



Diasporic Sensibility and the theme of Self-Recognition

in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

S.Latha¹, Dr.V.Suganthi²

¹Ph.D., Research Scholar, Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College,

Rasipuram-637410, Tamil Nadu, India.

²Assistant Professor in English, Thiruvalluvar Government Arts College,

Rasipuram-637410, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

At present, there are several writers dealing with the study of diasporic sensibility in their works. This piece of paper focuses on how India's recent writer Anita Nair who is a prominent writer in the land of Indian English Literature explores the theme of diasporic sensibility and self recognition through the characters in her novel. Diasporic writing takes place a significant role in 21st century. It has some characteristic features like quest for identity, nostalgia, familial relationships other than up-rooting and re-rooting. Anita Nair presents the diasporic system as a system of consensual values. She makes the characters to get their identity with the help of diasporic sensibility. The narration of location gives identity not only to her characters but also herself too. She describes homeland culture and her nostalgia through the work. The different trends of life in alien lands are described beautifully in her work. This paper shows how the character Koman in *Mistress* is tied to his ancestral land.

KEY WORDS: culture, diaspora, nostalgia, recognition, trauma.

Diasporic Sensibility and the theme of Self-Recognition in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary scenario Diaspora has become a valuable tool of post modernism. The writers with the help of the characters show how the people living on the margin feel exiled and alienated from their family line and find no place of their own. Generally in Diasporic sensibility the sense of failure, nostalgia, alienation, loneliness and shock is inter-connected with each other. Moreover the main characteristic features of the diasporic writings are the quest for identity, uprooting and re-rooting, insider and outsider syndrome, nostalgia, nagging sense of guilt. Diasporic writing is also a voice of those living



on the margins and who are homeless. Migration normally takes place owing to different reasons and in the Indian context the migratory movements were directed by historical, political, financial reasons higher education, better prospects and marriage. However, the Indian community has shown greater sense of adjustments, flexibility, mobility and accessibility. The sense of homelessness which every immigrant suffers is genuine and intense. At present it has been seen that this thought has been reduced and made less intense through their social networking and sense of unity.

2. DIASPORIC SENSIBILITY AND SELF-RECOGNITION IN ANITA NAIR'S *MISTRESS*

2.1. Koman's Identity

Anita Nair born who was born in Shornoor a small town in north side of Kerala firmly exhibits the diasporic sensibility. She represents her homeland culture and her nostalgia through the novel *Mistress* the third work of hers. She helps the readers to experience the different trends of life in alien lands. The attachment to the native land of the character Koman is clearly observed in this novel. This novel focuses on the ancient dance form Kathakali of Kerala and the other events that regularly take place in Kerala. *Mistress* revolves around the character Koman, the Kathakali dancer and teacher who live only for his art. Right from childhood, Koman is naturally interested in the kathakali dance and his country. His curiosity in his art is so irresistible that none can control his love towards his favourite dance Kathakali. He is interested to gain his identity only as a kathakali artist that too in his own country India. He has searched his identity only in his home land as an artist of Kathakali. His life is fully filled by the strong love for the art kathakali. He thinks that in an alien country the pure art like kathakali is reduced to the level of a commodity.

Sundaran, Koman's fellow dancer and fake artist tries to get fame and money by combining native art kathakali with western dance. As Koman is true to his art he is not interested at this fusion and the crumbling of the identity of kathakali and also he feels that he would get sense of power and confidence only when he exposes himself as kathakali dancer. When he is attacked by the words of others, he gets collapsed and loses his confidence. Nevertheless those wild activities mould him to face any oddities and trails of life. Aashan, the great mentor for his art advises Koman as:

Read not just Kathakali texts, but anything you can lay your hands on; reading will broaden your horizontal. Observe for that too is important. See hear, taste and feel and absorb around you. Art cannot feed off itself. It needs life to sustain it. So go and live life.

(327)

Angela is a student learning Kathakali. She admires Koman as he is good-natured, playful and an affectionate teacher. He is generous and romantic by nature. She starts desiring him. She feels that she is a part of him. Koman too has an affair with Angela. They start living together. Angela and Koman move to London.



He is unable to prove his identity as a Kathakali artist in an alien culture when he lands in London with Angela. He thinks that Kathakali loses its original identity in an alien place. As he is not satisfied there, he has left London without informing Angela. Success is becoming what one is capable of becoming. Progressing or moving towards a worthwhile goal is very significant. He wishes to show his identity as an artist in his own land. As Koman by nature a good human being, he recommends Sundaran's name for the teaching assignment and scholarship abroad as he knows well that Sundaran loves the art Kathakali only to earn. Then Sundaran gets an opportunity to go to a foreign country to show Kerala's traditional art to western audiences. He never returns to India as he got satisfaction in the alien country. But in contrast Koman has got satisfaction only with his dancing school in his own country.

He gets his identity only as a Kathakali artist in his own country. He says, "Without Kathakali am nothing." (414) His life is thoroughly sustained by the intense love towards the art Kathakali. He says, "It is of no consequence to me how I am perceived or how the world thinks of me, as a man or a dancer. What more do I say, expect that it is enough that I don my colours. It is enough that I am allowed to slip into the skin of a character. When I dance, know who I am". (422)

2.2 Koman- Mirror of Indian Culture

While surviving in London both Koman and Angela are very happy for a short duration only and then the problems arise; pop up, one after another and Koman is totally dependent on Angela both financially and emotionally. Creation of any identity masculine or feminine – rests mainly upon the patterns of power structures that exist in a society. The Indian male is largely shown to set beliefs in which male supremacy is unchallenged and female subjugation is taken for granted. The male identity is mainly built through personal possessions and achievements. A man identifies himself with his work and the prosperity he has obtained and women sometimes figure on his list of possessions. Men are always in a position to oppress women in any familial role they play like son, father, husband and brother. In Indian society the familial patterns assigned to man and woman is, the man has to be the leader, who has to lead, the woman is the follower. One can get examples from ethics for this leader and follower. The ethic character Sita has followed her husband when he is exiled. Savithri has digged death to regain her husband. Draupadi shared her husband's travails. A person who is brought up in this culture is unable to cope up his life with Angela in an alien country.

This causes friction between them. Money can make the best of friends into enemies. Male ego is hurt and Koman decides to move out of Angela's house. He feels estranged and lonely as long as he is in London. Nair makes the point quite eloquently in the character Koman. He becomes completely docile in front of his German lady Angela who silently has the power relations tilted towards her in the relationship. The power imbalance, or power mainly polarized towards Angela in *Mistress* makes life unbearable for Koman in an alien land Europe. The thought of having to live a life off his wife's money and dictums undermines the 'male' in Koman. Because of this inability to digest the power hierarchy finally makes Koman leave Angela as well as the European culture



altogether, where as in his home land he feels that he has a control over his women and his art. He feels that his home land is the right place for him to show his identity. When he deals with women like Maya in his 'home land', he is totally demanding, dictating his every fancy and expecting it to be fulfilled.

After returning from Europe he rejoins his dance school as an ashan. When he has been invited to Europe, which German University offered Koman a teaching fellowship he has refused to accept the offer as he knows the shallowness of perception of the people in the western world. At first when he has reached London with Angela he has the hope that the world would be his stage to shine. But he feels inferiority complex in the whiter world and this makes him return his root. With the help of the character Christopher, Anita Nair gives the reader an approach of how an abroad person views at the Indian culture and the fixed notions that they came with. After his arrival, while coming down the stairs of the railway station, Chris remarks that, "Philip told me about this view. He said I should stand here at the fourth pillar on the bridge and what I saw would make me want to never leave." (9)

2.3 Diasporic Sensibility

Diasporic sensibility of her works has provided her a healthy location for recreating home, country and her own identity. Nair regularly comes up with narration of her home land makes her create an identity not just for her characters but herself too. Koman's memories about his home town Kerala when he is in London with Angela is given in the following lines:

At home I would have gone to the kitchen, gathered a handful of dried coconut fronds, lit a fire and warmed a huge cauldron of water, while the water is heated, I would rub oil into my skin and then bathe in that water scented with smoke and wood fire. After that I would serene myself with plate of rice, not these bleached white grains, but the reddish brown rice still pasting of the earth and the sunshine. There would be a curry of green papaya cooked in butter milk and a piece of fried fish. (378)

This kind of representation gives the reader a beautiful graphical analysis and comparison as well as it makes the readers know the differences of eastern and western habits which make a migrant so uneasy and alienated in a foreign land. The diasporic community people may have a strange character that is double consciousness. It allows the individual to go beyond the disappointments by emphasizing the strengths of self and community.

Critic Clifford voices:

Experience of loss, marginality and exile (differently cushioned by class) are often reinforced by systematic exploitation and blocked advancement. This constitutive suffering coexists with the skills of survival: strength in adaptive distinction, discrepant cosmopolitanism, and stubborn visions of renewal. Diaspora consciousness lives loss and hope as a defining tension. (312)

The theme of diasporic sensibility is sprinkled everywhere in the novel *Mistress*. Maya Vinai says:



Throughout Anita Nair's novels we can trace a double consciousness pervading her writings or a like/dislike relationship which can be construed as a byproduct of the ideological construct fashioned by external stimuli and inner consciousness. (44)

Throughout the novel she strongly exhibits the diasporic sensibility. One of the major happenings of many migrant and diasporic writers is their search for roots and identity. Anita Nair is no exceptional case towards this. Creativity is the main element which is presented in the diasporic writings.

3.CONCLUSION

Diaspora is like a seed which has been scattered in the wind. One can get a new creation of oneself as a fruit in diaspora and this creation stands as a reward for the many losses suffered. It is known that every diasporic movement clutches a historical implication, as it carries within itself the essential part of the nations' history. It is a journey towards self-realization, self-recognition, self-knowledge and self-definition. As Maya Vinai says, "Nair's works are shaped by the active engagement with the dominant cultural forms to establish a space for oneself". (47)

REFERENCES

- [1] Nair, Anita. *The Mistress*. New Delhi: Penguin, 2005. Print
- [2] Vinai, Maya. *Anita Nair's Fiction*. New Delhi: Prestige Publisher, 2014. Print
- [3] Clifford, James. 'Diasporas', *JSTOR: Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 9, No. 3, Wiley, 1994. Print