



Feminism in Anita Nair's Novels

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Abstract

Anita Nair re-enacts feminism by delving deep into the visceral and psychological experiences of her female characters, in which she often engages with, through her writings. Her novels cover the issues related to women's oppression in general, their guilt in terms of masculinity and femininity, and women's patriarchal oppression in particular. The majority of Nair's female protagonists go through a transitional phase that establishes them as individuals in their pursuit of identity; who encounter endless obstacles before completing their mission or succumbing to life's vagaries. Anita Nair's different representations of middle-class women and their household concerns are examined in order to pay attention to the thinning lines between gender discrimination, marriage dilemmas, and female identity in these fictional female characters. She speaks out against issues relating to women's positions within families and their rights to equality compared to men in various spheres of social life. Nair elevates the woman to a cult figure, battling traditional taboos, societal and joint family limitations, and various other constraints imposed by patriarchy. It is a critical examination of the protagonists' desire for acknowledgement of their value and self-worth as economically self-sufficient people in a male-dominated society. It studies their resistance to dominant relationships and their fights for social space and acceptability, ultimately leading to the development of their social identity as a form of self-fulfilment. This paper seeks to liberate females from the accountability obligations placed or imposed on them, often with or without their awareness. Anita Nair's writings portray women as having a distinct identity within a patriarchal society. This paper aims to examine the influence of feminism on the writings of Anita Nair.

Key words: Equality, Female, Femininity, Women, Social life.

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Introduction

Despite India being a multilingual nation, English language is widely used all over India. During the British administration in India, Indian writers had developed a preference for writing in English. A number of Indian authors have also made a significant contribution to English poetry and novels. Many Indian English-language writers are hailed and applauded across the globe for their dynamic contributions to literature in the modern period. Post-colonial literature includes Indian writing in English and as a post-colonial narrative, it exhibits various characteristics that are unique to Indian literature. Cultural differences in literary texts, such as those related to gender, class and sexual orientation, are examined in these writings. As literature from one's own country is considered idealistic; writers are eager to establish new literary traditions and standards. To achieve that, they must draw on the familiar cultural conventions of India and at the same time examine its modern relevance in writing. Like their postcolonial counterparts, earlier the Indian writers "accepted" the European paradigm because they too assumed, at least in the beginning, that it had universal applicability. They altered the form to fit Indian ideas and perspectives. After this phase, the postcolonial writers felt comfortable in their own skin and cultural independence was explicitly declared.

Anita Nair has written a lot of novels and books for kids. Some of her books are *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), and *Cut Like Wounds* (2011), which are all about love. Thirty of her books have been translated into Indian and other languages. A collection of poems, *Malabar Mind* (2002) and a screenplay for the movie adaptation of her novel *Lessons in Forgetting* are also included in her vast collection of works. She explores the relationship between a man and a woman, in almost all her major works of fiction; also known for giving a detailed picture about the South Indian culture. ("Nair, Anita.")

Today, the modern woman's image is painted on a bigger canvas and in this case, in her fiction. The refreshed writings of women novelists have led them to look at the unknown facets of women's lives and psyche, which had been neglected before. In these works of fiction, socially stigmatised themes like disturbed behaviour, cold assertiveness,



existentialist attitudes, and violent situations are redefined in novel ways. Nevertheless, Anita Nair is one of the most promising contemporary Indian women novelists in English who is known for being both prolific and adept in her work.

Historical Background of Feminism

A historical study of Indian culture affirms that the patriarchal system came to India with the Aryans and was indeed a Brahmanical practice and among the Dravidian people, who used to live in South India, the family system had been more or less matriarchal. Studies on Dravidian ethnic groups suggest that the old Dravidian families became less matriarchal than they used to be because of patriarchal imposition. (Sen, Sailendera Nath 29) According to Indian philosophy, marriage is a holy union of two souls that lasts for seven lives. Having the two souls joined together was once a good idea, but now it has turned into an instrument of harassment for women.

In their novels, Indian womanhood, as well as the unique aspects of Indian society, are showcased by Indian writers through their novels and has received recognition all over the world. A woman's existence can be reflected through a wide variety of genres like short stories, poetry and novels. Women are born storytellers, owing to their innate ability to deduce the underlying causes of the events that occur in their lives. The desire for feminine identity is today's most important trend. (Kumari, S Santha 12). Due to their unique conventions of social and psychological differences, the nature of the conflict may differ invariably from one location to another. But holding significant assumptions, their own historical circumstances and ideologies have indeed plagued women's literary creations have caused harm and led to the undermining of their previous works. In order to underline the dominance of men over women, the patriarchal system has used its power over them repeatedly. It is not only the pain and exploitation that the women's works express, but also their social and moral accomplishments.

Meaning of Feminism

The word "feminism" comes from the Latin word "femina," which means "woman." It refers to the idea that women should have the same rights, status, and power as men because they are equal. In other words it proposes that women should have the same rights as men in the social, economic, and political realms. The term became popular in the early 20th



century when women began to fight for their freedom from all kinds of oppression, including physical, moral, monetary, and psychological. The political reach of feminism has grown because of the influence of Marxist ideology, which made feminists think about things in a new way. Male and female genders have been constructed by gender stereotypes notwithstanding people's biological classifications. Men are viewed as the superior sex, whereas women are viewed as the "substandard sex" or the "weaker sex". It is assumed that men are logical and sensible while women are deemed emotional, inconsistent, intuitive and subjective.

Literature Review

The most straightforward and practical technique to comprehend the research problem is to do a literature study. A review of literature relevant to the research topic is required to make the research effective and productive. A researcher can appropriately examine and estimate the research challenge after reviewing the literature. Reviewing journals, magazines, and standard books on the subject can provide useful information. In today's world, internet has become a great repository of diverse information on any research topic and therefore various internet resources have been consulted to look for a variety of books, journals, and periodicals relevant for the paper. The current study, titled "Feminism in Anita Nair's Novels," has set number of objectives to properly investigate the contemporary feminist stance. As a result, a number of relevant literatures have been reviewed in order to achieve this goal.

Feminist Perspective in Anita Nair's Novels

The traditional metaphor of purity associated with Indian female identity stands deeply questioned in Nair's novels, affirming with the approach of other postcolonial Indian female writers, who yearn for an individual space through their writings, enabling them a proper release of repressed desires; by rejecting patriarchal hegemony, traditional womanhood and gender roles set by the Indian society. (Vasanthakumari, T114)

But women's emancipation in society: legal or economic, and from familial bondage as well as their escape from narrow gender roles, isn't always easy to achieve for women. Through her fiction she interpolates and introspects whether a woman is capable to live by herself. The main goal of the study is to find out why women in Anita Nair's novels have social



problems. Through different novels, one can learn about the dignity and freedom of women.

Shari Daya reads Anita Nair's novels as a psychological investigation of modern Indian women's inner minds which she aims to explore for reconstructing the traditional meaning of sexuality. In many of her novels the protagonist-heroines are involved in the act of transgression. The act of sexual liberation is identified with the journey towards self realization which is sanctified by the Hindu religion itself. (212-13) To understand her argument, it is necessary to make a deep dive into some of her major novels to reinterpret the ostensibly antagonistic personality of women characters which falls in the category of aggression often connoted as any form of physical behaviour that is threatening or causes harm to someone or something or to act in an angry and violent way towards another person.

Feminist Perspectives in *Ladies Coupe*

However, the representation of womanhood in Indian female writers is not uniform. Each author has cultivated her own brand in accordance with her personal philosophy and revelations about life. The purpose of this paper is to evaluate Nair's important work, *Ladies Coupe*, through the lens of feminist theory, by examining the female protagonists' struggle to assert their uniqueness and seek refuge in a male-dominated socio-cultural environment. The author has frequently spoken out against social and cultural practises that limit their independence. In the majority of cases, the writings take a confessional and personal tone, and their composition serves as a social document, as the authors are both victims and agents of social upheaval.

This shall be the framework, adopted in this paper. The role of women in society, notably in the household, and their transformation from traditional stereotypes to rebellious and new women will be examined. This study is particularly relevant in an Indian context, where the family is still regarded as an integral unit and sacred institution. The analysis appears to be revolving around new disclosures. It is evident that feminism has heightened women's awareness. Women writers have made significant contributions to the monumental effort of demystifying the code of male dominance and assisting in the construction of women's physical and sexual individuality. Additionally, they have refused to be quiet on matters of sexual morality. Meanwhile, we must acknowledge that both the first and second



generations of Indian women writers have contributed to the ever-evolving and frequently self-questioning body of literature by addressing a variety of issues such as language, self-identity, homesickness, loyalty, and social and cultural compliance. Anita Nair is perhaps the most astute observer of women's worlds, particularly those of Indian women convulsed by a sensitive feeling of vulnerability, among all current Indian English novels. This paper focuses on how Nair portrays Indian feminism and attitude through female characters in her novel *Ladies Coupe*, which appears to be advocating for women's equality. Her works advocate for an equal application of morals to men and women. In *Ladies Coupe*, she has pursued to dig deep into the sensitive subject of marital dissolution, as well as issues surrounding pre-marital and extra-marital affairs.

Ladies Coupe may be a strong novel in terms of characterising feminine sensibility, despite the fact that this delineation is primarily portrayed through the projection of social standards crises and their internal desire for independence. Nair picks a women-only train compartment as the setting for her book. Her five new friends all have stories to tell. She meets them on the Ladies Coupe of the train. They all try to answer Akhila's hard question: Can a woman be alone and happy at the same time? In *Ladies Coupe*, Janaki, Margaret, Sheela, Prabhadevi, and Marikolanthu are all there with her, and they all have a lot of fun. Each of them reveals how they deal with their pain in different ways. The title of the book itself calls attention to how women are treated in India and their status as a second class citizen. Though there have been changes in the last few years, the author herself wrote at the end of the book to say that until 1998, there was a separate counter for women, the elderly, and people with disabilities at the Bangalore railway station and a ladies' compartment in most of the sleeper cars in trains. (Karmakar, Varshsha 210-14)

She looks for strength and independence, and the movie shows that every woman has her own inner strength. The modern Indian woman is more open-minded than ever before. She like the character Akhila from the *Ladies Coupe* has resolved her dilemmas and is more stable in her emotions and in her thoughts than ever before, too. In real life, just like the characters in the book, women want to create a world that is all theirs in the truest sense. They want to break free from traditional norms and be free from inhibitions. In fact, in Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, the rise of a new woman is the most important factor in female emancipation. (Karmakar, Varshsha 205-6)



Conclusion

While reading Anita Nair, who is accredited as one of the most important Indian English novelists, we realize that she is very good at writer about the Indian life and culture. Her novels are essentially humanitarian and most of her stories are about "feminist perspectives" and "family responsibilities". In her novels, Nair shows that she is afraid to show human relationships with their emotional content. An in-depth look at Nair's novels presents to the readers an insight into family traditions, mythology, legends and politics, as well as everyday life. Nair is a small-scale observer of society, and she focuses on the everyday things that happen in society. Nair unlike others had a different critique to offer about social problems like casteism, women's oppression, female infanticide, prostitution, lesbianism, and rape. Controversial issues and sensitive social conditioning issues have been shown with shocking and clear significance. Nair builds vividly detailed stories in her novels which makes her a landscape painter of her society. While at the same time, Nair also tries to write inside monologues in her novels Nair is unique in how she talks about life, family, society, and people.

A close look at Nair's novels shows that both men and women want to search who they actually are. There's a good chance that today's women are very good at everything they do. But in their marriages, women have to rely on their husbands. But there are still people left in the society who oppose how men treat women. Regardless of what people think, it's easy for men to forcefully pitch their "identity" in the society. A woman, on the other hand, is more responsible for the success of family household tasks. In the postcolonial world, women have been made victims by men who are more powerful than them and have to deal with many harrowing experiences by virtue of that.

In the future, this study will provide a valid and plausible setting for more research keeping in view the current trajectory of the socio-economic setting and also with the broadening scope of the post-colonial feminism. There is a need for an extensive study of Anita Nair's novels, her finesse to use of myths and legends in them, and how she can be compared with other great stalwarts of Indian English writers like Shashi Deshpande and Manju Kapoor, and as well as Margaret Laurence who is a Canadian novelist. To sum up, Anita Nair, as a feminist novelist and humanist, throws light on the unknown and unique facets of women's life and world and thereby offers a new perspective through her works.



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