

# Blend of Tradition and Modernity in the Select Novels of Anita Nair: A Study on Women Protagonists

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**Abstract – Anita Nair is an Indian writer, creative director, and human rights activist. Her works portray about the social, political, Economic Inequality of the fair sex in the current society. Social inequality should discontinue and economical equalities between both the genders must be maintained. But men receiving more opportunities than women. In Nair's works one can find the oppression, great insight of solidarity and humour.**

**Women, who constitute half of the world's population, are always relegated to the secondary status. The phenomenon of subjugation of women is a common feature not only India but in the whole world. Secondary status of a woman has been a silent acceptance for many because, to think of disparity has been considered a 'sin' and has a divine sanction as said in religious inscriptions. Women have been oppressed, suppressed and marginalized in every sphere of human activity. Even, a few women at times voiced the paradoxical inequalities and incongruities heaved on them by the patriarchy. Hence, women began to raise their voice in solidarity and sisterhood that began to be a binding bond of their own gender and have been trying to represent and re-present their 'self.' through their writings.**

**Since the inception of times every age there is a perilous tussle on the concept of hegemonic identity of the individual surviving in the fore front of the word 'tradition and modernity'. Tradition surpasses modernity with the passing of time, though conceptually they are complementary necessities for the development of a society. Tradition or modernity alone is inadequate terminology to exemplify 'living' as a philosophy of human survival.**

**Keywords: Subjugation, Sin, Divine, Oppressed, Marginalized, Incongruities, Patriarchy, Solidarity, Surpasses, Perilous Tussle, Hegemonic.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Anita Nair is a post-colonial feminist writer of literature. She has presented the plight of Indian women who are oscillating between traditional and modern roles. Her works are based on purely Indian background. She has shown the subordinate position of women in the traditional bound Indian society. The existing norms in this society are the hindrances for the rights of women and side-line their existence as human beings. Her main themes in her novels are the issues of "gender discrimination and social conditioning of women, husband-wife relationship: the assailant and the suppressed, and the sexual exploitation of women" within and outside the marital frame.

Anita Nair (1966) was born in Shoranur, Kerala. She grew up in an ordnance factory housing colony in a suburb called Avadi near Chennai, then known as Madras. Anita moved back to Kerala and she did her B.A. in English Literature. She began with a poem "Happenings in the London Underground" which was included in an anthology brought out by the Poetry Society of India in 1992. Stories started appearing in print. Her fiction was broadcast on the radio on numerous occasions. She started contributing regularly to the Times of India. She published in 1997 a collection of short stories titled *Satyr of the Subway and Eleven Other Stories*, in 2000 *The Better Man*, written with remarkable ease and restraint, and in 2001 *Ladies Coupe*, an even greater success. In 2002 she published *Malabar Mind*, a collection of poems that explore love, failure, lust, hope and anguish. She also wrote

Mistress in 2005, *Lessons in Forgetting* in 2010, *Cut Like Wound* in 2012 and *Idris Keeper Of The Light* in 2014. She lives in Bangalore.

The woman protagonists search for individuality and identity, trying to carve a life for themselves, breaking the age old traditions and norms of the society in which they live. They are bold and strong enough to make new choices, which the society normally does not accept. But the truth lies in the fact such relationships do exist invisible to the eyes of people. The credit goes to the writers who have realistically portrayed the society as it is and eventually prove that literature essentially reflects the societal conditions. Almost all the protagonists explore new possibilities beyond traditions to seek individual freedom and secure emotional independence and live a life up to their own wishes.

The novels selected for the study are Anita Nair's *The Better Man* (2005), *Ladies Coupe* (2005), and *Mistress* (2008). It tells us of the significance of the existence of the female characters who retain the balance of the society while adhering to diverse rituals and practices. The role of the female characters thus becomes vital and significant.

In all stages of human development, both tradition and modernity have played a significant role as tradition alone can unify or binds people in the name of traditions that can emotionally chains an individual invisibly, while modernity makes them hollow. Therefore, it cannot be either tradition or modernity it has to be a combination of both. Indian English women novelists Anita Nair realized it and synthesized tradition and modernity in her novels.

The repressive forces in woman's life are different manifestations like a patriarchal society and paternalism; sexual politics in marital relationships; sexual stereotyping with its imposed code on female sexuality and an imposed definition of female roles; the repression and marginalization of women affected through traditional institutions in society and many more. On the other hand the stirrings of revolt in the women begin with a sense of dissatisfaction within their lot. Their awareness of repression has led them into a questioning of the validity of their imposition.

The expected outcome of this process of an awareness of repression and a sense of revolt leads women to certain resolutions that are bold and lead them to happiness. The resolutions, arrived at through introspection and the moral courage to revolt, are again varied in their manifestations. There is bold rejection of society, accommodation and acceptance, withdrawal and a shrewd tackling of repressive factors. The whole process finally leads one to an exploration of the dilemma of the modern woman who is caught between tradition and modernity.

There is always a conflict between tradition and modernity. There are women who are traditional in their way of living but modern in their outlook and have the capacity to retain their individuality. There is a clash between awakening individuals and the dominance of the conventional social fabric where the individuals find themselves vulnerable.

Traditional women, who still hold their individuality and women who face challenges in their quest for self-fulfilment are seen in the novels of Anita Nair. The women characters of Anita Nair are not only conformist and traditionalist but also possess an admirable strength to face the calamities of life and are adept at the wisdom of compromise and adjustment.

This deals with the pitiable plight of the traditional women as depicted in the novels of Anita Nair. Embodying Tradition has a very strong hold over the Indian society and even a stronger hold over its women folk. Moreover the society is basically a Hindu society where women are given a status lower than that of Men. Traditional rules and norms bind the Indian women in nearly every quarter.

Indian tradition over the centuries has regarded woman as preserver of the family. She makes all kinds of sacrifices for the welfare of the family. Right from her childhood she is taught that her main duty is to obey. A number of social evils infested the Indian society in the eighteenth, nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth century.

These traditional women were unable to surface themselves out of the scum of patriarchal rotten waters. These women have not even ventured to be either liberated or be independent like the contemporary modern women.

Unheard of an option and unaware of liberty they survived within the haven of patriarchy for centuries. Anita Nair through her works have made the traditional women as true representatives of the bygone culture which viewed their voicelessness and nonchalant attitude as the true ornament of womanhood. Though there are innumerable women who have will nullingly survived to be recognized not as a human being but as Suhagan (a married woman). The rigid societal norms of the then society never harboured the inner psyche of women for any occasion. Characters like Paru Kutty and Anjana in Anita Nair's novel *The Better Man*, Akhila's Amma, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Marikolanthu, Ammumma and Padma in Anita Nair's work *Ladies Coupe*, Rani Oppal in Anita Nair's novel *Mistress* Saroja's mother rooted in the tradition.

We noticed that her works deals with knocks of modernity, so modern woman who defies tradition and come to have a new identity. The modern

woman does not find any sense in being acquiescent. She is not ready to suffer and sacrifice as the traditional Indian woman does. She wants to project her image as an individual, free from all kinds of conservative thinking which she seeks to overthrow. She is ready to fight her way against all odds coming in her way in fulfilling her aspirations. She rebels against the existing moral codes and social norms which either in theory or in practice tends to relegate the woman to a secondary place in society. Her rebellious craving for individuality and happiness cannot but result in the breakup of family and relationships within the family.

Meenakshi and Valsala in *The Better Man*, Akhila, Karpagam and Sheela in *Ladies Coupe*, Radha, Devayani and Saadiyya in *Mistress*, are modern in their outlook. These women show tremendous self confidence in taking up all challenges to attain their desired goals. These women usher in a change in the customary attitude to moral values and demand a new definition of the woman's image. According to their perception a woman need not be unquestioningly docile and faithful to her husband or an epitome of sacrifice. In short, the social system based on male-domination is seriously threatened and called into question.

A Blend of tradition and modernity is intended to bring out the basic differences between traditional image of woman and the modern woman as Anita Nair portray in the select novels that I have chosen. It also deals with how women undergo a lot of suffering in the male chauvinistic society with multifarious roles like mother, wife, daughter etc. After experiencing their lot they try to break the age old traditions and to assert their individuality. They possess an admirable strength to face the calamities of life and are adept at the wisdom of compromise and adjustment oscillating between tradition and modernity.

The tools for analysis are deduced from the novels of Anita Nair. In this study of the portrayal of women are analysed as attribute to the suffering of women in the genre Indian English literature that have been providing space for women, who otherwise have a severe quest for their self-assertion and identity, not only in the social realm but in terms of individualized spacing that has carefully avoided women's identity and has effaced her position from the family to the mere role of being a marginalised sex. Now, that attempts are being made to recognise her true self that has been for ages thwarted hence, through women's writings a woman is positioned to re-awake from the mythical role has she is a meek and a weak individual who is now seen as a modern Indian woman, who knows how to construct her own self in accordance to their choices and preferences, they desire to motivate their women with the notion of 'modern woman' who rejects the commonly accepted ideas and practices that oppress women from attaining self-identity. The process by which

Anita Nair women break the social rules is through their search for modernity for self-outside the ingrained mechanism of social control and this paves way for the construction of their own identity by emancipating the woman's mind from the society-ordained roles. It thus displays more of a psychological phenomenon- internal struggle of women due to the conflict between self-construction of women and social construction. In other words, a struggle is due to the conflict between tradition and modernity.

**So finally our Conclusion** establishes Anita Nair as novelist with a deep understanding over the problems faced by woman under patriarchal system. Struggles of women are highlighted in their novels and without being labelled as feminists they subtly manage to put them across by weaving them into the plot and their stories which echo their own personal impressions. It deals with the Anita Nair's deep probing into the psyche of the woman characters. She understands the modern women and do not aim to preach or create role models. It explores how all the women characters finally come to their conclusions and feel at peace with themselves and their worlds.

Women continue to be victims of circumstances constantly endeavouring to live up to the varied roles they are expected to uphold and in the process their soaring ambition and will to assert their freedom takes a backseat forcing them to combat unimaginable sufferings. Anita Nair speaks about women and their experiences. Throughout the world the treatment meted out to women is the same according to her writing. Her main focus is on the thoughts and feelings of women whose ideas are not accepted by the society in which they live. They are conditioned in such a way that they cannot break out of it and when they do so, they face a miserable situation in their lives. They have posed many questions to the society at large but have not got any answer. So they seek a sort of compromise through a blend of tradition and modernity.

Nair's women are universal in nature falling prey to the same injustice that women face all over the world. The acceptance of their victimization with humility, subsequent realisation of their deprived condition and their determination to brave the situations to transform themselves into a new class of women who aspire and achieve their own identity striving to attain fulfilment in themselves, make their protagonists unique. Wherever possible, cultural, psychological, feminist and social approaches are used in this study.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. To study the rise of novelists in Indian Writing in English with specific reference to works of famous women novelists.
2. To study the perceptible changes in the phase of Indian womanhood.
3. To focus on the desperate condition of women in the light of the traditional family system.
4. To emphasize the experience of modern Indian women who are bounded in the sphere of culture, tradition, belief structures of Indian society.
5. The study analyses the journey of Anita Nair women protagonist from a life under traditional norms of patriarchal structure to choose a life of their own by maintaining their dignity and self-respect.

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