



# Transformation of Regional Identity: A Boon or bane in context to Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

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## Abstract

In India, the twenty-first century has brought in its wake various transformations in cultural, political, religious, economic and social domains as the impact of modernity and globalization is manifested. But, these changes have also led the generation to follow the wrong doings which has led into trouble of their own alongwith the family members and the society. Modernity and globalization impact all other nation as well, the process of “diffusion, homogenization and integration” (Sivaramakrishnan and Agarwal 8) via the merging of regional and national boundaries. Hence, each and every individual in India today, has become ‘the subject’ of development and modernization in danger of reaching the destination of erasing the cultural and regional boundaries, at the micro level. Indian literature plays an important role in creating an awareness of the necessity of transformations and emphasizes the cause and consequences, in different contexts, of these transitions. It also shows how these changes affect an individual. As a part of such an endeavour, this paper attempts to discuss the transformation of religious and regional identities of the orthodox Brahmin communities in India, and the disadvantages of the changes with the focus on Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. This paper analyses on the important character of the novel, Akhila, a spinster, to evince the extrication of women from their entanglement in conventional roles and to what extent she has changed her personality. The narrative of this novel depicts how Akhila being born in a traditional orthodox Brahmin family dismantle and subvert the firmly established conservative brahminical values, ethics and customs to converge with the changing egalitarian modern society of India but had led herself into being a prostitute which is a curse to herself being born in a Brahmin family.

Keywords: Anita Nair, Identity, values, customs, egalitarian society.

## Introduction

Indian women during colonization have undergone the highest domination of the patriarchal society. Rules were imposed extensively on the women with different rules and regulations in each region and caste. The regulations were imposed mainly on the Brahmin women, compared to women from other marginalized castes which can be seen even in today's present society. The Brahmin women are imposed with all the society rules to be followed strictly as they need to show the position of the Brahmins high in the society. To maintain the dogmas of caste, the Brahmin women remain under suppression and they remain silent not raising their voice in the patriarchal society. They have played a voiceless role in the society in order to maintain the highest position in society being born as a Brahmin woman. It has been considered by many, that Brahmin women are "cowardly, frightened, superstitious and want to keep away from all change" (Rao 177). But now the time has come to change such fixed personalities with the greater awareness of education and the impact and influence of modernization and globalization. In present times, the women including Brahmin women who are born in orthodox families have decided to live an independent life with their own rules. They have decided to raise their voice against the wishes which they think should not be followed by them. Illogical thinking is not at all accepted by them. They have approached towards a wider space and identity moving away from the regional and religious identities. "Voice" is the main dynamic to break the orthodox rules of traditional families which can be seen in the character Akhila.

In Hindu religious mythology, women are presented as mere symbols of 'victim-bodies' (Bacchetta 2). This has been practiced down the ages not only in India but throughout the world. Today, in India, due to the impact of Women's Reform Movement; Women's Liberation Movement and the Feminist Movement from the West have revealed the fact that women can excel on par with the patriarchal, if provided an opportunity. These movements have made women to establish their own identity and raise their voice against the domination they face following the traditional stereotypes of a society. Changes are necessary for a girl who is born in orthodox family, but she has to see her society although being modern. Westernization has not taught us to lead ourselves into wrong doings. It is we, the generation who has led our lives go as we like following the westernization. People blame the western people for the change but we, the Indians has denied to follow our own culture and has changed the traditional rituals. The novel selected for the study shift between the traditional Brahmin society of India and the

modern transformed Brahmin society of India set in the time frame of 1930s and shows how Akhila has changed her personality denying to follow the traditional rituals and turning into a prostitute to enjoy her desires.

## Discussion

Akhila being born in a traditional orthodox family is always being taught to be submissive in nature. But certain unexpected twists and turns in her life brought the transition in her character. She was raised up with all the traditional values of the Brahmin society and was asked to be dutiful in nature towards her family and as a wife in future. She grew up learning all the values and customs of the society and never reciprocated against the stereotype beliefs. Akhila's mother Chandra was traditionally submissive and never complaint against her slavery. She had input the same lesson in her daughter to be submissive and belief her husband as 'God' after her marriage. Akhila lived in complete loss of her identity as she obeyed her mother's teachings and endured the pain till the twists came in her life. Akhila's mother on the other hand accepted her dominance.

Due to the impact of globalization, the younger generation denies to follow all the traditional beliefs being followed at homes. They need reason to each traditional practice to be followed. Due to the changing times, even practices are changed in traditional orthodox Brahmin family. Girls are being education in place of thinking of their marriage right at the age of 12. Akhila have challenged the aforementioned traditional manner of living life. With her character, one could see the gradual change as the traditional ways and customs and beliefs lose their significance and sacredness to the upcoming generation. Akhila being a Brahmin had mingle with other caste women and have discussed her problems and decided to fight for her identity. Education plays an important role in instilling moral values in the minds of the people and so has replaces religion in contemporary society. Neglecting one's religion practice does not mean we disrespect that religion but following every belief blindly doesnot makes any logical sense in today's times. One should respect the religious practices but they should not be forced to follow the practice if they don't will to do so. In today's era, one should live fight for their identity and against the ill practices if anything is being done in front of them. People should be educated to learn the right and wrong doings in place of blindly following the religious practices. Akhila, the eldest daughter of Chandra, is an educated woman and has also been employed as a clerk. Since her father has died when she was 19, she was willingly or unwillingly forced into the role of a breadwinner and the head of her family. At this time, her dreams were shattered and taking the household duties of her family she forgot that she was a woman.

Her dream of getting married was shattered and till the age of 36, she has been burdened with all the household responsibilities. In the minds of her siblings and her mother she was the only one to work, so no one reminded her of her marriage.

“In their minds Akhila had ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster. She longed for a life before she was 30 years. But she was 34, still remained the same.”(Nair 77).

Consequently, she has been made into a spinster by her own family members by suppressing her emotions and feelings. They have adapted the social norms to their selfish ends, in forcing her to earn for the family, which is against the Brahmin ethics. As per the tamil Brahmin culture, women are not allowed to work outside and they are married off at a tender age. But, in the case of Akhila, everything worked opposite. Akhila being working on for her family forgot that she was a woman. She realized that she had lost her self- identity. “The name Akhila no more existed” (Nair 85).

Once she realizes that she has lost her self-identity, Akhila decides to step out of the shield that has confined her so far. She begins to venture into the outer world in search of her identity. Her customs, religion and culture stand as an obstacle on her way to discover her'self”. So to prove her individuality she has stripped away her caste. She bravely fights against the orthodox beliefs and decides to move on. She decides to live for herself, forming a new identity of herself. She has moved away from the Brahmin community after the death of her mother. She has made conversation with other people, shares her food, tastes egg which is considered non – vegetarian food, spends weekend with her boyfriend, keeps away from the rituals and did everything a Brahmin girl dared not to do. Her sister raised against the change of Akhila's behavior but she ignored her sister's religious ethics. Akhila even didn't participated in the religious bhajans. She transformed herself with colourful dresses which she had left long before. She decided to live a life apart from living for others and working day and night to feed her family. She learnt her identity as a woman which was lost long before after the death of her father. Akhila realized her importance after she met the other ladies in the coupe. All the ladies suggested living her life without a man except one, Janaki. They suggested her to try once a life without marriage where she has violated the rules against the Brahmin ethics. Akhila decides to live the life without marriage and for this she completely turned her personality into being a prostitute. She wanted men for her physical needs but denied of marriage. She turned into a complete change personality at the end of the novel.

## Conclusion

Adopting westernization culture is not harmful but forgetting and not maintaining our own culture is a shame on us. The foreigners have never taught us to abolish our own traditions. Westernization is dominating today's minds and thoughts and forcing them to erode the Indian culture which is a lost to us. In future, we won't be able to save our own culture. In the novel, Akhila has changed her complete appearance and personality to become a modern lady but it was wrong. She should have changed for herself with modern thoughts but not changing her personality as prostitute. She believed the traditional practices as a burden on her. Transforming the practices of the Brahmin society was a good step in Akhila but not following the right path was a shame for her. People should change with modern world but should not leave the practices which should be genuinely followed in any religion. The regional identity should be maintained by each person. Our culture has a scientific explanation about most of the practices that has been followed for generations.

## Works cited

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