



A Study on the theme of identity crisis in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*

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Abstract

This paper explores the portrayal of the identity crisis in Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe* and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*. Both novels probe into the lives of women navigating societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal aspirations in their pursuit of selfhood. Through a comparative analysis, this study investigates how the protagonists negotiate the complexities of womanhood, tradition, and modernity, unravelling layers of identity. Examining themes of autonomy, relationships, and societal constraints, the research highlights the ways these literary works depict the multifaceted journey towards self-realization. Employing a feminist lens and narrative analysis, this paper aims to contribute to the discourse on gender, identity formation, and the intricate dynamics shaping women's lives.

Keywords: Identity, Women, Feminism, Anita Nair, Githa Hariharan, Self-realization, Society, Gender, Cultural Norms

Introduction

An attempt is made in this study to bring out the theme of identity crisis in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*. In the novel, *Ladies Coupe* there are themes like investigation of identity, engage in self-discovery, and raise a voice against female oppression and the issues that face women. Anita tells a variety of various storylines through the characters she creates. The narrative jumps around in time, jumping

from the present to the past and back again. Nair has shown her female characters enduring similar hardships as a consequence of patriarchy. Her female protagonists have typically been characterised as bright and inquisitive individuals. She discusses the six different ladies who appear in this book. The main character, Akhilandeshwari, is a spinster of 45 years of age. Similarly, in *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan, points out that Indians have a significant role in the plot, both as

personalities and as the source of the problems and the crises. It is interesting to take note that the titles of all of her books include the word "plural," such as "faces," "ghosts," "dreams," "Times," and "histories." Githa Hariharan wishes to convey the idea that the society is pluralistic and that nothing can be considered singular. The play 'Faces' follows Devi through her life, from her youth to her life as a married lady to her life as a liberated modern woman. This study illustrates how Anita Nair and Githa Hariharan portray both identity and self-discovery through their characters.

Discussion

The author, Anita Nair, has made the decision to centre her novel on the process of coming into one's own, much like a large number of other authors working in popular literature. The title "Ladies Coupe" refers to the section of the train that is reserved exclusively for female passengers travelling in the second class. Inside the cubicle, there were only women of a middle-aged age. These ladies got to chatting about their experiences, and the amount of information they shared was quite astounding. The novel *Ladies Coupe* by Anita Nair serves as the focus of this investigation on the search for identity and the finding of one's own self. The main character, Akilandeshwari, has seen her mother lionise her father while she and the other children were prepared and offered to him first. At this time, Akilandeshwari has been forced to observe this. The children were not permitted to try anything until after the adult had finished his meal. It was clear to her that in patriarchal societies, women are subjugated to the authority of their male counterparts. They consequently had the conviction that they needed to separate themselves from such kind of civilization. But, once her father passed away, she assumed her father's role as the primary provider for the family because she was the oldest kid in the family. She is not accorded the same level of significance as he is. Even though Akhila is the only member of the family who brings home a

respectable paycheck, she is not accorded the same level of respect as her male counterparts, even if she may have received equal money for comparable work. She cried every single tear that she had stored up for her entire life and then some. She believes that Akhila grieved every night when she looked at a dish of rice and set it with a jug of water so that Appa's soul, which is still hanging in their house, wouldn't be hungry or thirsty. She did this so that Appa's spirit wouldn't feel like it had to leave their home. Akhila wept to her grandfather and said, "Appa, as I provide for you to night, I will have to cater for the family you abandoned with such callousness." What am I supposed to do?

Akhila is the one who saves the members of the family, but the act of rescuing them requires her to make a sacrifice first. She is a worker who remains silent and is fully hidden from view behind the scenes, allowing the smaller children to have the spotlight on them. Even her own mother makes a conscious effort to refrain from inquiring about her desires. Akhila is able to comprehend and feel compassion for her mother, but because her mother has spent years internalising man-made ideological frameworks, she finds it more practical to dismiss Akhila's womanhood. She fulfils a variety of duties within the family, including those of daughter, sister, aunty, and caretaker. The retelling of the stories is done in the format of case studies all the way through. The events of the book take place against the backdrop of a train ride, and each of these people tells the story of her life as the train chug-trundles-and-troops-its-way-to-its-destination. The problems that women face and the oppression they face are also portrayed by the remaining five female characters.

Akhila does not live her life based on her own desires but rather on the expectations that she perceives. According to the Manusamhita, a woman should never be allowed to live as an autonomous entity and should be reliant on a man from the time she is born until the time she dies. *When Dreams Travel*, by Githa Hariharan,

employs the classic tale of the *Arabian Nights* both as a theme and as an intertextual element. Her narrative is filled with echoes from the significance of the past, yet at the same time it winds out adventurous lines of flight. The amazing device of stories within stories was utilised in the *One Thousand and One Nights* collection of tales. In Hariharan's opinion, this is crucial for her Meta cognitive model. From the vantage point of contemporary fiction theory, this two-part work appears to be a story about description, with the ultimate purpose of positing the triumph of artistry over life. The director not only raises these complex issues, but also mocks the sexist assumptions made about the main tale and the culture at the beginning of the film. Her use of metafiction, intertext, and charm credibility propels the women's lobbying discourse into the postmodern era. As such, *When in Dreams Travel* could be interpreted as a depiction of postmodern metafiction that fails to maintain an ideal distinction between reported works and their essential readings. An account of dream travel is provided in *When in Dreams Travel*. *Dreams Travel's* creators hand-picked these hot-button issues, and they're all laid bare in a public, in-depth examination of the film's theme. It paints Shahrzad as the victim of her patriarchal household, a woman who must persevere only due of her extraordinary storytelling ability. She is the exuberant and eager storyteller who is imprisoned by a lustful, petty, bizarre patriarch by day and by the collections of mistresses by night. The author's extravagant use of the images of a royal habitation tomb cell, a bed group of concubines, and sword-blood can only be made sense of by considering the context in which they appear in the story.

When Githa Hariharan begins her story in *When Dreams Travel*, it is several years later; nevertheless, she purposefully keeps the check off balance; "say fifteen, twenty when Dunyazad, the younger sister, on learning about the death of the older sister, accepts a lengthy

journey. She leaves the realm of her late spouse and travels to Shahabad while disguised as a man. The story unleashes an instance of intertextual inventiveness that resurrects the past only to subvert it through the unanticipated retelling of stories and the rediscovery of astounding amazements. In the meantime, Hariharan makes use of the device to alter the legend within the context of the postmodern movement for women's rights and meta fiction.

Hence, in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, the reader is presented with six ladies who come from a variety of social backgrounds, each of whom reflects on their own circumstances and arrives at specific conclusions that assist Akhila in arriving at her own. After the passengers have been properly introduced to one another and the train has begun its steady forward motion, Akhila initiates the chat. Akhila, who is now 45 years old, has never spent even a single second of her life apart from her family. This will be the first trip that she takes on her own, and she is going into it with the intention of meeting other women who can assist her in finding a solution to the question of whether or not women require the company of men. Akhila says: "As far as I am concerned, marriage is unimportant, companionship, yes, I would like that. The problem is, I wish to live by myself but everyone tells me that a woman can't live alone. What do you think? Can a woman live by herself?" (LC21)

Akhila wonders if women can truly thrive indefinitely without a man's company, or if she's missing out on something crucial to her well-being. She probes more into the women's life as the other five strive to answer her question. Janaki is a pampered housewife and confused mother whose marriage has endured for many years. The next person on our list is Margaret Shanti. Margaret is a chemistry teacher at the same school where she is married to the tyrannical principle. Her husband is unsympathetic. Prabha Devi was the ideal daughter, having been born to wealthy parents and having a daughter-in-law who was in

charge of running the household. Later Sheela, who was still a young girl, saw the passing of her grandma. She has a sensitive nature, and as a result, she sees things in society that most people cannot. The last person to board was a woman named Marikolanthu. One reckless night of desire had completely derailed the course of her life. This train ride becomes a metaphor for an inward trip that each character takes throughout the story. The path that each of these six people take through their own life paints a picture of society for us. As a result, all of the female characters are engaged in an identity crisis while simultaneously coming to terms with their own selfhood. Writers of fiction take a microcosmic unit of society, and use it as a spyhole into a wider network of social, cultural, and political structure, as Pauline Palmer comments in "Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist theory" (qtd. in Singh 29) Because of this, the passengers were able to let go of their inhibitions and speak freely, as they were confident that the words they spoke would never be repeated with a potentially damaging intent because it was highly unlikely that these women would ever cross paths again. Every single one of these ladies opened up their emotions to one another. Their life experiences have taught them that the only way for women to thrive in a male-dominated society and carve out a space for themselves is not to cut themselves off from it but rather to work together with the males.

Akhila puts her newly discovered self-assurance to the test by having a sexual encounter in Kanniyakumari. Abuse is being done to her by the fact that she is able to handle the brief interaction fully on her own terms. "That she will have the confidence to pick up from where she left off," she says with a smile. She picks up where she left off and starts over (275). She arranges to speak with Hari. It's possible that he's already moved on or that he's married. The stories told by Akhila's fellow passengers in the coupe fairly pour out of them, exposing the yearning that each woman has to

talk to a heart that is sympathetic. By the end of the book, Akhila is compared to Durga, which is meant to symbolise the power that lies within women. As a result, the novel provides a detailed and graphic account of the female psyche as well as the passions. Anita Nair expresses even the most minute elements of her female characters, bringing to life the challenges, emotions, and ideas that they face on a daily basis. This means that the research devotes a lot of attention to the characters' search for themselves and their identities. *When Dreams Travel* becomes a metafiction in the point that it is a story about a story, and when it realises that it is fiction, regardless of whether it is "a seething, porous broad term of a tale, a rambling story, said to common explorers on the streets prompting heaven," the point will have been reached *When Dreams Travel* is a metafiction. (WDT 8) It is possible to refer to the epic as a depiction of Curie's definition of metafiction, which is as follows: "The absorption of basic viewpoint within anecdotal example, a hesitance of the phoney of its advances." The story incorporates several points of view and methods of investigation directly within the anecdotal process itself.

Conclusion

In exploring Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, a profound examination of the theme of identity crisis unfolds. Both narratives delicately unravel the complexities individuals face in navigating societal expectations, personal desires, and cultural norms, encapsulating the struggles, growth, and eventual self-realization of their protagonists. Through the journeys of their female characters, these authors magnify the multifaceted nature of identity formation, illustrating the conflicts arising from societal constraints and internal aspirations. These novels serve as poignant reflections of the universal quest for self-discovery, where the protagonists confront traditional roles, societal pressures, and personal desires, ultimately forging their unique identities. Nair and

Hariharan skilfully probe into the nuances of identity, presenting a tapestry of experiences that resonate with readers on a profound level. As the stories culminate, the journeys of the protagonists toward self-acceptance and empowerment resonate, emphasizing the importance of embracing one's authenticity amidst the complexities of life's expectations. These narratives stand as timeless reminders of the resilience and strength found within the pursuit of personal identity.

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