



Feminism in the Anita Nairs's *The Better Man*

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Anita Nair's first novel *The Better Man* is a welcome change from the trite East west encounter theme. Nair sets her story in an imaginary town called kaikurrisi. This fictional town is described as somewhere in south Indian and having some elements of R.K.Narayan's Malgudi, Hardy's Wessex discovered by some critics. The imaginary towns that Hardy, Narayan, and Nair represented are closer in that the places are the example of the modern changeover of England and India respectively. Nair's *The Better Man* is the first book. She throws spotlights upon women issues, which also received good reviews.

Starting from Paru Kutty to Anjana, Nair's women characters grow stronger and show that the emergence of the New Women is not a myth or a utopia. However this New Women is mainly influenced by the west and expresses their resistance against oppressive element of Indian culture by using the value of the west as resources. Women in her novels struggles for freedom, asserts equality and searches for identity. Anita Nair's women, though having lost their identities, in the society, try to struggle and find selves in an extraterrestrial background in which many at least partially successful. The postcolonial critiques hope to give us new and culturally rooted insights regarding women.

The first novel we examine is *The Better Man* in which Anita Nair shows the oppression of a man named Mukundan by his father. Patriarchy means the rule of the father. Anthropologists first used it to describe this condition in all societies. The older male has a privileged position in relation to other members of the society, younger males and those males not related by blood. Feminists do not restrict the term to a certain kind of society but use it refer to male dominance as found in all societies.

Anita Nair in *The Better Man* illustrates the concept of patriarchy in relation to male domination. She shows how the rules of the father operate in the family and the extension of his power in the society. Mukundan

was brought up to follow his father's wishes. He was not allowed to do anything according to his own wishes. When Mukundan was thirteen, he loved literature but his father did not want his son to be a writer. So, he restricted him to writing only official letters. Later on he did not dare read any books, because "It caused too many in expectable emotions to surface."

Patriarchy as Kate Millett describes is twofold first, the female is dominated by the male and second, the younger male is dominated by the older. The forms of patriarchy vary according to place and historical background of the society in which these forms occur. Patriarchy is explained and defined in a number of ways. Women face various kinds of patriarchy in their everyday lives. Patriarchy is a system of symbols that provide the male control over woman's sexuality and fertility and that are used as to affirm the authority of the institution of male domination.

Patriarchy is also used to characterize the system and social arrangements that organize and maintain women's oppression. In all spheres of social life, patriarchy can be seen it is not constrained to the family, it extends to the economy, policy, medical science and many other institutions. Patriarchy describes how the father's role extends to the public and determines which roles women have to play in public. The male dominated system persuades men to think only of their assets and property. Whatever they do is in order to maintain and improve their assets. Prabha Devi moved from the family owned school to a convent school to be groomed well by nuns, speak English properly, and to be learn to be more fashionable.

The way her father brought her up and the facilities he provided her were in order to find a groom who might help him in his career. Our society is based upon the exchange of women. Women are told without the exchange of women, society falls back into the anarchy of natural world, the randomness of the animal kingdom. Social order is assured through men circulating women among themselves, according the rules of the incest taboo. These exchanges are the base of patriarchal societies and occur exclusively among men.

Women, commodities, and currency always pass from one man to another, therefore the labour force and its products, including those of mother earth, are objects that are exchanged among them. Anita Nair's definition of subjectivity emerges through her strong character Bhasi. In her view subjectivity means to learn to say, no, and put one's self first as Bhasi did:

" not to bow an buckle to any pressure. To overcome a childish need for the world's approval."
(1999:104)

Bhasi had passed through some very difficult stages to become a subject. Later on he was involved in healing of people physically and mentally. He wanted to help Mukundan recover from his pain, the pain that settled deep down in his mind. He knew that the remedy existed in Mukundan's own mind. He wanted him to realize his energy and strength in order to become a subject free from the tyranny of patriarchy. Bhasi showed

him the internalized "rule of father" in Mukundan's mind and showed him how to step into the process of becoming a subject Mukundan did not want to be considered only as Achunthan Nair's son.

Achunthan wanted to be counted as a worthy and powerful man as his father was. So he had the desire to be a member of the Committee Hall. As a result he pushed Anjana to the margin and ignored whatever he promised to her. He also did not try to solve Bhasi's problem. He allowed the Power House Ramakrishna exile him. There are three kinds of subordination man subordinating woman, man subordinating another man and woman subordinating another woman.

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