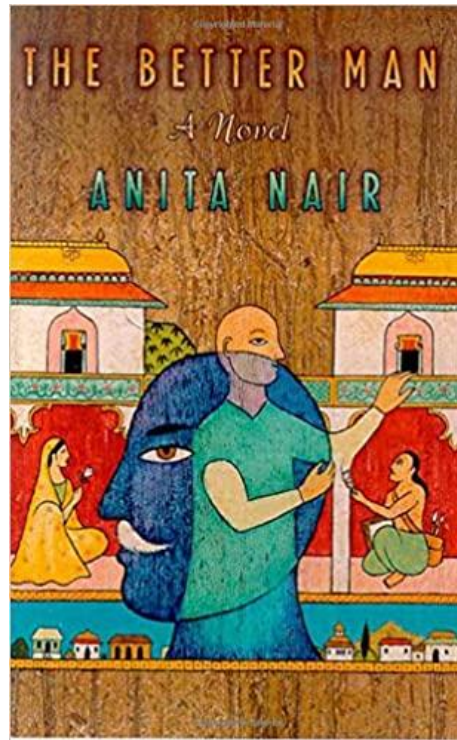


A Feministic Perspective in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*

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Abstract

Anita Nair explores the women's world in her novels. Her novels are embedded in the Indian culture and setting. The writer explains the agony women face in the modern India. Anita Nair was born at Mundakottakurissi near Shoranur in Kerala on January 23, 1966. Anita Nair portrayed her imaginary village as Kaikurissi in her first novel *The Better Man*. Nair's love for her native place Kerala is echoed in her novels. Besides writing novels, Anita Nair is also a writer of poetry, prose, short stories, essays, articles, book reviews, travelogues, crime series and non-fiction.

Her first novel *The Better Man* is the exploration of inner conflicts of Mukundan. Even though the protagonist of the novel is Mukundan, who is a retired government servant (Assistant Works Manager); the novelist also depicts a few female characters who are victimized by the tyranny of the men in the family. His mother Paru Kutty asks Mukundan to take her to the city in which he lives to escape his father's tyranny, but he abandons the idea. Her father married another lady Ammani. He feels guilty for his act as her mother died falling from the stairs. Her mother's accident might have been a plan of her father. Anjana is another female character not comfortable with her husband; Ravindran who treats her brutally and hardly shared his thoughts and plans with her. This research paper titled 'A feministic perspective in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*' explores the trauma of Anjana and Mukundan mother Paru Kutty who tries to break free from the restrictions of male-dominated family.

Keywords: Anita Nair, *The Better Man*, beloved, menacing, furious, tyranny, inner conflict, male-domination.

Introduction

The protagonist of the novel Mukundan, returns to his village Kaikurissi after his retirement as a government employee. His father lives in another residence with his mistress Ammani, their daughter Shanta and her family. Mukundan leaves his house at the age of eighteen in order to escape his father Achuthan Nair's domination.

'Amma', Mukundan asked in a troubled voice, 'why he is never satisfied with anything I do? Why is he so angry with me all the time?' (17). As Mukundan was away from the village for a long time and his father was not active, the leadership of the village Kaikurissi was given to PowerHouse Ramakrishnan who won a lottery and became a millionaire. Mukundan stays in his village home where he was born, brought up and lived in the tyranny of his father.

Paru Kutty

Paru Kutty, Mukundan's mother, honoured her menacing husband resembled many Indian women. Achuthan Nair was unable to tolerate Paru Kutty's annoyance every few hours and left for Burma without her company when she was three months pregnant. He convinced her by saying "Have you thought of what you'll do when the baby is born? Here you have people to do everything you want. From washing your soiled clothes to bathing you and feeding you. You can't expect the same luxury of life elsewhere, and that too in a strange place. I think it would be best for you to remain here". (68) After four years he entered their house without any intimation. Mukundan saw his father only at the age of four. When Mukundan was afraid of his father, he criticized Paru Kutty 'What have you done to him to turn him into a pathetic creature like this?' (69)

At the age of forty nine, Achuthan Nair had a relationship with a woman Ammini. Achuthan Nair told Paru Kutty about his affair with Ammini 'I'm tired of having to visit Ammini in her house. The whole village knows about Ammini. So I might as well bring her here' (74). On listening to this intention of Achuthan Nair, Paru Kutty emerged with anger 'shrugged aside years of cowardice, squared her shoulders and said, 'No' (74). Anita Nair presents Paru Kutty in a different genre which means that Man cannot do whatever they wish. She swallowed her pain and said in a furious tone, 'Then it'll be over my dead body. For as long as I'm alive, I will decide who lives in this house and who doesn't' (74). Achuthan Nair never heard her use that tone in all these years. He left Paru Kutty in the big house went to live with Ammini in another house. She also opposes Achuthan Nair for not allowing to store paddy in her house. 'To the horrified amazement of the village, mounds of paddy were dumped on the dirt near the stile' (75). She also invited her second cousin Devayani for the first time in twelve years whom Achuthan Nair doesn't like visiting them. Devayani came to Kaikurrissi with her husband and two sons and stayed there for a week. Paru Kutty felt the house 'vibrate with Achuthan Nair's displeasure from across the road and reveled in the feeling' (77). After the death of her aunt's in the big house, she lived alone in the house for six months surrounded by memories, ghosts and all consuming desire.

Mukundan was haunted by his mother's ghost in the house. Mukundan has a guilt feeling as he didn't take his mother to Trichy, she had clutched at his arm and pleaded one more time, 'Take me with you son, I am so unhappy here.' (31). When he was a small boy, her mother shielded him from his father's cruelty and told him that his cruelty is simply another expression of showing love and concern. But when she spoke of her husband when he boards the train to Trichy to take her with him it is different. Her mother was very much terrified with his father and no longer tried to hide it from Mukundan. He convinced her mother Paru Kutty that he will find them another house, and he needs time to do that as he shares a room with another bachelor. He can't tell him to move out and take her there. Paru Kutty lived with her dominating husband Achuthan Nair throughout her lifetime. Paru Kutty succeeded in not allowing her husband with another woman under her roof. Even after her death Achuthan nair never brought her mistress Ammini home as it was the homing place for Paru Kutty's distressed soul.

Anjana

Anjana was introduced to Mukundan as the niece to his former colleague K.M. Nair. She got married to an unfit man named Ravindran. Her parents educated her, and she works as a teacher in a school in Ottapalam. Anjana didn't get a suitable alliance until she was twenty seven years old, so her parents educated her to get herself occupied. She mastered all the arts for a housewife. 'She learned how to milk the cow and what to do when the rose plants were afflicted with a disease that turned their leaves brown and caused them to curl. She experimented with recipes she found in magazines. She fashioned shopping bags out of plastic wires and gave them

away to friends and relatives. She painted virulent sunsets, lonely shepherds and chubby-cheeked gods on the back of glass and had them framed. She even made a little palace using sheets of glass and tiny injection vials. And still no perspective groom appeared on the horizon' (223).

A marriage broker came with an alliance for her. Ravindran, a thirty-five year old man, who is a medical representative in a pharmaceutical company. His parents were not alive, and his only sister got married and lives in Jamshedpur. Anjana and her parents agreed for the marriage. After the marriage Anjana and Ravindran went to live in Kozhikode. Anjana was satisfied, even though the house was small and part of a housing colony in a little suburb called Beypore. Anjana made plans even before she entered into her marital home.

Anita Nair portrayed Anjana's suffering and women's expectation after marriage 'Late in the evening, bathed and dressed in a pink cotton sari with tiny white flowers on it, and a matching pink blouse she had made herself, Anjana went in search of Ravindran' (225). She tried her best to keep him happy, but he always hated her presence and behaved in a rude manner. A little conversation took place between them and hardly any companionship. When she tried to talk to him about his job, he said, 'You won't understand what I am talking about' (228).

When Anjana's mother fell in the bathroom and broke her hip after four months of their wedding, she went to her parents' home. Ravindran asked her to stay at her parents' home, as he is planning for a new business. An agarbathi factory making incense sticks and decided on the name Anjana Agarbathi. She felt the fragrance of love and joy. Anita Nair portrayed how Indian women are overwhelmed with their husband's love and affection even though it is unworthy. Ravindran rarely visited Anjana and he often changed his business, Agarbathi, Mattresses, red oxide floor colouring, special kind of industrial stapler and then an inverter. In spite of all his failures in business, Ravindran forgets Anjana and doesn't care about her. When her parents see her daughter suffer even after her marriage, they decided it is better for her daughter to live alone. 'My daughter can manage very well without a husband like you. If you ever hurt my daughter again, I'll throw you out of this house. Do you understand?' her father told Ravindran (232).

After her parents' death, Anjana woke up and realized in spite of being married she can very well termed a spinster. Anjana's emergence from the unsuccessful marriage and realization to remain a spinster depicts Indian women are not always in their boundaries. When she meets Mukundan, she decides to apply for divorce. She finds Mukundan as the better person than her former husband. She decides a life breaking free all the bonds of the society. Anjana is twenty two years younger than Mukundan, but she never cared for it. She adores true love and affection. Mukundan also disappointed her when she was not ready to accept her before the society. Anjana is optimistic this time, she is ready to reject Mukundan and remain individual.

Conclusion

Anita Nair gave a vivid picture of both the women Paru Kutty and Anjana. Achuthan Nair realized his fault and he came to his big house ignoring her daughter Shanta. He understands the value of his wife Paru Kutty and always called out her name in his death bed. Men can dominate women, but they can't live a life without their care and affection. Anjana, a young schoolteacher had a bitter past and falls in love with the protagonist of the novel Mukundan. Again she experiences a setback. Finally Mukundan realizes his blunder and pleaded her to forgive and accept him. Thus, these two women characters won the heart of their beloved at the end of the novel. Paru Kutty, after her death, and Anjana, through her survival in the novel.

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