

## **An Expedition of Women from Enslavement to Enfranchisement in Anita Nair's Novels**

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### **Abstract**

Intellectuals regard Indian society as male-dominated, where the different roles and expectations are fixed for males and females. Women are mostly treated like a beast and are often victims of male oppression. Most women also accept it as their destiny and believe themselves weak in comparison to males. They have been living without self-recognition since ancient times. They are far away from their authentic self, wearing a mask of happiness and social human beings. Nair has explored the psyche of her characters as well as discussed their main problems in life. Their struggle has resulted in an identity crisis. The blooming identity crisis of women is reflected in literature, especially in women's writings. The identification can be made on many levels: psychological, sociological, linguistic, cultural, and emotional. The title has been achieved on all these grounds. Nair has observed and created modern Indian men and women with various dimensions of their interests and activities. There are keen observations of the despair of the innocents, the corruption of the power, and rude and animal-like behavior with the poor. The lives of Indian women are full of diverse problems and difficulties, ecstasies and agonies, joys and frustrations.

The present article has explored the struggle and success of the female protagonists of Anita Nair.

**Keywords:** self-recognition, identity crisis, modern India, joys and frustrations

The need for social reform was an essential aspect of the Indian renaissance of the nineteenth century. Therefore social reformations became a significant theme in early Indian English fiction. Some of the early novelists' thought about the position of women in India is very much contrasted with the role of women in the West. Previously India was governed by its traditional conventions only. People were happy with their culture and manners of living, but in modern India, women find it difficult to follow the old customs and traditions. They could not see themselves fitting in the typical Indian frame.

Anita Nair deals with the theme of self-identity and socio-cultural identity in her novels. Through her protagonists, she unfolds a saga of revolt against deep-rooted family tradition, self-doubt, resolution, and acceptance of life. Her books also trace a

woman's unique needs such as love, expectation, achievement, freedom, and independence. She has evolved her writing style to suit her subject matter and temperament. KuhuChanana, in his article, "Dichotomic Representation of Lesbianism as an act of Resistance in Contemporary Indian English Women Writers With Special Reference to AbhaDawesar and Anita Nair", remarks about Nair's most famous novel,

Ladies Coupe:

These six stories unfold the oppression women face because of this essentialist identity where her entire being seems to stem from being a mother. This regulation of feminine sexuality by procreation is poignantly described through a powerful scene in ladies' coupe where Janaki's husband tells everyone how she had been instrumental in taking a pregnant woman to the hospital and making her deliver the child. Her husband tells this story repeatedly as if it is her highest and the only achievement. This sort of thinking of her identity as only being either a mother or helping the other woman become a mother irks her beyond measure. (13)

In the male-dominated society, a woman is supposed to be a daughter, a wife, a mother, a sister, and a homemaker. She is expected to serve, sacrifice, and surrender herself to the family's welfare. Anita Nair's protagonists and her minor characters are all

searching for a good and happy life, turning on a surprising and sometimes shocking path for society. They show their apparent disbelief in traditional relationships. They look like ordinary and calm people from the outside, but they all possess devil feelings.

On many occasions, they could not control their emotions and revolted against the traditional norms. Breaking the rules and regulations made by society and creating a comfort zone for them have paved a new way for the next generation. The female characters are raising the question of why they are not supposed to have all the happiness a male deserves. Akhila, Radha, Meera, Sheela,

Margaret, Kala, and Anjana support this opinion by becoming rebellious. Due to their emotional entanglement, failed social relationships, and the tension given by their family or lover, they are devoid of their real identity. They are all leading a life according to their life and finally, take bold steps and find their true identity. As soon as they neglect society, they start a happy life. Mukundan spent all his youth trying to become a man as his father and other villagers expected. But he is not pleased and feels it is like a burden.

As a child, Mukundan was unable to recognize his identity. He is forced to get the approval of his father before doing anything. He never gets his father's permission to fulfill his desires. As Nadine Richters, in her book *Does Mukundanin Anita Nair's novel "The Better Man" becomes a better man?* Writes, "Even if he

senses his desires, he learns to sacrifice them for the sake of his father's satisfaction. Here living becomes more for the other self than for oneself. He often felt beaten. These sacrifices lay the foundation for his gradual loss of identity" (101).

Identity and relationships are also transient. In Nair's novels, the passage of time becomes an essential preoccupation in the characters' minds. Time is the most powerful and endless one. It has the power to construct and destroy both. Theorists argue that only present experiences are real, and we conscious beings recognize this in the extraordinary vividness of our current knowledge and compare it with the vague memories of past. In Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, all the six characters travel together to move from past to present. The pleasant memories and brutal realities simultaneously move in front of their eyes like a movie. *Mistress* and *Lessons in Forgetting* are also blended with past and present incidents. Akhila witnessed all the stories the five women told, and she concluded that all of them had a bitter past but a better present. They were successful in getting rid of their sorrowful conditions through their virtues.

The working or lower class people search for their happiness in small things within their capacity. These people give importance to religion and believe in fate. They are not at risk of being deprived of some expensive goods or money. The upper class makes too much money which sometimes turns them away from their family and loved ones, but in contrast, lower class people have firm emotional and moral bonding. Marikolanthu in *Ladies*

*Coupe* seeks her happiness in her daily domestic work. She feels pleased while talking to her mother and playing with her brothers. She is satisfied with what she has. Her misfortune started with the death of her father.

In post-independent India, the archetypal image of women is changing, and they are craving more space in all walks of life. The number of women writers is increasing rapidly. Indian English women novelists are gaining ground worldwide and winning critical appraisal and international recognition. The glaring cause of their success lies in the fact that they are experts in story-telling from generations and are endowed with the gift of delving deep into the working of the human mind and heart with kindness and sensitivity. Nair says, "Short novels are like a tasting menu. Writing in capsule format is always dissatisfying for the reader. They get no full-fledged experience out of it" (Web, 2016).

The modern women novelists seem positive in their attitude and refuse to be cowed down and defeated. They rebel against gender discrimination, question the double standards, and refuse to be submissive. They are the women who respect themselves and protest all sorts of humiliation meted out to them.

Gender equality and women empowerment are the favorite subjects of many contemporary writers. Anita Nair also has projected the middle-class women's urges, dreams, and desires through her novels. These women are no more bounded and suffocated by their surroundings;

instead, they are happy individuals, sexually expressive, intelligent, and self-reliant. Nair has skillfully brought to the surface these new women's issues like pre-marital and extra-marital affairs, sterility of life, man-woman relationship, their expectations, and their fears.

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