

## Complexities in Art and in Life as portrayed in Anita Nair's Mistress

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**Abstract :**Complexity as an idea is the pertinent gap between human mind's perception of the world and the response of the society. The individual infuses the intricate structures of caste, religion etc. into the folds of life thus making a complicated puzzle. Anita Nair through her fiction portrays the individual's psyche from a keen perspective and studies the contours of art. This paper focuses on the complexities in Art and Life as reflected in her novel titled 'Mistress'.

**Keywords:** Art, complexity, life, mind, psyche.

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Art extends the wings of imagination and makes the individual view the world from varied perspectives. It attains sanctity with the involvement of the essence of the forces of nature replicating life in full vigor. The stimulation of the reserved experiences with the warmth of emotion makes the intuitive edge to come out connecting the minds of the world. In the words of Jebaruby, "An artist is one who translates life experience into works of art. Moreover, the artist manifests his self and culture in his art. Artist no longer plays the role of an idle moralist living on the ivory tower of philosophy but an activist" (*The role of artist redefined, Journal of English language teaching and Literary studies*).

The life of an artist is compounded with complexities that drive him towards the illusion of perfection. Koman represents an artist sandwiched between the essence of art and the impressions of it in the modern world of hypocrisy. He withdraws from the aspect of commercialization and thinks of promoting the true characteristics of art. Koman all through his life believes in the fact that art stands high in its endeavor and the artist becomes a mere instrument in the fulfillment. But he finds the world of art propagating the other perspective where the artist controls art and exploits it to his own needs. Koman becomes aloof in this regard and it becomes difficult for him to evolve as an artist. He attributes his success to the extended objectives of art as he says, " I am an ordinary man made extraordinary by my art. In this story of my life, perhaps you will discover, as I will in the telling, how my art ruled my thoughts and life, how it helped me escape the confines of my secret fears. In the end, that is what counts. That art imbues meaning to ones existence" (Nair, 262).

Kathakali is equipped with complexities that make the form become a divine art. It demands rigorous exercise to body, tiring the veins to make movements turn flexible in presenting the emotions. Apart from that, it urges the mind towards comprehending the traits of the character to be enacted as the artist's face reveals the characteristics of the person. The artist has to assimilate the conditions prevailing in the world of the character portrayed and adapt himself and his mindset to suite the interests of the audience without distorting the emotional mood of the situation. The technique of Kathakali includes a highly developed language of gesture, through which the artist can convey whole sentences and stories. The body movements and footwork are very rigorous. To attain the high degree of flexibility and muscle control required for this art form, a Kathakali dancer undergoes a strenuous course of training and special periods of body massage," says Vijayakumar, a famous Kathakali exponent.

Koman as a migrant experiences the conflict of cultural difference and becomes nostalgic. In his own words, " It began to rain. I saw the drops of water splash against the window. In my home even the sound of the rain was different. Here, the rain was feeble and the smell of it was a musty, dank odour of unwashed bodies and rationed heat. Grey skies, the stale, sour smell of damp, and a perpetual hunger. What had I exiled myself to?" (Nair, 378). In the words of Maya Vinay, "Though Anita Nair is classified as stay-at-home writer by the literary circles and academic institutions, Nair's Fiction strongly exhibits the diasporic consciousness. Born in Shornoor, a small town in Northern Kerala and brought up in Avadi, 22 kms. Away from Chennai her heart holds a fond longing for her native home state, Kerala. This longing is evident in the glowing terms in which she describes the landscape and the obeisance she pays to the rich cultural heritage of Kerala in her narrative" (Vinay, 40).

The problem is a result of the loss of identity amidst the new culture. Nostalgia can also be a reason, which doesn't allow an individual to adapt himself to the new surroundings. It questions the existence of him as fear engulfs making him lose the ability to think. The fear of future often disturbs the migrant in facing the challenges. The individual's power to live props up from the conditions he was habituated to. The habitat

provides comfort with the proximity of all the facilities that the new environment doesn't offer and urges that they be acquired. The struggle for existence and the insecurity resulting from the displacement can also be a cause for the migrant's melancholy that affects the confidence levels.

Though religion is a way of life, it becomes a complexity owing to the deviations made and the essence construed by the mankind. Instead of promoting peace for which it is formed, it became a shield for a human being to safeguard his ego and weaknesses, thus resulting in chaos. The accessibility rights given to the individuals lead to the exploitation of its core for the selfish needs giving a distorted version of it. The conflicts among the people are often considered to be the result of the injustice meted out in the hands of the other sect in the distribution of resources and make them crave for power over the other. On the other hand, the way of the world becomes the culprit as in a sociological structure that accommodates people, it becomes difficult for a large entity or a group to value the ideas of everyone and as man's instinct craves for identity there will always be an individual who tries to move away from the large entity to establish a separate group. When two groups operate in the same region, the will to win over the ideology of the opponent group arrives, and leaves the world in a catastrophe.

The idea gets projected when the Doctor objects the marriage of Sethu and Saadiya. Sethu makes a comment in frustration saying, "I believed that you would find it in you to offer us some of the precious Christian charity of spirit you talk so much about. But then, you always draw from the Bible what suits you and ignore the rest" (*Nair, 184*).

Anita Nair portrays the same issue when she says about the living conditions of Saadiya and her family. She clearly mentions that the natives built alleys exclusively for women to protect them from the evil intentions of the foreign inhabitants. She insulates the idea of religion with its customs as a reason behind the imposition of the rule that forbids women from moving in the open.

Sethu and Saadiya face the conflict when they beget a child. Religion becomes the bone of contention externally but it is the unrest created in their minds owing to the other factors that contribute to Saadiya's death. The words of Saadiya's father when he comes to know about the her trespass, reveal the issue of Patriarchy and insecurity but not religion to which such causes are attributed to. He says, "This is a lesson for you as much as it is for me, that it is unwise to give girls even a little rope. That it isn't in women to understand the nuances of freedom" (*Nair, 130*).

Saadiya's insecurity as a result of being alone, away from her family contributed to the possessive nature and she fights with Sethu owing to it. She having been brought up in a confined space, always wished to set free herself and walks into the open alley. Her wish gets revealed as she feels, "There is singing in my head that says, there is so much to see, so much to do, so much to know. It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want, see and do whatever you like, and I am expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys" (*Nair, 99*).

Saadiya's insecure feeling and her position in the depressed state could be the result of the frustration she might have faced in her inability to establish a border between the reality and the dream world.

In the words of Dr. Shanmugam and Saravana Kumar, "Saadiya's motivation is not difficult to trace, as it is mentioned quite explicitly several times; whatever she does, is motivated by the longing for freedom and the "familiar sense of despair" she feels every time she contemplates her life within the walls. How important her need to follow her decision is, is apparent from how far she goes when pursuing it. The need to experience true freedom is a stimulus that makes her take one step after another until she meets her limits. Saadiya's faith that becomes more and more important to her. Crossing the limits of the external laws helps her to find her internal limits that, at the end, lead her to yet another infringement of the rules. Realizing that her faith brings her more freedom than she could possibly ever experience on her own merit, while her life limits the experiences of her faith, she takes a decision that is supposed to free her from both the freedom that limits her soul and the limits of faith that bring freedom to it. To reconcile the two longings she experiences, she aims at the freedom that death brings. This is, however not a mere search for the ultimate freedom; at the same time it is a new violation of another set of rules, a whole set as in order to do so, she has to abandon her son and her man. Saadiya's violation of the rules is motivated by the longing for freedom, which eventually brings her back to following the rules, although her reputation has been damaged and the limits will consequently be harsher. In this respect, her breaking the rules can be understood as a bi-product of her search for freedom, thus being a limit in itself. Finding the freedom she was actively seeking, she paradoxically abandons everything that it offers" (*Shanmugam, 162 – 74*).

Anita Nair in *Mistress* tries to present the differing perspectives of the East and the West. When Radha and Chris make a conversation, they discuss their interests and issues pertaining to the world. The issue of Saddam Hussein trial perpetuates the difference in opinion when Chris justifies the invasion of Iraq by the Bush government and Radha supporting the interest of Saddam Hussein saying that it was for the UN to decide whether Saddam was a threat to international peace. Chris comments on India's stand in being neutral to the issue giving the name tolerance in place of laziness. In the words of Chris, "Tolerance is just another word for

laziness. To have an opinion and to stand by it necessitates making an effort, and you don't want to make that bloody effort" (Nair, 292). Radha retaliates saying that the concept of tolerance is beyond the comprehensive ability of the Westerners. She clarifies saying that India has no right to intrude into the interests of the other country. In the words of Radha, "What do you want me to say? That Bush and Blair and the coalition are right and we are wrong? Please understand. I am not justifying what Saddam did. All I am saying is, one country does not have the right to take away the sovereignty of another. That is all" (Nair, 293).

The differences crop up as a result of diversified backgrounds from which they have come and it is quite natural that a man thinks from a perspective that is bound to the conditions prevailing in a region he lives in. It becomes difficult to accept something new, as his instinct doesn't permit him to absorb on grounds of apprehensive mood that dwells inside. The root cause of it could be the challenges which man faces as a predator.

Radha's clash with the opinion of Chris can be attributed to the conflict in her own self. She considers herself to be a land that was invaded depriving it of the freedom and a structure. She argues with Chris with her own position in the background. She feels that she was under siege sans motif and says that her life with Shyam though deluged by turmoil, was amidst a set up called family. She adds that the privilege got stripped off leaving her with challenges without vision. She compares herself to the war ravaged land. She says, "Our opinions, even when they are about a world that has no direct bearing on our lives; are us. And yes, I do think that you have taken away something that is mine. You invaded my mind, my body, and while I had to suppress my desires and dreams and even forfeit my freedom to live the way I wanted to, under the previous regime, at least that existence had a pattern, a method. What do I have now? How am I to function without your support? I am a country that has to rebuild itself from nothing. I am a country that has to face recriminations and challenges and I don't know where to begin. Worst of all, I don't even know if you will be there to hold my hand through the rebuilding process. So wouldn't it have been best to leave me alone" (Nair, 293).

In the words of DebotriDhar, "And then there is Chris, who to Radha seems at first to be all that her husband is not: modern, liberated, intellectual, sensitive, and accepting of a woman's equality and opinion. As they "swap memories and quotes," Radha feels "their worlds nestled into each other. We belonged, he and I" (215). But as their relationship progresses, she realizes that Chris is dogmatic in his own way, and that his "modernity" is completely circumscribed by his own location and identity. For instance, in their insular world of soft caresses, their first major argument occurs during a discussion on contemporary politics and war. When Chris talks of Saddam Hussein as "evil," Radha retorts by comparing Hussain to Bush and pointing out the latter's dubious political motives behind invading Iraq. Chris is angry and rebukes Radha, saying that he finds her attitude of tolerance unacceptable. Radha is dismayed to realize that their sense of history, of politics, and even of ethics is different and runs deep; she hits back by saying that he will never understand what tolerance is about, since it is beyond westerners. Interestingly, after this discord, Radha then begins to liken her situation to that of the ravaged country, whose ravaging was purported to be for its own good" (Dhar, 14).

*Mistress* examines the inseparable relationship between Art and human life with special focus on individual's confrontation of his life from his own perspective and his attempt of cleansing the mind of the abstract tendencies that give a meaning to his existence.

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