

## Feminism is an Effective Way of Self-Determination

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### Abstract

*Women writers of Indian Writing in English are good at analyzing complex issues like complexities of human relationships, man-woman relationships, a woman's psyche, and her potential. The changing pattern of man-woman relationships can be traced in the works of writers such as Anita Desai, Nayantara Shagal, Arundhati Roy, Manju Kapur, and Shoba De show how the modern Indian women attempt to free themselves sexually, economically, and domestically from the male-dominated society. One among these woman writers is Anita Nair who has recently been shining among the galaxy of Indian woman writers. She is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with an international reputation. The paper makes a modest attempt to explain that the sufferings of the female characters, plight, despair, agony, and discrimination are due to the result of their desire to conform to the expectations of Indian society. Most Indian women living in orthodox and conservative families feel inhibited to raise their voices against the aggressive dominance of the male person in society owing to their inferiority complex and the rigid code of conduct imposed on them. Women come out of their homes. However, the vast majority of women, even now, continue to lose their identity, independence, and self-respect. Women are pawns in the hands of their husbands. They should realize how important they are not only at home but also in the society in which they live. They should assert their independence and know themselves. Anita Nair focuses on the social and domestic problems of women in her novels. She raises her voice against female oppression and spells out the problems of women with such a clear conviction through her characters that the readers should pause and ponder over it. She voices her objection to male chauvinism as well as men's irresponsible behavior which leads to disastrous consequences. Women generally bear the heaviest burden of marginalization and exploitation by society as a whole. Inequality, discrimination, harassment, atrocities, and shame have become the way of women's life and increased manifold in Indian society. Almost every man is wildly hungry for power, wealth, and sex. Consequentially sexual harassment, rape, and violence crop up in a society in which women are victims of men's desire. Men by nature have never realized the feelings of women and thus have failed to accept that women have equal rights in all aspects of life including sex. In these ways, women face various problems and issues in modern society. The paper discusses how the protagonists, to achieve freedom, seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. Every member of the family suffers due to the friction between husband and wife. Anita Nair does not give any solution to the problems of her characters. She just makes them realize their strength and self. They should realize and assert their independence and know themselves. Women must be put in a position to solve their problems in their way. No one can or ought to do this for them. They all come to their conclusions and feel at peace with themselves and their worlds. There is a strong message of hope through change and even the ending is revealed as another beginning.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Gender Discrimination, and Self-determination.*

Indian literature always reflects the hopes and aspirations of people. Most of these woman novelists are known for the bold views that are reflected in their novels. These are novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English Literature. Their novels consist of the latest burning issues related to women as well as those issues that have existed in society for a long. Anita Nair is one of the finest writers in Indian Writing in English with an

international reputation. She was born at Mundakottakurissi near Shoranur in Kerala State. Nair was brought up in a suburb of Chennai, Tamilnadu

The title of the proposed presentation work is Feminism is an effective way of self-determination. Nair depicts the modus operandi by which women subvert the existence of their male counterparts. The paper is expected to serve as a handbook for a complete understanding and appreciation of the works. It presents an in-depth study of all female

characters in Nair's select novels, *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress*, and *Lessons in Forgetting* irrespective of their major or minor role. It makes a modest attempt to explain that the female characters' sufferings, plight, despair, agony, and discrimination are due to the result of their desire to conform to the expectations of Indian society. Most Indian women living in orthodox and conservative families feel inhibited to raise their voices against the aggressive dominance of men owing to their inferiority complex and the rigid code of conduct imposed on them. It is wrong to assume now that women know only their homes. It is wrong to say that being ignorant of the ways of the world, women experience untold and intolerable hardships if they come out of their homes. However, a vast majority of women, even now, continue to lose their identity, independence, and self-respect. Women are pawns in the hands of their husbands. They should realize how important they are not only at home but also in the society in which they live. They should assert their independence and know themselves.

Anita Nair also focuses on the social and domestic problems of women in her novels. The appalling conditions of women are realistically portrayed in the novels, *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupe*, *Mistress*, and *Lessons in Forgetting*. Nair's female characters like Akhila, Sheela, Prabha Devi, Janaki of *Ladies Coupe*, Valsala of *The Better Man*, and Saadiya of *Mistress* suffer not only domestically and mentally, but also socially and economically. The protagonists possess a natural thirst for life; they ignore social norms and dictates.

Anita Nair proves that male is the root cause of female suffering. A woman has never been considered equal to a man. Man has always looked down upon women as the weaker sex. The ruling of the male in the family can be considered patriarchal. All the decisions about women, children, and property are taken by the head of the family. Sometimes this

authority creates a feeling of superiority over the male head of the family. The head considers him superior to women. This type of attitude begins to create a problem for female existence. Anita Nair's female characters are struggling and suffering in all her novels. They confront several hardships and their life is one of endless suffering. They all suffer at the hands of their chauvinistic husbands and their family members. *Ladies Coupe* primarily deals with the struggle of an unmarried woman, whose essence has been curtailed under the burden of her familial chores. Akhila ends up being marginalized by her own family detested by her family. Akhila and Marikolanthu are painfully remembering how their mothers so easily loaded them with the burdens of the family. They have always been an extension of someone else's identity. Akhila, bearing the burdens of others with close-lipped patience, is aptly called a workhorse and "mistress of all words but master of none". The suppressed and subjugated world of the Indian woman comes to dull light in the character of her protagonists. Almost all the characters in the novels have something to say about their loss. Even the minor characters are not an exception to this rule. They all suffer in different ways. In a country like India, women suffer mentally, physically, and sexually: Saadiya in the novel *Mistress* and Shanta in the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*. They undergo a very unhappy marriage. They are always with anger, jealousy, and petty disagreement that lead to fatal consequences and feel every time they contemplate their life within the walls.

Anita Nair's novels deal with existential themes such as alienation, footlessness, loss of self, and the absurdity of human existence. Existentialism is the basic theme in Nair's novels. Paru kutti and Meena in *The Better Man* and Saadiya in *Mistress* are the existentialist characters in her novels. They suffer grievously in their lives, but they are not aware of what they are suffering for, and they accept suffering

passively as part of their life. It reveals how men use power and later get destroyed by it when they turn to be over-ambitious. Nair voices her objection to male chauvinism as well as men's irresponsible behavior which leads to disastrous consequences. Inhuman male chauvinists are wrought in the novels to illustrate this widespread malaise in Indian society. Nair emphasizes in the scrutinized that men ride rough-shod over women at many levels. Nair wants to expose the educated men who are snobs and chauvinistic. Prabhakaran and Mukundan in *The Better Man*, Ebenezer Paulraj, Chettiar and his son Sridharan, in *Ladies Coupe*, Shyam in *Mistress*, and Giri in *Lessons in Forgetting* are all examples to cite. Chettiar and his second son Sridharan are unscrupulous male chauvinists. The two brothers of Akhila, Narayan, and Narsimman are miniature chauvinists.

Ebenezer Paulraj, who tyrannizes over his wife and fellow teacher Margaret Shanthi, is a callous and careless man and is the epitome of male barbarity and chauvinism. This paper focuses on women's marathon struggle to seek a sense of identity in an averse and envious society. It can be very clearly seen in some of the woman characters like Anjana and Valsala of *The Better Man*, Radha of *Mistress*, and Meera of *Lessons in Forgetting*. Marriage is a mere punishment for Margaret, Radha, Meera, Anjana, and Valsala. They are silent in their aspirations to fulfill their husbands' wishes. They are forced to develop an attitude that they should want what their husbands want. As a result, Margaret does not allow her to become a mother. Meera and Anjana's husbands walk out without any valid reason. Anita Nair depicts Radha, Anjana, and Valsala as female protagonists with heightened physical, sexual, emotional, aesthetic, and romantic needs. Radha and Meera are reeling under the stress and depression of married women who are no better than unpaid

servants. This temperamental gap leads to alienation and frustration.

Radha is forced to become the traditional woman and to live without an identity of her own. She finds her life stifling and becoming utterly meaningless. A woman, especially a married woman, does not have any "locus standi" in her natal family. Women generally bear the heaviest burden of marginalization and exploitation by society as a whole. Inequality, discrimination, harassment, atrocities, and shame seem to have become the way of women's life and increased manifold in Indian society. Sometimes suffering is attached to social taboos, and sometimes women are silenced in the name of family honor and are compelled to digest torture. In this paper Nair's novels, sexual violence is described both in physical and verbal forms. Violence against women is one of the commonest crimes in the world, which most often goes unnoticed and unpunished. Men use violence to control and subjugate women. As Simone de Beauvoir aptly remarks, "Sexuality most certainly plays a considerable role in human life; it can be said pervade life throughout" (77). Sexual violence explores with great objectivity the complication in human nature, the two necessary components of which are sex and violence. The stubborn male patriarchy of the Indian society oppress the female by eschewing the desires of her unconscious state and labeling her as a sexual object for man. As an outcome of this desire, sexual harassment, rape, and violence have popped out more in society, where women are used as prey to men's desires. This shows that "sex" is the most wanted subject of men. In developing countries, men are wildly hungry for power, wealth, and sex. Consequentially, sexual harassment, rape, and violence crop up more in society in which women are a victim of men's desire. Men by nature have never realized the feelings of women and thus have failed to accept that women have equal rights in all aspects of life, including sex.

In these ways, women face various problems and issues in modern society. These social aspects are effectively treated in the novels of Anita Nair. Sexual abuse of the female child and female feticide are the greatest evils of Indian society and Anita Nair portrays them in *Ladies Coupe* and *Lessons in Forgetting*.

In *Mistress*, Nair discusses the act of marital rape in one instance when the protagonist Radha's husband forces himself upon her to assert his position as her husband. The central theme of Anita Nair's novel is sexual violence. Her fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* is about the plight and predicament of a woman who is raped by a gang of selfish men. Female infanticide is an evil of society that is prevalent in India and some of the southern districts of Tamilnadu. The case of Margaret of *Ladies Coupe* and Shanta of *Lessons in Forgetting* is the best example given by Anita Nair. Another subtheme of the novel is lesbianism. In *Ladies Coupe*, the relationship between Sujata and Marikolanthu has lesbian strains. Lesbianism is a counter-revolution against the foundation of the male privileged society. It refuses male authority in a sexual regime where women's feelings and desires for sexual pleasure are discarded. In the novel, it is not presented as a taboo, but is simply an expression of mutual want which helps women to be comfortable with their physique and to feel loved. Anita Nair's women are victims of violence. But they are intelligent persons of sharp sensibility because they have framed their code to live in the world of violence. The paper explores those women characters who break traditional customs and religious faith and assume modernity. The novels under study clearly show the breakdown of familial bonds, more particularly marital bonds. There is desertion, separation, death, divorce, reunion, and reconciliation in all these novels. It also analyses Anita Nair's characters who take bold steps to make

life meaningful and worth living. Her characters make a sublime quest for self-analyses and self-probing. The focus of the writer is exclusively on feminine themes and empowerment and self-determination. It discusses how the protagonists, to achieve freedom, seek marriage as an alternative to the bondage created by the parental family. It also examines the causes of marital discord: lack of compatibility, intellectual, emotional, physical, sexual, and patriarchal domination, psychological problems, and lack of love. It attempts to sketch the consequences of disintegration. Anita Nair presents the female voice with a commendable force and matured vision. There are numberless ups and downs in women's lives, but they record landslide victory by their earth-shaking decision. Swami Vivekananda said: As for feminism, we need not copy the west, "it is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that the same conscious self is present in all beings. Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they tell you what reforms are necessary for them. Men's right to interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their problems in their way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world. Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong if any of you dares to say, "I will work out the salvation of this woman." I asked again and again. What I think of the widow problem and what I think of the woman's question? Let me answer once and for all. Am I a widow that you ask me that, nonsense, am I a woman that you ask again and again who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the lord that you should rule every widow and every woman? Hands of them will solve their problems. (76) Education is the tool that can break the pattern of gender discrimination and bring lasting change for women.

Women can gain status which transforms into power to influence their families and societies. The paper is based on the scrutiny of the writing of Anita Nair and her handling of the changing image of women in the modern and postmodern era. Women in her novels are the "new" women who try to throw off the burden of inhibitions they have carried for ages. Anita Nair's woman characters are conscious of their rights and respect, and even though they are rooted in a rational background, they always evolve and emerge as striking personalities at the end of the novel. They win their battles in the end, no matter how big or small their victory is.

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