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THE DYNAMICS BETWEEN MAN AND WOMAN IN ANITA NAIR'S NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

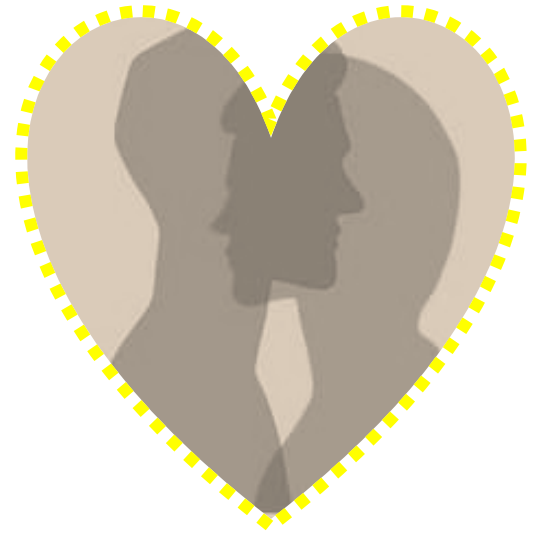
Relationships are the basis of life. It is the underlying factor on which every institution sustains and flourishes. The way one communicates, interacts, mingles and works determines the dynamics of relationship between man and woman and the manner in which roles swap and switch over between them is dealt with in the bestselling novels of Anita Nair. Masculinity and femininity are a set of behaviours and attributes associated with men and women respectively. Masculinity is not limited to men and neither is femininity an exclusive domain of women. These traits are not to be associated with gender but depend on the character or the role an individual plays and the situation that compels him or her to enact that particular role. A man's masculinity is only a little over a half and the rest of his consort is femininity; a female is of the same composition as of a man, femaleness, (not femininity) if only an over half and the remaining in her is masculinity. To be a balanced and a better human being one should possess both masculine and feminine traits. The relationships an individual maintains and the roles enacted, forms the basis of living and the basis of success: a complete human being. The paper explores the popular novels of Anita Nair and attempts to unveil the inner state of mind of the various characters, the traits that they possess, their reaction to different situations, and the conditions that urge them, to transform themselves into a different person.

Key Words:Behaviour,Desire, Dynamics,Feminine, Masculine, Role,Relationship

INTRODUCTION

Masculine and feminine are common gender classifications. The usage of these terms is not something unusual in everyday life. They are used to refer to abstract, sentient and

insentient nouns. Even languages are classified as feminine and masculine. Masculinity and femininity are a set of traits that humans require for survival, existence, comfort and success. Being assertive, brave, dominant, independent, innovative and strong are masculine traits and being caring, collaborative, emotional, humble, nurturing, and vulnerable feminine. These traits cannot be put in watertight compartments or demarcated as belonging to men or women. Based on circumstances these traits switch their roles. Women can be dominant or assertive and men can be emotional, caring and humble. Masculinity and femininity are not to be associated with gender but the role or character one handles and the situation that one is in.



Jaggi Vasudev (Sadhguru) on December 8, 2017 tweeted on Twitter, “The masculine and the feminine are two aspects of who you are. If you are too identical with one point you will be half a life.” On yet another occasion he stated, “A complete human being is in equilibrium between the masculine and the feminine.”

Women are equally good as men, they need not emulate the other sex, and neither do men. Anita Nair in an interview to Mr. Pranay Pathak of *Hindustan Times* on Dec 22, 2018 stated, “If you really want to tag me, call me a writer of the human condition, because it gives equal weightage to both men and women. As far as feminism goes, I feel that if a woman can start off by being who she is, that is the greatest feministic or feminist manifesto. It is not about having to prove that you are as good as a man, because biologically, men and women are different. To say that would be like a lion saying I’m as good as an elephant — but both are equally wonderful creatures.”

THE OBJECTIVE

The objective of the paper is to show that masculine and feminine traits cannot be compartmentalised as belonging to men and women exclusively. These traits can cross boundaries and to be a perfect, sound, human being, symmetry between the masculine and the feminine is of utmost importance.

THE DYNAMICS

On an expedition into the novel *Ladies Coupe* one comes across a variety of dynamic characters. Each one, being different from the other; with a totally diverse cultural, social, economic and educational background, seem to be striving hard for their existence and identity.

Like all the other girls of the community, Akhila, the principal character of the novel was trained to be a good wife. Her mother often gave her housewifely hints and tips. She too was getting ready for the household chores but then the tragedy – the unexpected demise of her father -takes place. She is forced by circumstances to do the role of the breadwinner and thereby become the head of the family with responsibilities of keeping the family well organized. Deliberately she forgets herself, her existence, her desires and all the training that her mother had given her. She now poses to be a different person. With this switch over of role, all the hidden masculine traits come to the forefront. She limits her activities as a woman. Her daily errands are that of a man. Nobody in the family sees her as a woman but as a caretaker, a fatherly figure or in fact the father of the house.

When her younger brother asks her at the time of their father's death, "what are we going to do?" She harshly replies "Cremate him and then ...and then, we'll find some way to keep ourselves afloat and alive." (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 57).

"When Akhila's father died, two things happened: Sundays became just another day of the week and Akhila became the man of the family." (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 75)

From nineteen to forty-five she had toiled like an ox, and everything went unseen. To her mother and siblings, she was only a provider, she had no cravings, needs, demands or identity.

"She was always an extension of someone's identity." (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 200-201)

During the train journey, Akhila subverts this oppressive thought into an ability to look at the future and give voice to her most intimate secrets. A case in point is represented by the erotic dream she has during the night, protected by the intimacy of the berth. She dreams of a man who can see the woman she has hidden for a long time.

"'You are Akhila' he says and comes to stand by her. 'You are Akhila the woman. Everyone else might have forgotten about the woman within you. But I see her. I see the desire in her eyes, the colours in her heart.'" (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 92)

This scene symbolizes Akhila's need to feel plainly like a woman and free herself from the constraints imposed by society as someone's daughter, sister, aunt, sister-in-law, provider, employee etc. Akhila is unhappy with the role thrust upon her and longs to be her true self – a grown up woman with womanish desires. The people who cross her path in life impart valuable lessons, especially, the women on the train to Kanyakumari.

Margaret Shanthi, M.Sc. Chemistry first rank holder and gold medalist was a smart, well balanced woman. She had plans to study further and apply for the Ph.D. programme. It was then that she met Ebenzer Paulraj, a tall well-built young man of twenty nine. Her parents

were pleased with their relationship and they were happily married off. The first eighteen months of marriage were blissful until she revealed to Ebe that she was pregnant. He persuaded her to abort the baby saying that the family can be expanded once they settle down in life. She loved Ebe and did everything to please him. She gave up her PhD. for B. Ed since Ebe felt B. Ed would fetch her job.

Margaret Shanthi discloses the strained relationship between her husband and herself who controls her life and career. She realizes that she has made enough of compromises, that her life is being crushed and her individuality suppressed by him. Margaret responds, but silently. Hers is not aggressive feminism, but assertive feminism. She plans to make him reliant on her and once this happens she will have an upper hand. With Ebe under her control, she can live as she aspires – whether at work or food or sex or the baby, the decision will be and should be hers. In this particular state, Margaret seems to switch over the role that she had been executing till then.

Marikolanthu was a lovely young girl. Her mother Kanakambaram was a cook at the ChettiarKottai. After her father's demise to support her mother and siblings she takes up the job of a babysitter at ChettiarKottai. She was raped by Chettiar's nephew Murugesan. Later she turns out to be the proxy of her mistress SujathaAkka.

Sujatha Akka in a faint voice enquires about the Missies that Marikolanthu was working for at Vellore.

“Tell me about the Missies again. Tell me what you saw.” (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 259)

Marikolanthu recounts the strange love of the Missies and the pleasure they found in one another's body. It is then Sujathadiscloses her contempt for her husband Sridhar.

“When he comes near me, I feel as though a lizard is crawling up my skin.” (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 259)

Marikolanthu understands that Sujatha did not feel repelled by touch but deterred a man's touch. The spark of desire was still alive and Marikolanthu had to ignite it. Marikolanthu loved Sujatha Akka dearly and whatever she did was out of necessity and devotion towards her. She satiated her mistress hunger and desire in the afternoons and at night she pleased the Master by letting him satiate his hunger. In these instances, Markolanthu plays a dual role, that of a man and a woman.

“By day I gathered with Sujatha Akka lilies by a giant lake... And by night, Sridhar Anna drove me to the centre of the earth, where molten lava clutched at my feet as I heaved, panted and burnt in the crush of his embrace.” (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 261)

She avenges Murugesan by mortgaging their son Muthu to Murugesan's loom for two years. Here masculinity is once again at the forefront.

“A perverse satisfaction flared within me. Murugesan might not know it but I had sold him his own son.” (Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 265)

On Murugesan's demise, she realizes that there is nothing left to hate in this world. There was no meaning in hating Muthu, the boy had done nothing wrong to hate him; with this realization, the bitterness fades away and like a woman, a mother, she has only love for Muthu.

“As the flames leapt, my hate burnt with them. What was left in this world for me to hate, I thought...? The bitterness unravelled, ‘Muthu,’ I called softly.” ((Ladies Coupe, 2014, P – 268)

Marikolanthu takes up different roles – that of a docile maid; a man supporting the family; a lover catering to the needs and desires of the mistress; a woman fulfilling the carnal needs of a man. On realizing that she is all alone in this world and there is nothing left to hate or love but her son Muthu, she decides to straighten up her life.

Missy K and Missy V the doctors' for whom Marikolanthu worked had their peculiarities. Missy V, young, with long hair and green eyes, liked uppma, vada, idli, sambar, dosa and chutney; wore jewellery, beads and chose gay colours. She was more womanly. Missy K with brown eyes, short dark brown hair, big hands and feet, loved toast and plantains; she preferred dull colours and wore no jewellery at all. She was more like a man, dominating and dictating terms to the other and finally they get separated.

The switch over of roles can be found in Anita Nair's *Mistress* and *The Better Man*. Radha the central character of the novel *Mistress* was not happy with Shyam. Marriage does not sanction her security and identity. She tries to fit herself into the framework of the established norms of the society, and tunes her life accordingly, resulting in a deformed relationship with her husband. Radha hates Shyam, he never lets her have her way or live as she wishes; to him, she is more of an ornament, a possession to be adorned, used and displayed.

Shyam was an efficient, hardworking businessman. He knew how to monitor and control his establishments and followed the same fashion at home. He was aware that Radha was more able than he was but never let her display her talent or skill. He made a note of anything and everything - From recording her menstrual dates and prescribing chores to spend her free time. He insisted Radha to abide by his dictated norms. Radha was suffocated in being treated as a slave, the unnecessary domination and control. She needed someone who might regard her as an equivalent, someone to spend time with and this drew her

towards Christopher Stewart, a travel writer. Setting aside all the traditional conventions of marriage she spent time with Chris but soon differences of opinion cropped up and they broke up. Radha was bold enough to violate the stereotype patriarchal rules, whether it was a pre marital affair, or abortion or an extra marital affair. She refuses to be a wife or a mistress and decides to live for her unborn child, to be a mistress of self. Radha's undeterred decision is a sign of the hidden masculine quality.

Koman, another central character of the novel *Mistress* was mesmerized by the advances made by Anjela a student of Kathakali. To Anjela, Koman was magnanimous, enticing and romantic and she was obsessive in craving his love and attention. She succeeds and they start living as husband and wife. Anjela wanted to return to her native land and she convinces Koman that the West is the best place to obtain international recognition, fortune and fame. Koman agrees and they move to London. For a while, everything was going right but then a sort of uncertainty arose. Koman doesn't get a chance to perform in public. He is confined to the four walls, with no friends, job or performance. He depended on Anjela for anything and everything. At home, everyone knew him especially people in the field of Kathakali and he knew who he was but here he had lost his identity. The love he had for Anjela slowly changed to bitterness and hatred. Extreme greed and desire were the cause of his present state. Koman blames himself and regrets for seeking green pastures.

"Moved by an impulse, spurred by greed, I had chosen to give up all I had, to chase a shadow. What have I done? (Mistress, 2005, P – 386)

Koman felt that Anjela had isolated him from all that he was familiar with – his family, home, and art. It was then he realized that this must be how she felt in his little house by the riverside. But there was a difference he was beholden to her and he did not like it.

"I depended on her for everything and I did not like to feel beholden. I was a kept man who had been robbed of everything including my dignity." (Mistress, 2005, P – 386)

Koman decides to break up with Anjela, return to his native land and rejoin his dance school as Aashan. Koman's excessive greed, his vulnerable dependent state in England, the psychological breakdown highlights the feminine traits in him.

Mukundan, the protagonist of the novel *The Better Man*, is a retired government employee who settles down at Kaikurussi, his native village. Even at sixty, he was afraid of his father and the people around him. He is not able to take a proper stance whether it is his relationship with Anjana or his friend Bhasi who cures and rescues him from the guilt of being responsible for his mother's death accompanied by the nightmares and the haunted memories that he had been experiencing. As he was more concerned of his reputation, he was not ready to smudge the perfect gentleman image and thus betrayed them. The fear-subordination element -- fearing his father, the society, its undictated norms, reluctance to publicly accept Anjana or stand by his friend Bhasi in time of need projects the inherent feminine traits in Mukundan.

Meenakshi is yet another prominent character in the novel *The Better Man*. She breaks all the patriarchal norms to become a Naxalite. In due course, she meets Balan a Kathakali dancer, marries him and settles down in life. Balan an exceptional dancer abandons her seeking new pastures. She was certain that he would return and waited for him but he was not worth the wait. With great courage and no regrets she takes care of her ailing mother and raises her son and then she receives a letter from Balan asking her to meet him. She called on him and was traumatized to see him in a pathetic state - fighting spinal tuberculosis. Meenakshi takes care of him until death.

“He couldn't dance anymore and when they abandoned him he remembered that I existed” (The Better Man, P-61).

Meenakshi's relentless nature and her willingness to face adversity underscore the masculine traits; taking care of Balan, attending to his needs, nursing her mother and rearing her son exhibits the inherent feminine traits.

Anita Nair does not highlight the problems, subjugation and subordination of women alone but reflects a variety of other themes too; to cite a few - family, relationship, economic and social status in society, gender, and the dynamics. Though the novelist tries to bring forth the different facets of human relationships in the novels *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress* and *The Better Man*, the switch over of roles is quite obvious.

Conclusion

Harmony is one of the most essential qualities for a society to flourish and establish. Anita Nair in her novels tries to emphasize that man and women are not separate entities. They are inter-dependent and complementary. The traits considered being specific to men or specific to women can be found in both men and women. Women, generally are considered to be the weaker of the sexes but then it is not so. Anita Nair through her novels exhibits that neither man nor woman can claim superiority over the other. It is the psychological bent of mind, the situation in which a person at the moment is that decides the trait.

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