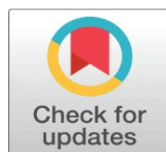


A PORTRAIT OF SELFSECURE WOMEN AMIDST INSECURITIES IN PREETHI NAIR'S ONE HUNDRED SHADES OF WHITE

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ABSTRACT

Indian women writers of twentieth century mainly spot light on casteism, silent suffering women who become the victims of the atrocities of dominant men, child marriage and constrained widowhood. Indeed the scenerio has been changed in the contemporary century where the focus is on women who start questioning the traditional patriarchal norms and search for their self identity. It is quite true in the case of Preethi Nair who depicts women rising as phoenix from the ashes of victimisation. The women characters of Nair's One Hundred Shades of White though abandoned by their husbands, rejected, betrayed by their beloveds, put in an alien world where cultural conflicts arise, threatened by the harsh realities of life and no matter what, but rise to the occasion to prove themselves. They are exhibits of empowered women who are selfsecure amidst insecurities and so leading a dignified living.

Keywords: Contemporary Women's Literature, Preethi Nair, Cultural Conflicts, Betrayal, Assimilation, Hybridity, Women Empowerment

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian women writers play a pivotal role in giving remarkable themes, extraordinary spots in their stories to the reader. Generally Indian writers have been awarded many prestigious honorable prizes. The Booker prize, the most dreamed and desirable award of every single literary writer, has been earned by four of Indian English literary writers. Among them two are woman writers namely Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai. Male writers on one hand deal with biographical stories, imagination and some society oriented subjects while woman writers on the other hand deal with Communism, Casteism and some with life oriented delightening stories. Preethi Nair frequently explores the theme of cultural identity, particularly how women navigate their dual identities as immigrants. Her characters grapple with the tensions between their Indian heritage and their new lives in Western societies, which reflects the experiences of many Indian women in the diaspora.

"The best of a book is not the thought which it contains, but the thought which it suggests just as the charm of music dwells not in the tones but in the echoes of our hearts" said by an American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes " aptly suits Preethi Nair's novel *One Hundred Shades of White*. The novel is a story about truth and forgiveness, unravelled through the mystical art of cooking. It is about telling a lie, to protect the vulnerable, only to have it resurfaces with unforeseen

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consequences. "A genuinely moving novel like the bottled spices that play such a role in the story, this has all its ingredients in just the right quantities to spirit away all negative emotions." comments Daily Express. "She writes evocatively about childhood and there are passages of tight and lyrical immediacy living description packs a powerful punch in this book about family, forgiveness and the power of truth." says Guardian "A carefully woven tale that's exceedingly good." says Company Magazine.

Preethi Nair's *100 Shades of White* vividly depicts woman a creator. Nair, who herself a winner of the 'Asian Woman of Achievement' award has portrayed women with creative force. All the three main women characters in this novel have undergone many intolerable trials and tribulations. In spite of them they are able to achieve or create something even it can be said great things.

"She (Ammamma) touched atleast a thousand lives using her gifts, something man never get to do in one life time. She fed those who knocked on her door, touching them and guiding them along their paths in ways that you cannot even begin to imagine. Not once did she think of stopping or moving away so life would be easier" says in the novel an astrologer, who has observed Ammamma's living. As far as Ammamma is concerned, she is a woman of success throughout her life. Sufferings invade her life throughout but are defeated in front of her skills and qualities. She can build up or construct strong buildings of lives of her and her daughter Nalini on the bare foundation of sufferings. The only thing she is capable of doing exceptionally well is cooking and offering her services to the patrons of the village. She discovers or rather invents the 'magic' of finding problem – solvents in cooking and passes it to her daughter and to her grand daughter too. Thus she creates a confidence to withstand trials and harsh realities of life in her daughter and her granddaughter.

If the protagonist of the novel, Nalini is taken, more than her mother, she is able to safeguard her life, her children's self-worth and everything in an alien culture, where she is abandoned by her husband, the only hope for her and the bread winner of the family. The same skill of cooking that her mother has, is mingled and mixed with Nalini's blood too. With that talent and with the help of Tom who supplies grocery and Maggie, Tom's so called sister she creates a pickle brand of her own, namely 'The Abundance of Spice.' She has carefully learnt from her mother how the spices work magic upon the hearts of people and comes up in life with all respect in a strange country, where she is ignorant of even the language. Nalini says in the novel "*When everything was taken away from me, I could have crumbled, but I chose not to. I chose to keep going, to find strength where I could and to build a life for my children*" (Nair 32). Evidently she can be called a self-secure woman. Sandberg's perspective on women's resilience and empowerment reflects Nalini's journey in *One Hundred Shades of White*. Nalini's strength in taking control of her life after her husband leaves her mirrors the traits of self-reliant women Sandberg encourages. This aligns with the novel's exploration of women achieving stability and self-assurance in the face of adversity.

Maggie, another important character of the novel is also a woman tossed by the storms of trial. A farmer has spoiled her by planting empty dreams in Maggie's head. She falls pregnant at fifteen. Then, she strives hard to bring up her son, Tom and one night she flees to England with an idea that she will find her eldest brother, Michael. Unfortunately, when she gets there, Michael has gone not leaving any forwarding address. She solely struggles day and night to lead a normal life and successfully brings up her son Tom. Thus she has also achieved things amidst insecurities and so can be called as self-reliant woman.

Maya, her mother Nalini and her brother Satchin live a carefree life in India, amongst the vibrancy and superstition of the East. Then their father moves the family to England. There, amid the grey and concrete, they begin to adapt to their new life and forget their heritage. But when Maya's father abandons them, leaving only deceit and debt behind, they are left to fend for themselves in a strange, damp land. Maya does not know of her father's betrayal. Nalini, determines to preserve her children's pride, tells them that their father died in an accident and, as their struggle to make a life begins, whole realities are built on this lie. While Nalini cooks exotic pickles which enchant all who eat them, Maya begins to adapt to her new home - the unfamiliar food, the language, the music - and then to explore and make bold plans. But even a white lie cannot remain hidden forever - and when the truth resurfaces, it changes everything, forcing Maya to question her relationships, and herself. Initially, Maya is captivated by Marcus, who offers her a sense of acceptance and romance she yearns for as she adjusts to life in a new cultural setting. However, as their relationship unfolds, she realises that Marcus's affection is superficial and self-serving, grounded more in convenience than genuine love.

When Maya finally recognises the falseness of Marcus's love, she faces the truth with boldness and clarity. Rather than becoming worried and distressed, she takes it as a lesson in self-worth and inner strength. Maya's ability to confront and move past this relationship reflects her resilience and reinforces her journey towards independence. By choosing to

prioritise her own well-being, Maya shows her courage in breaking away from relationships that do not honor her true self, further illustrating her growth into a strong and self-reliant woman.

Throughout the novel, Maya's journey to self-reliance is shaped by both internal and external struggles. Her mother's entrepreneurship with her pickle business influences Maya's perspective on resilience and adaptability. This experience nurtures Maya's ability to set and pursue her own goals, enabling her to redefine her identity outside of her family's expectations. Ultimately, Maya's self-reliance reflects her journey of personal growth and empowerment, as she learns to trust herself and make choices that align with her evolving sense of identity.

Bhabha's idea of hybridity, the fusion of multiple identities and cultures, relates to Maya and Nalini's identity struggles in London. Through hybridity, they learn to merge their Indian heritage with their new British environment, an adaptive process that eventually fosters a strong sense of self. Their self-assurance in the novel grows as they navigate these cultural intersections, aligning with Bhabha's theory that hybridity enables strength and agency within diasporic contexts.

The novel underscores that self-security is not merely an inherent trait but a dynamic process shaped by experiences, choices, and cultural negotiations. By intertwining elements of hybridity, economic independence, and emotional resilience, Nair highlights the transformative power of confronting one's insecurities and embracing change. Ultimately, *One Hundred Shades of White* serves as a celebration of the strength of women who, despite facing societal pressures and personal doubts, emerge empowered and self-assured, thus contributing significantly to the discourse on women's empowerment in contemporary literature.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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