

REVIEW ON FEMINIST PORTRAYED IN THE NOVEL OF ANITA NAIR

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ABSTRACT

Anita Nair is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who addresses the dilemma of Indian woman. Anita Nair is a bestselling author of fiction and poetry in India. Novels in Sight, The Better Man and Ladies Coupe translated into 21 languages. The Common themes ranging from her focus on fear, suppression, repression, Disappointment, sexuality, freedom, alienation, identity crisis, caste discrimination, Transgression, infidelity of the mother, emotional, social, psychological and emotional insecurity Anita Nair is very interested in the inner strength and desires of Female. It describes the status of women in families and in society. Anita Nair, through her famous novel, Ladies Coupe, elegantly projects the trials and tribulations of the Protagonist and her last self-affirmation, with five female characters. The present paper shows the truth that women should maintain their dignity and fulfill their wishes.

INTRODUCTION

Modern feminist tendencies in the West go beyond the insignificant politics of equal rights and Opportunities. We see that "feminism" or the liberation of women is a concept that clearly misses Definition, because it depends on the culture of the individual, the place to which he belongs and the Until now you can practice your feminist ideals. In my opinion, Indian feminism seems to follow an intermediate path between the extremist feminist radical position and the liberal position feminist, socialist and cultural positions.

The elongated and excruciating affliction of women, the bitter struggle for the exclusion of the idea of equal pay for equal work, the continuing battles for the assertion of dignity and aspirations are some of the visible marks to attain autonomy that has persisted and that woman had to fight for inspire of the commitments they were made under circumstances. Feminist situation in India possess a disparate dispensation. Indian society has always been highly hierarchical. The several hierarchies within the family concretizing age, sex and ordinal position, affable and fine relationship or within the community referring to the caste lineage, learning, occupation and relationship with ruling power have been maintained very strictly.

It was mainly after the Women's Liberation Movement of the late 1960s that the existing feminist principles evolved and the female voice was heard with special concern. The spotlight of the literary studies was shifted to women's writing with a view to re-reading, revisioning and re-interpreting it in the light of long existing gender bias and sexual politics in history, culture, society, family, language and literature.

Feminism portrayed in 'Ladies Coupe

Postcolonial feminist literature has always carried the heavy burden of dealing with, layers of misinterpretation of traditions and religions. At the centre of this dilemma is the role of woman and her (in) dependence, economically and socially. The more traditional a society is, the more problematic is the question of women's emancipation and therefore, the more passionate its women writers are. No wonder then, that Anita Nair's engrossing novel 'Ladies Coupe' raises the questions about the role of woman in contemporary postcolonial India. India suffers from a system of sex – role stereotyping and oppressing of woman that exist under patriarchal social organization. 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. The novel 'Ladies coupe' deals with such issues by asking fundamental questions that not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in a traditional society, but also imply the existence of an alternative reality. The novel questions whether the role of Indian woman living under oppressive patriarchal systems should be restricted only to their roles as wives and mothers. In such a world, woman's role is limited to reproduction regardless of her own desires and needs.

Anita Nair's imagination terms with stories that leap out like tiny fish, struggling to escape a fisherman's basket. As though to acknowledge the fact, she has signaled that her book is "a novel in parts", stringing together a collection of short stories than in going for the long haul. Through the 'ladies compartment' or coupe, Anita Nair shares the experience of her female characters with the readers. She places her protagonist in a cross – cultural scenario. She explores the immigrant sensibility, duality and flexible identity. Her character come from all the parts of the world with divergent social, religious and cultural preoccupations. She explores the multiplicity of themes which centre around her characters' struggle to outgrow traditionally inherited cultural values. Her women character are docile creatures who believe in wrestling with their own problems rather than trying to dominate their male counterparts.

The Brahmin heroine, Akhila, whose life has been taken out of her control, is a 45 year old 'spinster' daughter, sister aunt and the only provider of her family. The story is told in first person by Akhila, the protagonist, who is at first presented as a sympathetic figure : she sacrificed her life's dreams to maintain a modicum of normalcy for her sister and two brothers after her father was struck by a passing commuter bus. She becomes a woman who has always been the backbone of impossible demanding family until the day she gets herself a one-way ticket to a resort town, a journey that will ultimately make her a different woman.

"So this then is Akhila. Fortyfive years old. Sans rose - coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect". (Pg. 02) This is the beginning of a journey of self – discovery and life altering changes. At 45, Akhila awakes one day with a 'Fight – or flight' notion. So she boards a train's ladies coupe (a segregated, 2nd class compartment found on most overnight Indian trains until 1998) and journeys from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. After her father's death, she became the head of her family's household, breadwinner and martyr. She has sacrificed her desires to fulfill her family's wants and needs.

In the Ladies Coupe she meets five women each of whom has a story to tell. The stories are all an attempt to answer Akhila's question : Can a woman stay single and be happy at the same time ? The central character, as the story progresses, discovers that she had never been living for herself, but for others, governed by social pressures. Akhila

had badly neglected her 'real' self. But now she decides to come out of the nest because life has become intolerable for her. Thus, the novel deals with the leading character shedding off her mask, discovering herself and starting living for herself.

Akhila's mother Amma had her own theories on what a good wife ought to be like. She rejects the idea of equal marriage.

Amma is of the view that if one wants a peace and harmony in their marital relationship, the wife should accept to be inferior to her husband.

Amma insisted Akhila to draw the kolam just outside the front doorstep every morning.

"That's how a home is judged, a true wife is she whose virtues match her home".

But Akhila hated the kolams, for not knowing what her real life would be like. (Pg. 49).

Her siblings insensitivity bogs her down and she develops a keen urge to find whatever little that remains of the real woman in her, prompting her to undertake a distant journey to Kanyakumari. On the train she finds herself in a ladies coupe with five other women. She opens her to them just as they do to her. What develops is a camaraderie so strong and a bonding so rare that they reveal their deepest thoughts and darkest secrets. The roles these five women portray are our stereotypical Indian womens roles, those of the wives with the lost identities, women who have lost their innocence because of evil men, women who have silently bore the burden of running their households, while their families have all but forgotten their needs.

But in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe, the six women retain this unfair advantage, as they ponder over the question, thrown down like a tantalizing black leather gauntlet in the centre of the carriage by the protagonist Akhila : "Can a woman cope alone ?" In the sisterhood of their privileged space, the women bare their souls freely to each other, vent their resentment against a male dominated world, recall their small victories and minor acts revenge against the men who have dominated or used them.

Akhila is, in fact, going away from all her responsibilities in life and this is necessary, as she has to be alone now, away from all social pressures. Up to an extent, she can be termed as escaping from her responsibilities and duties for the time being, but she has already fulfilled her duties towards her family and now it is time for her to be alone.

As her journey progresses to the South India, the stories unfold ranging from the ordinary to bizarre. Akhila meets her co – passengers, all women. All of them can be termed as her own altered egos, as they, in one way or the other present her own need for independence and self discovery.

Anita Nair narrates her stories from a wide variety of perspectives, concentrating upon the concept of self within a large society. She has a special eye on characters who are adventurers and explorers, rather than refugees and outcastes and are part and parcel of the new changing society. Anita Nair concentrated on the emotional, intellectual and physical responses of a group of characters when they are placed in a situation not routine to them. She feels that psychic violence leaves a stronger impact on than mind then physical violence on the body. Therefore, her women characters make for interesting psychological studies. There is a continuous urge in her women to build up their

fragmented life and to express their affirmation to life. True enough, while they attempt to do so, they appear abnormal in their behaviour but this is only a bid to live life on their own terms.

The protagonists and other five women characters not only endure life's hardships stoically but in the process also emerge stronger, providing sustenance and equilibrium to the entire community. On the contrary, they are docile and submissive simultaneously exhibiting the courage and capability to wrestle with the problems of life for sake or survival yet they do not compromise with conventionality. The story of the various co-passengers refer to their personal crises such as loneliness, ill treatment, rape, abortion, madness, betrayal and how each one coped with them.

Janaki, the oldest of them, a dutiful wife says.

"I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there ways my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son.

Waiting to take off from where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile". (Pg 22)

Anita Nair's characters strive to attain their space in a male congested society.

Margaret emerges as a complex blend of the 'silent women' and 'rebellious woman". Her individual identity was controlled by her husband.

Making her toy with the idea of revenge, tired of her husband's domination, she seeks freedom in an unusual fashion. She feeds her husband with irresistible delicacies, she feeds him, until he is fat thereby reducing him to a caricature of his former self.

Prabha – Devi is a typical example of a woman who loses her identity and a sense of self-worth several years down the marriage line.

It is one day, while watching the swimming pool that she decides to again be her own self. As she slides into the swimming pool, the water touches her body and she gets a feeling of liberation. For too long she had denied herself the pleasure of being herself. Nair bring out the urge present in every woman to experience liberty and freedom. Marikolanthu, another passenger in Coupe, admits that she was raped. Though no fault of hers she was blamed and traumatized for making herself available. She decides to fight back, takes revenge and feels relaxed and content. In spite of the onslaughts of fate Marikolanthu emerges as a strong independent woman trying to strike an equilibrium in her otherwise chaotic life.

Conclusion:-

Akhila ponders on all the stories that she has heard, yet undecided about her line of action. Was she to follow Sheela Vasudevan, a young girl of 14 who understood the meaning of liberty and did exactly what she wanted? Akhila also thinks, if Prabha Devi can triumph over her innate timidity and rise above the traditions to float, she can also do the same and that she too must learn to move on with tide of life rather than be cast on its banks.

Akhila was suddenly struck by the condition of individual lives. This sets Akhila thinking that the other women are merely patterns of consciousness of a single psyche. All these women, in one way or another, advise Akhila to go against social pressures and to discover herself. All of them are mates not only in her physical journey in the ladies compartment of the train, ladies coupe, but also in her spiritual and psychological journey.

The answer to the question whether a woman can survive alone, is yes, she can, the security provided by marriages is illusory. Women must be courageous and claim their own lives and possibilities. The coupe becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from patriarchy, one that is not characterized by false binaries. In the novel `Ladies Coupe`, Nair has created Akhila's character which is universal. Akhila symbolizes the Indian woman whose inner strength when evoked can be an epitome of strength and courage.

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