



FEMINISM: EXPLORATIONS IN ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE*.

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**ABSTRACT**

Anita Nair is a living postmodern Indian woman writer in English. As a woman writer, she goes deep into the inner mind of the miserable women and brings to light their issues, which are the outcome of Indian women's consciousness and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society. Anita Nair's "Ladies Coupe" has turned out to be a great success. It is the story of a women's search for freedom and women's position in a male dominated society. This paper tries to point out how Anita Nair projects Indian feminism and attitude through women characters in her novels.

Keywords: Feminism, Patriarchy, Self-identity.

Literature helps the society to communicate. It communicates the social, political, economic or religious situation of the society in which it is set. Literature reflects the society and serves as a mirror in which members of the society can look at themselves and see the need for positive change. It criticizes and portrays the moral standard of the society and provokes the people to rebel against the useless moral codes.

The Indian Writing in English from its inception is closely connected with the growth and development of India as a nation. Indian English Literature relates to that body of work by writers from India, who pen strictly in the English language and whose native or co-native language could be one of the several regional and native languages of India.

Wide ranges of themes are dealt in Indian Writing in English. This literature reflects Indian culture, tradition, social values and even Indian history through the depiction of life in India. Feminism of all the shades, liberal, socialist and radical, supports anti-discrimination and takes interest in women's welfare and employment. In *Defining Women*, Linda Mc Dowell and Rosemary Pringle point out "the emancipation of women through their incorporation into socialized production" (126).

The history of feminism is divided into three waves of feminism. The first-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity from 1910s to 1950s. It primarily focuses on gaining the right of women's suffrage. This phase gave more importance for women's fight for equal contract and property rights. Second-wave feminism refers to a period of feminist activity beginning in the 1960s to 1980s. It was connected with independence and greater political action to improve women's rights. Third wave feminism is a feminist movement that began in the early 1990s. While second-wave feminism largely focuses on the inclusion of women in traditionally male dominated areas, third wave feminism seeks to challenge and expand common definitions of gender and equality.

Today, unlike the former movements, the term 'feminist' has received significance by the female population. The main issues were prefaced by the work done by the previous waves of women. Women are working to end violence against women in our nation as well as others.

Most post-modern Indian women novelists are interested in exploring the feminine consciousness of the women characters, their evolution towards an awakened conscience and how eventually this leads to enrichment of their inner self in a male dominated society. There are many good writers who have left an indelible imprint on the readers of Indian fiction in English. The highly acclaimed women writers are Anita



Desai, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Geeta Mehta, Gita Hariharan, Sudha Murty, Kamala Das, Jumpha Lahiri, Shashi Deshpande, Amrita Pritam, Manju Kapur, etc. Among these writers, Anita Nair is one of the most prominent women writers in Indian English.

Anita Nair is a writer of different genres like novels, poetry, prose, essays, articles, book reviews, travelogues and non – fiction. She is also good at translations. Her novels are *The Better Man* (2000), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), *Cut Like Wound* (2012), *Idris : Keeper of the Light* (2014) and *Chain of Custody* (2016).

The main focus of this research paper is to focus the feministic point of view of Anita Nair. The depiction of her excellent women characters and the feminist tone in her novel make Anita Nair one of the most outstanding female Indian novelists in English. The novel selected for study is *Ladies Coupe*.

Anita Nair recounts the stories of six women who are travelling together in a Ladies Coupe of a train. Mainly it depicts the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom. Akhilandeshwari alias Akhila forty-five, single and working as a clerk, has been brought up in a conservative family of Tamil Brahmins. Akhila bears the burden of her family after her father's death. Her brothers and sisters grow up and get married and they hardly think about Akhila's needs and aspirations. She has never been able to live a life of her own or passes an identity of her own. 'She was always an extension of someone's identity; daughter, sister, aunt....Akhila wished for once someone should see her as a whole being' (201-202). On her way to Kanyakumari, Akhila meets five different women – Janaki Prabhakar, Prabha Devi, Margaret Paulraj, Sheela Vasudevan and Marikolunthu. Though, they meet for the first time they share their life's experience with each other. Even though they differ in age, educational background and cultural upbringing, their stories have a common thread, the tragic predicament of Indian women in a patriarchal social order.

Janaki, the oldest of the six women in the Coupe, grows up in the traditional family of being groomed into an obedient daughter, a loyal wife and a doting mother. She has been looked after all her life by men.

First there was my father and brother; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son, waiting, to take off from where his father left off. A woman like me ends up being fragile. Our men treat as like princess. (22-23)

She recognizes the futility of being an obedient wife and a caring mother and the need to assert self-identity and freedom to live one's own life.

The youngest of the six is Sheela, fourteen-years-old who talks about the female child abuse by men. Sheela felt ashamed and hurt at the unwanted touching of Hasina's father Nazar as:

One Sunday afternoon when Sheela went to their house, rushing in from the heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lip. Nazar had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time. (66)

When once Nazar knotted the bows in her sleeves, "She saw the hurt in Hasina and her mother's eyes" (66). After that Sheela took the right decision that "She would never go to Hasina's house again" (66) as a means of her self-protection. Through this character, Nair has brought out the ill-treatment of women by men.

Margaret Shanti, another woman in the Ladies Coupe, is a successful Chemistry teacher, entangled in an unhappy marriage with Ebenezer Paulraj, the principal of the school she works in. He is demanding, self-centered and indifferent towards his wife. Margaret would like to divorce him, but does not do so because she is afraid of society. Her way of taking revenge is to feed him oily food and make him a fat and dull person.

Prabha Devi is an accomplished woman whose embroidery was done with stitches so fine that you could barely see them, whose 'Ideas were light and soft', and who 'walked with small mincing steps, her head forever bowed, suppliant; womanly' (170). Prabha Devi forgets how it is to be her and that's when she learns to strike a balance between being what she wants to be and being what she is expected to be.



The most heart-rending tale is that of Marikolunthu, thirty-one years old and an unwed mother who is a victim of a man's lust: her poverty forcing her to do things that violate traditional social, moral injunctions. Now, she is a mother to an illegitimate child. She has experienced poverty, rape, lesbianism and physical torture. "I was a restless spirit warped and bitter. Sometimes I would think of the past and I would feel a quickening in the vacuum that existed within me now" (266).

Akhila's one night in the Ladies Coupe and her interaction with the five women, helped to realize that she had given the society an unnecessary power of ruling her life. Towards the end of the novel Nair presents the actual Akila, who could live a life for herself.

Look at me, she would tell them. Look at me: I'm the woman you think you know. I am the sister you have wondered about. There is more to this Akka. For within me is a woman I have discovered. (270)
Now Akila started to live a life for herself.

Ladies Coupé is a masterpiece of Anita Nair. Indian custom and social order binds a woman. The novel is centred on six women all of whom were tied up by the unsteady custom and social order. The patriarchal society places them a number of hurdles and obstacles in the path of their smooth development. It was darkness that filled their life. But Nair's characters face the odd situation of their life with grit and courage. The women characters face several problems in their life which swipe away their mental efficiency, but still with great courage and determination they understand their self-better than ever before.

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