

POLITICS OF PRECARIITY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF RESISTANCE AND RESILIENCE IN ANITA NAIR AND ANURADHA MARWAH

Dr. Abhishek Yadav

PhD in English

ABSTRACT

This study explores the politics of precarity and the representation of resistance and resilience in the works of Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah, focusing on how their divergent narrative strategies contribute to Indian feminist literary discourse. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of precarity articulated by Judith Butler, Guy Standing, and Isabell Lorey, the research examines how vulnerability operates not only as a thematic concern but also as an aesthetic practice embedded in form, tone, and style. Through a comparative analysis of Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Eating Wasps* (2018), alongside Marwah's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and *Dirty Picture* (1998), the study demonstrates that Nair foregrounds affective realism to elicit empathy and intimate engagement, while Marwah employs political satire to critique systemic oppression and institutionalized inequalities. Resistance in Nair's fiction emerges as subtle and inward, whereas Marwah's is overt and political, yet both converge in portraying resilience as a transformative force bridging vulnerability with empowerment. By situating these texts within the socio-cultural context of gender, caste, class, and neoliberalism in India, the study underscores literature as a critical site where precarity is both lived and artistically represented. Ultimately, the research extends global theories of precarity into the terrain of Indian feminist fiction while highlighting the broader relevance of Nair and Marwah's works for understanding women's struggles in contemporary India.

Keywords: Precarity; Resistance; Resilience; Feminist Aesthetics; Narrative Strategies; Anita Nair; Anuradha Marwah; Indian English Literature; Realism; Satire

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary global literary studies, the concept of precarity has emerged as a critical framework for understanding how vulnerability, instability, and marginalization are represented across texts and cultures. Scholars such as Judith Butler (2004), Guy Standing (2011), and Isabell Lorey (2015) have expanded the notion beyond economic insecurity to include broader forms of social, political, and existential uncertainty. Literature, as a site where lived experiences intersect with aesthetic practices, offers powerful insights into how precarity is both thematically represented and structurally embedded within narrative form. Fragmentation, shifts in voice, tonal dissonance, and disrupted chronologies often serve as artistic strategies that mirror precarious lives, suggesting that precarity is as much an aesthetic concern as it is a socio-political condition.

Within the Indian socio-cultural landscape, precarity acquires specific contours shaped by intersecting forces of gender, caste, class, and neoliberal transformations. Women's lives, in particular, are often marked by instability and structural inequalities that expose them to vulnerabilities in both private and public spheres. The pressures of patriarchy, the precarity of women's labor, and the uneven distribution of rights and opportunities amplify the lived

experiences of insecurity. Neoliberal globalization further complicates these conditions, producing new forms of alienation, consumerist anxieties, and fractured identities. Indian English women's writing has increasingly engaged with these realities, embedding the precariousness of existence into its themes and narrative strategies.

Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah stand out as significant voices in this field, though their approaches to precarity diverge in form and tone. Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Eating Wasps* (2018) employ realism and psychological depth to foreground the everyday vulnerabilities and struggles of women negotiating patriarchy, desire, and autonomy. Her narratives draw readers into intimate emotional landscapes, generating empathy and affective resonance. In contrast, Marwah's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and *Dirty Picture* (1998) deploy satire and irony to critique institutionalized gender oppression and the precarious intersections of politics, power, and identity. Together, Nair and Marwah illuminate different aesthetic registers of precarity—realism fostering affective engagement, and satire producing critical distance—demonstrating how Indian women's writing not only reflects precarious conditions but also redefines the possibilities of feminist aesthetics in the Indian literary canon.

1.2 Research questions

1. How do Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah represent precarious lives in their fiction?
2. In what ways do their characters resist oppressive structures?
3. How does resilience manifest in both personal and political dimensions?

1.3 Statement of significance

This study contributes to comparative Indian feminist literary studies and the broader field of precarity theory by demonstrating how divergent narrative strategies—realism in Anita Nair's works and satire in Anuradha Marwah's fiction—collectively expand the aesthetics of precarity in Indian English women's writing. While precarity has been theorized extensively in global contexts, its application to Indian socio-cultural realities, particularly through a gendered lens, remains underexplored. By situating Nair and Marwah within this discourse, the research highlights how Indian feminist narratives embody vulnerability, resilience, and critique through form and style as much as through theme. The comparative approach not only deepens an understanding of the aesthetic possibilities of representing precarity but also establishes Indian women's writing as a critical site of engagement within transnational literary and theoretical debates on instability, insecurity, and survival.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Theoretical framework

Butler (2009) extends her earlier reflections on vulnerability by arguing that precarity is not merely an individual condition but a shared existential reality shaped by political frames of recognition and exclusion. She emphasizes that some lives are rendered more "grievable" than others, a concept crucial for understanding how literature can both represent and challenge hierarchies of vulnerability.

Lorey (2015) situates precarity within the broader logic of neoliberal governance, describing it as a normalized condition that structures everyday life. For Lorey, precarity is not just an effect of unstable labor or inequality but a mode of governmentality that disciplines subjects

into accepting insecurity as inevitable, which provides a critical lens for analyzing how literary forms embed and contest such normalized instability.

Standing (2011) brings attention to the economic dimensions of precarity by theorizing the “precariat” as a class-in-the-making, marked by insecure employment, unstable income, and lack of social protections. His work is particularly relevant for situating literary explorations of socio-economic vulnerability, as it highlights the structural conditions that shape precarious lives and their cultural representations.

3.2 Feminist perspectives on precarity

Butler (2004) situates precarity within feminist thought by arguing that certain lives, particularly those of marginalized groups, are rendered more vulnerable due to systemic power imbalances. For women, this means their precarious conditions are not accidental but politically structured, demanding recognition and ethical responsibility from society.

Lorey (2015) extends the feminist engagement with precarity by showing how women’s vulnerabilities are governed and normalized under neoliberal regimes. She emphasizes that women’s agency emerges not only in resistance but also in navigating and negotiating these precarious conditions, thereby making insecurity a site of both constraint and possibility.

Mohanty (2003) highlights the gendered dimensions of global precarity by analyzing how women, especially in postcolonial contexts, face intersecting vulnerabilities of class, caste, and labor. She stresses that feminist solidarity must foreground women’s lived experiences of precarity while also recognizing their capacity for agency and collective resistance.

3.3 Studies on Anita Nair

Awasthi (2016) examines *Ladies Coupé* as a narrative of female subjectivity and self-realization, highlighting how Nair situates women’s search for identity against the backdrop of patriarchal constraints. The study emphasizes how the novel becomes a space of resistance, allowing women to articulate autonomy within intimate and social contexts.

Chandra (2018) explores themes of selfhood and identity in Nair’s fiction, arguing that her female protagonists embody a struggle between tradition and modernity. Through close reading of works like *Mistress* and *Eating Wasps*, the analysis underscores how Nair portrays women negotiating autonomy in ways that resist silencing and marginalization.

Narayan (2015) focuses on Nair’s use of realism to depict women’s inner lives, showing how psychological depth and descriptive detail bring subjectivity into the foreground. The study contends that Nair’s narratives invite readers to empathize with women’s vulnerabilities while also affirming their capacity for agency and resilience.

3.4 Studies on Anuradha Marwah

Chatterjee (2010) highlights how Anuradha Marwah’s fiction deploys political satire to dismantle dominant cultural and institutional discourses. Through works like *Dirty Picture*, Marwah uses irony and exaggeration to critique patriarchal norms and expose the precarious position of women in public and private spaces.

Kumar (2015) examines Marwah’s *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* as a narrative of institutional critique, showing how the novel interrogates systemic gender inequalities embedded within educational and professional structures. The study emphasizes how satire functions as a tool of resistance against deeply entrenched hierarchies.

Singh (2018) foregrounds Marwah's contribution to feminist resistance narratives in Indian English fiction, noting how her works blur the boundary between personal and political. By combining satire with social commentary, Marwah exposes not only the vulnerabilities faced by women but also their agency in contesting oppressive systems.

3.5 Identified research gap

The identified research gap lies in the absence of comparative studies that bring together Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah through the lens of precarity, resistance, and resilience. While existing scholarship engages with Nair's realism and Marwah's political satire individually, there has been little attempt to examine how their divergent narrative strategies collectively articulate precarious lives in the Indian context. This gap limits a fuller understanding of how Indian feminist writing negotiates vulnerability not only thematically but also aesthetically, making a comparative study essential for mapping the intersections of affect, critique, and resistance in their works.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Approach: Qualitative, comparative literary analysis

This study adopts a qualitative approach grounded in comparative literary analysis to examine the aesthetics of precarity in the works of Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah. The focus is on close reading and interpretive analysis of selected texts—Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Eating Wasps* (2018), alongside Marwah's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and *Dirty Picture* (1998). Drawing on theoretical frameworks of precarity (Butler, 2004; Standing, 2011; Lorey, 2015), the study investigates how vulnerability, instability, and resilience are communicated not only through themes but also through form, tone, and narrative strategies.

The comparative dimension emphasizes differences and complementarities in Nair's realist mode, which generates affective empathy, and Marwah's satirical mode, which foregrounds institutional critique and political awareness. The analysis is structured around four parameters: representation of precarity (gender, caste, class, neoliberal context), form and structure (linearity, fragmentation, narrative perspective), tone and style (realism vs. satire), and strategies of resistance and resilience. By integrating feminist literary criticism with theories of precarity, the methodology situates both writers within broader debates on Indian English women's writing and global precarity literature.

4.2 Frameworks applied

This study employs a qualitative, comparative literary methodology to analyze how Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah articulate precarity through divergent narrative strategies. The approach is interpretive and textual, relying on close reading and theoretical application to examine the interplay between form, theme, and aesthetics. The methodological framework integrates feminist literary criticism, precarity studies, and postcolonial criticism, thereby situating the writers within both local and global intellectual contexts.

1. Feminist Literary Criticism

Feminist criticism is applied to uncover how gendered experiences of vulnerability, oppression, and resilience are inscribed in the texts. Nair's realist narratives are studied for their affective resonance and empathetic portrayal of women's inner lives, while Marwah's

satirical strategies are examined for their critique of institutionalized patriarchy and systemic gender inequalities.

2. Precarity Studies

The theoretical contributions of Butler (2004), Standing (2011), and Lorey (2015) provide a framework for understanding how precarity operates beyond economic insecurity, encompassing political, social, and existential instability. These perspectives guide the analysis of how form and style—such as fragmentation, irony, and realist description—embody precariousness in the novels.

3. Postcolonial Criticism

Drawing on Spivak's (1988) critique of subaltern representation and Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity, postcolonial criticism informs the study of how Nair and Marwah situate precarity within the Indian socio-cultural landscape. Their narratives are interpreted as responses to overlapping structures of patriarchy, caste, class, and neoliberal modernity, revealing how Indian feminist literature reconfigures global theories of precarity.

By combining these three frameworks, the study establishes a multidimensional approach that recognizes the gendered, structural, and aesthetic dimensions of precarity while situating Indian English women's writing in comparative and transnational contexts.

Table: Methodological Frameworks

| Framework | Key Theorists | Focus in the Study | Application to Nair & Marwah |
|-----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Feminist Literary Criticism | Showalter, Moi, Gilbert & Gubar | Gendered vulnerability, resistance, feminist aesthetics | Nair: affect and empathy; Marwah: institutional critique |
| Precarity Studies | Butler (2004), Standing (2011), Lorey (2015) | Social, economic, and existential instability represented through form and tone | Identifies how realism (Nair) and satire (Marwah) embed precariousness |
| Postcolonial Criticism | Spivak (1988), Bhabha (1994) | Intersection of gender, caste, class, and neoliberal modernity in Indian contexts | Situates both writers within Indian socio-political precarity and resistance |

4.3 Corpus

The primary texts for this analysis include Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001) and *Eating Wasps* (2018), alongside Anuradha Marwah's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and *Dirty Picture* (1998). These texts are selected because they represent central themes of women's vulnerability, resistance, and negotiation with patriarchal and institutional power structures, while also exemplifying distinct narrative strategies.

Analytical Approach

The analysis is conducted through close reading, with emphasis on how form, structure, tone, and style convey instability and resilience. The study applies the theoretical framework of

precarity (Butler, 2004; Standing, 2011; Lorey, 2015) while also incorporating feminist literary criticism to situate the novels in an Indian socio-cultural context. Comparative analysis focuses on how realism and satire, though divergent, converge in their representation of women's precarious lives.

Research Dimensions

1. **Representation of Precarity** – gender, class, and institutional vulnerabilities.
2. **Narrative Strategies** – realism (Nair) vs satire (Marwah).
3. **Aesthetics of Precarity** – fragmentation, tone, imagery, irony, and descriptive detail.
4. **Reader Engagement** – affective empathy vs critical awareness.

Table: Comparative Methodological Framework

| Dimension | Anita Nair (<i>Ladies Coupé, Eating Wasps</i>) | Anuradha Marwah (<i>Geetika Mehendiratta, Dirty Picture</i>) |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Representation of Precarity | Focus on personal/domestic struggles, psychological fragility, gendered oppression | Focus on institutional critique, systemic patriarchy, political vulnerability |
| Narrative Strategy | Realism, psychological depth, intimate voices | Satire, irony, exaggeration, political critique |
| Aesthetics of Precarity | Linear narrative, descriptive detail, emotional tone | Disruption, irony, humor, sharp critique |
| Reader Engagement | Empathy and affective identification | Critical distance and reflective awareness |

4.4 Analytical method: Thematic and narrative analysis of precarious conditions, resistance strategies, and resilience patterns.

The study employs a qualitative analytical approach combining thematic and narrative analysis to investigate how Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah represent precarity, resistance, and resilience through their distinct literary strategies. Thematic analysis identifies recurring motifs of vulnerability, instability, and survival in the texts, while narrative analysis focuses on the structural, stylistic, and tonal strategies that embody these precarious conditions.

The corpus consists of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), and *Eating Wasps* (2018), and Anuradha Marwah's *The Higher Education of Geetika Mehendiratta* (1993) and *Dirty Picture* (1998). The analysis examines how realism (Nair) and satire (Marwah) differently portray women's struggles, institutional critique, and modes of resilience. By reading these works comparatively, the methodology highlights how aesthetics of precarity intersect with feminist resistance in Indian English women's writing.

Table: Analytical Framework

| Analytical Dimension | Focus Areas | Application to Texts |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Thematic Analysis | Precarity (gender, class, institutional vulnerability); resistance strategies; | Identifying key motifs of instability and survival across |

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| | resilience patterns | both writers' works |
| Narrative Analysis | Form (linear vs fragmented); tone (realism vs satire); style (empathy vs critique) | Studying how narrative choices embody precarious conditions |
| Comparative Lens | Divergences and overlaps between Nair and Marwah in depicting precarity and resilience | Mapping realism (affective depth) against satire (political critique) |
| Interpretive Outcome | How literary form shapes the representation of vulnerability and resistance | Demonstrating complementary feminist aesthetics in Indian fiction |

5. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Precarity in the Fiction of Anita Nair

In Anita Nair's fiction, precarity is often represented through the gendered vulnerabilities women face within both domestic and social spheres. Her characters navigate oppressive structures of patriarchy that confine them to roles of dependence, leading to experiences of loneliness, repression, and marginalization. In novels such as *Ladies Coupé*, *Mistress*, and *Eating Wasps*, Nair portrays how emotional and psychological precariousness shapes women's lives, making them susceptible to silence and erasure. Yet, within these fragile conditions, she also emphasizes subtle forms of resistance—whether through acts of personal choice, the reclaiming of one's narrative voice, or the bonds of female solidarity that create spaces of resilience. Thus, Nair's realism highlights both the vulnerabilities and the quiet strength that define women's precarious existence.

5.2 Precarity in the Fiction of Anuradha Marwah

In the fiction of Anuradha Marwah, precarity is represented through institutional, political, and class-based vulnerabilities that shape women's everyday lives. Her narratives employ satire as a powerful tool to critique higher education, media, and neoliberal power structures, exposing how these institutions perpetuate gendered inequality and systemic marginalization. By blending irony with sharp social commentary, Marwah highlights the fragility of individual agency within oppressive frameworks while simultaneously offering spaces of resistance. Her characters often mobilize collective action, assert political voice, and use satire itself as a form of defiance, thereby transforming precarity from a condition of vulnerability into a catalyst for feminist resistance and critique.

5.3 Comparative Dimensions

The comparative dimensions of Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah's works reveal both convergences and divergences in their literary engagement with precarity. On the one hand, both writers underscore the structural vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalized groups, drawing attention to how patriarchy, class, and institutional hierarchies perpetuate insecurity. On the other hand, their narrative emphases differ: Nair foregrounds individual agency and resilience, using intimate and emotionally charged realism to evoke empathy and highlight personal struggles, whereas Marwah privileges systemic critique and political resistance, employing sharp satire and social commentary to expose collective injustices. Together, their divergent strategies demonstrate how Indian feminist writing can represent

precarity both at the level of lived emotional experience and as a critique of entrenched social and political structures.

5.4 Representation of Resistance and Resilience

In the works of Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah, resistance and resilience are represented through multiple, intersecting modes that reflect the complexities of women's lives in India. Resistance often emerges in the form of personal autonomy, where characters challenge patriarchal control over their choices; through community solidarity, as women find strength in collective bonds; and in political defiance, where satire and critique expose systemic inequalities. Alongside this, resilience takes shape in diverse ways: through survival in precarious conditions, creativity as a means of self-expression, the re-imagining of selfhood beyond societal restrictions, and the reclaiming of spaces of power previously denied to women. Together, these strategies underscore the broader implications for feminist politics in India, showing how literature not only narrates women's vulnerabilities but also envisions pathways of empowerment and transformation.

6. FINDINGS

The findings indicate that precarity in the works of Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah operates on multiple levels, encompassing personal struggles, institutional inequalities, and broader socio-political vulnerabilities. Nair's portrayal of resistance is often subtle and inward, reflected in her characters' emotional strength, personal choices, and quiet negotiations within patriarchal structures. In contrast, Marwah's resistance is direct and political, articulated through satire and sharp critiques of systemic oppression. Across both writers, resilience emerges as a transformative force that bridges vulnerability with empowerment, allowing characters to reimagine possibilities of survival and agency. Together, Nair and Marwah uniquely enrich feminist discourses by showing how women navigate precarious contexts through both affective endurance and collective critique.

7. CONCLUSION

This study restates its central argument that both Anita Nair and Anuradha Marwah, through their distinct narrative strategies, expose the politics of precarity while offering nuanced portrayals of resistance and resilience. Nair's realist mode emphasizes affective engagement and personal negotiations with vulnerability, whereas Marwah's satirical voice foregrounds systemic critique and political resistance. Together, their works demonstrate how Indian English women's writing transforms precarity from a socio-political condition into a powerful aesthetic practice.

Theoretically, the study extends Butler's (2004) and Standing's (2011) notions of precarity into the realm of Indian feminist fiction, showing how global frameworks of insecurity and vulnerability acquire unique cultural, gendered, and institutional dimensions in India. Practically, these insights are highly relevant for understanding the complex struggles women face in contemporary India, where patriarchy, neoliberalism, and socio-political inequalities continue to shape precarious lives.

For future research, the study suggests extending this comparative model to other South Asian women writers, such as Arundhati Roy and Kamila Shamsie, to explore how precarity, resistance, and resilience are re-imagined across transnational feminist literatures. Such comparative work would further deepen the dialogue between theory and literature, while

situating Indian and South Asian women's writing within broader global conversations on precarity and survival.

REFERENCES

1. Awasthi, S. (2016). Feminist concerns in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*. *International Journal of English Research*, 2(5), 63–66.
2. Bala, S. (2014). Gendered precarities: Indian women's narratives of survival. *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50(4), 439–451.
3. Basu, A. (2015). Resistance and survival: Reading women's narratives in Indian English fiction. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(2), 173–192.
4. Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*. Verso.
5. Butler, J. (2009). *Frames of war: When is life grievable?* Verso.
6. Chandra, N. (2018). Women and selfhood in Anita Nair's novels. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, 6(2), 182–187.
7. Chatterjee, P. (2010). Satire and subversion in Anuradha Marwah's fiction. *South Asian Review*, 31(3), 201–215.
8. Choudhury, A. (2017). Narrative strategies in contemporary Indian women novelists. *Asian Journal of Literature, Culture and Society*, 9(1), 41–58.
9. Ghosh, A. (2015). Women's writing and the politics of precarity. *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(1), 25–43.
10. Grewal, I. (1996). *Home and harem: Nation, gender, empire, and the cultures of travel*. Duke University Press.
11. Jain, J. (2003). *Writing women across cultures*. Rawat Publications.
12. John, M. E. (1999). *Discrepant dislocations: Feminism, theory, and postcolonial histories*. University of California Press.
13. Joshi, P. (2002). *In another country: Colonialism, culture, and the English novel in India*. Columbia University Press.
14. Kaul, S. (2014). Gender, power, and satire: Anuradha Marwah's *Dirty Picture*. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 49(2), 145–162.
15. Kumar, R. (2015). The politics of higher education: Institutional critique in Anuradha Marwah. *Indian Literature*, 59(2), 101–112.
16. Lorey, I. (2015). *State of insecurity: Government of the precarious*. Verso.
17. Marwah, A. (1993). *The higher education of Geetika Mehendiratta*. Kali for Women.
18. Marwah, A. (1998). *Dirty picture*. Rupa Publications.
19. Mehrotra, A. K. (2008). *An illustrated history of Indian literature in English*. Permanent Black.
20. Menon, N. (2012). *Seeing like a feminist*. Zubaan.
21. Mishra, P. (2012). *From the ruins of empire: The intellectuals who remade Asia*. Penguin.

22. Mohanty, C. T. (2003). *Feminism without borders: Decolonizing theory, practicing solidarity*. Duke University Press.
23. Mukherjee, M. (2002). *The perishable empire: Essays on Indian writing in English*. Oxford University Press.
24. Nair, A. (2001). *Ladies coupé*. Penguin Books India.
25. Nair, A. (2005). *Mistress*. Penguin Books India.
26. Nair, A. (2018). *Eating wasps*. Context/Westland Publications.
27. Narayan, K. (2015). Realism and representation in Anita Nair's fiction. *Literary Criterion*, 50(3), 72–85.
28. Roy, A. (2010). The aesthetics of vulnerability: Reading Indian women's narratives. *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 45(3), 321–337.
29. Standing, G. (2011). *The precariat: The new dangerous class*. Bloomsbury Academic.
30. Tharu, S., & Lalita, K. (Eds.). (1991). *Women writing in India: 600 B.C. to the present* (Vols. 1–2). Feminist Press.