

The Inter-relationship in Anita Nair's The Better Man

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Abstract

The inter-relationship deals with the harmonious and disharmonious relationship between men and women and the web of human relationships. Anita Nair has dealt with all the dimensions of human relationships. She has revealed the quandary of married women and their endless sufferings and efforts to overcome their wretched status. Her novels discuss the lack of understanding and communication in a marriage, extramarital affairs, and men as an arbiter. Anita Nair's fictional sphere depicts the disturbed female psyche and their human relationships owing to the cruelty of patriarchy. They are doomed to frustrations. They are denied the right to shape their own lives. The writer endows them with the power of will to break down the hurdles. They are not ready to bow down to the monstrous norms of patriarchy, to be defeated and disillusioned to live an enslaved life. The female psyche is torn between the passionate desire to live freely and the restrictions of society filled with predominant masculine traits. The present study aims at analysing the Inter-relationship in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*.

Keywords: Harmony, human relationships, extramarital affair and masculine traits

1. Introduction

Family is a foundation of society. Men and women are responsible for the proper functioning of the family. They have to work together to bring up the family. This is possible only when they have good understanding, affection, trust and proper communication. Both men and women are complementary to each other. Any relationship is considered a beautiful bond if it shares all the feelings of enjoyment, pain, delight, distress, success, and failure with the other. A man may feel that he is not secluded in this world if he has a strong relationship with others. One can differentiate the relationships as marital, parental, siblings and friends, and all these relationships surround everyone. A good relationship's important aspects are trust, commitment, adjustment, love and sacrifice. Every man is connected with other human beings. The man, his family and his society are linked with each other. Everyone's individuality and treatment of human relationships are associated with the other members of his family, with the society where he lives and finally, with his inner self for support and safety.

Of all the human relationships, the most significant is the man-woman relationship. In the different relationships between men and women, the husband-wife relationship is preferred as the principal relationship. Happy married life is based on sharing feelings. They may have a desirable life by working together and by having tolerance and flexibility. Physical and mental health should be maintained in a harmonious married life. The maladjustment, different tastes and interests lead to many problems in happy situations. There should be a spiritual rapport between the couple to remain united.

2. Discussion:

In India, the family structure has changed in the present era. This change affects the man-woman relationship. This transformation has touched the periphery of the family, and this interaction has brought an essential change in the construction of different relationships in a family unit. There is an apparent change in the spheres of roles and values. Indian novelists have discussed family relationships with great importance because the tradition of India gives great significance to the relationship.

In India, marriage is not the union of two individuals but the union of two families. They like to strengthen existing relations or make new relations through matrimonial alliances. This shows the complicated restrictive control of sexual and marital norms in Indian society. In Indian marriages, the parents give importance only to the social and financial position of the partners. The bride and bridegroom's role is played hard.

A woman has to manage multiple roles in a familial life to lead a healthy family. She should possess some qualities like service, sacrifice, and adjustments. The family cannot be led by masculinity alone. It can be led only with the help of femininity, as they cannot exist without the other. Even the woman is educated, assertive and self-reliant. The man can extend his boundaries to show his superiority in his marital relationship. According to our Indian tradition, a good wife should be faithful, obedient and virtuous to her husband. She needs to succumb to the dictates of her husband.

Anita Nair has a realistic attitude towards human relationships and does not believe in representing her characters following the archetypal model. She expects people to scrutinise their relationships and circumstances and develop a positive approach towards their lives. It is clear that male chauvinistic attitudes and the beliefs of society indeed would affect the man and woman relationship. She has scrupulously and intricately knitted the different facets of the husband-wife relationship in all her novels.

Once a woman gets married, their existences are always determined, recorded, and understood concerning their husband's family, and she has to pursue her roles according to them. She also depicts women's relationships with the opposite sex outside marriage. Women's superiority in the domestic sphere, education, and economics are considered a transgression of established custom. The true self of both genders can be burgeoned only when there is a harmonious relationship between them. The marital bond should free the women from men's domineering and dictating rule. Such a kind of marital bond is rare to find in the marriages of the Indian system. Anita Nair shows such a relationship compassionately.

In this era, a new woman has become conscious of her status in her family and society. This situation gives new strength to the women writers to redefine the husband-wife relationship. They make their protagonists assert their individuality and get their position by scheduling off their servile approach towards their husbands. It is a part of this changing scenario of husband and wife relations in a male-dominated society. Anita Nair underscores the value of the human relationship. She briefs the man-woman relationship within and outside the marital life.

Anita Nair's *The Better Man* portrays the present time women are not weak and parasite-type creatures. They are not on the margins but are capable of standing in the mainstream and are equal to males. Nair is not a feminist, but a realist and her characters attain stature according to their roles. Nair voices her women character's fears, wishes, predicaments, thoughts and actions. She details women's journeys from girlhood, adolescence, marital life and parental life.

Achuthan Nair in *The Better Man* treats his wife, Paru Kutty, just as a slave. Whenever he speaks to her, he shows his authority as a husband. He keeps his wife as a servant and has a mistress for him in private. Achuthan Nair got angry with Paru Kutty that his position had turned into a sympathetic one. As Anita Nair says, " Achuthan stood there furious, his lip curling in disgust at the mass of anger" (69). Everyone expects a suitable marriage, and the parents' primary responsibility is to find the right pair for their son or daughter.

Anjana, in the novel, is brought up in a liberal atmosphere in her family. In her married life, the relationship between her and her husband is haphazard. Her husband's home signifies a place of meaninglessness where she looks at him as a stranger beside her. She wants to lead a healthy, meaningful life with her husband, but it remains a dream for her to come into reality. She desires freedom and love in her marital life, but it is painful. She hates all the things around her and even herself. He never takes her for outings or shopping but always scolds her. Anita Nair says, "Three months later he was still a stranger to her. A man she cooked and kept house for. Man who used her body when the impulse took him. There was little conversation between them and hardly any companionship" (228)

According to Indian tradition, marriage brings man and woman together under one roof, but she skins over the sexual relationship. She feels that without an emotional relationship sexual relationship is incomplete. Her marital relationship with her husband is marked by loneliness and improper communication. She moves to her parent's house, which is a kind of escape for her from her loveless married life. Her relationship with her husband is affected adversely by their incapability to understand each other.

After the death of her parents, Anjana longs for true love from the one who takes care of her. She is unable to have a good relationship with her husband. She says to herself, "I am still the woman I was. Unloved, unwanted. And then she felt a great desire to be held. A chest she could lay her head upon and cry. A pair of arms that would wrap her around with caring. A voice that would whisper, 'Please don't cry' (237).

As a traditional good wife, Meenakshi accepts her husband when he returns to her after many years. The distance between Balan and Meenakshi in the martial atmosphere gives him sufficient time to reanalyse his troubles and his relationship with Meenakshi. Her husband relies on Meenakshi emotionally and economically. Meenakshi remains a dutiful wife and accepts him. She teaches him the value of family bonds through her attitude and demeanour. Anita Nair, through Meenakshi, portrays that man and woman are complementary. After looking at the husband-wife relationship of Meenakshi and Balan, Mukundan realises that the genuine marital relationship is beyond beauty, intelligence, eloquent conversation, charm and grace.

The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be cordial and intimate. It is challenging for a woman to live with a husband who does not love her. Even educated woman has to face this situation in this contemporary society. Indian women consider marriage and motherhood as the fulfilment of their life. One of the primary tests of gender discrimination is the governance of a man over his wife, and every woman is to endorse this ethics in her relationships with a man. Paru Kutty is the representative of this unequal status of women in society. Even when her husband dominates, she tries to be a suitable wife to her husband, and she struggles to express her emotions in the male-dominated chauvinistic society.

If the female psyche does not have a fulfilling relationship with her partner, her complete affection goes to her children, and she expects that her children should love her more. Paru Kutty could not get the love of her husband and son. There is no harmonious relationship among the family members at her house, bringing darkness into the family. This loneliness and disappointment in a conjugal relationship pushes her to death.

Anita Nair depicts the exact nature of the husband-wife relationship that is forever indisputably taken as a unified social unit. His relationship is the ladder of success to her and soon she establishes herself. The writer points out that society does not take cognisance and recognises women as equal to men. The image of devoted housewives has covered the actual image of soft, silent and pitiable women who want their family to acknowledge their existence as human beings and equivalent to their male counterparts.

The character Valsala represents the psychological and emotional feelings of women in society. Her husband, Prabhakaran, is a weak and sick person. Valsala has lost all her blitheness and becomes

downhearted because of her weak and sick husband. He cannot satisfy Valsala even in conjugal love and fails to give her a child. Love and sex are predominant in the relationship between the husband and the wife. If any of these is denied to either, they try to find it outside their married relationship. Gandharva comes in the name of Sridharan. Valsala expects some demon lover who would thrust her roughly and make passionate love with her. The secret desire of Valsala is apprehended by her neighbour Sridharan. She falls in love with Sridharan, and they become partners under a secret nuptial knot. Valsala does not feel guilty about her extramarital affair with Sridhar. Valsala violates the rules for women in the patriarchal society and the traditional norms of marital faith. Valsala breaks the stereotype.

In a family, the sons enjoy freedom in all aspects while the daughters are under constant supervision and control. Social conditioning also plays a significant role in the deprived state of women. Women are assigned a subordinate position. Indian women are brought up in such a way that they are inclined to follow the socially set archetypal codes. The ultimate goal for an Indian woman is to imitate the feminine archetype in their married life. Their lives are bound by those factors that are responsible for demarcating the limitations over women. Society clearly makes a woman understand that she is inferior to a male. She is expected to comply with the view that independence and control over women are meant for men, whereas dependence and inferiority are meant for women.

By nature, man and woman are complementary to each other. The man holds responsibility in the public sphere and the woman in the domestic sphere. They are the two halves of one being like Arthanaareeshwarar. The position of a woman in society is determined only by her marital status. In society, a woman is respected only when she lives with her husband, irrespective of the number of wives or mistresses he has, their incompatibility and his cruel treatment of his long silence with his wife. Society considers it satisfying if they live together under the same roof because of the notion that a woman is nothing without her husband and that the absence of a husband makes a wife miserable, as she is always dependent on her husband. However, this restricts the freedom and individuality of the woman, leading to the estrangement in the relationship between husband and wife. This causes an imbalance in married life.

3. Conclusion:

Anita Nair shows the agonies of the souls who do not have a good relationship with their husbands. After reading her novels, one can understand that the writer had dealt with all the dimensions of human relationships, particularly pre-marital and marital relationships. Her novels portray the complex web of human relationships in one's family. She brings out a new philosophy of man-woman relationships in modern times. All her novels have a galaxy of characters who are bonded by relationships. Some of her characters have happy and healthy relationships, and some are beyond tradition. Her novels depict how the relationship in and outside of the family affects the female psyche. When loyalty in husband-wife relationships is lost, it raises the question of the existence of the extramarital relationship. To be harmonious, the man-woman relationship should be sound, respecting each other equally, and non-partisan in society.

A complete woman is assertive and bold, even breaking the patriarchal tradition to take a position for herself in the domestic and public spheres. They assert their individuality and establish an identity of their own. They can tackle and resolve the conflicts in their lives. They add colour and

richness to their lives by living together with their husbands. This is part of the evolution of the feminine. As Joan Riviere comments in *Womanliness as a Masquerade* as: "seem to fulfil every criterion of complete feminine development. They are excellent wives and mothers, capable housewives, they maintain social life and assist culture; and when called upon they can still find time to play the part of devoted and disinterested mother substitutes among a wide circle of relatives and friends". (36)

Anita Nair's works are a critical examination of the psychic self as the psychological chaos creates psychic imbalances, which handicap them in creating harmonious and rewarding interpersonal and intra-personal relationships. She brings out the causes of marital discord and gives the necessary conditions for fulfilling and satisfying marital life. The psychological conflict between the love impulse from females and the power impulse from a male is exemplified in Anita Nair's fictional world. Anita Nair reveals that a man's failure to recognise the 'female' in a woman is the leading cause of the disharmony in the togetherness of man and woman.

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