



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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

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

QUEST FOR IDENTITY : A FEMINISTIC APPROACH OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN
ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE*

S. MANJULA¹, Dr. A. SABURUNNISA²

¹Part – Time Research Scholar, PG & Research Department of English
KunthavaiNaacchiyaar Govt. Arts College for Women (Auto), Thanjavur.

²Research Advisor, Assistant Professor of English, PG & Research Department of English,
KunthavaiNaacchiyaar Govt. Arts College for Women (Auto), Thanjavur.



S. MANJULA



Dr. A. SABURUNNISA

ABSTRACT

Indian writing in English has attained an independent status in the realm of Indian literature. Fictions by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary writing in Indian English. In the traditional post-colonial society, the question is of women's emancipation and its women writers are more passionate and serious about it. Women's effort to seek their independence and self-identity started a revolution all over the world. Anita Nair, is one such writer who portrays realistic female characters in her works. Her strength as a writer lies in bringing alive the everyday thoughts desires and doubts Nair portrays her-female characters as a realistic nature of thoughts and ideas in her novels. This paper focuses on quest for identity and the feministic approach of female characters in Anita Nair's second novel Ladies coupe.

Key words : Post-colonial society; quest for identify; women's emancipation.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

Identity is a state of mind that is granted by the interaction with the fellow beings in the society and also, by the acceptance in the society. A woman's identity crisis is that where she struggles to achieve as a human being in its full sense against those forces of society who bind her in chains and reject her as a being in comparison to man.

Earlier, woman sought her identity in the relationship as a wife, mother and daughter. She accepted this identity willingly. But now-a-days woman rejects this relational identity. Now she is able to understand the duplicity of this identity that is imposed on her by society so that she may restrain herself as a being. But now, woman wants to stand on herfeet as a full human being, equal to man in society. She doesn't like to know herself as someone's daughter, wife or mother, rather than she seeks separation from these relations and wants to make her own identity that shows her individuality. She also does not like the support of man in

making her own identity. And it is a quest for identity in a woman that she revolts against the traditional image of Indian Woman in words and deeds. She is conscious of herself as a being, not as an object. She realizes that she is not an appendage of man. A woman is not the "other". She is not an addition to man. She is an autonomous being, capable of through trial and error, finding her own way to salvation. Therefore, a new modern girl is reluctant to play the conventional role of a sex object and a yoked wife. In a sense, she is the symbol of the emancipated woman, the forerunner of the emerging Indian woman with her liberated woman hood.

In the 20th century, women's writing was considered as a powerful medium of modernism and feminist statements. The majority of the 20th century novels depicts the psychological suffering of the frustrated house wife. The list of Indian women novelist also comprises popular names such as Arundhati Roy, JhumpaLahiri, Kiran Desai, ManjuKapur, Anita Nair picturises the feministic themes in their novels. Modern female novelists works are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. They look for some 'Indian-ness' for conveying the messages of feminism in an Indian way. Woman writers of Indian writing in English are good in analyzing complex issues like complexities of human relationships, man-woman relationship, woman's psyche and her potential. Many Indian women writers in English with their newly acquired feminist consciousness have given their writings a new dimension in the portrayal of the new woman writers like Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, ManjuKapur, Anita Nair etc., have probed deep into the female psyche and have created an awareness of different kinds and forms of female experience. Their protagonists are mostly upper-class and middle-class women, educated and intelligent yet dislocated individuals whogo through a crisis in life as a result of repression within the family, their constrained relationship with their husbands, their disillusionment in marriage, and their own lack of assertion& realization of self. Poverty also has reduced women powerless.

Anita Nair is one of the finest writers in Indian writing in English with an international reputation. 'Ladies Coupe' is Nair's second novel and has been translated into more than twenty five languages around the world. Anita Nair's engrossing Ladies coupe raises what many readers might consider questions about the role of women in contemporary post-colonial India. Nair's India suffers from a system of sex role stereotyping oppression of women that exists under patriarchal social organization. This novel is a profound discourse of womanism. All the characters of this "female culture" without exception go through the grueling experiences of domestic oppression at the hands of their families and every one of them acquires an implacable resilience not only to stay alive, but even to discover their inner source of dynamism and creative wellspring.

Anita Nair's "Ladies coupe" is the story of a woman's search for strength and independence. It is also the story of six women who meet in a train journey, Akhilandeswari, the protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and gives her too, seeking in them a solution to the question that has troubled her all her life : can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? The story switches over from past to present and present to past and hence, even other than the five women in the compailment, we are shown of certain women who are humiliated and debased. India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many way to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality.

Feministic approach of female characters

Akhilandeswari :An Empowered woman

Akhila is a forty five years old spinster who takes various roles of a daughter, sister aunt and the provider of the family, an incometax clerk, one day she sets out to seek certain answers for herself, she buys a ticket to a kanyakumariand placed in "Ladies Coupe" along with five other woman giving her company for the overnight journey. These women share their life experiences with her, thus helping her to gain her full potential as a woman and grapple with the answers to the questions. She has been asking so long, Nair portrays the protagonist as by fulfilling the expectations of her family Akhila has forgotten to live for herself. The ties of tradition have always pulled her back, checked her in mid-stride whenever she has tried to make

her way towards freedom. Basically Akhila had spent all her life for others. She was forced to take care of others since her father had an untimely demise and there was really no-one else to be the family's bread winner.

Yet, at the age of 40 Akhila realizes that she has allowed life to pass her by and she needs to find some pleasure for herself. Her assertion comes in the form of a journey. She buys a ticket to the deep south, to Kanyakumari the southern trip of India. This is the turning point in her life. This innocent, cloistered woman is out for an adventure, but the real adventure is taking place within her for she is discovering herself. Her quest for a man then throws up the question whether a woman must have man to be really happy in her life. Akhila has taken over the responsibility of looking after her family for a long time. She has been successful in what is an essentially male-dominated environment. She is strong and assertive on most occasions. Yet she is looking for a man now to complete her life. Does she really need one? When Anita Nair was questioned about the issues of gender in her novels, she replied.

I don't set out to write anything that's gender related. In the process, if anything comes up, then I milk it. Because I am not a great person; I had a story to tell. I was exploring certain issues that were important to me.

Janaki:Notion of Good wife

According to Indian tradition a woman is always synonymous with good wife. A good wife should be faithful, obedient and virtuous. Janaki is expected to take up this traditional role of women. She plays a various roles such as a daughter, a wife and a mother but not an individual who claims her life to be her own. Janaki gets married to Prabhakar, when she is eighteen year old and leads a happy, comfortable long married life for forty years. Janaki's husband is a caring partner and she has a son and daughter-in-law. Janaki leads a happy life until she realizes her submissiveness. She feels some string of revolt when she finds her husband controlling everybody even their grown up son. She says to her husbands, "you just want to control him. You want to control everybody. You want everyone to do your bidding" (Ladies Coupe 30). Prabhakar's overbearing dominance exactness, and precision irritates Janaki. The life which has gone smoothly starts to find its ups and down. She discovers herself and her true happiness that lies in her, but she is not able to take off the web under which she is covered for a long period. Her initial response to Akhila's query "why should a woman live by herself? There is always man willing to be with her" (Ladies Coupe 21)

Margaret Shanti :A Revolutionary woman

Margaret Shanti is another example of how women are dominated upon by male power. Her life goes through man physical, mental and spiritual crises. Margaret, a chemistry teacher once adored her husband, an obnoxious headmaster but grows to hate him later. She marries Ebenezer Paulraj at her own choice. Ebenezer is most dominating men, is of the worst example of male chauvinism in the novel. Margaret does not understand the male egoism in Ebenezer as her extreme love for him has made her blind. She becomes a dutiful wife to Ebenezer. He controls her completely. Ebenezer asks her not to do Ph.D., long hair doesn't suit you, cut it off, Margaret do's everything for her husband wish. Margaret aborts her first pregnancy The more cruel attitude of Ebenezer is that he does not allow Margaret to apprise her pregnancy even to her parents. As Ebenezer is becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypo critic, She is unconsciously compelled to teach him to 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 founds 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.

Sheela and the Dynamics of life

Sheela, the next narrator of Ladies Coupe, a sensitive girl of fourteen year old, blessed with a deep insight; who talks about her grandmother in whom we can see the manifestations of femininity. And sheela, is in the process of being moulded by male dominated hands. 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 Hasina's shame", 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".

As a self- protection within sheela's story, Anita Nair has brought in an incident, where a girl named celine becomes a prey to a man's instinct. Celine becomes pregnant because of her friends father and her family moves to a place where no one will know about her abortion. But it is said, "The friends father went to a faraway town where he would find plenty of young girls to ruin everyone said". Through this incident Nair has brought out the unjust treatment of women by man.

PrabhaDevi :A Good Pampered Wife

She is an another victim of male domination. She feels lost after being married for many years. She asks herself, what do I sound like"? The writer has used the symbol of swimming as a way for Prabha Devi to break free from the bondage in which she is caged. Prabha gets married to Jagadeesh give birth to child lead a mechanical life, when she becomes forty years old, she has begun to realize that she missed something in her life. After that she cranes to learn swimming. But her husband Jagadeesh does not give his consent towards her pleading request. Because he wants his wife to be submissive. He is a typical conservative make. But out of great desire, Prabha Devi ultimately learns swimming without anybody's help. Thus she empowers herself and molds herself to achieve her desire.

Marikolunthu :A story of sexual exploitation

Marikolunthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry women on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. When she was nine years old, she lost her father due to poverty, her mother work as maid in Chettiyar'shouse, Murugesan a wicked person one of the relatives of ChettiyarseducedMarikolunthu, she lost everything, she gives birth to an illegitimate baby called Muthu, is taken care by Marikolunthu's mother, after her death nobody is there to support her, even her younger brothers tell her to leave the house with her child Muthu, she decides to live on her own. She does not depend on any other person. She joins the mission hospital as a helper.She defines her as an independent woman. Through she does not have anything she does not relinquish her hope. Thus finally she empowers herself and proves to the world that she can lead a good life.

Thus listening to the lives of various women in the Coupe, Akhila gets down at Kanyakumari as an empowered woman to rediscover her "self". She decides that she has to live for her not for other ultimately, she breaks the chain of male Chauvinism which have haunted her for nearly a decade. She empowers herself and makes a call to Hari, her past lover to make a new life with him, thus the novel comes to an end.

In Ladies Coupe, "Anita Nair has dealt with the themes of self-identity, search for strength and independence though her characters have suffered from male egoism, at the end they all empowered by themselves and successfully redeem themselves from a web called male chauvinism. To conclude, thus Anita Nair traces a woman's journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization self-denial to self-assertion. The feminist voice is beautifully picturized by Anita Nair.

Works cited

- Manohar, D. Murali, Indian Fiction women'sFiction : A Study of Marriage, Career and Divorce, Atlantic Publishers and Distributers Pvt. Ltd., Delhi – 1994.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi, "Women creative writers in Indian English Literature between spaces of silence : Women creative writers", New Delhi – 1994.
- Nair Anita, "Ladies Coupe",Penguin Books, New Delhi 2001