

## **The Conflict Between the Individual and the Society as Portrayed in Anita Nair's Fiction**

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### **Abstract**

Conflict finds its space in the inner layers of human mind as the relationship cracks and the perspective of the individual and the outside entity lies in contrast owing to the fact of parasitism that operates and spreads its tentacles in varied forms of life. The conflict creates fissures in the psyche and uproots him from the comfort zone. It even prompts him to question his position in the society and the individual takes the path towards liberation crossing the moods of introspection and analysis. When the individual gets liberated, he gets into the flexible mode that accommodates an exclusive space to connect himself with the outer world. It makes him move forward in the pursuit of eternal happiness that shapes him as a complete individual. Anita Nair through her works makes an attempt to portray the intricacy of the relationship that man shares with the world. She delves into the portals of human psyche and reveals the effect of

change on man as the natural instinct pressurizes him towards the aspect of static form.

## **Keywords**

Conflict, human mind, society, intricacy, relationship.

## **The Conflict Between the Individual and the Society as Portrayed in Anita Nair's Fiction**

Anita Nair is a popular writer in English. She was born at Mundakottakurissi near Shornurin Kerala State. A bestselling author of fiction and poetry, her novels, *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe* have been translated into 21 languages. She was educated in Chennai (Madras) before returning to Kerala, where she gained a BA in English Language and Literature. She was working as the creative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore when she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories called *Satyr of the Subway*, which she sold to Har-Anand Press. The book won her a fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her other works of fiction include *Mistress*, *Lessons in forgetting*, *Cut like wound*, and *Idris*. *Mistress* was long-listed for the 2008 Orange Prize in the U.K. and named a finalist for the 2007 PEN/Beyond Margins Award in the U.S.

Nair's other works include *Adventures of Nonu* (2006), *the Skating Squirrel* (2006), *Living Next Door to Alise* (2007), *The Puffin Book of Myths and Legends* (2004), and *Magical Indian Myths* (2008) apart from many travelogues. With the

play, *Nine Faces of Being*, best-selling author Anita Nair has become a playwright. The story is adapted from Nair's book *Mistress*.

She edited a work titled *Where the Rain is Born* (2003) which delves into the fabric of Kerala culture. Anita Nair made a foray into the arena of poetry through her work titled *Malabar Mind* (1997).

The dominating themes of the novels *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress*, *Lessons in Forgetting*, *Cut Like Wound* and *Idris* reveal the different elements that expose the unavoidable conflicts.

The aspect of suffuse connection can be perceived by the way in which the theme of the novel *The Better Man* is knit. The protagonist Mukundan is portrayed as a person who is sandwiched between the extremities of family bonding where he finds a conflict in accepting the love and affection of his mother, and the hard-wired compulsions from his father who expects perfection, and in the process resorts to force in evolving his personality. The psychic convulsions that Mukundun experiences in his life after his return to his village when he feels that he betrayed his mother, shows the attachment and possessive nature that a relationship entails in one's life. The concept that when one likes a particular member in a family, it is nothing but he could identify his positive aspects with the person and similarly, when one hates an individual in a family it resembles that he or she is identifying his/her negative aspects with the person on the other side is applied here.

Mukundun who has the instinct of love finds his own reflection in the perceptions of his mother and his feeling of fear and insecurity is seen as being reflected through the attitude he developed towards his father.

Anita Nair in her second novel *Ladies Coupe* portrays the sacrifice that a woman takes in bridging her own self with the values of her family and in turn the society. It shows the unique component of traditional Indian family that evolves a pattern of understanding, sharing the warmth of emotions to cleanse the senses.

The institution of marriage that stands between individual interests and the moods of the family setup reflect the intricacy of the pertinent inclination. In the words of Sethi,

The core relationship in the Indian family rests between the parent and child. Likewise, marriage in the family is not an individual or personal decision based on love but is considered to be the appropriate commitment in order to fulfill family obligations. In a sense, marriages are not between individuals but between families. In Indian families, the decision making power is usually vested in the parents. In areas of cohesion and differentiation, the traditional Indian family places heavy emphasis on proper attitude and conduct in accordance with the prescribed roles, obligations and duties. (Sethi, 31:22-30)

The huge crater created in the framework of the family of the protagonist Akhila as a result of the responsibility of bringing up the family that got transferred to her had

ruptured the core relationship in the family and there was none to satisfy her emotional needs. The gap created confusion in the life of Akhila as her situation is in quite contrast to the happenings of a traditional family set up.

Akhila identifies the vacuum created in her life and poses a question to her own self that says about the institution of Marriage. The question "Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a women need a man to feel complete?" reflects the self-introspection on the part of the protagonist in facing the tremors of life and stimulates her in taking a step towards individual freedom.

Anita, through her novel *Mistress* touches the theme of Man-woman relationship and introduces the mood of love that shapes the bond of marriage. The three corners of the triangle shared by Shyam, Radha, and Chris and their acts signify the aspect of search for true love. Koman's life showcases the plight of an artist who finds himself in a piquant situation, as he could not balance the two instincts as a performer and as a husband.

The novel puts forward the fact that all individuals have conceit tagged on to them in experiencing the nectar of relationships as observed through a character Malini.

Fear, Secrecy and the feeling of betrayal play havoc in marriage as they uproot the very essence of true love.

In the words of Nair,

"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).

The notion that children symbolizing reflections of understanding act as building blocks in sustaining the relationship between a husband and a wife is being showed, as Shyam tries to relieve himself from the doom of impotency and becomes frustrated in taking control of his life and makes attempts to bring Radha from the influence of Chris.

The purity of the system of marriage in India has something beyond the needs and pleasures and equips itself with the most valuable essence of compassion and the relationship is embodied with a bonding on a plane that transcends all physical and material things. The introspection on the part of Radha presents the mood of self-doubt that arises as a result of a gap between individual concern and the truth of the world.

Anita Nair focuses on the aspect that the family and the society are deeply knitted together and transgressing the borders of the family culture has everything to create an impact on the lives of the individuals. She shows how an individual has to wade through the turbulent waters to give value to his own self.

*Lessons in Forgetting* by Anita Nair reflects the life of individuals in corporate culture and its influence on relationships. It exposes the plight of two characters Meera and J. A. Krishna Murthy who lead their lives which were thrown out of the way.

The novel focuses on the aspect that the fine threads of nature have something to get connected with the relationships that human minds are encountered with. The writer uses the symbol of cyclone as a metaphor in delving deeper into the layers of family bonding.

“This violent depression of Nature becomes a metaphor for the sweeping changes that strike our lives in Anita Nair's new novel, “Lessons In Forgetting”.... her most intense book...an intimate exploration of duty, betrayal and the frail beauty of second chances...these are powerful emotional chords...” (Times of India)

The issue of female foeticide and its effect in retaining the values of family culture in India, the father-daughter relationship, responsibilities of a single parent are discussed giving a clear picture of the bridge that has to be built in between the society and the family so as to preserve the values of Indian culture.

*Cut Like Wound* belongs to the genre of detective fiction that explores the mind of a serial killer and the attempts of the cop Borei Gowda in nabbing him. It also delves into the aspect of family bonding as it is seen through the life of the protagonist. Further it documents the mood of city life and offers a vivid picture of the cratered structures of the society.

In the words of Harimohan,

One thing that 'Cut like Wound' does to the reader (it did to me) is that the characters seep directly into your life. Inspector Borei Gowda will

remain with me for long just as Assyrian does or Atticus does or Byomkesh Bakshi does - but where Anita Nair has gone further than detective fiction is in making the characters bigger than being just super detectives who somehow dazzle you with their super deductive skills. (Harimohanparuvu.blogspot.in.)

*Idris: Keeper of the Light* presents the journey of human mind through the complexities of life in the background of the seventeenth century. Idris takes a journey to the Malabar in an attempt to attend the Zamorin's mamangam festivities. He accidentally meets his nine-year-old son Kandavar, who is a result of his union with Kuttimalu. Idris is entrusted with the responsibility of keeping Kandavar away from the danger of becoming a chaver of the suicide mission. He takes the boy to the faraway lands in order to divert him and make him aware of different moulds of life.

The work is planned as a trilogy and the first part captulates the past and the present of a traveller Idris. The sketching of the women characters Kuttimalu, Margarida and Thilothamma symbolize the position of women in India of the time.

The novel focuses on the philosophy of life offering the perspective of drawing the essence from the world of sky and stars that power the destiny.

As Jaya Bhattacharya says,

"In *Keeper of the Light*, the first of a trilogy, the recurring themes of Anita Nair's fiction—gender

and caste—are explored once more with competence. The rigid caste structures are challenged by the existence of the “family” of Idris, Kuttimalu and Kandavar”. (Jaya, *The Hindu*).

Though the works reflect the plight of women in their struggle for self-realization, she refuses to get into the mould of being termed as a feminist writer as she feels that it limits her imagination and confines her to a limited sphere. Her versatility is exposed as she keeps on shifting spaces of creativity plunging into different waters of Crime fiction and Historical Fiction.

The line of thinking that Nair holds in her forte is identical to the thought process shared by the women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande etc. But Anita Nair takes a step forward by penetrating into the workings of human mind.

In the words of Margaret,

This is what makes Anita Nair worth reading: her life-like representation of a region – in the case of *The Better Man*, Kerala. The Indian village has come into its own. Sahgal may write about aristocratic India. Markandeya may obsess about Indo-British relations. Deshpande may examine the psychoses of women in Bangalore and Bombay. But Nair goes further: She shows the importance of the individual's integrity, whether in a village or, as in her next novel, *Ladies Coupe*, in a person's self- fulfillment.

She occupies a prominent position in the world of contemporary Indian English writers. Her style

mesmerizes the readers with a unique meditative technique to present the happenings before the eyes.

Anita Nair's fiction offers a view of the conflict between the individual and the outer world that poses a threat to the very foundations of the self that always seeks to liberate from the imposed structures of the society. Owing to her interest in human psychology as she wished to be a Psychiatrist, her pen touches the recesses of the insides digging out the varied moods and impressions of the seed of human thinking. She probes into social condition and maps them with the crude instincts of human race without pointing her fingers to any distraction in particular. All her characters are confronted with the inevitable conflict and they undertake a process of introspection to come out as successful individuals marking themselves as prototypes of freedom.

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