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WOMEN SUBJUGATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN ANITA NAIR'S "MISTRESS".

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ABSTRACT

Women play variety of significant roles in our society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in efficient manner in the modern society, she is weak because men are still, strongest gender of the society. Women are still treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected entire life-be it by her father, husband or son. It is obvious that women are still subjected to persecution by the male even in the present days. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The predicaments of women continue to be the same or rather worse despite the entire efforts for women empowerment. To eradicate this gender inequality, many women writers are writing about the embarrassing situation of women in our society. The literary writers with true concern towards the present predicament of women use their literary medium for the awakening of the human conscience which affects dormancy towards the pitiful condition of women. In modern days, the women writers play a pivotal role to create awareness and empower women through their novels. Anita Nair is one such genuine writer who creates life-like female characters in her works. These characters reflect the real condition of present women from different social strata. Nair's true concern and eagerness to uplift the women, make her depict her female characters as a beacon of hope to the oppressed ones because she makes her female characters rise up with their inborn potential and confidence from their utterly weak and helpless situations.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Discrimination, Predicaments, Persecution.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of great regret that even in this era of the twenty-first century; women are not given the freedom that men enjoy in the male dominated society. Women were treated as less-than-equal to men in many ways. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. Women are still treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected entire life-be it by her father, husband or son. It is obvious that women are still subjected to persecution by the male even in the present days.

Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. It is an undeniable fact that women have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, physically and mentally set to perform on a egalitarianism with men, but also destitute of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their fears and their distress. Women play variety of significant roles in our society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in efficient manner in the modern society, she is weak because men are still strongest gender of the society. Women play a great role in the growth and development of the society and making it an advanced and modern society.

The role of women in the development of society is of utmost importance. In fact, it is the only thing that determines whether a society is strong and harmonious , or otherwise. Women are the backbone of the society. In order to eradicate the all forms of discrimination against women, they should be empowered. And also the fastest way to change society is to mobilize the women of the world . "The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all." The topic of women empowerment is a burning issue all over the world. Women equality with men and empowerment is a universal issue. Even in India, the issues "gender equality" and women empowerment picked up momentum in the last three decades.

DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

'EMPOWERMENT' may be described as a process which helps people to assert their control over the factors which affect their lives. Empowerment of women means developing them as more aware individuals, who are politically active, economically productive and independent and are able to make intelligent discussion in matters that affect them.

The Oxford American Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "to make (someone) stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling their life and claiming their rights." It means to give women power and help them face the challenges of being a woman in society.

In general women empowerment refers to increasing and improving the social, economic, political and legal strength of the women to ensure equal rights to women and to make them confident enough to claim their rights. Gender equality implies a society in which women and men enjoy the same opportunities, rights in all spheres of life. Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in distribution of power and influence, have equal opportunities for financial independence through work.

Anita Nair has earned the fame of being India's well known author of many novels. In a very short span of time, this wonderfully acclaimed lady has achieved the feat of penning down more than ten novels, from a time when she had no idea that her work would end up being published. She is also the proud recipient of many prized awards. She is best known for putting down her imagination in simple words for the readers. Two of her novels, namely, 'The Better Man' and 'Ladies coupe' have now been successfully translated into 21 different languages. She is a post modern Indian woman writer in English, has earned much critical attention and has been acclaimed both in India and abroad as a significant novelist. Anita Nair emerged as one of the contemporary torchbearer amongst feminist writers who exhibited the issues of the empowerment of women. She always focuses on the problems of woman in our society. She draws one's attention to women's exploitation, and discrimination and she uses her characters as a great example for women empowerment.

The thrust area of this paper will be on the novel(*Mistress*) of Anita Nair. It will explore the journey of female characters from subordination to freedom and empowerment. The woman protagonists would be liberated from the shackles of the patriarchal set up and come to live life on their own terms and conditions.

The focus of this paper is on the empowerment of female characters in the selected novel of Anita Nair. Anita Nair emerged as one of the contemporary torchbearer amongst feminist writers who exhibited the issues of the empowerment of women. In Anita Nair's works, the female protagonists are placed through the grueling experiences of domestic oppression. This gives them a reason to stay alive and discover their inner dynamism.

Anita Nair's "Mistress" novel roams around the contradicting and complimentary life situations of travel writer Christopher Stewart, a Kathakali dancer whom he meets in Kerala named Koman, and the niece of Koman, Radha, who happened to be locked up into the traditional housewife's role. Stewart's and Radha's affection for each other, perplexed situation of Radha's husband Shyam and Koman's life story and his relationships, are slowly revealed in the story. The novel repeatedly questions paternity ranging from Stewart to the unborn child of Radha.

Anita Nair's "Mistress" novel project women subjugation and their suppression in the contemporary Indian society and explores the depth of relationship between Shyam and Radha. In their relationship we find that Radha's role as a wife blocks her freedom.

The centre female character Radha's marriage does not confirm her security and identity. Governed by the framework of the established norms of the society, she regulates her existence to the conventional feminine aesthetics of continuing a deformed relationship with her husband. A search starts outside the marriage when life and the relationship became mundane and an obligation to live with. She is drawn to Chris- a traveller writer who has come to Kerala to write story on Koman, Radha's uncle and a famous Kathakali dancer. Shyam, her husband- who runs the hotel, is in love with Radha who in turn looks down on him. Shyam tries to run his wife's life like he runs his business. He is quite possessive for her. From recording her menstrual cycle dates to dictating the chores to be done in free time, he expects Radha to confirm to his dictated norms.

She comes across to him not more than a materialistic asset who has to be owned and possessed jealously. All such issues and many more sent Radha in to the arms of Chris. Whether it is having a pre marital affair, undergoing an abortion or an extra marital affair, Radha dared to violate the stereotype patriarchal society. That is why at the end, she refuses to be a wife and a mistress. She decides to give her unborn child a fatherless identity and be a mistress of self.

Another female character in the novel, Saadiya, a Muslim had defied her community to come to stay with Sethu , a Hindu She soon came to realize the constraint of religion in their relationship. After an altercation with Sethu, she decided to leave him and her baby behind .Since the conservative patriarchal society would not have taken her back into the community, she drowned herself and thus became the mistress of self.This was her way of showing her resentment against patriarchal society.

Nair's *Mistress* is about the possibilities of exploring changes within oneself. Her woman protagonist Radha is always willing and receptive for redefining attitudes and relationships shorn of undue romantic embellishments. She want to free herself from the stultifying traditional concerns and cherish a spontaneous surge towards life. One can trace the struggle of a woman protagonist to seek a meaningful definition of life. She vociferously puts forth the private truth about what woman want. Her women feel their emotions strongly, yet retain a constant value judgment, about themselves as well as, about other relationships they have to live through. Though they belong to different stratum of society, they do possess an inner independence to experiment with their life. In the process, life yields self knowledge which imparts them the strength of accepting that a woman desire to succeed like an individual is not incompatible with her desire for love or small pleasures of domesticity. However Nair is excellent in depicting the inner furies of women and their rising tone for emancipation and empowerment.

In all the works of Anita Nair, each aspect of womanhood is talked with graciousness and sensitivity generating the message of womanhood. The choices and preferences of women in the patriarchal society are well talked and crafted artistically in all the above mentioned works. She has been able to celebrate the spirit of womanhood and uplift their sovereignty and integrity. The constant struggle for self assertion and identity is

paid off with the discovery of inner strength and the courage to evolve and construct a new image of womanhood.

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