



**REALISM BEHIND THE CHOICES MADE BY THE FEMALE  
PROTOGONIST IN KAVERY NAMBISAN'S MANGO-  
COLOURED FISH**

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**Abstract:**

Everyone wants to live happily, and the vast majority of individuals choose the same course of action that has been followed in society for decades. This proves conclusively that most people are fine with the current state of affairs. People get married and spend their lives according to their personal choices or the standards set by their families or society. They manage to endure and have happy lives in spite of the challenges, pressure, discomfort, and weirdness they encounter in marriage. Marriages sometimes break down, that's why some people seek to get a divorce and then get remarried. People continue to live their daily lives according to the tradition of multiple marriages. In light of this, Shari, the main character in Kavery Nambisan's Mango-Coloured Fish, decides to live a free life without the restrictions of marriage. Shari rejects proposals for marriage. She alludes to the fact that she does not desire to resemble the mango-coloured fish that mindlessly swims back and forth in the jar. The fish is still beautiful, but it is still a slave and a showpiece and is not really free. Shari resolves not to be that fish and instead chooses to be a free bird. This article seeks to determine the actual driving forces behind the decisions she made.

**Key Words:** Mango Coloured Fish, Realism, Marriage-Bonds, Oddities, Divorce.

**Introduction:**

Marriage is an essential part of everyone's life between these two stages of living and dying because every action after birth results in death. While some people enjoy happy marriages, others do not. Yet, as parents cannot remain with their children throughout their lives, as soon as a son or daughter fulfils the minimal standards for age, income, or education, they are all ready for marriage. The parents' biggest desire is for their children to get married at the appropriate age. Considering the fact that humans cannot survive alone, marriage is obviously a mechanism to locate life partners. They need company both physically and psychologically. Mignon clearly states that the sacred principle is referred to as Purusha (the male) and cosmic energy as Shakti (the female) in the macrocosm. Marriage is the most important rite that creates a strong bond between two individuals.

In the public sphere, marriage's challenges and difficulties are evident. From their family members' experiences, everyone gains knowledge about the benefits and drawbacks of marriage. Furthermore, there was a lot of news coverage in the media about the distressed married couples who came to the courts to petition for divorce. The ceremony of marriage is nonetheless carried out in spite of this. Many marriages are taking place even in the midst of the pandemic. The difficulties of marriage increase along with the number of newlyweds each year. Shari speculates that she might be impacted by the challenges and discomforts that other individuals experience in their marriage. Comparing oneself to others is a habit that could result in poor judgment. This paper aims to find out the reasons behind her decisions.

**Shari, the Protagonist:**

The current plight of women in society and their inner quests are presented by Kavery Nambisan. In Mango Coloured Fish, Nambisan asserts that women should make their own lifestyle choices and are not required to follow the expectations of society, culture, or family through Shari, the female lead. Shari feels uneasy in the presence of her ideal older sister, her dominating mother, and her good but uncaring father. Her life is under pressure in many areas, including how she looks and conducts herself. She has to think about what the community anticipates from her. During the course of this fabrication, she realizes that she is losing her genuine identity. She wants to break free from the constraints of traditional society and not be held captive by it. She chooses not to wed Gautam because she believes he will diminish her distinctiveness. She is determined to escape this stifling environment and is sure that she can manage her life on her own. Shari wants to learn more about marriage from her environment before she gets engaged. She looks at how the housekeepers, friends,

brothers, sisters, uncles, and parents interact. She worries that her own marriage might be similar to the samples she has gathered. She will need more time to decide what kind of life she should lead. Because of her unstable mental state, she finds it challenging to make judgments at the start of her survey. She discovers that she does not have to live her life completely at the whim of others, like a mango-coloured fish in a jar, after investigating different married lifestyles.

The goal of this study is to ascertain the cause of the marriage proposal's rejection. She researched the reality and authenticity of married life before coming to her decision. She carefully considered and contrasted the lifestyles of her mother, father, siblings, uncles, aunts, housekeepers, and friends with her own marital status. The article makes an effort to identify the specific psychological aspects that contributed to Shari's decision-making autonomy. Below is a discussion of the causes.

#### **a. Escapism and Prejudice on Marriage:**

Escapism, in general, is the act of physically or emotionally running away from troubles in one's life. Because no one wants to face challenges, everyone on earth is an escape artist. Ekuu Hagan, (2019) explores why people like to go away. He claims that compared to other organisms, humans have the most difficulties. They have several ways to avoid the issues they are dealing with.

Everybody needs a break from the daily grind, which is why they sleep, dream, watch movies, and go on picnics. Even while it is seen as vital rest, it is actually a kind of escape from uninteresting or problematic lifestyles. Everyone yearns for their own little utopia so they can escape the awful realities of life right away. Escapism frequently symbolizes a person's dark side. People try to run away from reality when they are experiencing problems in their lives. It eventually looks into their negative character or attitude. Escapism often has a beneficial psychological effect. According to Freud, escape is a necessary part of being human.

Escapism is defined by Cohen and Taylor as a break from the rituals and boredom of everyday life. It represents a person's attempt to create their own personal utopia. When faced with difficult situations, people try to run away from their real lives; eventually, this behavior takes on a personality of its own. According to Longeway, escapist behavior is a type of defense technique used to stop unpleasant and undesired thoughts or feelings that are causing great distress. Escapism is only psychological in nature. Many people turn to alcohol, tobacco, and drug use as a means of escaping the problems; nevertheless, these behaviors inevitably lead to addiction.

Escapism is a topic that is well-covered in English literature. The writings of John Keats, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, and Byron all make references to escapism. Escapism has a significant role in Keats' poetry. Through his poetry, he tries to get away from uncomfortable situations. His poem "Ode to a Nightingale" is the ideal illustration of escape. He desires to transform into a nightingale so that he might soar like a bird and escape his emotional pain. 'Death' is the primary theme of Emily Dickinson's poems. She has never enjoyed living in reality. She makes the decision to pass away because she wants to experience life after death. In her lifetime, she made three suicide attempts. In her paper, Aishwarya Agnihotri (2021) notes that escapism is a natural instinct for people and that it is more comfortable for people to escape from difficulties than to try to solve them. Escapism, according to her, is a natural instinct. Most people choose "flight" when given the choice between "fight or flight" because it is more comfortable to "fight." Many people are simply prepared to flee because they are not prepared to face difficulties.

Shari's primary motivation for choosing marriage, in line with Aishwarya Agnihotri's remarks, is her desire to escape from nature. A person who has created a safe haven for themselves might not go the extra mile to confront obstacles. He or she can be preoccupied with difficulties and averse to commitments of any kind. Shari is considered to fit into this category as well. She makes the decision to leave the marriage after polling her friends and family about marriage. This demonstrates how she has a certain comfort zone. She has lost sight of the realities of modern life since being independent. She assumes that marriage would spoil her identity and views family life as separate from professional life. She blindly believes that money can compensate for family life. She says, "If you have education, you can get a better job than this, earn more." (MCF, 28).

This demonstrates Shari's immaturity and her preconceived notions about marriage. Marriage is regarded as the most important aspect of life in India. If a person is not married at the appropriate age, it is thought that they are incomplete. Thus, marriage is seen as a necessity for both men and women as insurance. Marriage is seen as a necessity for spiritual development rather than as a surrendering to human weakness. In his essay *The Merchant's Tale*, Chaucer, the father of English poetry, masterfully captures the beautiful condition of marriage and husband-wife relationships. Jeremy Taylor says, "Marriage is the mother of the world; it preserves kingdoms and fills cities, churches, and heaven itself. It is that state of thing for which God has designed the present constitution of the world."

Marriage is about learning to compromise one's identity and come to an agreement with another person rather than about establishing one's own identity. There are issues in every home. Life in a marriage is rarely perfect. Even carefully thought out and researched marital arrangements don't always work out. It is difficult to foresee life's events. Despite the difficulties and complications that arose at the time, a country like India has

witnessed many happy families. The entire family system would have disintegrated if all those female family members had been clamouring to establish their identities in the past.

When there are no revolutionary ideas, a family is lovely. To create a strong sense of family values, either the husband or the wife must be subservient. The family is still together since even Shari's father submits to his wife. The family would have lost its entire structure if he had acted in a domineering manner like his wife. But Shari is unaware of this and has her own ideas about marriage. She questions the struggles of women in a family as "Moulded How? Pulled, pushed, elongated, flattened, hammered, punched, and gouged out until I was the right specimen, the perfect wife?" (MCF, 73).

In the present, a family's system is changing rapidly, and as a result, the family's structure is also undergoing substantial changes. Marriage may suffer if there isn't harmony and unity in human interactions. Currently, it is believed that marriage is a social compact that disintegrates because of boredom, misunderstandings, betrayal, and animosity. People's ignorance and complacency regarding their duties as husband and wife in a family are the cause of this. Marriages that fail as a result of a lack of sincerity and trust in the rituals performed at the wedding ceremony. If they had been serious with the rites and customary procedures that were followed throughout their marriage arrangements, they would have comprehended the purpose of marriage.

Today's generation views all of the marriage-related traditions as superfluous and superficial, which makes it simple for them to sever the connection to married life. Shobha De makes it quite obvious in her photo that a woman is always her husband's wife, despite having a higher social status. In spite of the differences they encounter in their relationship, Kamala Markandaya's novels show the husband-wife relationship from every viewpoint and demonstrate that there is no better relationship than the husband-wife one.

The protagonist of Anita Desai's novel "Where Shall We Go This Summer?" is Sita, a woman who marries a man of her father's choosing but progressively loses her enthusiasm for life. Sita is a metaphor for the boomerang nature of women. She finally flees to Maroni because she is tired of her monotonous life and her obligations since she is unhappy, bored, and unfulfilled. At the conclusion, she decides to return and face reality after realizing the truth. Shari also makes the decision to leave her marriage and may come back once she has adjusted to real life.

After noticing this pattern in public life and in the lives of her family members, Shari might have made hasty decisions about her marriage, which is why she decided to organize a survey on marriage. Shari should have investigated life's realities and the meaning of marriage instead of surveying married couples. She simply withdrew from the marriage out of concern that she might run into issues similar to others. She ought to have married instead, and faced the difficulties. She dismisses the marriage out of sheer self-confidence. She may have been surprised by how well things turned out. This demonstrates Shari's pessimistic and escape-seeking tendencies.

#### **b. Dependant Decision Making:**

Making decisions is the cognitive process that is utilized to choose amongst several possible actions. Dependent decision-making is a decision-making approach that entails consulting others for guidance. Dependent decision-makers, according to Thunholm (2004), will always seek advice and counsel from outside sources before making significant judgments.

A person can develop decision-making as a fundamental skill by having excellent determining aptitudes and a clear knowledge of the facts or concept. Everyone should strive to develop this crucial quality so they can make the right choices when they need to. Making decisions involves selecting a sound choice from the available options. Choosing a lifestyle is a decision that both men and women make. Women in India are frequently denied the right to make decisions due to the patriarchal society there.

Women are unable to make independent decisions at every stage of life, from infancy to marriage. She has a substitute decision-maker who meddles in all of her decisions. A "surrogate decision-maker" is someone who makes decisions on behalf of someone who is unable to do so due to a mental illness. This person could be a guardian, parent, brother, wife, or parent. Women are not thought to be mentally stronger in India since they are thought to be less intelligent and rely on a second or third party to make crucial decisions for them. As a result, women are restricted from making independent decisions about all aspects of their lives. Women share a lot of duties and responsibilities in the family, but they hardly participate in decision-making. (Mehta & Saraswat, 2014). Patriarchal hegemony excludes women from aspects of political life because women are mostly prejudiced that they don't have "masculine" traits like leadership, which is very essential to being successful in politics (Paxton, Kunovich, & Hughes, 2007).

The situation has marginally changed today, but not much. Greater changes in societal perceptions and treatment of women have been brought about by education. Working women are more empowered than non-working women, according to Devi and Rayalu (2003), and as a result, they make more independent decisions. In a perfect family, the husband is the only person who makes the final choice after consulting with the wife and any adult children (Mehare & Nikhade, 1978). Shari finally decides to decline the marriage proposal after considering the marriages of her father, mother, aunt, uncle, brother, sister-in-law, and friend-her spouse. She

feels unsure about her marriage since she is unable to make an independent choice. For instance, Shari reads a quote in her brother's house regarding marriage, and her sister-in-law explains the quote: "Marriage is a mirage because people choose to see only the icing on the cake" (MCF, 56).

Shari is even more perplexed when she meets Yash. Yash is not a typical woman; she has an affair. She uses a sexist tone to communicate her disapproval of Shari's marriage. According to her, the bride is discriminated because marriage merely entails signing a legal paper designating who is married to whom. The bridegroom's name is always entered first on all documents that need to be filled out during the wedding, followed by the bride's name with the prefix "wife of." She also queries the existence of the "husband of" signature. She criticizes the idea of just referring to women as someone's daughter or wife. Will Satya ever complete a form and write "husband of -" next to his name? (MCF, 121-122)

She has the irrational belief that whatever occurs in the lives of others will also occur in hers. She is prevented from entering marriage life by her dread of obstacles and her superficial views of married life. She wants to flee from her daily routines in the name of discovering her identity and enjoying freedom in life. She hears Gautam say, "I want you." She hasn't responded to it; you can be shaped (MCF.73). She should have made it obvious to him that she cannot dance to his music and that she will not, under any circumstances, compromise her identity. Despite being an intelligent girl, she lacks the bravery to start at the beginning and assume Gautam's intentions. She lacks clarity and is therefore perplexed by thoughts and ideas related to marriage. When she stated that she opposed premarital sex, Gautam casually and stupefyingly replied, "For heaven's sake, Shari, in this day and age!" as he smiled. (MCF 34). She was able to deduce Gautam's extramarital relationship from his response. She did not, however, dispute Gautam's physical innocence before to marriage. She ought to have questioned the significance of his comment regarding extramarital sex. She could have ended the marriage if it was known that he was an adulterer before going public with it. She didn't want to look into the groom's character, but she did want to end her marriage because of the negative examples she had gathered from her family members' and friends' kith and kin.

Shari is so unsure of herself, which causes everyone around her to misjudge her based on their own marriage-related experiences. It is acknowledged that Shari is not inspired by successful people in her neighbourhood. None inspires her or helps her have a good outlook on life. Only Kavery Nambisan is aware of the inspiration behind such characters. A person will naturally lack motivation if they are surrounded by people who are rarely motivating. When it comes to her marriage, Shari only polls those who are dissatisfied. Only this might be a more compelling excuse for her refusal to get married. Her perspectives are constrained, her research is scant, and she makes impulsive, dependent decisions.

#### **Conclusion:**

There are hardships in every life. Roads have ups and downs on them. Life will be more miserable if one is very sensitive to what is going on around them. Shari is perceptive to her surroundings and the people in them. She doesn't realize that every person's life is different. Not everyone is tremendously happy or incredibly miserable. Life goes on, nevertheless, and people are able to cope with all the drawbacks and go on living by embracing them. Since a family should work toward creating a shared identity, one shouldn't try to develop their identity during marriage. Families can only be successful and happy if they share a similar identity. However, it is equally unacceptable to engage in harassment in the guise of forging a shared identity. The family's members should respect each other's values while also learning to adapt to others. It seems like Shari has not studied the reality of life, and thus she desires a life that she aspires to. The harsh truth is that only a select few are fortunate enough to get what they want, although many have accepted what they first receive and later rebuilt them in accordance with their interests. Shari desires a life of her choosing. She worries that the people in her immediate environment will prevent her from leading the life she desires. She doesn't want to be a mango-colored fish because she doesn't comprehend life's realities and expects to use them to construct her identity. Many characters in the novel, including Shari, are unaware of the holiness of marriage life. As a result, they have set a poor example for Shari and disallowed her from getting married.

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