A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN THE NOVEL OF
ANITA NAIR

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ABSTRACT: Many feminist women writers who have contributed literature to the society wrote chivalric novels. Most of their novels had women protagonist and were based on the glory of women in the world. Feminist women writers still strive to uphold the rights of women through their works like poems and novels. Anita Nair is an Indian bestselling author of fiction and poetry. She always had an affinity towards writing and the courage to pursue it under all the situations. Nair relates to the many roles women play in their lives and it is reflected in her work too. She writes with great energy and creates amazing works at ease. Post-colonial feminist literature has always carried the heavy burden of dealing with layers of misinterpretation of traditions and religions. At the center of this dilemma is the role of woman and her dependence, economically and socially. The more traditional a postcolonial society is, the more problematic the question of women's emancipation is. Therefore, the more passionate its women novelists like Anita Nair raise what many readers might consider taboo questions about the role of woman in contemporary post-colonial India. Among the novels of Anita Nair, Ladies coupe and Mistress are chosen for this paper. Through these novels Anita Nair has signalled the arrival of a sensitive writer who could perceive deeper mysteries in people's personalities and take the reader on a wonderful journey of discovery. These novels have a talent for probing the insular world. In these pages I shall attempt an appreciation of Anita Nair's powers for the delineation of the deeper layers of the woman's personality.

Keywords: Feminist women, Novel, ANITA NAIR'S,

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE

English literature is one of the most visible majors at any college or university, with huge a portion of students enrolling. But with this area of study being so broad, some people are confused as to what exactly English literature is. This article explores the scope of English literature in school and in the workplace. The easier half of that question to answer is that it covers literature in English not from the United Kingdom, just any literature in the English language! But defining just what literature is becomes a more complicated prospect. While commonly thought of as novels, poetry, and sometimes drama, the nature of literature itself is debatable. Literature is generally defined as writing with artistic merit, meaning that other mediums like screenplays, nonfiction, and even song lyrics could be considered literature by open-minded international students! The scope of most schools' English literature programs will be largely limited to the traditional literary pursuits, however. A standard English literature major will cover a balance of poetry and prose fiction, with drama and other, more contentious forms of “literature” mixed in to varying degrees.

Well, any English literature program worth its salt will cover all important periods and movements of English literature while introducing new critical ideas and analyzing things more deeply than you would in your own independent studies. The course catalog of an English department is often broken up by region (British literature, American literature, and world literature) and period (pre-1800 and post-2000 are common markers, for example), with at least some required classes in each of these areas.

ABOUT NOVEL

We've all seen shelves full of them. We've all read at least one in our lifetimes. But could you give a definition of 'novel'? Keep reading to find out more about the novel's characteristics and encounter some examples of this literary form!

The Old and New: Defining 'Novel'

Getting to the bottom of what makes a 'novel' a novel is like meeting an old friend all over again. In the simplest terms, a novel is a fictional prose work of considerable length. Beyond that, though, novels aren't so simple anymore.

By this meaning, Egyptian works from around 1200 BCE could be designated as some of the first novels. Extended works of prose fiction also found fans among the ancient Greeks and Romans, with such authors as Heliodoros, who wrote Ethiopian Romance, and Apuleius, who wrote The Golden Ass, producing memorable pieces still in circulation today. Nevertheless, literary tastes and the forms they subsequently shape evolve over time. And in the millennia since its inception, the novel has developed a unique set of characteristics that help distinguish this literary form from the many others.

CHARACTERISTICS OF A NOVEL

Like many other topics in literature, the discussion of what exactly constitutes a novel frequently becomes a heated debate. Thankfully, however, there are a few generally agreed-upon qualities that novels possess.

- Innovation

Though perhaps not a hard rule for each specimen or even mentioned by many novelists, novels as a whole represent literary change. For the Greeks and Romans, they were a departure from the traditional verse epics and lyric poetry, and they have meant something different to every generation afterward. Even the name (from Latin novellus, meaning 'young and new') of the literary form indicates that its contents should be something on the cutting-edge of literature's evolution. Indeed, the novel has seen countless adaptations over the years and continues to evolve constantly, unlike some other literary formats that have become frozen in their development (i.e., haikus or Shakespearean sonnets).
Length

So just how long is a 'work of considerable length'? As in the case of its cousin, the short story, the length of a novel is something scholars in the field argue about constantly. Fortunately for us, though, there is a fairly standard range, with the shortest containing somewhere between 60-70,000 words and all but the very longest coming in around 200,000.

Content

Of course, calling a novel 'a long book' just isn't enough. The stories told by novels are fictional pieces. Nonetheless, one of the defining attributes of the form is the realism they depict. In this instance, realism is conveyed in the ways in which characters in a novel interact with one another, their surroundings, and themselves. However skewed it might be, there will always be an underlying logic to the events taking place as well as to how people react to them.

Luckily, this sort of realism does not exclude genres like fantasy or more fanciful science fiction from providing content for novels. Another important characteristic of a novel's content is that it's written in prose rather than poetic format, though there may be lines of verse inserted for various effects. Even when this does occur, however, it is clear in some way that the verse portion is distinct from the rest of the narrative.

Character and Plot Development

The length and realistic elements of the novel allow for deep and broad development of characters and their circumstances. Unlike the short story, novels are long enough to support numerous participants or even groups of participants in the story's action.

Novelists have much more room to flesh-out each individual more fully, adding innumerable dimensions of perspective and analysis to their work.

The situations that these people find themselves in are also typically more involved and complex. These story lines frequently involve dual perspectives of the action: one representing the external situation itself, another the internal conditions that coincide with, result from, or caused this series of events.

Publication Practices

Historically, one of the most popular ways to publish one’s work has been either to collect it together with similar works in anthologies, or to print it in another medium (i.e., magazine, newspaper, or other periodical) as a serial, or sequentially segmented piece distributed over time.

THE IMPORTANCE OF NOVEL BEGINNINGS

As you work along writing your novel it is critical that you are also taking some time each day to learn more about the techniques of writing. In an earlier post I stressed the importance of your reference library and suggested the four books that should be on every writer’s bookshelves: Plot & Structure by James Scott Bell, Stein on Writing by Sol Stein, On Writing by Stephen King and The Elements of Style by Strunk & White.

As you study these books and others that you add to your library, as well as your Internet research, you will come across references to “Beginnings, Middles and Endings.” Novels, like plays, can be dissected into three parts, or three acts. Act One, or the beginning, will surely be the greatest challenge of the three acts although each “Act” will have its own demands.

You may have full knowledge or only a basic rough idea of the plot, the story you want to tell. You’ve decided on writing in first or third person. You know the genre and tone, such as sci-fi, romance, thriller, epic or other and if your story will be humorous, loopy, serious, fast-paced or slower nerve-wracking suspense. You must bring this much to the table before you are ready to address beginnings, middles and endings.

Beginning your novel

In the beginning your goal is to:

1. Hook the Reader
2. Establish, or hint at, a dramatic situation
3. Tell us the setting and time
4. Introduce at least one character
5. Introduce the opposition

Hooking the reader is a term you will hear often. Its importance cannot be overstressed. You must make the reader want to read more and you must do it quickly. A reader is not all that different from an agent considering your manuscript. If that first paragraph or two, or to some readers or agents that very first sentence, does not generate interest and make one want to read more, it won’t matter what else you do with the book because it is not going to get read.

Not sure how to hook? Do a little research at the library.

Go to your local library and spend some time reading the openings of one book after another. Look at the best sellers as well as obscure novels you never heard of. What is it in the openings that make you want to continue reading? I believe that in every successful novel you’ll see or feel intrigue; a question has been raised in your mind and you are impelled to read on. You are pulled deeper into the story. You have just been hooked.

Many years ago I read a detective novel, long since forgotten, possibly by Raymond Chandler. I can’t quote the opening exactly, but it went something like this: “My partner and I were just finishing our shift and getting ready to head back to the precinct when someone threw the girl off the bridge.”

Holy buckets! Is this a book you’d put back on the shelf? I don’t think so.

Or what about this one: “Hapscomb’s Texaco sat on Number 93 just north of Arnette, a piss-ant four street berg about 110 miles from Houston. Tonight the regulars were there, sitting by the cash register, drinking beer, talking idly, watching the bugs fly into the big lighted sign. It was Bill Hapscomb’s station, so the others deferred to him even though he was a pure fool.” Want more? Sure you do and so did ten million others who read Stephen King’s The Stand.
The best way to learn? Practice.

While all openings won’t be as dramatic as these, all good first scenes have this effect on readers. We can’t resist. We want to know more. Work on your opening lines until you are convinced that they will grab readers with a clenched fist.

Introduce us quickly to a character that we can identify with, whether or not the protagonist. If the author opens the novel with information we think we need to know before getting on with the story everything is immediately slowed down. Exposition always slows a story and too much of it turns a story boring. As an opening it basically kills a novel before it even gets breathing well. Unless maybe you’re James Michener. Think “action” as you create those first lines. You can explain later. And of course you’ll want to work it into the story not feed it to the reader in long dull ramblings.

Another beginning to avoid is to open with a dream. Readers don’t like it and agents hate it. Its another death knoll to your novel so don’t be tempted.

In the 20th century, several Indian writers have distinguished themselves not only in traditional Indian languages but also in English, a language inherited from the British. As a result of British colonisation, India has developed its own unique dialect of English known as Indian English. Indian English typically follows British spelling and pronunciation as opposed to American, and books published in India reflect this phenomenon. Indian English literature, however, tends to utilise more internationally recognisable vocabulary then does colloquial Indian English, in the same way that American English literature does so as compared to American slang.

India’s only Nobel laureate in literature was the Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore, who wrote some of his work originally in English, and did some of his own English translations from Bengali. India’s best selling English-language novelists of all-time are the contemporary writers like Chetan Bhagat, Manjiri Prabhu and Ashok Banker.


In category of Indian writing in English is poetry. Rabindranath Tagore wrote in Bengali and English and was responsible for the translations of his own work into English.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SELECTED AUTHORS

Each of the four writers, Charlotte Brontë, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf and Jeanette Winterson, are connected to feminism and approached the topic in a slightly different way. This chapter, however, discusses their lives and mentions their best-known works. Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855), a British novelist and poet, was the eldest of three Brontë sisters. When she was five years old her mother died of cancer and she and her siblings were raised by her aunt. Charlotte and her sisters were then sent to a Clergy Daughter’s School to gain an education, however, the school’s poor conditions permanently affected Charlotte’s physical and mental development, which she afterwards depicted in Jane Eyre. When Charlotte returned home from school, she acted as the oldest sibling as a mother towards her sisters and brother. The family lived in a Haworth Parsonage which is also the place where the siblings started creating their fiction. The siblings created fictional worlds and began chronicle the lives and struggles of their characters.

Charlotte with her brother Branwell wrote about imagined country Angria, whereas Emily and Anne wrote poems about the country of Gondal. Charlotte, nonetheless, continued her education and between 1835 and 1838 was a teacher and after that also worked as a governess. In 1846 Charlotte, Emily and Anne published a collection of their poems under pseudonyms of Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell. And a year later she published her masterpiece Jane Eyre (1847), which is inspired by the author’s life and the book became an immediate success. Among her other novels are Shirley (1848), which concerns with the role of women in society, and Villette (1853), that deals with isolation and social repression of individual desire. The deaths of Branwell, Emily and Anne affected Charlotte on a great scale, nevertheless, she managed to get married despite her father’s disapproval.

-However, in 1854 while expecting a baby she caught pneumonia and after a lengthy illness she died the following year. Thomas Hardy (1840-1928) is considered to be one of the most renowned authors of British history. He was born in Dorchester, in a rural area of Wessex, and studied architecture and consequently became an architect, however, when he came to London in 1891 he found himself to be more interested in writing poetry and fiction.

Six Women in a Box

Nair’s Ladies Coupe mirrors the intimate feelings of middle class women in Indian society. The characters are the reflections of women’s status in India. The real middle class home and the irony of the petty problems of the daily living are described sensitively by Nair. The heroine of Ladies Coupe is like a common woman victims of exploitation in the men dominated society. As the title of the novel indicates the plot in Ladies Coupe, where six women who meet for the first time in their lives, share their experiences, even though they differ in age, educational backgrounds and cultural upbringing, their lives have a common thread that is an Indian woman’s life dominated by a man or woman in one way or another. Ladies Coupe has an all woman cast and is about a single women’s decision to break from claustrophobic traditions and multiple identities as daughter, sister, aunt, provider and live life on her own terms. Nair in one of her interviews says “Whenever things perplex me, I write fiction”. She said I want to show the Equality of strength in women in this novel. Indian women don’t consider themselves important enough and so we tend to put our needs and desires on the back burner.

This is what needs to be addressed and this is what feminism ought to tackle. Nair compared the strength of women with water.

“Among the five elements that constitute life, I classify myself as water. Water that moisture, water that heals. Water that forgets. Water that accepts. Water that flows tirelessly. Water that also destroys is as much a part being water as wetness is” (LC 96).

In Ladies Coupe, Margaret Shanty, the successful chemistry teacher, is the victim of an unhappy marriage with an insensitive tyrant and too self-absorbed husband who neglects her. She says,

“What else could I do? Hadn’t I done everything he wanted me to? I didn’t know what it was he expected of me now. And suddenly, I felt much too weary to care” (LC 109).

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From the beginning itself the prevailing fact in Indian marriage is hinted. It is normal to quarrel with one’s husband. Everyday won't be the same when you've been married to a man for years. There will be bad days and there will be good days. The trick is to remember the good days. And like I have said many times before, it is a women’s responsibility to keep the marriage happy.

*Men have some many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of a marriage oiled.*  
*(LC 112)*

**Simone de Beauvoir in The second sex remarks:**

Just as he wants her to be at once warm and cool in bed, he requires her to be wholly his and yet no burden; he wishes her to establish him in a fixed place on the earth and to leave him free, to assume monotonous daily round and to bore him, to be always at hand and never importunate. He wants to have her all to himself and not to belong to her;

*to live as one of a couple and to remain alone. Thus she is betrayed from the day he marries her.* *(465)*

In this context, Marriage has become the destiny usually offered to women by society. In India where arranged marriages are widely prevalent, the wife is all through her life forced to obey the whims and fancies of man.

**OBJECTIVE**

Anita Nair has written six novels so far. They are “The better man”, “Ladies Coupe”, “Mistress,” “Lessons in Forgetting,” “Cut Like Wound,” and “Idris: keeper of the light”. Among these novels, “Ladies Coupe” has received much appreciation and it has been translated into 21 languages.

The main focus of this research paper is to focus the feministic point of view of Anita Nair. The portrayal of her memorable women characters and the feminist tone in her novel make Anita Nair one of the most outstanding female Indian novelists in English.

**ABOUT THE TITLE**

Anita Nair’s Ladies Coupe (2001) is a story of a woman’s search for freedom and independence. Nair says “I am not a feminist. I enjoy being in the house. I liked to be treated nicely and pampered. I don’t think this book is about feminism”. “It’s about the inner strength which I see in so many women that overwhelms me”. “When fifteen years ago, I was travelling in a Ladies Coupe, the women around me began talking….people talk more openly to strangers”. That is why Anita Nair keeps the title a “Ladies Coupe”. *(Behal, Suchitra: An Interview. The Hindu)*

Anita Nair compared her novel to Chaucer’s The Canterbury Tales’ told by a band of pilgrims on their way to the shrine of St. Thomas at Canterbury. They are a collection of stories in frame. Likewise, in “Ladies Coupe”, Anita Nair depicts six women in a railway compartment, each having a story to tell. By narrating the stories of six women, Nair moves from a state of passivity and absence to a state of active presence, from the kitchen and the bedroom to the street and the world at large. These are the stories which together make a single story of women rediscovering their bodies. There are stories which become a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from patriarchy, one that is not characterized by fake binaries.

**SIX WOMEN CHARACTERS**

Anita Nair narrates the stories of six women who are travelling together in a Ladies Coupe of a train. Mainly it depicts the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom. Akhilandeswari alias Akhila forty-five, single and working as a clerk, has been brought up in a conservative family of Tamil Brahmins. Akhila bears the burden of her family after her father’s death. Her brothers and sisters grow up and get married and they hardly think about Akhila’s needs and aspirations. She has never been able to live a life of her own or passes an identity of her own.

*’She was always an extension of someone’s identity; daughter, sister, aunt….Akhila wished for once someone should see her as a whole being’* *(P.201-202).*

On her way to Kanyakumari, Akhila meets five different women – Janaki Prabhakar, Prabha Devi, Margaret Paulraj, Sheela Vasudevan and Marikolunthu. Though, they met for the first time they share their life’s experience with each other. Even though they differ in age, educational background and cultural upbringing, their stories have a common thread, the tragic predicament of Indian women in a patriarchal social order.

**NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES AND THEMES**

Even though other women novelists are more famous for their style and for their approach in handling fiction, Anita Nair has taken up an outstanding place as a novelist in Indian literature. Anita Nair stands unique in her style, character portrayal, uplifting woman’s rights and duties in their life. She vividly portrays their sufferings in the society. Anita Nair is particularly good on the domestic details such as lazy Sunday lunches, a family row, the sights, sounds and smells of a busy railway station, which make up her characters’ live. Nair says “I am not a feminist. I enjoy being in the house. I liked to be treated nicely and pampered. I don’t think this book is about feminism”. “It’s about the inner strength which I see in so many women that overwhelms me”. “When fifteen years ago, I was travelling in a Ladies Coupe, the women around me began talking….people talk more openly to strangers”. That is why Anita Nair keeps the title a “Ladies Coupe”. *(Behal, Suchitra: An Interview. The Hindu)*

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Narative is by no means a monolithic term. If one seeks a common strand in a number of its varieties, it is the critique of the patriarchal modes of thinking which aims at the domination of the male and the subordination of the female. This patriarchal ideology teaches women to internalize this concept in the process of their socialization. It brings to front the concepts of gender, which are manufactured. On reading Simone de Beauvoir there came a thought view that the history of humanity is a history of systematic attempts to silence the female which gave a clear view that it is not by birth, a woman becomes. It is a whole of this civilization that produces such a creature which can be described as feminine. The narrative technique employed by the novelist is also gaining importance, considering the gradual increase in the different methods of storytelling. Plain narrative or story telling is still the most common method employed by the novelist who is omniscient in this type of writing. The first person narrative is usually employed by the novelist to make his story appear more realistic and more credible.

While novels written in such a manner have a ring of authenticity to them, they do not enable the novelist to look deep into the minds and motives of the rest of the characters. After going through a laundry list of what the novels and its flaws are, including the overwhelming bitterness throughout the work, the narrowness of its setting and characters and its inability to sustain itself past the first
reading all of which are arguable points. It is easy to agree that Anita Nair is talented, to remain as the recorder of the middle class of Indian life.

One can disagree with her that the characters are nothing more than their place and function in the novel. After reading her novel, anybody will begin to think about other famous authors and novels and realize that most stay within a certain setting and way of life. Anita Nair is not writing her characters as flat by making them a product of their environment and upbringing; she is simply mirroring the reality of life and human nature. In one of her radio talk Anita Nair has revealed that she used to plan certain incidents and the narration happens as she writes which is in long hand. Then when she keys it in, she would add something and elaborates on it. She partly drew her characters from stories, films or people she saw, sometimes at a railway station. She remembered meeting someone like Akila some time back very briefly that had a sad look in her eyes. The author wondered about their lives and writes.

Anita Nair had a staunch belief that someday the world would want to hear what she had to say. She never minded the rejection slips that came in so regularly. It began with a poem ‘Happenings in the London Underground’ being included in an anthology brought out by the Poetry Society of India in 1992. Then gradually stories started appearing in print. Her fiction was broadcast on the radio on numerous occasions. In addition, she began to contribute regularly to the Times of India. A short story collection was published in June 1997, even though a small firm published Satyr of the Subway, the book caught the eye of critics and readers alike. One of the reasons for the success of Satyr of the Subway (1997) was the cover, which was designed by a design firm. Around that time, Anita Nair began to work with India’s first ever-literary agency. In 1998, she completed work on and in the span of a week signed up with Laura Susijn of a literary agency based in London. Then came The Better Man (1999) that was accepted almost simultaneously by Penguin India and Picador USA. It was the first book by an Indian author living in India to be published by Picador and the book hit the stands in 2000.

Today The Better Man has publishers in France, Germany, Italy, Lithuania and India. Of all her works she has written, the novels are highly appreciated by readers all over the world. Her first novel The Better Man (1999) is about the story that is set in the little, imaginary village of Kaikurussi, in Kerala, and the state where Nair was born and that saturated her poetic and reminiscent writing. In the past, Kerala was part of a region known as Malabar.

CONTRADICTIONS AND AMBITIONS OF ANITA NAIR’S WOMEN’S CHARACTER

Anita Nair is a bold and straightforward writer. Anita Nair refuses to be labelled as a feminist writer. She makes an attempt to show the quality of strength in a woman. Anita Nair also adds that strength is not usually considered a woman as thing. Her styles ultimately differ from other feminist writers. In other words, she is a feminist with difference. She traces the real position of women in the families as well as in the society. She has created ripple in the society of male domination by taking women as women in a serious manner. Her attempt to exhibit the plight, fears, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions of her women’s character is remarkable. Her primary focus of attention is the world of women, the struggle of women in the context of modern Indian society. Her novels depict the real life of her characters. Her novels reveal the effect of social conditioning on women. Society uses many different means to propagate belief we have literature as one of the means to carry these ideas further, surrounded by such messages. They break the chains of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries which limit women. So we can say that Anita Nair breaks the chains of society in portraying her women characters, which usually leads to its fragmentation. She forces us to think of the importance of curbing adultery to save family life. The female characters in Anita Nair’s novels come from different religions, reflecting thus the diversity of Indian culture, which would be difficult or impossible to generalize. Anita Nair is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who has presented the plight of Indian woman. This novel deals with tradition and modernity in the contemporary India. Anita Nair has demonstrated the subordinate position of woman in the orthodox tradition –bound Indian society. She has taken up issues of gender discrimination and social conditioning of women, husband-wife relationship and the suppression of women and sexual exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame.

THE TREATMENT OF FEMINISTIC ISSUES IN ANITA NAIR’S NOVELS

Anita Nair’s fourth novel Lessons in Forgetting (2010) is discussed to redefine the role and the quest of women to move on life. Her writing reveals a story about real people, about second chances and fresh beginning. It deals with love, dependency and betrayal. Anita Nair in her fiction talks about how women suffers from patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and abuse women. The question she raises in the novel makes us to rethink about the ideological ground of man’s patriarchal role in the traditional society and to think about the existence of alternative reality. It presents an opposition between ideological appearance represented in mythic and metaphysical understanding of the material world and reality represented in the material oppression of women.

CONCLUSION

These two novels, Anita Nair’s Ladies Coupé and Mistress focuses on domestic sexual violence. Though Anita Nair is not a feminist, her stories delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. They are entangled in their suffering and rebellion born of that pain, and convey a message of hope, through the change that is out there and can become possible through one’s courage and initiative. Ever since Ladies Coupé, Anita Nair has been referred as a feminist but she has vehemently opposed this. In one of her interview with Sneha K. R., she said that she does not want the title feminist. She says she wants to have some changes in society which she feels essential for womanhood.

In one of her another interview with Sneha, Nair says, “The creative process begins for me when certain aspects of life trouble me. I then try and explore why the way it is. But in doing so I merely hold up a mirror to the society we live in. At no point do I delude myself that by doing so I will help start a social revolution. It isn’t my intention in the first place”. In the same interview, she stresses that she is not a feminist because she is not agreeing with everything that feminist theories propound. She does not like to limit her bounda...
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