



LITERARY QUEST

An International, Peer-Reviewed, Open Access, Monthly, Online Journal of English Language and Literature

Visualizing Marriage as a Curse in Disguise in Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish*

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Abstract

At the end of the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first century the image of women has changed as a result of their quest for individual identity. Achieving individual identity helps the modern women to create a new image which transcends stereotypes. Knowing all the difficulties Shari, the protagonist of Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish*, takes up a journey to achieve liberty and individual identity.

Keywords

Marriage as a Curse; Kavery Nambisan; *Mango-Coloured Fish*.



The Indian urban middle-class women, unlike the women of traditional image are questioning their traditional roles of dependence on men and unsatisfactory social and cultural ideals. They feel that some of the traditional roles are failing to offer a satisfactory self-image for them. Now-a-days, they cannot be set aside as insignificant gender. They get into the temper and with the help of education they try to change the scenario. They perceive their education as a strength that would help them become economically independent. The ability to earn is seen as an insurance against the personal tragedy of widowhood or separation and even supports her decision to remain single without marriage.

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In the novel *Mango-Coloured Fish*, the life of Shari (Sharada), the protagonist, who is twenty-two years of age is controlled by her domineering mother, too-perfect sister and kind but passive father, who sees to it that her choices are shaped more by the demands of social propriety than by her will. But for her marriage they agree with her choice as the man is equally rich and educated to marry their daughter.

Shari's marriage is both love and arranged. But in contradiction, she has an increasing uncertainty about her decision to marry. Tormented by the ghosts of the past, she flees to her brother Krishna's house in Vrindhaban a few weeks before the marriage which shocks her mother. This trip is her symbolic travel into the nooks and corners of herself with the aim of self-discovery. She does not want to be a stereotype. She wants to be a "new woman" who has her own say in her life and career. She wants to become the mistress of her own body and author of her own decisions. She is afraid of entering into the married life

where she would become a puppet in the hands of her husband as she is already experiencing the same in the hands of her father, mother and sister.

Shari is always controlled by her mother. Her mother plays the role of the agent of patriarchy. She constrains her way of dressing, way of behaviour, way of eating and everything. When her mother restrains Shari from going to Vrindaban, she firmly says, “mother makes all the decisions in the family, which is odd, because both Krishna and Chitra are married, and I’m twenty-two. It is foolish to argue with mother but for once I was determined” (2). Shari’s growing bitterness towards her mother is because of her bitter childhood experiences. Even in her teenage Shari did not get much attention and care from her mother. She is always treated by her mother with disgust.

Shari’s conflict still more increases when she observes Paru Aunty, Shari’s relative who silently bears all the sufferings and hardships caused by her husband. He drinks almost everyday and if she is rude to him, he even physically assaults her. She leads an unhappy life amidst the violent atmosphere created by her husband. Observing Paru Aunty, Shari feels that the struggle against violence is the struggle against the unequal distribution of power both physical and economic between the sexes. Shari’s fear of entering into marital life begins as she observes bitterly the marital lives of her relatives. Even her brother Krishna and his wife Teji lead a name-sake life with all misunderstandings. Shari, during her stay in Vrindaban, happens to realize it when she comes across a sign posted on the side of a wooden shelf as MARRIAGE IS A MIRAGE (40) which appears Shari as a cautionary message.

To add more to her confusion, Gautam, Shari’s lover, is very particular about moulding Shari’s tastes according to his own. Shari herself doubts whether she would be a suitable wife for him. When she raises this doubt to Gautam, he says that she should be moulded. She bitterly thinks, “Moulded How? Pulled, pushed, elongated, flattened, hammered, punched and gouged out until I was the right specimen, the perfect wife?” (73). Gautam also desires that Shari should have to do something like an MBA which would be useful when he

sets up his own company. He wants Shari to get a business related education. But on the contrary, Shari does not have such an interest because she wants to be a teacher.

Shari is fed up with the advice of the people around her. Suren Swami is called to advise her. Chitra also instructs her to plan her future. When her mother is boasting about her thirty-two years of married life, Shari with a straightforward view, argues, “There’s this marriage and that marriage and the other. People make it good or bad, I have analysed. Your marriage wonderful? Father sold his soul to you and there is no forgiving him” (230).

Shari’s observation over her parents’ married life makes her to empathize her father. In all the difficult situations, Shari likes to run away from the clutches of her relatives. She hopes that there is a world for her, there is a place for her on the vast earth. Her departure from her home is an initiation towards personal freedom and a rejection of the role her family wanted to thrust on her.

Shari is trapped between traditional values and demands of the self. When she stays with Yashodha, her classmate and close friend, at Delhi, she observes her immoral lifestyle. She asks Yash about this, she simply answers without any guilty conscience, “I’m not so stupid that I’ll wreck myself over one person. I use men. Swallow and spit them out like seeds” (120). On watching such treacherous attitude of Yash, Shari’s conflict increases. Observing unfaithful husbands as well as wives, and the failures of the marital lives, she realizes that marriage is not what everyone thinks but it is a trap to women. Being much frustrated by the words of Yash, the thought of marriage frightens Shari from all directions.

The failures of her relative’s marital lives drive her to the extreme. She tries to recollect the past to determine the present. She recollects her friendship with Naren, a blind young man who is very sensitive in maintaining his self, in spite of his blindness. Naren never worries about his blindness, for he has created his own world and explores himself as an independent man. He tells Shari of his world, “My blindness is my gift. I have my sun, my stars, and my

sky. I don't know what everybody else's world looks like but mine's unique" (142). Surprisingly, Naren's parents also are not made for each other. In spite of the failure of his parents' marital life, Naren develops self-confidence to be successful in his career. He understands the reality of life and explores his self. Naren's self-confidence inspires Shari to choose her own path of life.

Developing her own ideals and principles in her life and adhering to them, Shari recollects the past of her life and chews everything in her loneliness and makes herself take any decision according to her mind's instruction. She gets vexed about the marital life whenever she happens to see the failures and sufferings of Ruku, her servant maid, Paru Aunt, Yasodha and even her own parents. But the difference is that Shari realizes the shackles of marital life before her marriage. Her realization is the result of her physical and mental journey from past to present.

Realizing the fact that marriage is a curse in disguise, Shari takes off her engagement ring and covers it carefully in a handkerchief and puts it away in the corner of the bottom-shelf. She does not want to constrain herself bound in the shackles either in the form of marriage, or in the form of love. When Yash questions about Gautam, Shari says, "I feel so confident about my decision that I have no need to explain myself" (240). Finally, she determines to continue her life as a teacher and expresses her feeling as a free bird saying, "I started hearing my own thoughts a long time ago, now I'm ready to listen and obey" (240).

She decides to find a job and stay in a working women's hostel. She wants to be on her own for a while, she cancels her return to Madras. In the course of her journey, she mentally struggles. She detaches herself from love and concludes that marriage is a mere folly. She makes up her mind and decides to return to her life of kindergarten teacher by which she hopes to get the peace of mind.

Work Cited

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MLA (7th Edition) Citation:

Kaliswari, R and K. M. Sumathi. "Visualizing Marriage as a Curse in Disguise in Kavery Nambisan's *Mango-Coloured Fish*." *Literary Quest* 1.4 (2014): 21-26. Web. DoA.

DoA – Date of Access

Eg. 23 Aug. 2015. ; 05 April 2017.