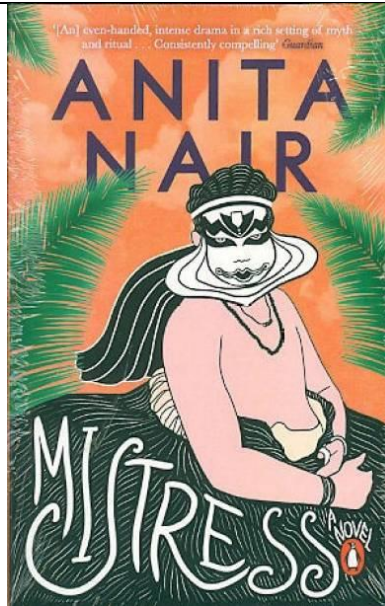


Feministic Approach with Ecosystem in the Select Novels of Anita Nair

M. Shanthi, Ph.D. Research Scholar and Dr. Vithyaprabha



Courtesy: <http://www.flipkart.com/author/anita-nair>

Abstract

This Paper deals with Eco feministic approach in the novels of Anita Nair namely *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupe* and *Mistress*. Ecofeminism defines movements and philosophies that link feminism with environment. This movement seeks to eliminate all forms of social injustice. Ecofeminism tells the oppression and domination of all subordinate groups (women, people of color, children, and the poor) and domination of nature (animals, land, water, air, etc.). All of these subordinate groups have been subject to harassment, domination, mistreatment, and colonization from the Western male-controlled society that emphasizes and values men. The aim and main objective of my present study is investigation and interpretation of the textual and conceptual essence of ecofeminism in brief in the select novels of Anita Nair. It is essential to discover relevant ecofeminism theories and perspectives through a detailed and vast literature survey.

Keywords: Anita Nair, Feminism, Nature, Ecosystem, Culture, Reformation, Movements

Introduction

Ecofeminism was coined as a word in the 1970s. It has its roots in literature also. It focuses on the natural connection between women and nature as exclusive and supports the concept of 'Mother Earth' and 'Femininity of Nature'. It argues that traditional wisdoms of

preserving and protecting nature as well as respecting women should be practiced in our contemporary society. Women participated in the environmental movements, specifically conservation much prior, beginning in the late nineteenth century and continuing into the early twentieth century. Women worked in efforts to protect wildlife, food, air and water. These efforts depended largely on new developments in the environmental movement. Anita Nair's novels: *The Better Man*, *Ladies Coupe* and *Mistress* have turned out to be a great success. It is the story of a women's search for strength, independence and women's conditions in a male dominated society and unveils the exploitation of nature, narrated with great insight, solidarity and humour.

Novels of Anita Nair

Anita Nair is a Bengaluru settled writer and ex-columnist from Kerala. She has published various novels, short stories, collection of poems, children's stories and travelogues. She is branded for her novel *Ladies Coupe* (2001), which was translated into more than twenty-five languages all over the sphere. It narrated the lives of six women who happened to share a coupe in a railway compartment. Her major novels on women, environment and empowerment that I have taken for the present paper are her first three novels, namely *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001) and *Mistress* (2005) which are majorly written in the premise of Kerala.

The Better Man

Anita Nair's first novel narrates the story of Mukundan, who after retirement from Government service, has come back to his native place Kaikurussi in Kerala. The novel records his journey through reminiscences, repentances and revelations. He takes back his old house where all his childhood memories lay and makes Bhasi, an outcast painter, to help him with the renewal, which starts questions on his evolution to become a better man like his father. Anita Nair's character portrayal, expressions and plot make the novel rich and earthy. The novel also stresses on one's connection to his land and heritages and the attachment which continues for a life time. The major female characters in the novel, their controlled and broken life, their yet achieved boldness and actualization are narrated along with the uncertain and confused life of Mukundan. Anita Nair, as a person, believes that there is no particular connection between women and nature that men do not possess. She, ideologically, does not support any kind of essentialism, but feels that women are more affected by both the positive and negative impacts of nature. According to her, "Whether it is environmental protection or anything, women are the primary agents of alter. Whatever rules are made, eventually, women are the practitioners of change as they are involved with the daily aspects of life in a daily basis. Women, whether they belong to rural or urban areas, they can initiate change".

Ladies Coupé

The novel portrays the life stories of six women travelling in a Ladies coupe, each of them describing their life to Akhila, the protagonist, who is travelling to find out what she really wants in life. Akhila is a scapegoat for her family, as she has taken all the responsibility of her mother and siblings when her father died. Even though she is an income generating source, most of the time she is not receiving social independence. Aged forty-five and the background demanding her to be a spinster, she feels lost without having a companion and getting exploited by her sister. The novel roams through the memories of Akhila, interconnected by the story telling of fellow passengers and their empathy towards each other. The Coupe becomes a

platform for them to express themselves and support each other. A bond of sisterhood is suddenly created among the women from different caste, class and age. The story of Marikolanthu, a Dalit woman, remains unique and reveals the multiple layers of exploitation she has faced in her life by being a woman, minor, Dalit, and poor. Akhila finally decides to resume her old romantic relationship and take a bold stand in her life. The novel deals with such issues by asking fundamental questions that not only shake the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in a traditional society, but also imply the existence of an alternative reality.

Mistress

In this novel Nair has brought to the fore the issue of marital rape, which is often not discussed in public and which does not necessarily amount to violence under the law, because it is the husband who is the perpetrator. Women have been living in pain and silence for ages as victims of male dominance and sexual violence. Anita Nair portrays how women are oppressed and dominated by men through this novel. The novel roams around the contradicting and complimentary life situations of travel writer Christopher Stewart, a Kathakali dancer whom he meets in Kerala named Koman, and the niece of Koman, Radha, who happened to be locked up into the traditional housewife's role. Stewart's and Radha's affection for each other, perplexed situation of Radha's husband Shyam and Koman's life story and his relationships, are slowly revealed in the story. The title of the novel *Mistress* itself states the dubious status of a woman who is opted out from the prime position. The three major female characters in the novel namely Saadiya, Angela and Radha who belong to different time and space, yet connected to one another, as they can be roughly introduced as Koman's mother, are getting affected by the shift of environment from their natal place to marital life. But they deserve their distinctive identity that is not essentially attached to these titles in the novel. While defining them, it is crucial to comprehend how their identity as 'woman' in the society, devoid of space and time, is inevitable in analyzing their actions and reactions. Finally, she rejects both Shyam and Chris and in doing so, releases herself from the roles of wife and mistress but keep her urban baby, she gives her baby a maternal identity through the maternal care only, by rendering it 'fatherless'. In Eco feminist terms, Shyam sees nature or woman as a resource for the benefit of man. Both nature and women represent the generative powers of fertility and birth. But it exists as a reflection of nature through the reproductive and productive work of giving birth to children, feeding them and ensuring their healthy growth. Shyam runs a resort. He knows that Radha is feminine, but he views her as a passive resource, a decorative asset, in addition to be a material asset. He objectifies her by classifying her mentally as 'soiled goods', and yet she retains considerable value for him in terms of the wealth she owns.

Conclusion

In the three novels we discussed, Anita Nair brings into focus the issue of self-realization. In addition, *Mistress* focuses on domestic sexual violence. Though Anita Nair is not a feminist, her stories delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. They are entangled in their suffering and rebellion born of that pain, and convey a message of hope, through the change that is out there and can become possible through one's courage and initiative. Nair's India suffers from a system of sex-role stereotyping and oppression of women that exist under patriarchal social organization. Of course, patriarchy, in its different forms, has tried in many ways to repress, debase and humiliate women especially

through the images represented in cultural and traditional forms. These novels raise the question whether the role of an Indian woman as a representative of other women, living under oppressive male-controlled systems in relation to culture resistance, should be restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers.

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M. Shanthi

Ph.D. Research Scholar
Nehru Arts and Science College
Coimbatore
shanthi.maruthachalam@srec.ac.in

Dr. Vithyaprabha

Professor & Head
Dept. of English
Dr. N. G. P. Arts and Science College
Coimbat