

The Concept of Infidelity in Anita Nair's Novels

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Abstract

In all religions, Infidelity is seen as a vicious and forbidden act and considered one of the greatest sins. Sociologists have conventionally concluded that Infidelity, whether committed by women or men, is a social danger to both society and the individual. This paper introduces the idea of Infidelity as expressed in The Better Man and Mistress by Anita Nair. The purpose of this paper is to pay attention to the concept of Infidelity as a risky act. Furthermore, it exposes the causes and repercussions of such a scandalous act.

Keywords: infidelity, literature, marital, tradition, culture

Infidelity populates the chief spot in literature as an important subject in the community, primarily in poetry, plays, and novels. Leo Tolstoy acknowledges once that "Adultery is not only the favourite, but almost the only theme of all the novels." (Overton) The subject of infidelity is dealt with in much great fiction and poetry. The epic Iliad by Homer depicts the Trojan war as a result of Helen's unfaithfulness to Prince Paris. In fiction Leo Tolstoy's Anna Karenina, Gustave Flaubert's Madame Bovary, Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter, F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby all deal with the theme of infidelity. Anita Nair, an Indian English Writer from Bangalore is famous for her fiction. Her novels The Better Man, Mistress, Lessons in Forgetting, and Idris also deal with the theme of Infidelity.

Infidelity is a literary theme that derives its meaning from sociological and anthropological apprehensions since it is specifically associated with the first brick, that is, marriage, in the construction of life. The paradox of the holy bond, that is, divorce, has also been a result of infidelity. It is vital to examine its definition as well as the historical and modern opinions about it to understand the meaning of the word Infidelity.

As per the Cambridge dictionary, Infidelity is defined as

"The act or fact of having a romantic or sexual relationship with someone other than one's husband, wife, or partner." (Cambridge dictionary)

This common and short-term definition stresses an

illegitimate and sexual interaction between two people, both of them married or one of them. The definition in general is what this article is dealing with. It is also important to note that a sexual relationship between two unmarried men and woman is not referred to as infidelity, but is stated to as pre-marital sex or an affair or love relationship or fornication since a person or its partner who has committed infidelity needs to be married. As far as sociology is concerned Infidelity is described as

"heterosexual intercourse takes place outside marriage between two people of whom at least one is married to another person," (Mohammed 36)

Many religions condemn adultery as an illegitimate and immoral act. According to the Bible, if a person sees a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. According to Judaism, one must not go near adultery. Moreover, its followers were cautioned in the Holy Quran not to approach infidelity as it is a shameful act and opens the door to other evils. Adultery is viewed in Hindu shastras as a significant violation of dharma. Hinduism considers marriage a sacred bond. Vishnu Purana tells about infidelity,

"A man should not think incontinently of another's wife, much less address her to that end; for such a man will be reborn in a future life as a creeping insect. He who commits adultery is punished here and hereafter; for his days in this world are cut short, and when dead he falls into hell." (Hinduism and Adultery)

It is well accepted that an infidelity is a forbidden act approved by all the major religions because it contributes to the family's disintegration and degradation, as well as to the individual's moral corruption in that society. In order to alert those who committed or even intended to perform such an act, in their views of condemnation and judgment on the adulterer or adulteress, communities varied. they are punished by death, killing, stoning, and flagging, or even wearing letter A as a sign of committing such an act. The term Infidelity tends to hold both moral and religious associations in this connection, as it is considered as general and natural as marriage itself.

For Anita Nair, the theme of infidelity seems to be of special interest. In nearly all her novels, she portrays this theme. She focuses on the plight of a woman and her degradation at the ceremony of marriage in a male-dominated civilization. In her novels, Nair talks about infidelity as a reflection of the predicament of a woman under male domination, an abusive marriage, unhappy marriage, and the infidelity of not being fulfilled and needing to be free as she described in *The Better Man* and *Mistress*.

The Better Man is set in a trivial imaginary village named Kaikurussi in contemporary India, in the northern part of Kerala. The area was when identified as Malabar under British rule. Mukundan, an aged single and former government employee is the protagonist of the novel. He had left his native village, but he had to return to Kaikurussi because of his circumstance. Nair sees marriage as a union of incompatibility rather than harmony in *The Better Man*. Nair articulates two extra-marital affairs in this novel. There are various types of motives for both instances of infidelity.

In the novel, Valsala is Prabhakaran's wife, an elderly schoolmaster. With him, she is not fulfilled. Therefore, she falls in love with Sridharan, does not worry about society, and thus commits infidelity. She appreciates her inner mind and becomes Sridharan's mistress. She justifies herself as,

"I am just forty years old. I don't want to be pushed into old age before its time. I want to live. I want passion. I want to know ecstasy, she told herself, night after night." (*The Better Man* 131)

Valsala breaks with traditional Indian culture. So, she is sexually satisfied and does not feel guilty about her affair with her neighbour, Sridharan. Valsala seeks to satisfy herself, but in the form of infidelity, against the conventional way. By murdering her husband with her lover, who was a hindrance to her satisfaction, she also crossed the limit. No one knew Prabhakaran was murdered by Valsala. The villagers all think he's been gone for a few days. But Mukundan, incidentally finds Prabhakaran's body, and all is clarified.

Anjana and Mukundan include the second instance of infidelity. Anjana, in the novel, grew up in a beautiful setting. When, at the age of twenty-seven, she married Ravindran, she lost all her freedom in the name of marriage. Her married life hasn't been fulfilled. Ravindran gets uncomfortable and leaves the place whenever Anjana tries to converse. She yearns for love and liberty, but this ends in disappointment. So, she grows up to hate all the

things. When her father recognized the unhappiness of his daughter, he raised a voice against Ravindran. Without divorcing her, Ravindran leaves Anjana. Anjana's father finds a teaching job for her, and with that, she earns a living. She loved her work and reading books and magazines, but since she didn't get a divorce, she is still married.

She meets and falls in love with Mukundan, and they both start an affair. Being weak, Mukundan didn't want to disclose this to anyone because he's an old bachelor and Anjana is still married. They are committing infidelity, in his opinion. With the desire to exist as a free person, which is an acknowledgment of her independence, Anjana decided to make a fresh start and to move out of her failed relationship. She knows, in Mukundan's company, that she must free herself from her miserable marital relationship. When Anjana reveals her love for Mukundan, being a weak person he tells Anjana;

"My mother begged me to rescue her and take her away. But I didn't. I was afraid of my father, and so I made excuses. If I had done as she asked me, perhaps she might be still alive. That is the kind of man I am. A weak and undependable creature. All of us have our weaknesses, but we seldom have the courage to accept them. Or even declare it as you have done now. To me, that makes you braver than anyone else. I love you. My love tells me that this right for me?" (245)

As Anjana wants to stand up for her interests and rights, Anita Nair is more concerned with women's freedom. Anjana comes out to be a woman who would make choices, take decisions, and make up her mind to start an affair with Mukundan after a long struggle.

The third novel *Mistress* by Anita Nair concerns man-woman relationships, pre-marital, marital, extra-marital relationships, and husband-wife alienation. The novel 'Mistress' by Anita Nair addresses a woman not as a simple sexual object, but as an equal partner to a man. His uncle, Radha's father, humiliated Shyam, a self-made entrepreneur. His uncle has a marriage proposal for him of his daughter, who has committed infidelity to a married man;

"What is wrong? Shyam asked as gently as he could"? She has been involved with a man,' So why don't you get them married"? (*Mistress* 121)

When she was working in the city, Radha had a sexual affair with her married boss. He has left her now, however, and no one is ready to marry Radha. Thus, Radha's father, who provided Shyam with shelter and income, suggested that Shyam should marry Radha. Since childhood, Shyam

has been in love with Radha. At any price, he wanted to possess her. Even though he knows she's having a premarital relationship with a married man, he's getting ready to marry her. His sister, Rani Oppol is suspicious that Shyam has been forced to agree.

"You can get any girl you want. You don't have to be saddled with her just because we owe her father a debt of gratitude." (122)

Shyam's being ambitious wants to prosper and become wealthy. Radha's father gives him land and assets. He has a resort close to the Nila River where locals and foreigners visit and stay. On the marital front, although married for eight years, Shyam and Radha do not have children. Due to the actions of Shyam, Radha is unhappy about the marriage. A mistress is what Shyam wants. He demands a dutiful wife.

One day, Chris comes to the resort to stay. He's a writer, a journalist, and interested in music. He came here to investigate and find out if Koman was his father. There were several affairs with Koman, one with Chris's mother. Radha also doubts if her uncle Koman is her father, who had an affair with her mother. Radha knows that wooing another man, a foreigner, Chris, is a sin. Her husband, despite her treacherous disposition, loves her. He believes that Chris is attracting her. Shyam is concerned about her repeated visits to Chris and places him in a precarious state. Radha secretly sees Chris. Even after her marriage to Shyam, Radha fails to restore her life.

This infidelity provides everyone a chance to comment on her husband. She's never worried about the image of her husband and by romancing with Chris, she attempts to quench her lust for sex. She forgot that when her life was in turmoil and her family was at an intersection, Shyam had offered her a new life by wedding her. Regrettably, she neglects the support of Shyam. He feels cheated, but still very much loves her. It reflects his good nature and his sincere love for Radha.

Thus, in both novels, infidelity is not the main question, but all the lead characters in both novels are centered on it, whether as a means or as an end. In *The Better Man* the protagonist Mukundan has an affair with Anjana, who is still married to Ravindran. Valsala is Prabhakaran's wife who starts an extramarital affair with Sridharan, her unmarried neighbor. Both affairs are the result of unhappy married life and both ends in failure. Valsala and Sridharan get arrested for murdering her husband Prabhakaran and Mukundana couldn't marry Anjana as he is scared of the society. In *Mistress Koman* had many affairs, one was with Radha's mother. Radha had premarital affair with her married boss, who eventually leaves her. After she gets married to Sham, she commits infidelity with Chris, a foreigner. She cheats on Shyam and gets pregnant by Chris. In the end, Radha neither live with Shyam and nor goes with Chris.

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