

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* as a Voice of Suffering Women in Postcolonial Literature

R. Ravichandiran
Assistant Professor
Department of English
Thanthai Hans Roever College
Perambalur
rajeravi100@gmail.com

Abstract

Anita Nair is a famous feminist of this age. Through her books she had proved it, especially in *Ladies Coupe*. In this particular work she brings out the life of 5 differently abandoned women, who have been victims of the male dominated society. Their life brings out the difficulties of women in the society. The place they possess in family and societal frame work draws us towards the life of women in the postcolonial India.

Ladies Coupe published in 2001 has been very successful in understanding how society has been crucial and cruel in designing the life of these 5 main characters including protagonist, representing the majority of suffering women. The book begins with the story of these 5 women but ends with the imagination of the protagonist about her future. Every character faces different challenges and different problems. Their fight to stand is a great inspirational aspect of this fiction. It is a reflection of Anita Nair's own experience in this society.

No feminist would like to see a woman struggling for her life. So as a feminist Nair gives this book for the self-satisfaction of the suffering women. As it is a voice suffering women it speaks on behalf of suffering women. Being in advanced 21st century, the place of women in society is very backward. The problems of women in the society are divided in to five types and each represented by each character who are all struggling for their life in the society.

Introduction

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* follows the journey of 5 middle-aged women along with the protagonist, Akhila who is in search of independence. This book was published in 2001. It represents the life of women in India, who are defeated by fate and society.

Nair is the author of bestselling novels "The Better Man" and "Ladies coupe", poetry collection of "Malabar Mind", a collection of short stories "Satyr of Subway" and Eleven other

stories and has written two children's books, 'The Puffin Book of world Myths and Legends'. Anita Nair is a novelist, poet, travel writer, essayist, short story writer and writer of stories for children. Anita Nair was working as the creative director of an advertising agency in Bangalore when she wrote her first book, a collection of short stories called *Satyr of the Subway*, which she sold to Har-Anand Press. The book won her a fellowship from the *Virginia Center for the Creative Arts*.

The novel *Ladies Coupe* is about women's conditions in a male dominated society. *Ladies Coupe* (2001) was rated as one of 2002's top five books of the year and was translated into more than twenty-five languages around the world.

Nair has also written a few other books, such as *Mistress* (2003), *Adventures of Nonu, the Skating Squirrel* (2006), *Living Next Door to Alise* (2007) and *Magical Indian Myths* (2008). She was recipient of Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in May 2012 for her contribution to Literature and Culture. She was also appointed as Global ambassador for Women for Expo May 2015.

Anita Nair is one of India's popular female writers. She depicts through her expression, the present condition of women in society. She displays the real life of the suffering women and makes the reader to feel as it is a real incident of the day to day society.

In the novel, *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair develops deep into the minds of the main characters and produced an excellent novel. All the main characters are women in this novel and they express their innermost hope, goal, wishes, emotions, and experiences in their life. Akhila, a Brahmin spinster of forty- five years old is the protagonist of the novel.

Akhila obeys the elder without making any objection as like her mother. When Akhila finished her pre-university course, her parents considered her education was completed and expected her to find turn all the house-keeping abilities in preparation for the day she should be married. It shows that where the restrictions start for the women.

Akhila's mother used to say that the wife is inferior to the husband. It is revealed through her words, and it will be the best example to know how Nair has depicted the life of suffering women in the society.

It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way there can be no strife, no disharmony. it is when one wants to prove one's equality that there is warring and sparring the time. (LC 14)

Anita Nair uses certain character like Akhila's mother, to express how women are strong conservatives of the structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Akhila's mother is a conservative and orthodox, mother, devoted wife her own theory that a wife is always inferior to her husband. She is a sort of women who never takes decision on her own but leaves all decisions to her husband for she believes, "He know the best" (LC 14). According to her, a good wife learns to put her husband's interest before anyone else's, even her father's.

Akhila's life before and after her father's death is entirely different. Akhila wanted to live a life of independence but becomes a failure because of her family. Akhila is conventional while her father is alive.

After her father's death Akhila took the job of supporting her family. When Akhila's father died, two things happened: Sundays became just another day of the work and Akhila became the man of the family. She got a job of clerk in the income tax department. She becomes the pillar and breadwinner of the family. Her responsibilities had increased. She educated her brother, Narayan and Narsimman.

Narsimman decided to get married. Akhila helped Narsimman to marry and she also helps her sister Padma to get married in a respected family. But no one in the society is thinking of her marriage and no one wants to hear that she has a mind of her own. Akhila is not given opportunity to get married and to have family of her own. This leads Akhila to commit some immoral activities. It is only the result of the male dominated society which treated Akhila as a weak gender.

Being an educated woman, Margaret Shanthi is another example for domestic abuse in this novel who suffers without independence in her domestic life. Margaret completed her M.Sc. in chemistry with a gold medal. This shows that she was excellent at her academic standard. She falls in love with Ebenezar Paulraj at first sight in the church youth group meeting. He was a principal of a reputed school. He also attracted towards her. Ebenezar and Margaret got married. Ebenezar starts to thrust upon his supremacy over her. And he treats her as like a slave which makes her to suffer a lot.

Prabha Devi is another traveler. Anita Nair has chosen the character of Prabha Devi to emphasis this issue, when Prabha Devi is born her father sighs, as it would be a hindrance for his business progress as he says, "Has this baby, apart from reining my business plans, added your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance" (LC 169). These words of Prabha Devi's father show that how the society reacts with the female gender however it s child.

Sharmila is another educated woman in this novel who cannot enjoy her own freedom and suffers from male domination. She is a school friend of Prabha Devi. Prabha Devi went along with her husband Jagdeesh on a business trip to New York. On their way back, she met her friend, Sharmila in Bombay airport. She was the most brilliant student in her school. Everyone had said that she was destined for great things. Everyone thought that she would be either a doctor or an IAS officer. But Prabha Devi was shocked to see her friend with sweat dotting brow, lank hair, droopy mouth, chained to a fractious toddler in a stroller and a mother-in-law who darted suspicious glances at everyone and everything. It proves the place of women in the society.

Janaki, another important character in this novel is quiet elder to Akhila. She is a pampered wife and a confused mother. Janaki was eighteen and Prabhakar was twenty-seven when they were married on the basis of the matching of their horoscopes. Janaki did not know what was expected of him. Her mother and aunts taught her all the skill of marriage-cooking, cleaning, sewing, pickling, etc., initially she was unable to meet her husband Prabhakar's sexual needs. She didn't like being touched by her husband. She felt only revulsion. She began to fear that if she did not give him what he wanted, he would go looking for it elsewhere. She decided not to remain cold towards her husband. As years passed by she became very loving towards her husband. Though she is satisfied with her life, she is at the dissatisfied which all human beings have at a certain age woman. Janaki's assertion fails to assure Akhila. What Janaki says appears to be absolute in today's changing times. These matters too show the suffering of the people who has born in the female gender.

Sheela, another traveler is a fourteen years old teenager, studying ninth standard. Anita Nair has not only brought out the need to assert the individuality of the female selfhood but also has finally brought out the issue of female child abuse through the character portrayal of Sheela. She has exceptional perceptive observation. She can understand even the subtle things around her. Sheela is very fond of her mother's mother, calling her Ammma. The old woman is treated very harshly by her sons and their wives. It is so sad that the women are suffering by the women due to the condition of the society.

Marikolanthu is an example for "sex objects". She is a realistic picture of the humble and miserable woman on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. Even as a girl she is denied to be sent to the town school as her mother says, "It's not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself... there is too much risk" (LC 215).

Men and women are like two wheels in a cycle. So they must be treated with equal importance. They should be united and should work together. One is not superior or inferior to other. At the same time, women should not misuse if the freedom is given to them. They must

keep themselves away from the vices. The women should learn to conquer their fears and assert themselves. Another activist, Margaret Sanger says that no woman can call herself free who does not control her own body. According to the above mentioned quote, women must control themselves. They must be aware of their rights and responsibilities towards their family and society. They should plan their own life, family and career. If this happens, our nation and world will become the happiest one.

This attempt is to conclude with the words of Marikolanthu in the novel, *Ladies Coupe*. “Women are not weak women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vain of strength in her. It does not show itself naturally” (LC 209-210). And it can be taken as the voice of suffering women on the male dominating society by Nair. And therefore, women should not be made weaker by the society. No society can ever progress without an active participation of women who are an integral part of human civilization in its overall development. Everyone can look forward to the universalization of women. Only then women can be entirely brought into the dominant discourse and feminisms’ search for autonomy will be possible. Nair speaks on behalf of suffering women in this novel thus it is as the voce of suffering women.

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