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Exploration of Memory and Fragmented Psyche: Psychological Violence in Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps*

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Abstract: Anita Nair's novel, *Eating Wasps*, explores narratives covering three generations. The work primarily addresses cultural difficulties that include psychological impacts, physical transformations, identity crises, and introspection of personal identity. The way of living life for a purpose and necessity was known as culture and it was interconnected with society. The characters in the story have shown signs of undergoing a transformation in their identities. The changes were associated with several aspects. One individual who underwent an identity change was Leela, who desired to alter her identity in order to advance her career. In contrast, J. A. Krishnamurthy was affectionately referred to as Kitcha by his family members. The generation gap was a significant factor in contemporary society. Anita Nair effectively highlighted the disparity between generations by portraying distinct characters in her work *Eating Wasps*. The daughter of J. A. Krishnamurthy had a strong affection for her father's residence in Minjikapuram. Consequently, she was prepared to restore her father's cultural heritage. Anita Nair successfully established cultural identity in her novel by providing a solid basis for women to discover their own qualities within society.

Keywords- Cultural Identity, Generation Gap, Tradition, Mental Psyche, Modern Woman.

Motive of the Research:

The objective of the research paper was to elucidate the elements of Cultural Identity and the Generation Gap as presented in the novel *Eating Wasps*. The discourse encompassed themes of redemption, forgiveness, and the concept of second chances in a comprehensive manner. The text contained several allusions to deities from Greek mythology. A mention was made of Zeus, the deity associated with the sky. He held the position of chief, guardian, and divine entity for all living beings. Despite possessing numerous commendable qualities, he was deficient in honesty. For his own gratification and contentment, he would also resort to deceit. In this literary work, Giri is likened to the figure of Zeus. He would betray Meera due to his fascination with the Lilac House, which was meant to facilitate his union with her. Hera, the consort of Zeus, found herself the object of his seduction. Hera held the esteemed position as the divine figure presiding over the realms of heaven and the institution of marriage. She possessed emerald eyes and harbored a vengeful disposition. In this narrative, Meera is likened to Hera due to her profound appreciation for mythical tales. She endeavored to connect herself with the characters she held in high regard. In the narrative of forgetting, one encounters the ancestral abode known as Lilac House, a residence preserved by Meera's great grandparents. Subsequently, the property was acquired by Meera, who entered into a thirty-year lease agreement for the residence. Giri was unaware of this and exhibited a materialistic disposition. He directed his intentions toward the house and entered into matrimony with Meera. Meera



embarked on a profound exploration of her identity, seeking to understand the essence of her individuality.

Introduction:

Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* explores the complex patterns of human emotions, emphasizing the significant themes of memory, identity, and the fragmented self. The narrative intricately explores how the experiences of its central characters reveal the profound impact of historical traumas and repressed memories on contemporary existence, thereby shaping their identities and interpersonal connections. An analysis of the text through a psychoanalytic lens uncovers the novel's investigation into the unconscious, the various defense mechanisms at play, and the significant impact of memory whether suppressed or remembered on the characters' endeavors to come to terms with their disconnected identities. Anita Nair's narrative transcends the superficial, delving into profound psychological wounds, revealing how individuals contend with guilt, loss, and the act of forgetting as a strategy for survival. This essay aims to explore *Eating Wasps* through a psychoanalytic perspective, emphasizing the symbolic depiction of memory and trauma and their influence on the psyche, thereby providing a deeper understanding of identity formation and the internal conflict for completeness amidst a fragmented reality.

Discussion

"In the 1930s, when Raghavan Menon began working in Calcutta, he fell in love with a way of life. Calcutta reminded him of his Calicut in many ways but there was more. Art flourished in every home and in one of those soirees he had taken to attending, he met Charu, a Bengali woman. When he married her, he became a born-again Bengali. Charu died some years later and Raghavan Menon decided to send his daughter Leela to Santiniketan. 'I want culture to course through her veins. I'd prefer culture to blood, in fact!' he told his brothers who advocated that he send Leela to study in Calicut instead". (Nair 2010, 28)

This novel presents numerous connections with the concept of generational shifts, often referred to as the generational divide. This novel reveals narratives spanning three generations. Raghavan Menon, a distinguished figure, served as the great grandfather of Meera and had his professional endeavors in Calcutta. During his time in Calcutta, he had the opportunity to encounter Charo. She hailed from Bengal, and they entered into matrimony with one another. Their offspring was a daughter, whom they named Leela. Following the passage of several years, Charo departed from this world, leaving Leela in the guardianship of her father, Raghavan Menon. He sent Leela to Shantiniketan with the intention of providing his daughter an education enriched by cultural understanding. Shantiniketan served as both an ashram and an educational institution, where students received their education beneath the expansive canopy of trees. This approach aimed to cultivate an educational framework that is intrinsically linked to the natural world. Shantiniketan was founded by Rabindranath Tagore, who aimed to offer education without charge, emphasizing a connection with the natural world. Shantiniketan is known as 'The Adobe of Peace,' where the pursuit of tranquility served as a fundamental motivation for education. Traditionally, educational institutions were characterized by their structured classrooms and enclosed settings. This institution has eliminated the practice of closed classrooms and has delved into innovative dimensions of educational experiences through the surrounding environment. This intellectual illumination can be likened to the renowned notion of Plato's 'Cave Image'. Within the confines of the cave, certain individuals were present, perceiving only the shadowy representations cast upon the walls. One of the



inmates was afforded the opportunity to exit the confines of the cave. The individual emerged from the cave, encountering the radiant illumination of the external realm. He sought to traverse the world imbued with fresh meanings, aspiring for his companions in the cave to emerge from their confines. The illumination beyond the cave symbolized a profound understanding of knowledge. Those who cast aside trepidation and uncertainty are able to perceive the illuminating power of knowledge. Leela embarked on a journey to explore the intricacies of culture and education as revealed through the lens of nature.

Leela caught the attention of a Hindi director, who offered her an opportunity to perform in Hindi cinema. However, she faced a dilemma regarding her inability to utilize her name as a means of self-identification. A renowned actress by the name of Leela graced Hindi cinema, thus affording her the opportunity to adopt the identity of Lily. She transformed her identity to advance her professional trajectory. Although she had no desire to alter her identity, circumstances compelled her to do so for the sake of her survival. Lily encountered a Hungarian painter named Sandor, and they developed a profound affection for one another. They entered into matrimony and welcomed a daughter, whom they named Saro. She was raised in a nurturing environment that fostered a fulfilling childhood experience. She held deep affection for her best friend's brother and ultimately chose to marry him. Following the passing of her husband after several years, she found herself in a position to raise her daughter Meera. They took residence in their ancestral home, where Meera assumed the duty of caring for both her grandmother and her mother.

“Giri had never known such people before. He thought of his father in his yellowing banian and dhoti in Palakkad. He thought of the old decrepit house and relatives as stringy and penurious as his father.” (Nair 2010, 36)

Giri came from Palakkad and held no regard for his father's conventional choice of donning a yellow banian. He resolved to transform himself into a contemporary individual, distancing himself from his own cultural heritage. He began to embrace the contemporary tradition that fulfilled his aspirations. Upon arriving at the Lilac House for a photo shoot, he found himself captivated by the exquisite beauty of the residence. Subsequently, he engaged with Meera and developed affection for her. They entered into matrimony, and Giri exhibited a pronounced focus on financial matters. He would disapprove of Meera's evolution as a cookbook author. Thus, Giri sought to showcase his abilities. He resolved to embark on an entrepreneurial venture of his own design. In order to embark on a new business venture, he found himself in need of financial resources. He proposed to Meera the idea of selling the Lilac House. However, she was aware that the property could not be sold due to the existing lease agreement. Meera's refusal of his request ultimately led Giri to part ways with her. Meera bears a considerable array of responsibilities, encompassing her familial obligations, professional pursuits, and the maintenance of her personal identity. She struggled to discover her identity, having long existed in the shadow of another. Meera perceived the nuances of cultural transformations and the disparities between the elder generation and her own contemporaries.

“Appa shook his head dismissively. ‘It is not what you think. You are not to blame. If someone is to be blamed, it is me for being such a coward. I should have told you. My parents knew I never wished for any of this. A wife, a child, the murkiness of grihastha ashrama’ (Nair 2010, 14)

A notable variation in cultural perspectives existed between J.A. Krishnamurthy and his family. He possessed expertise in cyclones and resided in the United States; his perspectives were shaped by Indian culture. He held a profound attachment to his native place, Mijikapuram.



His mind wandered to the recollections of his formative years spent at mijikapuram. He recalled an event to fulfill his obligation of generating successors. His father designated him as Grihastha Ashrama. Ashrama served as an institution where children received both education and cultural values. The four Ashramas are as follows: the first is Brahmacharya, representing the youthful phase or student stage; the second is Grihastha, denoting the Householder stage; the third is Vanaprastha, symbolizing the Hermit stage; and the fourth and final Ashrama is Sannyasa, which signifies dedicating the remainder of one's life to the divine. Among the fathers of JAK, the term Grihastha Ashrama refers to one who dedicated their leisure time to domestic life, commonly recognized as a Grihastha. Another domestic task was referred to as Grihastha.

JAK's father advised him to embody responsibility within the household and attend to the maintenance of his home. His father advised him to achieve a sense of completeness within the family by embracing his obligations. This incident had a profound impact on JAK's intellect. His identity underwent transformation at the hands of his maternal aunt. She bestowed upon him the moniker Kitcha. Despite the alteration of his identity, he found contentment in this transformation. His maternal aunt was subjected to the constraints of conventional practices and societal norms. Kala possessed flowing locks, and her father remarked that her lengthy hair was a declaration of her identity. Her lengthy hair was likely to contribute to health complications such as neck pain, prompting her to seek a medical evaluation. The physician recommended that she trim her hair to alleviate the discomfort she was experiencing.

“My neck hurt that night. An ache that crept down to my shoulders and lodged there. My mother, who hadn't said much until then, found me whimpering with the pain. ‘What is it, Kala?’ she whispered. ‘Is it the time of the month? Do you want me to give you a hot water fomentation? Will it ease the cramps?’ ‘It is this,’ I cried, gesturing to my hair. ‘The weight of it! My neck and shoulders hurt. It is worse than the menstrual cramp, Amma.’” (Nair 2010, 194)

She conveyed the doctor's words to her father and mother. Kala's father prohibited her from altering her hairstyle. Her father's belief regarding the long hair of a girl child represented a significant aspect of their marital traditions. Kala became agitated and inquired if she was to endure suffering until the end of her days. Her parents indicated that she could choose to cut her hair following her marriage, should she desire to do so. Kala entered into matrimony with Ambi. Following the union of marriage, her identity transitioned from Kala to Vaidehi. She believed that her life would improve following marriage. However, the situation deteriorated, and her husband exhibited traits reminiscent of a capitalist mindset. Capitalists designated an individual in a position of authority; thus, Ambi began to exert influence over both the household and Kala's thoughts. She found herself ensnared by the weight of reliance. Her husband exhibited a domineering disposition; he instructed Kala to refrain from cutting her hair without his consent. Her headache intensified with each passing day, making the task of managing her hair increasingly burdensome. Kitcha recommended that Kala adhere to the doctor's guidance regarding her health. Kala made the audacious choice to cut her hair.

Ambi experienced profound frustration towards Kala, as he believed she had been unfaithful to him. He imposed a consequence on Kala for her decision to cut her hair. The consequence of his actions was a prolonged silence that lasted eighteen months, despite their union in matrimony. This indicates that Ambi exhibited autocratic tendencies. He regarded himself as elevated and perceived her merely as an object. He would disregard the emotions of those around him. In the context of a patriarchal society, certain expectations and standards



were imposed upon girls. The role of a woman was primarily defined by her responsibilities as a wife, daughter, and mother, among other societal expectations. It is advisable for her to consistently rely on others to fulfill her needs. The elimination of those patriarchal values is imperative. Women ought to explore and establish their unique identities and personal individuality. Kala emerged from her various obligations and delved into the exploration of her own identity. She transformed into a contemporary figure, embodying her unique identity. The concept of ethnocentrism was introduced by William Graham Sumner. Ethnocentrism involved the assessment of individuals through a lens of superiority. It was characterized as the act of diminishing others through our perceived excellence. In this narrative, Ambi may be associated with the ethnocentric individual who governs Kala through his ideologies and behaviors.

“They tell me I ought to feel blessed to have been married to a man who has taken up sanyas. I am cursed, Kitcha, that’s what I am. Neither a wife nor a widow. Who am I, Kitcha? You tell me. He says – it’s not you. That’s what I can’t bear. If he left me for another woman, I would woo him back. I would bring him back to us. But this! How do I fight this, Kitcha?” (Nair 2010, 17-18).

JAK's mother encountered numerous challenges throughout her life. Sarada Ammal, the mother of JAK, exemplified a profound sense of duty and demonstrated a deep commitment to her religious practices. Her spouse aspired to embrace the life of a sanyasi. He entered into matrimony with Sarada to procreate and cultivate the lineage. Following the arrival of a child, he resolved to embrace the life of a sanyasi. Sanyasam pertains to a symbolic manifestation of dedicating oneself to the divine. This symbolic correlation may be associated with the principles of Symbolic Interactionism. The concept of Symbolic Interactionism was articulated by George Herbert Mead. The methodology of linking concepts through symbols is referred to as Symbolic Interactionism. The symbols may convey a multitude of interpretations, shaped by the reader's perspective. Sanyasam may be understood as a form of divine connection to God or a profound spiritual devotion to the Deity.

JAK entered into matrimony with Nina, and together they welcomed two daughters, Smriti and Shruti. JAK was engrossed in his professional responsibilities, leaving little room for familial engagement. This facilitated the distinction between JAK and Nina. Nina's frustration with him fostered a rift in their relationship. At the conclusion of their divorce, Smriti was assigned to JAK, while Shruti was paired with Nina. JAK recounted the narratives of India, with particular emphasis on his native Minjikapuram. Smriti made the decision to pursue her academic endeavors in India. She was profoundly shaped by the rich cultural heritage and traditions of India. This influence led her to recognize that India is a country characterized by its rich diversity and multicultural values. Smriti discovered that India was rich in diverse cultural practices. India, despite its advancements as a nation, continues to adhere to certain antiquated practices, such as infanticide, which are rightly regarded as criminal offenses.

Anita Nair's novel *Eating Wasps* shows psychological violence as a crucial theme, intricately interwoven into the characters' lives and their fragmented psyches. Anita Nair, recognized for her thorough examination of human emotions and relationships, investigates the nuanced yet powerful manifestations of emotional abuse that create enduring impacts on the psyche. In contrast to physical violence, psychological violence frequently reveals itself through more nuanced means, including manipulation, gaslighting, emotional neglect, and the gradual undermining of self-worth. The effects of this violence profoundly affect the characters,



molding their identities and guiding their actions and choices. The central character, Meera, is a thriving professional whose existence starts to fall apart when her husband unexpectedly departs. The emotional turmoil she endures develops not only from the abandonment but also mirrors years of psychological abuse that quietly undermined her sense of self. As she explores her past and the disintegration of her present, Meera's journey reflects the fractured mind that emerges from enduring emotional trauma. Anita Nair's examination of psychological violence in *Eating Wasps* is characterized by a detailed depiction of mental and emotional distress. The characters frequently find themselves ensnared within their own thoughts, grappling with past traumas, lost memories, and lingering emotions that remain unresolved. Examining these experiences, the novel provides a profound insight into the ways emotional abuse can undermine an individual's identity, resulting in a life filled with doubt and apprehension. Anita Nair's depiction deliberately emphasizes the broader societal norms and expectations that play a role in psychological violence, particularly within relationships and family dynamics, illustrating the enduring effects it can have on an individual's psyche.

Research Outcomes:

Eating Wasps explores the dual nature of memory, highlighting its capacity to inflict suffering while simultaneously offering avenues for recovery. The characters grapple with the weight of their memories, laden with trauma, loss, and betrayal, which persistently linger in their minds. For instance, Meera's struggle to move beyond her past, especially her unsuccessful marriage, reflects the psychological notion of repressed memories that persistently linger. In a parallel vein, J.A. Krishnamurthy (Jak) grapples with the enigmatic misfortune that has befallen his daughter, a puzzle he feels driven to uncover. The memories serve as psychological impediments, hindering the characters from attaining closure and progressing in their journeys. Meera and Jak both demonstrate fragmented identities, which can be associated with the psychoanalytic concept of a fractured self. Meera's sense of self as a wife and mother is profoundly disrupted when her husband departs, compelling her to embark on a journey of self-reconstruction in the wake of his absence. Jak also navigates a division among his responsibilities as a father, scholar, and an individual in pursuit of significance following the tragedy of his daughter. Their fragmented identities underscore the theme of psychological disintegration, wherein individuals experience a loss of coherence and grapple with the challenge of sustaining a unified self amidst unresolved trauma. The characters in *Eating Wasps* frequently employ mechanisms such as repression and denial as strategies to navigate their traumas. Meera initially conceals the truth of her husband's abandonment, submerging her feelings beneath the weight of her obligations. This suppression results in a gradual breakdown of her psychological equilibrium, compelling her to face the reality of her situation. Jak, conversely, remains oblivious to his own involvement in his daughter's existence and the calamity she faces, opting to concentrate on dissecting the particulars of the incident rather than confronting his own emotional turmoil. The defense mechanisms exemplify the ways in which the unconscious mind endeavors to shield the ego from excessive emotional suffering, yet in this process, it inadvertently sustains psychological turmoil. Anita Nair's novel posits that forgetting, while frequently viewed in a negative light, may also function as a vital mechanism for survival. Meera and Jak confront the intricate task of discerning which painful memories to relinquish, as they seek to heal and reconstruct their lives. The psychoanalytic notion of "forgetting" serves as a mechanism for navigating trauma, clearly reflected in their experiences. Jak's quest for understanding concerning his daughter's misfortune brings him to the profound realization that certain elements of the past must be given up in order for him to



progress. In a comparable manner, Meera's eventual acknowledgment of her new circumstances, along with her choice to welcome a future detached from her past, represents a constructive form of forgetting one that enables the characters to harmonize their fragmented psyches and progress toward a sense of completeness. The Significance of Unconscious Desires and Fears: Psychoanalytic theory underscores the importance of the unconscious, and in *Eating Wasps*, the influence of unconscious desires and fears is crucial in determining the characters' behaviors. Meera's profound apprehension regarding abandonment, rooted in her father's emotional detachment, permeates her marital relationship, shaping her actions and choices. Jak's fixation on revealing the reality behind his daughter's accident may be seen as an implicit yearning for redemption, possibly serving as a means to reconcile with his perceived shortcomings in his role as a father. The characters' emotional journeys are propelled by these unconscious motives, highlighting the novel's examination of the intricacies of the human psyche. The discussion of psychological violence in *Eating Wasps* uncovers how emotional abuse, frequently subtle and insidious, inflicts profound wounds on the characters' psyches. Anita Nair illustrates the ways in which manipulation, neglect, and abandonment progressively diminish the victims' self-worth and identity, resulting in a fractured sense of self. The novel illustrates the struggle of characters as they confront repressed or distorted memories, showcasing the internal turmoil that arises from psychological violence. Furthermore, Anita Nair underscores the societal standards that sustain this form of emotional abuse, drawing attention to the enduring impact on individuals' mental well-being and personal development. The psychoanalytic exploration of *Eating Wasps* elucidates that the path to healing is rooted in self-awareness and acceptance. Meera and Jak are compelled to engage with their suppressed emotions and past traumas to restore their sense of self. The act of recollection, along with the phenomenon of selective memory loss, enables individuals to liberate themselves from the repetitive patterns of guilt, blame, and self-indulgent sorrow. Anita Nair's characters illustrate that although trauma can lead to a fragmented psyche, the journey toward healing involves the integration of those fragments through acceptance, introspection, and the bravery to progress onward.

Conclusion:

Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* presents a profound terrain for psychoanalytic inquiry, particularly in its examination of memory, identity, and the disjointed nature of the psyche. The narrative of Meera and Jak delves into the intricate ways in which suppressed memories and unaddressed traumas disrupt the sense of self, resulting in profound dislocation and emotional stagnation. The narrative emphasizes the complex character of memory, portraying it as a source of anguish and a possible avenue for recovery. It also brings to light the defense mechanisms of repression and denial, which aim to safeguard the self but ultimately sustain psychological discord. Anita Nair posits that the act of forgetting, rather than serving as a mere obliteration of history, functions as an essential mechanism for survival, enabling characters to reforge their identities and attain psychological balance. As both protagonists embark on their journeys of self-discovery, it becomes evident that mending the fragmented self necessitates engaging with the unconscious, embracing uncomfortable realities, and reconciling with the past. Through the integration of psychoanalytic themes within her narrative, Anita Nair reveals the intricate nature of the human mind and the possibilities for rejuvenation via self-awareness and acceptance. In short, Anita Nair's *Eating Wasps* offers a profound examination of psychological violence, emphasizing its profound and frequently unseen impact on the human mind. The characters' fragmented memories and emotional struggles reveal the profound



effects of emotional manipulation, neglect, and abandonment, as illuminated by the writer. The novel illustrates the personal impact of such abuse while also examining the societal norms that sustain these harmful patterns, ultimately providing a detailed and compassionate insight into the intricacies of emotional trauma and the path to recovery. *Eating Wasps* ultimately suggests that although memory may torment, it can also serve as a crucial element in rediscovering one's identity and achieving tranquility amidst a fractured history. This research paper elucidates the evolution of generations over time. Every generation has cultivated its distinct traditions and undergone transformations. Michael Foucault observed the equivalence of Power and Knowledge. When an individual possesses knowledge, they have the capacity to generate power through that very understanding. Should an individual possess authority, they have the capacity to generate knowledge. Thus, both hold equivalent value. Meera possessed knowledge, yet she struggled to forge her own identity, as she failed to recognize her inherent power. Ultimately, she came to understand her unique talents and individuality. Anita Nair endeavors to illustrate the nuances of cultural divergence and the complexities of identity through the characters in her novel. She adeptly illustrated the interplay of three generations and their traditional values concerning cultural identity and the generational gap.

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