

Women characters in the novels of Anita Nair

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Anita Nair is a popular writer in English. She was born at Mundakottakurissi near shornurin Kerala state. A bestselling author of fiction and poetry, her novels, *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe* have been translated into 21 languages. She was working as the creative director of an advertising agency in Banglore when she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories called *Satyr of the Subway*, which he sold to Har-Anand press. The book won her a fellowship from the Virginia Center for creative arts.

Her other works of fiction include *Mistress*, *Lesson in Forgetting*, *Cut like Wound*, and *Idris*. *Mistress* was long-listed for the 2008 orange prize in the U.K. and named a finalist for the 2007 PEN/Beyond Margins Award in the U.S. She has also written two children's books *The Puffin Book of World Myths and Legends*. She has also edited an anthology of writings about Kerala titled "Where the Rain is Born." Anita Nair is a novelist, poet, travel writer, essayist, short story writer and writer of stories for children. She is working as a creative director in an advertising agency in Bengaluru (Formerly Bangalore).

Anita Nair is one of India's popular female writers. She discusses through her expression, the present condition of women in Indian society. As story telling is an art she has an art to analyze the human life, society, social systems existing at that point of time. Woman seems to be of particular interest to Anita Nair. She depicts the woman nature in her novels. She concentrates on the predicament of modern woman in a male dominated society. She depicts that marriage destroys Indian woman because most marriages happen to be union of incompatibility than compatibility.

Men are to be rational and women sentimental and emotional. Both are different in nature, attitudes and interests. Naturally they look at things differently. But everywhere woman is expected to adjust herself with the changing values, family ways and surroundings to which she belongs. Woman plays significant role in our society woman is the backbone of the society. The role of woman in the development of society is of utmost importance. Even after playing all here roles properly in the modern society, woman is considered weak , mean and unequal to men. Man is the strongest sex of the society. Woman is treated as the 'weaker sex' who needs to be protected themselves by their father, husband or son etc.

In modern days, women writers play a significant role to create awareness and empower women though their works Anita Nair is one such talented writer who creates life-like female characters in her works. These characters reflect the real condition of present women of Indian society. In all her works of Anita Nair, each aspect of womanhood is depicted with graciousness and sensitivity. Anita Nair has picked the varieties of female characters from her novels for this paper.

Though these novels, Anita Nair has depicted the deeper level of the female's personality. She traces the actual place of females' of the families also as in society. She has displayed the plight, fears, dilemmas, ambitions, and conditions of her female characters. Her interest of the planet of females in the context of contemporary Indian society is remarkable.

The trust area of this paper will be on the novels of Anita Nair. It will explore the female characters and about the embarrassing situation of women in our society. Anita Nair is one such genius writer who creates life-like female characters in her works. These characters reflect the real condition of present women of India. Anita Nair draws one's attention to women's exploitation and discrimination and she uses her characters as a great example for women empowerment.

Anita Nair has depicted women character realistically. In the novel '*The Better Man*'. She has represented the bad condition of woman. Achuthan Nair in *The Better Man* treats his wife Paru Kutty just a slave. He shows his authority on her as a husband. He considers her as a slave or servant. He suppresses her femininity and her human demands. A perfect marriage is expected by everyone and the main responsibility of the parents is to find out a suitable match for their son or daughter. Anjana, in the novel, *The Better Man* is brought up in the frank and free atmosphere in her family. But the atmosphere, she gets after marriages is haphazard. Her In-laws' home is a place of meaninglessness where her husband is stronger beside her. She wants to live a healthy meaningful life with her husband. She wants freedom and to be loved by her husband but it remains a dream for her to come into reality. She leads a painful life under the authority of her husband. She hates all the things around her and even herself. In Indian culture marriage brings two person, man and woman together under one roof but she skins over the sexual relationship. According to her, sexual relationship is incomplete without emotional relationship. Her marital relationship with her husband has not a fine tone and marked by loneliness, and loveless life. Her relationship with her husband is adversely unable to understand each other. An account of escape from her loveless married life she moves to her parent's house. Here she longs for true love who takes care of her.

She says to herself, "*I am still the woman I was unloved and unwanted. And then she felt a great desire to be held. A chest she could lay her head upon and cry. A pair of arms that would wrap her around with caring. A voice that would whisper, "Please don't cry"* (*The Better Man* 237)

Anita Nair, through her novel, has depicted many problems which women face, personally and socially. Women do not enjoy their freedom and suppressed by men. Women are enough strong to face any kind of problems but men always keep her under their clutches. Men are like an obstacle in the path of women. They are unable to think on their own. They are under the patriarchal system in the Indian society.

In her novel, *The Better Man*, Anita Nair has explicated a quest for identity self realization and portrays women's aspiration for freedom in marital life, freedom in establishing healthy husband wife relationship. Anjana in *The Better Man* enjoys independence and self satisfaction till she gets married to Ravindran. She wants to love and give the best to her husband but, he avoids her. She longs for freedom in

married life. When she doesn't get the same she hates everybody including herself. She endures pain, suffering and misery. She suffers the devoidness of healthy sexual life and conjugal bliss. She feels that she has been victimized by her traditional upbringing. She had to return to her parental home only to ignore her husband's attitude. Lack of understanding, between husband and wife egoist attitude each other and incompatibility between them, have made their life complex. Anjana feels that marriage is not a happy world. It has no meaning in her life. She wants silence and gives up everything as

'She gave away her colourful saris and took to wearing starched.

Cottons in shade as inspid, dull as her life. She locked up all her.

Jewellery in a safe deposit box at the bank and swept all her.

Flipperies away into the waste basket. (P. 234).

Through the character of Anjana, Anita Nair has protested against oppression of any kind. She has carved a unique creative niche of making her character discover herself. The novelist has shown the importance of education for women that provides them the privilege to be aware of themselves, specially of their rights. Educated women demand equality, freedom and justice to bring about a radical change in their lives. Anita Nair, in the novel has given the internal and external identity of her female character in psychological way.

In the novel '*Mistress*' these are women who want independence and self satisfaction. They undergo tremendous crisis throughout their lives. Sadiya, Maya and Radha try to cross boundaries to meet their target. Sadiya, a muslim woman with her cherished dream, violates laws set for women of her community. She intentionally breaks harsh rules to achieve freedom.

Sadiya is born into a stubborn muslim community. Her quest for freedom compels her to break the laws set out for her. She disobeys for the first time to mercy walk outside the back alley and then wandering into the common alley. Though her father punished her. she couldn't able to help herself longing for freedom as she says, "*I wept for I knew that even though Vappa had done all he could, I couldn't stop thinking of those hardly moments of freedom of a sky that was not bound by grey walls*" (*Mistress*, 30)

This quest for freedom is the beginning and the end of self-searching. Here Anita Nair, through her character Sadiya has depicted that freedom is necessary for a woman to realize her potential for a complete life. Sadiya's second disobedience is for her choice of a man who is everything for her but her community does not accept him. Sethu is an illeterate, without a job and a man with no proper faith. Sadiya craves for herself when she has been in her father's house. But later she feels herself trapped in her faith. She is unable to give up her faith. She craves for a freedom which has been imprisoned by the harsh rules of her community. But she does not want to throw away the faith her community has built in her.

Radha in *Mistress* is a representative of the modern Indian women. She is like a woman who is in search of her strength and independence. Radha had a shameful past. She took her education in a city beyond

home and a job too. She thinks herself as an independent, beautiful and young woman. Being an independent woman she chose a lover too. This was a married man through whom she became pregnant and thus her independent life became shameful. She decided to go back to her family and marry Shyam and tried to become a traditional woman. It was her independent way of life that made her return to her family. She tries to become a self-contained wife to Shyam.

Radha had a quest for “self” and that was why she chose her lover to her satisfaction. But she had to ignore herself because of her shameful past and make herself into the role of a traditional wife. She tries to love Shyam and does not protest of his touch. Whenever he makes love to her to forget her past. Shyam says, “when she responded to my touch. I know that she was trying to block a memory” (P.123). But she has emotionally attached with Chris for bodily pleasure. She is always between her duty to Shyam as a husband and attraction to Chris as a lover.

Radha is a dutiful wife to Shyam and not a loving one she does not love him because his opinions are seldom respected. She feels disgustful when Shyam treats her just as a *Mistress* who is to fulfill his sexual desires. She says- *Don't I have a right to an opinion? I am your wife. Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me as if I am a kept woman I bloody Mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights for independence* (P.198).

Anita Nair has shown through the example of Radha, that women find themselves entrapped in a male-dominated society. They get a secondary position in the family. In the society women have more social customs and traditional values than men. The age-old social tradition and the control of women education by men are the factors which are the causes of the subjugation of women in their family life and the society in general.

Anita Nair, in her novel, *Lessons in Forgetting*. Presents a variety of issues such as women seeking their self in Indian society, their dependence on other, man-woman relationship, mother-daughter relationship, redemption and forgiveness. In the novel, the Protagonist Meera is a loving housewife who is a mother of two cute children and a comfortable as a corporate wife of Giri, queen of her house and also a successful writer of cookbooks. Meera is not able to think of her “self” what is her individuation, till Giridhar, her husband leaves her one night suddenly. Then she is able to think of herself. Meera never dreamt big dreams. She had no desires to live a luxury life, no designer clothes, Gold, diamonds, expansive things and worldly pleasure. In those hard years after her father's death, she learnt how to worship at the altar of enough. Though Giri is a big guy and earns quite handsomely. But he has a greedy nature. And keeps an eye on her wife, Meera's property as she is only daughter of her parents with huge property. That is why he marries her he wants to buy two flats to sell Meera's property. But it is on ninety nine years lease and cannot be sold. Giri was not interested to live in this house all that he wanted the disposal of the house. Here he says- *then there is the house I ask you, begged and pleaded with you to sell the house with the money, I would never have had to work for someone else. I could have pursued my dream, my chance at happiness... but you wouldn't listen. You kept brushing*

the thought away. You indulged me with a “not now, well do it later”, as if I were a child hankering for the moon. I have to move on Meera. I don't know what it is I want to do. I know it is too much to expect you to understand what I am going through. Or for you to look at this objectively. But I want you to know that I didn't intend to hurt you or the children.” (Lessing in Forgetting, 82)

Meera is totally bothered when her husband Giri forsakes her and her family one night as Giri does not return at all, Meera is forced to seek a job. She has to become the caretaker of the entire family. She has now become the sole responsibility of her children Nayantara and Nikhil and her mother Saro and grandmother Lily. It takes time to heal up her broken mind and the family also.

Anita Nair, in this novel, makes a statement about the fragility of the modern Indian marriages and the challenges that parents face in bringing up their children. Further Nair describes how every woman has to make painful choices in order to assert and retain their sense of self redemption and second chance. The novel touches on very sensitive gender issues like gender violence, gender biased sex selection and male gaze.

In the novel, *Ladies Coupe* Prabha Devi was brought up by her mother very graceful however her birth was not a welcome news for her father, as he expected a son to be of half in his business. But her mother gave birth to a girl child happily. She differs from her husband who hates a girl child. At the age of eighteen, Prabha Devi was married to Jagdish. Her future was decided by her father and her elder brother. Jagdish was the son of a rich diamond merchant.

All of his family members expected Prabha Devi to perform her role as a good wife and a daughter-in-law. But Prabha Devi gives expression to the self-hood in particular. She longed for independence and her own identity. She made a trip to New York, and wanted to be like them. She wanted to be independent and self-confident like these women. She changed, the style of her dress, her looking and her life style. She was very modern in thinking as she told her husband to use condom at bed time. Her husband felt embarrassment as he was very traditional in these matters. He was not aware that husband and wife could discuss sex relationship in this manner. He began to dislike her wife for openly discussing sex with him.

Anita Nair through this novel depicts how women have no freedom in making a choice of their husband and how their wishes and ambitions, are shattered by the necessity of getting them married at the early age of eighteen. In Indian society girl's future is decided by the male members of the family. I was not considered necessary to ask for choice or opinion in this matter. She had to sacrifice her desires to the necessity of performing variety of roles such as daughter, wife, sister, daughter-in-law etc.

Anita Nair's latest novel *Cut Like Wound* introduced a female character called Urmila, who commits sacrilege and adultery to fulfill her desire. Urmila is the ex-girlfriend of Gowda. They meet after twenty-seven years. Urmila brings an emotional chaos in the life of Gowda. Urmila's husband is a Philander. Her marital life is uncontented. Her husband takes up a woman in the neighbour-hood. This is unbearable for her and she wants to divorce from her husband now this disappointed married life makes her to search for a man to fulfill her position.

Urmila seeks Gowda for her physical needs. Gowda has also a long distant relationship with his wife Mamtha, who is a doctor. They have a son named Poshan, a medical student lives with Mamtha in Hassan. Gowda's feels detached and wants love and care. Both Gowda and Urmila meet in café. Gowda worries about his dignity and circumstances whereas Urmila thinks to have relationship with him. She shows her love and passion to him. But he is worries about his marital life and his son's career. He is completely puzzled instead of feeling happy.

Even being a married woman Urmila speaks freely about her love for Gowda, "you would be the Borei I once knew. And fell in love with" (*Cut Like Wound P.109*). Inspector Gowda, a 49 year old man is surprised on hearing the speech from a married woman. Urmila wants to have a 'living together' relationship with Gowda. She doesn't care to throw the veil of customs and tradition and appears as a free woman. Her marital life is a total failure. And she doesn't have anyone to share her grief.

She finds Gowda her former lover to be the right person to share her sufferings and to be poured all her contradictions and ambitions. She thinks Gowda to be her best companions in life. But Gowda does not throw away his wife and his son for his the illegal relationship with Urmila. It does not bring any change in his life. He struggles hard with his relationships with his wife, son and his old flame. He asks himself "my career is going nowhere, my wife is a stranger, my son is probably a drug addict, and here I am falling in love again. Do I really need this in my life now (P.126-127)

But Urmila considers Gowda her everything. She renders her whole life in his hands. Anita Nair, through the character of Urmila, discusses the modern Indian woman who confines to the leash of social norms and boundaries of woman, she experiences submission and slavery in her family and in the society. She goes against the society as well as family to break the bondage. Anita Nair shows the real position of women in the families as well as in the society in a serious manner. Her attempt to portray the fear, plight, dilemmas, contradictions and ambitions of her female character is Praiseworthy. Her novels convey the real life of her characters. They break the chain of social norms and unable to confine themselves the boundaries which have been made by the society. So we can say that Anita Nair breaks the chain of society in depicting her female characters.

Anita Nair shows in her fiction the infinite variety of female character. She exposes the darker and brighter side of their existence. She presents the turmoils and troubles of their mind and their self fragmented and lost in the social predicament. She reveals a vivid picture of their inner conflicts. She shows how gender

differences leads to social inequality and subversion of women are born to suffer injustice as we have noticed in the case of the character like Paru-kutty, Meera, Radha, Prabha Devi and others. The woman is depicted traditionally as undemanding and compromising according to the circumstances. Nair female characters illustrate this, but as a modern novelist she also shows how women are ready to fight for their rights and win their position in the social and family life. Anita Nair successfully uses her fiction to represent the life of women in Indian society and shows how woman is treated secondary to the male-dominated society. Anita Nair also shows how the modern women emerge out of it fighting for their freedom and ambition. Anita Nair is very bold and frank in depicting the middle-class. Women and their struggle in the large Patriarchal set-up of the Indian society.

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