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THE WESTERN INFLUENCE ON POST-COLONIAL INDIAN WOMEN IN ANITA NAIR'S *MISTRESS*

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ABSTRACT

Indian art forms possess an exceptional place in Indian culture and are neglecting their brilliance in today's world. But through literature, diverse Indian writers have tried to keep the art vigorous in their writings, therefore to enrich our literature. Anita Nair, an Indian women writer has made unambiguous use of classical art work and the present paper emphasize on how she has used in her novel, *Mistress* made elegant use of the traditional dance form 'Kathakali', and Nair has infused all the nine 'Navarasa' in the scenario to focus on the existential predicament of mind of the persona. The subject of post-colonial women pressured to break up from the orthodox benchmark of the society under the impact of the western culture has been dealt with accordingly. The novel *Mistress* is set in the backdrop of the river Nila. People live in the locale want to embrace new lifestyle but also want to hold on to their ancient customs. Therefore, we see fusion of tradition and modernity. Characters in the novel have to make their own choices between the arts, rituals and westernized style of living. Post-colonialism brought plenty of adjustments in its wake. This novel has brought the exterior intricacies which involved a man-woman kinship in post-modern era which is evidently dissimilarity to the past.

KEYWORDS:

Indian Culture, Post-Colonial, Western Culture, Lifestyle, Intricacies.

INTRODUCTION

In pre-colonial times, women were produced as more show pieces to decorate the homes of their partner and had no power to take any resolutions in family or economic situations. They followed the code of behavior laid down by Manusmriti (The Laws of Manu) which stated, "In childhood a female must to be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, and when her lord is dead, to her sons, a woman must never be independent"(Buhler, 5:148). This has been the background in India for a longtime and is still widespread in some rustic locale. Women have started searching for their identity

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and prestige in society in defiance to the patriarchal system prevailing in the society.

Radha, the central female character in the novel had pre-marital affair with a married man. She breaks the benchmark, maintains a sexual relationship with him becomes pregnant and had to abort the child. This is one of the hallmark of post-colonialism and an image of western culture influencing the minds of the Indians. On finding this hideous truth of her life, her father finds a match for her, who is beneath her caliber. Even though well-educated, she has not given choice for choosing her life-partner and had to bow to her father's wish. This is the customary way of women in India who get married whether they find their husband well matched or not, whereas the bridegroom is given full decision of selecting a wife for himself. It's a patriarchal tool to keep women under suppression. The women are treated as birds in a cage which are constricted to a certain range. What we find here is the subject matter of revolt, the post-modern generation observes women who want to break and free them from the chains of patriarchy tied in their feet, and ascend that it is brutal to keep a bird in a confinement, but what about women? This question is raised by Radha towards Shyam:

...How different is it from keeping your wife and daughters at home? Isn't that a cage, too? And he...would laugh in disbelief. How can you compare the two? Birds are meant to be free? 'And women are not?', women need to be looked after(M, 74).

The condition of women is even disastrous than birds. They are not given permission to be liberal. Wedding is like a sequence for them which binds and limits them within the four walls of their residence. It is like penal institutions where they cannot practice their desire and are forced to surrender their aspirations to live life and thus, they accept to withstand the punishment of life imprisonment. Radha tries to uplift her outlook and make Shyam to comprehend her situation:

Don't I have a right 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 fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights(M, 73).

The search for self is the main concept of post-colonial Indian women. Radha's husband, Shyam, refers to her as "my Radha". In patriarchal system, men like Shyam desires to command their wife's lifestyle and the way she dresses, her bearing in the society, even keeping an account of her menstrual cycle is a cautious attempt to restraint their life, about which she furiously says:

Isn't anything sacred to you? Her voice rose. These red crossed are my periods, aren't they? Why are they here? On your calendar? If anyone should keep tabs, it should be me. Why are you like this, Shyam? You seem to want to rule me. You Won't let me breathe. It isn't right (M, 203).

He even ordains her on what to do in her free time and what colour of saree she should choose. Her survival is nullified. She doesn't have the integrity to exercise intellectual liberty nor is allowed to use her cognitive capabilities. She never wanted to be a submissive wife but that's how her husband expected her to be in the role of an orthodox woman as assumed in a patriarchal system. Ram is standing on a partition line where modernity meets traditional embodiment and he is not able to obtain it. He shows his contemporary outlook for his business but sticks to custom when it comes to control his home and symbolizes true Indian male psyche. He is not able to acquire Radha's uniqueness and her vital ethics to lead a life based on freedom and choice. Male chauvinism is brought to frontline when he wants to improve his resort on the lines of western civilization. He selected a western perspective for his career but he is unable to let his wife go off his customary patriarchal thinking that is

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strongly embedded in his inner being when it comes to agreement with his wife. Radha is the present-day woman who realizes and desires to provoke an impartial life that is not prescribed by the terms of her husband. She wants to persuade life of a free bird that spreads its wings in perception to stretch out the skies and measure unfathomable heights.

No compensation however hard she finds that she has always to play the part of a confirmed wife whose only assignment is to make her husband happy. Shyam feels that essential qualities and woman have an identical role to play and they should be utilized for commerce and trade. He uses historical convention to fascinate his foreign customers who come to spend time in his resort but provides them the comfort of western luxurious life. Western colonialism has demolished the very foundations of the society. It is as if the society is contaminated with western virus. The main intention is to become luxurious and delight one's hunger for money and love making, using whatever means is appropriate to the male gender. Radha is rich and he becomes conscious how to use the resources and retain her under his thumb. The maltreatment becomes so suffocating for her that she breaks away from the relationship. It is a form of objection which set the rule of patriarchy and Radha genitally involved by desiring with whom she wants to have intercourse and to have children.

When Shyam distrust Radha to have a flirtation with Chris, and tries to take liberties with himself on her, she realizes it to be sexual assault is another feature highlighted that a woman has to undergo sexual abuse by her husband only shows male domination as they see it as their right to pressure themselves upon their wife whenever they wish. It is another way to show ill-treatment and to conquer women. In their case, the custom of marriage is regarded as very holy and put at the altar. It is just a dais for men to display their potential and women have to withstand it. But with changing times, the post-modern women knew the vigour which lies within her and showed her objection contrary to any type of violence. They can no longer play the part of sacrificial goats, because there is a need in her to break all the hindrances and breathe in the air as a free bird. Shyam does not give her liberty and compliments which she wanted from him and she gets harassed towards Chris.

However, this extra-marital affair leads to a guilty conscience as she is vacillating between her household duties towards her husband Shyam and her tendency towards Chris. Her romance with Chris makes her feel lively and while being with Shyam makes her seem guilty and perished with Chris she can be the way she wants but Shyam wants her to acquit oneself in a specific manner as per the requirement of the condition. He considers her as private property and believes in the morals that a husband is the Lord for his wife and he can treat her in whatever way he wants. He always wants to use her for his well being, there by suppressing all her desires. She is not supposed to act as per her impulses. She is always presumed by him to act properly in a very sensible manner.

He disapprovingly comments on her behavior:

Does she ever consider that such silly acts have repercussions? Besides, what will my friends and their wives say if they find out? We have a place in society. A standing that Radha has always been treated rather carelessly (M, 70).

His principles are contrast to Radha's feelings. She feels like she is not his better half but his mistress whose exclusive job is to delight him genitally. She dislikes to be considered as a sex-toy and struggles to find her uniqueness. This makes her to be determined to break the conventional role of a woman. Her affair with Chris, even though permits her to break the conventional image, makes her feel a harmony with other modern women who have the right to make their own choices in life and also

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persuade their life on their own circumstances.

Anita Nair in one of her previous novel, *Ladies Coupe*, had asked a question whether a woman can live single in this society or she requires a man to carry her for the whole of her life? She gives appropriate reply in this novel through the character of Radha that a woman can live alone. Even the names of the characters are used ironically, Shyam and Radha as per Hindu mythology, are names of Lord Krishna and his beloved respectively. Radha in Hindu Mythology as per tradition always yearned for Krishna and could not live without him. But the character Radha of this novel has no attraction towards Shyam and does not adore their affinity and finally breaks free to be a liberated woman. It is entirely her choice whether she wants to spend her life with a man or without a man. Radha leaves both the men in her life and chooses to be a mistress of her own life. She gives birth to a child and adores the joys of motherhood.

Radha is the mouth piece of the author and through her character she has displayed the post-modern tendencies. The complete transformation of women is shown as she become visible to be the stimulated soul who knows to have full control of her mind, body and life of her female counterparts in the west. Thus, man-woman bond has experienced an extreme change as differentiated to the past. This change in the appreciation of women is not brought overnight but with the advancement of time and post-independence perspective. Women started getting education and manifested their spirit in every globe of life. Through Radha's character, Anita Nair has brought openly out the ideology of the modern day woman. Radha is the emancipated one, who rules the world with judgment and leads an abandoned life. They are no more puppets and know how to keep the reigns in their hands. Her defiance against patriarchal system has been projected very powerfully.

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