

FAMILIAL FRACTURES: EXPLORING FAMILY DISINTEGRATION AND SUFFRAGE OF WOMEN IN ANITA NAIR'S THE BETTER MAN

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ABSTRACT

Betrayal, disloyalty, and illicit relationships have emerged as the significant concerns affecting the intricate fabric of man-woman relationship, specifically in the context of marriage, often reducing this sacred union to a mere societal necessity. Anita Nair skillfully denotes the complexities of these relationships, masterfully mediates them with themes of disloyalty and family disintegration in her debut novel The Better Man. (2000) The title itself reflects the protagonist's inherent quest for an idealized partner in her entire life. Anita Nair vividly puts forth the monotony and vacuum in the marital relationship placing her characters amidst the abnormal marital relationships, keeping them unfulfilled and accentuating by disloyalty and unfaithfulness that seems to cast women as silent sufferers, submissive and meekly obedient accommodating within prescribed patriarchal framework only. Anita Nair's adept handling of disloyalty, illicit relationship and the thematic undercurrent of love adds depth to her debut narrative, making her work a compelling read. These elements invite diverse interpretations, seeking a kind of solace and offer a profound solution to the preservation of feminine dignity at large. The paper puts forth the intricate realm of marital relationship, shedding light on the consequential disintegration of the familial system within the narrative. Simultaneously, it explores the nuanced portrayal of female characters and their inherent quest for true identity and authenticity in life.

Keywords: *Intricate Fabric, Betrayal, Disloyalty, Familial System.*

Introduction

Anita Nair: Biographical Sketch

Anita Nair, a distinguished Indian novelist, has indelibly left her mark on the literary landscape through a compelling body of her literary works those offer the rich texture of cultural complexities, authentic life like characters supported with profound human vision of life. She is considered to be the vibrant literary novelist, acclaiming widespread admiration and recognition for her insightful portrayal of human relationship, social concern and the in-depth human psyche. Anita Nair's literary portfolio spans a diverse range of genres, encompassing novels, short stories, poetry and children's literature at large. Her initial novel The Better Man (2000) brought her literary name and fame acclaiming global attention portraying the complex dynamics of human relationship, specifically the subtleties of disloyalty and familial disintegration. Anita Nair's literary voices and choices consistently dwell around the universal themes of man-woman relationship, showcasing a profound understanding of woman's predicament, suffrage under the patriarchy. Her distinctive narrative voice dedicatedly portrays vivid picture of India illuminating the complex web of Indian women's lives demanding womanly dignity and grace in life.

The Better Man: Breaking the Marital Ties

Anita Nair's The Better Man is set against the complex dynamics of man-woman relationship, placing her female protagonist and other female characters amidst the shifting marital bonds, facing the consequences of illicit, extra marital affair, and under the shades of patriarchal pressure. Notably, the

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women in the novel are portrayed with a self-vision of life, possessing their own feminine aspirations and choices. Convincingly, they are seen asserting their self-vision, dedicated to their self-determination and set in pursuit of their feminine grace, dignity and authenticity in life. It is surprising to see them realizing their true self and dreams of life, under the burden of familial and societal expectations, offering them multiple roles of Goddesses Laxmi, Saraswati, Durga and Chandi all at once. Each of her female characters is deliberately crafted with a broader vision, dreams and aspirations, but they inevitably face psychological trauma, disintegration confronting the implications of disloyalty, betrayals and unfaithfulness. Their developmental course compels them to make individual choices, break the margins of marital relationships, at times mistake and confront the consequent repression of relationship and society in their lives.

The *Better Man* revolves around the uncertainties of matrimonial relationship, with a profound sense of suffocation in relationship, and the prescribed norms of patriarchy, prompting a poignant exploration of individual autonomy under the patriarchy. The story unfolds a compelling example of broken marital relationship and its consequences, coupled with the themes of disloyalty, betrayal and familial disintegration. Be it Anjana, Meenakshi, Valsala or Paru-Kutty, all of these characters succumb to a social restrictions, conditioned under the engaging layers of systematic marginalization, bringing acerbic interpretation of traditional restrictions of Indian women. Betrayal, disloyalty, unfaithfulness, and the aspirations of women become poignant markers of contemporary societal realities.

Anjana, the female protagonist, finds herself in a stifling marital relationship that brings her only suffocation, pressure of marital restrictions and systematic domination of patriarchy. Anjana grapples with the uncertainties of matrimony as she deals with the disloyalty bringing her psychological trauma, struggle in the village of Kaikurissi, encapsulating the suffocation, loneliness and norms of individualism. The *Better Man* symbolizes multifaceted layers of contemporary societal realities, providing a complex exploration of clash between the tradition and aspirations of modernity. The concurrent themes of betrayal, disloyalty, unfaithfulness and female dignity, become overwhelmingly reflexive to navigate the cords of relationships in a traditional, yet evolving society that undergoes metamorphosis of the age.

The *Better Man* explicates the quest for identity, self-realization and portrays women's aspiration for freedom in marital life, feminine autonomy establishing healthy husband-wife relationship. Anjana enjoys independence and self-satisfaction till she gets married to Ravindran. She wants to love and give the best to her husband but he avoids her. She seeks personal freedom in married life. When she doesn't get the same she hates everybody including herself. She endures pain, suffering a misery. She suffers the deviousness of healthy sexual life and conjugal bliss. She feels being victimized by her traditional upbringing, returns her parental home only to escape from marital cords. She seeks understanding from husband, instead incompatibility between them, brings curse in their life. (Female, 2023: 03)

Anita Nair thoughtfully explores through all possible dynamics of male-female relationship, placing female characters in the circles of marital bonds, remarkably bestowed with self-vision of life, individual aspirations, compelling them to make choices and raise voices against the societal restrictions. They assert their commitment to alternative identities and simultaneously project new dreams in various aspects of their lives. Each of her female deviates a broader understanding and a comprehensive vision of the circumstances they are placed in, and invariably face psychological trauma and disintegration of family all at once.

The entire journey of life brings them several mistakes, each leading to their respective downfalls in life. The *Better Man* proclaims around the uncertainties of matrimony, with a profound sense of suffocation, loneliness, and psychological turmoil that becomes impingent upon individualism. It serves as a compelling example of broken marital relationship and their consequences evolve with themes of failure of marital relationship. Anjana, Meenakshi, Valsala and Paru-Kutty all female characters are victimized under the darker shades of societal conditioning, engagingly destroyed with multiple layers of social restrictions and expectations, conflicting with overwhelming sense of tradition and modernity that becomes talkative in their internalized turmoil.

Anita Nair's all female characters confront their respective failure in life, due to crisis in marital relationship and patriarchal pressure. Anjana, the protagonist is brought up in frank and free atmosphere in her parental family, but adversely faces crisis in life, after her marriage. Her law's home becomes the meaningless place where she leads to brutality, ill-treatment and suffocation as she discovers loveless behavior of her husband. She leads a painful life under the authority of her husband, hates all the things around her, extremely begins to hate her existence as an Indian woman. Her marital relationship brings her merely loneliness, loveless and fruitless endeavor compelling her to seek an escape from woman's

role. Her quest for self-realization, identity and womanly dignity brings her no fruits but merely suffrage, under the tones of patriarchy, bringing her return to parental home. She deploys lack of understanding between them, mediating the failure of marital bondage, taking her to eternal silence that becomes more talkative in her vain.

Eventually, Anita Asserts her Silence as in the Words

She gave away her colorful saris and took to wearing starched. Cottons in shade as insipid, dull as her life. She locked up all her jewelry in a safe deposit box at the bank and swept all her. Fripperies away into the waste basket. (Better, 2000: 134)

Similarly, Meenakshi appears to be a vibrant role model for Anjana who aligns to her side deploying the depth of her feminine dignity and aspirations underlying the Indian woman's role in conventional model of life. Her character delineates marriage as an overwhelming establishment for a lady, seeking singularity and an escape from the grip of man. She appears to be desolate individual seeking obvious concerns in life that becomes a platform for women to challenge a gender biased societies hegemonic tends, examining their offered roles in society. Valsal exemplifies the struggle against social constraints unfolding her part in the story. Paru-Kutty also dwells around the consequences of being an Indian woman and additionally a slave. Her husband shows his manly authority, to illtreat her by all possible means, at his whims and fancies, ignore her womanly aspirations and kill her womanly spirit, and at the same time expect her to please everyone in marital relationship. He suppresses her feminist and her human demands ignoring her significant role in family. In short, Anita Nair offers a profound and comprehensive picture of Indian patriarchy, that brings painful existence, suffocation to women under the tones of marital relationship that eventually becomes unbearable, as Anjana comes forth breaking the norms, escaping to a loveless, meaningless and self-less existence.

Both Anjana and Meenakshi suffer the pangs of broken marital relationship, as the consequences of disloyalty, fidelity of their husbands. Their choices and voices for economic autonomy bring them suffrage in entire life. Paru-Kutty's life gets ruined, due to intervention of another woman in their marital relationship. All these women are victimized, marginalized and destroyed being conditioned and broken apart in their law's homes. Their laws show least human concern for their feminine dignity and human needs. Eventually, they confront disintegration of family, and become silent, but their silence becomes more talkative as they challenge their broken relationship, divorced parents, escaping the consequences of illicit relationships and suffocation therein. Anita Nair's each female character is brought to challenge the conventional patriarchy of Indian society seeking a kind of solace for women, demanding equality, dignity and humanist approach towards them. Considering the illustrations, Anita Nair asserts

In The Better Man, Perhaps, what I seek now is a friend like I have never had before. Someone to share a smoke and my thoughts with. Someone who will see life with the same eyes as I do; experience the same lift of spirit when mine soars. Someone whose destiny is woven with mine even though we are bound by neither blood nor any other tie. (Quotable, Web.)

Anita Nair's deploys Anjana as an educated, free minded, city-bred and aspirant girl who becomes silent sufferer, at the hands of her dominant husband, who likes nothing in her except her body. Her husband's disloyalty, infidelity brings breach in their marital relationship complicating their lives that eventually ends up beating up Anjana. The Better Man reveals several dimensions of Indian women's lives, making them submissive, meek and obedient role models accommodating under the restrictions of conventionalism. Yet, Nair's women are rebellious, aspirant of liberal life and appear to be independent in their thoughtful orientation of modern life. They admire and acclaim modernist approach of life, seeking an escape, freedom from the prescriptions of Indian society. This becomes reflexive when Anjana asserts her belief in love, "Love is a colorless, volatile, Liquid. Love ignites n burns. Love leaves no residue neither smoke nor ash. Love is a poison masquerading as spirit of Wine. (Better, 2000: 143) Anita Nair postulates the trauma of compulsory living with one's split inner self in addition to the want to camouflage the non-life of this sort of self that eventually becomes suffocative. She picks up women from real life, textures them with fictional colors of imagination and puts forth the manifold of factually fictional characters.

When Achutan Nair leads to Burma, he avoids taking Paru-Kutty with her as she was pregnant; he systematically avoids his responsibility to her. Additionally, he deliberately avoids keeping any contact with her for years together, never enquires whether he had a son or a daughter, and engages in an illicit relationship with Ammini that kills everything worthwhile in their marital relationship eventually. This systematic betrayal brings merely internal crisis and trauma in Paru-Kutty adversely affecting her delicate

feminine conscience and making her silent in her life. Anita Nair explicitly mediates an insult of a dutiful wife, in the mouth of an authoritative man under patriarchy as:

I'm willing to live with the shame of your taking a mistress. But I'm not going to let you flaunt how little I mean to you. I am your wife and I insist you treat me with the due respect to me. And what if I don't. He sneered as his fingers bit into her upper arms. ... For as long as I'm alive, I will decide who lives in this house and who doesn't (Better, 2000: 143)

Contrary to this, SelvaLakshmi views Mukundan Nair emerging as emergent man leading to become The Better Man who alters himself in due course of his life. He turns from a common man to the person who feels no responsibility towards himself and shares no concern for others. She refers to the inherent internal forces that keep guiding us towards the vision of better human life. However, she offers him a human consideration for his manliness as

Mukundan undergoes an important role in the novel. The novelist brings out a better man from a common man, the person who is unable to feel responsible neither for him nor for the others whom he loves. With his friend Bhasi's help, Mukundan is relieved from the memories of his childhood days which are terrifying him of his domineering father. Every man is guided by a force that is individual and unfathomable. No man is the master of another man's destiny. (Common, 2017. 02)

Achutan Nair does not show any care or concern towards his son instead he shows his violence power. His self-doubt and selfless feelings signet his dominating powers. The conflicting relationship between father-son deliberately underlines crisis in relationship with huge generational gap in the two.

Paru-Kutty, eventually, faces the death of her mother, problematizing the life of Mukundan, fills him with deeper sense of guilt for his mother. Paru-Kutty symbolizes woman's quest for dignity in life, self-reliance and autonomy but eventually fails to achieve one either. She demands self-respect, womanly honor and a space for human living. Similarly, Meenakshi believes in true love with Balan, who flies to Europe, keeps no contact with her. Meenakshi suffers in silence, turns to a Naxalite and yet is seen playing the role of a dutiful wife taking care of Balan, being affect by Tuberculosis. Valsala figures as a wife an aged school master Prabhakaran, devoid of freedom in lie. She aspires free, autonomous life, bears no fruits, and falls in love with Sridharan, rebels against the patriarchy, but leads to miserable sexual and physical turmoil only. Her internal dilemma brings her merely pain and internal turmoil as she years for happy sexual and physical freedom from her husband. Her life turns to be unpleasant, fruitless as she leads directionless and meaningless existence only.

Anita Nair has examines the inner identity of her all female characters in a psychological way. Like Anita Desai, Nair also depicts the psyche of her women characters of all age groups. She also focuses on the tactics of readjustments her female characters in order to create an identity of their own.(Self,2016: 03)

Conclusively, The Better Man mediates the boredom, vacuum and emptiness in the marital relationship that becomes unbearable as the contemporary Indian women, unlike Anjana and others, lead to a suffocative environments making their existence merely as fruitless, and meaningless existence. Anjana, Valsala, and Paru-Kutty do accord with familial disintegration due to failure of marital bondage, affecting their psychological conscience and integrity at large. Millions of such women, facing the duality of tradition and modernity have confronted suffocated existence. Collectively, they sought individual autonomy, asking for human space and consideration, being aspirant of their feminine grace, dignity and honor. They were aspirants of self-liberty, self-realization under the hues of broken familial and marital relationships, being crushed under the tones of societal pressure and patriarchy. The burden of broken relationship could bring them only disillusionment, lead them to suffer respective predicament against their true love for their males and family. Symbolically, they represent psychological and familial disintegration with weakness of their own. They rediscover their self, orient their lives accordingly, and explore the barrenness of society and vacuum in loveless life. Marriage, for them, remains merely as social necessity, depriving them from every right, placing them under male dominance, the obvious supremacy. Anita Nair's The Better Man mediates the overwhelming portrayal of this weakest society causing self-destruction, systematic marginalization, and objectification women that gets interlinked with the failure of marital and familial relationship eventually. Simultaneously, it puts forth the necessity to redefine the prescriptive norms of marital relationship, asking equal space, human concern and approach for healthy, harmonious life and peaceful existence of women affirming them womanly dignity, honor and self-respect.

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