

**Breaking Chains A Feministic Perspective in Anita Nair's *Mistress***

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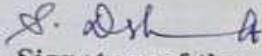
## **DECLARATION**

I do hereby declare that the dissertation entitled **Breaking Chains A Feministic Perspective in Anita Nair's *Mistress*** submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts (M.A.)** is carried out by me **KAVIYA R** during the period from **JANUARY 2024 - MAY 2024** under the guidance of **Mrs.C. KAVITHA M.A.,M.Phil.**, Assistant Professor and Head of the Department (i/c), Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (SF), Coimbatore, and, has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship or similar Titles in this University or any other University or other similar Institutions of Higher Learning.

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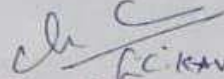
## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled **Breaking Chains A Feministic Perspective in Anita Nair's *Mistress*** submitted to in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of **Master of Arts (M.A.)**, is carried out by **KAVIYA R** during the period from **JANUARY 2024 - MAY 2024** under the guidance of **Mrs.C. KAVITHA M.A.,M.Phil.**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women (SF), Coimbatore, and, has not formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Associateship, Fellowship, or similar Titles in this University or any other University or other similar Institutions of Higher Learning.

  
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**ABSTRACT**

Anita Nair, one of India's popular women writers describes the present condition of women in society with wit and humor. She probes deep into the human psyche and takes the reader along a wonderful journey by presenting absorbing stories that have colorful and interesting characters. She is perhaps, the most brilliant observer of women's world, in particular, that of Indian women, confronted with an acute sense of helplessness. The story of this love triangle is narrated from the overlapping first-person viewpoints of these central characters and with its structure of three 'book' of three sections each. The narrative reflects the art of Kathakali performance in all aspects. Mistress could have been a worthy but a noteworthy read. The locale of the novel is the banks of the river Nila in Kerala, where the prestigious dance form, Kathakali, exists. Koman, a famous Kathakali artist, and her niece Radha receive Chris at the railway station. From their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are very impressed by this young man with his cello and his inquisitiveness about the dance form. Radha is a typical modern Indian woman. She is aware of the expectations of the society from 'a married woman', 'a wife'. The confrontation of opposites directs her into a state of helplessness. Her desire for Chris overshadows her responsibility towards her husband and respect for the rules of the society. She plays mistress to Chris, meeting his physical needs and in turn her own.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Literature is a soulful creation that leads to the interpretation of life. It is the tool to comprehend life. It is flexible and made up of decorative words to cast decorative and Philosophical thoughts. Literature is a tree with deep roots in human minds. The Essence of literature can be accomplished by losing oneself in observing life and passing on the observed to upcoming generations. In literature, the human psyche is essential in finding who we are. It is the germination of thoughts influenced by sensory organs. Literature imitates society through genres like novels, poems, and short stories. Literature is closely connected with nature and the environment as it paves the way for the growth of literature.

Literature dwells within us and showers beauty to life. Literature transforms the view and art of living a life. It is a therapy that analyzes characters in life. Literature never meets your needs in a single reading; instead, it explores deeper to fulfill your literary desires. The main motto of literature is to render virtues for better living.

Literature stepped into India during the Sumerian civilization, and Mesopotamia was the place where literature reached human eyes. Gradually, with the help of archeologists, contemporary people understood the emergence of language. The inscriptions and scribbling on the mud walls were the pioneers of words. The Indus script is known as the First writing in India. English peeped into India during the advent of the East India Company, an association of hundred English men from Britain. They pierced their culture and language in our country. Aurangazeb, an empowered king of the Mughals, witnessed English with a unique eye and issued greater

importance as he found his father Babur contributing much to literature through translations. Eventually, English ended up being the official language of India.

During British control in India, the seeds of Indian writing in English were planted. The seed has grown into a lush tree with fragrant blooms and juicy fruits. The foreigners “chewed and digested” the fruits in addition to the locals who tasted them. Only after continuous feeding, pruning, and caring did it occur. Night and day, gardeners such as Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, R.K. Narayan, and Raja Rao, to mention a few, took care of the delicate plant. It is protected in the present day by several writers who are receiving honors and recognition worldwide.

Indian English Literature is a sincere effort to showcase the precious works of Indian writing in English. Indian writing has evolved from a unique and remarkable, albeit slow, local flare-up of geniuses to a new type of Indian culture and speech that India regularly converses in. Since before Independence, Indian writers have made significant and noteworthy contributions to world literature as poets, novelists, essayists, and dramatists. In recent years, Indian English writing has experienced a phenomenal rise in popularity internationally.

Within the field of international literature, Indian English literature has established a distinct position for itself. Numerous subjects are addressed in Indian Writing in English. While the portrayal of life in India and Indians residing abroad in this literature still reflects Indian culture, customs, social norms, and even Indian history, contemporary Indian English fiction has attempted to communicate the Indian experience of contemporary situations. Critics and pundits in America and England appreciate Indian English books. Professor M. K. Naik highlights one of

English education's most significant contributions to India. Prose fiction because, even though India was undoubtedly the birthplace of storytelling, the novel was brought over from the West.

India's prolific English-language writers have produced much of the country's significant literary contribution to the world. In their works, a wide range of subjects were considered and explored, such as nationalism, the struggle for freedom, social realism, individual consciousness, and others. This literary movement has established itself as a notable force in world fiction and is strengthened by the vast production of writers.

Novelists who attempted to demonstrate their inner creative impulses in English a foreign tongue for them have succeeded. To their credit, these novelists have successfully navigated the challenges of penning in a foreign language, developing a unique literary style as they absorb the nuances of the language and infuse it with the colors and tastes of the Indian subcontinent. In 1938, Raja Rao made a well-known argument in the introduction of his book "*Kanthapura*" in favor of utilizing English, but with modifications to suit Indian circumstances.

English writer Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) is a well-known figure in the field. The term "myriad-minded," which Mathew Arnold had used to describe Shakespeare, can justly be used to describe him as well because of his creative creativity, which is so abundant in him, and his literary output, which is so rich and varied. For his timeless poetry collection, *Gitanjali* (1913), he was given the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature. The brilliant Tagore is not only a master of poetry that transcends all time, but he has also carved out a career as a novelist, dramatist, short story writer, musician, philosopher, painter, educationalist, reformer, and critic.

His novel's atmosphere is symbolic and contemplative, and its characters are genuine, lifelike, realistic, and nuanced. In his works, the socio-religious culture of Bengal is masterfully portrayed. In his works, he highlights some issues facing women in his age group. The many social contexts are used to illustrate and analyze various human relations scenarios. Many of his books address contemporary issues facing our society, and readers are drawn to them because they focus on the characters' psychological growth in the face of intense hardship. To his credit, he has a lengthy list of plays and poems in both Bengali and English that have elevated him to the status of one of the finest authors of all time.

The beginning of the new millennium saw a meteoric rise in Indian English fiction, and writing across all literary genres gained traction, especially the Indian novel. Indian literary greats like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and others supported the traditional writing style. Among the modern-day crusaders are Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Salman Rushdie, and many others. They clarify and support the strength of India's newly emerging modern voice, which possesses the vitality and vigor of a gushing artesian combined with an unrivaled drive to do new things and pursue innovative writing opportunities.

An array of modern post-colonial writers, including Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Meena Alexander, Anita Nair, and Jhumpa Lahiri, have spearheaded the process of decolonizing "Colonial English," utilizing it as a vehicle for articulating Indian ideas and emotions in a uniquely Indian manner. The literary world was ablaze with activity due to Gandhi's leadership of the liberation fight. The desire for an independent nation spurred a creative explosion to inspire the people to take up the cause of Independence and drive the British out of India. As a result, there was a boom

in both the national and regional novel streams. This surge of enthusiasm in local writing created the foundation for refining and expanding the scope and liveliness of Indian English fiction.

Indian novels play a vital role in our country. It helped Indian novel readers acquire the latest knowledge from the past to the present state of Society and Indian and Western countries. The Indian novel gave the dimension of a national movement to our freedom struggle.

The twentieth century saw Indian English writing taking off in a big way. The triumvirates Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan boosted the genre. Laxmi Holmstrom traces some of the dominant themes in the writings of Indian women since Independence, which hint at the social context of "colonialism and its aftermath, partition, and exile and changing social conditions." She says, "Many of the stories are feminist in that they present a woman's perspective and point of view in a particular way." One of the writers, Lalitambika Antarjanam (1938), in *Revenge herself*, narrates a late nineteenth-century event that shook the foundation of the orthodox Nambudiri Brahman caste in Kerala. The writer uses the literary device of the ghost in order to bring out the pathos of the female victim in a first-person narrative.

As far back as 1955, Kamala Markandaya depicted Rukmini in *The Nectar in a Sieve* as a picture of suffering and sacrifice, steeped in love and faith in the background of rural India. Even if it is a quest for nectar in a sieve, one must endure and hope. The novel affirms a faith for a better tomorrow. Attia Hussain's "Sunlight on a Broken Column" (1961) is the form of an autobiography, covering about twenty years in the life of its narrator, Laila, a novel about the growing up of a young girl against the background of the disintegrating family, of the political upheaval of pre-partition days. Nayanatara Sahagal explores the traditional narrow-minded Indian society that

imposes arranged marriages in *This Time of the Morning* (1965), while her book *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969) deals with the hypocritical Indian society, which has different yardsticks of fidelity for men and women.

Many women writers have written magical realism, social realism, and regional fiction novels. Suniti Namjoshi (1941) and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (1956) employ magic realism in *Mistress of Spices* (1997) and *The Mothers of Maya Diip* (1989). One notable example of a fantasy writer is Suniti Namjoshi. Here, magic and reality beautifully blend to create credible novels. The discursive mode of narration makes the novel realistic. Provincial writers such as Arundhati Roy (1961), Anita Nair (1966), and Susan Viswanathan have put Kerala on the fictional map of India. *The God of Small Things* (1977) went on to win The Booker Prize. Bharati Mukherjee's *Jasmine* (1989) and Kavery Nambisan's *The Hills of Angheri* are Bildungsroman novels about growing up. The young Indian girl Jyothi becomes Jasmine and then Jane in the U.S. in the novel *Jasmine* by Bharathi Mukherjee. Nalinakshi, born in a small village, nurtures a dream of becoming a doctor and fulfills it by studying and practicing in India and abroad. Sunetra Gupta's *A Sin of Color* has the hero disappearing from the novel, while his English wife Jennifer, modeled on the patient Hindu wives, waits for his return for years and years.

Indian novelist Anita Nair gained notoriety by defying prevailing conventions in Indian English literature. Because she wrote in a style that was uniquely her own, she became the best selling author in terms of the number of books sold and gained the respect and opinions of Indian book and literary reviewers.

She has worked hard to establish herself as the voice of authentic feminism in modern Indian English literature, in contrast to Shoba De and others who have preferred to use feminism as a platform for pointless demands of headless equality with men rather than vital requirements that can improve women's lives.

Kerala was the place of Anita Nair's birth on January 26, 1966. After completing her early schooling in Chennai, she moved to Kerala to graduate with a degree in English language and literature. She began writing while she was a creative director for an advertising business. She became well-known after publishing a collection of short stories, which also aided in her application for a Virginia Center fellowship.

That event altered her life, and she began writing novels full-time. Moreover, after that, Anita Nair rose to fame both domestically and internationally as an author. Anita's story has a somewhat unusual premise, thoughts, and plot compared to other modern fiction writers. She tries to go into great detail and takes her time while discussing a particular situation. She has changed the image to the daybreak of villages rather than the lights of the metropolis. Her book *The Better Man* brings back the ideals passed down through the village atmosphere, which are forgotten in Indian English fiction today.

Anita Nair is a successful writer of the novels "*The Better Man*" and "*Ladies Coupe*" "*Lessons in Forgetting*," "*Mistress*," "*Collection of Malabar Mind*" a collection of poems, "Satyr of Subway" a collection of short stories, and Eleven other stories, and has also written two children's books – "*The Puffin Book of World Myths and Legends*." "*Where the Rain is Born*" is a collection of literature about Kerala that she curated. Portraying strong women's expressions and

feelings, Nair stands alone at the top of all contemporary writers. She presents women in society with all the facts and outstanding emotions in her domestic life. She provides a few tales about strong women in various situations. She penetrates the deepest layers of human psychology and exposes the readers to find ways and means to think about themselves. She exhorts her experiences that strike in the deepest layers of her heart, which pinched her life at different corners. So, she provides a few tales about strong women in various situations. Her approach toward all her feelings is obvious in demanding self-identity and struggle.

Her novel "*Mistress*" embodies her experiences entwined with human relationships and their roots with the neighbors in society. She is also unequivocal in men and woman relationships. Her proposition on pre-marital and also marital, and extramarital relationships created a kind of havoc in society during the period. She expresses that all these are purely a woman's emotions, and no one should question them, including her life partner.

All her ideas are radical and different from the existing systems of thought process. Her views about marriage, relations, and societal behavior are entirely new, and nobody quickly approves them. So, she faced many challenges in her life and faced them boldly. She says there is a dire need for consciousness of the life pattern. It must be helpful to the growth of society and individual development with a better understanding between men and women. Her primary focus is developing personality and genius, which is quite challenging in modern society. The atmosphere of life plays a crucial role in everyone's life. It is mentioned many times in Nair's novels through many characters and incidents.

The economic Independence of a woman makes her life very smooth and easy. At the same time, such economic Independence should not be accidental but should have top priority. However, human relations mainly depend on the circumstances in which they live and the society in which they live. However, for centuries together, there have been many incidents where a woman is treated as the secondary one despite all her strengths and crucial role in society. She has been described as weaker in her mind and body in fiction and narratives. She always depends on men to serve even her own needs. Such characters can be traced to Nair's novels, like "*Radha*" and others.

One of India's most renowned writers, Arundhati Roy, is well known for her book "*The God of Small Things*." The book discusses how little things in life may significantly impact people. The book was one of the best-selling novels for three years after winning the 1997 Booker Prize for Fiction. Roy's essay collection "*The Algebra of Infinite Justice*" won her the Sahitya Academy Award in 2006, but she declined to accept it.

*God of Small Things*, which received the prestigious Booker Prize in 1997. Arundhati Roy's maiden novel, *God of Small Things*, has earned immense critical acclaim from readers and critics worldwide. The novel received praise for various aspects, such as the shifting of past and present, with extraordinary finesse, her flair for description, and her narrative style, which includes magic, mystery, and sadness. The novel narrates the tragic story of Velutha, the protagonist, whose life is ultimately destroyed by the combined forces of religion, tradition, and society. Apart from Velutha's tragedy, the novel focuses on the anguished world of Esther and Rahel, the twins, who

become part of this tragedy. Arundhati Roy adopts a narrative that is satiric in tone and lashes out her anger at the rigid age old caste system that dominates our society.

Anita Desai is one of the most reputed writers in India and was nominated for the Booker Prize at least three times. She was awarded the prestigious novel "*Fire on the Mountain*," which won the 1978 Sahitya Academy Award and the Padma Bhushan in 2014 for her contribution to Indian literature. Her stories have an exemplary implication that strikes the human heart besides being humorous at the same time. The author's book "*The Village by the Sea*" also won the British Guardian Prize.

She is different from other female protagonists as she imbibes the qualities of Independence, courage, and service; she uplifts herself to meet the challenges instead of shrinking and escaping from them. In her novel *In Custody*, Anita Desai portrays the character of Deven, a Hindi lecturer who endeavors to interview the great living Urdu poet Nur. Through this process, Desai beautifully explores the male psyche and their disillusionment. Baumgartner's Bombay displays a brilliant picture of alienation and personal despair through an elderly German Jew who fled to India to escape from the Nazis. After staying for 50 years in Bombay, he was brutally murdered by a German youth. *Journey to Ithaca* encapsulates the protagonist's spiritual journey, which focuses on the issue of east-west encounters and the position of women still trapped in traditional family structures. In her latest novel, *The Zig Zag Way*, Desai returns to the realm of history, interwoven with past and present, represented by the zig-zag paths of our lives.

Jhumpa Lahiri has gained international acclaim for her writing, which mainly deals with NRI characters, immigrant issues, and people's problems in foreign lands. In 2006, *Mera Mair*

directed a film based on her first novel, "*The Namesake*". Her book *The Law Land* was a nominee for the 2013 Man Booker Prize and National Book Award for Fiction.

Kiran Desai is well-known for writing "*The Inheritance of Loss*," which discusses the suffering of moving and residing between two separate nations. Her writings touch the reader's heart, especially regarding making it in America.

Shashi Deshpande is an Indian novelist who has won awards; her book "*That Long Silence*" made her famous. The Sahitya Akademi Award was given to her for this novel in 1990, and the Padma Shri Award in 2009. Her novels are mainly introspective, and an individual's quest for a personal meaning in life becomes the crux of her works. She also explores the anguish and conflicts of modern, educated Indian women caught between tradition and modernity but constructively trying to attain their individualistic desires. Almost all her protagonists from Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Saru in *The Dark Holds No Terror to Jaya* and Devyani initially need clarification. However, as the novel unfolds, it is found in the characters' introspecting and self-analyzing, ultimately reaching self-realization. They emerge more confident, more in control, and more buoyant. Deshpande received the Sahitya Akademy Award for her novel *That Long Silence*, which narrates the story of Jaya, who is married to Mohan. The problem arises when Mohan is found guilty of some illegal business, and Jaya takes a break and introspects about her past. She realizes how many times she had compromised because of Mohan. She does a detailed analysis of their marital relationship and concludes that though Mohan was domineering, it was her unquestioning role that was the cause of her present miserable state. After years of selfless submission to her marital life, Jaya emerges as an individual who awakens and takes a tiny but firm step to reposition

her life. From Jaya to Devyani, it is found that there is a gradual delineation of self asserting females who, despite being brought up in traditional society, show the courage to voice their opinion for female emancipation.

In the novel *Mistress*, the storyline progresses from the point of view of three significant characters, Koman Asan, Radha, and Shyam, who are women together through the silk thread of art. The novel is written on the backdrop of Kathakali, a unique art form from Kerala. Anita Nair used the expression called the Navarasas that laid the foundation of the novel. The novel has been divided into three books, each comprising three expressions from the Navarasas. It is an intense novel full of deep, mysterious, complex emotions that reflect life. Each character's story gradually comes to light and culminates in a passionate tale of life. Every character in this book is driven by a passion that shapes their lives in one way or another and makes them into demanding mistresses.

The motif of objectification of women is omnipresent in the text. When Shyam in *Mistress* speaks or thinks of his wife, he always refers to her as "My Radha." To Shyam, it is natural to want to exercise control over her, from the way she dresses to her behavior in society to the most intimate aspect of her life. His records of Radha's period, mentioned several times throughout the text, symbolize his attempts to control her life. Telling her what to do in her free time is usual for Shyam, as is telling her how to dress her hair and what color of sari to wear. Even in the case of marriage, Radha's father decides on her husband; thus, she plays a passive role in terms of marriage, made to marry below her standards, thus ruining her father's expectation for her "To make a brilliant marriage into a family that will match them in a status and Wealth" (*Mistress* 119).

In *Mistress*, several female characters adopt the traditional role. However, most of them are broad-brush characters without individual traits. Their appearances are scarce and always very short. The only one who appears repeatedly throughout the novel is Rani Oppol, Shyam's older sister. She seems to be independent and has more individuality, yet still, when it comes to her behavior, the decisive factor in her conduct is traditional rules. What is known about Rani Oppol's life is usually information that emerges from her conversation with Radha and Shyam. More information must be provided on Rani's life before she gets married. It is mentioned, however, that her marriage was in compliance with tradition, an arranged one, and cast all the family's fortune.

Despite marrying a man of lower social status than Radha, she feels superior to her, not only because she is a married woman with children. Unlike Radha, she is a verifiable, fertile, and therefore extolled woman. Besides, she is a woman who honors tradition, something that Radha does not seem to care about. When Shyam is very particular about lighting a lamp, especially Radha, at home in the evening, Radha thinks that it is only an accessory to the house, and she feels even a maid can do that. These two facts explain why she needs to tell her what to do and criticize her improper behavior.

Radha's behavior is considered improper for various reasons; what they have in common is that, on the one hand, she hardly ever conforms to the traditional female role that Rani expects her to play. However, on the other denies even the role of a modern woman that Radha would like to be. Radha's staying at home instead of finding herself a job is considered Radha's most significant flaw and a reason to denounce anything in her behavior, her clothes, and even her cooking.

Rani Oppol, herself sticking to the traditional image of women, expects others to act similarly. Her motivation for conforming to the rules has yet to be explained. Rani may resemble a modern woman and even try to be one, yet her demeanor and remarks show that she values most of the traditional way of life. Even though implying that Radha should find herself a job as a modern young woman, Rani still expects her to dress modestly in a sari and have children. Unless Radha fulfills such expectations, Rani is not willing to consider her equal. To her, Radha's reluctance to fulfill the traditional role is of greater significance than her higher social status until she gives birth to an offspring. Radha's life is dedicated to Shyam and Rani, who know her responsibilities and want to help her meet them.

The dilemma and oscillation in Radha's mind about the importance of her marriage life with Shyam is made known to the readers by Anita Nair. I Cannot say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no heights, there are no lows, either. I believe that I am a possession of Shyam. A treasured possession. I play that part in his life. What he wants is a mistress; he does not want an equal. These lines, "I remember the butterfly I captured and fastened to a board while it was still alive, pinning its wings to show off its markings, not realizing that somewhere, a little heartbeat, yearning to fly," make clear the agony that Radha endures at the hands of Shyam, who treats her like a Mere Possession.

I am that Butterfly now. These lines express not only Radha's mind but also the voice out of the feelings of many married women who undergo the same kind of treatment by their husbands and how men do not want to consider them as their better half but only as a "*Mistress*". A woman's genuine expectation to be considered equal by her husband is very neatly expressed.

Adultery is one of the main aspects dealt with by Nair in this novel; Radha is not the First person to indulge in an extramarital relationship. Her mother had deep-rooted this thought in her mind at a very early age. However, Radha felt that her mother should not have done so but later committed the same mistake. Radha shared this incident not with her husband Shyam but with Chris, whom she had taken into confidence. The secret she discarded as irrelevant until then was shared with Chris, showing her intimacy with him. Radha, experiencing the same situation as her mother, tries to justify the act, thereby convincing herself. Radha feels constrained in her marriage of convenience; her artistic soul needs freedom and seeks expression, and she is barely tolerant of Shyam, who sees her as materialistic and boorish, with lowbrow aesthetic tastes. The sudden appearance of Chris in their midst causes her latent vibrancy to erupt with the volcanic fury of emotions, which changes her relationships with all three men.

When Koman talks about his past, the readers are introduced to Lalitha. Koman and Radha had had a post-marital relationship; when Koman proposed to marry Lalitha, she instantly replied that she was not interested in marriage because she considered it the best way to lead her life. Lalitha is one more example of Anita Nair's characters who feel that marriage would deprive her of her self-identity and freedom. Nevertheless, she did not mind having an affair with a man without getting married to him.

The novel has splendid imagery and strong metaphors. It can be aptly called as a poem in prose. The blend between Kathakali and literature is unique in this novel. The novel fills the reader's mind with emotions as filled by the unique art of Kathakali. Being a consummate writer with a deep understanding of human nature and matters of the heart, using a traditional dance form

from India, "*Kathakali*," which depicts traditional ancient tales and characters, Nair weaves them into parallel lives set in modern India. She skillfully uses the struggle with jealousy, fear, love, and other desires.

Anita Nair is considered a bold and straightforward writer. The novel *Mistress* reveals the effect of social conditioning on women in the name of culture and tradition. The characters of Anita Nair's novels commit adultery and sacrilege, as depicted in *Mistress*. They break the leash of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries of women. Her female characters are bold and confident enough to fulfill their desires by going against the cultural norms of society. Many of her characters experience sex before entering into the social institute of marriage or indulge in extramarital affairs that are strictly against Indian society. She breaks the chains of society, portraying her as a woman.

Some similarities can be found between the protagonists, who learn to resist such social atrocities by going beyond the family boundaries. In *Mistress*, the character Radha is bold and dominating. Being dissatisfied with her husband, she opts for an extramarital affair with Chris; her husband, Shyam, tries his best to bring her back to him, and he is ready to forgive her for all her follies; he is ready to accept her at any cost. In many of her novels, Anita Nair has depicted husband-wife relationships. Her female characters are bold enough to fulfill their desires by negating family bonds and go up to the extent of establishing physical gratification with other men.

The faithfulness in the husband-wife relationship is lost, and there is a big question about the existence of such a relationship. Search for self or identity crisis is no longer confined to the individual. It can characterize a group, an institution, a class, a profession, or even a nation. Anita

Nair merges fiction with reality and makes female voices authentic. Her fictional women can be seen as patterns of real women in everyday life, self-effacing and self-sacrificing women one can meet anywhere in Indian middle-class society. Most of them experience the burden of tradition.

Anita Nair does not write to shake the system or the society. She is not an activist and does not wear her ideology on her sleeve. She merely holds up a mirror of the middle-class society. She never intends to start a revolution in the society. The search for self and identity is the predominant theme of many writers, especially in postmodern writings. Anita Nair, a living postmodern Indian woman writer in English, has earned much critical attention and has been acclaimed both in India and abroad as a significant novelist. The control identity that is imposed on women in the name of marriage by society is no longer a welcome aspect among modern women who have started looking out for an individual identity with no tags attached to them in the name of any institution, such as marriage and family. It is also evident that Indian writing, especially by women writers, reached a different phase or rather an advanced stage. The writers are enough to discuss sensitive issues, break or change women's cultural identity through their writings, and are least bothered about negative criticism. They paved the way for Indian women to have a life of their own.

## **CHAPTER II**

## **Narrative Technique and Feminist Discourse**

“Feminism is a movement to end sexism,  
Sexist exploitation and oppression.”

The term ‘feminism’ originated concerning women's rights and equality, and it was taken from the Latin term “Femina,” which means “woman.” “Matrimony” is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as the state of being womanly or feminine. The Webster's Dictionary defines the term 'feminism' as the principle that women should have political rights equal to those of men. Toril Moi says, The words ‘feminist’ or ‘feminism’ are political labels indicating support for the aims of the new Woman's Movement which emerged in the late 1960s.” Similarly, Simone de Beauvoir contends that the genders are only utilized symmetrically in legal documents for formal purposes.”

The definition of the term ‘Feminism’ differs from person to person. Chaman Nahal, in his article, a way of living where the lady is not affected by the dependent syndrome Feminism is defined as a way of living in which the lady is not affected by the dependent syndrome. Feminism is described referred to in “Feminism in English Fiction.” Dependency syndrome exists regardless of the source the spouse, the father, the community, a particular religion or ethnic group, etc. My concept of feminism comes to pass when women break away from the dependency syndrome and conduct everyday lives.

The fundamental belief behind feminist theory is that from the beginning of human civilization, women have been given a secondary status by masculine-dominated social

discourse and Western philosophical tradition. The history of every civilization shows that women have always been subordinated to a position where they have no means to re-claim their unique identity unless and until they re-visit the history, explore it, and finally re-establish it through their own experiences and insights. In order to explore their own unique identity, women must define themselves against the male-informed ideals and values transmitted from one generation to the next. These beliefs have produced a dominant system by creating female subjects who are conditioned to accept the values of the system.

The physical universe is also dishonored and exploited by men through analogous exploitation that women are subjected to, reducing both to docile entities and selfless artifacts. So, in all these areas- historical traces, philosophical or epistemic tradition, and ecological inhalation- men have gained immense control to maneuver the dominance over women and nature. To put it more simply, the historical insignificance of women forces them to rely on and derive the existence of men. The epistemic and philosophical system has largely regarded women as non-entity, second mistake, nonexistent creatures, or a sexual object that oscillate between libido and envy.

The third exploitation corresponds to nature's exploitation because women have always been compared to nature and with those objects of nature that are serene, cool, and ir-resistive- loving, caring, clay, Earth, moon reproduction, and nurturing. Feminist thinkers call these notions into question by showing a protest and resistance to masculine-coded codes of conduct. They ground their counterarguments in the theoretical and philosophical framework while taking historical revision of history to re-establish a nascent feminist literary canon.

Therefore, feminist literary theory is the extension of feminism into a theoretical or philosophical framework to analyze the causes behind women's inferior status and explore women's literary tradition. While de-centering phallogentric notions, they passed from various stages to establish their unique and autonomous identity. These development stages gradually helped them claim what they have been denied for generations.

Although the feminist movement started gaining international traction around the close of the 19th century, it was not until the 20th century that it became global. The term “feminist” was first used in the title of an international conference in Paris in 1892. Feminism was primarily a Western phenomenon, and connections between feminists in North America and Europe were essential to its spread. Many dictionaries define feminism as a philosophy that seeks to elevate the status of women. Assuming that achieving gender equality is a primary goal, any attempt to classify feminism must consider that it values equality and diversity.

A significant proportion of feminists employed lobbying tactics to advocate for legislative changes. Their demands were defined by multinational actions, or what is now referred to as a transnational strategy. Because of this, feminisms have been inherently transnational from the beginning, organizing themselves into transnational associations with intercontinental proportions. This section on feminism highlights the international dimensions of feminist collaboration and the various connections among feminists worldwide.

It examines the variations and complexity of feminism around the globe and demonstrates the relevance of discussing feminism in light of globalization. Writing about feminism does not mean describing a straight line; this post demonstrates the progressions and

regressions that occur when a right is not obtained forever. Despite this nonlinearity, it is crucial to establish a chronology that makes sense of the overall structure.

The golden period of feminism, which began in the final decade of the 19th century and ended before World War I broke out in 1914, was attained. Feminists prioritized serving their countries throughout the War and generally put their claims on hold in light of the heightened nationalism and patriotism that pervaded the country. They hoped women would be granted rights after the War, most notably the opportunity to vote. While this did occur in the United States (1920), the United Kingdom (1918), and Germany (1919), several nations denied women the right to vote for a long time. Only in 1931, 1932, Brazil, 1944, France, 1945, Italy, 1946, Japan, 1947, Argentina, 1948, Belgium, 1949, Chile, 1952, Greece and India, 1953, Mexico, 1955, Egypt, 1971, Switzerland, and 1974 did women get the right to vote. In contrast, women were granted the right to vote in Finland, Norway, and Denmark in 1906, 1913, and 1915, respectively.

Feminisms differed in what their national settings prioritized. The demands of feminists were and are greatly influenced by the various national contexts. If gaining women's voting rights was the primary goal in many European nations and the United States at first, it was seen as a method of achieving other rights, the most important of which was the right to education.

The right to work was one of the movement's main demands, and feminists worked to amend federal laws by contacting legislators and asking for changes to several articles in the various civil codes (many of which were influenced by the Napoleonic civil code of 1804). It is inaccurate to lump women's movements under more general categories with feminism since not

all groups of women are intrinsically feminist. Those who are active within feminism also must not be mistaken for all women: Feminists were and remain a minority.

The Great Depression of the 1930s pushed women who had gained the right to vote in several countries during the 1920s to return home. Women were accused of stealing men's jobs at this time of high unemployment. Fascism rose to prominence during the interwar years in many nations, creating a hostile climate in which feminists had little leeway. Following World War II in 1939, women began to fill the positions held by males when they were forced to fight. When the War ended and the men went home, the women were supposed to take care of their “Domestic obligations” at home.

Feminists were always torn between their rights and their obligations. Feminists of the first wave emphasized the need for a balance between the two, but it was fragile and depended on the economy and politics. In summary, first-wave feminist movements came to an end during the Great Depression of the 1930s, which was followed by the emergence of totalitarian nations and World War II. In the 1950s, obligations predominated, and women were expected to marry and care for their families. The 1940s had been years of enforced domesticity. Naturally, this did not mean feminists stopped being active; several participated in the movements that ended British colonialism in Egypt and India. Amid decolonization, second-wave feminism developed, with feminists actively engaged in anti-colonial movements.

Within French socialism, Charles Fourier was the originator of a female tradition. In addition to criticizing the oppression of women, he also criticized the inequalities of modern society, arguing that in his utopian society of Harmony, women's “liberty” would be unassailable.

Women would have the same freedom to work, love, and live that men do. Although few of Fourier's contemporaries and successors fully adopted his views, they significantly influenced them.

Numerous studies of Fourier and early French socialism have also reproduced this maxim to illustrate Fourier's feminist radicalism. He has even been credited with inventing the term feminism itself. Fourier's concern about the position of women and his arguments for their “liberty” reflected his vision of a universe structured by dualisms and oppositions, which needed to be kept in balance. Suppressing one of a pair of contrasted elements distorted the system entirely and needed to be redressed for the correct functioning of the cosmos. According to Fourier, the contrast between 'the feminine' and 'the masculine' was one of the most essential dualisms. It had significant implications for women since it established a sometimes limited view of their nature and potential roles in Harmony, making his legacy for feminism a mixed one. In addition, however, sexual differences represented a range of other fundamental polarities.

Fourier's writings on ‘the Feminine’ were not always propositions about real women. However, his ideas about women shaped his views on the operation of ‘the Feminine’ at the social and cosmic levels. Perfected gender relations revitalized, reordered, and loving- were necessary for social Harmony, but they also stood as metaphors for Harmony itself. Concepts of sexual difference provided a language through which Fourier's vision of social and cosmic equilibrium could be expressed based on the Harmony of opposites.

Fourier's commitment to the 'liberty' of women would seem as extraordinary to the citizens of Besan, where he was raised, as his renowned fantasies about humans evolving Tails

and the seas turning into lemonade. The capital of the Franche-Comte, in the far east of France, was not noted as a center of advanced thought, let alone as a home of feminism. The influence of the Catholic Church remained strong there, and Fourier regarded his hometown as the archetype of the small-minded provincial center. Nor did Fourier's background point to his emergence as a radical theorist and inspired visionary.

The words feminism and feminist are used today throughout the Western world to connote the ideas that advocate the emancipation of women, the movements that have attempted to realize it, and the individuals who support these goals. However, only some people in the English-speaking world realize that it is possible to determine these terminologies origins in nineteenth-century French political discourse. The earliest origins of the French word feminism and its derivatives are still obscure. Their roots should be traceable to the political agitation of the 1830s. During this time, the related words socialism and individualism appeared in the political vocabulary of French-speaking people. Scholars have long since illuminated the origins of these latter words. However, this is not the case for feminism.

The invention of feminism has long been attributed to Charles Fourier (1772-1837), the audacious thinker who coined many French neologisms and understood so well that women's emancipation was eradicating their legal and economic subordination to men. The dates of attributed origins nevertheless vary from 1808—the publication date for the first edition of the *Theories de Quatre Movements et des de- stories generals*—through 1837, the year of Fourier's death, to 1841, when the posthumous second edition of the *Quatre Movements* appeared in Fourier's *Oeuvres Completes*.

In 1896, Marya Chaliga-Loevy, writing in Paris, claimed that Fourier had invented the expression in the 1808 edition of his *Theories*. In Paul Robert's *Dictionnaire alphabetique et analogique de la langue française* (1960 edition), the first usage is attributed to Fourier with the date of 1837. This dictionary distinguishes between the “Doctrine that anticipates the extension of women's rights and role in society” and “the political feminism of the suffragettes.” Robert cites Marcel Braunschvig, *Notre Littérature*, as his authority.

Feminism has many meanings and interpretations, and no definition is universally accepted. Diverse feminists define feminism by their particular social, political, religious, and cultural worldviews. "Belief in the Social, Economic, and Political Equality of the Sexes" is what the *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines as “feminism.” It comprises several ideologies, moral philosophies, and social, cultural, and political movements that address gender inequality and women's equal rights. It opposes the misuse of authority and works for justice and equality in various contexts, including the economy, class, caste, race, culture, and religion.

Feminism is such a vast, competing, and sometimes incoherent system of moral precepts, political ideas, and social theories. It talks about women's economic, political, and social injustices. In an attempt to define it and offer remedies to end societal injustices, it investigates the origins, effects, and tactics of women's oppression. The goals of equality, rights, dignity, and the empowerment and independence of women must be pursued. Thus, the fight against sexism provides the pretext for women's subjugation and men's advancement. In actuality, sexism is a kind of societal oppression and is not a new problem.

Globally, women are perceived as having less access to opportunities, information, and skills, as well as some fundamental human rights. Women are oppressed and suppressed in every country, which leads to their extreme marginalization. Humans have tried to reduce discrimination and achieve gender equality in ancient societies since prehistoric times (Freedman, 2002). Greek philosopher Plato (427–347 BC) disclosed that women have "natural capacities" comparable to those of men (Scott, 1996). According to some academics, the word "feminism" is derived from the word "femme," which signifies woman. The word "feminism" is French, and its derivatives are unknown.

The statement was first used in 1837 and is credited to the French philosopher and utopian socialist Charles Fourier (1772–1837). Originating in French rallies in the 1880s, this movement is socio-political (Herouach, 2019). The activity was then moved to the United States in 1910 (Hilversum, 1994). The 1791 "Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen," which demanded equal rights for women, was based on Olympe de Gouges (1748–1793) publication of "The Rights of Man and Citizen" during the French Revolution. This was the turning point for the political movement known as feminism (Mousset, 2007). Similar concepts first appeared in the USA in 1848, England in 1878, Russia in 1848, and China in 1911, claim Raj and Davidson (2014).

The first president of the National Organization for Women, Betty Friedan, released "The Feminine Mystique" in 1963. Despite having the ability to vote and own property, women spend far too much time tidying and organizing their homes, which causes them to become anxious and bored. She has realized that they must leave their home country and pursue paid employment in

the public sphere. She has maintained that if women are unable to work, they cannot achieve equality or human decency. As a result, numerous discriminatory legislation must be repealed, and work opportunities for women must be expanded.

The term “feminism” is used to describe a variety of cultural phenomena. It seeks to grant women the ability to work and become economically and psychologically independent. It lists institutional and community-based initiatives aimed at eradicating gender-based inequality in society. It seeks to grant women equal rights in the political, social, and economic spheres while also attempting to uncover the hidden reality of male dominance and women's servitude and enslavement worldwide. It backs a giant fight for women's liberation from all forms of oppression, financial independence, autonomy over their bodies, and freedom to choose their lives and sexual orientation.

They have opposed feminists who seek to destroy the traditional family and backed the feminist movement's attempts to protect women's rights and interests in society. In this movement, there is a significant change in the previous debates within feminism, and feminists reveal that language is what constructs gender.

A multitude of elements, including class, color, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, come together to shape the identity of the woman. None of these causes is entirely to blame for the oppression of women, nor would addressing any one of these be able to end the issue of women's suppression. Although we live in a postmodern environment in the twenty-first century, prejudice and discriminatory views against women have not altered significantly over time.

French feminism, postmodernism, and poststructuralist feminism combine to create postmodern feminism, often known as third-generation feminism. These three words have occasionally arisen independently, and their ideas contradict one another and share overlapping concepts. However, postmodern feminism and postmodernism have a tense connection since some feminists think postmodern ideas mitigate the criticisms feminist theory aims to level, while others support the combination.

According to postmodern feminists, there are many different kinds of women and women's movements, each representing unique and conflicting interests. They oppose a comparatively simplistic explanation of patriarchal oppression and advocate for a broad range of social structures and practices. The instability of what is regarded as natural or normal regarding gender is known as postmodern feminism. Postmodern feminism argues that gender is a construct of language or discourse and is mainly based on social constructivist theories. It aims to create a new paradigm of social criticism that stresses the connections between feminism's concerns and language, sex, and power while eschewing traditional philosophical supports.

Postmodern feminists disagree with the mainstream feminist stance and favor multiple ways of knowing, including essentialism, philosophy, and universal truths. They hold that each woman has a unique manner of capturing the truth and that knowledge is always relational, open-ended, and provisional. Additionally, they wish to eradicate gender discrimination from the community. They concentrate on how social discourse shapes societal norms regarding the treatment of women. They have seen how language and culture influence sexual differentiation.

They believe that truth is not absolute and is merely constructed by individual groups, cultures, and languages.

The history of feminism in India may be divided into three main periods: the first started in the middle of the 19th century when reformists began promoting women's rights through changes to educational policies and cultural norms surrounding women. The third phase has finally emerged, prioritizing treating women fairly at home after marriage and in the workforce and their right to political parity. The second phase ran from 1915 to Indian independence, during which Gandhi integrated women's movements into independent women's groups, and the Quit India movement started to emerge.

Despite the progress achieved by Indian feminist groups, modern Indian women continue to face significant discrimination. The patriarchal nature of Indian society makes it challenging for women to acquire the rights to property ownership and education. In the past 20 years, sex-selective abortion has also become more common. Indian feminists think that feminism is more about female supremacy than it is about equality, and they think that these injustices are worth fighting for.

Feminist movements in India have faced criticism, just like in the West. They have drawn particular criticism for giving undue attention to affluent women while ignoring the concerns and representation of lower caste or impoverished women. Feminist movements and organizations that are caste-specific have resulted from this. The feminist movement began in Maharashtra on its own with the pioneering of women's rights and education: Savitribai Phule (1848) founded India's first school for girls; Tarabai Shinde (1882) penned India's first feminist

text, *Stri Purush Tulana*; and Pandita Ramabai (1880s) criticized the caste system and patriarchy in Hinduism.

The efforts of Bengali reformers brought about the marriage of upper caste Hindu widows, ended the practice of sati, which involved a widow being charred to death on the funeral pyre of her husband, ended child marriage, prohibited the disfigurement of widows, encouraged women's education, secured the right for women to own property, and mandated that the law recognize women's status by granting them fundamental rights in areas like adoption.

Most women's difficulties came to light, and improvements were implemented during the 19th century. Men carried out a large portion of the initial changes for Indian women. However, by the late 19th century, their spouses, sisters, daughters, proteges, and other people directly impacted by campaigns like those for women's education had joined them in their endeavors.

As independent women's organizations were formed by the late 20th century, women had more autonomy. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, a new story about “women's activism” emerged. In order to establish “logical” and organic connections between anti-communalism and anti-casteism, for example, and between feminism and Marxism, this was recently investigated and broadened. Although “equality between the sexes” was guaranteed by the Indian Constitution, women's movements saw a relative lull until the 1970s.

The distinction between the sexes in duties, functions, goals, and aspirations was primarily taken for granted throughout the early stages of women's rights movements. They were, therefore, to be treated differently in addition to being raised differently. This distinction

eventually emerged as a critical catalyst for the start of women's movements. Reformers of the early 19th century contended that women's subjugation in society had nothing to do with the differences between men and women.

Subsequent reformers believed that this distinction bound women to their social positions. Women's rights, therefore, needed to be correctly taken care of. Their roles as mothers were emphasized once more, but in a different way, with the establishment of women's organizations and their campaign involvement. This time, the argument was for women's rights to independence, education, and expression. However, throughout time, the idea of women as symbols of their mothers changed, moving from a focus on family to the development of an archetypal mother figure who evoked a complex and frequently atavistic image.

The principles of democracy, equality, and individual rights were introduced during the colonial march toward modernity. The emergence of nationalism and self-examination of discriminatory practices led to caste and gender-based social reform initiatives. Men in India started the first wave of feminism with the goals of eliminating societal problems, permitting widows to remarry, outlawing child marriage, and lowering the rate of illiteracy. It also sought to protect property rights using judicial action and control the consent age.

However, as nationalist movements arose in India in the late nineteenth century, attempts to elevate the role of women in Indian society mainly were impeded. Particularly in the domain of family relations, these movements opposed "colonial interventions in gender relations." A nationwide movement emerged in the middle to late 1800s to oppose colonial attempts to "modernize" Hindu families. Among these was the Age of Consent dispute, which started when

the government attempted to raise the legal Age of marriage for females. During the British colonial era, women reigned over several states in India.

Intense resistance to colonial rule emerged during this time. Nationalism emerged as the main factor. The assertion of Indian supremacy was used as a vehicle for cultural revivalism, which led to the creation of an essential Victorian-style model of Indian womanhood—one that was unique but kept private from the public sphere. Gandhi's introduction of Indian women into the nonviolent civil disobedience movement against the British Raj legitimized and extended their public activities.

For Indian women, the 1920s marked a turning point in history, when 'feminism' gave rise to regional women's organizations. These groups created livelihood plans for working-class women, focused on issues related to women's education, and coordinated national-level women's organizations like the All India Women's Conference. AIWC had a close relationship with the Congress of Indian Nations.

It operated within the nationalist and anti-colonialist independence movements led by Mahatma Gandhi. As a result, the widespread mobilization of women became a crucial component of Indian nationalism. Consequently, women were crucial in several nationalist and anti-colonial initiatives, including the 1930s civil disobedience campaigns.

The all India Women's Conference persisted after independence, and the Indian Communist Party established the National Federation of Indian Women as its own women's division in 1954. Following India's independence in 1947, nationalist objectives for nation building trumped female concerns, and feminist movements and agendas became less active.

Women's critical awareness of their rights and place in an independent India was fostered by their involvement in the liberation movement. As a result, the Indian Constitution now includes women's civic rights and the franchise. Affirmative action, the provision of maternity health and child care, equal pay for equal work, and other measures were implemented to support the advancement of women. The government started acting condescendingly toward women. The Indian Constitution, for instance, asserts that women constitute a "weaker section" of society and, as such, require support in order to exercise their equal rights. Therefore, unlike women in the West, women in India did not have to fight for their fundamental rights. The paradise ended abruptly when social and cultural beliefs and structures did not uphold the newly gained ideals of democracy and fundamental rights.

Feminists started redefining the parameters of women's employment rights after independence. The majority of feminists acknowledged the gender gap in the workforce before independence. On the other hand, feminists contested and worked to undo the entrenched disparities during the 1970s. These disparities included keeping women in "unskilled" occupations, paying them less than males, and using them as labor reserves. Stated differently, the goal of the feminist movement was to end the free labor of women, who were essentially being utilized as cheap labor.

In the early twenty-first century, the Indian feminist movement shifted its focus to include women's autonomy over their personal lives and the right to self-determination. It also saw them as valuable contributors to society and granted them the right to parity. Indira Gandhi took office

as India's first female prime minister in 1966. She led India as prime minister for three terms in a row (1966–77) and then for a fourth term (1980–1984, until she was killed in 1984).

People typically equate feminism with an aimless movement that promotes radicalism, encourages women to despise males, and destroys traditional family values. People only view it from a radical feminist perspective or through the radical feminist lens, which is why this is the case. Nonetheless, the truth is that numerous thinkers and theories have developed since the advent of feminism. Although they all had various ways of thinking, they all agreed that a woman should be granted the rights that she is due in society as a human being. The idea that a woman should not be treated like the other sex was widely shared.

Feminists are against the way society treats women in this way. As a result, all feminists try to recognize and deal with women's difficulties and problems. Also, they speak out against the long history of abuse and exploitation of women. The intention is to combat subordination, bias, and dominance. They challenge society's conventional mindset with this movement.

Feminists claim that “women are less valued in comparison to men in all civilizations which split sex into different cultural, economic or political realms.” The term “feminism” is synonymous with sexual equality as well as a dedication to eliminating sexual ascendancy and transforming society. They oppose sexual harassment and gender segregation of women in the workplace and the home. They dispute the primacy of man and his propensity for polygamy at the expense of women's subjection. Now that we have a basic understanding of Western feminism, one may wonder how far this can be transferred to Indian society and circumstances; it would be riskier to replicate a mistake.

Feminism was theorized differently in India than in the West, as evidenced by the position of women in pre-colonial society. When the state requested a report on the status of women from a jury of feminist professionals and activists, the wide range of issues affecting women were addressed. It acknowledged the unfair hierarchy and oppression of women that exist in India. Around this time, popular topics among Western feminists, such as violence against women, had an impact on Indian feminists. Given our nation's sociocultural diversity and history, the argument had to be done exceptionally creatively to preserve the essence of socio-culture. As a result, some of the Western concepts were outright rejected.

In India, feminism takes a different form that is very different from that of the West due to the same historical conditions and values. It implies a competitive individualism where “people are supposed to be free but everywhere in chains,” similar to the definition of “self.” A person is, nonetheless, regarded as a part of the broader social collectiveness in India. It is cherished and admired when individual banks can survive by banding together and sacrificing themselves for the greater good. Via a variety of repressive patriarchal family structures, Age, and relationships to men through their families of origin, marriage, and childbearing, as well as patriarchal qualities, Indian women manage their existence.

However, it should be noted that there are several cultures in India, including the Nairs of Kerala and the Shettys of Mangalore, who also have some Bengali families demonstrating matriarchal inclinations. The oldest lady in the family, as opposed to the older male, is the family's leader. Some of the communities in India that the Constitution recognizes as scheduled tribes are matriarchal and matrilineal, making them more egalitarian. Anuj Kumar, the

interviewer, claims that “Manipur has a matriarchal society,” although this statement cannot be regarded as an objective evaluation or judgment. This is due to the straightforward fact that women have assumed leadership roles in most social activism. Their culture has a patriarchal structure. Their women's empowerment is evident due to historical factors. Strong dynasties governed Manipur; therefore, to prevent any invasion or threat of crushing the frontiers, their males had to stand like a rock, protecting the borders, which freed up women to assume leadership in the family.

Muslims view men and women as being equal, but not in the sense that Westerners do. The Al Quran teaches that men and women have biologically different minds and that these minds function differently. Islam thus distinguishes between the rights of the husband and the wife. Being the head of the household is one of these rights the wife owes to her husband. India is a nation that is mainly made up of social hierarchies. Age, sex, ordinal rank, kinship link, caste lineage, wealth, occupation, and relationship to the governing power are the several categories that these hierarchies fall under. Girls from low-income homes experience twice as much vulnerability and instability when family hierarchies are established based on societal norms and financial requirements.

Girls are expected to be behind their brothers and have less access to the family's financial resources. If we examine the data, the birth ratio is another significant concern. The 2011 Census shows 943 available girls in India for every 1000 males. Another example is marriage, where a woman spends the majority of her life making a devout vow. After age 18, a girl is considered biologically capable of having children. However, in India, girls are frequently

married off before they reach puberty. Gandhi created the notion of “Stree Shakti” to represent the idea of femininity.

In addition to those above, Dalit groups have criticized Indian feminism, arguing that it favors upper-class or Hindu women of higher castes while ignoring the needs of the underprivileged, particularly Dalit women. Several minorities have criticized feminism for failing to take their concerns and challenges into account. It was suspected that upper-class Hindu feminism in India's mainstream ignores the issues faced by minority women. Numerous components help us understand the distinctions between Western and Indian feminism.

Liberalism is an economic and political philosophy that places a high value on protecting individual liberties, equal access to opportunities, and independence. It supports civil and human rights, democracy, secularism, the rule of law, freedom of the press, expression, and property. It encourages the expansion of rights, particularly those in the political and financial spheres.

Liberalism is a political and economic ideology that prioritizes preserving individual rights, equal opportunity, and self-reliance. It favors democracy, secularism, the rule of law, human and civic rights, press freedom, and property. It promotes the growth of liberties, especially those related to politics and the economy.

Liberal feminism is primarily concerned with equality and is rooted in liberal political ideology, which the French Revolution influenced. With its foundational concepts of democracy, equality of citizenship, autonomy, and universal rights, it is developed from liberal political philosophy. Liberal feminists contend that the misconception that women are inherently less intelligent and physically gifted than males exists throughout society. They contend that women's

subjugation is the result of antiquated ideas and that all people are equally capable of performing any task. Men are evaluated on their merits, but women's abilities are evaluated based on gender. They emphasize that women should have the same chances and rights as men. Until we transform society from the ground up, gender inequality will not be eradicated.

To provide women with liberal ideals, liberal feminism initially arose in the Western world in the 17th and 18th centuries, then spread to other parts of the world. Ultimately, feminists expanded the case for women's equal legal rights to vote and own property in the 19th century. The social and political theory that is most frequently supported among feminists is liberal feminism. It has emerged as the theoretical foundation for the movements supporting feminism. It is a primary subset of modern feminism that works to bring about gender equality in society. It is socially progressive and inclusive.

Liberal feminism favors universal suffrage, which includes equal rights to political, civic, and educational opportunities and the ability for all people, male or female, to vote. It focuses more on problems, including political rights, education, and employment equality. John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797), and Harriet Taylor Mill (1807–1858) are the three founders of liberal feminism. They acted for women's rights and liberation when the economic and social position of European women was shallow. The renowned English author Mary Wollstonecraft's groundbreaking “A Vindication of the Rights of Women,” a feminist treatise published in 1792, is regarded as the start of the liberal feminist movement. She demonstrates how women can develop the same moral strength and independence as men. Men and women should not be forced to attend distinct educational programs; this will be unjust and

unhelpful, leading to “artificial and weak characters” in the country. Because of this, she advocates for equal access to education for men and women. She likened the women who married affluent professionals and businessmen and had no desire to work outside the home to the “feathered race” or the caged birds plating themselves. As a result, education should be provided for both sexes to improve their reasoning, which will benefit society.

In addition, liberal feminists called for equal rights to healthcare, abortion, and voting, as well as a response to sexual harassment. They contend that there are no gains from the current gender disparities, only harms, as both men's and women's potential is stifled. As a result, many competent workers are denied the chance to further their skills. However, a household with two incomes is more solvent than one with just one income.

The liberal feminist movement produced this. In order to liberate people from oppression in all spheres of life including social, political, economic, and religious—liberalism has evolved into an intellectual instrument. Liberal feminists come in two varieties: i) welfare feminists, who want to remove socioeconomic barriers to women's advancement, and ii) classical feminists, who campaigned to repeal legislation that discriminated against women.

In order to integrate women into mainstream society and improve its responsiveness to the rights of individual women, liberal feminism works within its framework. However, it does not explicitly address the ideology or the system that supports the oppression of women. The fundamental source of gender disparity has not been adequately addressed. Liberal feminism causes a significant shift in world society. It believes that women are primarily human beings, not only objects of sexual desire. Given that women and men are rational beings, they should

have the same natural rights and the ability to do as they like. Liberal feminists also seek to gradually alter society's political, economic, and social structures.

Liberal feminists have differing views on pornography and prostitution. Prostitution involves three primary components: emotional detachment, promiscuity, and remuneration. Liberal feminists have noted that women are forcibly pushed or blackmailed into becoming prostitutes and posing for pornography. However, a large number of liberal feminists are against pornography and prostitution. In society, these are inconsistent with dignity, solidarity, and equality. They realize that prostitution is the sale of mastery as opposed to sex; they only provide their enslavement as a service. Among prostitutes and other sex workers, poverty, drug abuse, and early sexual abuse are prevalent issues.

Based on the notion that patriarchy is the primary cause of discrimination and oppression against women, radical feminism was founded in the 1960s by women who had taken part in civil rights and anti-war campaigns, mainly in New York and Boston. The movement spread to other parts of the USA and Europe. It holds that sexism and patriarchy are the leading causes of women's oppression and discrimination, ignoring all other factors like caste, economic class, location, race, color, Age, religion, ethnicity, culture, and disability. Biological and psychological aspects form the foundation of patriarchy that is ingrained in society.

Radical feminism also draws attention to the coercion and violence committed by men against women and children in patriarchal societies, including rape, sexual harassment, child sexual assault, and domestic abuse. It holds males responsible for women's exploitation since they have profited from their subjugation. It acknowledges that men subjugate women and views

them as a single homogenous group. The two leading proponents of radical feminism are Australian writer and public intellectual Germaine Greer (1939) and American feminist writer, educator, artist, and activist Kate Millet (1934–2017). They expressed dissatisfaction with the way women are exploited as housewives, mothers, and sexual partners, and they saw marriage as a formalization of discrimination against women.

The severe and extreme development of liberal feminists during the 20th century is known as radical feminism. It strives to avert a society ruled by men and opposes patriarchal oppression and the mistreatment of women. It focuses on privilege within the social structure that aims to advance women's organizations as distinct social groups and the power of men and patriarchy. It is predicated on two ideas: first, that women are of inestimable worth, and second, that patriarchy is the root cause of all forms of violent oppression against women.

It considers sexism and patriarchy to be the leading causes of women's oppression. Because of their biological functions, it recognizes women as a political class. It opposes marriage and family since they both contribute to the establishment of patriarchy in society. It stresses that women who give birth are different from men, and therefore, they should have their rights rather than only equal rights to those of men. Its goals are to foment separation among peoples based on little differences; its ideas are implausible and frequently seen as a path toward bloodshed. In order for it to be regarded as heterosexualism as well as race and class blindness. Radical feminism is evident on the Chinese social networking site Weibo.

Radical feminists believe that males are the ruling class, women are the subject class, and men dominate and rule society. Furthermore, they think matriarchy may take the place of

patriarchy and that women are not only morally superior to males but also equal. They hope to change society and women's lives by taking drastic measures. They view marriage as a hegemonic pact meant to take advantage of women and believe that men are the enemy of women. When it comes to satiating their sexual cravings and meeting their reproductive needs, they favor using technology over men. Betty Friedan was one of the first radical feminists to recognize that women's sex is a factor in the way society is culturally constructed to oppress them. The radical feminist organization logically argues that a woman should use reason while deciding whether or not to get married rather than giving in to emotion. Rather than considering masculinity or femininity as absolute categories, they saw "gender" as a social construct. Women are closer to nature than men are to their sexuality, according to Mary Daly and other campaigners. Radical feminism holds that the inferior status of women in society is the primary source of oppression. In contrast, Marxism holds that sociocultural activities in patriarchal cultures are the root of women's exploitation.

Radical feminists contend that males regularly buy and sell objectified female bodies for their sexual gratification and that industries such as prostitution, pornography, stripping, massage parlors, and escort services are all forms of sexual exploitation. Pornography is widely condemned by feminists such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine Mackinnon, who argue that it dehumanizes and degrades women. Several radical feminists contended in the 1980s that the participation of women in the manufacture of pornography and prostitution was not linked to patriarchy.

The primary focus of cultural feminism is on “female nature or female essence,” which aims to reframe and revalue characteristics associated with the feminine form. This feminine essence, often known as an ethic of care, places more value on relationships, cooperation, and peace. The goal of cultural feminism is to identify biological distinctions in reproductive potential as the basis for disparities between men and women. It aims to affirm feminine qualities that, in a patriarchal culture, have been consistently devalued. It likewise draws attention to the struggle between men and women, but it does so in a culturally rather than naturally inherent way.

In 1972, socialist feminist Elizabeth Diggs used “cultural feminism” to apply it to radical feminism to minimize gender differences. The primary focus of cultural feminism is on “female nature or female essence,” It seeks to reinterpret and revalue traits connected to the feminine form. This feminine nature, also called an ethic of care, values peace, cooperation, and relationships more than others. Cultural feminism aims to pinpoint differences between men's and women's reproductive capacities originating from biological differences. It aims to give legitimacy to feminine qualities that, in a patriarchal culture, have been gradually marginalized. It also highlights the conflict between men and women, but it does it in a way that is culturally embedded instead of innate.

Cultural feminism is the belief that women should be given more credit for their perspective on the world because men and women have distinct perspectives. Sometimes, a woman's perspective on the world is better than a man's. The notion of cultural feminism extols the virtues of women. The objective is to establish areas exclusively for women, like women's

bookstores, art galleries, fitness centers, health clubs, magazines, etc., to foster a new society devoid of patriarchal and drastically altered lifestyles. Cultural feminists see a chance to reconstruct society with institutions and power structures oriented around women. Cultural feminism is based on the fundamental tenet that women are not the same as males in terms of language, ethics, or even epistemology. It aims to unite all women regardless of Age, race, ethnicity, or class in a shared sisterhood. It aims to establish and preserve wholesome settings and relationships devoid of macho ideals.

Numerous academics have noted that when radical and liberal feminism fails to bring about gender equality in society, cultural feminism offers unique and innate ways of speaking, thinking, and behaving that contribute to developing a woman's common culture. Cultural feminists challenge the subjugation of women by establishing and maintaining distinct spaces dedicated to women, which they argue “promote female biology as the basis of women's power.” They try to figure out ways to lessen the harshest effects of patriarchy. Cultural feminists defined women as possessing traits associated with men, regardless of whether those traits are innate or socially constructed. The traits of men are detrimental to society, whereas the traits of women are advantageous.

Marxism is a left-wing political philosophy created and influenced by two of the greatest German intellectuals, Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) and Karl Marx (1818–1883). It is also known as the economic theory of history. Applying categories such as law, religion, race, and production sources, the top class applies a political theory that breaks the ties of oppression. Two prominent social classes have been established by capitalism: i) the bourgeoisie, who possess the

means of social production, and ii) the proletariat, which is the employer of wage labor lacking independent means of production; they are oppressed in all spheres of society. The exploitation is profitable for the bourgeoisie.

The 1970s saw the discovery of Marxist Feminism, which emphasized the destruction of capitalism and methods for emancipating women. Marx never developed a theory of gender; instead, his indirect contribution to feminism can be attributed to the advent of capitalism. Marxism has given society the categories and tools it needs to think about feminism, anti-capitalism, and gender and class together. Marxist feminism characterizes it as “critical of traditional Marxism for Its Gender Blindness.” is how Marxist feminism puts it. It is focused on the dual oppression of women by both sex and class. It accuses capitalism outright of being the primary driver of women's oppression. Marxist feminists have observed that the oppression of women is visible according to commercial, social, and economic factors, one's home environment, place of employment, and social life. They contend that capitalism oppresses women and that gender inequality will disappear when socialism takes the place of capitalism.

Marxism has determined that the establishment of private property is what gave rise to the oppression of women. It holds that women's labor is invisible and unpaid in society and that capitalism is mostly to blame for women's subordination, oppression, and second-class position. Consequently, women's equality cannot be attained under the framework of capitalism.

According to Marxist feminism, a capitalist system's structural element is poverty. Within the dominant capitalist global system, women's oppression is considered integrally tied to class oppression, preventing their freedom.

Marxist feminists point out how capitalism's social, political, and economic institutions subjugate women on a secondary level. It has emphasized the need to modify wages and domestic labor to maintain their status. Women's roles within the family may improve due to their financial contributions. It has come to recognize that women are not the only ones who oppress women men are, too. Marxist feminists believe that women may be free and that the state and society should appreciate their housework if class divisions can be eliminated through the unification of the working class, which includes the oppressed. Marxist feminists also emphasize the need for women to actively participate in the oppressed class's unification against the bourgeoisie. Marxist feminism holds that increasing knowledge is the first step toward achieving this unification.

Marxist feminists believe capitalism is to blame for the patriarchy. The exploitation of women is associated with private property, which fosters an atmosphere in which fathers and then spouses dominate women. Marxists want freedom and gender equality but reject the capitalist state in its entirety. However, in Marxist feminism, unpaid household work is largely hidden.

In the 1970s, black feminism began to take shape, offering social theory to counter oppression. It is a philosophical, artistic, intellectual, and activist approach based on the real-life experiences of Black women. Fighting oppression is a political battle that affects all women of color. It offers the notion that “Black women are valuable by nature”, that “black women are inherently valuable, that Liberation is essential because we as human beings require autonomy, not as a supplement to someone else's.” Other terms are associated with it, including African-

American feminism, Black-Canadian feminism, etc. Black feminism was founded to empower Black women to pursue their special brand of social justice. The term “Black Feminism” was first used in 1989 by the scholar Kimberlee Crenshaw (1959), who made the argument in her doctoral thesis that Black women must contend with the idea of the “double bind,” or the conflict between being Black and being a woman.

The establishment and maintenance of black families in the United States is significantly influenced by black feminism. It highlights how racism is a significant factor in the subjugation of women of color, with black women specifically experiencing many forms of sexist and racist oppression. In the act of oppression, the majority of African-Black women were taken to the United States to labor as enslaved people. Black and white women in American society are viewed differently. Racism, sexism, classism, and ethnicism have all had a gravely detrimental effect on the lives of African-American women. Every African American woman has lived in a society that devalues her, and the majority of them have suffered numerous forms of oppression, including female genital mutilation, child rape, and child marriage. The societal perception of Black women as subhuman and the statement "there is no more isolated subgroup in academe than Black women" make their backgrounds difficult.

In society, ethnicity is determined by cultural factors such as nationality, language, and culture. In contrast, Physical traits like skin tone, hair type, and facial features define a person's race. In addition to concerns of race and gender, black feminists have broadened the definition of “Black feminism” to encompass issues of class and sexuality. Sojourner Truth (1797–1883), Maria Stewart (1803–1879), and Frances E. W. Harper (1825–1911) all battled for the rights of

women of color. Sojourner Truth, a formerly enslaved person who later became a public speaker, stated in 1851 that while white women were fighting for labor rights and the right to vote, black women were fighting to be recognized as human beings. In other words, although living in the same society, black women's circumstances are very different from those of white women. "womanism" was first used in 1979 by feminist African-American author Alice Walker to refer to an intersectional alternative to white feminism. When her book "The Color Purple" was released in 1982, she adopted the word "womanist" to characterize the black feminist movement.

The dominance of nature and the oppression of women are intertwined and reinforce one another. With the movement's backing for women's emancipation and a sustainable environment, ecofeminism evolved in the latter half of the 20th century. Ecofeminism can be defined as "The feminist position most explicitly concerned with environmental degradation." This is the definition of ecofeminism. Its essence is far more spiritual than theoretical or political. There are two main components to it: feminine and ecology. It holds that under patriarchy, women are innately aware of and in love with nature and thus reject both the mistreatment of women and acts of violence against it. Ethicists such as Alice Walker, Vandana Shiva, Ivone Gebara, and others address the ethical foundation of humanity's relationship with the natural world. Many movements in the world are related to ecofeminism, such as the Chipko movement in India, the Anti-Militarist movement in Europe and the USA, and the Green Belt movement in Kenya.

Some order dualities, such as male/female, white/black, human/nature, West/East, conscious/unconscious, logic/emotion, strong/weak, and spirit/body, exist in our society, with the

former dominating the latter. Certain societies hold that man is superior to woman and that culture is superior to nature. Consequently, women must stand for nature, unconsciousness, emotion, and body if man represents culture, consciousness, reasoning, and spirit. When it comes to women and nature, both are perceived identically and are taken advantage of in a society where men dominate.

The natural fusion of feminist and ecological ideas expressed via the efforts of female botanists, gardeners, animal welfare activists, and other professionals is known as ecofeminism. It aims to create comparisons between the exploitation of women and the environment by bringing ecology and feminism together. Its foundation is the resurgence of earth-honoring and earth-caring practices. It demonstrates how women are more in tune with nature than males are. In the 21st century, nature is in a risky situation due to the quickening commercialization, industrialization, urbanization, and the unlimited needs of human beings. Women and nature are due to their reproductive roles, biological status, and discrimination; they are different in many respects; both are defined as passive subjects that are subjected to violence and social inequalities.

According to ecofeminism, patriarchy and its emphasis on dominance and control not only contribute to the oppression of women but also harm humanity, destroy all living things, and destroy the world. It emphasizes that in order to preserve ecological balance and sustainable growth, humans and nature must coexist peacefully. It upholds the political, economic, social, and cultural aspects of women's rights and empowerment, all of which benefit all living things. Like nature, women are capable of procreation and life creation. Women, for instance, give birth

to, raise, and nourish humans. With its resources, nature, like a mother, ensures that life on Earth continues. "Mother Nature, motherland, or mother earth" refers to nature. They intended to convey through the term "ecological feminism" that women are inherently environmentalists simply by their gender.

Feminism is a social theory and political movement that advocates for the abolition of all forms of social oppression, including everyday sexism, sexual exploitation, and discrimination against women. Additionally, it advocates for the rights and interests of women. The issues raised by feminist political activism include representation, wage equality, domestic abuse, maternity leave, abortion rights, reproductive rights, voting rights, sexual harassment, gender discrimination, and sexual violence.

The feminist movement's historical trajectory is separated into four sections. Every wave denotes a distinct cultural era and the media participation of women. The feminist movement is based on social and political initiatives that improve women's social, political, and cultural standing. Feminism has undergone numerous transformations and waves, yet its significance remains in mitigating the oppressive status that women hold in contemporary countries.

The 19th Amendment to the US Constitution was approved in the Senate on June 4, 1919, and Congress gave women the right to vote in 1920. Women in most European nations and colonies began to have partial or total voting rights in the 1950s. The vote was granted to women in most European nations, including Russia, Germany, Austria, and the UK in 1918, Belgium in 1919, the US and Canada in 1920, Ireland in 1928, Spain in 1931, and so on.

It focuses on accomplishing legal and political rights, including women's access to public spaces, employment, education, and the fundamental right to vote. Moreover, it backs the notion of women having a respectable place in the home and equal property rights. The economic, sexual, and reproductive rights of women in society are also emphasized. During this movement, three primary forms of feminism emerged: cultural, radical, and liberal.

The women's achievements in the first wave are both positive and negative. It brings activists from all around the world together for a single cause, and its disciplined framework moves smoothly. It ignores the predicament of Black women in favor of concentrating on the hardship of White women, who are mainly middle-class Western women. The US Constitution's Fifteenth Amendment, which would have granted Black males the ability to vote before them, is opposed by some campaigners. Additionally, it is racial bigotry and support for segregation.

The 1960s marked the beginning of second-wave feminism, which lasted three decades and ended in the 1990s. In this movement, sexuality and reproductive rights are central concerns. In 1968, Martha Lear coined the term "second-wave feminism" in addition to identifying the first wave of feminism. The movement emerged after World War II when many women entered the labor force and challenged current notions of women's role in the family, workplace, and society. Several political feminism movements, including socialist feminism, ecological feminism, and Marxist feminism, rose in society.

The Miss America Pageant demonstrations in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1968 and 1969 catalyzed the movement. Because it is an occasion where women's beauty is objectified and "oppressive" feminine artifacts like makeup, artificial eyelashes, high heels, bras, and girdles are

thrown in the trash. Protesters have said that "women were victims of a patriarchal, commercialized, oppressive beauty culture" and are demanding an end to pageantry after witnessing how contestants are herded like livestock. With the second wave of feminism, women's private lives are now included in the realm of feminine politics against men's sexist practices. Only white middle-class women in the West drive the first wave of feminism; however, non-white and white women in the West and emerging nations drive the second wave.

Support is given to the movement that empowers women regarding their sexuality and reproductive rights. It operates in the context of anti-war and civil rights movements. It addresses many different subjects, such as equal access to political and economic positions, paid maternity leave, paid education, equal employment opportunities, rights to birth control, paid maternity leave, abortion, construction of sufficient childcare facilities, and the safety of women and children. In addition, it addresses issues of misogyny, official legal inequities, rape and domestic violence, marital rape, sexual harassment, prostitution, and the commodification of women's bodies for sexual purposes. In addition, it seeks to modify divorce and custody laws and establish rape crisis centers and women's shelters. Several initiatives are needed to eradicate gender disparity in society.

Including women from impoverished countries, the second wave attempted to create a color scheme based on sisterhood and solidarity. American activists have noted a lack of unity in the women's movement. White feminists sometimes downplay or overlook the struggles and voices of women of color. In order to make up for this shortcoming, women create a social class in which class, race, and gender are combined to oppress the patriarchal class both directly and

indirectly. Specific requests made by women in this wave are reasonable and required. The feminist sex wars within feminism over topics like pornography and sexuality put a stop to this movement.

The 1990s and 2000s saw various thought patterns and levels of third-wave feminism. It raises questions about body positivity and heteronormativity. American writer, feminist, and activist Rebecca Walker daughter of feminist Alice Walker is credited with creating the term "third-wave feminism" in her seminal 1992 piece "Becoming the Third Wave." The intellectuals and activists of Generation X, born in the developed world in the 1960s and 1970s, are in charge of it. In actuality, a large number of third-wave feminists are the daughters of second-wavers.

Third-wave feminists feel they have "more opportunities and less sexism" than older generations of feminists and consider themselves as strong, independent, and capable social agents of first and second waves. The new postcolonial and neoliberal international order is where it all began. With broad philosophies like cultural feminism, black feminism, and postmodern feminism, it offers a dynamic analysis that is appreciated globally. The concept of "universal womanhood," which emphasizes shifting from group goals to individual rights, is emphasized.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **Sexuality, Desire and Feminist Discourse in Anita Nair's *Mistress***

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

To begin with, we come across Saadiya, the teenage daughter of a Muslim family in Arabipattanam. Her father, Vapa Haji Najib Masood Ahmed, 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 pure Arab stock, the descendants of the prophet himself. Moreover, he firmly believed that he and the other Arabs must safeguard the bloodline, the pure Arabic blood.

Saadiya is impatient about being pinned down to the twenty by thirty feet sky above her head, as the Muslim women are confined to their homes and 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 seashore of Arabipattanam were only for the men. The women were not supposed to see and be seen by other human beings. Saadiya, the family's youngest daughter, hankers after freedom, which the men enjoy. She also wants to see, 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. Usually, the girls in Arab families are married off at the age of eight or less. She is also allowed to learn Arabic, and a tutor is appointed. 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, was 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 an 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 of 'the Plank of Avidity.'

The life demand of us is that we have a plank of avidity. How can we have more if we do not raise our expectations? How can we be content with just what we have and know? (*Mistress 100*).

However, the four walls of her house have become her world. Saadiya hankers after the world beyond these four walls. From her small room.

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 feel 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 woman born here to live and

die hidden by these walls? Was there never to be a way out from here?

(Mistress99).

This hankering after reality, the desire to experience things, drives the teenager Saadiya to venture out of her house. She is unsatisfied 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 and the wrongs being done to women. She would like to say.

It is not 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 (*Mistress 99*).

Saadiya was content with more than just imagination or the stories. For her, reality was essential to see, touch, hear, feel, sense, know, and experience (*Mistress101*). Saadiya, therefore, wants to explore the world around them to see things for herself. This curiosity makes her go out. The stories she reads from the picture books awaken the dream of the prince, who would come and take her away on horseback. She is suppressed in her ghetto life. The pictures of the blue seas, green hills, the endless roads 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. However, she has no fear and is unaware that she is transgressing. This adventure gives her the first glimpse of Sethu, who has come to Arabipattanam with the doctor.

Saadiya's face colors as she finds Sethu looking at her uncovered face, and she hanks after the unknown hero. Sethu's single glance smites Saadiya. Saadiya is doubly inhibited in her short life. She was born into 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 participate in education and also in the economic sphere of the family and community. Saadiya is singularly lucky because she is taught to read and write at home, while other women in the house are not allowed this facility. Some Muslim women were allowed to read, but writing skills were unnecessary. Haji Najib Masood was a rigorous man, who considered men to be responsible for maintaining the family, and the good women were to be obedient to him without question. When there are such strict laws, there is a human tendency to go against naturally react against this oppressive rule and dare to walk in the familiar alley. As she walks to Nadira's house, she thinks.

Life: Life in so many colors and shapes. A life that breathed and walked. A life that chewed and spat. Life that screamed and shouted. A life that mumbled and tumbled, hissed, and crawled. Life that waited.

A life that never is hers (*Mistress* 102).

Saadiya walked on, uncovering her face, and at this fateful moment, Sethu saw her. Saadiya's face flushed with color, which created a feeling in his mind. This momentous action of

uncovering face changed Saadiya's life. Saadiya dreams of Sethu, whom she names Malik. The passion in her creates a strange longing as she confesses to herself.

My body feels like thighs. My insides quiver with queer churning

My breath quickens; I do not understand myself anymore if this Vaapa, you

ought to have branded me so I could never dream again (*Mistress* 131).

Saadiya's love-lorn state is responsible for her tragedy. Her spontaneous falling in love overrides her religious spirit. She never thought Sethu could be someone other than a young Muslim man: strict religious laws and her love for Hamid clash, resulting in tragedy. Saadiya's obstinacy brings about her tragedy. Even when she learns who Sethu is, she calls him Malik. She tells him

You are Malik. The unique individual who originated from across the

oceans. Among men, he was a strong and upright leader who could be

relied upon to brave the sea, the winds, and the unknown paths.

Malik, you are mine. Do not see? (*Mistress* 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 resolves like a mutineer to oppose this proposal of her marriage. Her father tries to ignore her, but she threatens him, saying. Vaapa, you can pretend that you do not hear me. But I will tell the Kazi, I am not willing to marry the man you have chosen for me (*Mistress* 144).

Saadiya is punished for this transgression by her father, who brands her with a heated iron rod. However, Saadiya stubbornly refuses to marry Salim. Sethu's single glance smites Saadiya. She does not know his name but thinks he is 'Malik.' She tells her elder sister as much. When Doctor Samuel visits Saadiya's house to treat her pregnant elder sister, Sethu 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 he sees the woman in the alley next time, Sethu says, Are you asking me to close my eyes to the beauty of the moon? How can I? (*Mistress*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 acknowledgment of his feelings 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 leave the four walls of their homes. 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 because 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.

Though we live so close to it, we never see it. All the men in Arabipattanam, they went to the 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 noon, bringing  
 a whiff of salt into our homes and, on hot days, a brackish odor, part fish,  
 part decay, part mystery (*Mistress* 138).

Saadiya escapes this ghettoed life when Razia is taken to the hospital for childbirth. She goes, along with Zulekha, to the hospital in Nazareth. A house is rented there for their stay to keep Razia company and 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 meeting Sethu comes to light. Her father loves her, but his respect for his religion is more vital than his love for his daughter. He punishes Saadiya, branding her thigh with a heated iron rod. However, this punishment does not stop Saadiya from loving Sethu. Their love story is inevitable as Saadiya has to accompany Razia to the 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 make her final decision by the dawn of the next day, and if she does not change her mind, she must go. Saadiya, now in Nazareth, appears at Sethu's doorstep in 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, leaving 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 leaving the house and falling in love with a stranger. Her tragedy results from her craving for freedom but, at the same time, remaining staunchly attached to the faith that is built into her by her family and her community. She is proud to be the descendant of the original Kahirs of Arabia. She tells Sethu

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 (*Mistress* 227).

Despite her staunch faith in Islam and its teachings, Saadiya longs for freedom and follows the dictates of her heart. Being an inexperienced teenager, she does not understand the complexities of the world outside the ghetto created by her family and the community dominated by male members. She takes Sethu to be 'Hamid' because she is familiar with only one religion and community, which is the world for her. 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 faiths 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 seashore, and Sethu was in the service with James Raj, a Christian businessman. They lived an idyllic life until Saadiya was pregnant. Saadiya suffered physically as well as mentally. She felt contempt for the neighbors. She is not even correctly married. She is worried about her Child. What kind of life would it have anyway? With no ancestry to speak of, no family, not even a religion or a god to call its own? (*Mistress* 197).

Sethu brought her books on all religions-Christian, Muslim, and Hindu. Sethu tries to console her, saying that the Child is God's gift to 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 compassionate. The conflict between inter-religious marriages is inevitable if 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 on bringing up her son as a true Muslim. Conflict between interreligious

marriages is inevitable if the husband and wife have strong religious feelings. Sethu reacts angrily, saying Over my dead body (*Mistress 227*). Saadiya tries to convince him, telling him about five acts of cleanliness in Islam

Shaving the pubic hair, plucking the hair under the armpits, shaving the mustache, clipping your nails, and circumcision. Only then is Fitra achieved.

Fitra has an inner sense of cleanliness, making him a good Muslim (*Mistress227*).

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. However, Saadiya maintains that her being a Muslim of the purest of Arab blood, and her son is pure Muslim of her blood. Sethu is annoyed and tells her the Child is his son also, that there is his blood in him. He blames her for being a fanatic. However, Saadiya reacts by saying, I made a mistake. I cannot allow my son to do the same (*Mistress 228*).

Sethu becomes cold; he feels hurt as if someone has hit him in his ribs. In his anger, Sethu tells her to return to her family and religion if she thinks she has 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 for her final rest.

Saadiya's story turns out to be a tragedy because, in her innocence, she takes Sethu to be Malik. Merely sixteen years old and living a ghettoed life, she is 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 her husband's name, replacing her father's. Saadiya tries to claim the right to name her son and decide 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 return 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 drowns herself in the ocean as a suicide. In Saadiya's story, gender discrimination is marked by religion. Girls are not allowed education. They are pinned down to the back alleys and must cover themselves entirely in black cloth, while men can go anywhere and do what they like.

Saadiya's protest here is not to get equality but only to have the freedom to go out and see the world with her own eyes and to know people and places. She does not know other people who have different faiths and religions. Her tragedy results from her cloistered life, ignorance, and inexperience. In presenting the story of Saadiya, the writer tries to show how women are denied essential freedom even by their loving parents in a conservative society. Saadiya's father

is a Kazi, and he must set an example for others, so he severely punishes his daughter and finally abandons her. Saadiya belongs to a 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 beings inferior to men and has subjected women to strict rules. When she disobeys rules, she is severely punished. As Neeru Tandon observes

Throughout history, violence against women has been allowed and even encouraged. More than 2000 years ago, Roman law gave a man life and death authority over his wife. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, English common law permitted a man to discipline his children and wife Using a whip or stick no more significant 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 aggressive men (*Mistress140*).

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 disapprove of. However, she did not know the reason behind such strict rules, which were only against women. She did not know that there were people of other faith. Her father repents giving his dear daughter 'a little rope' to wander about. He must punish her because he might risk his honor in society as a Kazi. Religion everywhere imposes severe restrictions on women and discriminates against them. Men enjoy 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, but 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 her and then making a decision. It is her ignorance that lands her in trouble.

Unlike Saadiya, Radha is well-educated and aware 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 way. She worked in a company where she fell in love with a senior manager, much older than herself. It was not falling in love. However, 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 a relationship with him for two years. It was more an infatuation than love. The man uses her as a playmate, and she goes to the pubs and restaurants with him. 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 she is taken advantage of but has to face the consequences. She becomes pregnant and gets herself aborted, pretending to be separated from her husband. Aware of what she has gone through, Radha's father finds a bridegroom for her. She agrees to marry Shyam, who loves Radha, but he has a poor relationship and cannot hope for her hand. Radha's father obliges him, and he agrees to marry her. However, Radha does not love him. It is a marriage of convenience for her. Shyam loves her, but they are an incompatible pair emotionally and culturally. As Beauvoir says, the institution of marriage has

marred the spontaneity of feelings between the spouses by "converting freely expressed emotions into required duties and shrilly asserted rights."

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 be a traditional wife. Radha accepts her married life and casts herself as a traditional wife, but she cannot love Shyam. She does not protest whenever Shyam makes love to her. He said that when she responded to my touch, I knew she was trying to block memory and closed my mind to it (*Mistress123*). Shyam finds her reading a book on which a blurb on the back says An account of a woman's quest for Independence and strength (*Mistress123*).

This is a clue to Radha's complex life, her dissatisfaction with 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, 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. However, Radha is well-educated, and culturally, she is superior to him. He would not allow Radha to interfere in his business matters because, like an arch patriarch, he would like his wife to busy herself at 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.

I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools, and you said it was too

much work for a small quantity of money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a creche, and you said you did not want the house filled with bawling babies. I thought I would find something else to do that did not involve making money, but even that is not right (*Mistress*73).

Radha, thus, makes her grievances quite clear. In Indian society, a woman is not supposed to express her sufferings or her complaints against her husband openly. However, Radha is an educated New Woman who has her aspirations. She could not tolerate Shyam's chauvinistic attitude and habit of saying no to everything. Shyam was using her only as a sex object and never thought of her 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 Shyam's taste. Shyam treats her merely as a woman to fulfill 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 did not ever feel desirability for Shyam as she now feels for Chirs.

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 honor, so contemptuous of convention? (*Mistress* 54).

Radha's marriage of convenience propels her into a relationship with Chris Stewart, who comes to Kerala to interview Koman, the Kathakali artist. At first, she has misgivings about forming an amorous relationship with Chris. However, 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 Creche. She impatiently says

Do I not have the right to my own opinion? I am your spouse. Your wife, do you hear me? However, you treat me like I am a married woman. A deadly *mistress* who satisfies your sex cravings while having no legal rights (*Mistress* 73).

Here, Radha is protesting against the typical patriarchal domination of a husband, who decides what a wife should or should not do. Kate Millet, for instance, says that Under patriarchy, the female did not develop symbols used to characterize her. The concepts that molded society about women were likewise male-designed since both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male-dominated. As we know, the image of women was created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from the fear of otherness of a female. However, this idea assumes that patriarchy has already been formed and that men have established themselves as the standard for humanity, serving as both the subject and the referent of the female as 'other' or alien (*Mistress* 46-47).

When Radha expresses her desire to start a business on her own, he shouts at her that he has a status in society and that she must behave as a wife to him and not spoil his name in society. She does not like his domineering and superior attitude. Shyam does not like Radha to show her talent and her intellectual ability. He is aware of his inferiority in this respect. So, he opposes every proposal where she can show her intellectual ability. He is aware of her social and intellectual superiority, and though he loves her very much, he feels insecure about 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

It would have helped if you had not come with us. You know how people are. They think a married woman who has not had children for so long is a Macchi. They will not like it. It is inauspicious to have a barren woman at such functions—the evil eye, etc. (*Mistress* 114).

This rejection makes Radha cold towards the family 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. She thinks seriously about 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 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 is 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 has offered him money to marry her. Radha had told him before the marriage that she was not a virgin. Her confession was expected. Radha would not keep it secret. Radha and Shyam are quite plain-spoken about this matter. They were honest with each other, but Shyam did not tell Radha that he loved her. Radha is also not aware of Shyam's love for her. She thinks she is only a possession for him.

I believe that I am a possession of Shyam. A treasured item. I play that part in his life. He desires a *mistress*, not an equal: someone to spoil and someone to use feminine cunning to spoil him. I picture a butterfly captured and pinned to a board while still alive. Its wings were spread to show off its markings, but it was unaware that a tiny heartbeat inside of it was aching to fly. I have now created that butterfly (*Mistress 54*).

Despite her antipathy towards Shyam, Radha cannot help but submit to his needs as a husband. Shyam loves her, but he does not say so because he knows 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 the Kathakali performance late at night, Shyam forcibly makes her yield to his physical pleasure. He resents Radha's attitude towards him. He feels she 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 soulmate, 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 the pleasure of having imposed his will on her. However, Shyam interprets her normal behavior as the right way to treat her. She pretends gaiety but nurses great pain in the heart of which Shyam is unaware. Radha broods over the word 'rape' and feels 'sore and bruised, invaded and robbed. Shyam knows 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 behavior. He thinks that by raping her, he has made her feel low about herself. He feels this is how 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. You are my wife. I have my rights. "Don't I have the right to say no," she demanded (*Mistress* 163).

And then he brutally rapes her. Radha then decides what to do. This incident prepares her mind to flout the notion of loyalty in the marital relationship.

I will know how to deal with this attack if I can name 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 did not. I was never his. Moreover, I never will be. He had expected anger all day, 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 (*Mistress* 166).

This incident makes up Radha's mind to disobey moral norms and form an alliance with Chris, an extramarital affair. Her affair with Chris is, thus, a relation to the tyrannical behavior 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 and tells them she will meet Uncle Koman while she 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 cherishes herself as an independent young woman. However, when her notions of Independence land her in trouble, she meekly accepts a family set-up. Her marriage with Shyam is convenient, but she takes it seriously. As Umesh notes

Radha impresses him (Shyam) with her self-contentedness, and he is willing to follow many of her decisions, such as the diet she decides they follow. However, he still cannot accept her personality as a whole.

Thus, Radha finds herself between her longing for Independence, acknowledged to a certain degree, and the traditional role she is to play.

Though Radha tries to be a traditional wife without 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 fulfill her marital duty towards Shyam but cannot repress her feelings 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 fulfill his sexual needs. She feels that Chris understands and appreciates her opinions on arts, politics, etc., while Shyam does not allow her to participate in his business activities. She goes to the factory where women work and tries to do something for them. Shyam

resents it, as he is worried about social status. Shyam should have understood her need to define and assert her individuality. She wants to be respected and loved and create an image of herself. This is 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.

Shyam's highhanded behavior very much hurts Radha. She feels 'sore, bruised, invaded, and robbed.' However, she decides to pretend that nothing has happened. She would not like to give him the pleasure of having imposed his will on her. However, she finds another way of punishing him. Her affair with Chris, to begin with, is more of revenge rather than an infatuation. She is a woman of independent spirit and would not accept meek submission to her husband like Shyam. When Shyam is on a tour, Chris invites her for dinner, and 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.

He is a painter. A portrait of satiation, of a night of abandon.

A moment of languor frozen. I feel a joy; he is mine (*Mistress* 172).

Radha's marriage with Shyam is a compromise, but she is aware of her duty as a wife at one stage. She has to be loyal to him. However, the circumstances of her marital life and Shyam's overbearing nature pushed her into Chris's arms. She comes to Uncle's cottage, lying about Uncle being ill. When Uncle asks her bluntly about her affair with Chris, she reacts by saying.

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

She believes Chris shares the same feelings for her and that he cares for her similarly. When Uncle warns her that Shyam's servants will tell Shyam about her affair, Radha is defiant and reacts vehemently. I do not care. My marriage is dead. Moreover, Shyam means nothing to me (*Mistress* 207).

Uncle tries to warn her, reminding her that she has been married to Shyam for eight years and cannot say she does not care for Shyam. However, Radha is in no mood to listen to the Uncle's warning. Radha is attracted to 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 declaring it is An account of a woman's quest for Independence and strength (*Mistress* 123).

It shows that Radha needed someone to help her find her strength and Independence. Radha's affair with Chris is motivated by her desire to find a man who would give her this Independence and appreciate her, to help her realize herself. She thinks her affair with Chris would help her find meaning in her life and her self-realization. For this, she breaks the social conventions of married life. She does not think of the consequences of her Intimate relationship with Chris, which suddenly dawns on her when she discovers she is pregnant. She is very uneasy. She knows that adultery's beast is lust but does not think that her relationship with Chris

is lust. However, she feels cheated by him. She thought she could find her Independence with Chris, but she did not realize that breaking the social conventions of married life could not help her. When she became pregnant, she felt guilty.

She sees 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 had never felt that I was committing a crime---. However, I cannot erase from my mind the sight of Shyam as I saw him that night. (*Mistress 397*)

Radha knows she is responsible for robbing Shyam of his pride and has been cruel to him. Radha does not want to remain with Shyam or go with Chris. She realizes that her relationship with Chris is 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 either. She tells Shyam he can have parental rights when her Child is born. However, Shyam flatly denies having anything to do with her Child and is prepared to leave even her house. However, finally, she remains with Shyam, who also accepts her baby, who is yet to be born.

Radha, a well-educated woman, is quite aware that for Shyam, she is a much-cherished possession'. This is what a woman has meant for a man. Simone de Beauvoir comments

Respectful of her husband in both social and financial spheres, a decent wife is a man's greatest asset. She is most fundamentally his because she

shares his essence, has his name, is descended from his gods, and he is ultimately in charge of her. He was addressing her as his better half. He is as proud of his wife as he is of his home, fields, flock, wealth, and occasionally more. She is his measure and share on earth, and he uses her to project his power to the outside world (*Mistress* 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 her aggressive husband, Shyam. P. T. Kurian remarks about this feeling of educated women like Radha, who do not like male domination, whether the 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 (*Mistress* 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. A woman must be married. A girl who has been unmarried for a long is looked down on. Such gender discrimination and the authority of males over females is very

oppressive for women. Shyam, as a husband, also has such stereotypical ideas about women. A wife should look beautiful and appealing, and she should be dependent on her husband. He would not allow Radha to take an 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 proto-type Indian husband. Radha, of course, is partly responsible for her subjugation because she landed herself in trouble with her thoughtless and wanton love affair with a married man.

Radha appears to be the new woman, liberated from the traditional notion of a wife, loyal to her husband. She feels no guilt for her premarital 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. Critics describe her as rebellious, but she appears willful and stubborn. Her actions are impulsive, as seen in her relationship with Chris.

On the other hand, for Shyam, Radha is a cherished possession. He loves her but would not like her to interfere with his business. His tastes in reading and cultural matters do not agree with hers. Radha and Shyam have been 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 says:

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

It seems that Radha is rebelling against 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 that He would rather have a flashy, goofy wife than a sensible, domestic one. Glossy, foolish ladies can be bent (*Mistress* 61).

Radha also feels repulsive about Shyam's brazen admission of his ambition to be rich and make money. She once tells Shyam that money is not 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 incompatible pairs in many ways. Shyam does not like her to take an 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 also has differences with Chris. When she argues with Chris about American politics about Iraq, she vehemently opposes Chris's taking the American side. She says

Yes, I want to tell him. Our opinions, even about a world without direct bearing on our lives, are us. Moreover, yes, 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 do not know where to begin. Worst of all, I would like to 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? (*Mistress* 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 feels disturbed by Chris's Westernized approach, whether it is the case of Iraq or the personal relationship with her. It shows that her infatuation with Chris is short-lived, and she realizes that she is guilty of adultery. She says:

I have no love left for Shyam. That I cannot love him, I can live with. However, I have robbed him of his pride. How could I have done that to him? It was not kind. Far worse than the fact that I had never loved him (*Mistress* 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 :

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

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

of defiance for me, an exciting encounter for him, loneliness and funneling need that had exploded into unbridled passion (*Mistress*399-400).

Her affair with Chris, thus, ends abruptly. Radha realizes she cannot go with Chris or live with Shyam. However, finally, it is her Child; her love for it is her talisman. She is a new woman because she is liberated and can pursue her dreams without any inhibition. She breaks traditions, flouts social norms, and feels no remorse. She does feel sorry for the way she has treated her husband. They are incompatible, yet she yearns to lean against a shoulder and thinks only of Shyam. However, there is a consciousness of guilt 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 says:

She finally decides firmly that she should lead her own life with her Child, leaving both Shyam and Chris. She knows that both men will be hurt by her decision. However, both Shyam and Chris silently accept her decision.

Nair, while narrating the infatuation of Radha with Chris, makes Radha remind herself of the mythical Story of Ahalya 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 is deceived by the disguise Indra uses for her husband, Gautama, while Radha is fully aware of what she is doing. Narrating this story to Chris, Radha ponders 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 convenient, Radha thinks that she has been imprisoned in her married life. She compares herself to a butterfly. She says,

I remember the butterfly I captured and pinned on a board when it was still alive, its wings spread to show off its markings, not realizing that a tiny heart beats inside, longing to soar. Now, at 54, I am that butterfly.

.However, she is responsible for her condition. Her wayward affair with a married man, her pregnancy, and then her marriage with Shyam out of necessity are all due to her 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 I cannot say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no highs, there are no lows, either. Some would call this content even (*Mistress* 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.' As Radha is socially and culturally superior to Shyam, his tastes are boorish in her opinion. Since her marriage with him is convenient, she is drawn toward Chris. She questions herself in her introspective moments about this feeling and her attraction for Chris. She broods over it.

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 honor, so contemptuous of convention? (*Mistress* 54).

Radha tries to fight her attraction for Chris; she resists it, reminding herself of Shyam, 'who has endured much' for her. Despite the warning of her conscience, she surrenders to her fatal attraction for Chris. Shyam and Radha are in contrast in their likes and dislikes, as well as their tastes. Shyam is very orderly. His musical collection is appropriately arranged 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, does not allow candles to drip, and puts clothes correctly 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, so they had no conversation. Shyam has a typical 'male' attitude towards the 'female' field of action. When Radha visits his factory and tries to introduce the women workers to the literature of writers like Tolstoy and Kafka, Shyam objects to it. What troubles him is her encroachment on his affairs. He bluntly tells her.

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 (*Mistress 72*).

Radha is taken aback, realizing that Shyam was secretly snooping on her. Radha is impatient with Shyam's snobbish attitude, accusing her of erasing the 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, etc. She is impatient with him as he appears to treat her as merely a beautiful doll, A woman who was kept. A bleeding *mistress* with no rights who satisfies your sex desires". Radha is, thus, increasingly estranged from Shyam. His refusal to allow her to use a car independently and bluntly telling her so annoys her greatly. He curtly tells her.

Your family may have left you many things, but they did not leave you an oil well. Since I pay for the fuel, I will decide if we need one vehicle or two  
(*Mistress*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 no child is in the house even after four years of marriage. Shyam is suspicious that Radha is deliberately preventing conception. She says she is not on contraceptive pills. However, Shyam is not happy. He secretly keeps a record of her menstrual periods. When Radha finds out, she is very annoyed. Shyam's sister, Rani Oppal, advises Shyam to consult a specialist. When Radha knows why Shyam keeps a record of her periods, she tells him bluntly.

I was pregnant once. So, it is not that I cannot conceive. You may need to determine if you can father a child (*Mistress* 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. However, the husband is never blamed or examined for fertility. In modern times, there is a medical device for fertility tests, but in the olden days, women's life was made miserable for no fault of theirs. Shyam, here, is entirely 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 with pregnancy. Radha's blunt admission that she was pregnant once is a furious reaction to Shyam's keeping a 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 to Shyam. Her desire to demolish Shyam's pride in being a man motivates her. Shyam's meeting with the fertility expert reveals that he is the one who lacks the sperm count to father a child. Radha feels more and more estranged from Shyam.

Anita Nair has portrayed different types of female characters in her fiction. The sixteen-year-old Saadiya is intensely religious but steadfast in her love, though she discovers that her 'Malik' is a Hindu 'Sethu.' Radha, a new woman, has no moral qualms about her relationship with a married man or an extramarital love affair with a foreigner. Maya, Koman's friend and admirer, is a married woman. Maya is married but does not feel guilty about 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 garlands. On an impulse, Koman asks Maya if she wants to get married. Maya refuses at first, but when Koman points out that 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 I want to know that someone else has a stake in my life and well-being. For the first time, I began to feel lonely (*Mistress* 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 loneliness. Maya is not troubled by

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 an admirer of his art. Koman, earlier, when he accepted Angela as his student, developed a relationship with her and went to London with her, hoping to find scope and disciples for his Kathakali art form. However, he is very soon disillusioned and comes back to India. This is different 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 does not need him. Theirs is a platonic relationship.

Maya is a married woman who has a crush on Koman and appreciates him as a great Kathakali dance artist. She tells Koman that she needs to be with him. Koman himself has been in love with May for ten years. However, he also knows nothing is definite about his relationship with Maya. Their relationship is more of a platonic one. Koman draws excellent comfort in her company, and Maya shares this feeling with him. Koman asks Maya what held her back in their relationship. Maya has children, and this may be the reason holding her back. However, she also wonders why she could not be more kind to herself. Koman makes her an offer that they can still be together. However, 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 Koman's loneliness, as he feels his age and would like to belong to someone like Maya, who has a stake in his life. The marriage was not going to be registered, so there would not be any legal problems for Maya.

Anita Nair has divided her novel into nine 'Rasas.' The 'Sringaaram or 'love' rasa' is manifested by Radha's desire for Chris, whose bodily strength, long fingers, unhurried smile, natural indolence, and 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, feels passion for Chris, and rebelliously forms an 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 a feeling of wonder. Radha wonders about who her father really is, and Chris is too. 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 became pregnant. He tells Radha how her father, Babu, loved her even before she was born. Finally, the 'Shantam Rasa' shows discipline of mind, 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.

This quietness that fills me has replaced all of my burning passions, my disdain for my life, my sorrow for opportunities lost, my rage at being forced to live such a stifling existence, my fear of what lay ahead, my disgust for myself, my yearning, my deceit, my worrying, my aching, and the whirling, twisting chaos (*Mistress* 397).

She remembers looking at Shyam, ‘A broken man, hurt and humiliated,’ and she confesses that she was responsible for causing him such anguish. She is horrified at her callousness. She robbed him of his pride. She also realizes how 'adultery's beast of lust

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 (*Mistress* 398).

Moreover, she finally realizes that her attraction for Chris is merely physical, A funneling need that had exploded into unbridled passion. That was all it was. Moreover, as is the nature of such things, it died as it was born. Abruptly (*Mistress* 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, and for Chris, it was just an exciting encounter. Radha, sitting in a rocking chair, thinks about her past and her wayward decisions and realizes

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? (*Mistress* 402).

Even in this pensive mood, Radha would like to lean back against a shoulder to be comforted, and she thinks of Shyam. However, she is undecided because she doubts she can play wife anymore. She is undivided about what to do but has her Child now.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **CONCLUSION**

In delineating the characters of Saadiya and Radha, Anita Nair tries to bring out the aspects of patriarchal domination. The story of Saadiya is quite overt in the sense that her father very plainly admits that he should not have given freedom to Saadiya.

It is a lesson for you as much as for me that giving girls even a little rope is unwise. That it is not in women to understand the nuances of freedom.

Henceforth, these welts on your calf will help you remember your place (*Mistress* 130).

Here, Kazi does not mince his words when he underlines his opinion that women should not be given freedom, that women do not deserve it at all. In Radha's story, 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 a record even of her periods. He would not allow her to use his vehicle anywhere because he suspects she will meet Chris.

Anita Nair has portrayed women who silently suffer patriarchal oppression and the women who rebel against it in her novels. Saadiya and Radha rebel against it in their way. Saadiya rebels against her father and husband, who would not allow her son to be brought up the way she likes. Moreover, 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 her freedom of choice to her.

Moreover, when she makes her choice stubbornly, she is banished from the house. Her transgression 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 could 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 desires. Even then, once in a marital bond, she is expected to be controlled by her husband's desire in the social sphere and her physical relationship with him. She chafes against it, and when, as a reaction, she tries to have an extra-marital alliance, she has to be secretive about it. Her marital bond requires her to be an obedient wife and follow her 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. As she tries to transgress it again, she is on the brink of disrupting the marital bond and living alone. Her quest for freedom ends in the feeling of remorse for her actions, and she questions herself if God Punishes us for our sins or does he leave it to us to punish ourselves (*Mistress* 426).

Whatever the answer to this question, she feels she is undergoing punishment for her actions. 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 her *mistress* and bring up her child. In this

novel, Anita Nair deals with extra-marital affairs, beginning with Sethu and Devayani, Koman and Angela, and finally, Radha and Chris.

Radha, here, is the most robust character who tries to liberate herself from the restrictions of marital life. Her marriage is, of course, a marriage of convenience. She will be his child's mother, though she breaks her relationship with Chris. 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 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 emancipated women 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 'Hamid,' but she makes the supreme sacrifice when she realizes her mistake. Radha finally decides to bring up her child independently without being dependent on Shyam or Chris. Maya agrees to perform a simple marriage ceremony with Koman to make him happy, though she is married. These women have dynamic personalities and are new women aware of their 'self' and individuality.

Anita Nair's *Mistress* brings into focus the issue of self-realization, and the female protagonists of the novel appear to challenge the age-old norms against women in society. Those women know what they need in life and are aware of their "self." Women's empowerment and equality with men are sensational issues worldwide. Even in India, the issues of gender equality and women empowerment have picked up momentum in recent years. The role of women in the

development of society is of utmost importance, and it is the only fact that determines whether a society is strong and harmonious or otherwise.

In many of her novels, Anita Nair depicted a husband-wife relationship. Her female characters are bold enough to fulfill the bond and go up to the extent of establishing physical gratification with other men. The faithfulness in a husband-wife relationship is lost, and there is a big question on the existence of such a relationship. Search for self or identity crisis is no longer confined to the individual. It can characterize a group, an institution, a class, a profession, or even a nation. Anita Nair merges fiction with reality and makes female voices authentic. Her fictional women can be seen as a pattern that feels like real women in everyday life, self-effacing and self-sacrificing women, and one can meet anywhere in Indian middle-class society. Most of them experience the burden of traditions.

The control in identity imposed on women in the name of marriage by society is no longer a welcome aspect among modern women who have started looking out for an individual identity with no tags attached to them in the name of any institutions such as marriage and families. It is also evident that Indian writing, especially by women writers, reached a different phase or rather an advanced stage. The writers are enough to discuss sensitive issues, break or change women's cultural identity through their writings, and are least bothered about negative criticism. They paved the way for Indian women to have a life of their own.

According to Indian tradition and culture, women are generally responsible for their father, who, after marriage, hands over to their husband. The description of a woman's marriage life discloses, with no shock, dual strands of both genders. If the bride admits to her

impure virginity, it is very problematic, and she has to go through the consequences and considered to bring dishonor to the family. However, at the same time, if he depicts all the men and confesses a similar issue, it is not considered an important matter and does not bring a disgrace to the family.

Women are also not given a choice in selecting their groom, and society does not favor the decision of not marrying anyone. The bride's desires are never cared for by any of the grooms, and they are alleged to take care of the responsibilities of her newly wedded home. The bride's responsibility does not end up taking care of their spouse and his family but also giving birth to children as early as possible. In the older days, the men's view about women reaching their complete form is only when they become mothers by giving birth to a son, so their generation does not come to an end. There is always a warm welcome for regenerating male babies but not open-minded in giving birth to a female baby, which leads to complicated issues and can lead to divorce in many cases. A wife's duty is over as soon as she accomplishes her duty of giving birth to a boy.

The women's expectation of giving birth either to a female or a male baby is becoming so mechanical in the present-day world. Society view of the woman who does not have any children is branded as "Macchi," meaning incompetent. Such women are considered lousy omen to respectable families and are not allowed to be in the family or at nearby functions. For the smooth running of their family, she must bear a child from her devoted spouse, which society will accept. A woman giving birth is established as a dedication towards her husband, which is very much applicable to arranged marriage and love marriage. Apart from all these, a good wife

should discharge her duties sincerely and dutifully to please her husband and give birth to a male heir who will be a legal asset to the husband.

Indian women have to reconcile themselves with the reality: you save yourself -dress up appropriately, do not go out unescorted or stay at home – or remain unsaved. Most of these words are being repeatedly said to make the impression that the woman" 's deeds and dressing led to this mishap. The sad thing about this allegation is that the women who were raped were very appropriately dressed and were well-behaved in society. It is alarming to the mind that there appears to be a rising number of children who are being targeted. These kinds of happenings caused very much shame in a country where girls are considered goddesses.

Regarding the past few years, there has been an increase in the reporting of rape. However, only one in four rape cases in India results in a conviction due to the chaotic criminal justice system, which is still susceptible to political pressure and lets many of the accused get away with it. Also, both men and women refuse to believe that sexual violence is a severe problem eating away the nation's vitals. Moreover, most political parties do not appear to recognize and treat it as a crippling social crisis.

Women in Kerala have access to good education; they are encouraged to work, though women constitute just a fifth of the workforce. Once educated, they can look after their children and stay at home or work but expect no say in who they will marry. Unsuitable marriages between educated women and men in menial Gulf jobs have led to a considerable incidence of wife-battering and psychological problems among women. The high levels of alcoholism, among

other factors like a medieval mindset among men, have led to the state" 's women getting a raw deal. Regular interaction between the sexes is still frowned upon.

Anita Nair has proposed a new philosophy regarding the man-woman relationship in modern times. She firmly affirms that the social and conventional basis of marriage is being eroded, and this would ultimately lead to a situation where marriage may not be solemnized or performed at all. The Indian Supreme Court has acknowledged that people have the right to live together without being married. We refer to this as a live-in partnership. Man – woman may live in mutual companionship. The relationship may continue if they trust each other and the essential emotional bonding subsists. Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. However, in human civilization, women are often allocated a secondary role. However, they possess the power of endurance, affinity, love, and foresight, which contribute to the happiness of others.

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