



## “Love is not love which alters when it alteration finds” – A Reference to Anita Nair’s *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*

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### Abstract:

Love is a basic human instinct and without it the human life is not possible on this earth. Though love is portrayed in many texts, including scriptures, yet it has multiple shades and meanings in literatures. There are various types of love discussed in literatures, yet the love between man and woman gets a high voltage of interest. All writers give importance to human relationship which has love at its crux-pole and without love, literature is not possible. Anita Nair who is a contemporary Indian woman writer writing in English, devotes a special place to love in one of her novels called *Alphabet Soup for Lovers*. The main characters in this novel are entangled in the web of love and prove that love alone has the power to give meaning to life in this meaningless world. The love between them does not find any alterations as said by Shakespeare and it stands as an epitome of love of two souls.

**Key Words:** Platonic love, Instinct, Epitome, Depopularize, Eros, Philia, Storge, Agape, Ludos, Pragma, and Philautia.

### Introduction:

Literature is one of the best tools that picturizes love in various shades and colours. Though there are many types of love, yet the love between man and woman portrayed in a novel or a play or a short story or an epic interests the readers. Hence writers of all ages give importance to portray the love of man-woman in their works. Both men and women writers equally speak about love in their works. Yet the love spoken by women writers in their works gives a clear view of the inner-minds of their women characters who are always craving

for true love and companionship in their lives. Anita Nair, one of the contemporary Indian women writers has produced many novels and short stories. All her novels bring out the idea of woman's freedom and her struggle for establishing her individuality.

Anita Nair's *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2015) is unique, because in this novel, the author has brought out the love of Lena and Shoola Pani through the versions of various food recipes. It indicates that man's love instinct is nurtured by the food items that he consumes. Like Ben Jonson who treats man's 'four humours', Anita Nair treats 'human love' connecting it to that of various food items. The fantasied love of Lena and Shoola Pani crosses all limits of social life and it transcends the universe to stand as an epitome of love of two souls. The love between them is Platonic and has a metaphysical tone in it. Their love is like the epic love of Radha-Krishna. Their love also proves the world's saying, 'love is blind'.

### **Discussion:**

Love is the basic human instinct. Without love, life is not possible for man on this earth. Hence all the scriptures of the world teach about love between man and God, between man and nature and between man and men. Love is the medium through which spiritual bliss can be attained. If man's heart is filled with love, then there is no place for the negative human traits such as anger, jealousy, cunningness, envy, untruthfulness, selfishness and so on. If man loves others, then he is loved by all. The power of love is proven by many men in the history of the world. Love is mightier than the sword because it had put an end to many great wars. However, love has various shades and shapes. Love among the family members is a common one which develops by blood-bond. But love between two men or two nations is a prime thing in human life since it involves so many traits of human life. Literature is one of the best media that describes the various shades of love and its impacts on the lives of individuals. Scott Fitzgerald very rightly said:

There are all kinds of love in this world but never the same love twice. When we think of love, what do we understand? Does it exist only between partners? Or in the family? Or between friends? The best place to search for the answers is in the treasure trove of literature.

[\(https://www.thinkrightme.com/en/live-right/types-of-love-in-literature/\)](https://www.thinkrightme.com/en/live-right/types-of-love-in-literature/)

Literature expresses love at its best. There are many types of love described in literature. And it presents all these types in a very excitable and heartbreakingly beautiful way. Some examples of various types of love are Eros, Philia, Storge, Agape, Ludos, Pragma, Philautia. Eros is the Greek god of love. It represents romantic or passionate love. The word Philia stems from Philos. It is the love of goodwill and friendship.

Storge is the Greek word for natural affection. It denotes the familial love. Agape is the universal love. It is the comprehensive feeling for the entire cosmos. In this type of love more spirituality is inclined. Ludos originates from the word ludo, the word which relates to a game. This is the skittish kind of love. This type of love, in literature, is portrayed many times as betrayal. Pragma stems from 'pragmatic'. Duty and reason are the foundations of this type of love. Consequently, it is seen in the form of arranged marriage. Philia, meaning 'between equals.' It has the root in the word, Philautia. Philautia means self-love, love within oneself, the process of loving ourselves.

Anita Nair in *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2015) portrays the various shades of love in a unique way. This novel is told from the point of view of Komathi, a cook working in the protagonist's house. The protagonist, Lena Abraham @ Leema "@ Lee of Anita Nair's novel *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2015) falls in a fantasized love by keeping aside her loveless married life. She has metamorphized herself in order to lead a love-life. She has transcended from the stage of pragma to the eros state to lead a love-life in the philautia state. Her marriage with KK is perfect precisely because both have no love for each other and their life in the tea plantation of the picturesque Anamalai Hills is idyllic but empty. They are perfect man-woman living in the same house sharing no common passion or emotion. Like Shashi Deshpande's Sarita and Mano of *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Lena and KK lead a life of non-communication and non-interference.

A change occurs in the married life of Lena when one rainy morning a man called, Shoola Pani Dev arrives at their 'homestay' which they run in the tea estate of Anamalai Hills. Shoola Pani is a South Indian Cinema's heartthrob. The famous actor, Shoola Pani flees away from his own superstardom. He has been married and has two daughters. Though enjoying luxurious life in all aspects, yet he also like Lena, feels 'emptiness' in his life. But when Lena and he meet something flares up between them that neither of them could have anticipated. Slowly she becomes his 'Lee' and he, her 'Ship' and the Arcadia at where they drink the bliss of love turns out to be their Paradise, the Garden of Eden. Lena finds her own 'self' after becoming the soul-mate of her Ship.

The novel is partly told from the point of view of Komathi, the cook in Lena's house. Being a cook and uneducated, she does not know English and on all a sudden, one day the desire to learn the English alphabet pops up in her mind. As she is familiar with the food items, she decides to learn the alphabet through the names of the food items. Anita Nair, who is a storyteller and a cook book writer narrates this story in a unique way by exploiting the qualities and names of food items and correlating them to that of human emotions and

passions and the happenings and events that take place in the lives of the characters of the novel. Every chapter is narrated with a title that carries the name of a food item and accordingly the events and incidents and also the inner-working of the characters are beautifully intertwined by the author.

Komathi, the couple's omniscient domestic helper, is the real protagonist holding the novel together with her history lessons, life lessons and cooking lessons. She is taking English lessons from her granddaughter, Selvi, by relating a kitchen staple to each alphabet. So, it is 'A' for 'Arisi Appalam', 'B' for 'Badam' and so on. This narrative style is the highlight of the novel. But some of the associations are rather a forceful fit like 'Z' for 'zingarthanda' which are inexplicable like the whys? and hows? of KK and Lena's bitter married life. However, the author gives justification through Komathi's own way of learning alphabet. Komathi says, "I know the Zigarthanda should start with a 'J'. But this is my alphabet book. What is right for the world may not be right for me. I have always called it Zigarthanda and this shall be my 'Z' (202). Like this, Lena's elopement with Shoola Pani is justified by her because it is their life and no one has any right over it:

Lena lives with her husband KK in a perfectly loveless marriage set in their tea plantation in the Western Ghats. They don't argue and their interactions are all mater-of-fact; just how they like it.

But love does find Lena when Shoola Pani, a South Indian Superstar rents out their homestay in an attempt to outrun his fame. Before they know it, Lena becomes his "Lee" and Shoola Pani her "Ship".

And the quiet of the hills will not be enough to calm the rising storm.

(<http://www.thenewsminutes.com/article/food-fiction>)

Lena has buried dreams and passions in the depth of her heart but she lives like a walking shadow. However, the lurking desire for redefining her place in their married life often pops up in her. In fact, not only sexual harassment, beating and torturing but also non-involvement, non-communication and non-sexual life offered by a husband to his wife is also a kind of torture which affects the psyche of the woman. When Lena goes on a walk in the dangerous zone where leopards often attack people, KK does not say anything about it to caution her. This non-caring attitude is also a kind of marginalization. She is marginalized by KK in their married life. Whenever she does not like something in KK for example, his desire for food items, dress, or things, she wants to rebuff at him, but she never does so.

Lena, in her late thirties, wants to reshape her life putting it in a love-mould. She wants to reexamine the relationship between herself and her husband. She wants to explain him how important she is in his life. She also wants to shower her love on him and also expects him to share mutual love and concern. But nothing

has happened in her life until the arrival of Shoola Pani to their place. Whatever she expects from KK happened in her life through Shoola Pani:

Leena's relationship with a guest at the homestay they run is the exact opposite. The moment she meets Shoola Pani, a popular actor who has a sudden desire to flee from his life, she feels reinvigorated. Shoola Pani too feels the same, and the two hopelessly fall in love with each other. On top of the chemistry between the two, the setting of their romance too has a role to play”(<https://www.indiatoday.in/lifestyle/culture/story/recipe-for-an-affair-anitanair-novel-love-story-food-alphabet-soup-for-lovers>).

Love is the basis and from which humanism stems out. Humanism “is life affirming and not life-denying: it seeks to elicit the possibilities of life and establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all and not only a few” (Panigrahi 39). This clearly shows that both Shoola Pani and Lena are aching for life-affirming force which is part of human existence. Though popular even in his fifty-five, Shoola Pani feels that he has lived a life ‘full of sound and fury signifying nothing’. He wants to find out his deep senses because ‘acting’ has made him a man who has many identities but nothing of his ‘own’. And so, he decides to flee from his life, family, friends, fans, and profession in order to find out his real ‘self’. Therefore, he chooses a remote place at where he must not be identified for his cinema ‘face’.

Shoola Pani chooses Mimosa Cottage, a homestay which was refurbished by KK. The journey towards finding his ‘self’ begins with his act of not informing his wife or children or directors or others about his plan of disappearing. His P.A., Biju alone knows the whereabouts of Shoola Pani. Shoola Pani had made his head tonsured in order that he should not be identified by the public during his stay. He also instructed his P.A. to inform others that he has gone to Europe. This symbolically indicates that his ‘self’ journey begins to find out the ‘real’ human being in him. Shoola Pani reaches the homestay and he gets a strange satisfaction imbibing the silent and serene beauty of the hill and the cottage.

Lena has lost zeal in her life due to KK’s indifferences. The miscarriage and KK’s non-communication attitude has turned her out to be a pessimist. However, she runs a crèche in order to get some solace and she silently lives with KK without making any complaints. This attitude of Lena keeps her family life intact, despite the growing stress and strain of her relationship with KK. Commenting the empty life of the characters of the novel namely Komathi, Lena, KK and Shoola Pani, one of the reviewers of the books states, “And while *Mistress* had complex characters that developed throughout, ASFL (*Alphabet Soup for Lovers*)

has characters out of a mould. They're shells. Empty shells. Forgettable. Crumbleable” (<http://www.rainndabook.wordpress.com>).

The intimacy between KK and Lena never works out even in the beginning period of their married life. Their marriage is an arranged marriage. Yet it fails to add flavour to their life because of their non-interference into the matters of each other. Generally, non-interference attitude arises among individuals if there is no love, care, and concern for one another. In KK and Lena's case, they never shower love, care and concern even at the time of their union. Family has been recognized as a basic unit of society. It provides a link between individual and community. Contemporary situations indicate that there is disharmony in husband-wife relationship. This is what happens in KK and Lena's life also.

Lena, in order to maintain a tie with her husband, KK compromises many things, especially his non-caring attitude. Therefore, in due course she becomes a walking shadow. She lost the lively-spirit of her life. She has always fiddled KK in all his activities. She never questions KK whenever he dances or flirts with young girls. She magnanimously accepts KK in order to lead a life which seems to be perfect in the eyes others. Moreover, she has developed a guilty conscience after the removal of her uterus. She even questions herself whether uterus alone is the symbol of womanhood. Thus, Lena suffers psychically as Miss Barot rightly comments about marital adjustment between couples:

The emotional components of the marital relationship, which satisfy emotional needs of affection, belongingness, security and adequacy ranked very high as sources of satisfaction, the cognitive and economic aspects of marriage and relationship... accorded to a lower degree of importance. (64)

The present divorce rates are testimony to the increasing fragility of husband-wife relationship. Like Lena, Shoola Pani Dev also suffers from non-intimate relationship with his family members. He finds no link among the members of his family through husband-wife and father-mother-children ties, because his daughters who are in their teen are leading life through their own choice without the control of their parents especially their mother. In fact, while Shoola Pani is busy with his acting schedule, his wife who is running a dance school in abroad is also busy with her profession and there is none to take care of and tend the teen girls emotionally or psychologically. The family members occasionally meet during vacation and spend their time on touring to foreign countries.

Shoola Pani has family, name, fame, and money, yet it seems to him that everything becomes useless with his increasing psychological loneliness. A sense of impasse has crept into his life. He wants to depopularize

his name in the cine industry and to regain it once again in order to re-energize his career and life. Hence, he decides to rejuvenate his dead spirit by focusing himself to Nature without the interference of anyone. Therefore, he chooses the homestay of KK and hopes that at there, he will not be recognized for his stardom. The first meeting between Lena and Shoola Pani is a common one and instead of exchanging sights and sighs they confront each other with words.

Lena goes to the homestay to enquire the guest about the comfortability of the Mimosa Cottage. When Shoola Pani opens the door, Lena gets really surprised and shocked to see a South Indian superstar standing there in the cottage. Hiding her surprise, she greets him with her 'hello' but he frowns at her and enquires in an irritating voice whether she needs his autograph on his photograph. The voice of Shoola Pani makes Lena to get angry at him, yet she hides it and "then she asks, careful to hide her annoyance 'Are you always this rude?'" (31). Lena's attitude of not adoring a famous person like him and also her decent etiquette of pointing out other's mistake surprise Shoola Pani. He then "feels a queer sense of ease; the freedom he had sought may be his after all" (31). Therefore, he introduces himself to her thus: "Hello. I am Shoola Pani Dev, the runaway actor" (31). Then they talk about the scenic beauty of the place and find out that their taste for 'Nature' is similar.

This similarity between them has brought them very close to each other. "They look at each other. It's as if the two of them have just felt a delicate contouring of their souls" (32). In fact, their attraction for each other is not 'love at first sight' as in Shakespearean terms but it is the love of two persons who have felt the emptiness in life. The sprouted attraction between them has a metaphysical tone in it and it is of the two souls. A woman is 'new' when she analyses and reflects upon her position essentially as a woman in the scheme of things which includes the social, moral and spiritual fields. After meeting Shoola Pani, Lena realizes that there is a 'new woman' born in her. Lena now analyses her position as a wife to KK and a daughter to the parents of a reputed family. She also thinks that being a cine-star Shoola Pani would have slept with other women besides his wife.

Lena has a doubt, whether her attraction for Shoola Pani is love or mere an infatuation. Finally, she consoles her heart saying that it is only 'love' that she has been craving for throughout her life. The emerging image of Lena is like that of a 'new woman' who achieves self-fulfillment and self-realization. She believes that the struggle for higher consciousness is the only possible way for a good life. This idea is described by Usha Bande and Atmaran as,

...the new woman is one who shows off her 'feminine mystique' is aware of herself as an individual. She is free from her traditional, social and moral constrictions and is able to live with a heightened sense of dignity and individuality. (14)

Shoola Pani also experiences a kind of change that has taken place within him after he saw Lena. He comes to a conclusion that she is a special asset to him. He even wants to call her with a dear name which is only his: "He says her name: Lena. That's what the whole world calls her. He must have a name for her that's his. Lee: he says it to gauge how it sounds. It feels like a promise on his tongue. A strange sense of elation runs through him. All through these two hours, it felt like the wall he has built around himself was cleaving and crumbling..." (39). Lena has more love and care for Shoola Pani than any sexual attraction for him.

Emotions, love and compatibility are the very essential qualities needed for human relationship to flower and flourish. These qualities are invariably absent in Lena due to her inert married life but springs up in her after she met Shoola Pani. Komathi who is an observer of Lena's attitude now and then warns her about the consequences of the crossover. However, Komathi makes dishes which Lena specially wants to serve to Shoola Pani. In India, there is a general belief prevailing among wives – it is possible for wives to reach their men's hearts through the stomachs of their men. So, Lena also wants to serve Shoola Pani with food items that he likes most:

Shoola Pani mentioned how much he liked *daangar* chutney and that he hadn't eaten it since his mother dies years ago. No one knows how to make those old-fashioned dishes any more, he said softly. She heard the undertone of regret and thought that he didn't much like his life. He was like a wild animal, a leopard trapped in a circus, unable to leave, unable to belong. She had felt a great yearning to gather him in her arms. Instead, she decided to surprise him with *daangar* chutney. (40)

Lena is a kind of a woman who never loves herself. She highly considers others' welfare. Her humanistic concern works more while she treats the emotions of others. She does not hurt anyone even though they hurt her. She does not like KK's non-communicative and non-caring nature. Yet she adjusts herself and drag on their married life without any friction. After the miscarriage Lena was ready to adopt a child. But KK was adamant and reluctant to the idea of adoption. Therefore, Lena after waiting for a few years, without hurting the feelings of KK, started a crèche at where she looks after the children of factory women. She loves them, cares them and plays with them every morning. In the same way she takes pity at Shoola Pani who is indeed



in need of love and care. Motherly concern and care are more explicit in Lena than her libidinal attraction for him.

Anita Nair's fictions are witnesses of modern man's sense of isolation and his quest to redefine his identity by establishing his 'self' and relationship. In *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* also, human relationships form an important part of the very narrative structure. In fact, life is a synthesis of intricacies of relationships both external and internal. Not only Anita Nair but writers of all ages have drawn their tales based on the complexities of relationship that binds men to life. Lena leads an unflavored life with KK. Her new relationship with Shoola Pani rejuvenates her dead-spirit and she wants to live a life in which showering of unconditional love, care and concern is the prime thing. Both Shoola Pani and Lena do not bother about the consequences of their togetherness. Yet as a traditional Indian wife, Lena speculates the dangers associated with their love-affair.

Intricacies of human relationship form an integral part of life and characters. "The relationships we have with other people are projections of the relationship we have within ourselves. Our external relationships and our internal relationships are in fact the same relationships" (Pavlina). In this sense modern man is a victim of self-alienation; he is alienated from his environment and relations because he is, in prior, alienated from his 'self'. The external relationships are in fact a reflection of the inner relationships that an individual has:

The people we are in relationship with are always a mirror, reflecting our own beliefs, and simultaneously we are mirrors, reflecting their beliefs. So, relationship is one of the most powerful tools for growth.... If we look honestly at our relationship we can see so much about how we have created them. (Gawain)

Human relationships though invisible, weaves live together, permeating fragrance and making life more meaningful and worth living. They are an integral and necessary part of humanity; however, a much advanced, sophisticated and mechanized world man lives in. These relationships are incomprehensible sometimes and continue to be in an untangled way and mostly end on a mechanical, yet compromising note. Whenever there is a compromise there is always trouble. And if there is a compromise between a man and a woman, it is the woman who has to bend herself more than the man. This imbalance in compromise leads to hopelessness in relationship and life.

As a married woman, a woman who values Indian tradition and culture, and a woman who has much humanitarian concerns, Lena realizes that her love-affair with Shoola Pani is a trespass that she has done to

her husband, KK and to their married life. However, the spirit of Lena starts sprouting after she met Shoola Pani. She starts dressing well and even applies makeover to look smart and beautiful. When he admires her saying, “you look nice” (47), her heart leaps up both in happiness and guilt. The guilt in her makes her to murmur “What am I doing? I am a wife, I have a life” (47). Though the inner-voice warns her, she boldly invites Shoola Pani to join her in the walking exercise. Then it becomes practice for both of them.

The close proximity and sharing of love and concern for each other make Lena to take a drastic step of inviting Shoola Pani to have a cup of coffee at her home. Even the phone calls from Shoola Pani make her to feel bloomed and elated and slowly she realizes her inner self. “She has been married for almost sixteen years now and has never thought of herself as a woman who would look beyond her marriage” (64). Lena takes Shoola Pani to the cemetery which is a dear place to her. She explains him how her grandfather bought the estate, the homestay, the bungalow and also the annexure cemetery from an Englishman. She also tells him that she likes the statue of the fallen angel in the cemetery.

The serene beauty of the graveyard enters into the souls of them. Shoola Pani calls Lena, “Lee” in an excited mood and she welcomes it and surrenders herself into the hands of him under the statue of the fallen angel. They hold each other and experience the thudding of his heart in her and hers in his. They feel that as if they are the first parents, Adam and Eve:

He holds out his hand to her and she takes it. Who moves first? Later they would tease each other about it. But in that moment, in that cemetery of forgotten graves and fallen angels, under a tree with dense green leaves, they embrace. ‘Arcadia’ they say to each other. For how can anything that feels so perfect be anything less than the Garden of Eden, the golden age, a world where everything but the two of them is irrelevant. He feels it deep within him, a quietness that flows and heals, a warmth that melts each hardened knot of ennui, unraveling all the doubts. She feels it too – tunnels of energy that ignite dead tissues and numbed feelings; a fire that heals even as it flares within her. They hold each other, unwilling to move, unwilling to even breathe, for to do so would be to step away from Arcadia. (72-73)

Both Lena and Shoola Pani realize that they have come very closer to each other after crossing the boundaries of their married lives. Shoola Pani realizes that the accolades, awards, applause won by him, the wealth earned by him, and even wife and children become insignificant and irrelevant to him when he is with Lena, his “Lee” in the Arcadia: “Their Arcadia. Their golden butter moment” (75). Lena wonders at her for the

change that has taken place in her inner spirit whenever she thinks of or with Shoola Pani, her “Ship”. Even in her teens or during the first years of her married-life with KK, she never heard her inner voice talking to her. But at the age of thirty-nine and in the company of her ‘Ship’, she realizes the excitement of blooming of her own ‘self’.

Lena’s attraction for Shoola Pani is blind since she knows that love is blind. But she realizes that her love for her Ship is stable as said by Shakespeare: “Love is not love which alters when it alterations find.” She understands very well that her Ship is a famous actor who has life of his own with his profession, fans, wife, and children. He might also have women on his bed to satiate his libidinal thirst. The very thought of other women with Shoola Pani makes an earthquake in Lena’s heart but she brushes aside all these thoughts as nonsensical. Her concern or love for Shoola Pani measures no limits because she almost treats him as her child. She finds her ‘self’ in him and his in hers.

One of the famous psychoanalysts, Sigmund Freud raised a question – what do women want? But he did not provide answer to this question in any of his books or speeches. In fact, women’s heart is so peculiar, even another woman cannot interpret it. In *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* both Komathi and Lena are victims of Indian culture. Komathi hides her connection with Rayar and is ready to sacrifice him for the sake of social norms codified for women in the society. But Lena though hesitant in the beginning, finally overcomes the norms of patriarchy by eloping with Shoola Pani in order to celebrate the blossoms of her psyche which has been aching for true love, care, and concern of a man.

Lena is a matured woman and she can perceive the consequence of her relationship with Shoola Pani. She clearly understands that the attraction between herself and Shoola Pani is not based on sexual relation alone, because she knows that if sex plays a vital role between them, soon they will end up in separation. “...sex is not substitute for happiness, that sexual indulgence is coarsening and devitalizing rather than revitalizing” (Bharucha 67). Hence, she thinks that she has done nothing wrong to KK or to her parents or to the name and career of Shoola Pani, with her act of elopement with Shoola Pani.

Anita Nair through Lena and Shoola Pani has traversed the border of universe and presents the complex gamut of the feminine search for identity and self. The woman’s work: “of the beauty of devotion and sacrifice, the small discontents and great joys of conjugal love, dreams of youth, the resignation of maturity” (*The Second Sex* 379) is transformed in this novel into a sensitive and throbbing story of two dejected persons namely Shoola Pani and Lena. Shoola Pani appreciates Lena’s love, care and concern for him. He also

appreciates the baby-talk of her. And so, he feels that he has born once again in his life. Lena also feels happy and elated when she understands that she is in a position to give love and care to a needy person like Shoola Pani. This makes Lena to compare her life with KK which distorts and limits self-expression and fulfillment. According to Wolpe and Lazarus mental health is result of physical gratification in all ways, including sexual satisfaction. They opine thus:

A continued life pattern of such painful conflicts, especially when the person receives little love or support, leads to chronic anxiety and weakening of the persons psychological strength. After that, any crisis makes the person react inappropriately, either by having an anxiety attack, becoming totally unable to make decisions, or developing physical symptoms, all responses that are typical in mental abnormality. (187)

Lena narrates to Shoola Pani about the love story of Komathi and the irrevocable impair that she had caused to the love-life of Komathi and Rayar. Hearing the story of Komathi, Shoola Pani consoles Lena saying that what she had done in the life of Komathi and Rayar is a mistake and not a sin. And so, it can be rectified. At the same time, both Shoola Pani and Lena think that their love-life is at jeopardy because KK, Komathi and even Shoola Pani's PA, Biju suspect that some chemistry is working between Shoola Pani and Lena. Shoola Pani rationally thinks that he should not do any evil to KK's married life and also to Lena's family and at the same time he could not bear the pain of separating from Lena. Lena also thinks that she should not cause any harm to both KK and Shoola Pani's career:

I don't want to be the reason for you to jeopardize your movie career or diminish your standing with your fans. But I don't know how I'm going to cope without you in my life. And I don't know if I can be this bit on the side either. (155)

Unlike Komathi, Lena is not able to give up her love-life at any cost. However, there is an inhibition in her mind to relate everything to KK. And one day when KK is found in his usual place in the house, he opens up the matter of Shoola Pani and Lena's love affair, to Lena, indirectly. Through their conversation, one can understand that KK has no love for Lena. Above all, KK's words kindle the uncertainty of her life with Shoola Pani. Certainly, the word of KK has some truth in it but it also has tint of sadism. He does not bother about Lena's future life, instead he takes pleasure by making Lena to worry about her life with Shoola Pani:

We are organizing a camp for the tribals. The medical officer from Parry Agro wanted me to pitch in. I really need to leave'.

‘The Kadas?’ she asks.

He nods. ‘Why didn’t you tell me? We would have come too,’ she says. Ship would have loved it.

‘It’s not a movie set. It’s the real jungle. He would be a nuisance.’ KK’s mouth twists as he starts packing his rucksack.

‘Aren’t you generalizing?’ she snaps.

‘And aren’t you hovering around him a little too much?’ KK demands in turn. ‘You don’t want him thinking you are a star-struck groupie, do you?’

She laughs delicately. ‘I don’t think you need to worry about that. I think he likes my company because I am not star-struck.’

Then, unable to resist, she asks, ‘Are you jealous?’

His eyebrows rise. ‘Me! Why would I be? Besides, if the tabloids are right, you are a little too old for his liking. Movie stars like nymphets.’

She looks away so he doesn’t see the bleakness in her eyes. It’s as if he has struck at the very heart of her uncertainty. (171-72)

Shoola Pani announces Lee that he has to leave the place soon, in order to complete his cinema assignments. Now Lena is confused to take decision, whether to leave with Shoola Pani or stay back and sigh for the lost love. Her life is once again put in the dark chasm as she once experienced after her miscarriage. Komathi who perceives a noticeable change in Lena after the entry of Shoola Pani into her life, wants Lena to go with him. But being a traditional Indian woman who is playing the role of a mother-like, Komathi wants Lena to continue her life with KK. She even selects food items which can kindle the libidinal desires and serves them to KK in order to make KK to turn towards Lena and to give not only sexual pleasure but also spiritual bliss. Above all, Komathi watches everything silently and does not offer any solution to Lena.

Lena and Shoola Pani also do not openly invite each other to go somewhere away from KK’s life. They think that their elopement may cause harm to their families. Certainly, it may create a jerk in Shoola Pani’s career and a great fall in Lena’s married life. Therefore, Lena feels that she needs counseling in this matter and so she approaches Komathi to give a concrete solution to her, in order to overcome the dilemma:

Komathi asks her, 'What is wrong?'

'Life.'

....

'The thing is, it all happened so quickly that I never thought of what next.'...

'And now I realize that he will leave soon and I don't know what I'll do once he is gone.' Lena's voice crack.

'Will you go with him if he asks you to?' Komathi asks, looking up from the dishes.

Lena stares. Will he? She hasn't even considered the possibility. Here, amidst the tea slopes and shoal, their relationship has grown and blossomed into a magical marvelous thing. But away from it, would it survive? Reality has a curious way of peeling away the magic until all that is left is the nothingness of a crumbled dream....

'You have to be strong,' she says. 'No matter what you decide, you have to be strong for yourself.'

(185-86)

Both Lena and Shoola Pani so far exchanged their soul-felt love. Then later, at the time of his leaving, she feels guilty about why she did not hear about his likes and dislikes. He informs her that he never has bad memories because he is a person who considers 'past is past.' Hearing the words of Shoola Pani, Lena is struck and wondered whether he would consider their love-life as 'past is past'. The very thought of it pricks her psyche. Reading Lena's mind, Shoola Pani asks her to come with him, because he considers Lena as his treasure. He does not want this relationship to end up in 'past is past':

'Will you go with me?' he asks.

'What?' she asks.

'I ask, if you will go with me, Lee?'

'You do realize I am married.' she whispers.

'Yes, so am I.' His mouth twists into a parody of a smile. 'What do you want, Lee? he asks.

She wraps her arms around her knees and buries her head between them. 'I didn't think you would ask me to go with you.'

He opens the door on the passenger side for her. She gets in. He hands the puppy to her.

He gets in and reverse. He still hasn't spoken.

Then he turns to her and asks, 'Are you happy, Lee?'

‘Are you happy Ship?’ she retorts.

He takes her hand and places it beneath his on the gear stick. And then, with his fingers entwined with hers, he changes the gear. (194-98)

### Conclusion:

The woman portrayed by the Anita Nair is an independent, free-thinking individual who claims her life as her own. She is no more seen as the compulsive victim of the social roles assigned to her – a mother, a wife, a daughter or a sister complementing the male in every role that she plays. Anita Nair, in *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* has used the learning of English alphabet by Komathi, one of the characters, as metaphor to explain the love story of Lena and Shoola Pani. The novel focuses on human passion and emotions. Lena’s moods are explained by the author through the qualities and flavours of food items. There is a justification in Lena’s act according to the author and this is explicit when Komathi says that even though Zigarthanda starts with ‘J’ she has made it as ‘Z’. This certainly indicates that the author has created a ‘new woman’ through her own perception.

As I see the actor’s car leave with my Leema in it, I get that feeling of strength again.

It isn’t going to be easy for KK or her parents, when they rush home from their Singapore holiday on hearing what has happened. Lives will fall apart. But life will heal itself.

And so, my alphabet book ends. I know the zigarthanda should start with a J, but this is my alphabet book. What is right for the world may not be right for me. I have always called it Zigarthanda and this shall be my Z. (202)

The end of the novel, *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* proclaims the dictum that one should not worry about others’ comments and criticism. If one does heed too much to the words and opinion of others in the decision making, certainly, his life will be in jeopardy. Women should listen to their inner voice to take decisions. Nair’s Lena wants to be an independent woman. She becomes influential, strong-minded, self-assertive and admired who silently rebels against the codes and customs of patriarchy and also the societal norms. Lena emerges as a self-empowered individual who finally finds time and space to lead her life happily with Shoola Pani, basking in his love and care. The love between them does not find any alterations and it stands as an epitome of love of two souls.

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