her past, she can on no account be at peace. So here is a quest for her real self, her identity. After experiencing many conflicts she becomes conscious her true self, which frees her from her emotional bondages. When a person becomes aware of his or her self, reform is predictable. And this is exactly that makes Saadiya evaluate her world in an intend conduct. And her choice is the tragic end.

The systems in society are so powerful that they generate conflicts which fragment the identity of the individual. Nair employs the stream-of-consciousness technique to reveal the forces which war on self. Her loneliness, anxiety, guilt in marrying against the wishes of her family all has their growing effect on her deeds. Like a typical Indian wife she is a habitual practitioner of the work of subjugation with its negative and terrible consequence.

In moments of severe misery and stress such individuals cannot survive and commit blunders or take tremendous actions that are irretrievable. Invariable disagreements with Sethu lead to gloominess and force Saadiya to commit suicide. Though Saadiya leaves her parents home because of her love for Sethu, she cannot leave her religion. This absolutely tells us that Mind and Body are different. Body is willing but the mind is unwilling to accept things.

In earlier days, women were merely portrayed as dependent souls. They have a preference for others happiness. Women's identity is veiled behind the mask of sacrifice and dependency. Their voices are no better than the voices of the dumb, not capable of being heard to the world. At the present time, women have as much as necessary valour to reveal their individuality at various levels. Though they possess the voice of the dumb, they have made it perceptible in recent years and in progress quaking the convention of dependency. They are ready to undertake challenging journey of

self- discovery to make the whole world recognize them. A certain percentage of women have successfully reached their destination and remaining are on their way to the destination of ' Self-discovery'.

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