



THE SELF - INTROSPECTION IN ANITA NAIR'S THE BETTER MAN

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Abstract:

Anita Nair, a renowned contemporary writer of this modern era has written several novels with great sensitivity and creativity. As a writer she is well aware of the facts and issues of the society that grip life in general. The hunt for liberty and its leading to self-discovery is the central theme spread in the novels of Anita Nair. The quest for freedom makes women stand away from mythological and limited stereotypes. Being a woman, the novelist makes her women characters take up centre-position in the novels, and she sprinkles the feminist attitude everywhere. Since their rules are typically associated with real women in life, the feelings of these women protagonists are sure to cope with their struggle to get their identity in real life too. She represents women's struggle on the one hand and self-expression on the other. In her view, only liberty and peaceful survival in the community help to know one's identity. She stimulates a sense of self-realisation in her characters. Anita Nair strongly hopes that self-realisation is the exact direction for obtaining selfhood.

Key Words: Quest, Identity, Feministic Attitude & Self-Realisation.

Introduction:

The post-colonial novelists of India have through political and social issues. The social and psychological issues became their chief concerns. When writing the novel the novelists were concerned about the inevitable changes in Indian society. Some writers dealt with some changes in Indian society to compete with the West. They wrote the novels that depicted the contemporary trends. The diasporic literature mentioned about this issue related to race and feminism. Indian novelists show remarkable awareness of these issues and deal with them effectively.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, more women started to write in the English language. English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns. Women novelists have incorporated the recurring female experiences in their writings. It has affected the cultural and language patterns of Indian literature. They have brought new strategies in the whole context of Indian writing. Now-a-days readers enjoy the novels written by the new age women writers. In the twentieth century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The last two decades have witnessed phenomenal success in feminist writings of Indian English literature.

Anita Nair, a renowned contemporary writer of this modern era has written several novels with great sensitivity and creativity. As a writer she is well aware of the facts and issues of the society that grip life in general. Her works range with various issues such as dislocation, politics of rural village, clash between aristocrat and plebeian, integration of art and so on. She vehemently objects for being labelled a feminist or a reformist. Being a writer she courageously mirrors the real life situation and happenings of periods specific whether it is seventeenth or twenty-first century. In her varied themes one can easily notice her social consciousness and integration of the individual with the family, society and universe as a whole. Anita Nair has presented her diverse themes with originality and realistic nature with common day-to-day characters and real life like situation. She may be pinned as regional writer but her works do not stick to any region specific. One can find universality in the specificity.

India is rich in its diversity and well known for its unity in diversity likewise Anita Nair's fictions with diverse themes uphold integration of several things. As a committed writer, Nair deals with burning issues of contemporary society like alienation, diaspora consciousness, female issues, familial issues, moral degradation, quest for self-identity, sense of escape, class, caste and gender discrimination and the evils of power. The issues, suffering and problems of the actual people are the issues, suffering and problems of the characters. As theme is the essential core subject of any creative work, portrayal of those themes by the writer is inevitable and essential. Any literary work though depicts the society of particular time has its own integral ties with the present day situation helping its readers to learn invaluable lessons about life.

Anita Nair has shown the psychology of women who try to establish themselves as human beings with some reason for their birth in a patriarchal society. She also recommends that women develop self-awareness and self-confidence. Even though she highlights women who bear the brunt of patriarchy, she does not like to be termed a feminist writer. Her novels mirror the reality of Indian society. Her fiction gives a more transparent picture of the status of Indian women. Also, she reconsiders and reinterprets women's position that helps them rejuvenate their values, identity and status in the human community.

Anita Nair, being a woman, can easily recognise and reveal the characters' feminine sensibility and psychological makeup. In all her novels, one can observe that she often merges themes like man-woman relationships, their marital discord and the liberation of women. In addition, she presents her female protagonists as vividly alive in terms of feelings and mental and physical power. Also, she recommends a balance of body and mind in an individual and their relationship with the other gender.

Anita Nair's women are distinct and different from those of the past. The current social structure, economic conditions, women's education and Western influence are the impacts of the changes in their personality. This optimistic transformation in them helps to define and redefine themselves positively. They come out of the traditional wraps and are viewed in almost every sphere of human activity. This change has deeply influenced the man-woman relationship too. She helps them to get solutions to many problems they face. Some of her women believe in traditional values and ethics, and they propagate them.

Despite having marital problems, they understand that breaking up marital ties and going against social order is difficult. However, they maintain the traditional practices but look at them with a new and different dimension altogether. They rise silently without breaking or loosening the social order. By living with moral values, ethics, and tradition, considered the framework of society, they establish their identity by asserting their equal rights.

Anita Nair does not simply accept the patriarchal views established in her society and the oppression of women. When recognising the inequality in the position of the two sexes, she starts to explore the real process through which this inequality is continued. She is worried about stereotyping all men as oppressors and all women as sufferers. Women's suppression is rooted everywhere, particularly in traditions, religious principles and practices, in the educational and legal systems and the families of Indian society. Anita Nair gives typical examples of persecuted women in a patriarchal system.

In her novels, Anita Nair focuses on middle-class family characteristics and shows how they struggle to prove their societal identity. Her characters suffer a lot, emerge from the suffering and realise themselves. They change their sufferings into strength and weapons to fight their predicament. Her women characters are categorised as positive women, inadequate women and negative women. Her archetypal women who are positive modify age-old customs and rituals. They have a strong opinion that the conventions should be changed. They are ready to break the conventions and accept life.

In the novel *The Better Man*, Anita Nair delineates the concept of alienation through the characters Mukundan and Bhasi. In the case of Mukundan, he is ostracized by his dysfunctional family that consisted of his mother and father. He undergoes fear and frustration in the hands of his father whom he happened to meet only at his fifth year. He could not relate oneness between his real father and the picture of him which he has developed so far and accepted. This meeting ended futile and lead Mukundan to hide behind the pillar which also created a sense of rejection in Achuthan Nair. Thus Nair states "Achuthan Nair stood there furious, his lip curling in disgust at the mass of tears and sniffs before him. And a little hurt that his own son should reject him so. In time Mukundan began to accept Achuthan Nair as his father. But the tone of their relationship had been set in that first meeting" (BM 69).

Achuthan Nair's rejection hurts Mukundan more vehemently and made him feel depressed, devoid, indecisive, panic and repulsive. This results in his from conviction to stay away from his village after his retirement too. Thus he plans to lead a life in an alienated soil along with his colleague Narendran. Nair states: "Mukundan didn't know what he was going to do. But one thing was certain. He was not going back to his native village. He considered buying small plot of land in Bangalore and settling down there" (BM 19).

The passive character in *The Better Man* is Paru Kutty, the wife of Achuthan Nair carries out her responsibility as a good wife. She is very particular in serving him good though he treats her as a slave and frightens her always. Above all, he makes his wife a housekeeper and has a mistress for him. Whenever he speaks to Paru Kutty, he would first shout at her to show his authority and power and then only would he communicate his message. She leads an unhappy life with him. She expects nothing from him but little love.

On the contrary, he does not mind her. Achuthan Nair tells his wife that he will bring his mistress to the house, but she cannot bear that. When Paru Kutty hears this news, she loses her endurance and becomes a new woman by daring to say "no". She has started to rebel against her husband. Her feelings are expressed as "I said 'no'. I'm not willing to live with the shame of your taking a mistress. But I'm not going to let you flaunt how little I mean to you. I am your wife and I insist you treat me with the respect due to me" (BM 74).

ParuKutty digests her throbbing and mumbles that she can decide who has to live in the house and who should not. Even though he throws the harmful arrows, she protests with the shield's help, 'new woman.' The realisation of ParuKutty as a new woman helps her overcome her dread and prove herself. When Achuthan Nair tries to bring a concubine to her house, she dares to question her husband's extramarital affair, and she has the power to resist and is ready to chase them away. She lives alone with self-respect. She pictures the power of women and their confidence. In such a way, Anita Nair imbibes into her character courage and transforms female victimisation into self-respect.

Anjana, the positive woman in this novel, enjoys freedom in her independent world, which gives her a sense of self-fulfilment. When she touches twenty-seven, she enters the nuptial world as the other women do in society. Her independence is lost in the name of marriage. She has lost her life in the hands of a stranger in the name of her husband. "Who was this man? This stranger she allowed entry into her house, her life, her body?" (BM 223) She wants to lead a beautiful and healthy life with her husband, Ravindran. However, enjoying a lovely life has become just a dream for her. When she longs for liberty and care from her marital companion in her nuptial life, she feels only pain, unhappiness and anger.

Anjana has repugnance to all the things that surround her. As a result, she starts hating herself to some extent. She thinks she has been mistreated in the patriarchal society under the pretext of traditions and practice. Her marriage with her husband is marked by isolation and rude communication. Anjana feels throttled because of tears and worries and finally takes protection at her father's house. When she fails to recognise her individuality from her husband Ravindran, she makes a new path for herself. At last, Anjana's optimistic outlook towards life, economic independence, and self-identity have led her to lead her steps forward in her life with hope and optimism. By finding herself, she proves that a woman can achieve independence if she believes.

Anjana realises her inner self and establishes her new identity. She is not a passive sufferer and victim of patriarchy who fails to treat women with love and understanding. She has strong views about patriarchy and has decided to come out of the cruelty and domestic violence of her husband and educate herself and become an empowered woman. Anjana emerges from the condition of weakness and the feeling of failure. She has achieved this through self-assessment and self-criticism. She empowers herself as a teacher and achieves her 'self' through economic independence.

After getting a teaching job, Anjana realises that a happy life would be possible. She is a sufferer and subjugated woman but not a submissive silent sufferer. She can smash her submissiveness now. She comprehends that life can always be made possible. Now the previous impetuous Anjan becomes a grown-up woman, and with her realisation, the darkness that enveloped her tends to vanish.

The other positive woman, Meenakshi, is isolated by her husband Balan and leads her life with her child in the village. Now she must take care of her mother and her son Mani. Meenakshi has fixed out a place for herself, her child and her mother in the village without getting anyone's help. Although Meenakshi's husband, Balan, is inadequate and good for nothing, she has the courage and conviction to balance her life through her intellect. She empowers herself and gets economic independence. Her education gives her confidence, and she accepts life without the support of her husband. Her positivity and understanding of life bring her a happy life.

Both Anjana and Meenakshi get their positive self. At first, they do not find themselves due to stress, but they finally remove their masks, find themselves, and start living for themselves. Anita Nair depicts how Meenakshi and Anjana overcome obstacles because of their education and preserve their freedom. Anita Nair believes women's education and economic independence will make them self-reliant.

Damayanti, the wife of Bhasi, has lost her first husband and six-month-old child. She feels that she has no more life. Bhasi understands her position and helps her to come out of her depression and psychological trauma and makes her understand his love for her and desire to marry her. She has lived her life without taking any medication out of detachment. Bhasi takes charge of curing her. He explains that she should not let herself float into an empty circumstance. He helps Damayanti to overcome her stress. She comes out of her fear of living her old life, with its dreadful and understands the happiness of life in the present world, which is beautiful. With the help of Bhasi, she has realised herself and got her identity by overcoming her timidity. So far, she has been sensitive and emotional, but now she is thoughtful and understanding.

Anita Nair portrays through her novel how a woman should overcome the tough time and victimisation of old-age customs and rituals. Anita Nair's characters break away from the age-old customs and adapt to a new life with their positive power. She shows how traditional women like ParuKutty and modern women like Anjana become stronger to become new women. She also brings out the negative character Valsala in *The Better Man*.

Through Valsala, Nair brings out the immaturity of some women. Her cold decision to kill her husband shows her immaturity. Valsala, the wife of the old schoolmaster Prabhakaran is intertwined in her household tasks, protecting the house and watching television every evening as the other women do. All her deeds show the emptiness in her life. She has become a forlorn woman in her house, and there is no revelation. She is not happy with her married life. After understanding her inner self, she decides to free herself from Prabhakaran.

Valsala strives to achieve harmonisation in life, but it is against conventional social practice. She tries to achieve it in her new way. Her self-awareness permits her to a new thought about her womanly quality. She can achieve her self-identity if she decides to solve her internal conflict. At last, she has decided to be the mistress of her neighbour Sridharan. She believes every woman requires energised love, liberty, social equality and sex. She is eager to entrap the new structure against the conditions of Indian tradition. She blends the complete society with her liberal views and outlook, puts forward a new image of her and says that she is just forty years old and does not like to act as an adult before she reaches that age. She likes to live with ecstasy and passion night after night.

As a result of Valsala's inner conscious search comes out as a course, it is the battle to establish a female identity. When a woman like Valsala is unsatisfied, she results against the conventional system. Valsala's search has become a conflict against tradition. Valsala moves beyond the conventional identity to acquire her 'self-identity'. Here Anita Nair puts forth an emotional exhibit and the throbbing feelings along with the perceptive emotions of women bravely. She is brave enough to dismantle the conventional principles of a family-established culture and has got a unique space, individuality and liberty.

Thus, Anita Nair represents a few women's life like Anjana, PareeKutty, Meenakshi and Valsala in the society who is always aware of their emotional needs and act violently for getting self-fulfilment by rejecting the existing tradition and sociological systems. They desire a more liberal and unconventional life. Most of the characters of Anita Nair search for liberty, self-realisation and self-introspection. In her novels, she records women's tragic experiences, disillusionments and suffering as a part of the predicaments of identity.

The Better Man projects the trauma and dilemma of Anjana and Meenakshi. They are economically independent and got a recognizable position in the society. They expect a good companion to share everything. Paru Kutty lacks the courage to think and act. Anita Nair depicts the exact nature of husband-wife relationship that is forever indisputably taken as a unified social unit. The writer points that the society does not take cognizance and recognises women as an equal counterpart to men. The image of devoted housewives has covered the true image of soft, silent, and pitiable women who want their family to acknowledge their existence as human being and equivalent to male counterparts. Damayanti in *The Better Man* finds her true potential in her relationship with Bhasi. The timely help and guidance of Bhasi assist her in beginning her new life. His relationship is the ladder of success to her and soon she establishes herself.

Being educated, many of her women get awareness of their own rights, wishes, dreams, and needs. Anita Nair's main concern is economic independence, individuality, profession, self-respect, and self identity. As the society is tied up with stereotype social norms, her protagonists have a conflict with their patriarchal society. Hence Anita Nair's women protagonists fight in the society and against the society and discover their new selves. Few women like Valsala, lose their path right from the beginning. The society imposes psychological stress to the women protagonists when they undertake the risky journey of search for a real self and undergo many personal troubles to gain their own identity in the society to lead the liberated life. The new obtained consciousness and alertness are the celebration of womanhood and their own space. Hence their pursuit for self identities is determined to a large extent by a break up with their past norms. Their achievement of new identities leads to changing the universal image of India.

Conclusion:

The individual identity is formed over a series of bizarre accumulation. One's identity is dogged by the following factors. Firstly, childhood notions and desires play a critical role in deciding identity. An individual has to come out of his or her dependence on her or his parents, and expand his or her ideas and try on his or her own that will give him or her distinct identity. The second element in determining one's identity is to know how big and strong is the rebelliousness. All these elements call on

one to develop various qualities in different times and historical periods. It is well known that identity is the protrusion of the self. Self identity is moulded and transformed by self image. It is also rooted in the society where one lives. The individual's separation from the society is the symptom of one's quest for declaration of individual identity.

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