

Exploring Selfhood in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*

^{1#}V. Pallavarajan^{2*}S. Bhuvaneswari

^{1#}Ph. D Research Scholar, Department of English, Annamalai University

^{2*}Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor of English, Annamalai University

Abstract

This research paper scrutinizes self-realization as depicted in Anita Nair's novel *The Better Man*. The novel offers a fascinating tale depicting the protagonist's self-realisation and identity-unveiling path. This research paper aims to illuminate the many facets of self-realization shown in the book via textual analysis. It also delineates the protagonist's investigation of gender identity and how it interacts with social norms and expectations. It explores the debates over cultural identity and their resolutions, emphasising the influence of heritage on the quest for identity. In addition, it traces the protagonist's psychological progress, considering the importance of self-reflection, emotional development, and the impact of earlier experiences. The inquiry also delves into the protagonist's interactions with secondary characters, asking how they aid the protagonist's psychic development. It also explores how the protagonist's friendship, familial ties, and love connections shape her sense of self. The novel's social and political settings are also analyzed, focusing on how cultural taboos and political upheaval affect the protagonist's journey of self-realization. Analysis of the protagonist's quest for meaning, enlightenment, and a higher purpose is presented, along with a discussion of the novel's spiritual and existential components of self-realization. Ultimately, it sheds light on the many layers of identity and maturation highlighted in Anita Nair's *The Better Man* illuminating its theme of self-realization.

Keywords: cultural heritage, self-reflection, emotional development, self-realization, patriarchy

Introduction

Exploring themes of introspection and coming into one's own, *The Better Man* by Anita Nair is a page-turner. The book's protagonist takes the readers on a trip as he undertakes a journey of self-actualization. It explores several aspects of self-realization, including gender identity, cultural background, psychological development, interpersonal connections, sociopolitical context, and spiritual or existential reflections. This research paper intends to thoroughly investigate the concept of self-realization in Anita Nair's *The Better Man*.

In *The Better Man*, Nair deftly spins a tale that questions accepted ideas of identity and asks readers to consider their self-realization journeys. One of the novel's main themes is the protagonist's investigation of gender identification. Anjana, the protagonist of the tale, is a genuine woman who struggles with patriarchal culture and a bad marriage until she finally finds happiness with Mukundan. In the face of cultural expectations and standards, Nair expertly captures the protagonist's struggle to identify and appreciate their actual self. Readers are given a provocative viewpoint on the difficulties of self-realization concerning gender through the protagonist's journey, which mirrors the larger social conversation around gender identity. In addition, Nair's book explores the relationship between cultural legacy and self-realization. The main characters Anjana and Valsala are how they struggle with the

issues of cultural identity and how their ancestry affects how they see themselves. The challenges and resolves that result from the protagonist's path of balancing their cultural origins with their development are illuminated by Nair's rich descriptions and dynamic narrative. The tale is made deeper and richer by investigating cultural identity, providing insights into the importance of heritage in self-realization.

The protagonist's path to self-realisation is shaped by her emotional development, reflection, and the impact of prior tragedies. Readers are encouraged to explore the complexity of the human mind and the transformational potential of self-reflections in Nair's empathetic depiction of the protagonist's psychological evolution. Additionally, Nair skilfully crafts complex connections throughout the book, crucial to the protagonist's quest for self-awareness. Relationship dynamics in friendships, families, and romantic partnerships act as catalysts for reflection and personal development. By examining these interactions, Nair examines the effects of interpersonal connections on forming one's identity and the part they play in self-realization.

The socio-political setting that *The Better Man* presents gives the idea of self-realization an additional level of nuance. The protagonist's journey of self-realization is influenced by Nair's depiction of social conventions, cultural taboos, and political events. The book emphasises the challenges and victories of defying accepted standards and invites readers to consider the larger social environment that influences one's path to self-realisation. Nair also explores self-realization's philosophical and spiritual aspects, giving readers a window into the protagonist's search for purpose, meaning, and enlightenment. Nair encourages readers to reflect on existential concerns and the pursuit of self-actualisation via the protagonist's study of spiritual spheres and existential reflection.

The Better Man by Anita Nair gives a captivating depiction of identity development and self-realization. This research paper thoroughly examines the novel's depictions of the many facets of self-realization. This research tries to illuminate the many layers of identity and personal development that emerge within the story by investigating gender identity, cultural heritage, psychological development, relationships, and spiritual or existential contemplation.

Discussion

This research paper focuses on self-realization and issues related to Anita Nair's *The Better Man*. The characters Valsala and Anjana in Nair's stories are genuine, physical, flesh-and-blood heroines who are amazing in how they relate to their environments, cultures, families, mental states, and selves. In *The Better Man*, Prabhakaran, an elderly schoolmaster, is married to Valsala. He does not satisfy Valsala. So she develops feelings for Sridharan. She is unconcerned about the society. She becomes his 'Mistress' after realizing her true 'self'. This event demonstrates Valsala's feminist viewpoint via morals. She is aware that sex, freedom, and love are essential stimulants for any woman. She raises contemporary concerns about gender and sexuality in women. She defends herself as follows:

"I'm just forty years old. I don't want to be forced to retire before my time. I'd want to live. I'm looking for zeal. Night after night, she persuaded herself, 'I want to know ecstasy'." (BM130).

Valsala possesses the traits of a "New Women". She challenges conventional Indian culture. As a result, she is sexually content with her relationship with

Sridharan, her next-door neighbour, and does not feel bad about it. Valsala strives for individuality in life, but she does so in an unconventional way. Valsala turns to freedom in both her sexual and psychological lives. She may overcome her identification once she finds a way to reconcile her inner tensions. The second section of this article explores the life of Anjana, another important women character in the novel *The Better Man*, who grew up in a lovely environment. She gave up all of her freedom when she married Ravindran at the age of twenty seven. Her marital situation is not ideal. Ravindran becomes agitated and leaves the room whenever Anjana is ready to talk. She yearns for independence and love, but her efforts are unsuccessful. She begins to detest everything, even herself, as a result. Anjana visits her parents' house one day to care for her mother. This space serves as a retreat from her relationship. Ravindran wants to launch a new firm after his last one had collapsed. Ravindran tries to forget about Anjana. This "silence" causes their marriage to become unstable and depressing. Anjana's father yelles at him after noticing this gap:

I thought you would adore my daughter when I asked you to marry her. For the remainder of her life, cherish and protect her. There is no necessity for such a relationship if all you want to do is harm her and make her sad. My daughter will be OK without a spouse like you. (BM 232)

Anjana's father gets a teaching job for Anjana. So that she can escape from her abusive spouse. Anjana finds pleasure in both her work and her leisure reading. This causes her to leave her husband and start a new life. She learns that everything is achievable if one is willing to work for it. The author tries to investigate the patriarchal structure that contributes to the pitiable plight of Indian women. The protagonist's journey from immaturity to maturity is also chronicled throughout the story:

Anjana, a well-educated lady, desires a balanced lifestyle and some kind of autonomy. She no longer donned bright sarees but instead wore starched cotton in muted tones that reflected her life. She deposited her valuables in a bank safety deposit box and discarded her baubles. (BM 234)

Anjana overcomes her cultural upbringing in India and writes in her voice. Her decision to leave her unhappy marriage and start a new life as a single woman expresses her desire for emancipation and empowerment. She eventually meets Mukundan and develops feelings for him. While conversing with Mukundan, she comes to terms with the fact that she has to end her marriage. Mukundan's response to Anjana's declaration of love was:

Anjana', 'You must pay attention to me,' Mukundan said. The computer knows you consider me a decent human being. Someone you can put your whole trust in. I'm not sure I'm as strong as a guy as you portray me to be. My mom asked me to come and take her away from there. However, I didn't. I lied to my dad because I was terrified of his anger. If only I had complied with her request, maybe she would still be alive today. That's the kind of guy I am. A helpless and unreliable being. Do you want to be associated with such a man? We all have our flaws, but it takes a lot of courage to admit them. Or you might just say so, as you have done. That makes you the most courageous person I know. What can I say? Is my heart correct in telling me this?

(BM244,245)

Anita Nair cares greatly about women's liberation and hence she expresses her notion through Anjana who fights for her right to act independently. Anjana finally becomes a self-reliant lady capable of making her own decisions. Anjana and Mukundan decide to start a new life together. Anjana's optimistic outlook on life, career, financial stability, and unique individuality contribute to her upward momentum in life. She discovers a new life with Mukundan and crafts a persona that fits her gender and potential.

Finally, Anjana is let down when Mukundan refuses to accept her in front of the society. However, she is more determined to make her place in the world. Anita Nair aptly presents the psyche of all her female cast. Like Anita Desai, Nairtoo explores the inner lives of her female characters throughout their lifespan. In addition, the author explores the strategies her female protagonists use to forge their identities via various re-orientations.

Indian women in the past were strictly conventional; they lacked freedom, education, and independence. They had no concept of the possibility of a world outside their own. Women in such a conservative environment tend to see marriage as their only option and their husbands as their ultimate authority figures. They must follow their husband's orders and care for him and his family. Because of her gender, Nair can get into the psyche of women and expose the underlying emotional and mental health issues arising from living as a woman in India's patriarchal culture.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The Better Man* by Anita Nair prompts introspection on one's identity formation processes and how one's culture and upbringing have shaped them. In addition, the rich tapestry of Indian culture and customs is brought to life via Nair's detailed descriptions of the surroundings and her beautiful language. The novel's exploration of love, grief, and self-realisation will strike a chord with its readers. Self-realization is shown in *The Better Man* as a convoluted and difficult journey rather than a simple one. It stresses the significance of introspection, challenging accepted social standards, and accepting one's authentic self regardless of the consequences. Readers of *The Better Man* by Anita Nair are encouraged to accept their unique personalities and set out on their paths to self-realisation as they follow the protagonist's journey of self-realization.

References

Nair, Anita: *The Better Man*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1999.

Marriage and the Working Woman in India. New Delhi Vikas, 1970.

Sinha, Sunita. *Post-Colonial Women Writers New Perspectives*. New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd: 2008