

**A Stance of New Women:
A Textual Reading of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe***

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Abstract

Ladies Coupe is a novel of Anita Nair, discusses the major problems faced by her woman character Akhila from a feministic perspective. This research paper aims to explore Akhila's journey to attain her real 'self'. At the end, after a prolonged struggle and attainment of freedom, she learns to undo the social and psychological boundaries by standing with determination. She assumes her role as that of a new woman, with daring and rebellious attributes.

Keywords: Feminism, Patriarchy, Sufferings, Crisis, New women, Self and Society.

Introduction

Anita Nair is a famous Indian English writer. She wrote almost all the genres of literature. She wrote novels, short stories, poems, essays, children's stories, plays and travelogues. She is notable for her novels titled *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe*. Her works of fiction have been translated into twenty one languages. Anita Nair, as a female novelist, has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. All the characters in *Ladies Coupe* and the major and minor women characters in *Mistress* portray the idea of male domination. Sometimes owing to the compelling patriarchal situation in their social and domestic life, women are forcibly pushed into the trap by their own protectors. Portraying such feministic perspective has gained her the title Feminist. Although she deals with feministic perspective, she pays attention to Indian tradition and culture.

Ladies Coupe

The novel *Ladies Coupe* begins with the narration of the major character named, Akhila in a railway station. The whole novel is about Akhila's journey and her contacts with different people. She happens to meet people with different nature and different backdrops in the compartment. All the women characters who travel with her in the particular compartment, share their life experiences which help Akhila to find her own identity. It also fostered her to discover answers for her question "Can a woman live happily alone without a man's support." (LC 21).

The novel begins with a clear picture of the protagonist, Akilandeswari. She is the perfect example of being a victim of gender bias. Akhila is a forty-five year old spinster who acts as the head of her family discharging duties like a man, obeying her mother as a dutiful daughter, caring nieces and nephews as an aunty, sacrificing her entire life to her siblings as a sister and a

loyal employee in the work place. But she is conscious that she is a person with no identity of her own. Akhila loses her father at the early age and his death compels Akhila to take care of her family. Akhila does not get affection or friendly treatment from her own family. At certain point she is disgusted and wanted to live a life of her own. She prepares herself to get out of the responsibilities to which she has been bound for many years.

Akhila's unexpected encounter with her school friend Karpagam, who was a widow. Her meet with Karpagam becomes a turning point in Akhila's life. As the outcome of their meeting, Akhila runs out of her family and reaches the railway station and buys a one-way ticket to Kanyakumari. Thereby, starts her own journey. During the journey, she has co-passengers, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margret Shanti, Marikolanthu and Sheela imbibed with different mind sets and life experiences. Their stories help Akhila to introspect her life and find the true meaning and the purpose of life.

Discussion

Anita Nair is considered as a unique artist whose works are considered to be a revolt against conventions and norms practiced in the Indian society. Her novel contains social and political issues reflecting women's struggles in their daily lives. Her works act as a catalyst by creating awareness to feministic issues. The novelist is dogmatic and believes that the problem of identity crisis is very much connected with the problem of one's existence. She tries to reveal the moral breakdown of modern society in which a woman longs for satisfaction of her needs. Ideologies of modern Indian feminists hold multi-faceted perspectives upon the Indian society including its economic and cultural conditions. The feminist ideologies explain the search for self-identity and emphasize on transformation. Ashok Kumar rightly observes the condition of women in one of his essays as, "The new woman, however, is a compulsive emergence out of the existing Indian ethos and not just a blind imitation. It is not a transplant but the product of changes going on everywhere" (17:2001) Anita Nair's novels portray women who have undergone changes. They are new women, conscious of their state and with a readiness to fight for their right and undergo changes that would pronounce them to be new women. As Malati Mather cites: "Writing by women can be seen to reflect their awareness and understanding of social and political issues as well as a commitment to self and all those who belong to the fraternity of their sisterhood that transcend actual, disciplinary and theoretical limitations".(12)

In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila, a woman who is in search for 'self' through Independence. The best years of Akhila's life fade away looking after her kid sister Padma and two brothers, Narayan and Narsi. She cherishes her relationship with Hari who wishes to marry her, but she refuses as he is younger than her. She is afraid of society, so she lets the relationship die with reluctance that eventually causes her agony. One day, in the ladies' compartment, she finds five women passengers. In all their lives, one could witness a multifaceted gender pattern swaging between revolt and resolution. Talking to them and listening to their stories, she in builds a confidence to choose a life without obtaining permissions from her brothers as insisted always by her mother. She determines not only to make her own way but also to choose the man whom she liked earlier. After hearing the stories of her co-passengers, Akhila finds an answer to the most disturbing question of her life: "Can a woman live by herself?" (LC21). She understands that

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ultimately human relationships assure nothing but entrapment of gender. She realizes the value of freedom. Her definition of 'body' and 'self' is eventuated by her proposed sexual intimacy with Vinod, a stranger whom she meets in Kanyakumari. Finally, she takes a crucial decision of calling Hari for a reunion.

Age difference would no more stand as a barrier between them. Anita Nair views her sufferings from gender perspective and makes a lucid point about mothers' indifferent attitude towards her daughter. Akhila's mother is unsympathetic and rude towards her while compelling her to obey her brothers. The obedient daughter now assumes a new form- daring and revolting – a change needed for any Indian woman to metamorphose psychologically to be a new woman.

Summation

All the stories of Akhila's co-passengers makes her wonder why men are the total cause for their sufferings. She also doubts whether women could live without men's support. The constant retrospection and ponder upon the lives of women that she knew, has provided solution for her question. She explores through the labyrinth of her inner psyche to comprehend who she is. The discovery of her 'self' eventually enables her to discover her own identity as new woman. According to feminists' theory, women do not need a man to support them financially and they are conscious of their state to fight for their rights. Even if they have to walk out of marital life, they continue to love their children and determine living for them. A few of them compromise with their husband and prolong their relationship asserting their identity and claiming self-respect. Anita Nair's fiction is a protest against the patriarchal system of oppression and exploitation. It is also a depiction of her women characters finding their real 'self' as worthy.

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