

## **Women Characters: A Study of the Select Novels of Anita Nair**

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Literature is one of the most appealing and remarkable expressions of human race. In fact, literature becomes the living recollection of a country. In ancient India, literature had its origin in the form of oral stories that retell morals to the society. Any good literature is universal as it transcends time, space, place, geographical and linguistic boundaries as long as any work of art discusses about human sentiments and emotions.

Indian English Literature refers to the body of work by writers in India who write in the English and whose native or co-native language could be one of the numerous languages of India. Indian English Novel emerged as a necessary outcome of its own story telling tradition and the tradition of English novel. As Prof. M.K. Naik in his Dimensions of Indian English Literature rightly points out, "One of the most notable gifts of English education to India is prose fiction for though India was probably a fountain head of story-telling, the novel as we know today was an importation from the West." (p. 99)

Women writers have distinguished themselves for their boldness in presenting the status of woman in Indian society and for depicting man-woman relationship in the novels. It is only after the emergence of women writers that we have been able to have a deep insight into the female psyche. No longer is woman portrayed as a mere tool in the hands of her male partner. She is no more a mere living creature always subjected to suppression and male domination.

As this study deals with the works of Anita Nair, it deals with the writer extensively. Anita Nair was born at Mundakottakurissi near Shoranur in Kerala State. She was brought up in a suburb in Chennai. Her family made frequent visits to Kerala and these trips helped her to know the heart of rural Kerala. During her professional life in Bangalore as the creative director of an advertising agency, she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories called *Satyr of the Subway* (1997) which added a feather in her cap in the form of fellowship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Since then, Anita published a number of books and every creative output bears peculiar characteristic. She authored *Malabar Mind* (1997), *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *The Puffin Book of Myths and Legends* (2004), also edited *Where the Rain is Born* (2003). Anita Nair's geographical location and area has made deep impact on her writing. She has written about Kerala poetry that has been included in -*The Poetry India Collection* and a *British Council Poetry Workshop Anthology*. She has also written a few other novels such as, *Mistress* (2003), *Adventures of Nonu, the skating squirrel* (2006), *Living Next Door to Alice* (2007), *Magical Indian Myths* (2008), *Goodnight and God bless* (2008), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), *Chemmeen* (2011), *Cut Like Wound* (2011) and *Idris* (2014).

Her works also include many travelogues. Thus, Nair's writing has wide range of themes. Anita Nair is a fine writer, with a great sense of character, a vibrant knowledge of South Indian culture, and an eye for telling detail. She can move from tender compassion to sensuality, to raging hatred, and is a compelling teller of stories. Anita Nair signaled the advent of a sensitive writer who could probe deep into people's personalities and take the reader on a brilliant voyage. The first fictional village to make literally famous was R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi* but in *Kaikurussi*, Anita Nair has created another homestead that could become just as well known.

Satyr of the Subway is her first book, a collection of short stories published in 1997. The first collection of the book comprised of twelve stories. In her debut work, Nair makes a brave attempt to portray the intricacy of human relationship and the uselessness of the expectations we have in life. It is a collection of short stories, which share certain common themes. The writer looks at male-female relationships from an entirely different perspective examining in exhaustive detail their superficiality and temporality. She addresses the idea of existence in the 21st century and portrays the lives of her characters as hollow and meaningless. The characters are stuck in a furrow from which they wish to escape. She uncovers the isolated lives of characters who are real enough to be our friend, neighbour or colleague.

Anita Nair's first novel, *The Better Man* (2000), has a haunted house- with ghosts lurching around dark hallways and pushing the living down staircases. The cursed construction is in Kaikurussi in central India, and our protagonist, Mukundan, grew up there with his tyrant father and meek, apologetic mother. As the story opens, this frustrated middle-aged writer finds himself returning home, once again taking up residence in his dull, oppressive childhood village. He doesn't want to be there. He drinks rum and fears the dark. Anita Nair's imposing debut novel leads our agitated souls back to the primitive wisdom enshrined in love, the essence of one's being.

Characters are introduced throughout the novel with eloquent portrayal. Gradually the characters are shown to play a role in the life of the protagonist, Mukundan Nair. The entire episodes move in perfect tandem to reach the culmination point of the novel. The main storyline features Mukundan Nair, who retires to his northern Kerala village Kaikurussi after years of government service. His father, Achuthan Nair, has by far the most powerful personality in the book - at 90, he still inspires trepidation in his son and the other people in the village. Combine this fear with the guilt that Mukundan feels about having deserted his mother, and you see why Mukundan was not keen to return home. At this point, the story reads as though the author forced the characters into particular actions for the sake of her story their actions are not very consistent with the personalities she drew. There is a lesson for everyone in this novel. Mukundan learns that happiness cannot be had by being the cause of someone else's unhappiness. Bhasi learns that man cannot control and change another man's destiny. Man cannot play God.

Anita Nair's second novel is the much commended *Ladies Coupe*. The novel follows the journey of a middle-aged Indian woman named Akhilandeshwari or Akhila. She is a 45 year old single Indian woman from a Tamil Brahmin family who works as a clerk in the income tax office. She feels that she has never got the chance to live her own life, always fulfilling the roles of the daughter, sister, aunt and the provider. She resolves to break free from her conservative Brahmin life and buys a one way train ticket to the sea side town of Kanyakumari to start a new life alone.

In *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair brings out the inner conflicts that arise in the inner world of women, which often stand as a barrier to find their self. Like many other women writers, Anita Nair also deals with middle class family women stories. Many women writers like Anita Desai depict the mental conflicts their protagonists undergo and not able to come out of it. Whereas Anita Nair's novels depict the sufferings of her women characters, who make their sufferings into their strength and weapon to fight out their quandary. As Muthulakshmi Paramasivan says, "These women with their strength, in domitable will and undefeatable spirit break all the barriers in life, learn to live by their own rules and finally achieve their goals of self-realization" (p.1).

Radha is a sensual woman bonded in marriage to Shyam who is an ill-mannered lout to her. It is with Christopher that Radha realizes love that is intensely passionate. Radha's repulsion to Shyam and later her decision to learn to love him following her break-up with Chris adds a new dimension to her character. Moreover, she has no cordial loving relationship with her husband. Her pre as well as post marital affairs are the results of her longings. Nair has brought forth very pithily the mockery of human bonding.

Her fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* is a touching story. Meera is a high society lady who leads a corporate lifestyle. She writes cookery books during her leisure time. Her life turns topsy-turvy when her husband fails to return home after a party. The entire family burden falls on her. On another plane, we find J.A. Krishnamurthy a renowned cyclone specialist living with his exhausted daughter Smriti. Their lives entangle together and a heart-warming story of redemption and second chances take place.

Anita Nair influences her characters to crush the Victorian partiality of the ethical woman with the postmodernist vision. Anita Nair's postmodern woman endeavours to pull forcefully with the goal that she makes her own particular ideas of personality. One reason why Anita Nair takes care of even the minor points of interest joined to minor characters. The greater part of the minor points of interest makes up the significant components of structure, which deliberately develop the content into imparting the intense impact of the plot.

**References :**

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