

 <p>ISSN 2631-2131</p>	<p>9. SUBJUGATION OF WOMEN IN ANITA NAIR’S MISTRESS: A STUDY ON ECO-FEMINISM</p> <p>- By Katuwal S.</p>
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Received Date	20 th March 2021
Accepted Date	1 st May 2021
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Abstract

The condition of Nepalese or Indian women still in primitive stage from modern eco feminism perspective. The socio cultural status of a woman of developing economies like Nepal and India, Anita Nair’s Mistress provides a clear spectrum. The pain, suffocation, suppression, passion, love and hate are beautifully analyzed in the Novel. To find out its relevancy in present context of ecofeminism the study has adopted textual analysis method with selected literature presented in reference. Researcher tried to find the Subjugation, through the Anita Nair’s Mistress focuses on the Subjugation of female, and how they face extremity in male dominated society. The study explores the resistance, struggle of women in this context of what women are for the male and hence how they are treated as per the Novel – Mistress by Anita Nair.

Keywords: Anita Nair, Ecofeminism, Mistress, Textual Analysis

Introduction

Yesteryears of the women in the society of India and Nepal are the same representative case of the domination of women. There we get spooky type of subjugation then and now from the many instances. Women are taken as goods for the male dominated society and so as the women are treated. Feminism in general assumes that women have less power than men (Hedman, 2007). Feminism is itself the problem on its ideology. Women are not less powerful than men. The assumption is completely biased toward men to demoralize the women. Women are not matter

of claim, protest, product and entire other political allegations produced in the time of modernity. Women are the role model of Goddess explained in Veda in South Asian perspective. The independent goddesses that were described as role models. Men and women equally participated in Vedic rituals. Vedic sacrifices were performed jointly by husband and wife. *Atharvaveda* suggests men to make their wives equally participate in *Yagya* and other rituals (Pathak, 2019). The pro-feminist thought in Nepal is the impact of colonial thoughts of modernists. All females are pro-masculinist and all male are pro-feminist in Nepal. Entire males leaving some mentally sick is pro-feminist and vice versa. *Yatra pujanya nari, tatra ramante devata* – where women are worshiped, there Gods will be happy. Feminism is simply a political tool of modern age of first wave and second wave of feminists' movement which is outdated in this post-post-modern sustainable development era.

The distinction between sex and gender can be defined in the following way: Sex refers to the biological division into male and female; gender to the parallel and socially unequal division into femininity and masculinity (Hedman, 2007). No man, even in anger, should ever do anything that is disagreeable to his wife; for happiness, joy, virtue and everything depend on the wife. Wife is the sacred soil in which the husband is born again, even the Rishis cannot create men without women. — Adi Parva, Mahabharata Book, 1.74.50-51. Similarly, Manusmriti preaches that as a girl, she should obey and seek protection of her father, as a young woman her husband, and as a widow her son; and that a woman should always worship her husband as a god (Olivelle, 2005). It means that men should not be arrogant but must save and protect her either way from other people and wild animals. It was the written code of security responsibility of women. Pro-feminism is also a protection shield of feminism as Manu did at that time and Michael Kimmel theorized the feminism from masculine perspective. The south Asian present ecofeminism is clearly presented by the novel- *Mistress* by Anita Nair. So as women in our society are treated like Radha and Saadiya. Nepal and Indian society outlook is same in case of subjugation, where they are treated very badly. we have many more cases Just as women are treated in the representative novel so as women in the Nepalese society treated. Eco-feminism is taken as reference ideology and movement finds that the oppression of women is like the oppression of nature with the same male chauvinistic attitudes and practices concerning the patriarchal society.

Objective

The main objective of the study is to find out the real status of South Asian women from ecofeminists' perspective. The aim of this paper to find the required attributes of women are to sacrifice, submissiveness and tolerance. And woman makes in her life faithfully and obediently

through her excessive endurance service of adjustments are main admired qualities of women. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement becomes her normal way of life. Which brings hierarchy between men and women? This is not good for the evolution either its environment or human life. Rather there should be harmony, peace, equality which is the key way of living happy life and brings solace all around the world.

Textual Analysis

This paper discussed how women like Radha and Saadiya faced the predicament of the male ideology, suffered at many fronts and resisted. The study has explored the struggle of women in this context of what women are for the male and hence how they are treated. The methodology I have applied is eco-feminism. The novel has beautifully depicted the plights of two major characters Radha and Sadiya and their resistance against the male patriarchy that suppressed them physically and mentally through the lens of Eco-feminism and resistance. There is a dominant male ideology about the nature, role, and characteristics of women. Where male characters like Shyam, Stewart, Sethu, Vapa are represented the ideology that women like nature have to be exploited.

Suppression, Resistance and Ecofeminism

In *Mistress*, there is a dominant male ideology about the nature, role, and characteristics of women. In Anita Nair's novel the male characters like Shyam, Stewart, Sethu, Vapa represent the male ideology that women are like nature and they have to be exploited. This journal discusses how women like Radha and Saadiya in the novel face the predicament of the male ideology, suffer at many fronts and resist the oppression they face. The methodology I have applied is eco-feminism. Eco-feminism is an awareness movement which questions the relationship of woman and nature as the subjects of exploitation. Radha and Saadiya have been dominated by their husbands, father and family and to unveil the suffering and resistance of Radha and Saadiya. Journal focus on textual analysis of the ideology and resistance.

In *Mistress*, Radha and Saadiya appear to take their life in their own hands and try to live it on their own terms. They have their own individuality and they are strong enough to follow the dictates of their heart. Saadiya, a teenager from a very orthodox Muslim family, follows the dictates of her heart and makes ultimate sacrifice for the decision she takes. Both show how they take their own decisions and are ready to face the consequences as well.

Radha is not happy with Shyam, she does not want to get married with Shyam, but her family compels her in the name of society and ritual. Evenly, Saadiya is not allowed by her father Vapa to

go out of home and venture in the alley. Sethu is another person with strong male ideology, who dominates Saadiya being lover and husband time and again.

Eco-feminism literature portrays the historical exploitation and domination of women and nature as going hand in hand, and both are seen as victims of development. It is taken as self-evident that any harm to nature harms women equally, since women are seen as closer to nature than men. None of the eco-feminist literature attempts to establish this linkage through concrete evidence or strong argument. However, eco-feminism is also interrelated with ecology as well. To make it clear Mack Canty writes:

From ecology, it learns to value the interdependence and diversity of all life forms; from feminism, it gains the insights of social analysis of women's oppression that intersects with other oppressions. Eco-feminism, in its use of ecology as a model for human behavior, suggests that we act out of a recognition of our interdependency with others, all others: human and nonhuman (Millet, 1972)

Here, it can't assert the idea that ecology act as the modal of human behavior. So, by looking at the ecology of the nature around the human periphery, one can study human nature too. In the context of the novel *Mistress* by Niar, the river 'Nila' reflects the human nature as it has been severely polluted just as the greedy and insecure polluted psyche of people living around it. River also symbolizes female and freedom at the same time. If we study about the nature of Radha, the protagonist of the novel, we find that she has extreme desire of free existence and liberation. However, like river 'Nila' has been captivated by the people living around it, her life has been captivated by her father at first and husband in the later phase. Because of the same, her life has been severely affected just like river 'Nila' has been severely affected.

Similarly, in the context of Saadiya, the sea symbolizes her means of freedom. Saadiya has been captivated by her father and her actions are limited within the house. She has keen interest in Sea and the surf. She desires to go to the sea which indicates that she wants to achieve freedom. She takes Sethu as the means of her liberation and love. However, it proves to be wrong because her desire of freedom to live her life the way she chooses is hindered. As a result, she takes sea as the means of liberation and drives into it.

On the other hand, the river 'Nila' also serves as the modal of human life, if we study the major male characters of the novel. As the river 'Nila' is polluted, the mentality of Shyam is corrupted as he is unable to upgrade himself from patriarchal psychology. As river 'Nila' has been polluted and controlled by people around it, in the same way Shyam controls the life of Radha directly or

indirectly. Though he claims to love her unconditionally, he chains her mobility and her entrance in his business world. Like river 'Nila' is affected by human action, Radha's life has been affected by different males in her life. For example, her premarital relationship destroys her life as she is impregnated and forced to have abortion which gives her psychological trauma. Similarly, after she gets married she is polluted by her own husband who rapes her despite her wish. Moreover, Chris Steward (lover of Radha) also takes advantage of her body only just like people are seen taking advantage of river 'Nila'.

The major female character in the novel Radha reflects the title and its significance. First of all, Radha becomes mistress of married man before she is married and then she becomes mistress of Chris Steward. Her position as wife and mistress, are inferior to men and their identity.

In Nepalese society, parents treat daughters as the property of others, while parents-in-law see daughters-in-law as a curse. Women who get divorced to escape oppressive marriages or who are abandoned or widowed by their husbands have no social status. Men take control over women's bodies and lives. Women are forced to take care of children while performing backbreaking household chores. In addition, women have no control over the decisions regarding household, community, and political activities. These factors add up to low self-esteem among Nepalese women, where there are so many instances (Mahat, 2003).

Nair has very clearly brought this concept to light that women in modern days may be educated and financially independent but still the rope of their lives are in the hands of men. The women living in orthodox society where the marriage is their destiny and their husbands are their masters and their duty is to obey them and serve their masters thereby giving birth to an heir. According to some instances of Radha and Saadiya:

Saadiya stared at the square of 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 it stood a solid six feet and two inches high making sure she would never see what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone.

Saadiya remains in the four walls of her house that have become her world as mentioned by her father Vapa. She just knows about her real place from the book 'Nadira's house' where she is living. Only she is allowed to read about the Arab by her tutor. Thus she knows where she is living and how is her living place from the book! The both Radha and Saadiya are treated like passive nature reflected through Nila in the novel. They both longing to know the reality want to escape from the chain of male ideology and they resist in their own way ahead somehow.

In *Mistress*, the writer compares and contrasts with great intelligence the complexity of deceit with the flash back of the protagonist Radha. The *Navarasas* present the struggle of Radha with other male characters in the novel. The book is sectioned into nine parts, each named after one of the *Navarasas*, the nine emotions or the nine faces of the heart...love, contempt, sorrow, fury, velour, fear, disgust, wonder and attachment their traditional names, of course, are used. Each section begins with a wonderful piece on that particular *rasa* in the Radha faces along all the male characters as well throughout the novel.

Overview of Radha's Plight and Resistance

It presents the struggle of Radha and her resistance towards her own husband, her boyfriend Chris and rest of the society that bound her within the four walls of her home. She is treated as the marginal by the men like Shyam and Chris Stewart. This chapter presents a textual analysis of the kinds and nature of exploitation of the protagonist Radha, evident in the novel bringing numerous textual references.

Eco-feminism; along with oppression of the women and nature also criticizes all forms of exploitation and domination. To make it clear Elizabeth Carlassare writes:

Eco-feminism holds different views on how to effect social change, and on the role of western dualism, capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism in perpetuating ecological degradation and oppression along multiple lines including gender, race, and class. Despite this diversity, eco-feminism is united by the commitment of its proponents to planetary survival and ending oppression (Carlassare, 2000) .

Here, Carlassare means to say that feminism by deconstructing oppressive social, economic, political system which is male biased, too tries to establish more viable, social and political from that values all the biological and cultural diversity where women are affirmed as a subjects. In this manner, eco-feminism is the theoretical modality taken into consideration for the deconstruction of patriarchal ideology.

Radha does not love Shyam. It is a marriage of convenience for her. Shyam loves her but they are an incompatible pair emotionally as well as culturally.

The institution of marriage has married the spontaneity of feelings, between the husband and wife by "transforming freely given feelings into mandatory duties and shrilly asserted rights" (Beauvoir, 1949, pp. 445-446). Radha is an educated modern girl, who is conscious of her individuality. Though she is married to Shyam, it is a marriage of convenience for her. She is forced to become

a housewife, and has to play the role of a traditional wife

Radha accepts her married life, casts herself in the role of a traditional wife, but she cannot love Shyam. She does not protest whenever Shyam makes love to her. He says 'When she responded to my touch, and I knew that she was trying to block a memory, I closed my mind to it. Radha thus, makes her grievances quite clear. In the Indian society a woman is not supposed to express her sufferings or her complaints against the husband openly. But, Radha is an educated, who has her own aspirations. She could not tolerate Shyam's chauvinistic attitude and his habit of saying no to everything. Shyam was using her only as a sex object, and never thought of her individual aspirations.

Here Radha is protesting against typical patriarchal domination of a husband, who decides what a wife should or should not do.

Under patriarchy, the female did not herself develop symbols by which she is described. These needs spring from the fear of otherness's of woman. Yet this notion itself presupposes that patriarchy has already been established and the male has already set himself as the human norm, the subject and referent to which female is 'other' or alien (Millet, 1972, pp. 46-47).

When Radha expresses her desire to start a business on her own, he shouts at her that he has a status in the society and she must behave as a wife to him and not to spoil his name in the society. She does not like his domineering and superior attitude. Shyam, in fact, does not like Radha to show her talent and her intellectual ability. He is aware of his own inferiority in this respect. So he opposes every proposal where she can show her intellectual ability. He is quite aware of her social and intellectual superiority.

This incident makes up Radha's mind to disobey moral norms and form alliance with Chris, an extramarital affair. Her affair with Chris is, thus, a relation for the tyrannical behavior of her husband. "Out that one should be a little more than skeptical of an over-emphasis on the significance of 'female biology' where the woman's body is seen entirely in terms of sex and reproduction (Segal, 1991, pp. 7-9)." This is a reflection of the power that patriarchy exercises over women's experiences of their own bodies. Thereby, Radha is seen entirely in terms of sex and reproduction by Shyam.

Radha has strong self-awareness, and she cherishes herself to be an independent young woman. But when her notions of independence land her in trouble, she meekly accepts a family set up. Her marriage with Shyam is a marriage of convenience, but she takes it seriously. Radha is attracted

towards Chris because she feels that he is the one who has culture, being an artist himself, while Shyam is a materialistic boorish person. Chris, she thinks, understands her. Radha, a well-educated woman, is quite aware of the fact that for Shyam she is a possession, 'a much cherished possession' (Nair, 2005, p. 53).

She does not like to be subjugated to the aggressive husband that is Shyam. P. T. Kurian remarks about this feeling of the educated women like Radha, who do not like male domination whether it is father or a husband. He says:

Cruel fathers overtly and vehemently reject and terrorize their children. They rule the family with a firm grip and become verbally and physically violent with their wives and children. They are aggressive men who dominate the lives of those around them. (Nair, 2005, p. 173)

We have come across this picture of a dominant father in *The Better Man*, the novel, in which Anita Nair has created the character of a violent patriarch in Achutan Nair, who turns his son, Mukundan into a timid man, unsure of himself, and who is responsible for the death of his wife. Shyam is ambitious. He wants to flourish and become rich. His uncle gives him money and property. He is a growing business man and an entrepreneur in that part of Kerala. He is a crafty businessman. He has a resort near river Nila where tourists and foreigners visit and stay. On the marital front, Shyam and Radha do not have children though married for eight years. Radha is unhappy about the marriage because of the behaviour of Shyam. What Shyam wants is a mistress. He wants a dutiful wife. Lois Tyson's good woman bad woman concept implies that the proper patriarchal young woman is sexually dormant until "awakened" by the man who claims her. He asserts;

I refer in the above paragraph to "good girls" and "bad girls," and this concept deserves more attention because it's another way in which sexist ideology continues to influence us. These two roles—also referred to as "Madonna" and "whore" or "angel" and "bitch"—view women only in terms of how they relate to the patriarchal order (Tyson, 2006, p. 89).

Of course, how "good girls" and "bad girls" are specifically defined will alter somewhat according to the time and place in which they live. In case of Radha, when Radha accepted the proposal to get marry with Shyam she is taken as good girl. For i.e. once Shyam did not allow to Radha to go the Factory for working and doing job, Radha Counts and presents her willingness to be independent there she has taken as bad girl. Tyson Theory makes clear that if the women are supposed to be accepted all the required of male they called good girls if not they called bad girls. So as the female character are treated in the family and society (Tyson, 2006).

Vandana Shiva in her book, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India*, criticizes the western ideology of development and its negative impacts on women and nature in the third world countries. She calls this patriarchal Western concept of development as “maldevelopment” as it is least concerned with the well-being of all human beings and other living beings deprived of their position in the society. In the book *Ecofeminism*, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies criticize the existing theories and practices and propose a practical as well as ideological ecofeminist perspectives rooted in sustainability to practice in everyday life (Mies & Shiva, 2010, pp. 205-212).

Saadiya’s struggle for freedom

Nair presents the next female character Saadhya in *Mistress*, she is also dominated by the male ideology like Radha, which is given in chapter first. Here, Saadiya also stands against her father and lover/husband Sethu. Because these both male characters keep her in patriarchal cage. Saadiya struggles so much to escape from the male domination throughout the novel. This chapter only focuses in Saadiya’s plight and her resistance to acquire freedom in her life. Saadiya’s husband and other males from this novel are the example how patriarchy has brought up the male attitude and egos in men. Rather they should be able to change the prospect of oppression, domination and inequality towards women into a new relationship of mutuality and understanding (Nair, 2005). Saadiya, the teenage daughter from the Muslim family, in Arabipattanam. Her father, Vapa Haji Najib Masood Ahmed, (Vapa for short), one of the six Chiefs of the Muslim town and the most respected man, impressed on the mind of his daughter that the Muslim women are confined to their homes, and to the street in the alley, never allowed to venture out on the main road where they might come across and be seen by the other men. Saadiya is impatient of being pinned down to the twenty by thirty feet sky above her head. The main roads and the sea-shore of Arabipattanam were only for the men. The women were not supposed to see and be seen by other human beings. Saadiya, the youngest daughter of the family hankers after freedom which the men enjoyed. She also wants to see and do and know so much. In her heart, she nurses discontent that only men are allowed to do whatever they like, and go wherever they want to, but she must remain contented to watch a patch of sky above her room, and only the maze of alleys.

Muslim women are not supposed to have participation in education and also in the economic sphere of the family and community. Saadiya is singularly lucky in the sense that she is taught to read and write at home, while other women in the house were not allowed this facility.

Life: Life in so many colors and shapes. Life that breathed and walked. Life that chewed and spat. Life that screamed and shouted. Life that mumbled and tumbled, hissed and crawled. Life that waited. Life that never be hers (Nair, 2005, p. 102).

Saadiya walked on, uncovering her face, and at this fateful moment Sethu saw her. Saadiya's face flushed with color, which created feeling in his mind. This momentous action of uncovering face changed Saadiya's life. Saadiya dreams of Sethu whom she names as Malik. The passion in her creates a strange longing in her, as she confesses to herself "My bodice feels thighs. My insides quiver with queer churning, my breath quickens, I do not understand me any if this Vaapa, you ought to have branded me so that I could never dream again" (Nair, 2005, p. 131).

Finally, she gets married and becomes pregnant. This is the feature of eco-feminism, the motherly act of giving birth and nourishing the child. The concept of reproduction in the broadest sense is, as Carolyn Merchant observes.

What draws together the various components of the eco-feminist movement is the concept of reproduction in its widest interpretation that includes biological reproduction and social reproduction of life, with the common aim of restoring the natural environment and improving life in the planet (Merchant, 2008, p. 58).

Thus, Saadiya's father is himself a Kazi, and he must set an example for others, so he severely punishes his daughter and finally abandons her. Saadiya belongs to very orthodox Muslim family and hardly knows the world outside. Her transgression is also the result of her ignorance as she is, like others, subjected to a ghettos life. Like, Hindus, Islam also looks upon women as the beings' inferior to men and has subjected women to strict rules. When she disobeys rules, she is severely punished. As Neeru Tandon observes (2008):

Violence against women has been accepted and even condoned throughout history. More than 2000 years ago, Roman law gave a man a 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 (Tandon, 2008, pp. 140-145).

This is what makes Saadiya's father punish her and banish her. Saadiya knows that walking out of her alley to the prohibited area is transgression, a disobedience her father would not approve. But she did not know the reason behind such strict rules only against women. She did not know that there are people of other faith. Her father repents for giving his dear daughter 'a little rope' to wander about. He must punish her because he might risk his honor in the society; he is being himself a Kazi.

In the book *Eco-feminism*, Vandana Shiva and Maria Mies criticize the existing theories and practices and propose a practical as well as ideological eco-feminist perspectives rooted in sustainability to practice in everyday life. Nair presents that how woman like Saadiya faces the predicament of male ideology, suffer in many fronts and resist. The study explores the struggle of women. And, women are treated as the margins. Where Saadiya has been dominated by her husband Sethu, father Vaapa and family. This chapter explores the Saadiya's struggle and questing for freedom in detail. Eco-feminism is also a tool of social development (Badal, 2017).

Conclusion: Resistance of Subjugation

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair is seeking possibilities and solutions for empowerment of women. She clearly gives a picture of domination and resistance of Radha and Saadiya as well. This study is primarily undertaken the position in contemporary Indian society and how they are suppressed in the male-dominated society and eventually how they fight patriarchy and women's desire are portrayed through the novel of *Mistress* by Anita Nair. In the delineation of the characters of Saadiya and Radha, Anita Nair tries to bring out the aspects of patriarchal domination. In the story of Saadiya, it is quite overt in the sense that her father very plainly admits that he should not have given freedom to Saadiya. He underlines his opinion that woman should not be given freedom, that woman does not deserve it at all.

In Radha's story also patriarchal domination is quite revealing in Shyam's attitude towards Radha. He asserts his right over her as a husband to have sex with her. He does not allow Radha to interfere with his business. He keeps record even of her periods. He would not allow her to use his vehicles to go anywhere because he suspects that she goes to meet Chris. Anita Nair has portrayed in her novels women who silently suffer patriarchal oppression, and also the women who rebel against it. Saadiya and Radha rebel against it in their own way. Saadiya rebels against her father and also against the husband, who would not allow her son to be brought up the way she likes. And Radha also rebels against patriarchy following her own will, flouting the moral and social norms of patriarchy. In Saadiya's case patriarchy ruthlessly controls her life disallowing a freedom of choice to her. And when she makes her choice stubbornly, she is banished from the house. Her transgression, in fact, is the result of her ignorance of the world outside her ghetto, and cloistered life. For her, Sethu was Hamid, a Muslim hero of her imagination, because she had no idea that there can be young men of other religions around. The ruthless patriarchal society keeping women ignorant and helpless, entirely dependent on the male members of the family, is responsible for the tragic end of Saadiya.

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