



Research Paper

Agony And Conflict In Eating Wasp By Anita Nair

R. NAGARAJAN, DR.E. SUGANTHA EZHIL MARY

¹(Research Scholar, Department of English, Vels University VISTAS, Pallavaram, Chennai)

²(Associate Professor, Department of English, Vels University VISTAS, Pallavaram, Chennai)

Corresponding Author: R.NAGARAJAN

ABSTRACT: It is the story of ten women, each of whom is fighting their own battle against different aspects of patriarchy, that constitute Anita Nair's novel *Eating Wasps* which was published in 2018. Throughout this feminist fiction piece, we see contemporary women's issues in all their complexity. It examines the narrations of two prominent characters such as Urvashi and Sreelakshmi who function as key characters in their own stories. Over half a century apart, these female characters are taking on the agony of fulfilling their desires against societal pressures. Taking into account their position in the institutions of marriage and family, the study explores what happens to these women when they act on their desires. As this paper proposes, both Sreelakshmi's flight and Urvashi's struggle with her stalker can both be viewed as acts of resistance that reinforce their agency and unapologetic nature.

KEYWORDS: Agony, Pleasure, Patriarchy, Dominance, and Conflict

Received 12 Apr, 2022; Revised 26 Apr, 2022; Accepted 28 Apr, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at www.questjournals.org

I. INTRODUCTION

Eating Wasps, by Anita Nair, tells the stories of ten women whose experiences serve as a model for how women suffer in a culture that emphasizes male values. Women in this story, from various socio-cultural backgrounds and ages, were subjected to a variety of abuses and discrimination, ranging from acid attacks (Najma) to online stalking (Urvashi). These protagonists had one thing in common: they were all pushed to the brink of death by patriarchal society for choosing to take the path of their hearts. Instead of meekly allowing society to victimize them, most of these individuals refuse to submit to patriarchal institutions' rules and confront the world unashamedly. The concerns of feminine suffering and struggle are brought to the forefront in this tale. Patriarchal frameworks deny women the right to make their own decisions and exercise their independence [1].

Female anguish and desire are stifled in a male-dominated culture to retain men's dominance over women. Female desire has always been regarded with suspicion, and it is frequently regarded as a harmful phenomenon. Few academics note the implications of expressing a woman's desires in a study on female desire as follows:

“For a woman, giving in to passion has always entailed severe risks, quite apart from the physical risk of undesired pregnancy. Being labeled unfeminine or being perceived as a loose of fallen woman has a severe societal penalty.”
(EW 21)

In a patriarchal society, a woman who expresses her sexuality and desire is viewed as an unwanted figure, and society frequently attempts to suppress such demonstrations of feminine desire. The characters in this tale are two ladies who consciously chose to enter the 'forbidden' realm of wants. These individuals come from various historical and social contexts, but they are all embedded in a complicated web of social and cultural reality. Women's desires and sexuality are restricted within the family system, implying that female desire is not free from cultural pressures and expectations, whether inside or outside the institution of marriage.

AGONY OF FEMALE IN NAIR WORDS

Sreelakshmi, who lived in the 1960s, was a very ambitious young woman who chose to put her marriage on hold to pursue her career. She has used her misery and free will to direct the course of her life

throughout her life. As she pursued her interests, she faced hostility from her family and society. Her suicide was caused by a conflict between her desires and patriarchal cultural expectations. Urvashi, on the other hand, is entangled with questions of desire and agony through the institution of marriage. Urvashi, a married working lady from Bangalore, is having difficulties finding desire outside of her marriage after her desire was stifled in a supposedly happy marriage [2].

The scenario becomes more complex when her lover becomes a cyberstalker. By examining the paths of feminine misery and want as portrayed by the characters of Urvashi and Sreelakshmi, this analysis will focus on the tension between female desire and societal expectations. Sreelakshmi (her right index finger bone) takes on the role of a ghost narrator, observing the lives of several women who visit or work at the Nila resort in Kerala. Her lover Markose recovers this finger bone from her funeral pyre and keeps it discreetly as a souvenir in his wooden almirah, which Shyam has purchased as an antique item to furnish the Nila resort after many years. The narrator's invisibility is a metaphor for her marginal status as a single woman and a writer in society. In the prologue, she says,

“Once upon a time, I had a name: Sreelakshmi. I used to be a woman. I used to be a writer whose stories elicited both love and disdain, stirring rage as frequently as they provided relief, a writer whose words cut through the norm. I had previously survived wasp stings. When I died, though, I was reduced to a forgotten bone, a phantom of my former self” (EW 45)

The Wasp in the title is crucial to her character's meaning: as a youngster, she dared to eat a live wasp in the hopes of getting a taste of honey on her tongue, but she later realizes that the wasp has nothing to do with honey [3]. The young woman grew up to be a strong and independent woman with a clear view of life. She pursued her goals in life, from education to employment, and from singlehood to a relationship. She fell for a married man with the same fervor as the girl who ate a wasp and went on to write about it.

These moves drew a lot of criticism from the public. Ironically, in her afterlife existence, the independent woman whose success and prominence upended male-dominated society was marginalized by her boyfriend Markose, who kept her hidden for decades. Sreelakshmi was a bright academic and intellectual who chose to live a single life. Despite considerable opposition from her family and society, her father was the lone backer of her choices, encouraging her to complete her Masters in Zoology at Banaras Hindu University. Her older sisters were “married off” at sixteen, and she was under constant pressure to follow the ‘traditional’ path as a lady.

Her dream was to become a lecturer and a writer, and she had no idea of starting a family. Because she stayed unmarried, Sreelakshmi was regarded as a “damaged good” by those around her. She was a successful writer and lecturer, but society was not ready to accept a woman who defied the traditional roles (wife and mother) that society had bestowed on women, and they found delight in demeaning and harassing her. When the singlehood of men writers is exalted and revered, the singlehood of women writers is ignored [4]. Even when Sreelakshmi achieves substantial success in her work as a writer and lecturer, her singlehood is viewed with contempt or mistrust.

She also recognizes her ‘outsider’ status in the literary scene as a writer. Her aspirations for a literary career and her writing experiences were vastly different. Even after winning a major Academy Award, she received mixed reviews from the literary community, which was dominated by men writers and critics. Patriarchal ideas are rooted in the intellectual world of writing, which was supposed to be above society's prejudice. After receiving the Academy Award, she explains her disenchantment as follows:

“I discovered adulation. I learned what it meant to be a hero. I came across spite. Brutal competition, even mocking. But I didn't find the friends I was looking for the literary discussions, the artistic process, self-doubts, the deconstruction of a novel or a poem it was all a fabrication of my imagination. Nothing had changed since the time I mistakenly ate a wasp for a bee full of honey” (EW 110)

She was frustrated by the literary world's coldness and remoteness as a young and ambitious writer. Because the environment was not designed to accommodate a female intellectual, she was unable to find the intellectual companionship she desired [5]. Sreelakshmi's literary career takes a turn for the worse when she decides to write about her body and desire. *Letters to a Man Never Met*, her novel, is based on her relationship with Markose, and as a writer, she never hesitates to write about her private desires or sexuality. Sreelakshmi has won accolades for writing about traditional and approved subjects, but her decision to write about her desire, body, and sexuality has changed the image.

According to Cixous, a woman writing her body defies society's objectification and hence poses a threat to patriarchal society. According to her, there is a strong link between women's bodies and their writing, and both have been suppressed for a long time by men. The public's reactions and rejections were a reaction to a woman writing about and with her body. People around her students, coworkers, and relatives – are enraged by the serialized novel's release, and they react with hate and scorn. A woman who openly expresses her desire and

sexuality in her writing is an issue that the male-dominated society cannot accept. People gossiping around her, a paper rocket being thrown at her with a sexual image on it, a chilly quarrel with her mother, threats from relatives, and so on are examples of hostile responses.

“My male colleagues gave me the once-over without even bothering to be cautious about it, she recalls from college. My older male pupils surrounded me like a pack of hyenas. The women, both coworkers, and pupils hummed like bees with needles. Giant wasps attempting to paralyze me indefinitely.” (EW 183)

Aside from these daily humiliations, her landlord requested her to depart the rented home, and her potential study guide rejected her previously accepted research project [6]. The word “spinster” is used to disparage women’s singlehood, and sexual attraction for a single woman is frowned upon by patriarchal society. Sreelakshi finds comfort for the first time in a man’s care and devotion when an unexpected encounter with Markose, a married priest, turns into a relationship. She sees it as a way to get away from her loneliness and the monotony of her daily routine. Her intelligence and independence made it difficult for her to find a suitable husband because these were not the “normal” attributes expected of women in patriarchal societies.

“But to him, I would go again and again, she says after she decided to pursue the man she found. “My lust was unquenchable. My sex vibrated as it had never vibrated before” (EW 209).

She affirms her right to sexual choice as well as her body’s right to pleasure. She makes a determined decision to exercise her sexual freedom. Markose’s act of treachery echoes the reduction of a woman to a body, which could explain why he ran away from the Madras hotel after making love to her. Her suicide was caused more by his indifference to her wishes than by the other cultural pressures she faced as a woman.

Urvashi is a contemporary woman who lives in a world that is vastly different from Sreelakshmi’s period in many ways (the 1960s). The question is how marriage’s institution defines and limits female sexuality and desire [7]. She finds herself devoid of all desires at the age of 51, and she is solely linked to her marriage by duty. She inquires about herself with her husband Mahesh, who responds,

“I see a beautiful woman; my wife and the mother of my children. I see a successful journalist; I see a lady who can run a marathon and drink a man beneath the table, a definition she couldn’t live up to”. (EW 222)

Urvashi is married to Mahesh, but her ‘happy marriage’ has dried up her needs, so she sets out to find them elsewhere, but her endeavor proves to be an unsatisfying experience. It didn’t turn into anything more than a sexual experience, and when she wanted to end the relationship, her partner turned out to be a stalker.

“Each time she blocked his number, he appeared in the fresh guide, her stalker, her very own ten-headed Ravana,” the experience of being stalked was described. You couldn’t just chop off one head and hope for the best. He’d reappear after reappearance.” (EW 236)

Cyberstalking is a criminal practice in which a stalker acquires all of the victim’s information by watching and tracking her or his internet activities. Cyberstalking is a sort of harassment directed at women, and the stalker in this case is denying Urvashi the right to reject or break up with him. He invades her privacy regularly and demands that she return to the relationship. His threats and hate messages drive her insane, and even after changing her phone number, she has difficulty escaping the stalker or removing him from her digital world.

This is a simple obsessional relationship in which the victim and the offender had a previous connection and the perpetrator utilizes stalking to persuade the victim back into it. The victim was originally compelled to go to a remote location [8], such as a resort, and she kept her phone turned off to avoid receiving messages from the stalker. She eventually refuses to apologize for her actions and confronts the stalker, announcing her definite intention to move away from him. So, while both of these women’s misery and desire are intertwined in patriarchal power structures that are hostile to women’s free choices, both of these candidates speak out against subjection, remain unapologetic about their desires, and refuse to be victimized by a male-dominated society.

CONFLICT IN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY

Sreelakshmi died in her mid-thirties, and the reason for her decision was a mystery to the rest of the world. Even as a corpse, she assumes the role of a caustic and detached narrator who is critical of the pretensions of those who pay respect to her body, a world that had previously been unsympathetic to her skills or hardships.

“An ordinary lady had become a legend, a tragic heroine,” she explains, “and the nature of my death had made me into someone remarkable in their eyes. I was the Virginia Woolf of Kerala.” (EW 78)

The irony of this proclamation of independence from captivity was that even after her death, her ex-lover Markose stole her right index finger off the burial pyre and kept it hidden in a velvet-lined case within a cupboard in his home [9]. Keeping the fingerbone in a secret safe might be interpreted as a metaphor for women's domestication within the house. However, the decision to use the index finger rather than the ring finger is noteworthy because the first denotes power, agony, and leadership, whereas the second represents marriage and family. So, after half a century, all that is left of her in the world is her power and misery, which makes her the ghost narrator.

Sreelakshmi commits suicide rather than accept the options presented to her by society. She could have settled into a marriage that her mother and relatives would have arranged for her, or she could have withdrawn her publication of the controversial novel to return to her comfort zone, but she chooses to end her life without losing her agony or identity, despite the patriarchal familial and literary circle's expectations.

The last decision regarding her life, like the others she had made in her life what to study, where to study, whether or not to marry, and whether or not to have an affair with a married man was her option. As a result, her death can be interpreted as a protest against the limitations imposed on her profession and sexuality [10]. Urvashi's attempts to explore her passion were successful, but she is confronted with hypocrisy from her friends when she does so. When she resorts to a man, her friends, who used to openly discuss entering adulterous relationships for satisfaction, expose their double standards.

But she was unrepentant about her choices, telling him that she no longer wanted to be with him and that she wants to break up with him. She *"refused to be shamed into obedience"* (EW 178) when he sought to humiliate her for having a sexual relationship with him, and she begs him to move on because she has no feelings for him. Urvashi was a lady who never hesitated to act on her impulses, ending both her passionless marriage and her extramarital affair when she became overwhelmed in their suffocating grip.

II. CONCLUSION

Sreelakshmi and Urvashi were both educated and employed women who fell victim to the hypocritical double standards of a male-dominated society. Sreelakshmi lived in the 1960s and Urvashi in the present, but the oppression and devaluation they faced from the masculine dominant culture is the common thread that runs through the novel. Indeed, the chronological gap between them couldn't keep marginalization and the cargo of gender prospects from the outside world at bay. One promoter attempts self-murder rather than live a life without love or passion, while the other chooses to quit a jealous relationship without falling into her nut's traps. The issues they're facing in their lives are caused by desire and fornication. When Sreelakshmi falls in love with a married clerk and acts on her feelings, her mate's poltroonery and insincerity compel her to attempt self-murder, despite her lack of remorse. Also, when she writes about her own body and solicitations, the erudite community shuns her, but she is unafraid of her choices and never quits writing about her body. This rejection of patriarchal structures' laws and proscriptions generates problems, however, this study claims that killing herself is more of a kick and resistance than an escape. Urvashi's new connection stresses her out with possessiveness and humiliates her with stalking since she is attempting to satisfy her sexual desires and needs outside of her marriage. Though her initial reaction was to flee the situation, she eventually confronts her problems, and her final decision to resist her enterprises and leave the unhealthy relationship is a strong confession of her female suffering. As a result, both of these womanish narrators draw attention to the societal pressures put on women by marriage, family, and society, and they successfully negotiate with patriarchy by making their suffering, desire, and immorality public.

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