



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Vol. 3. Issue.2.,2016 (April-June)

ISSN INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA
2395-2628(Print):2349-9451(online)

WOMEN SUBJUGATION AND EMPOWERMENT IN ANITA NAIR'S 'LADIE'S COUPE'

RAJESH REDDY B.L

Assistant Professor

Department of English, SVR Engineering College, Nandyal , Kurnool(D), Andhra Pradesh (State)



RAJESH REDDY B.L

ABSTRACT

For centuries, women were treated as less-than-equal to men in many ways. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. Even after the end of colonial rule in the colonized countries, the impact of colonization is still felt in the form of patriarchy. The colonial domination still continues in the form of male domination towards women. It is obvious that the decolonized man asserted his mastery by his unjust treatment of women, and also it is obvious that only men are feasting the fruits of independence whereas women are still subjected to persecution by the male. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. The predicaments of women continue to be the same or rather worse despite the entire efforts for women empowerment. To eradicate this gender inequality, many women writers are writing about the embarrassing situation of women in our society. The literary writers with true concern towards the present predicament of women use their literary medium for the awakening of the human conscience which affects dormancy towards the pitiful condition of women. In modern days, the women writers play a pivotal role to create awareness and empower women through their novels. Anita Nair is one such genuine writer who creates life-like female characters in her works. These characters reflect the real condition of present women from different social strata. Nair's true concern and eagerness to uplift the women, make her depict her female characters as a beacon of hope to the oppressed ones because she makes her female characters rise up with their inborn potential and confidence from their utterly weak and helpless situations.

Keywords: Women Empowerment, Discrimination, Predicaments, Patriarchy.

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INTRODUCTION

It is a matter of great regret that even in this era of the twenty-first century; women are not given the freedom that men enjoy in the male dominated society. Women were treated as less-than-equal to men in many ways. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or work in many jobs. Even after the end of

colonial rule the colonial domination still continues in the form of male domination towards women. It is obvious that, man asserted his mastery by his unjust treatment of women, and also it is obvious that only men are feasting the fruits of independence whereas women are still subjected to persecution by the male. Discrimination against women and girls including gender based violence, economic discrimination and harmful traditional practices remain the most pervasive and persistent form of inequality. It is an undeniable fact that women have not only been denied existence as complete human beings, physically and mentally set to perform on a egalitarianism with men, but also destitute of the opportunity to give expression to their feelings, their fears and their distress.

Women play variety of significant roles in our society from their birth till the end of life. Even after playing all her roles in efficient manner in the modern society, she is weak because men are still strongest gender of the society. Women play a great role in the growth and development of the society and making it an advanced and modern society.

The role of women in the development of society is of utmost importance. In fact, it is the only thing that determines whether a society is strong and harmonious , or otherwise. Women are the backbone of the society. In order to eradicate the all forms of discrimination against women, they should be empowered. And also the fastest way to change society is to mobilize the women of the world .

There are some famous quotes on prominence of educating and empowering women. Some of them are as following ,

“You educate a man ; you educate a man . You educate a women ; you educate a generation-Brigham Young

“There is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women”-KOFI ANNAN

The topic of women empowerment is a burning issue all over the world. Women equality with men and empowerment is a universal issue. Even in India, the issues “gender equality” and women empowerment picked up momentum in the last three decades.

“The education and empowerment of women throughout the world cannot fail to result in a more caring, tolerant, just and peaceful life for all.”

DEFINITION OF EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The Oxford American Dictionary defines "empowerment" as "to make (someone) stronger and more confident, esp. in controlling their life and claiming their rights." It means to give women power and help them face the challenges of being a woman in society.

Anita Nair has earned the fame of being India’s well known author of many novels. In a very short span of time, this wonderfully acclaimed lady has achieved the feat of penning down more than ten novels, from a time when she had no idea that her work would end up being published. She is also the proud recipient of many prized awards. She is best known for putting down her imagination in simple words for the readers. Two of her novels, namely, ‘The Better Man’ and ‘Ladies coupe’ have now been successfully translated into 21 different languages. She is a post modern Indian woman writer in English, has earned much critical attention and has been acclaimed both in India and abroad as a significant novelist. Her ventures have produced some good works and in a little span of her career she has gained an international reputation. She is one of the notable writers in India. She always focuses on the problems of woman in our society. She draws one’s attention to women’s exploitation, and discrimination and she uses her characters as a great example for women empowerment.

Anita Nair strongly agrees with Simone de Beavouir's “that fact that we are human is much more important than our being and women”. Women have been quite suppressed, quite oppressed.

She depicts her female characters as a beacon of hope to the oppressed ones because she makes her female characters rise up with their inborn potential and confidence from their utterly weak and helpless situations.

In “Ladies Coupe”, Anita Nair deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies inequality in relationships. Her novel raises questions about the role of woman in contemporary postcolonial India.

The woman characters in the novel "Ladies Coupe" go through the grueling experiences of domestic oppression at the hands of the repressive forces of society but finally they revolted against the oppressions and resolved to discover them and establish them in society.

Akhila, the protagonist of the Ladies coupe is a 45 yr old single women working as an Income tax officer. Born in a conservative Brahmin family Akhila was brought up in an environment in which the society had the supreme power and the people living in this society would never ever dare to rewrite its unfounded norms.

Akhila's mother belonged to the old school of thought, sometimes through her actions and sometimes through her words she taught Akhila that a perfect woman is the one who blends with the environment. 'There is no such thing as equal marriage it is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way there can be no disharmony. It is when one wants to prove ones equality that there is warring and sparring all the time. It is so much easier to accept one's station in life and live accordingly. A woman is not meant to take on the man's role. Or the Gods would have made her so. So what is all this about two equals in a marriage' is what her mother tried to drill into her mind. But this very mother of Akhila on becoming a widow expected her daughter to play the man of the house.

So from playing the role of the daughter Akhila progressed to being the provider and continued playing different roles all through her life. Sometimes a sister, sometimes an aunt but she never got to be herself. She never was Akhila until one fine day when she realised that she has got nothing from life not even memories to look back to. To change the course of her life Akhila decides to do something she had never done before. She buys a one way ticket to Kanyakumari to escape from the norms that stopped her from being Akhilandeshwari.

On her way to Kanyakumari, Akhila meets five different women, her fellow passengers. Each with a story of her own but all of them had one thing in common and that was their search for the real denotation of life.

The oldest of the women is Janaki with a story that many women of her age will identify with. Janaki is someone who learnt to love the man she married. She is someone who always had a man to protect her. Someone who was first protected by her father then by her brother then by her husband and after him it would be her son. Janaki believed that to be a good mother and a good wife are the only two duties of a woman and she made her home her Kingdom. It was too late to amend her life when she realised that even a strong and independent woman can make a good wife and a good mother.

The Second story to unfold is that of a fourteen year old. Someone who is generations apart from Janaki but still with a mental maturity that quite surpasses her age. She is someone who accepted her grandmother's death with an air of a person who had seen it all and done it all. Sheela feels embarrassed 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 finger". The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time". But sheela is unable to open her mouth against the physical abuse attempted on her, but she develops confidence to protect herself from it in future for it she says " thereafter she mopped her face with a hanky each time she entered enters Hasins's home". Even sheela's friend Hasina and her mother are unable to voice their contempt for his attitude because they are helpless. When once Nazar knots the bows in her sleeves, "she saw the hurt in Hasina and her mother's eyes". Thereafter sheela takes the right decision that " she would never go to Hasina's home again". Through this incident Nair has brought out the unjust treatment of women by man. What makes Sheela different from others is her ability to look beyond things and her knack of perceiving what others cannot.

The third story to unfurl is that of Margaret Shanthi, a chemistry teacher married to Ebenezer Paulraj, the principal of the school she works in. She is another example of how women are dominated upon by male power. She marries Ebenezer Paulraj at her own choice. Ebenezer Paulraj is dominating, mean and almost perverse. He is the worst example of male chauvinism in the novel. Initially, Margaret does not understand the deep rooted male egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj, as her extreme love for him has made her blind. From an

ambitious and brilliant student who wants to chart out a career on her own, she becomes a dutiful wife to Ebenezer. He controls her completely. She is persuaded to do B.Ed through she wanted to do PH.d.. He says "what's the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. A woman with brilliant academic career and a warm and vibrant personality, she is reduced to a silent spectator. Margaret is unconsciously compelled to teach him a lesson. She chooses flattery as the weapon to bring down Ebenezer's self-esteem. She flatters and flatters and feeds him with fatty food, till fat finds its home on him and turns him into a fat man, a quiet man, and an easy man who seek her help for every task. Though Margaret suffers a lot, at last she empowers herself and makes herself to come out from the web and finds her way.

The fourth tale to open up is that of Prabha Devi, born to rich parents she had the perfect childhood. Her mother beamed with pride when Prabha Devi turned eighteen. She was everything that a girl ought to be. She was beautiful, docile, a good cook, a good singer her, needlework was perfect. Soon this demure girl was married to a diamond merchant's son. After marriage her life swished past in the blur of insignificant days till one day - a week after her fortieth birthday when she realised that somewhere in the process of being a good wife, a good daughter-in-law and a good mother, Prabha Devi forget how its is to be herself 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 and a shufti of a swimming pool helps her realise the need for the balancing act. Thus she empowers herself and molds herself to achieve her desire.

The fifth and the most heart-rending tale is that of Marikolanthu who only when grown up realised that circumstance never let her be a kid. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry women 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 now how can I send a young girl by herself". As a kid she worked at the Chettiar's house to help her mother raise her brothers and when she grew up her innocence was destroyed by a man who was determined to have her carnal knowledge sans her consent. This one unpleasant incident changes Marikolanthu's entire life and destroys her verve. From being a kid who worked hard to help her mother raise her brothers to being a maid to two lady doctors who were foreigners, Marikolanthu was now a mother to an illegitimate child. Marikolanthu had seen it all from poverty to lesbianism but all through her life though she was untutored and bucolic she stood up for what she believed in, not caring for the society. After all her troubles ,finally she empowers herself and proves to the world that she can lead a good life.

One night in the Ladies coupe Akhila's interaction with the five women - Janaki who had a happy marriage though it was an arranged one, Margaret Shanti though married to the love of her life suffered from the agony of an unhappy marriage, Sheela , a teenager who had the ability to look beyond things, Prabha Devi who after years of marriage learnt to strike a balance and Marikolanthu different from all the four women did not succumb to the norms of the society just to gain a right place in the social order helped Akhila realise that she had given the society superfluous power of ruling her life. These women and their stories helped Akhila find the answer to her biggest question - "Can a women stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?

There was a time when a woman needed a man for protection but today she needs a man for companionship, she needs a partner who would share her ups and downs. She is not in need of a breadwinner but in need of someone with whom she can share the bread. So, does this realisation make Akhila get back in touch with the guy she fell in love with, someone whom she did not accept for the fears of the society? The dilemma that a woman goes through at every point of her life is shown in a beautiful way.

Nair's marvellous understanding of the minds of women is depicted beautifully in her novel " Ladies Coupe" which captures women's overwhelming problems and challenges. Nair's protagonists journey for search of relationship and independence , no doubt her indomitable will and undefeatable spirit compels her to carry on her life in a revived manner. Anita Nair, perhaps the only Indian women novelist who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the information and development of women in a patriarchal world.

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