

Gender Studies in Anita Nair's Novels

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Abstract

Women play variety of significant roles in our society. In spite of playing all her roles in efficient manner in the modern society, she is weak. Men are still strongest gender of the society. Women play a great role in the growth and development of the society and making it an advanced and modern society. Throughout the world the women are treated in the same manner. Their thoughts, feelings and ideas are not accepted by the society in which they live. They are in such a condition that they cannot break out of it, if they do so, they face a miserable situation in their lives. Anita Nair in her novels deals with women's suffering, subjugation, oppression, frustration, freedom, alienation, identity crisis, emotional insecurity and social issues. She portrays the patriarchal system in the male dominated world and shows how these women try to overcome it.

In all the works of Anita Nair, each aspect of womanhood is depicted with graciousness and sensitivity generating the message of womanhood. Anita Nair's marvellous understanding of the minds of women is depicted beautifully in her novel *Ladies Coupe*. Women continue to be victims of circumstances living up to the varied roles they are expected to uphold. Patriarchy, in various forms tries to repress, and humiliate women. Women should not be ashamed of their status in life for e.g. widowhood, divorcee status, spinster status etc. Instead they should realize their true potential and strength. They should have the willingness to face new challenges and come up with innovative ideas to tackle issues around them. Though Patriarchy is a common concept Anita Nair deals it with variety of women in different situations. She has portrayed her women characters who rise against patriarchy to find their identity.

The issue of the status of Indian women remains controversial even in the twenty-first century. Women are the backbone of the society. To eradicate all forms of discrimination against women, they should be empowered. Women writers including Anita Nair have succeeded in raising their voices

over the last six decades and have heralded an era of equal opportunities with a bright future ahead of them

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Women play variety of significant roles in our society. In spite of playing all her roles in efficient manner in the modern society, she is weak and men are still the strongest gender of the society. Women play a great role in the growth and development of the society. But throughout the world women are treated in the same manner. Their thoughts, feelings and ideas are not accepted by the society in which they live. They are in such a condition that they cannot break out of it. Most of the Indian women living do not raise their voice against aggressive dominance of the male either because of their inferiority complex or the rigid code of conduct imposed on their ambitions, desires, sense and sensibilities.

In the last quarter of the twentieth century there was a creative surge in Indian Writing in English in general and in women's writing in particular. After the writings of Raja Rao, R K Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, some eminent women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur depicted the Indian woman in all her changing faces, fires and fervour.

One of the well known international reputed writers in Indian Writing in English is Anita Nair. Anita Nair in her novels deals with women's suffering, serfdom, frustration, independence, isolation, identity and emotional insecurity. The patriarchal system in the male dominated world and how women try to overcome it is depicted in her novels. Anita Nair was born in Mundakottakurthu near Shornur in Kerala. She was brought up in a suburb in Madras. Her grandparents lived in Kerala. Anita Nair made frequent visits to Kerala. Her visits made her to know the heart of rural Kerala. She did her B.A in English literature and language in a small town Othapalam in Kerala. At the age of twenty four, she studied journalism in United States. Working as an innovative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore, she wrote her first book.

Anita Nair breaks the chains of society and portrays her women characters, which leads to its fragmentation. They break the chains of social norms and do not confine themselves to the boundaries which limit women. In Anita Nair's novels the female characters are from different religions and culture. She presents the reality in life to show the aggressiveness of women characters in her novels. Women express their opinions strongly and forcefully. It is an attack on the male dominated society. "Anita Nair is a powerful writer, who through this tender story shows great understanding and compassion for all women and for the choices and regrets they cannot avoid. She portrays women as not totally cut off from familial social ties but women who remains with those orbits and protest against injustice and humiliation" (Kalamani143)

People have been influenced by the culture, beliefs, traditions, and norms that prevail in society. What women should do for their liberation and how our society can become conscious about them is demonstrated by Anita Nair. Akhila in *Ladies Coupe*, born in a middle class Brahmin family is unmarried woman. At the age of forty five she becomes aggravated as “Dreaming for escape and space. Hungry for life and experience”(LC 2). So she decides to go on a long trip alone by train. She goes in search of the dominant question which obsessed her throughout her life “Can a woman live by herself” (LC 21). This one question troubled her a lot.. Akhila had to take the entire burden of her family on her shoulders at the age of nineteen without any complaint. She is the eldest and the only earning member in her family. She is supposed to take the permission of her younger brother when she goes out just because of the fact that he is a man and she, a woman, “She was always an extension someone’s identity. Chandra’s daughter, Narayana’s Akka, Priya’s aunt, Murthy’s sister-in-law [.....] Akhila wished for once someone would see her as a whole being”. (LC 200-201). She loses her complete self identity, freedom for the sake of her family.

Margret Shanthi, portrayed as a well educated is a gold medalist in Chemistry. She is still dominated by her husband. Ebenezer Paulraj who is a school principal, gives first importance to her career rather than her desires. He never tries to respond to her feelings. Anita Nair through the example of Margret’s character reflects that not even an illiterate woman but also a well educated woman feels herself trapped in such a society.

The other Lady passenger in the coupe Prabha Devi is one who is very pretty and beauty conscious. When Prabha Devi was born her father was not happy as he wanted a male child. “Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans, addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance” (LC169). Here Anita Nair presents gender bigotry in Indian society where a girl is still considered inferior to a boy.

Marikolanthu is a poor woman. When Marikolanthu is exploited, instead of showing sympathy, everyone blames her. Here Anita Nair delineates the psychology of all the members in the society both male and female. They find fault with the woman who has been exploited. They regard that woman herself is responsible for her tragedy. After that disastrous incident, Marikolanthu spends her days in a phase of complete loss of identity. After some time she gives birth to a male child, Muthu. She is unable to love her baby Muthu, an outcome of that hateful incident and of her helplessness and nothingness. When Murugesan died, his body was not fully burnt so Muthu has been given the task to take care of his father’s dead body. In these circumstances she accepts her son and starts enjoying the most important part of her life ‘The Motherhood’

Janaki is the eldest lady in all of six ladies in Coupe. She was married at the age of eighteen and her husband was twenty seven. It was an arranged marriage. From her childhood she had been taught that a

husband is an equal to God and it is her duty to serve him “He is your husband and you must accept whatever he does” (LC25). She realizes that her life is not hers as it is wholly dedicated to her husband and to her son.

Anjana, in the novel *The Better Man* was brought up in a liberal atmosphere by her parents. She is happy in her world of independence which gives her a profound sense of self fulfillment. When her age turned twenty seven her independence is lost in the name of marriage. In her married life she endures several injustices perpetrated by her husband. In the days of her earlier married days she tries a lot to impress her husband, Ravindran but she could not. She wants to give the best to him but he was not interested in her. Whenever Anjana is ready for a casual conversation Ravindran feels irritated and leaves the place at once. In spite of his actions she is ready to perform her duty and all that she wants to know about the likes and dislikes of her husband. She is eager to lead a healthy life with him but it is mere a dream for her to achieve. She longs for freedom and love in marriage, but it breeds pain, misery and fury. She develops hatred to all the things around her, even to herself. She has lived for others sacrificing much to be called altruistic. Then she is egocentric to be called aggressive. Women are tending to be more aggressive than usual as they began to give importance to their own self.

Education provided them the privilege to be aware of themselves, especially of their rights. The women of the oriental countries remained confined to the four walls of the houses. With the spread of knowledge and greater independence, women have started raising the voices of the protest against oppression of any kind. Educated women demand equality, freedom and justice to bring about a radical change in their lives. Anjana breaks the traditional Indian consciousness and creates the world of her own. Anjana emerges from her unsuccessful marriage, with the determination to live as a free individual. Thus she asserts her personal freedom. Anjana is a blend of both traditional and modern elements and she wants uniqueness and autonomy

Meenakshi is one of the characters of Anita Nair. Meenakshi falls in love with Balan the Kathakali dancer. When she is deserted by her husband, she does not want to depend on others. She finds herself a job and become financially independent. She is projected as the woman of the twenty first century. Modern women are aware of their potentiality.

In Anita Nair’s *Mistress*, she portrays the husband and wife relationship in the patriarchal society. In those days marriage is an ultimate goal for all Indian women. With this assumption, Radha in *Mistress* suffers in her traditional marriage life. She is forcefully married to Shyam by her father’s compulsion. She is not happy with traditional life. Therefore she decides to lead her life as her own wish. She seeks her own individuality. She never wants to live in tradition and society so breaks the limitation and family customs of tradition.

Anita Nair's fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* discusses the redefining role and the quest of women to move on life. The protagonist, Meera's husband leaves her alone. But she is not like the traditional woman. She takes the whole responsibility of her family and drives away the economic crisis. Smriti voices against female foeticide. She is depicted as a bold and courageous woman.

Anita Nair's writing reveals the 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 woman suffers from patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and abuse women. Anita Nair has presented that her women are struggling side by side because of patriarchy. At the end of the novel she provides them a gesture of defiance against patriarchy. Anita Nair's women raise the question of their way of life due to patriarchy. They see it not only in the oppression at home but in society also.

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