



PRE-MARRIAGE DILEMMA AS REFLECTED IN KAVERY NAMBISAN'S *MANGO-COLOURED FISH*

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Abstract

Kavery Nambisan's novel, *Mango-Coloured Fish* is chosen for this paper in order to explore the protagonist's pre-marriage dilemma and incessant burdens loaded on her by the patriarchal forces. She also wants to define and trace out her self-identity, as well as self-discovery and while achieving it she has confronted loneliness, alienation status in her life. The present novel which is richly textured and boldly perceptive, is the heartwarming story of a young woman's attempt to strike out her own.

Key words: Pre-marriage dilemma, Kavery Nambisan, Mango-colored fish

According to a survey report published in India Today on February 8, 1999, Nambisan's present novel has the distinction of being included in the top twenty-five Indian fiction books. The story of the novel deals with the close knit, Tamil family Chettiars from Madras, staying in Delhi. The family consists of father, mother Bimmy, as the father addresses her by this nick name, but her real name was Ahalya and they have a son named Krishna, and two daughters, Chitra and the protagonist, Sharada as 'Shari' of the age twenty two. Young Shari always believes that hers and Krishna's identity in the family was merely at the periphery of things. She observes her status as: "Krishna and I hover at the periphery of things. We are the stitches that slipped out of a cosy pattern" (4). Shari's father was the Managing Director of a garment export firm and has a privilege of two office cars, a Secretary and subordinates to follow his orders. He was very vigorous and assertive in his office transactions but his status in the family was apart from it and he was putty in his wife's hands. The export business for which Shari's father worked opened a branch in Madras, so he was transferred there. It was since fourteen years the family was there, when the protagonist was eight years. Her father was an avid reader of periodicals and his wife refers to it as his 'intellectual pursuit'. He enjoys reading of The Economics Express, The Financial





Express, Business India, India Today, Frontline, and Business Line. Similarly he eagerly and curiously listens news bulletins on AIR, on DD, BBC and CNN.

To Shari her father appears as an encyclopaedia of superficial knowledge. Shari's mother was different type of creature who has extravagant pride of superiority of Delhi culture and ashamed of being a Tamilian. She has immensely converted her father's identity of Tamilian into Delhian. Nambisan described this typical change as:

Father gave up the dhotis he wore at home for Kurta-Pyjamas, and rubber chappals for Kolhapuris; ate rotis instead of rice, drank tea instead of coffee and listened to Begum Akhtar and Bade Ghulam Ali instead of Mali or Chembai. Father is not a committed convert but an apostate who defected to please his wife (12).

It clearly indicates that Bimmy as a wife, too dominant to her husband and always wanted to overpower each member of the family. Krishna has excelled his job as an assistant to the Professor of Surgery at Stanley Medical and married Tejaswini, an anaesthetist. Shari's elder sister, Chitra married a person, having M.B.A. degree, who was working in Lucknow. In most of the novel, female protagonist is presented as a young character and yearning for marriage, aspiration, hopes and plannings for the future life and the marital bliss beckons her to the celestial world. But, Nambisan's present protagonist appears totally different from them. While presenting this teenage young protagonist, the author has chosen less trodden path. No doubt, she likes other protagonists, has faced predicaments, ordeals but her determination led her on the right track of life and mould her as a vigorous character. She wants to redefine her self-identity and desires to visualise self-discovery by visiting remote places to her dearest ones and tried to perceive herself the concept of marriage institution before entering into it. Like every young girl's mother, Shari's mother too is anxious for her future, her marriage and career. "She is afraid of losing her grip on her worthless younger daughter" (6). Mother Bimmy is disappointed with her for all sorts of reasons. One of them was that Shari was not blessed with single feminine appearance at the same time her decision to be a KG teacher was also a jolt to her imagination. To some extent, Shari resembles Anita Desai's Uma of Fasting Feasting, only difference is that Shari is not too submissive like Uma, but both have marriage predicaments. Shari herself reviews her personality in her own words as :

And physically, I'm a fizzle. I am not blessed with a single pleasing feminine trait. Not a bosom, a hip, a curl or smile to make me desirable. My nose is bulbous, my very black eyes are bit too large





for my face, I need to wear glasses, my cheeks have stayed a shiny, girlish pink. I have a proclivity to plumpness (11).

Bimmy was incessantly worried about Shari's future, because Shari was of marriageable age and yet there were no any prospects of her marriage. Hence, restless Bimmy consulted her guru Suren Swami, and expressed her concern over Shari's age and not being able to find a suitable match for her.

Shari's slipshod attire was one of the many things, which provokes her mother's anger and despair. Kurta with trousers or a midi and T-shirt was comfortable and favourite attire for her. But her mother strives hard to buy salwar-kameez sets and fancy jewellery and tries her best to convert her daughter. But these things lie unused in Shari's wardrobe. From psychological point of view, most of the teenage youth spent their lot of time for the best appearance, mostly they concentrate on their luxurious and gorgeous dress, ornaments, and perfumes but for all these things Shari has no any interest.

Even she never blushed and overwhelmed with the word marriage. On it Chitra was also in favour of mother and her verdict for Shari was that as a lazy, obstinate and lacking aesthetic judgement. But Shari herself thought that the reason for her dowdiness was her ego. On it Shari ponders and expresses her view :

“How can I let anyone know, so blatantly, that I want to impress? My appearance, I like to think, is low on my list of priorities” (30).

Shari has an incessant feeling that life had been controlled by others – a domineering mother, Chitra – a too perfect elder sister, kind but passive father. Shari also believes that she has two sets of parents – one was Bimmy and father, another was Parvati aunty and uncle but she was more affectionate to Paru aunty and uncle, than to her parents. Aunt Paru and uncle with their pensive innocence and simplicity always impressed to Shari. On one occasion at Shari's childhood days, while the family was travelling to Mahabs for picnic, Shari puked over her purple taffeta dress and she felt sick of it. On this occasion, Mother sprang away as if she had been struck and screamed father to stop the car. She got out and instead of washing Shari's dress, she inspected the folds of her crisp blue chikan sari for stains. On the contrary, aunt Paru extricated Shari from the purple taffeta mess and washed her even uncle poured the water to clean her. And later aunty took her on her lap but her Mother's role to Shari was neutral.

Shari also reminisces another dreadful event of her early young age when it was a beginning of menstrual period in her life. But she was so confused and bothered by it and went to Chitra in the middle of a game of hopscotch. After scrutinizing Shari, Chitra informed about it to mother who was lost in watching the serial Humlog, it appears as an interruption to her and only she





turned to look at Shari across the room. She hurriedly went inside and brought a packet of carefree and suggested Chitra to show it to Shari and asked through Chitra to stay clean. Thus Bimmy's relationship to her daughter, Shari not as a mother but also like a step mother. Beginning of menstrual period in the puberty phase of any girl is like a transitional period. It is a delicate, tender occasion of every girl's life and on this anarchical phase the mother should have to play the key role not merely as a mother but she should have played the role like a friend, supporter, and inspirer. But unfortunately such things were never reflected by the mother. Hence most of the time their relationship appears as too strained. Sometimes Mother Bimmy also reiterates that aunt Paru as a childless woman, on it Shari strongly and proudly defends aunt Paru by declaring herself as their daughter : "But they have me!?" (223).

Shari even in her school days was too innocent and ignorant to the worldly things that all the time she appears clumsy and embarrassed character. On her menstrual period, if it was delayed, she had constant fear which she expresses in the following words :

It was awful. From whispered conversations that I overheard in school, I knew that if the period didn't come for over a month, you were pregnant. Six weeks passed and I realized that I hadn't bled after the first time. I WAS PREGNANT! But how? One had to get very close to boys, take one's clothes off most likely, and the closet I had been those horrors was at PT when the boys joined us (8).

However, Shari's marriage was finally fixed with young Gautam, a computer Engineer, to whom Chitra and Mother favoured from the point of views as, money gifted, intelligent, and sense of humour. But Shari became overwhelmed by exaggerated fears of awkwardness to this relationship. Now Bimmy has got a temporary relief of Shari's marriage but her next important task was to train Shari for kitchen duties, so that she could be a good housewife. On the other hand, Shari was never enthusiastic and eager to get married that it appears no thrills and spills for it. She was neither excited by the marriages of Krishna and Chitra nor exhilarated by Gautam's feelings for her. Gautam reveals to Shari about his cherished dreams of going to the U.S. good jobs, excellent money and after six years he will be last word in systems.

But Shari was not content with Gautam's decision to be in U.S. for six years and she was somewhat dismay with it. Gautam repeatedly realizes to Shari that she must have purpose in life and further told her : "you must learn to be less of a prude" (34). As a young girl of the modern generation, Shari has her own ideals and principles in the life and adhered to them, one day she expresses her opinion that she did not believe in the idea of premarital sex. On it, Gautam laughed casually and stupendously exclaimed to her:





“For heaven’s sake, Shari, in this day and age!” (34).

His casual reaction on it made Shari to ponder seriously that whether he was sexually experienced and it settled in her heart as an ache. Gautam also desires that Shari should have to do something like MBA, which would be useful when he sets his company.

But on the contrary, Shari does not have such an interest because she wants to be a teacher. While Gautam was in his office he appears like an autocrat and too disciplined person. Shari used to visit his office only on Tuesdays and Fridays when he finished his work early. But Shari went to him on one Thursday to surprise him but Shari’s arrival on an irregular day did not please him but also put him into a awkward position. Instead of welcoming her, he asserts :

“You mustn’t embarrass me when I’m with my colleagues” (71).

But in his next day’s meeting he clarified things to her. He used to say her that he worked hard to create a positive impression, and even he did not hurt people or spoke ill of colleagues. In his life, he planned to do so many things, one of them was he wanted to endow a chair at his IIT or at least an award for something in computers. He revealed his noble dream to Shari by saying :

Success without wealth is worthless. My father – I haven’t told you much about him – is successful, highly so; but I feel no envy for a man who in spite of being a University Professor, can only afford a two wheeler, and lives in a rented house. Success coupled with wealth gives respectability and that’s unbeatable. I want, Shari, to be the most envied person in the world (72).

Though, Gautam on most of the occasion displayed his ambitions, aims and determination in the life, yet Shari’s state of mind appears totally muddleheaded. And in this bewildered state she asked him like a catalytic converter:

“Why do you want to marry me?” (73).

On it Gautam explained her, he liked her because she could be ‘moulded’ and further he asserts her that:

“You mustn’t ever think that the money your parents offered me is in any way important” (73).

So there was sincerity in Gautam’s assertion because he wanted a good marriage. At the same time in the mind of Shari cravings arise that their house will be classy, with splendid and expensive real-leather sofas and rich soft curtains, learned books displaying on shelves, antiques of solid brass, vivid show birds in a cage, and the visiting guests will be computer people and clients and so on. Thus, when Shari was in the company of Gautam, she had a rare but unusual





urge, which dreaded sweet yearning to change herself physically into the most pleasing woman. First time, she has sensation the way she sits, the way she talks and the way she tenderly touches her hair, all of it appears noteworthy to her. Hence, she really wants to be soft, yielding and desirable. The mother of Shari always tries to engrave in her the realization that Gautam will bring order, stability and security in her life. And Shari also felt there is no doubt about it, because he reiterates her several times:

“You must have a purpose in life” (74).

And she has been seriously trying to find it since. On an occasion of one Saturday, as Gautam drove her in his Maruti 1000, to visit his office, she was too much impressed for his status and position commanded with respect and awe there.

But next moment all of a sudden, she decided to visit Krishna and Teji, her brother and sister-in-law in Vrindaban, near Mathura to take the view of this proposal. Even, Gautam was shocked about her visit to her brother, of whom he too had a dark opinion. In the family, Shari was only on right track of communication with Krishna only, so it was essential for her to take his opinion on this relationship. Inevitably, as there was no other alternative, she consented for the proposal of Gautam. But tormented by the ghosts of the past and increasingly uncertain about her decision to marry Gautam, she arrived to her brother Krishna in Vrindaban, a few weeks prior to wedding. This visit was a great shock and dismayed to her mother. This trip was her symbolic travel into the nooks and corners of herself with the aim of self-discovery. Even as she got down into busy and entirely unpredictable lives of Krishna and sister-in-law, Teji, both doctors, the visit offered her rare opportunity at first hand as a model to observe their married life thoroughly. Nambisan narrates the odyssey of self-discovery of Shari in the following words:

I carry a stool in and sit next to him, determined to talk. About marriage. I'm anxious that mine be perfect. I want to find out more about theirs, study it, learn; and be so well-prepared that confusion in me will quieten and cease (45).

Shari also remembers at the time of his marriage Krishna too had faced the hurdles. The parents of Teji were hesitant their doctor daughter's marriage with Krishna, not because he was Chettiar and she was a Deshpande from Maharashtra but because of the problems of Krishna. So they tried to dissuade her like any caring parents do. Even they threatened to take her out of Medical College and back to Pune. But Teji was stubborn and firm with decision and got married. Shari ponders:

“It was Teji who resurrected my brother, and almost ended up becoming a wreck herself” (43).





Mother, Bimmy also pinned her hopes of fame for Krishna that her son would rather have it to join an army and died a heroic death in some war. But Krishna considers that it was bad. Then while sharing his past first time with Shari, he confessed his unhappy affair and its grim reaction over his married life. He reminisces:

I allowed myself to be blackmailed, without realizing that a blackmailer goes all the way. When Teji come to know, from an anonymous call, it killed her. I was still in the clutches of that woman. I was afraid, dammit, but pretended I was breaking it off in a civilized way, that I was sparing Teji from being hurt. The stupidest thing I ever did in my life (65).

So the tale of Krishna indicates that, to some extent, there were crises and ordeals in their married life too. But both of them had to cope with these crises in a proper way and also by mutual understanding. As a brother to Shari, Krishna tries to make cautious her for the proposal of Gautam. He warns her :

“I afraid you’ll be laundered, ironed and folded into something Gautam’s looking for to complete his image – and then you’ll be no different from Sher Singhs and Chitras ...” (63).

But, Shari takes this Krishna’s warning as a male jealousy – as there were most of the men jealous of Gautam and Krishna was one of them. Through the novel, Krishna emerges as a typical modern generation character, a bookworm, imaginative and typical rebel. His was silent presence in Shari’s life as silent but formative. While her stay in Vrindaban, Shari came across a sign pasted on the side of wooden shelf as :

MARRIAGE IS A MIRAGE, it appears her as a cautionary message. Later, Teji elaborates it on one occasion to Shari by saying:

Marriage is a mirage because people choose to see only the icing on the cake. Every person longs to meet another all the way. Even DNA is a double-stranded molecule, pair bonded with its mate. The best relationship improve with time (56).

However, the life was appearing to Shari like odysseys, and she begins to define and redefine the meanings of the words like love and marriage which perplex her. Fleeing to Krishna and keeping distance from her parents and solitary ruminations help to poise herself, yet most of the time she appears fickle-minded and she spent few months pondering over her impending marriage and her present condition was like that of enigmatic state. Most of the occasions, Shari appeared as a baffled young girl. To her, the very object of affection became the source of disgust. It was





her erratic behavior towards Gautam. As an elder brother, Krishna sometimes tries to advise her, inspire her and give her strength to rise over weaknesses in the life. He convinces her :

“Tell you something. Marriage is certainty. You eat, talk, think, sleep, love and live a marriage together. Make it worthwhile. If it’s the uncertainties that are more appealing, it’s too early for marriage” (84-85).

Though, Shari was with her brother to purge her future tormenting feelings, yet she was always in predicamental and bewildered situation. She ruminates herself : “How could I have explained to Krishna when I don’t know myself? Each day I know less and less” (85). At the same time to maintain her position she also played tricks of lies on two fronts. While, she wrote to her blind friend Naren, she lied that she loved Gautam and would be getting married to him soon. And the letter written by her to Gautam with the same lie spilling that : “I love you, my dearest” (85). So the lie expressed through her letters by Shari growing bigger all the time. It seemed with these lies; she was not only playing the games of tricks but cheating to herself. This was merely a self-deception.

To Shari the word ‘marriage’ appears so slippery that sometimes she reacted very negatively. She had never been enthusiastic about marriage as most young girls. When their maid servant Ruku’s marriage was called off on account of demanding excessive dowry from the side of groom, Shari comforts her by saying about it and also asked her :

“And what do you want a husband for? Where does it say that a girl must marry? If you have education, you can get a better job than this, earn more” (28).

Shari also ponders that her parents do not appear to enjoy being married to each other. She never saw them teasing each other or they never sat cozily together. And even she could not imagine them touching. Krishna and Shari considered that their parents marriage though peaceful yet lacked love. But in the case of aunt Paru and uncle, she witnesses what love did to the two of them. First time she has seen that uncle kissing aunty and Shari was stunningly embarrassed. Before that, she had not seen anyone kiss except in films. Shari had spent three or four months with aunty and uncle and from them she had learnt to love but when uncle was too addicted to wine, their relationship disturbed and crisis began in their life. Now they were reflecting to Shari the other side of their life, and unfortunately it forced her to witness their humiliation. She reminds that there had been time when she felt jealous of their love for each other and nudged herself between them like a puppy. She always craved to be theirs.





Shari has carefully observed and introspected the life of Krishna and Teji, and remind herself over it:

“This life is Teji and Krishna’s not mine”(50).

Now she thought that she had fulfilled the purpose of her visit, when she had talked, listened and understood by them. She considers:

“There is no desire to be back home, most certainly not, but there is this loneliness to deal with. I know now, it’s the sea that I miss” (50).

Like most of the protagonists of the contemporary Indian novels, Shari too was confronting isolation or loneliness in her life. While defining her own identity she confessed it in her own words:

“I realizes with sadness that loneliness suited me” (13).

There was always gnawing to her heart that she has never been more clear headed in her life. The world appears to her as revolving around greed, revenge and anger.

After her completion of ‘market survey’ on marriage Shari decided to proceed to Delhi to visit her classmate friend, Yashoda as ‘Yash’. It was after fourteen years Shari was visiting to Delhi not out of any longing for her past but to judge her verdict. While visiting to Yash, she reminisces the past when Yash had announced very quite simply that soon she would be getting married a Saraswat Microbiologist to whom two year Fellowship had been awarded for the research. On the occasion of engagement Shari not only disapproved Yash’s parents but all parents, disparaging their daughters. She compared this occasion for some reason with the slaughter of chickens, which they witness every day on their school way. Shari and Yash every day had to pass by a shop of those chickens. The shop was lined with wire cages stuffed with live birds. Every now and then, a butcher boy, working there, would emerge open a cage and seize a chicken, while the other birds, terror-stricken gurgles rising in their throats. Shari equated this situation to Yash’s helplessness in finery on engagement occasion as chickens waiting for their turn. The interpretation of Shari also indicates that she does not believe in such pompous occasion where young girl are belittling by the patriarchal forces. Like every young girl Yash has an ambition to join IES. She would be Ambassador to Russia and to see Swan lake at the Bolshoi and play chess with the Russians. But her marriage turned her into stereotyped typical Indian wife with domestic choruses.

During the course of her stay Shari comes to know that though Yash was married and mother of two siblings, yet there was a stigma of adultery to her married status. First time Yash confides it to her close friend that :





“I am not so stupid that I will wreck myself over one person. I use men swallow and spit them out like seeds. Really, you must believe me” (120).

As a young girl of contemporary generation, Yash has illusion and frustration that as there is nothing sacred about the marriage institution. Further she tries to assert that she has to cope up with the time with her faith to give the impression of being happy than really to be happy. But at the same time she expresses her repentance and guilty feeling. She says to Shari :

“I’m sick, sick, sick of it. Adultery is vile; for me, it’s a daily humiliation. I wish it had been otherwise with Satya” (121).

And further like a veteran personality, she advises Shari :

Look, don’t get worked up about this marriage thing. What does it all mean anyway? A legal document on paper, saying who you are married to and when. From then on, in all the forms you fill,. You write your name beside that enter ‘Wife of ____’ while previously you entered, ‘daughter of ____’. ____ Will Satyu ever fill a document and enter “husband of ____” beside his name? (121-122).

The assertion and interpretation of Yash about marriage infidelity appears very pungent and it also gives one more jolt to Shari’s bewildered state. Yash also strongly believes that the arranged marriage seems to work better than the so-called love marriage. She also bitterly opines that :

“Love, dear girl, is very matlabi most of the time” (122).

Sometimes Shari wonders how Satyu will react if he finds out about Yash’s infidelity. But at the same time she believes that forgiveness as the best way out on it. On next time, when she ponders it for her own case, doubts arise in her mind like:

“What, for instance, will I do if Gautam cheats on me?” (132).

At the same time, Shari grapples with the memories of her relationship with Naren, her blind teacher friend. She met this young teacher of Physics and Maths at the restaurant Breeze and the Sams, while she was enjoying her coffee. They met frequently at the bus stop and then at their coffee sessions on Saturday evenings. There was exchange of mutual thoughts by sharing their views and ideas about life. She also learnt from him there were occasion of frequent clashes between his timid father and shrewd smart woman, Stephanie Selvaraj, his mother. In Naren’s point of view, the marriage of his parents was not a successful marriage, but they pretended it. Naren thought that when he left his sheltered predictable, humdrum childhood the world





appears to him as to devour him. First time he was sharing his frustrated thought to someone like Shari. He shares his feelings as:

Why did my father not do something? He knew that Mother was demolishing me. She ate my mind, chewed my thoughts and replaced them with her own ... she smashed my instincts until life became conditioned reflex. College was my first taste of freedom. I learned to smoke and smoked so much I could smell it in my sweat and urine. ... All my energy went into resisting my mother (102).

Here, Nambisan has presented Naren's mother, Stephanie Selvaraj as equally dominant character like that of Shari's mother Bimmy. Both have similar qualities to dominate over their husbands and their young children, as if they have darkly covered over their lives and caused partially to rebel to Shari and Naren. Naren always believes that his parents are opposites, antipodal almost. He also believes that his mother has moulded him as cocky for his blindness.

He says:

"For all the hideous things I say about my mother, she made me. She taught me to believe I was special. I was blind! Gifted! I became cocky about my blindness and she did not mind that; she knew it's better to be cocky than miserable" (107).

Shari confessed that, when she was with Naren her mind moved and swayed unpredictable ways. Her sympathy was now gradually converting into love towards him. She expressed her feelings as:

"Sometimes we would think the same thought and it was like sipping through one straw" (99).

In Naren's company she appeared contented and happy. Even, she began to use perfume, before that she always hated perfume as defiance of her mother's belief in the alluring power of artificial smells. Now she used the perfume from her mother's collection, but when Naren did not notice it, she became frustrated. When one Sunday Naren visited to Shari's house for dinner, and after dinner, Mother spread a trap to check Shari's feelings for Naren. She deliberately says to Shari: "What's the use? No girl will marry him" (140). And on it Shari passionately and spontaneously blurts out: "I will" (140). On it, Mother in her soft, lethal voice expostulates Shari: "Don't even think of it, ... If you do anything foolish, I will splinter and die" (140).





On the other hand, Naren's mother, Stephanie exhorts Shari for marriage proposal with Naren. She convinces her by saying:

“Marriage is a practical business. At least one person must be down-to-earth, realistic. Naren needs a wife who can compensate for this handicap. ... You are sharp girl, you must think” (156).

Even, when Naren went to his native place, Thenmalai, he had written fifty two letters to Shari and Shari has also responded him by thirty letters. The letters were like the conversations. But this deep intimate love was wind up all of sudden by Shari, through a letter with lie in which declares her engagement with Gautam, which she had written from the airport.

In her stay at Delhi, Shari was haunted by the terrifying dreams which used to visit her night after night. Dreams like, woman in yellow dress chasing her, or she running in panic, losing herself through hospital wards, offices, government buildings and strange countries, and she also dreamt that she was dead and Gautam cremating her. It seems that Nambisan infused these dreams to portray Shari's predicamental status in her life from which she wants to find out the way out. Meanwhile the shocking result of Shari's market survey on marriage prompts her to be on her own for a while. Now she has decided to cancel her return to Madras and she wishes to find a part-time job and to stay into a hostel as she wanted 'sort out something'. Like a sudden revelation, she strongly and urgently wants to be on her own for awhile. Yash wants to call on phone to Gautam and would like to acknowledge him about Shari's change in the plans. But Shari protested to it and considers better to write him. On it Gautam replies her promptly:

“We have a lifetime to spend together, a few months won't matter. Have a fun, darling” (129).

As determined firmly about the life, after a few days Shari moved into the hostel, and she took off her engagement ring, a token before the marriage and wrapped it carefully in handkerchief and put it away in a corner of bottom shelf. She ponders that it as one of the life's important decisions. To sacrifice her own family and live far away from dear ones, and to stay in hostel was one of the unusual decision of Shari. The isolation of the young protagonist is symbolically compared with an aged bitch with sad, expressive face. She observes:

A constant, silent companion of my early days at the hostel is a dog outside that I can see from my window: an aged bitch with a sad





expressive face, dark grey coat matted in filth, and a mottled pink belly with withered teats (161).

Shari also ruminates her past when she used to read a lot. This habit was developed in her by Krishna. But her Mother Bimmy abhorred the reading habit, which she fears that it would turn her children antisocial. Bimmy also expresses her anxiety to Paru aunty:

“She’s a problem worse than Krishna, ... At her age, children are always at something, never still. Shari behaves like an old woman” (172).

Shari ultimately decided to break off her engagement after her period of soul searching. Marriage appeared to her as a hurdle of big boulder, in her search for identity. So she thought better to renounce it. To some extent, it did not appear as a Shari’s total rebel to patriarchal system but it appeared as self-assertion, she wanted to be free bird of her own will. She expressed her feelings in her own words:

“I can feel myself leaping out of the cage I have prisoned myself in, I savour the joy of being me. Where is the sense of living by someone else’s rules? ... I started hearing my own thought a long time ago, now I am ready to listen and obey” (240).

In the end Shari appeared to reject to live the life of pretence, reflecting the thought of other which were imposed on her individuality. On her last day in Delhi, she came back to Yash’s house to say goodbye. It was on that occasion, she decided to put off with her engagement with Gautam. She determinedly declared to Yash :

“I am going to give this marriage thing a rest ... I’ve got the heebie- jeebies. Stage fright. Panic attack” (240).

She firmly determined not to be like a fish in the glass bowl, which darts about in purposeless monotony, because the space was restricted to its freedom.

Earlier in Yash’s house, Shari was impressed after seeing the sunlight reflecting at the glass and water on fish, and while arguing about its colour as mango-coloured. Though, for Shari the fish appears impressive in its mango coloured, yet she did not want to restrict her own identity with that fish. She wanted to trace out her self-identity and freedom in this world. Thus, when once again she started her return journey for Madras, she was not the confused, jittery and fickle-





minded. In the present novel along with Shari's predicament of marriage, and search for identity, Nambisan also presented other young generation characters like Krishna, Teji, Yash, Chitra and in their young age hostel warden George and his beloved Portia. On the background of Shari's present status, Krishna and Yash appear as severe critics and critical observer of the marriage institution. And Mother Bimmy and Stephanie have presented as dominating patriarchal forces like hurdles in the ways of Shari and Naren. In an article Alka Saxena rightly observes the novel as protagonist's searching for identity and pre-marriage dilemma. She observes:

Nambisan conveys to the readers the need to hold the reins of life in one's own hands. Marriage is no child play and so before taking the plunge one has to really prepare for it. The novel helps in building up courage and sensibility. Through the various characters Nambisan points out that living life of pretensions and fragmented personalities is no fun (Saxena 169).

Though belongs to a field of medicine as a Surgeon, yet like a real literary artist, Nambisan successfully depicted the contemporary younger generation pre and past marriage dilemmas and ordeals effectively and lively.

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