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EXPLOIATION AND SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN IN MODERN INDIA

Among the emerging women novelists in Indian Writing in English. Anita Nair holds a predominant place among other women writers who portrays the plight of the marginalized and oppressed women stifled by age old-traditions and dogmas. A woman is constantly reminded that she is grown up for a man whom she had to spend rest of her life. A woman's whole existence is considered in relation to a man. Like the feminist writer Mannu Bhandrai's women characters, Anita Nair's pictures the character Saadiya in *Mistress* reflects the dilemma of Indian women who are the victims standing at the crossroads of community and freedom, symbolized by 'home' and 'world' respectively unable to choose one above the other. As Anita Gosh observes:

With respect to Mannu Bhandari's women, if their ties with the community deny them freedom, then the process of leaving the community creates in them the fear of isolation. The act of breaking away from the communal conditioning becomes fraught with pain and frustration. Manu Bhandari's writings depict the helplessness and confusion of women in their attempts to overcome the conflicts. (2)

Like Manu Bhandari, Anita Nair has drawn the character of Saddiya to show how women are denied freedom as per the rules set by their community and how she is unable to shrug-off her emotional and psychological dependence on men, family and community. As quoted by Sunita Sinha, "Feminism is an attack upon social option, whenever it discriminates in its attitude towards man and woman".

Anita Nair through the character portrayal of Saadiya shows her concern for women who are denied basic freedom even at home, restricted within the strict framework of marginalization and oppression. As Prasanna Sree says, "Through the centuries, women in Hindu tradition are depicted as silent sufferers, they have given a secondary status both in family and society" (18). In the same way, over many years, the Islam looks upon women as inferior to men and has made women suffer under strict laws.

Saadiya is the youngest daughter born in a traditional Muslim family. Her father is very particular in keeping the womenfolk in Islamic tradition as he often says, "It is our duty to safeguard the bloodline" (99). So it is the fate of women like Saadiya to be born and die in the same room. The four walls become their world:

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

Saadiya cannot express her thoughts. She wants to cry out the discrimination that her religion their religion has drawn between men and women. She wants to tell her father what is right and wrong. She wants to break her throat to say "It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want, see and do whatever you like, and we are expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys" (99). The more Saadiya questions about such restrictions the more she craves for freedom and attempts to break the rules. But violation of rules will end in violence against women. This is what is the result in Saadiya too. In the words of Neeru Tandon:

Violence against women has been accepted and even condoned throughout history. More than 2,000 years ago, Roman law, gave a man life and death authority over his wife. In the 18th century, English common law, gave a man permission to discipline his children and wife with a stick or whip no wider than his thumb. Feminists claim that men are more likely to use violence

to keep their dominant position. While society claims to abhor violence, we often make heroes of men who are aggressive (140).

These words are true with Saadiya's strict father. Breaking the rules when she steps out and goes to the common alley where men would walk, she knows that her father would be furious. As she expects, the furious father, takes violence as the weapon to discipline his daughter. Patriarchy overflows through his veins and says he is the man of the family. This makes him too violent to press a very hot iron rod on her calves twice. Moreover, he wants him to be the hero of his family who could keep up its honour, by disciplining his girls this way:

You feel the need to break rules. This is my Saadiya; good girl. The next time you feel the need to break your reins, remember how your flesh melted This is the lesson for you as much as it is for me, that is unwise to give girls even a little rope. That it isn't in women to understand the nuances of freedom. And if I have left you unpunished I may risk the honour of my family(130).

Here Anita Nair reveals the gender discrimination marked by religion. It is obvious through Saadiya's story that women in Arabipatnam are not allowed to go out of the four walls even for education. There is no reference of girls being sent to school. Moreover they were fully covered with black dress all over their body except their eyes: " She took away the bold fold of the cloth that covered her face and flung it on her shoulder" (101). But men enjoyed endless freedom. Women seldom saw the sea though they lived close to it. These questions arise in Saadiya's mind:

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

Women pursue freedom by rebelling against the religious code. The rules are likely to be broken as the situations trigger the urge to cross the line. So Saadiya breaks the religious code. The rules are likely to be broken as the situations trigger the urge to cross the line. So Saadiya breaks the religious code, crossing the line set by it. Her father expels her from their society in

order to keep up the honour of his position in the religious circle. Saadiya craves for a new world of freedom and that is why she leaves her home and goes with Sethu, a man who is not of her religion. She expects total freedom, in the sense that it allows her to follow that freedom her religion and inculcating its rituals on her child after marriage. When this is denied by Sethu her husband, she thinks of her past in her father's house. She breaks the shackles of traditional conventions and comes out, but unfortunately she is unable to come out of it fully. She stands at the crossroad of ancestry and life and the end chooses death as the only solution to the problem. She drowns herself in the sea, "not to feel so torn between my ancestry and my life as it is now. The body washed up three days later. A bloated Saadiya..."(228). Neeru Tandon has this to say by way of comment on the attitude of Saadiya, "By remaining free, women hoped to retain not only their independence, but those rights that, in spite of some change, they still lost on marriage" (126).

In the feminist concept of the 'New Woman,' she challenges the traditional notions and is essentially a woman of awareness of her inferior status in the family and society. She tries to bring it up in her best of efforts. She chooses to rebel against the accepted rules and regulations formed by the society. In the words of Neeru Tandon:

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

Work Cited.

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