

**Social Disorganisation and Victimization of Men in Select Novels of**

**Anita Nair**

By

Kaviya. R

(15PEN006)

A thesis submitted to

Avinashilingam Institute for Home Science and Higher Education for Women,

Coimbatore – 641043

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

Master's Degree in English

April 2017

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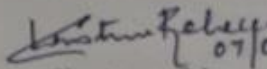
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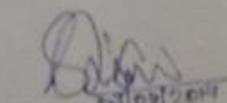
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## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The world comprises of different combinations of people, who are unique and with different characters, together forming societies of their own. The word 'society' came in to the English language from the French, but has a Latin root that means companion or fellowship, and this meaning was retained until the middle of the eighteenth century. A society is an autonomous grouping of people who have a common territory and a common culture of beliefs, values, customs and who are linked to one another through numerous social interactions and interdependent roles. A society is intangible. It is a process rather than norms.

People are valuable only as agencies of social relationships. The relations which are not organised in definite associations are excluded from the definition of society. There is also a belief that society exists only when the members know each other and possess common interests in objects. Thus if two persons are travelling in a train, their relationship of co-existence in the same compartment, of being at the same time in the same place, does not constitute society. But as soon as they come to know each other, the element of society is created.

There are two types of definitions of society, the Functional definition and the Structural definition. From the Functional point of view, society is defined as a complex of groups in reciprocal relationship, interacting upon one another, enabling human organisms to carry on their life-activities and helping each person to fulfil his wishes and accomplish his interests in association with his fellows. From the Structural point of view, society is the total social heritage of folkways, mores and institutions; of habits, sentiments and ideals.

Society is to be interpreted in a wider sense. It is both a structural and functional organisation. It consists in the mutual interactions and mutual interrelations of the individuals

but it is also a structure formed by these relations. It is a pattern, a system, and not the people. Likeness, interdependence and co-operation are the essential elements to constitute a society. The beings who constitute society must realize their likeness and their interdependence. They must have a community feeling.

Anthony Giddens and Simon Griffiths in *Sociology* (2006) say that “society is not a mere agency for the comfort of the beings but it is the whole system of social relationships” (24). It is the social fact and not the biological fact which constitutes society. The true nature of society consists not in the external factors of interdependence or likeness or authority but in the state of mind of the beings that compose society. It is the pattern, not the people, which is termed society. It is not a group but a process of relationships.

Sociolinguists argue that society as a whole is held together through the interaction of complementary parts. Society is bound together by an automatic process of self-regulation in which many different parts such as business, governments, families, schools, all serving different functions. It evolves to work together in an integrated fashion.

Social structure is a basic concept in sociology. Social structure is an abstract phenomenon. It refers to the external aspects of the society. Its units are groups, institutions, associations and organisations. Each society has a pattern of organisation composed of the structures resulting from the associations of men with each other. When men relate themselves to each other they establish a structural form. It may be a group, an association or an organisation.

Bernard S. Phillips (1969) states that the social structure is “made up of these structural forms which are arranged in an interrelated way to enable the society to function in a harmonious manner” (62). Society functions through these structural units. Institutions, associations, groups, organisations, community all are parts of social structure instruments through which it functions.

The meaning of social structure is same as the organic structure. In an organic structure body is an arrangement of different parts like hands, legs, mouth, nose, ears, etc. These parts are arrangement in a particular and systematic way to create a pattern. The body works through these parts which are interdependent and interrelated. The form of organic structure of the people differs. Some are longer, others are short, some are fat and others are lean and thin. Similar is the case with the social structure. The parts of all the social structures are the same; that is, every social structure has a family, religion, political organisation, economic institutions, land, area etc.

But the forms of social structure differ as the forms of body differ, for example, the form of family is not similar in all the social structures. Some have families of one husband, one wife, and their children. Others have families of several wives, one husband and their children. Thus the parts of social structures being the same, their specific forms vary. Therefore, the social structure is a patternised arrangement of human relationship structures. These structures are ecological entities, human groups, institutional agencies and organisations.

The idea of structure is fundamental to the social disciplines. There are two fundamental characteristics of structures: first, structures are made up of connections, and second, structures create and sustain predictable pattern and shapes. Social structure is simply the way that people, groups, and institutions are organised with respect to one another. In contrast to a structural perspective there is a view that looks at the other side of the relationship between the individual and the society.

Instead of dwelling on how individual behaviour is the product of social forces, it stresses that individual action is constantly creating many social arrangements that make up the society. Society exists as a social system of structures that become different from one another. Making structures and systems different from one another means that there will be

problems of coordination and control. Society has a need to motivate people to perform their social roles by giving life a meaning and purpose. Action-oriented sociologists believe it is a mistake to see society as strictly external to people. Sociologist Max Weber (2006) says “cultural ideas and values help shape society and our individual actions” (qtd. in Anthony and Simon 18).

Society is always shaped by the actions of individuals. Although, these actions are often influenced by social forces, they do not involve giving way to such forces in robot-like fashion. Instead, human behaviour is a creative process, which is based on how people interpret and redirect these social forces. According to the action perspective, then, interpreting the subjective beliefs and outlooks that underlie individual action is a central task of sociology.

In the article, “Social Disorganisation: Meaning, Characteristics, and Causes” (2016) Shelly Shah explains as follows:

Life is a process of continuous adjustment and readjustment. The social organism is always undergoing a change necessitating adjustment of its different parts. When the various parts of society are properly adjusted, we have social order and a well organised society. But when they fail to adjust themselves to the changing conditions, the result is social disorganisation leading to social problems.

Marvin E. Olsen in *The Process Of Social Organisation* (1997), says,

The individuals influence each other and exchange information, they frequently adjust their activities to one another, introduce regularity and predictability into their relationships, and begin to share common ideas. Through this process of social organisation they bring order and meaning into their common social life. Social organisation cannot occur in a vacuum. This

process is only part of the totality of ongoing existence and can be understood only in relation to its setting. (3)

Society is a vast system. A society can be said as an organised one only if it functions smoothly without any changes. Social organisation is a system of social relationships. They are complex. They are composed into numerous small groups. The organisation of the society depends on the actions of the individuals. The individuals organise the society and form the patterns. Social structure is thus the part of social organisation.

Seen against this background, social disorganisation is the process opposite to social organisation. When the parts of social structure do not perform their functions efficiently or effectively or perform them badly, there occurs an imbalance in society. Social organisation provides the means by which a society maintains its unity and cohesion through effective control of its members, and functions smoothly. Elliott and Merrill say “social disorganisation in the process by which the relationship between members of the group are broken or dissolved” (qtd. in Bhushan and Sachdeva 813).

Shelly Shah’s (2016) understanding is that “social disorganisation causes a weakening of group solidarity, loss of control over its members, and therefore, conflict and disintegration”. The social equilibrium is disturbed and society gets out of gear. Social disorganisation is a disturbance in the patterns and mechanisms of human relations. Social disorganisation refers to serious maladjustments in society so that they fail to satisfy the needs of the individuals satisfactorily.

Society is thus a web of social relationships. In an organised society, social relations have some patterns and mechanisms. When the relations become disordered or disintegrated there is social disorganisation. In a well organised society the various institutions are in a harmonious adjustment and there exists functional balance between the various elements of the social structure. When there is a lack of adjustment and balance and when the institutions

do not function in a manner dissatisfying all the individuals, there occurs social disorganisation.

Social disorganisation is to be considered in terms of functional disequilibrium. It is the society's disequilibrium with its customs, institutions, groups, communities and societies. Comparing social disorganisation with social organisation, Queen and Harper (1997) write, "if social organisation means the development of relationships which persons and groups find mutually satisfactory, then disorganisation means their replacement by relationships which bring disappointment, thwarted wishes, irritation and unhappiness" (qtd. in Bhushan and Sachdeva 821).

The main characteristics of social disorganisation are conflict of mores and institutions, transfer of functions from one group to another, individuation and change in the roles and status of the individuals. Karl Marx (1969) says, "it is not the ideas or values which human beings hold that are main sources of social change. Rather, social change is prompted primarily by economic influences" (qtd. in Phillips 16). In the conflict of mores and institutions, new ideals arise and new institutions are formed. The existing mores come in to conflict with new mores. Some people want to replace them by the new ones. This destroys harmony in the society. With the destruction of harmony, social organisation breaks up and social disorganisation ensues.

In the Indian society such conflict of mores and institutions can be seen in everyday life of the individuals. There is a strong difference of opinion on a number of other issues like divorce, family planning, untouchability, love marriage, joint family system, women education, widow remarriage, education, etc. There is much confusion of mores in our society and so it leads to a state of social disorganisation. In the transfer of functions from one group to another, in an organised society, the functions of different groups are defined

and predetermined. But as society is dynamic, the functions of one group are transferred to another.

Man today thinks in terms of self. The functions of different groups are determined in purely individualistic terms. Under the impact of individualism every person thinks upon all the important matters of life from his individual view point. The young men and women want to take decisions on such important matters such as marriage, occupation, recreation and morality in accordance with their individual intolerance, interests, and attitudes. This trend has set in a dangerous process of social disorganisation.

In an organised society the roles and status of people are defined and fixed. Their functions are well defined and they carry on the tasks allotted to them. They enjoy the status in accordance with their role in society. A primitive society suffers less from disorganisation because it is stable and its members follow the professions allocated to them. But in course of time our norms change in the roles and statuses of the people. They no longer are treated as fixed and the people begin to choose from amongst the different roles which cause disequilibrium. Thus the women are no longer confined to homes. They work in offices. This change in the roles of women also has caused family disorganisation.

Social disorganisation is present in every society. According to W.I. Thomas and Znaniecki (1997), “when the rules and regulations of society fail to keep individuals under control, social disorganisation sets in” (qtd. in Bhushan and Sachdeva 824). In a society, there are always individuals violating the social rules. This has a disorganising effect upon social institutions, and unless the violations are checked, they may lead to the death of institutions. It is a matter of fact that social disorganisation had not only changed the life of women but also men.

In all societies the obvious biological difference between men and women is used as a justification for forcing them into different social roles which limit and shape their attitudes

and behaviour. Having stated that, no society is content with the natural difference of sex, but each insists on adding to it a cultural difference of gender. The simple physical facts therefore always become associated with complex psychological qualities.

However, once the contrast between men and women has been increased and accentuated in this fashion, it is usually taken as a further manifestation of biological differences which confirm the need for different social roles. In the other way, sex differences are used to create gender differences which are then explained as sex differences, which, in turn, require gender differences, and so on. This may be no more than circular reasoning, but it is socially very effective.

In our own patriarchal society males enjoy a socially dominant position. Thus, from an early age, boys are helped to acquire a masculinity that allows them to assume and maintain that position. At the same time, girls are taught to cultivate a submissive femininity. The resulting difference in the male and female character is then described as inborn and used to defend the existing power arrangement. Only those who accept it are normal, and only they can expect to succeed.

The male social role is designed to reward masculine men, while the female social role offers its relative advantages only to feminine women. The aggressive man will run the bigger business; the pretty, agreeable woman will find the richer husband. In other words, masculinity and femininity are gender qualities which are developed in response to social discrimination. However, once they have been developed, they justify and reinforce it.

The masculine and feminine gender roles mutually reinforce each other and thereby perpetuate the inequality on which they are based. Obviously, this psychological mechanism can operate only as long as the behaviour of men and women does not disobey the generally accepted limits. Every society tries therefore to prevent such disobedience by calling the socially defined gender roles as natural, eternal, and unchangeable. Any person who refuses

to accept them is victimized as deviant and is punished as an offender, not only against society but against Nature itself.

An historical example of such deviance is the case of Joan of Arc who, as a young girl, not only led the French army to victory over the English, but also wore male clothing. In her later trial she was promptly accused of having thus violated the laws of nature. If the arguments were true, there would be no need to deny women equal opportunities, since they would be unable to compete with men. If women were naturally inferior, men would have nothing to fear. Therefore, the fact that many men do fear such competition raises sufficient doubt as to the validity of their state.

All of these views are based on a wrong conclusion drawn from a false assumption. The false assumption states that women are naturally passive, while men are naturally active. The wrong conclusion asserts that every passive person is playing a feminine role and that every active person is playing a masculine role. However, in actual fact, neither sex nor gender needs to be characterized in this fashion.

After all, in some human societies the role assignment for men and women is the reverse of our own. In short, there is nothing natural or definite about our sexual stereotypes. By the same time, full human equality will not be achieved until it becomes possible to both sexes. Indeed, once the old stereotypes have been discarded, the differences between individuals within each sex are likely to increase. Furthermore, under conditions of social equality, these individuals may also happily continue to play different gender roles. There should be no need to point out that there is nothing wrong with gender differences as such. They can greatly enrich our lives. In human beings, 'different' does not mean 'superior' or 'inferior'. In other words, those who demand equal rights for men and women are not asking for drab uniformity, but for a social climate in which variety can flourish without being exploited.

As In Kashyap Deepak (2012) states, “Indian English Literature pertains to that body of work by writers from India, who pen strictly in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous regional and indigenous languages of India”. English literature in India is also intimately linked with the works of associates of the Indian diaspora, especially with people like Salman Rushdie who was born in India but presently resides elsewhere.

As such, Indian English Literature, precisely conforming to its gradual evolution, had all begun in the summers of 1608 when Emperor Jahangir, in the court of the Mughals, had welcomed Captain William Hawkins, commander of British Naval Expedition Hector, in a gallant manner. Though India was under the British rule, still, English was adopted by the Indians as a language of understanding and awareness, education and literary expression with an important means of communication amongst various people of dissimilar religions.

Indian English literature, quite understandably, grabs attention from every quarter of the country, making the genre admired in its own right. Creative writing in English is looked at as an integral part of literary traditions in the Indian perspective of fine arts. In early times of British rule, the novelistic writing, indeed the Indian English poetry, had tremendously arrested attention of the native masses. Every possible regional author was dedicated in their intelligence to deliver in the British mother tongue, highly erudite and learned as they were even in such periods. The man that comes to surface more than once in all the genres of Indian English literature is Rabindranath Tagore, who possibly was an unending ocean of knowledge and intellect, still researched as an institution in him.

The truthfulness and honesty of the writers writing in English is often made a theme of suspect in their own country and in the English-speaking countries; they are indeed addressed as marginal to the mainstream of English literature. Writers of Indian English literature are sometimes incriminated of forsaking the national or regional language and

penning in a Western, alien language. Their dedication to the nation is considered in much suspicion, a rather unfortunate sensibility for such intelligent and cultured wonders. Indian literature in English dates back to the 1830s, to Kashiprasad Ghosh, who is considered the first Indian poet writing in English.

Sohee Chunder Dutt was the first writer of fiction, bringing in the tremendous attraction and brilliancy of admiration of Indian English novels. In the beginning, however, political writing in the novel or essay format was dominant, as can be seen in Raja Ram Mohan Roy and his extraordinary output. He had written and dedicated pages about social reform and religion in India, solely in the medium of English.

Stylistic influence from the local languages appears to be an exceptional feature of much of the Indian literature in English – the local language construction and system is very much reflected in the illustrations, and is mirrored in the literal translation of local idioms. The remarkable and admirable feature of these Indian English writers is that they have not only nativised the British mother tongue in terms of stylistic features, but they have also acculturated English in terms of the Indianised context.

A broad view that the mother tongue is the primary means of literary creativity is still generally held across cultural diversity. Creativeness in another tongue is often measured as a deviation from this strict norm. The native language is considered pure, and it is addressed as a standard model or comparison. This however have caused difficulties for non-native writers or Indian English literature and it is more than rarely that they have to guard themselves writing again, in English.

Besides the legendary and hugely venerated Indian English literary personalities like Rabindranath Tagore and R. K. Narayan, later novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Manohar Malgaonkar, Anita Desai and Nayantara Sehgal, have eternally captured the spirit

of an independent India struggling to break away from the British and traditional Indian cultures and establish a distinct identity.

During the 80's and 90's, India had emerged as a major literary nation. Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* had become a rage around the world, even winning the Booker Prize in 1981. The worldwide success of this work made Rushdie the first writer of the Indian Diaspora to enter the sphere of elite international writers and leave an unforgettable mark on the global literary scene.

Other contemporary Indian English Novelists of repute include V.S. Naipaul, Shobha De, G.V. Desani, M. Ananthanarayanan, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh, O.V. Vijayan, Allan Sealy, Sashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh and a score of others.

The writer in the genre of Indian English Literature who took the world with a storm was Arundhati Roy, who's *The God of Small Things* won the 1997 Booker Prize and became an international best-seller overnight. Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Kiran Desai, Sudhir Kakar, Ardeshir Vakil and Jhumpa Lahiri are some other renowned writers of Indian origin.

The mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Indian literature in English had witnessed the emergence of poets such as Nissim Ezekiel, P. Lal, A. K. Ramanujan, Dom Moraes, Keki. N. Daruwalla, Geive Patel and others, who were profoundly influenced by literary movements taking place in the West, like Symbolism, Surrealism, Existentialism, Absurdism and Confessional Poetry. These authors had heavily made use of Indian phrases alongside English words and had tried to reproduce a blend of the Indian and the Western cultures.

Indian English literature is an honest enterprise to demonstrate the ever rare gems of Indian writing in English. From being a singular and exceptional, rather gradual native flare-up of geniuses, Indian English has turned out to be a new form of Indian culture and voice in which India converses regularly. On the other hand, the Indian authors – poets, novelists, essayists, dramatists, have been making momentous and considerable contributions to world

Literature. Since the pre-independence era, the past few years have witnessed a gigantic prospering and thriving of Indian English writing in the global market.

Indian English literature in the recent times is growing fast. It is growing to be the largest body of literature among the literatures of the world. In fiction, expatriate writers like Salman Rushdie, Rohinton Mistry, Amitav Ghosh, Bharati Mukherjee, M.G. Vassanji and others have been emulating as internationally reputed writers.

One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction, for though India was probably the foundation head of story-telling, the novel as we know from today was an importation from the west. The earliest specimens of Indian English fiction were tales rather than novels, but their use of fantasy shows their links with the ancient Indian tradition, in spite of the fact that their subject is contemporary.

The first Indian English novel, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's *Rajmohan's Wife* (1864) shows this awareness being applied to the contemporary social scene. This melodramatic story of the trials of a long suffering middle class Hindu wife at the hands of her callous husband is obviously designed to point a moral. The urge for social reform is a significant aspect of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century. It has therefore naturally become an important theme in some early Indian English fiction. The questions that engaged the minds of some of these novelists are the position of women, the plight of the peasants and the decay of the old aristocracy.

Recent Indian English fiction, however, appears to be cautious of this kind of experimentation involving a total or modified return to ancient Indian literary methods. On the other hand, it seems to be trying to give expression to the Indian experience of the modern predicament, while frankly modelling itself on Western originals. Trends in recent fiction unmistakably indicate how the new novelists are trying to tread fresh paths and this is the surest sign of the continued vitality of an art, though actual achievement is naturally

determined by many factors including genius. This perhaps explains why during the last decade, Indian English poetry appears to be poised for an important breakthrough, while the new fiction is yet to register a major achievement comparable to the rich harvest of the preceding twenty years.

The Indian English novel is now slightly less than a century and a half old, though hardly fifty years have elapsed since it came of age. During this short span it has certainly given to the world at least some major novels which could only have been produced in modern India. Fiction by women writers contributes a major segment of the contemporary Indian writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings and a basis of discussion.

In any appraisal of the Indian English Literature, an appreciation of the writing of its women is essential. Ranu Uniyal in *Women in Indian Writing* (2009) says,

Today Indian women's writing deals with multiple issues concerning self and society. Women had for long been denied access to education, equal rights, right to work and the freedom to choose. And much of women's writing is primarily a critique of social injustice and equality in a patriarchal society. Writing as a women and writing about woman are two distinct ways of reading and understanding the female mind. (9)

The woman folk is not a homogenized entity but it is viewed as specifically determined by her sociocultural background. Much of Indian women's writing in English focuses on the middle class woman and her subsequent roles in an upward society. These roles are well defined and situated within the parameters of the family. Many of the Indian women novelists focus on women's issues. They have a woman's perspective of the world. Many women have been taken to reading women's writing with the help of which they can explore a wide range of experience of the world from which they can identify themselves

with a range of characters and a variety of existences. That is why women's writing has occupied such a significant and central place in women's lives.

Among the Indian women novelists Comelia Sorabji, Iqbalunnisa Hussain, R.P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Rama Mehta, Shashi Deshpande, Kamala Das, Mahasweta Devi, and Arundhati Roy are primarily concerned with the psychological crises in the lives of Indian women who are subjected to physical and psychological torture in a male dominated society. The novelists have exploited their skill in projecting convincingly the agonised mind of the persecuted women.

The portrayal of women characters in the novels invariably bears authenticity to their feminist approach, outlook and perspective. The keen observation of the life of Indian women and their interest in the study of their inner mind are evidenced by their vivid and panoramic portrayal of the plight. The women novelists focus in their novels on the existential predicaments and trials of the subdued woman in a male dominated society governed by rigid traditions and restricts. These writers being women dive deep into the inner mind of the repressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and bring to light their issues which are the outcome of their psychological and emotional imbalances.

Indian author Anita Nair is best known for her fiction and poetry. Her Novels *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe* are bestselling works and have been translated in 21 languages. She was born at Shornur, Kerala and took education in Chennai. After that, she returned to Kerala to pursue B.A. in English Language and Literature. Then, she took up a job of creative director in an advertising agency in Bangalore where she wrote her first book, which was a collection of short stories named *Satyr of the Subway* (1997). Anita sold this book to Har-Anand Press. This book won her a fellowship from the Virginia Centre for Creative Arts.

Anita's next book was published by Penguin India, and it was the first book by an Indian author which was published by Picador USA. Soon Anita became a well known face across globe and her books were published in several languages around the world.

After that her novel *The Better Man* came in the year 2000, which was also been published in Europe and the United States. Thereafter, her collection of poems, *Malabar Mind*, in the year 2002, and later in the year 2003, came her edited volume *where the Rain is Born-Writings about Kerala*. Anita published her second novel *Ladies Coupe* in the 2001. This novel turned out to be a turning point in her career as it achieved greater success than the first two novels. This novel increased her reach and her novel was read far in 15 countries apart from India, which included USA, Turkey, Poland, Portugal and others.

In 2002, Anita was elected as one of the best five writers in India. The novel *Ladies Coupe* was about women's conditions in a male-dominated society and was told with great insights, solidarity and humour. This novel was also rated as one of the top five books of the year in 2001 and was translated into more than 25 languages all around the world. Apart from these novels, she has also written fiction like *The Puffin Book of Myths and Legends* which is a children's book.

Anita Nair's writings about Kerala and her poetry were included in 'The Poetry India Collection' (2003) and in a 'British Council Poetry Workshop Anthology' (2001). Anita also wrote other novels like *Mistress* (2003), *Adventure of Nonu-The Skating Squirrel* (2006), *Living Next Door to Alice* (2007) and *Magical Indian Myths* (2008). Anita also wrote many travelogues. She turned playwright with her *Nine Faces of Being*, which was adapted from her book *Mistress*.

The title of the book *Ladies Coupe* itself makes a point about the way the Indian society treats its women. Poonam Patil (2015) states:

It is not very uncommon to find a 'ladies only queue' in a tickets reservation counter or 'a ladies special bus' or for that matter 'a ladies coupe'. Why do Indian women get this kind of a special treatment maybe because it is presumed that a woman can survive only in an all women's world which we know exists only in Venus and to survive in the kind of world we live in - a woman needs a man. Every Indian woman tries to escape this supposition but is it really possible for a woman to survive without a man's protection? (2)

Akhila, the protagonist of the Ladies coupe is a 45 year old single women working as an Income Tax Officer. Born in a conservative Brahmin family. Akhila was brought up in an environment in which the society had the supreme power and the people living in this society would never ever dare to rewrite its unfounded norms. Akhila's mother belonged to the old school of thought; sometimes through her actions and sometimes through her words she taught Akhila that a perfect woman is the one who blends with the environment. This is what her mother tried to drill into her mind. Akhila's mother, on becoming a widow, expected her daughter to play the man of the house.

Akhila plays the role of the daughter, progressed to being the provider and continued playing different roles throughout her life sometimes a sister, sometimes an aunt, but she never got to be Akhila. She has never lived with her own identity at any cost. "she was always in an extension of someone else's identity. Chandra's daughter; Narayana's Akka; Priya's aunt; Murthy's sister-in-law ... Akhila wished for once someone would see her as a whole being" (200-201).

Akhila never finds herself until one day when she realised that she has got nothing from life, not even memories to look back to. To change the course of her life Akhila decides to do something she had never done before. She buys a one way ticket to Kanyakumari to

escape from the norms that stopped her from being Akhilandeshwari. On her way to Kanyakumari, Akhila meets five different women, her fellow passengers.

Each of them has a story of their own but all of them have one thing in common and that is their search for the real sense of life. The oldest of the women is Janaki has a story that many women of her age will identify themselves with. Janaki is someone who learnt to love the man she married. She is someone who always had a man to protect her. Someone who was first protected by her father, then by her brother, then by her husband and after him it would be her son.

Janaki believed that to be a good mother and a good wife are the only two duties of a woman and she made her home her Kingdom. It was too late to amend her life when she realised that even a strong and independent woman can make a good wife and a good mother. The second story to unfold is that of a fourteen year old Sheela. Someone who is generations apart from Janaki but still with a mental maturity that quite surpasses her age. She is someone who accepted her grandmother's death with an air of a person who had seen it all and done it all. What makes Sheela different from the others is her ability to look beyond things and her knack of perceiving what others cannot.

The third story is that of Margaret Shanthi, a Chemistry teacher married to Ebenezer Paulraj, the Principal of the school she works in. Margaret compares herself to supercritical water which is capable of dissolving just about anything. Soon after marriage Margaret realised that her husband was not the knight in shining armour that she expected him to be but on the other hand he was this insensitive, self-obsessed tyrant who could not care less for his wife. Every action of Ebenezer gradually transforms Margaret's love into hatred; and to avenge him, Margaret uses a very ingenious method. She formulates a scheme which would not only save her marriage but also eat into his armour proper and shake the very brass tacks of his being.

The fourth tale to open up is that of Prabha Devi, born to rich parents and had the perfect childhood. Her mother beamed with pride when Prabha Devi turned eighteen. She was everything that a girl ought to be. She was beautiful, docile, a good cook and a good singer. Her needlework was perfect. Soon this demure girl was married to a diamond merchant's son. After marriage her life swished past in the blur of insignificant days till that one day, a week after her fortieth birthday, when she realised that somewhere in the process of being a good wife, a good daughter-in-law and a good mother, Prabha Devi forgot how it is like to be herself and that is when she learns to strike a balance between being what she wants to be and being what she is expected to be.

The fifth and the most heartrending tale is that of Marikolunthu, who, only after she was grown up, realised that circumstances had never let her be a kid. As a kid she worked at the Chettiar's house to help her mother raise her brothers and when she grew up her innocence was destroyed by a man who was determined to have her carnal knowledge sans her consent. This one unpleasant incident changes Marikolunthu's entire life and destroys her verve.

From being a kid who worked hard to help her mother raise her brothers to being a maid to two lady doctors who were foreigners. Marikolunthu was now a mother to an illegitimate child. Marikolunthu had seen it all from poverty to lesbianism but all through her life though she was untutored and bucolic she stood up for what she believed in, not caring for the society.

One night in the Ladies coupe, Akhila's interaction with the five women – Janaki, who had a happy marriage though it was an arranged one. Margaret Shanti, though married to the love of her life, suffered from the pain of an unhappy marriage. Sheela, a teenager who had the ability to look beyond things, Prabha Devi who after years of marriage learnt to strike a balance and Marikolunthu, different from all the four women, who did not succumb to the

norms of the society just to gain a right place in the social order – helps her realise that she has given the society superfluous power of ruling her life. There was a time when a woman needed a man for protection but today she needs a man for companionship, she needs a partner who would share her ups and downs. She is not in need of a breadwinner but in need of someone with whom she can share the bread.

In *Mistress* (2005) Anita Nair portrays the husband and wife relationship in the patriarchal society. In those days marriage was the ultimate goal for all Indian women. Radha in *Mistress* suffers in her traditional marriage life. She was forcefully married to Shyam by her father. Before she got married with Shyam she had a premarital affair. She was very unhappy with her traditional life because she was completely dominated by her husband and his elder sister Rani Oppol.

At the beginning of her marriage, the patriarchy exists in different ways such as she was not able to conceive even after eight years of her marriage. So she was called ‘barren’ by the society. By calling her name barren she was affected in the patriarchal society. Radha was obviously blamed though Shyam was impotent. The entire society is ready to blame Indian women. In the other case, Shyam’s dominant nature is to put an end to all her plans. So Radha retaliates:

I hope that is not going to undermine your standing in society. Is there anything I can do that won’t? I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools and you said it was too much work for too little money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a crèche and you said you didn’t want the house filled with bawling babies. So I thought I would find something else to do which didn’t involve making money, but even that isn’t right. Don’t I have to an opinion? I am your wife. Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me

as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfil your sexual needs and with no rights. (73)

Two stories unfold in *Mistress*. The first is the story of Radha, and Shyam, and of travel writer Chris, who comes to their riverside resort in Kerala with a cello and a tape recorder, to meet Radha's uncle, Koman, a famous *Kathakali* dancer. While Koman and Radha both find themselves strangely drawn to Chris, Shyam becomes a helpless observer as Radha embraces Chris with a passion and carelessness he cannot comprehend.

Koman is both an observer and participant in this story, making no judgments, except those he reveals to the readers. The second story is that which Koman tells Radha and Chris, the story of his own convoluted past and his parents, a fascinating account by all standards. The tale takes us all over Kerala and Tamil Nadu, to the unique town of Arabipatnam, and to various other places. And it brings us to *Kathakali*, with fascinating insights into the training and performance of this traditional dance form, which are drama as well as dance.

The book is in the first person, but does not have a single narrator. As in a dance-drama, each of the players is allowed to speak for himself. Shyam voices his thoughts, and Radha voices hers, and both are hurting each other, the misunderstandings deepening through the trickery of words. A complexity of relationship is seen between Shyam and Radha.

Koman is the most interesting character. With his knowledge of *Kathakali*, a dance form which is entirely based on the epics, he looks upon mankind with a wisdom drawn from the heroes, princes and villains of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. He recognizes every shade of emotion in *Kathakali*. In minor gestures and fleeting expressions, the minds of all are revealed to an artist who is trained to interpret emotions with a finesse and perfection. The author uses *Kathakali* as her metaphor for life.

The novel is sectioned into nine parts, each named after one of the *navrasas*, the nine emotions or the nine faces of the heart that is love, contempt, sorrow, fury, valour, fear, disgust, wonder and attachment are used. Each section begins with a wonderful piece on that particular rasa, in the voice of the teacher, giving examples from nature to teach his students how to bring the expressions onto their faces.

*The Better Man* is set in contemporary India in a little fictitious village called Kaikurussi in the northern part of Kerala. Kaikurussi village is in a little hollow surrounded by several hills. It has nothing there that would make any one come looking for it. There is nothing of significance that ever happens there to anyone. There is not even a road running through Kaikurussi or a river flowing alongside it. All Kaikurussi has to define its topography are fields, wells, a mountain and distant hills.

An elderly bachelor and a retired government employee, Mukundan is forced by circumstances to return to Kaikurussi, the village he was born in. A village that he fled when he was eighteen. And now back in his ancestral house, he finds himself unable to cope. He is haunted by a sense of failure, for having abandoned his mother and for not measuring up to his still alive and domineering father Achuthan Nair's expectations. Mukundan realizes that he has no role to play in the village. He discovers that what should have been his rightful place had been usurped by an upstart Power House Ramakrishnan.

In the first few weeks of his exile, he meets up with a wayward genius. Bhasi, or One-screw-loose-Bhasi as he is known, is a house painter and a practitioner who heals the people. Bhasi is deeply disturbed by Mukundan's anguish and decides to mend the cracks in Mukundan's much battered psyche. He manipulates and shapes Mukundan. Power House Ramakrishnan is a cruel man, who decides to build a community hall in the village, and chooses Bhasi's piece of land as the site to build on. When Bhasi refuses to sell his land, Power House Ramakrishnan threatens to break his business and run him out of the village. As

the richest and most powerful man of the village Power House Ramakrishnan was capable of doing just that and Bhasi knows this as well. So he turns to Mukundan to intervene on his behalf.

Mukundan sets out to save Bhasi's home but is completely won over by Power House Ramakrishnan. He conquers Mukundan by appointing him as the important person in the committee. Mukundan is not in a situation to help Bhasi because, he had attained a reputation in the village and he does not want to lose it by interfering in Bhasi's problem. Mukundan betrays Bhasi his friend and alienates Anjana, the woman he is in love with. Mukundan said to Anjana,

You must listen to me. It knows you think I am a good man a gentle man. Someone you can depend on completely. I don't know if I am that man you make me out to be. My mother begged me to rescue her and take her away. But I didn't. It was afraid of my father, and so I made excuses. If I had done as she asked me, perhaps she might be still alive. That is the kind of man I am. A weak and undependable creature. Do you want to be part of such a man's life"? "All of us have our weakness, but we seldom have the courage to accept them. Or even declare it as you have done now. To me, that makes you braver than anyone else. I love you .My love tells me that this right for me? (244, 245)

Anjana is still married to another man and would therefore be considered an unsuitable love by the community hall committee. Mukundan however does not perceive it as betrayal and stubbornly clings to the belief that what he has done is right. But it takes the death of Achuthan Nair, his father to make him realize how empty his life was and would continue to be without either Bhasi or Anjana. He is stricken by both regret and guilt. And the

realization that he was no better than his father whom he had despised all his life. With this comes the real transformation.

Mukundan decides to make compensation. And now he goes about it is an indicator to how much Mukundan has changed from a fastidious and colourless man lacking in courage to take even the slightest of risks, becomes a man capable of finding love and happiness. He becomes a man who discovers the varied vibrant hues of life who emerges from the shadow of his father's personality to become a better man.

Anita Nair has focused on the condition of women in all her novels. But the conditions of men were hidden by nature. Most of the people were interested to read women-centered novels and try to find solutions for the problems of women. But most of the writers fail to notice the sufferings of men which were hidden for generations. Thus the rationale of this dissertation is to locate the sufferings of men and to examine the factors that lead men to treat women the way they are treated unjustly.

## Chapter 2

### Man - Woman Relationships

The treatment of human relationships depends on social status to which the characters belong. In society different people have different requirements to fulfil.

Meenakshi Rastogi in *Human Relationship* (2009) says,

A relationship is normally viewed as a connection between two individuals, such as romantic or intimate relationship. All relationships involve some level of interdependence. People in a relationship tend to influence each other, share their thoughts and feelings, and engage in activities together. Because of their interdependence, anything that changes or impacts one member of the relationship will have some level of impact on the other member. (16)

The Indian concept of a man-woman relationship has always been that they are inseparable and have equal rights and responsibilities towards society in which they are living. Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. In earlier days, women were merely portrayed as dependent souls. They prefer happiness of others. Women's identity is hidden behind the mask of sacrifice and dependency. Lance McKeithan in *Understanding Men - A Relationship Guide* (2004) says,

A successful relationship is about finding a common bound on all levels, not just the physical or the emotional. Many of the problems we face in relationships are from the perception that we are similar in our wants and desires. We may be similar in the most basic desire to love and be loved but our approach to meeting the goals is quite dissimilar. (5)

Men are considered to be rational whereas women are sensitive and emotional. They have their different attitudes and interests and so they look things in different ways and react to the same conditions differently. Most women have been culturally and emotionally

dependent on men. If there is any disruption of attachment or relationship is seen, there will be not only a loss of relationship, but a total loss of self.

Anita Nair holds revolutionary ideas about marriage and man-woman relationship. In her opinion, social consciousness of today is leading stress on development of personality and genius, which is quite difficult to achieve. Economic independence as such is incidental and not important in man-woman relationship; what matters most is the importance of surroundings and environment.

Anita Nair has proposed a new philosophy regarding man-woman relationship in the context of modern times. She strongly feels that social and conventional basis of marriage is being eroded and this would ultimately lead to a situation where marriage may not have to be performed at all. Recently the supreme court of India has recognized the right of individuals to stay together without getting married. This is called live-in relationship. Man - woman may live in mutual companionship. The relationship may be continued as long as they trust each other and as long as the basic emotional bonding subsists.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, *Better man*, and *Mistress* are therefore relevant to be studied for man-woman relationship since they portray woman's search for strength and independence. It is a part of the political instability which affected Indian society at large, along with myriad other influences which have affected culture, language and social patterns. Literature in India has evolved to show common experiences, a sense of sisterhood and a range of female experiences that question the recurring face of patriarchy.

Anita Nair is one of India's living woman authors who have carved a distinctive niche for herself. She tells her story with a distinct, incisive and to the point directness which makes her unique. Her characters are drawn from different walks of life and are realistic. Nair has emphasized that her characters interact and cause tensions allowing the narrative to unravel at

a brisk pace. Her ideas are very identifiable, relating to common sensibilities. Though her story is not meant to be universal, its theme is universal.

The traditional role of a woman is being as a wife and mother. She is to be nurturing, compassionate, caring, and supportive of her husband. Many women still choose this role for themselves because it is a good fit for them, but many more choose very different roles for themselves. The most difficult transitions have been into traditionally male domains of business and professional world.

The oppression of women stems largely from men's desire for power and control. The same need which, throughout history, has driven men to try to conquer and subjugate other groups or nations, and to oppress other classes or groups in their own society, drives them to dominate and oppress women. Since men feel the need to gain as much power and control as they steal away power and control from women.

Society denies women the right to make decisions so that they can decide for them as well and leave women unable to direct their own lives so that men can direct their lives for them. Ultimately, they are trying to increase their sense of significance and status, in an effort to offset the discontent and sense of lack created by humans. But even this is not enough to explain the full terrible story of man's inhumanity to woman.

Indian women have gone through a quiet revolution. Contrary to popular belief, a large number of Indian women work. Though the society has a decisive patriarchal outlook, women are more assertive now and definitely play a positive role in the country's march towards economic progress. Indian women were subject to a secondary position in the family set-up. The man has the upper hand since he is, more often than not, the principal worker of the family.

In the past, Indian women had to contend with a secondary role compounded with illiteracy, malnutrition, maternity deaths, *Sati* (the practice of being burnt alive at her

husband's pyre) and dowry. Malnutrition, female infanticide, subjugation in the family set-up due to the practice of dowry continues even today. Yet, women are now pushing for their fair share on the sub-continent. Rising literacy, better laws to protect women, a media-friendly image and the women's will to fight the odds against them have made all this possible.

The Indian woman is particularly conditioned by tradition and conventions and willingly accepts the responsibility of being the custodian of the family and prestige. It is widely acknowledged that family constitutes the dominant situation and constructs the primary identity of women. It defines and prescribes the social roles that women will play in familial terms: daughter, wife, and mother. Thus family becomes the major site of women's oppression. An Indian woman is yet to seek identity as a human being with equal status in the family in which she is born and in the family to which she is given in marriage.

In one section it is stated that a woman must be honoured and kept happy if a family is to be blessed by God. In another section it is stated that a woman should perform all household duties, irrespective of her husband's treatment of her. Through the centuries, woman in the Hindu tradition is depicted as a silent sufferer. She has been given a secondary status both in the family and society.

The Indian woman has carried the burden of the family. She has been slaved for her husband, for her children and for her family. Woman is made to believe that this secondary position is not imposed on necessarily by natural feminine characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of social traditions and education that have been under the control of men. Indian women take pride in suffering and live with the idea of subjugation entrusted to them for years. It is inculcated in them to accept the roles assigned to them by patriarchy that runs all through their blood.

B. D. Usmani in *Social Organisation* (2007) says, "Society is made up of people of different tastes and hues. By nature, every individual possesses a distinct identity and

character.” (2) The structure, type of the family and the position of women in family clearly pictures the secondary status assigned to women. As a philosophy of life feminism opposes women’s subordination to men in the family and society.

During the second half of the twentieth century women have been striving to challenge these systems of power developed by patriarchy. Women started to oppose, the patriarchally dictated, long-existing stereotypes of woman as a passive, docile and voiceless being. They were not ready to conform to the traditional ties and sought to define themselves in terms of what they really are, rather than what society wants them to be as a mere wife, mother or home-maker.

Sarbananda in *Dimensions of Social Change* (2010) says, “Social change depends on the speed with which it changes itself and adapts itself to the new environment. Social change refers to the changes, which take place in mode of life patterns of people. The term social change is used to describe the modification of any aspect of social processes, social patterns, social interaction or social organisation.” (3)

Domination is significant in an analysis of man-woman relationship where the male characteristics are coupled with mental thought and positive activity, at the same time the woman is regarded as basically submissive. Her role is to be respectable for male sexual drive for the subsequent reproduction of the species. Having lived in such an atmosphere, women had become narrow and controlled. They could never think that there can be a different world outside the four walls of their house. She was completely cut off from such dynamic world. It was so because the men of the traditional society wanted them to be so.

A situation like this was tolerated by the women for a long time and after that it bursts out and makes them to take revenge on their men. *Ladies Coupe* depicts the plight of Akhila, a forty-five year old single woman employed as an income-tax clerk. She has never been allowed to live life on her own terms. The novel takes off with her decision to discover her

own life and in her pursuit of freedom she takes a train to Kanyakumari. Having got a berth in a second class compartment in the Ladies Coupe, she meets five other women—Sheela Vasudevan, Prabha Devi, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paulraj and Marikolunthu.

During the course of the journey, Akhila gets to know her fellow travellers. All the characters lead stereotyped roles, into which women are moulded by patriarchal society. They all hope and strive to break free from that mould. When all the five characters meet and share their woes with the protagonist, Akhila, the latter finds the answer to her quest for freedom.

Janaki is a pampered wife and a confused mother; Margaret Shanthi is a Chemistry teacher who is married to a self-absorbed insensitive tyrant; Prabhadevi is an ideal wife and daughter who too undergoes a major transformation. The youngest character, fourteen-year old Sheela, is gifted with an exceptional ability to perceive matters that are beyond the capacity of normal souls. Marikolunthu falls prey to a rich and lustful man, who destroys her innocence.

The stories revealed by all the five characters provide Akhila with an answer to her quest for freedom. Akhila's quest for freedom is turned inward and aimed at the goal of self-discovery. Anita Nair presents both restrained and apparent analysis of conflicting phases, underlying reasons and suggests a way out of it. It becomes more interesting to analyze the image of women in *Ladies Coupe* when it is portrayed by a woman writer. Today, the woman plays diverse roles both indoors and outdoors. She participates in all the hitherto male-dominated spheres. But a conflict persists in her mind and makes her restless. Family, marriage and social norms bind her completely. Akhila, who is the protagonist, has multiple roles to perform - that of a daughter, sister, aunt and provider. At the beginning of the novel itself, Nair has thrown light on the various aspects of Akhila's personality as someone who is in pursuit of her identity, strength and independence.

Akhila's image reflects a realistic picture of a contemporary middleclass woman, who has a penchant for exposing the societal flaws prevalent in orthodox families in India. Akhila, a conservative Brahmin, is determined to break free from the shackles of age-old customs. Marrying one's uncle is an accepted norm in the Tamil-Brahmin community. The independent-minded Akhila at the age of fourteen has no fears expressing her displeasure and disapproval at her mother's decision to marry her uncle (Akhila's father). Further, she strongly opposes her mother's theories on what a good wife have to be. Her mother's formula of a successful marriage is in subordination of women. Akhila refuses to believe that a woman's need to prove her equality creates strife and disharmony in the house.

Anita Nair's portrayal of Akhila shows her determination to live life her way after a long suffering. Akhila's belief in the institution of marriage at the beginning of the novel gradually changes and towards the end of the novel she seduces a young man. A stranger called Vinod in her pursuit of discovering the woman in her. Her awareness of her needs and the self-realization leads to her empowerment. She wishes for companionship as well as motherhood.

Akhila considers marriage is unimportant but she likes to have companionship. She wishes to lead her life on her terms but is constantly reminded by everyone that a woman can't live alone. After she engages in a one-night stand with a stranger, Akhila feels emancipated from the age-old customs. The need for self-fulfilment is so intense that she is willing to let go off the burden of the societal pressures that had clogged her mind all these years. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan in "*Religion and Society*" (2007) observes that, "Marriage is not a mere convention but an implicit condition of human society. It is an adjustment between the biological purposes of nature and the sociological purposes of man. It is an institution, and a device for the expression and development of love" (147).

Akhila, the protagonist succeeds in her goal of self-discovery. She succeeds in retaining her dignity even as she finds self-fulfilment. Like the male child, Akhila takes over the reign from her father after his death. She rescues her mother from the threat of poverty and degradation. She even enrolls in the Open University for a Bachelor of Arts degree at the age of thirty-five to prevent her mind from wandering. Akhila finds herself a misfit in the society she lives in.

Because of her unmarried status, she does not have many friends and fails to identify with the world of householders. She finds her soulmate in Katherine Webber as both have no preoccupations. Akhila's journey in search of her identity is not an easy one. It means breaking free from her conservative background. She secretly feasts on hardboiled eggs for a whole year and also picks up the art of boiling eggs. She tastes her first victory and establishes her individuality when her orthodox mother accepts her taste for eggs. Thus begins Akhila's journey as a spinster, government employee, historian and eater of eggs.

In her moments of weakness, Akhila lets her neglectful thoughts overrule her. The woman in her seeks a sense of gratification and allows a stranger to take liberties with her. Akhila's relationship with Hari fails to conclude in marriage as he was younger to her and this relationship would not get social acceptance. After her mother's death Akhila's overwhelming desire to lead an independent life of her own, recoils when her overbearing cruel sister Padma moves with her family to stay with Akhila. Akhila tolerates the invasion of space and privacy but she dislikes being thrust into a life that was dull without any highs or lows. She hated herself for being an extension of someone else's identity.

The other characters in the novel play an equally significant role. It is their revealing stories that lead Akhila to her final destination in her search for strength and independence. Janaki is a pampered wife but with a strong sense of insecurity. Her habit of switching channels each time a life-insurance commercial appeared on televisions shows her height of

insecurity. Her urge to be pampered definitely leads to her accepting a very small image which clashes with her self-image and results in marriage at the age of eighteen to a twenty-seven year old Prabhakaran and gets from him all the attention she desired. From her girlhood she was being groomed for marriage. Marriage was her ultimate destination.

A perfectionist in the skills required for marriage – cooking and cleaning, sewing and pickling- she symbolises the plight of most Indian women, who are always looked after first by father and brother then husband. When her husband is gone, there will be her son. She says, “Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses” (23). All her life she believed that a woman’s duty was to get married, a home was a woman’s kingdom and she strived hard to preserve it.

Nevertheless, with all the affection and attention she receives, Janaki is bored with her monotonous life and craves for a change and it hints at the dissatisfaction experienced by women at a certain age. She believes that women can achieve satisfaction only by being with her male equivalent. She says “I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and my brothers, then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses” (22- 23).

A true image of the ideal Indian woman, Janaki believed that a woman’s role was to keep the family intact and reach out to every member. She finds herself in a very unbearable state when forced to bear taunts and disrespects at her son’s house. Unable to bear the insults, she decides to live with her husband. Janaki’s story hints at the dissatisfaction experienced at a certain age by every individual, though what she believes is not true for the women of today’s times.

Sheela, a fourteen-year old girl, is the youngest of the lot. Nair thrusts upon her an unusual ability to perceive what adults around her could not. She is gifted with strong

instincts that protect her from impending danger. When her friend Hasina's father takes the first step to outrage her modesty, she does a simple innocent act of wiping the line of sweat from her upper-lip and trying to knot the bows on the sleeves of her blouse when it had come undone. She could easily sense the danger lurking behind these innocent acts. She instinctively stopped going to Hasina's house later. Even as an adolescent girl she could sense that her ammuma (maternal grandmother) hated imperfections of any kind. Hence

She braided the hair into a plait, rubbed foundation onto her face, shoulders and chest. She dusted expensive talcum powder on her Ammuma's face, neck all over the body, rimmed her eyes with a kohl pencil, touched her eyebrows and turned her into an obnoxious creature - a garish, dressed up dying harlot.

(74)

Only Sheela knows that her Ammuma did not want to look diseased and decaying. She does not care for her father's disapproval and disappointment. In Sheela, Anita Nair has created the image of a young girl, fiercely independent, who allows her instincts to rule rather than do what was expected of her. Margaret Shanthi, the Chemistry teacher, is married to an insensitive tyrant called Ebenezer Paulraj. With the sole desire of taking revenge on her brutal husband she feeds him and turns him into a fat man.

Margaret believes that being fat can erode his self-esteem. If he survived, he would continue to give her sorrow with a single-minded joy. Among the five elements that constitute life, she classifies herself as water. Water has several qualities. It moistens, heals, forgets, accepts, flows tirelessly and also destroys. Like water, she has the power to dissolve and destroy. She wants to end her miseries by bringing an end to her self-absorbed narcissist husband. Her story reveals the metamorphosis from a dutiful wife to a revenge seeking one. Her greatest virtue is her immunity to what people think of her. Anita Nair has bestowed Margaret Shanthi with a sound knowledge of chemical elements. Margaret describes other

characters by ascribing those names of chemicals akin to their nature. Premilla Madhav is Bromine. Daphne, Lithium. Sankar Narayan, Cobalt. Xavier, Nitrous Oxide. Kalavati, Arsenic and finally Nawaz, the ex-principal, as Tetra Sulphur Tetranide. She thus describes her husband:

Ebenezer Paulraj. Biting. Scathing. Colourless. Oily. Dense. Sour. Explosive. Given to extremes. Capable of wiping out all that was water, fluid and alive. Fortified to char almost anything that was organic - wood, paper, sugar, dreams. Concentrated sulphuric acid. H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>. Hydrogen Sulphate. King of chemicals. Oil of Vitriol. (120)

Prabha Devi, married to Jagdeesh, a prosperous diamond merchant, is quiet and nervous to the extent that she has never tried doing anything new. She does not like the way she has evolved and therefore she makes attempts to change herself. Her birth made her father sigh. At 15 years of age, she was moved to a convent school to be groomed well by the nuns so as to get a good alliance. She was permitted two hours of outing every week (i.e. Saturday morning) because boys prefer girls who are friendly and can hold their own in a conversation.

Prabha Devi becomes the woman her mother had envisioned. Her visit to New York brought back with her a whole set of possessions. She longed to be like the women in New York with swinging air and confident stride. Her quest to acquire dignity, confidence, celebration of life and beauty moulds her into “a woman of the world sans the slouch, the downcast eye and sari pallu weighing down her youth” (178).

From a meek and mean person she is transformed into a confident, youthful looking, Passionate woman. She does all this not only to restore the balance of their relationship but also because she did not like the person she had become. Prabha Devi, who was governed and shaped by the patriarchal value structures, brought about this change by realizing the need to

exercise freedom, choice and will. She had imprisoned her natural longings for so long that they began to erupt in peculiar form. She practised the walk trips to Mary's cosmetic counter to learn how to apply makeup, watched talk shows and soap operas and the last thing she acquired to complete the transformation were clothes.

After motherhood, in order to revitalize her energies and boost her self-worth, she enrolled in a baking class and joined swimming which brought about a feeling of supreme contentment in her. For Prabha Devi, her outward appearance is of prime importance. The transformation in her comes in the way she looks and conducts herself and not by bringing change in her inherent nature. Her flirtatious nature and advances made towards Pramod made the latter succumb to Prabha Devi's attentions. Lapping up a stranger's attention was yet another conquest for her. But very soon she "realized with a sinking heart that she had ignited something she had no idea how to extinguish" (182).

In her attempt to submerge in the subtleties of her bodily hungers she had perhaps forgotten that repressed desires and emotions are more dangerous. On renewing her desires and longing for her husband she becomes the bubbling beautiful Prabha from the calm and composed woman. The novel describes Prabha's renewed sexual desire in the following lines: "But she had discovered that desire spawns desire; fulfilment begets fulfilment. A kiss for a kiss. A caress for a caress. What one gives comes back manifold" (195).

Anita Nair brings the last character in the form of Marikolunthu, who is a victim of a Man's lust. She is poor, uneducated and represents that class, which leads unsheltered lives. This sixth passenger who narrated her tale has a strong belief that women are strong and capable of doing much more than men but for that she has to seek that vein of strength in herself There is no sense of rightness; no chronology about the roles in her life. She succeeds in taking control of her life for the first time. A woman, content in her role of a substitute lover, discovers herself and recognizes her desire to be the real mother to her son Muthu.

All the characters in the novel try to make some sense of their own existence by talking about it to anyone who is willing to listen. The revelation of the five co-passengers leads Akhila towards the path of self-actualization, self-realization and self-fulfilment. Like her fellow travellers, she too is determined to break free from all that her conservative life has bound her to. The characters represent the middle and upper middle class, educated, urban woman with the exception of Marikolunthu. By liberating oneself from the clutches of family a woman can survive only if she has inculcated in her the culture of self-dependence both physical and mental.

Deepa. K (2013) points out that “Akhila represents the New Indian Woman who is dissatisfied with the roles assigned to her by the patriarchal society and manages to reject the cultural and social background totally to transcend the horizons and thus depicting a revolutionary spirit. Her predecessors were caught between tradition and modernity. But she represents the changing image of woman in today’s time” (35).

Akhila’s quest for freedom, self-discovery and self-actualization runs through the novel. The slow, but firm assertive strides takes in her pursuit of freedom from the age-old customs and feminine consciousness prevails throughout the novel in the form of all the female characters, the protagonist encounters and interacts. For them it is the revolt against the family traditions in search of freedom and quest for their selves.

The novel presents how human relationships are redefined. Akhila’s extramarital adventure certainly indicates the move towards sexual emancipation. The novel also highlights the theme of freedom from bondage of culture, from the concepts of family, marriage and sex as defined by male-chauvinism and are thrust upon women. The protagonist does urge to seek self - fulfilment through self expression. She questions the two codes of morality existing in society based on gender.

Women take revenge on their men when they are suppressed to the extreme level. When they feel that they are losing their identity, it creates problem in their relationship. When they get less importance from their family, it makes them develop hatred towards living. In *Ladies Coupe*, the character of Margaret Shanthi is an impressive one. Margaret's story is a story of a woman who learns her own strategies to get her dreams true. Margaret's Husband, Ebenezer Paulraj, is an example for male dominance. He transforms Margaret into a position of submissive silence, making her out to be an unnoticed and unremarkable girl.

Thus despite a brilliant academic career and a warm and vibrant personality, she is reduced to an average girl. His subtle cruelty to the children in his school gets repeated with his wife too. He was obsessed with the girlish characteristics of Margaret. It is visible even at their first meet. To retain the girlish charm in her, when she happily announces her pregnancy, he insists to abort the baby. Margaret felt confused, angry, sorrowful, pain and self-pitied. Tired of her submissiveness at her home, she finally takes her life into her own hands.

With supreme will power she collects her hidden strength and sends it as a revenge for her husband. Having learnt the tactics from his constant playing of games to get his things done, she takes revenge by following the same tactics of her husband. Margaret has undergone physical, mental and spiritual crisis throughout her life. She keeps on growing till she finds a state where she is happy and peaceful.

Margaret's marriage to Ebenezer Paulraj is like a fairy tale for her. Ebenezer Paulraj loves Margaret Shanthi from the bottom of his heart but not ready to accept her individual likes and dislikes, impulses and fancies and dreams and aims. Margaret's state, , is excellently portrayed by Anita Nair. Her husband loves her but he did not allow her

individuality. Margaret is initially a little girl who says 'yes' to whatever her husband says and ready to do anything for him. She is jolted out of this role when she has to go for an abortion. He controls her completely. She is forced to do B.Ed. though she wants to do Ph.D. She is made to work only for her husband and he nags her all the time. She starts to hate him and the day she realizes her hatred towards him, she feels liberated from some unknown clutches:

I mouthed the words: I hate him. I hate my husband. I hate Ebenezer Paulraj. I hate him. I hate him. I waited for a clap of thunder, a hurling meteor, a whirlwind, a dust storm... for some super phenomenon that is usually meant to accompany such momentous and perhaps sacrilegious revelations. (98)

In *An Introduction to Sociology* (1998), Vidhya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva state that "life is a process of continuous adjustment and readjustment. The social organism is always undergoing a change necessitating adjustment of its different parts. When the various parts of society are properly adjusted, we have social order and a well organised society. But when they fail to adjust themselves to the changing conditions, the result is social disorganisation leading to social problems" (815).

When Margaret understands that she is isolated, she finds consolation through eating a lot of food. She puts on weight. Ebenezer, on the other hand, who is aware of his health and fitness, makes her feel guilty about her weight gain. She leads a routine life until the day James, the golden fish, floats dead. The moment proves to be a turning point in her life. She does not want her life to float like dead fish. She identifies herself with the golden fish.

Ebenezer's love for food and sex becomes a tool for Margaret. She starts pampering Ebenezer with sex and food he likes the most in his life. The result he becomes fat, loses his vanity and needs her more and more. She, once controlled by him, now holds him completely in her hands. A unique way adopted by Margaret helps her to go back into the society,

changes her parents' outlook and her husband's attitude. The strategy, finding and attacking the weakness of the opponent to win him, is artistically handled by the character Margaret Shanthi.

In the case of Margaret Shanthi, an organised setting in her life, suddenly changes to be distorted. The social value in her life has disordered. She revenges her husband for her long day sufferings. The relationship between them has not given fruitful memories for her. At the same time Ebenezer had not considered or given importance to the desires and feelings of his wife. He wanted her to be under his control and perform activities with his suggestions. This is what is detailed by Rajendra K. Sharma in *Social Disorganisation* (1998) as follows:

Social organisation derives its strength from social values. This organisation is destroyed when some injury is inflicted upon them when the process of disorganisation sets in. In this both the organisation and disorganisation of society is based upon social values. Changes in social values necessitate new social institutions and associations. This creates disorder in society. The status and roles of people change in accordance with the changes in social values. (9)

The society is responsible for the behaviour and it plays a major role in the life of every individual. For each character in the novel, the decisions in their life are mainly taken by keeping society in their mind. In Akhila's life the organisation of the society changes and it leads to social disorganisation. Margaret Shanthi is set to the organisation of the society, but suddenly she acts opposite to the usual norms of the society by taking revenge on her husband. Social disorganisation occurs in the life of each characters of the novel.

In the life of Marikolunthu, the change has occurred continuously. The usual life of a girl in the society cannot be viewed. She has an illegitimate child. Her life was destroyed by her innocence. The transformation in her life is considered as social disorganisation. The organisation of the society depends upon the actions of the individuals. Sharma points it out

as “changes in social attitudes concur with changes in social values. Individuals influenced by this change desire a particular kind of change in society whereas people beset with old tendencies, traditions and mores object to this change. Social disorganisation results from this struggle” (10).

The lives of these six ladies revolve around the society. The immediate changes of the individuals are not accepted suddenly by the society. Janaki is a traditional wife and mother and a daughter who always had a man to protect her. But one day she decides to live her own life and to create an identity for herself. Similarly, Prabha Devi also likes Janaki, she wants to create her identity and live for herself. Finally Sheela, the youngest girl in the group, is completely opposite to the traditional norms of the society. When applying the Social Problem Approach, to these characters, Sharma says

In accordance with this approach it is imperative for social advancement that all kinds of social maladjustments be removed are responsible for impending social progress. The social maladjustment is truly a stumbling block in the social progress; and, therefore, without first taking care of it no social advance is possible. Social problems arise out of the maladjustments between the individual and the society. The maladjustments are of numerous types. They may affect the social, political or economic sphere. But if these maladjustments are unresolved for a long time, the process of social disorganisation becomes activated. (10-11)

The Social Problem Approach provides a rational basis for social welfare and upliftment and tries to present a scientific account of social disorganisation. These characters have maladjustments with the society. The sudden change in the life of them is the main cause for the social disorganisation. The men who are considered as victims in this novel are Ebenezer Paulraj. The story of Ebenezer and Margaret is the interesting section in the novel.

Margaret is under the control of Ebenezer and she obeys all his orders. But, her husband never wants Margaret to attain a development in her career or other activities which decreases his priority over her. He never wants her to explore and attain knowledge and power.

Margaret has been silent for long years and suddenly she realised that she had no special identity except being the wife of Ebenezer. This creates an impact on her mind and she decides to go in her husband's way to take revenge on him and making him to depend on her in all the activities which he performs. This sudden change in the attitude of Margaret paves the way for the disturbance in their relationship. Every individual is depending on the society. The norms and regulations set by the society should be followed by every individual. If the individual deviates from the actual norms, there will be a disintegration that occurs in the society.

A society is made up of individuals. Different types of individuals live in the society. They may have a common culture or may belong to different sets of culture. When all individuals in a society belong to the same culture, they form a social system. It is necessary for a social system that social actions should be well-coordinated and should not create a conflict as to destroy the social harmony. Social relations are established through mutual behaviour between various members of the society. In this way social relationships depend upon the social interaction of the members of the society.

Social interaction is to establish mental relations among persons. The mutual relationships between individuals are controlled and regulated by institutions and associations. Thus, society is a vast system. The organisation of this system is the interrelationship of its constituents. The social change occurs in the life of its people is the change in the society's structure. The change in the social structure involves social relationships, social patterns, social interaction or social organisation. Human society is constituted of human beings. If there is any alteration that takes place in the mutual behaviour

between individuals, it is considered as the sign of social change. Hence the society can never be static.

The process whereby social relationships become disorganised is known as social disorganisation. In a disorganised society these social relationships exhibit lack of organisation. The individuals constitute society. Individuals influence the society. It is the society that makes individuals cultured. But the social relationships and organisations in this novel is not in an organised manner. The relationship between the people is not in a mutual manner.

The characters in the novel act according to their own self and fail to follow the usual norms of the society. But it is the society who had made them to act in such a manner. Society is the main reason for the development and fall of an individual. The life of Akhila in the novel has gone in such a manner because she cares for the society. She cared for the upliftment of her family and she could not satisfy her own desires because of her fear for the society. In the end she destroys all the barriers which had not let her free and decides to live her own life which is opposite to the actual norms of the society.

In the life of Margaret and Ebenezer it is he who had made his wife to act in a different manner. If Ebenezer had treated Margaret in a good manner and supported her to get exposure, the relationship between them would have been well and the organisation of their family will be in a proper condition. But instead Ebenezer had restricted his wife to perform her own activities which she deserves. Because of his ill treatment the suppressed Margaret takes revenge on him. In this aspect he is considered as a victim who suffers by becoming fat and depends on Margaret to perform all his activities.

A social life is a web of relationships. In order to maintain these relations properly, a system of rights and duties is organised which avoids conflict between the members of society and allows them to develop a mutual relationship between each other. Control over

sex relationships is necessary for maintaining the social order otherwise disintegration will spread over the social life. Relationships between men and women will lose their solidarity. This sort of relationship will lead to the birth of illegitimate children.

In Marikolunthu's life, she has given birth to a child by being a prey for a man's lust. Because of that, the new born child is considered as an illegitimate child. This becomes a cause for the society's disorganisation. Controlling the individual is not handled in a proper manner by the society. The life of Marikolunthu has changed because of her ignorance. If proper education has been given to her by the society, she would be aware of these social values. The organisation of the society is disordered due to these incidents.

## Chapter 3

### Male as a Victim

A victim is referred to as someone or something that has been hurt, damaged, or killed or has suffered, either because of the actions of someone or something else, or because of illness or chance. It can be a person who suffers from a destructive or injurious action or agency, a person who is deceived or cheated as by his or her own emotions or ignorance, by the dishonesty of others, or by some impersonal agency.

Anita Nair has portrayed her women characters as victims and she made them to suffer and finally she brings them out with an authoritative personality against the society. Her women characters in all the novels, at the first level they suffer from the male due to the domineering and authoritative power of men. She had focussed on the suppression of women and their sufferings to survive as an individual.

Not only Anita Nair had focussed on women but the other contemporary writers had also focussed on women. But the real thing is none of them had noted or focussed about what men suffers and no one had found that why are men dominating women and suppressing them. In this novel, the men characters are suppressing women but in some instances, they support women and men are victimised by women.

In *Mistress* (2005) Anita Nair has brought to the fore the issue of marital rape, which is often not discussed in public and which does not necessarily amount to violence under the law, because it is the husband who is responsible for that. Women have been living in pain and silence for ages as victims of male dominance and sexual violence. Anita Nair portrays how women are oppressed and dominated by men through the novel *Mistress*.

*Mistress* is set on the banks of river Nila which instils in one's heart, the beauty of art, wonder of creativity, depth of love and passion and the pain of betrayal. Like the river the plot is a journey to self-realisation. *Mistress* revolves around the life of Radha, Shyam and

their unhappy marriage against the backdrop of the narratives of Radha's uncle Koman, the Kathakali dancer and teacher, who lives only for his art. Shyam sees nature or woman as a resource for the benefit of man. Both nature and women represent the generative powers of fertility and birth. But it exists as a reflection of nature through the reproductive and productive work of giving birth to children, feeding them and ensuring their healthy growth. Shyam runs a resort. He knows that Radha is feminine, but he views her as a passive resource, a decorative asset in addition to being a material asset.

Radha is aware that her husband's love is only a shame and her marriage is meaningless. A young travel writer from the west, Christopher Stewart, arrives with a cello and a tape recorder to include Koman's life in his book. He spends a lot of time with Koman and his beautiful unhappy niece, Radha. Radha is suddenly drawn by the personality of Chris. Shyam becomes a helpless observer as Radha embraces Chris in a passion, when he could not understand.

Radha is drawn into a sexual relationship with Chris. It is a form of protest against cultural norms that deny a woman any expression of her sexuality. Bala Muthu Marieswari (2014) says,

It voices feminists' continuing concern with giving women control over their bodies, providing them with the power and the knowledge to enjoy their sexuality and to have children if and when they wish, in short, the power to be able to say, "Our bodies are our own". So he forces himself upon her, claiming it as his right and unmindful of her right to refuse, while Radha's mind condemns it as rape. (17)

In the case of Radha and Shyam, the institution of marriage becomes the platform upon which the game of sexuality and power are played out. Radha's resistance is not without tension or fear. She for a while as the dutiful wife in order to give herself time for hard

decisions and says, “fear makes one do things one would never do otherwise. Fear lets you compromise. Fear will even let you seduce your husband so that he thinks he imagined your transgressions, your betrayal, and that you still are his” (253).

Finally she rejects both Shyam and Chris and in doing so, releases herself from the roles of wife and mistress. In her decision to break away from both men in her life, but keep her urban baby, she gives her baby a maternal identity through the maternal care only, by rendering it “fatherless”. Radha, who had been mistress to two men (Chris and Shyam) and wife to one, moves towards becoming “mistress” of her own self.

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair focuses on the issue of domestic sexual violence. It is an intensive novel full of deep, mysterious, complex emotions that are very true to life. The story of each character unties slowly and in the end culminates in a passionate story of life. All of the characters in the novel have a passion in their life and in some way or other it decides the course of their lives, and it becomes a demanding mistress.

The novel explores the depth of relationship between Shyam and Radha. Mote Ramraja.V (2014) says that, “In their relationship, Radha’s role as a wife blocks her freedom. Radha’s alienation under the rubrics of sexuality is on account of Shyam’s cold intellectuality. The entire pulsating and throbbing world around Shyam serves to deepen her love for Chris”. Radha’s contact with Shyam never went deeper than skin. She is unable to satisfy her sexual urge because of Shyam’s superiority, and this leads her into Chris’ arms.

Radha rejects her husband’s oppressive environment and she rebels against the false materialism and vulgarity of society. She even virtually rejects her marriage. She distrusts love as a form of male possessiveness and does not want love to be an aspect of male domination. Vidhya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva accounts to this as, “marriage is to be considered not as an expression of purely sexual urge but as a social safeguard. It is both a social institution and a bilateral man-woman relationship”. (317) Radha, who had a

pre-marital affair with a married man, had an abortion. Later her Post-affair with Christopher, she grapples for the true sense of love, completely divorced from the sense of guilt.

Radha is completely dominated by her husband and his elder sister Rani Oppol. At the beginning of her marriage, the patriarchy exists in different ways such as she was not able to conceive even after eight years of her marriage. So she was called “barren” by the society. Radha was obviously blamed though Shyam was impotent. The entire society is ready to blame women to favour men.

The reason for Radha’s aversion towards Shyam is the ill-treatment and because he never allows her to do anything on her own. When she suggested him that she would like to start a business on her own, he shouted to her that she has to behave as a wife to him because he has a status in the society that should not be spoiled by her. She raised her voice and said that he behaves as if he was superior to her but actually all are human beings no one is superior or inferior in this society. Behind this incident she was very angry and went into her room.

Radha as a rebel started to revolt to her husband but he does not care with her behaviour. He likes her extremely and he doesn’t react in a way that they are equal partners in life. He wanted her to be under the control of him. He likes her spending time in the beauty parlour or at the tailor’s shop or at shopping. But if it comes to her spending time somewhere where her intellectual talents are concerned, he laid an end to all her movement. She stomped off the room door and in the evening she uttered that she was going to meet his uncle and said

I hope that is not going to undermine your standing in society. Is there anything I can do that won’t? I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools and you said it was too much work for too little money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same. Then I wanted to start a crèche and you said you didn’t want the house filled with bawling babies. So I thought I would

find something else to do which didn't involve making money, but even that isn't right. Don't I have an opinion? I am your wife. Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfil your sexual needs and with no rights. (73)

As she travels back to her uncle she confronts many harsh truths of her own past. To the agitated self of Radha who is fed up with ugly life, she has a strong desire to find out an order. She tries to explore the past of her uncle, as well as Christopher, who are so closely connected with her mysterious past. She wants to understand the secret behind Christopher's visit and her uncle's procrastination to narrate his own life story. She plunges to the past and many realizations occur to her. The shocking revelation is that Christopher, with whom she had extramarital affair, is her cousin. In the process of knowing her past, she is transformed into a new being. This transformation gives her the inner strength to submit to Shyam's wish to take her back to home.

Usha Bhatt and Mihir Dave (2014) point out that, "mysteries are a reflection against men who believe in holding their women in their grip. It is a statement against women who take pride in their servility and it is again an indictment against men who trade in marriages as a means of increasing money and power" (91-92).

In this background, women like Radha in *Mistress*, Janaki, Prabha and Margaret in *Ladies Coupe* occupy a unique place. Being sensitive and having spent their childhood in comfortable conditions of parental care, it was expected that their marital life should be wholesome and happy. But, it could not come about, mainly on account of their sensitiveness and an inner urge to carve their own identity.

Radha's search for physical interaction and gratification or that of Koman - her uncle for recognition is no different from Akhila's search for meaning in life. They want an

alternative definition of this world, its inhabitants and their own life. Usha Bhatt and Mihir Dave (2014) put it right as

the crisis that the author presents is that of the whole, “women” race. In Radha’s and Akhila’s character she depicts the compromise between what ‘is’ and ‘what ought to be’ the struggle before us and the efforts which we should harness to surmount the struggle. This approach to her novels truly point out Anita Nair’s place as a forerunner to fight for the cause of women’s liberation movement in India and abroad. (92)

The novel narrates the fascinating tale of a woman’s desire. Unfolding along the fault lines of tradition and modernity in contemporary India, the novel says a triangle of desire that plays out through Radha’s lack of desire for her businessman - husband Shyam and her growing desire for Chris, a travel writer and cello player from America who came in search of his own stories. The novel discusses the sexual violence and repressive power of Shyam in the marital relationship of Shyam and Radha. It revolves around the life of Radha. Her unhappy situation in the ill-matched marriage drives her into the arms of Chris. It ends in Radha’s finding her own voice and deciding to go against the repressive force of her husband.

Radha and Shyam are unsuited in many ways and Radha feels suffocated by her marriage. She compares herself to a butterfly which can be taken as a good example of repression. The repression of women is expressed well in the novels of women writers in all its intensity. Shyam wanted to prove that he is the husband and he has complete right over his wife, whether she welcomes the intrusion or not. Shyam’s committing acts of sexual violence leaves a deep scar on Radha’s heart.

Shyam is blind in his search and does not care for Radha’s feelings. His only aim is to bring her under control by suppressing her desires and emotions. The key to happiness in marriage is the ability to endure and go on. But there are many marriages where women are

dominated by their husbands and do not find freedom and space in their marital life. There is a new breed of women who is questioning the very institution of marriage and the double standards of judgement applied to men and women. For Shyam, Radha is his proud possession and the marriage between Shyam and Radha fails to a marriage of minds or hearts. Shyam always does things to maintain his prestige. Radha is blamed always for being disorderly.

According to Radha's father, marriage is just a convenient contract to lead a comfortable life. It was on this basis they were married. Social status is more important for Radha's father. It is more important for both the individual and the society. Vidhya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva (1997) point to this as "an individual wins respect in society by virtue of his status. An increase in the individual's status entitles him to more respect than before. Marriage in almost every society is contracted on the basis of status. Everyone wants to marry his sons and daughters into a family of an equal if not superior status" (424).

Radha is honest and confesses her previous relationship to Shyam on the very day of their marriage. Though Radha does not know it, her father has given all his property to Shyam in the name of marriage as compensation. Her father offered money to Shyam to marry her. In the name of authority and love Shyam makes Radha his slave and subordinate. Radha is overcome by a sense of helplessness and frustration with the physical repressive force of marital life.

Shyam is satisfied with his manly behaviour. He believes that women should be made to feel like women and they should be controlled and put in their place. But Radha tells him that he is wrong in his thinking when he has forced her in to submission. She confesses that she can never be his possession and bow to his repressive attitude or his domineering behaviour. The woman in the past was completely traditional, uneducated, superstitious and confined. Being lived in such atmosphere women had become narrow and controlled. They

could never think that there can be a different world outside the four walls of their house, there can be some more roles for her to play. She was completely cut off from such dynamic world. It was so because the men of the traditional society wanted them to be so. The women living in such an orthodox society became so habitual to their surrounding and age old philosophy that they too were thinking that the marriage is their destiny and their husbands and their master. Their duty is to obey him and serve him and his family.

Radha is bold and confident enough to fulfil her desires by going against the society. She experiences sex before the marriage and indulging in extra marital affairs that are strictly against the Indian society. She breaks the chain of the society in order to fulfil her desires. Radha explores herself to fulfil herself basically as a human being, and to be independent of her various traditional roles as a daughter, wife, mother and so on.

Radha's sufferings become her strength and weapon to fight out her predicaments. The novel shows only about woman's capacity to assert her own rights and individuality in marriage and develop in to a fully fledged woman of prospective as a human being. Even though men are suppressing woman, they are considered as victims in some of the incidents in the novel.

Shyam is portrayed as a villain in this novel. He considers Radha as his own property and possession. He finds pleasure in owning her. But because of Radha, Shyam is found as a villain. Shyam finds pride in owning his car and often prides that his car was the first car to be manufactured in India. He cherishes Radha. Radha considers Shyam as a materialistic businessman who understands neither art nor aesthetics, who constantly embarrasses Radha by exhibiting "a carelessness that is so typical of him," and who in her words "wasn't just a sham, he was an uncouth boor, this husband of mine" (9).

When Chris arrives at the resort owned by the couple, Radha thinks of the difference between men,

I look at him. With every moment, the thought hinges itself deeper into my mind: what an attractive man. It isn't that his hair is the colour of rosewood – deep brown with hints of red – or that his eyes are as green as the enclosed pond at the resort. It isn't the pale gold of his skin, either... It is the strength of his body and the length of his fingers that belies what seems to be a natural indolence. It is the crinkling of his eyes and his unhurried smile that throws his face into symmetrical lines. It is the softness of his mouth framed by a brutish two-day stubble. It is how he appears to let order and chaos exist together without trying to separate one from the other. (8-9)

Radha's desire for Chris backs the contempt she feels for Shyam. Ironically, she feels that it is Shyam who holds her in contempt and treats her, his wife of eight years, as a valued but lifeless object. Radha's hatred for Shyam shows that she does not have love for Shyam. Radha's lack of desire for her husband Shyam and the ambivalence she feels towards her marriage are thus sensitively portrayed as being the reasons for her subsequent attraction towards the good-looking, intelligent, and sensitive Chris.

Rao (2015) states "Radha who consciously decides to fill the void in her life created by one man through indulging her desire for another". Her husband Shyam, the traditional man, is a curious mix of rationality and superstition, of softness and strength. While Radha finds it impossible to desire and to love him, he is loved and admired by all his employees. Shyam has a great love for Radha and he prides to have her as his wife. It clearly shows when he says, "I like looking at Radha when she is with a group of women. My Radha shines" (115).

When Shyam came to know that Radha and Chris are in a relationship, despite all his anger and pain, he realizes that he loves Radha deeply. So he ultimately decides not only to

accept her back but to accept the outcome of her adulterous desire, Chris's illegitimate child, whom she is now carrying in the hope that she will finally learn to love her husband.

Eventhough Shyam is aware that Radha has a pre-marital and has a post-marital affair, wants her to come back to him. He wants her to understand him and show her affection for him. Shyam in each and every situation cherishes and loves Radha deeply. He considers Radha as his proud possession. But Radha had not followed the principles of a wife. She wanted to have an extra marital affair in order to take revenge on Shyam. She lost her identity of an Indian woman.

Radha neglects both Indian and Western culture. Therefore she decides to lead her life as her own wish. She seeks her own individuality. Radha's trespassing is but a by-product of the patriarchal culture. Therefore, despising a life in such a male-dominated tradition and society she breaks the limits and family customs. The organisation of the society changes in the life of Shyam and Radha.

The character who is considered as victim is Koman. Koman is the protagonist in the novel *Mistress*. Sethu, father of Koman, is a Hindu orphan, trained as a health inspector before he moves to Nazareth, a small town. He starts work under Dr. Samuel. There is an epidemic in the village and its neighbourhood. They provide necessary help and service to the affected population. The doctor has tremendous confidence and faith in Sethu. The doctor takes him wherever he goes on medical rounds. In a village by name Arabipatnam, Sethu sees Saadiya, daughter of Haji Najib doof. Her family is very orthodox and conservative. Women and girls are not allowed to see any strangers except their parents, brothers and husbands.

When Saadiya's parents come to know about her love for Sethu, a Hindu boy, she is expelled from the house. She joins Sethu. Sethu is confident that Dr.Samuel would help him. Dr.Samuel asks him to leave immediately. Sethu is very fortunate. Whenever he is in

trouble, providence comes to his rescue. He is offered a job by James Raj, the richest man in Nazareth. After sometime, Saadiya gives birth to a male child.

Sethu and Saadiya argue about “Khitan” to be performed on the newly born child. He feels very bad because this may cause pain to the child’s penis and testicles. He tries to convince her not to perform such things on the new born baby. She is stubborn and wants to follow every instruction that is said in the Quran. Saadiya’s upbringing through indoctrination about religion is strong and common sense is not allowed to work. Sethu does not allow such things to be performed on his son and asks her to leave his son and go to her parents. When he comes home, only the child is there. She commits suicide.

Sister Faith, a nurse, is free and accepts to look after the child so that Sethu can get along with his life. He makes arrangements for delivery of money every month for maintenance of the child. He migrates to Shoranur and buys properties. He marries Devayani and has children through her. Sister Faith marries; there is none to look after the boy, Koman. Sethu has not discussed his previous marriage or about the child with his wife Devayani.

Devayani is disturbed by the arrival of Koman. Sethu feels that time will settle all problems. Like every father, he wants to give his son a good education. Koman is an average student. Koman’s interest lies in *Kathakali*. Sethu encourages him to learn the art of guises. His teacher, Aashan, trains him for many years to make him a good *Kathakali* dancer. He receives an invitation to play Keechakan in *Keechaka Vadham*. People praise his performance.

Angela is a student learning *Kathakali* under Aashan. She has been learning *Kathakali* for two years. She is here to do her dissertation work. Her parentage is both German and Spanish. She now joins Koman’s class as a student. She finds him attractive. He is playful, mischievous and an affectionate teacher. He is generous and romantic by nature. She starts desiring him. She never misses to witness any performance given by him as it helps her

research of recording as many *Veshams* as possible. She feels that she is not just a student of his but she is something more than that. She feels that she is part of his being, like Ardhanareeswara, Lord Shiva having Goddess Parvati as one half of his body.

Koman starts to have an affair with Anjela. It is very difficult to restrain oneself from the affectionate advances of a strong-minded woman. They start living together. Sethu is worried that this would be a replay of his own life. Sethu insisted Koman to marry Angela and says:

‘You are old enough to know what you are doing’, he said. ‘Why don’t you marry her? All your life has been wasted on Kathakali. Will your art fetch you a glass of water when you are thirsty? Will it lay a wet cloth on your brow when you are burning with fever? Will it hold you up when your legs tremble? That is why you are lonely? That is why you need a family and home. (371)

Sethu tries to reason with Koman regarding marriage with Anjela. Sometimes relationships don’t need rituals to purify them. Koman and Anjela started living as husband and wife, without being married. Slowly, perception of Anjela changes and wants him to move to the west to get international recognition, fame and fortune. Koman’s ego gets advanced. Planning for the future reduces fear and uncertainty. He does not plan nor does he learn from the past. He is going to land in an uncertain future as the future events reveal. Anjela and Koman move to London. They are very happy for some time and then problems arise, pop up, one after another. Koman is totally dependent on Anjela both financially and emotionally. This causes friction between them. Money can make the best of friends into enemies. Naturally male ego is hurt and Koman decides to move out of Angela’s house.

Koman does not find any progress in the art world. For survival he starts working in a hotel. He feels estranged and lonely as long as he is in London. Finally he leaves for India. Having no goal to achieve, Koman feels frustrated and dejected thereby gets separated. Koman on his return rejoins his dance school as Ashan. Two years later the institute troupe is

invited to Europe. They perform at various places. Koman is offered a teaching fellowship by a German University. He declines the offer as he is aware of the shallowness of perception of the people in the western world.

Koman proposes to Lalitha, his long time mistress. She refuses to marry him because of her fear of people in society. She knows that Koman's family would never accept her as his wife. She would always be treated as his mistress. Koman, with his uncanny knack of enticing and building sexual relationships with women meets Maya, during his stay in Delhi. Maya is a voluptuous woman. She is lonely. A month later Koman goes to Madras where she lives. Inevitably they become lovers, an affair of the heart and body. He is comfortable, has peace of mind as long as he is with her.

Society plays a major obstacle in Koman's to marrying Lalitha. The family is considered as society here. Men could not fulfil or satisfy their own desires, in order to obey the norms of the society. Discussing this fact, Kimball Young in *Handbook of Social Psychology* (2013) says, "Socialization will mean the process of inducting the individual into the social and cultural world; of making him a particular member in the society and its various groups and inducting him to accept the norms and values of that society..... Socialization is definitely a matter of learning and not the biological inheritance" (89).

Vidhya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva (1997) opine in this regard as, "Every man tries to adjust himself to the condition and environment predominantly determined by the society of which he is a member. If he fails to do so, he becomes a social deviant and brought back in to the line by the efforts of the group of which he is a member. The process of adjustment may be termed as socialization. It is the opposite of individualization. It is a process of expansion of the self. It develops in him the community feeling" (129).

Koman is celebrated as a successful dancer and praised by the audience wherever he has given performances. A well-known filmmaker makes a short film on him. A journalist

attempted what he called a fly-on-the wall biography. He is invited to perform at prestigious venues and participate in workshops and seminars. There have been many interpretations of his technique and style. He is detached from all. It is of no consequence to him how he is perceived by others or what the world thinks of him, as a man or as a dancer.

The social disorganisation that occurs in the novel involves the extra marital relationships in the life of Radha and her uncle Koman. Radha is married to Shyam without her interest. But the actual norms of the society insist that a woman should live only with her husband and a man should live only with his wife. They should not encourage the extra-marital relationships. At the same time, Radha does not like to live with Shyam, simply because Shyam wants to own Radha's body and heart but never cared about her desires and aspirations. He considers her only as a possession. The social control is not in a proper manner among the individuals.

Rajendra K. Sharma in "*Social Change and Social Control*" (1998) says that, "social control is a pattern that aims at maintaining social organisation. This control is both formal and informal. The formal control consists of the laws of society and the state which are enforced through the police and law courts, etc. The informal control takes the form of customs, etiquette, manners, etc" (236).

According to the Microscopic and Macroscopic theory in Social Disorganisation, the ineffectiveness of the social institutions proves to be the starting point of social disorganisation. Thus the social and individual disorganisation, both are interdependent. We cannot separate individual from society and society from individual; they both constitute an inalienable complex whole. Social disorganisation neither is due to individual disorganisation nor is individual disorganisation due to social disorganisation, but both are interconnected, interdependent and interactive" (13).

The disorganisation in the life of Radha as well as Koman is the reason for the disorganisation of the society. It is impossible to say who is responsible for the disorganisation. It may be because of either the society or the individuals. They both are interrelated and interconnected. Both these characters have an extra marital relationship because of the disorganisation of the society. Society plays the major role in the life of the individuals. Shyam is considered here as a victim. He suffers by not getting a pinch of love from his wife. He can own only her body, but not her heart. This paves the way for the disorganisation of their family.

Shyam is cheated by Radha in all the aspects. She does not consider Shyam as her husband. She considers the marriage with Shyam as a shame in her life. She did not realise that her life was saved because of Shyam in attaining a status in the society. A disordered life of Radha has been changed by Shyam, who had married her with extreme love. Even though she cheated him, he loves Radha in an unconditional manner. The organisation of the society is spoiled by the disorganisation of the individuals in this novel.

## Chapter 4

### Quest for Identity

Anita Nair's *The Better Man* (1999) represents the theme of self-discovery. The protagonist of the novel, Mukundan, seems to be an escapist, who runs away from responsibilities and is afraid of the society. But he covers up his disposition in his deep-rooted fear of his father which was imbibed by him right from his childhood. He is governed by societal pressures, does not live for himself but for others. *The Better Man* states the reality of Indian women who are still deprived of their rights in love and marriage. Marriage is still a social necessary, where women seek security and men respectability.

Four years old Mukundan, who has seen his father only in the photograph, is scared, when his father turns up all of sudden from Burma. Dressed in black, he appears tall and when he starts talking to him, Mukundan gets more afraid and starts calling his mother. When Mukundan is eight years old, the relationship between father and son does not improve. It has become worse, for Achuthan Nair he chooses to settle in Kaikurussi after resigning his job. Achuthan Nair always ends his talk with a question and Mukundan is expected to answer not on his own but to merely repeat his father's last words. Ranjana Sengupta refers to this as "Mukundan is tortured by hatred of his father, Achuthan Nair, who bullied him and intimidated him since his childhood" (21).

With an overbearing father and a docile mother, he is forced to lead an uneventful life. So he decides to escape from his house by acquiring the job of a clerk in Trichy. He does not take his mother with him though she pleads with him to do so. He even easily forgets Meenakshi, his cousin, who had always entertained a desire to marry him. These factors go to prove that Mukundan is basically an escapist who fails to undertake responsibilities.

Mukundan's mother is said to have fallen down from the steps and died but there is a hint that she was killed, probably by her own husband, who had done that for his mistress.

Mukundan often visits his ancestral house even while at his place of work and brings gifts for his father. This shows he still is trying to find a means to enter his father's heart. The impact of an overpowering and dominating father is quite visible in Mukundan. When he turned 18, Mukundan secured a clerical job in an explosive factory in Trichy. His later plan of settling in Kerala with his friend Narendran was also failed by the sudden Death of his friend, eight months before their retirement. With no option Mukundan returns to his village, which he had tried to stay away from all his adult life.

At the age of fifty-two, Mukundan has no hope of getting a bride, young enough, who could give him a child. When he found hope in the twenty-seven year old village school teacher Anjana, he was unwilling to stake his reputation in the eyes of the villagers. Mukundan's wavering is the only responsible factor for his state. The influence of his dominant father follows him as a shadow all his life. Moreover, his father constantly reminded and drummed into his ear day after day, "if you wish to survive, you need to think of yourself first" (71).

Mukundan is unable to free himself from his father's influence but all his acts are a mere duplication of what he detested in his father. Unconsciously, he tries being as ambitious and powerful as his father but fails to get rid of the fear and anger he has within him. Mukundan's dealings with his mother Parukutty, beloved Anjana and dear friend Bhasi clearly exhibit his selfishness. His desire for recognition and acceptance, importance and praise blind him to everything else. He realizes that a survivor is someone who is selfish and there is no point in surviving when there is no one to share one's happiness or grief with.

Mukundan's insistence on not being just his father's son and his struggle to identify his own identity in the village force him to make some contribution to the betterment of his village. In his quest for identity, he betrays Bhasi and joins the side of the all-powerful Ramakrishnan – the richest man in Kaikurrussi. Mukundan could not mourn his father's

death as he always wished him dead and held him responsible for his crippled spirit. He hated his father for being a tyrant, who tormented him throughout his life. It was only his father's death that made him realize that despite his father's faults, his cruelty and brutality, he was a man who had the courage for his conviction.

Mukundan discovers that he is merely an extension of his father. Mukundan hides his inadequacies by using his father's domineering methods as an excuse to explain his own weakness of his character. Mukundan is portrayed as a timid man, who used his integrity as a disguise to prevent attention from the fact that he was a failed man in his life. He was as selfish, insensitive, brutal and incapable of loyalty or love as his father Achuthan Nair.

In *The Better Man*, Mukundan's decision to follow his principles, to stop chasing brief dreams and to alter the wrong done to Bhasi makes him a reformed soul. His kind gesture of gifting a quarter of an acre land to Bhasi in order to resettle him in Kaikurrusi makes him acceptable as a reformed man. By conducting the *Pooram* (a temple festival in Kerala) with *Vedikattu* (the ritual of bursting crackers) Mukundan stealthily procures gunpowder and decides to eliminate the Community Hall, a statement of his weakness, his cowardice and his lack of integrity.

The new and transformed Mukundan did not want his past to stare at him. He becomes a man and 'a better man' in the true sense of the term. He is transformed from a coward who feared fire-crackers to a determined and self-righteous soul. Mukundan is portrayed as a failed lover in *The Better Man*. All the intimate moments he shared with Meenakshi, who was his childhood soul-mate were relegated into some corner of his mind after he left Kaikurrissi:

Mukundan had Meenakshi. They crawled together as babies. They paddled together in the pool and when they were a little older, they learned to swim together... They knew each other's bodies and minds as well as they knew

their own. And then suddenly one day they were considered to be too old to spend so much time in each other's company...And because their meetings were so infrequent, they began to function as two separate beings. For the first time in their lives, they had secrets for each other. His dreams were no longer hers. Her plans no longer his. (53-54)

When dumped by Mukundan, Meenakshi seeks comfort with a *Kathakali* dancer Balan, whom she marries. Thus, Meenakshi dwindles into a memory Mukundan preferred not to dwell upon. Thinking of her aroused many emotions, chief among them is guilt. When they met later, she too had dismissed their adolescent fumbling as a part of growing-up process. "There was no bitterness, no references to the past, no dredging up of forgotten promises" (55).

Valsala, wife of the ageing schoolmaster Prabhakaran Nair, is engaged in her daily household tasks, the maintenance of the compound wall and watching television every evening. She is the lonely person in her house and there were no surprises in her life. She falls in love with Sridharan, who first appears in her life as a neighbour and then becomes her lover. Soon after the realization of her inner self, she decides to free herself from her husband. She enters into a sexual relationship with Sridharan as a natural partner to her emotional involvement. She decides to be his mistress. Since Prabhakaran master went to school they enjoyed freedom emotionally and physically.

Valsala sets her heart on enjoying her life with Sridharan, as her *Gandharva*. She is very much aware of the fact that every woman needs the energizer of love, freedom, equality and sex. But she is also certain, that it is quite impossible to get all that from hostile men. Accordingly, she is willing to trap the new system against the backdrop of the traditional concept of Indian Womanhood. She stirs the entire society with her liberal views and attitude, and puts forth the new issues of woman's sexuality and gender. She justifies herself as, "I am

just forty years old. I don't want to be pushed into old age before it is time. I want to live. I want passion. I want to know ecstasy, she told herself, night after night" (130).

As a consequence, Valsala's quest emerges as a battle, of course, the battle of the female psyche. All of a sudden, Prabhakaran was missing and later found dead. Circle Inspector Devasiya, who dropped in Mukundan when the case was filed, explained what he had pieced together as the grand plan. Six weeks later, when Prabhakaran Master had still not returned, Valsala would have filed a complaint. Bhasi told to Mukundan, the murder suspects Sridharan, accused in the Prabhakaran Master Murder case, was finally captured by the police.

Mukundan discovers that what should have been his rightful place in the village had been usurped by an upstart, Power House Ramakrishnan, who according to A.J.Thomas (2001) "is utterly unreal and superfluous" (31). In the first few weeks of his return home, he meets Bhasi, 'One-screw-loose-Bhasi', house - painter and self appointed emotional healer of the village. Despite Bhasi's compassion for him, Mukundan betrays him when he seeks his intervention in fighting against Power House Ramakrishnan's attempt to build a community hall in the village on Bhasi's piece of land.

When Bhasi refuses to sell his land, Power House Ramakrishnan threatens to throw him out of the village. Mukundan sets out to save Bhasi's land but is completely won over by Power House Ramakrishnan who makes Mukundan a member of the community hall committee and makes him feel important. Mukundan also withdraws himself from Anjana, a married woman and a school teacher with whom he is in love.

Mukundan's second attempt to seek love in the form of Anjana also fails. His unwillingness to stake his reputation in the eyes of the villages costs him fear. In *The Better Man* Mukundan is engulfed by his own loneliness. Mukundan did not receive any affection from his father, though he yearned for some token of affection, some proof of acceptance or

praise. On the contrary, all that he got were harsh words and sticks of the cane that his father always kept handy. His mother Parukutty also failed to protect him from this harsh treatment. He too failed to stand by her when she needed him the most. “Take me with you, Son. I am unhappy here” (31).

Mukundan is convinced that his mother wishes to avenge her death and the Ghost seems to speak to him in a hollow voice, “I want you to know the fear I felt when a hand smashed into my back, pushing me down. I want you back. I want you to know what I saw when the floor reached out to slam my life away. I want you to feel the anguish I felt as I realized I was going to die before my time” (32).

Mukundan’s egocentricity, lack of integrity, his disinterest from his loved ones and the loss of identity in his own native place and his sense of rootlessness, all form the moral fibre of the society. The novel reflects Mukundan’s struggles to win the local bigwigs and grab the power once owned by his father Achuthan Nair. To establish his identity and grip in the village he tries to organize *Pooram* (temple festival) an important cultural event of Kerala.

Bhasi, another prominent character in the novel, is armed with a college degree in Botany and a post-graduate degree in English language and literature. Despite his degrees he is a house-painter by profession. He represents the educated, unemployed masses of the hundred percent literate Kerala. Nair voices her concern about unemployment, a major predicament of the educated youth in Kerala. Bhasi voices this distress of the author when he says:

I have a college degree in Botany and a post-graduate degree in English Language and Literature. I have a piece of paper that states I qualified with distinction in the study of plants. And a certificate of merit issued by the University honouring me as one of the ten rank-holders in

mastering the intricacies of the English language. But it wasn't enough.

There was a time when I knew that I wanted to cling to the last fragments of self-respect, I would have to leave. (7)

Bhasi also plays the healer and consoler to Mukundan. Bhasi believes that the human body has a natural in-built capacity to heal, to safeguard against trauma and disease. He is shown as an individual with the capacity to reinforce the natural life. The protagonist, Mukundan seeks Bhasi's help to cure him and his father. Bhasi plays an essential role in shaping the character of Mukundan. But Mukundan was so obsessed by the idea of being someone's important. He didn't realize how important Bhasi was to him till the end. Mukundan compensates his mistake which he has done to Bhasi, by giving a piece of his ancestral property to Bhasi. Bhasi also plays the catalyst in making Mukundan to develop as a better man.

In her interview in *Hindustan times* (2017) to Aditi De, Nair has mentioned about how she conceptualized the character of Bhasi. She says:

Well, One-screw-loose Bhasi didn't exist until I was halfway through the book. After the short story collection, when I went back to the novel, it just didn't seem right. Am I just chronicling a village, I asked myself. Big deal! (Laughs) At that point, I was working with an ayurvedic client. I thought: maybe I should use this stuff, it's interesting. Then this character emerged.

Mukundan learns that happiness cannot be attained by being the cause of someone else's unhappiness. Bhasi learns that man cannot control and change another man's destiny. Man cannot play God. When the committee members of the community hall along with Mukundan's support, demanding Bhasi's land, Bhasi feels cheated and experiences the pangs of an outsider.

Each one of them at Shankar's Tea club, my everyday cronies, had known about Power House Ramakrishnan's ploy to take control of my land and they had wilfully kept it from me. Even Shankar, whom I have always liked and trusted. In the final reckoning they were all natives of this village, bonded by birth and bonded together. While I was the outsider. The other one who could be dispensed with. (289)

When Mukundan too refuses to stand by him, Bhasi feels helpless and pained, "how could you be so oblivious to my anguish? Could you really not see that you were building your dreams on the dust of my hopes?" (328). The Realization dawns upon Bhasi that he does not possess extraordinary power as he had believed. He could not control or heal Mukundan as he had thought. No matter how authoritative man becomes, he cannot dream to be similar as God. The powerlessness and uselessness of mankind is revealed through these lines.

The fundamental truth that Bhasi had learnt over the years is that affection openly given is never valued. Bhasi, represents the working class who is exploited by the cultural privilege of the village. Through these characters the author tries to highlight the inequities present in the society. Bhasi is shown subjected to wrongs by the powerful men and he is repeatedly exploited and defeated by the pressures of the economic system in which he lives.

Meenakshi and Anjana are the two living women characters in the novel. Child-hood soul mate of Mukundan, Meenakshi is relegated into some corner of Mukundan's mind after he leaves Kaikurrissi. Although she has been brought up in a world that teaches women to depend on men, she learns that she is alone. She must bear the brunt of circumstances that are not her choice but are rather imposed on her by the patriarchal society in which she lives. Usually women are depicted as the oppressed through the conventional representation of their being weak, vulnerable and sexual objects of the male's desire. Meenakshi and Mukundan

had also shared some intimate moments before the latter left Kaikurrussi. But on his return, Mukundan observes a transformed person. She had donned a new role in life.

Meenakshi had become a Naxalite. Armed with books on revolutions and driven by the mythical powers of Stalin and Lenin, Meenakshi had pledged to cleanse the earth of bourgeois vermin. And her first target of attack was Achuthan Nair - Mukundan's father, her uncle. Feudal landlord. Tyrant. Master of oppression. She and her group incited the labourers to rebel. When that didn't work, haystacks were set ablaze; cows let loose in ready-to-be-harvested paddy fields and irrigation ditches gutted with mud. To them Achuthan was the system, and these were some ways of upsetting what he represented. (56)

Meenakshi's failed marriage with *Kathakali* dancer Balan makes her a lonely figure. To diminish her loneliness, she finds solace in Naxalism. She emerges a stronger woman. She rejects the sympathy of relatives and neighbours. Being more educated than the other women in the village, she takes control of her child by running a creche authorized by the panchayat. She runs the creche until her son Mani is old enough to go to school. Then she gives it up and sets about becoming a shopkeeper. In the process of lending an ear to the woes of troubled women of her village she acquires a reputation for rationality and wisdom. There is a streak of steel within her when she takes the toughest decision to forgive her husband and look after him when he returns as a decrepit old man. A sense of guilt sweeps Meenakshi off her feet. She is willing to forgive her husband for deserting her.

Anjana is the niece of Mukundan's friend K. M. Nair who remains unmarried till she is twenty seven. Just when she considers herself as "one of those old maids destined to remain at home. Unloved, unwanted, unfulfilled. Long in the tooth, sunken cheeks and vacant eyes" (223). Her marriage with thirty five years old Ravindran is fixed. After marriage,

Anjana is shocked at her husband's indifference. "She wishes there was some way she could discover his likes and dislikes. All what she wanted to do was to please him" (227).

Even after three months he remains as just a man "who used her body when impulse took him. There was little conversation between them and hardly companionship" (228). She desperately needs someone to share her agony, to console her, and she thinks of Mukundan. She expresses her anger against Ravindran to Mukundan: "Just because we are man and wife in the eyes of law, he thinks he can treat me as he pleases. As far as he is concerned, "I am merely a servant who doubles as a whore" (243). She feels happy in the company of Mukundan: "I feel married when I am with you" (244). She files a divorce suit so that she would formally marry Mukundan. But Mukundan, who values his reputation as a member of the community hall committee rather than his commitment to marry Anjana, withdraws from her. "You are a coward" (323), Anjana tells him and moves on to face the world all by herself.

Paru Kutty, mother of Mukundan, is dead when the novel begins. A lonely woman, with a dominating husband and a cringing child, she lived a life of misery. To add to her woes, her husband takes on a mistress even though she protests and refuses to allow the mistress to enter her house. However, Achutan Nair insults her by building a house for his mistress right across the street.

A pathetic and dismal Paru kutty fails to protect her son from the wrath and merciless beating of her husband. As a result of this she feels a sense of helplessness and despair. With the aging aunts for company she begins to assert her identity by irritating her husband's fury by dumping outside the house the entire paddy which was not a part of the produce of the land that she had inherited. She even dares to invite her cousin Devyani, with whom Achuthan had forbidden her to have any contact. She also razed to ground an almond tree that

Achuthan Nair had planted near the gate. Demonstrating various means of protest she lived a lonely life till her death.

Powerhouse Ramakrishnan represents Capitalist society. He is “a social climber, a status seeker, a snob and opportunist” (206). The above quote from the novel describes every inch of the character of Power house Ramakrishna. He ventures into new businesses, invests and makes extra profits. Even in the name of community service he attempts to grab land. An ordinary man, transformed into the richest man in Kaikurrussi, wielding power and position is overnight seen as an immediate threat and arch rival to Mukundan. Mukundan feels Ramakrishnan has usurped his rightful place. Ramakrishnan operated on a simple theory, that every man has his price.

Based on this theory, he conspired to buy Mukundan’s complicity in the building of his dream - The Powerhouse Ramakrishnan Community Hall. He represents the richness with his acres of land, rubber plantation and a car-hire service. Being the richest man in Kaikurrussi, he commanded a lot of respect. Nobody dared to protest against his decision to grab Bhasi’s land for building the Community Hall.

When Mukundan, post-retirement returns to his home state Kerala, he encounters a serious loss of identity and rootlessness. He finds himself in an unfamiliar and strange setting where people fail to acknowledge his presence. But after his father’s death Mukundan decides to mend his ways. Mukundan understands, that he had betrayed the only two people who had loved him and given all of them to him - Bhasi and Anjana.

Mukundan had used them and discarded them because it suited him to do so and realizes, “He was no better man than his father had been. Perhaps, he was the lesser man” (344). He now remembers his father’s principle that if one has to be successful in life, he has to be selfish – that is what is meant by the survival of the fittest. Only such men thrive in society. Realization dawns on Mukundan that, though notorious for his immoral ways, his

father was never afraid of society and followed only his own mind. Mukundan decides to become a 'better man' than he is at present.

Mukundan was driven by his domineering father and failed to save his mother from his father. He even betrayed Bhasi and Anjana who had believed him. He had not lived his life for his sake. But instance he lived with fear for the society in order to save his reputation from them. When Bhasi was in distress, he could have saved his land. But he had become a member of the community hall and so he could not interfere and thus failed to save Bhasi's land. Mukundan could not act according to his wish. To save his reputation as a famous personality in the village, he had betrayed the people who had trusted him.

The social disorganisation that has occurred in this novel is quite different when comparing to other novels. Mukundan, who is already in a disorganised state in his life, is trapped in the net of reputation by Powerhouse Ramakrishnan. In order to save his reputation and familiarity, he is unable to act according to his wishes. Anjana in the novel wants to leave her husband Ravindran because, he does not consider Anjana as his wife nor as a human being itself. So Anjana decides to marry Mukundan. But Mukundan, who cannot destroy his reputation among the village people, rejects Anjana.

Achuthan Nair had also made a social disorganisation by leaving his family alone and living with his Mistress. Meenakshi. Talking about a condition like this, Meenakshi Rastogi in *Human Relationship* (2009) states "a mistress is a man's long-term female sexual partner and companion who is not married to him, especially when the man is married to another woman. The relationship generally is stable and at least semi-permanent; however, the couple does not live together openly" (167). Social disorganisation has therefore occurred when Achuthan Nair did not follow the norms of the society. He never showed affection for his family.

The organisation and the rules mentioned in the novel are not followed by the characters. In one side, the society makes an individual not to act according to his wishes, and the society plays a major role and considered as an obstacle for the individual's own actions. Anjana is also represents as an individual who does not follow the traditional norms of the society. Bhasi in the novel is represented as the individual who can be considered as pity for the society. Though he had been a good comfort to Mukundan, he was left and betrayed by him.

Expanding one's emotional and psychological potential and learning how to stand by oneself play an important role during the whole novel. With regard to Mukundan and Bhasi, the novel says that it is important to take the responsibility for oneself and for others. Mukundan neither feels responsible for oneself nor for the human beings he loves (Bhasi and Anjana). Mukundan does not even realise that he has betrayed both his beloved and his friend. He has made serious mistakes. In order to be a better man, one has to admit their mistakes and apologize for it.

Honesty is also an important trait of character because it takes a long time for Mukundan to be honest to himself and to others. When Bhasi wants Mukundan to tell him about his traumatic experiences and his sufferings, Mukundan does not tell him about them, immediately. To become a better man, it is important that one should understand his own feelings. Mukundan is the victim for the society, who could not perform the activities according to his will.

At the same time, Mukundan could not help the people who truly trust him. Every time he is helpless for the people who trust him. He is not true to his mother, who had asked him to take her with him, in order to save her from her brutal husband, who does not care for the family and society. He is not true to Bhasi, who has been a great comfort for Mukundan,

when he is in despair. But when Bhasi faces a trouble, he remains silent for saving his reputation among the people of the community hall.

Mukundan knows that he has been suffering from his mother's death for years. He is haunted by a sense of failure for having abandoned his mother. He is even tortured by nightmares concerning his mother's death. Several times Krishnan Nair calls attention to the fact that the mother's death was not Mukundan's fault. The 58-year-old still assumes that he has made a big mistake by not helping his mother and that she consequently hates him. Mukundan says to Krishnan Nair that he might have prevented her death. Krishnan Nair says that Mukundan's mother herself could have prevented what is happening to her. But she remains as a victim. Krishnan advised Mukundan not to feel guilty for what happened to his mother.

Mukundan has never tried to overcome that trauma and now he is almost 60 years old. When he eventually takes great pains in the betterment of his psychological constitution, Mukundan considers himself as a victim of his father's callousness, as well. Krishnan Nair wants to point out to Mukundan that everything depends upon the point of view and that Mukundan mostly tends to perceive what he wants to perceive. Bhasi is eventually the one who sets Mukundan thinking about his past and his trauma.

Mukundan's father is a very strict authoritarian and is hardly empathetic. Though he is brutal and tyrant, he also had the courage to hold on to his convictions. When he believed in something, he let nothing come between him and his purpose. Achuthan Nair stands by his statements and his deeds. Achuthan betrays his wife and he does not feel ashamed of that and he takes full responsibility for it. He even accepts being hated by Mukundan and being unloved by his daughter.

Achuthan even shatters his son's dreams and hopes to become a famous writer. Achuthan humbles his son by tearing the sheets into several pieces. That experience was such

shattering to Mukundan that he has never been writing anything but letters and official reports. Consequently, Mukundan does not want to keep the memories alive, all the time. Achuthan has been influencing his son's entire life.

Applying the Geographical approach to understand the disorganisation in the novel, Rajendra K. Sharma(1998) says,

according to geographical approach the main cause of social disorganisation is the variation in geographical conditions. The construction and composition of soil, variation in temperature, seasons, presence of minerals, quantum of rain, sunshine etc., are the geographical factors which have tremendous impact on the personality of man. The geographical conditions are responsible for social evils like crime, mental ills, divorce, etc. (12)

In the novel the geographical condition of Mukundan is not very good. He had no wish to come to his native land. Since the death of his friend, he has no option to go anywhere, and so he is forced to come without willingness. The geographical setting of the place can affect the mentality of the character. Mukundan is trapped by the society such as his domineering father, and Ramakrishnan. Because of his father, he is unable to save his mother. Ramakrishnan made Mukundan to remain silent in the case of Bhasi. The society has made him to act opposite to Anjana, in order to save his reputation.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Summation**

According to Reuter and Hart (1998), Social organisation “meant the totality of cultural institutions and their interrelationships together with the body of the unorganised activities characteristic of the group” (qtd. in Sharma 11). A society must have population. Without a group of people no society could be formed. Society refers not to a group of people but to a system of social relationships. But for the establishment of social relationships a group of people is necessary. Social relationships are the foundation of society. As Maclver (1997) says “society is a network of social relationship. Hence it is difficult to classify social relationships. But this social relationship is based on mutual awareness or recognition. Without these social relationships no society could be formed” (qtd. in Bhushan and Sachdeva 74).

As social relationships are abstract in nature the society is also abstract in nature. Different kinds of social processes like co-operation and conflict constantly take place in a society. And the relationships established around these create society. Therefore the network of social relationships created among individuals constitutes a society. Society not only refers to a group of people but, to the complex patterns of norms of interaction that arise among them. The nature of the society is connected with the relationship of man and the society.

Society is a vast system. The organisation of the society is the interrelationships of its constituents. The constituents of society are institutions, associations and groups. A society can be described as an organisation only when they functions in a proper manner without any changes. When the organisation changes in a certain situation, it is identified as social disorganisation. The changing of the usual norms and patterns in the life of the individual is both a reason for and a result of this social disorganisation.

Anita Nair is one of the finest women writers of modern India. Her novels, *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress* and *The Better Man* deal with radical changes in attitude towards social rules, sex, social disorganisation, and marital relationships. The emergence of new generation of Indian women in the 1980's and 1990's who tend to focus the tradition and images of women in terms of femininity and female identities and patriarchal values led to a radical change. Thus suppression of women became one of the strong matters of discussion for most of these writers.

In the novels of Anita Nair, she mainly focuses on the issues related to women and their oppression in the male-dominated society. But the concept of men and their sufferings in the society have not been spoken by many writers. The purpose of this study is to find the social disorganisation that is given for the readers to understand in *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress*, and *The Better Man*.

*Ladies Coupe* has many narrators. The main narrator is a third person. As the novel has used a third person narrator, it enables her to explain her perception on men and matters in an objective way. The main narrator is a middle-aged spinster, Akhilandeswari. She is the protagonist and in her lies the central consciousness of the novel. As the narrator moves on with the story there is an oscillation between the present and the past that becomes evident. The narration moves forward and backward in time and space.

All the characters in the novel have come across the same experience that has taken place in the three periods of time viz. the past, the present and the future. And this enables us to dive a greater depth into the consciousness of the protagonist. This technique has been used in the novel in order to realize her objective of presenting a vivid picture of the protagonist's mind and its interaction with the other characters and the background. Anita Nair has used the flashback technique in this novel. The characters in the novel one by one tell their flashback.

In the novel *Ladies Coupe*, she narrates the stories of six women who are travelling together in a ladies coupe of a train. The novel mainly focuses on women's search for identity. The protagonist Akhila bears the burden of the family after her father's death. Akhila's needs and aspirations are not even considered by her own family. She has never been able to live her life or possess an identity of her own. This finally makes her to deviate from the social norms and culture.

Janaki, the oldest in the coupe, grows up in the traditional way. She is an obedient daughter, a loyal wife and a good mother. She has been looked after all her life by men. Later she realizes that a woman needs to be strong and independent. She decides to live her own life. On the other hand, Sheela, the fourteen years old and the youngest is the rebel who defies traditional ideas about women by symbolically making her dying grandmother look like a bride.

Margaret Shanthi is a successful teacher but she suffers in an unhappy marriage with Ebenezer who represents as a dominating person and tries to control her completely. He is insensitive, self-absorbed and indifferent towards his wife. Margaret would like to divorce him, but she does not dare to do so because she is afraid of society. Her way of taking revenge towards him is to feed oily food and make him a fat and dull person.

Prabha Devi is a traditional wife for a long time. Suddenly she reverts back to her family with a difference in attitude. She wants a sense of freedom and liberty. Marikolunthu, thirty one years old and an unwed mother, is a victim of a man's lust. Her poverty forces her to do things that violate the traditional moral of the society.

In *Mistress*, She compares life to a performance of *Kathakali* where the artists play numerous emotions as men come across these emotions in life. The novel plays around with the motif of art as a demanding mistress. One of the protagonists Koman is a renowned *Kathakali* dancer who has retired and the novel weaves together, his past and the present

involving his niece Radha and her husband Shyam. Anita Nair draws on the techniques of *Kathakali* and uses it to tell this story in many voices while attempting to decode the language of *Kathakali*, a language without sounds.

The novel is divided into nine chapters based on the *Navarasas* in *Kathakali*, namely *Sringaaram* (love), *Haasyam* (contempt), *Karunam* (sorrow), *Raudram* (fury), *Veeram* (valour), *Bhayaanakam* (fear), *Beebhalsam* (disgust), *Adbhutam* (wonder) and *Shantam* (peace). Each chapter begins with an introduction to the 'rasa' concerned. The main focus in the novel is the relationship of men and women is explained briefly. Shyam who is betrayed by Radha is considered as a victim in the society. Koman is also fails in his relationship with Anjela and he searches his passion and finally finds that his true love is on his dance.

Anita Nair in *The Better Man* has used this technique effectively. The protagonist of the novel, Mukundan, a retired officer staying single, returns to his village. Bhasi the first-person-narrator opens his past to Mukundan, the protagonist and Mukundan too does the same to Bhasi. Bhasi is presented as a healer of human minds in the novel. But one would think what a painter like Bhasi could have to do with the healing of human minds. In order to provide the readers more information about him, he is made to open his past to Mukundan.

As Bhasi oscillates between his present and past, there are interior monologues that are used to bring out the thoughts in his in-depth mind. These monologues disclose the fear in his mind. Though he seems to redeem others from fearful memories, he himself could not help it. As one reads about his past, the perplexity about Bhasi is cleared and one is prepared to believe that Bhasi could grasp the mind of Mukundan and relieve him of his terrific past.

Anjana is the niece of Mukundan's friend, who is unmarried. After marriage, Anjana is shocked at her husband's indifference. She desperately needs someone to share her agony, to console her, and she thinks of Mukundan. She expresses her anger against Ravindran to Mukundan. She feels happy in the company of Mukundan. She files a divorce suit so that she

would formally marry Mukundan. But on the other hand, Mukundan, who values his reputation as the member of the community hall, denies to marry Anjana.

All the three novels taken for this study state only about men's potential suppression by women. The novels also have men who are suffering from both society and from women. The society has formed the conventional rules for the people. When the women could not tolerate their suppression, they start to rebel against the society and revenge their men. Based on the theories of social disorganisation theories, the characters are analysed. The theories are such as social problem approach, bio-psychological approach, geographical approach, cultural approach, and microscopic and macroscopic approach.

The characters in the novels of Anita Nair deviate from the actual norms of the society. Society in turn is responsible for the changes and deviation of the individuals. Everyone has a desire to live their own life as their wish but, they fear for the society. When the individuals rebel against the society's organised patterns, social disorganisation occurs. At the same time, the relationships between the individuals and the society affect in a large manner. In *Ladies Coupe*, the protagonist Akhila depends and considers society as her first priority but, later when the society does not consider her, she rebels against the cultural norms of the society.

Akhila deviates from her tradition and decides to live the life according to her own wish. She becomes an independent individual without following any kind of the norms of the society. The social organisation of the society changes in the one aspect. But, in the other aspect, the society is the main reason for this sudden reformation of the individual. All the other characters are also reformed as their wish by not considering the barriers in the society. The men in the novel are considered as the sufferers and victims in my perception. Margaret bears all the troubles given by Ebenezer but, to one extent, she decides to rebel and revenge against her husband in a tricky way.

These sudden changes do have an upheaval in the organised pattern of their family, thus disorganisation takes place here as well. Margaret makes her husband a fat person who could not perform any work without depending on her. This gives a sympathetic view on Ebenezer and he is considered here as a victim. He is the only responsibility for the sudden change in Margaret. If he would have been a cooperative person to his wife, this may not have happened.

In *Mistress*, Radha deviates from the organised patterns of the society by having extra marital affair with Chris. She betrays Shyam to take revenge on him. She takes revenge because Shyam is not allowing her to perform her activities as she wishes. He controls her all the time and tries to possess her even if she does not like him. This makes Radha to hate him to the extreme level and she develops a relationship with Chris. Shyam is the victim here who shows much love for Radha even though she betrays him. Finally he takes responsibility for the child of Radha and Chris and also accepts her by believing that she would show affection for him.

The novel has irking social issues like extra-marital affairs, betrayal, etc. The life of Radha is not in an organisation which is formed by the society. Instead it destroys the organisation of the society and paves the way for the disorganisation of the society. Hence, the society plays a major role in maintaining the organised patterns and the destruction of the patterns. Radha does not care for the destruction of social values. She considers her emotions and wishes as her first priority. She does not have fear for the society because, the society is responsible for her change.

In the *Better Man*, the society plays the important role and it is not letting the protagonist to perform actions of his wish. Society stands as a barrier for the individual to perform his own actions. The disorganisation of the society is highly reflected in Mukundan's family. Mukundan is the victim of the novel who was trapped by the society for maintaining

the organisation of the society. He too has the inner sufferings which are not letting him to be in a normal state.

The theme of betrayal, extramarital relationships, male domination, etc. is reflected in the novel. Hence, society is the reason of the disorganisation of both the individuals and social rules. Maintaining order of the society is the responsibility of the individuals. The traditional mindset of the men in the society makes them to act in a different manner to their women and that makes them to tolerate but in one extent, they rebels and revenges their men. If the mindset of men changes, they can be equal to women and the disorganisation can be reduced. But it is the traditional norms created by the society that makes men to keep women under their control.

If the attitude of the men changes, social organisation can very well be ensured. They cannot be victimized by the society and women. The order of the society changes because of the society itself. The barriers for maintaining the organisation of the society is the responsibility of the social institutions. The order can be changed according to the changes of the attitude of the individuals.

Social life is being continually transformed due to the effect of various individual or collective factors. As Sharma (1999) says “new institutions and associations are being formed and destroyed in the social, economic, political, cultural and in all spheres” (3). The form of family, marriage, culture, economic and social structures is continually changing and transforming. As a result a change occurs in the life of the individual and his relations with others as well.

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