

# **Feminine Perspectives Unveiled: A Comparative Study of Female Characters in Manju Kapur's and Anita Nair's Novels**

**Dr. Rajnesh Kumari**

*Assistant Professor (English)*

*Shaheed Dalbir Singh Govt College Kharkhoda, Sonipat*

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## **Abstract**

*Portraits of Feminism refers to features and actions that a culture considers to be desirable for or particularly suited for women and girls. Feminism refers to socially acquired attributes and secondary sex characteristics, as opposed to femaleness, which is a biological and physiological categorization associated with the reproductive system. In India, a woman's function in life has been rigorously segregated for centuries; she was either a daughter, a wife, or a mother. She must follow certain prescribed rules in all of these roles; she has no unique identity as a human being. Indian women, like women all around the globe, are expressing their desire to be liberated, to be free of the unfair limits placed on them and the widespread prejudice they face. She wants to be seen as a whole human being, not only as a sidekick to her male counterparts. The purpose of this article is to examine the female portraits in Manju Kapur's and Anita Nair's books.*

**Keywords:** *identity, femaleness, voice of women, culture, feminism*

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## **I. Introduction**

This study is based on Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's chosen works. They investigate the lives of women and their struggles under the repressive mechanism of a closed society in their works, as well as how contemporary Indian women seek to break free from the male-dominated society sexually, economically, and domestically. In their stories, male and female protagonists combat their interpersonal difficulties without regard for outcome, and they often achieve some type of harmony. In their works, the characters want to be self-sufficient and to live lives of their own.

The female authors' characters are shown as coping with the changing realities of Indian life and the pain they imply on the one hand, and the mental problems of personal origin on the other. These conflicts and traumas become too intense at a certain point in their lives, and their capacity to suppress their emotions breaks down. Several Indian Writing in English academics and critics validated their assessment of feminine desire and entrapment, as well as compromise and obedience.

However, it seems that no one has investigated the female mind, the environment in which Indian women live, and the cultural effects on women's lives, which impact both their personal and social life.

The research will aid us in analyzing female literature, particularly Manju Kapur's and Anita Nair's novels, and formulating a viewpoint on attitudes that influences Feminism's structure.

## **II. DISCUSSION**

As a recognized exponent of Indian Writing in English, Manju Kapur has attained a significant degree of critical and popular success in India and beyond. Manju Kapur, a professor of English literature at Miranda House College, University of Delhi, won the Commonwealth Writers Prize in 1999 for her first novel *Difficult Daughters*, which was published in 1998. She has earned a reputation as a candid and compassionate recorder of the lives of Indian middle- and lower-middle-class families, particularly the women.

*Difficult Daughters* (1998), *A Married Woman* (2002), *Home* (2005), *The Immigrant* (2008), and *Custody* (2011) are the five books by Kapur that feature female portraiture. All of them are concerned with the plight of Indian middle-class women. They are centered on family and relationships. They also address taboo subjects such as lesbianism, child maltreatment, and sexual dysfunction.

*Difficult Daughters* is a novella set during the partition of India. Manju Kapur tells the tale of Virmati, a married woman who falls in love with a married man, a professor with a wife and children. The connection reflects India's battle for independence and, finally, independence, as well as the country's split, with Virmati becoming the Professor's second wife, resulting in her exclusion from her family. Manju Kapur's mother, Virmati, was a part of the inspiration for the narrative. Manju Kapur was so affected by her parents' love tale set during the

partition that she wanted to reintroduce it piece by piece before it faded from her memory. The book tells the story of an innocent Indian woman's dreams, her revolt against a tradition-bound culture, self-doubt, resolve, and acceptance. She has convincingly represented three generations of ladies from a middle-class Punjabi household during the pre-independence period.

The context of *A Married Woman* is the political and religious turmoil of the Babri Masjid and Ayodhya temple. It is the narrative of Astha, a young lady raised in a regular middle-class family in Delhi. Her parents locate her spouse in the customary arranged fashion, and she gives in. She seems to have a happy existence within the confines of marriage, establishing her footing in the teaching profession and producing two children. Underneath it all, though, is a life of suppression and sorrow. Kapur builds Astha's unhappiness against the background of religious turmoil in India, with the Hindu-Muslim battle over holy site in Ayodhya. Astha and Pipeelika have a tumultuous relationship, breaking societal barriers to find peace and understanding in one other's arms. Astha comes home in the end, knowing that they cannot have a future together. Kapur demonstrates a sophisticated grasp of the feminine psyche by expressing the inner intricacy of a woman's thoughts.

Manju Kapur's novel *Home* depicts the deceptively tranquil environment of a Delhi middle-class joint family. The Banwari Lals have a luxury clothing store in Karol Bagh's market, which is Delhi's most popular shopping destination for middle-class Indians. Men work outside the home to support their families, while women stay at home to care for their children. The two boys work and live with their father Banwari Lal, but their wives do not. Neither does Banwari Lal's granddaughter, Nisha, who takes decisions that are typically reserved for the family's women. The story is set in India and deals with issues of love and marriage. Because of society's strong adherence to norms, love marriages confront a slew of challenges right from the start. The tale depicts how powerful Indian norms are, to the point that even in the most affluent households, weddings are planned and love comes after, not before. Kapur's great understanding and observation of the human heart may be seen in his descriptions of minor rebellious and fierce power battles.

Manju Kapur's *The Immigrant* is set in India during the Emergency in the 1970s. The book depicts an arranged marriage in a personal way. It all starts with Nina, a thirty-three-year-old single woman living with her widowed mother in a tiny Delhi flat. Under the influence of her mother, she agrees to marry Ananda, an NRI dentist in Halifax, Canada, abandons her teaching job, and relocates to Halifax. It takes a long time and a lot of effort for her to adjust to both her spouse and Canada. Finally, both of them are drawn into extramarital affairs. Nina's delicate new existence in Canada starts to disintegrate as she learns realities about her spouse, both sexual and emotional, and she finds a new professional identity as a student of library science. The novel's ending is left open-ended, with Nina, traumatized by her own affair and now fully aware – unbeknownst to him – of her husband's – riding out on a bus into what may prove to be an entirely new existence. Kapur examines the NRI phenomenon — the NRI's connection with the home country, with all of its ambiguities, desire, and nostalgia, which coexists with the belief that the choice to live abroad is justifiable. No one captures the subtlety and sensitivity of middle-class family life like Kapur.

*Custody*, Manju Kapur's fifth book, recounts her revolution against an age-old practice without favoring anybody. She has brought forth two feminist ideas in her work, adultery and infertility, in the shape of her two female characters, Shagun and Ishita, respectively. This is also the tale of post-departure custody of children and the Indian judicial system. With their unnerving secrets, unstable relationships, and yearnings for riches, independence, and peace, Kapur brings the lives of prosperous, urban, middle-class Indians to life. As the tale revolves on Raman and Shagun, the marriage, Ashok Khanna, Raman's boss, and Ishita, a childless divorcee, the writer reveals the hollowness of modern existence. She tells the narrative of four people and two children via the Indian marriage tradition. A series of fights and heated debates ensue, showing the negative aspects of divorce. Kapur strives to save both of her heroes from their precarious positions. They do not attain freedom via larger feminist uprisings, but rather through a deviational behavior pattern that depicts a psychological and spiritual process.

With a poem, Anita Nair entered into the field of Indian Writing in English, but she has since established herself as a writer with her own particular style. She was born in Kerala's Shoranur and raised in Madras. She earned her B.A. in English language and literature at Othapalam, a tiny town in Kerala. She moved to the United States at the age of twenty-four to study journalism. She presently resides in Bangalore, India.

Nair started her literary career with the poem *Happenings on the London Underground*, which was included in a Poetry Society of India anthology in 1992. *Satyr of the Subway and Eleven Other Stories* (1997), as well as four novels, *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Lessons in Forgetting* (2006).

*Malabar Mind* (1997) is her debut collection of poetry, which examines love, failure, passion, hope, and agony. *Where the Rain is Born* (2003) is an anthology of literature on Kerala, featuring contributions by O.V. Vijayan, Kamala Das, Salman Rushdie, Shashi Tharoor, Arundhati Roy, Jaishree Misra, Pankaj Mishra, and David Davidar, among others. She's also the author of *The Puffin Book of World Legends and Myths* (2004). This magnificent anthology brings together some of the world's most extraordinary and wonderful tales and stories,

from Africa to Japan, Thailand to Alaska. Her children's books include *Nonu*, the *Skating Squirrel* (2006) and *Living Next Door To Alise* (2007). Some of the fifty stories from India are detailed in her fantastic book *Magical Indian Myths* (2008). Her collection of literary essays, *Goodnight and Godbless* (2008), is a dazzling mixture of bedtime musings. It's about books, authors, moms, the wind, and other oddly thought-provoking topics. She's also authored five trip articles, as well as a number of drawings and profiles. She continues to work in the business of advertising as a literary writer for *The Indian Express*.

*The Better Man*, Nair's first book, is a soul-searching tale of a retired government man named Mukundan Nair who returns to his Kerala hometown. However, this means confronting his dead history, with millions of grey shadows and ghosts of his deceased mother and forefathers haunting and torturing him. Nair has shown her mettle by delving into the depths of man's mind and beautifully bringing it to the top.

Nair used the fictitious tactic of the ladies compartment to bring her six characters together in *Ladies Coupe*. The ladies, who are virtually strangers to one another, unveil their deepest selves. Each narrative is distinct. Each narrative, however, enhances Akhila's fundamental theme of being alone at 45 and questioning whether a woman can exist alone. After her father's death, Akhila, who was born into a Brahmin household with happily married parents, finds herself in charge. She takes a job with the Internal Revenue Service and helps her sister and brothers get back on their feet. She is 45 years old and has no life of her own. Finally, after the train ride and hearing about the other women's lives, Akhila views her life as complete and believes she can begin to understand the bliss she is entitled to. She finds a solution to her problems by recognizing that women must be brave in asserting their rights to their own lives and opportunities. All of the other ladies in the compartment, like Akhila, become conscious of who they are. Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is a psychological study of the female characters.

*Mistress*, Nair's third book, is a poignant study of the quest for meaning in art and life. The story is arranged around the "navarasas," the nine faces of the heart described in Kathakali, with each chapter focusing on a different emotion. When travel journalist Christopher Steward comes in Kerala to see Koman, Radha's uncle and a renowned Kathakali dancer, he enters a world of masks and suppressed emotions. Radha and her uncle are intrigued to the intriguing young guy with his cello and his persistent inquiries about the past from the moment they meet. Shyam, Radha's husband, is rapidly excluded from the triangle, and can only watch helplessly as she hugs Chris with a passion he has never been able to elicit from her. The first book, *Mistress*, documents the breaking of tradition; the second book analyzes the implications of that step and the ways in which one might become both lost and found in the process; and the third book tracks the gradual unraveling and recalibration of diverse lives. There is a lot of anxiety about one's identity, whether it's biological, professional, or socio-cultural, and a lot of worrying about who one is and who one loves as a result.

*Lessons in Forgetting*, Nair's fourth book, is a wonderfully portrayed narrative of redemption, forgiveness, and second chances. Meera is a well-dressed corporate wife who has a good profession as a cookbook author. When her husband fails to return home after a party, she is left to care for not just her children, but also her mother and grandmother, as well as the upkeep of Lilac House, their sprawling old family house in Bangalore. Prof. J.A. Krishnamurthy, often known as JAK, is a famous cyclone specialist who embarks on a radically different path in life. Smriti, his daughter, is in a coma following a violent assault on her when she was on vacation at a seaside resort. In his hunt for the facts, neither the local police nor her boy buddy assist the bereaved father. Meera and JAK's lives are spinning and twisting together due to a sequence of coincidences, with the unpredictability and overwhelming inevitability of a storm. As the days pass, new beginnings emerge where there had previously only been ends. In Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*, the violent depression of nature becomes a metaphor for the vast changes that hit our lives.

Manju Kapur and Anita Nair have concentrated on the man-woman interaction in order to characterize, analyze, and determine the destiny of the Indian lady. They've reimagined and recounted the fate of Indian women as it relates to their situation in patriarchal societies. Traditional women, with their glorified images, and emerging women, with their uniqueness, shifting views, and roles, have both been included in their works. One might legitimately anticipate that future authors will be successful in depicting women in the context of changing reality.

### **CONCLUSION**

The current paper, *Female Portraits in Selected Novels of Anita Nair and Manju Kapur*, examines empirically the oppressive and suppressive forces in patriarchal society, as well as how different characters, depending on the prevailing environment, fight for liberation or otherwise in a male-dominated society, and how they achieve freedom and self-identity at various levels.

In their works, Anita Nair and Manju Kapur explore the inner lives of Indian women. They depict the three stages of characters in accordance to their degree of education, status, and occupation in a realistic manner using a figment of the mind. All of the characters are from various social strata in India: lower middle class, middle class, and higher middle class. They may be found in rural settings, semi-urban towns, cities, and metropolitan areas. The first generation of women-mules live in vast numbers in rural regions, surrendering their selves and identities to a patriarchal culture controlled by males, and becoming men's shadows. Mules live in great numbers in rural regions, surrendering their selves and identities to a patriarchal culture controlled by males, and

becoming men's shadows. In semi-urban communities, protesting women rule the scene, and they finish their lives in compromise and adjustment without abandoning their originality and personality. Women with self-identity rule the roost in urban and metropolitan areas by defying patriarchal society's limitations and social standards. At all costs, they express their uniqueness and self-identity. All of these traits may be found in Indian culture.

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