



## FEMININE SENSIBILITY IN ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE*

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### ABSTRACT

The novels of Anita Nair contain an 'Indianess' which is essentially an important criterion for Indian writing in English because it is creative as well as resourceful. It is interesting to note that the novel *Ladies Coupe* is worked up from the combinations of different women's experiences. The most significant element is the conversation between these women. In the post colonial period, the decolonized male oppressed the female continuously. Under the banner of family, men continued to dominate over women in the name of love and security. Sometimes marriage becomes a curse for the female, despite she lives under this curse and tries to survive. As a woman writer, Anita Nair's dilemma is to focus the voice of women's concern. Anita Nair reveals that her concern is with the exploration of human psyche. She explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists. This paper focuses on the struggles and sufferings of women in *Ladies Coupe*.

**Key words:** Gender, oppression, culture, alienation, love, journey, relationship and marriage etc.

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Anita Nair was born in Kerala. She is a famous poet, short story writer and journalist. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair focuses on men and women relationship, marriage and divorce, social and cultural, and psychological issues. Here the character Margaret Shanthi is a chemistry teacher who got married to Ebenezer Paulraj. He is an example of male dominance. He changed her life because of the power he had in her life. She wanted to do Ph.D. but he asked her to complete B.Ed. Finally she changed herself in an artistic way to win her freedom from her husband. Janaki, another fellow passenger of Ladies Coupe, is an example for old age tradition. According to her a woman should be a good daughter, sister, wife, mother and so on.

Indian society also believes that woman should always depend on some man in her life.

Anita Nair depicts the plight condition of women. In her novel *Ladies Coupe* she describes many female characters and their different life events. They share their life stories to one other how they are exploited in male dominated society. The heroine of the novel is Akhila, Akhilandeswari. The story of the novel moves around the female passengers of the ladies coupe. In this coupe there are five women who tell their past stories. All the women are married except Akhila. She is not married but she has her own story related to her family and ex-lover, Hari. When she reaches the railway station, gets her name beneath were five others named Sheila Vasudevan, Prabha Devi,

Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paulraj and Marikolanthu.

Janki, the elderly lady of the coupe, is a house wife. Prabha Devi is also a house wife. Margaret Paulraj is a Chemistry teacher and teaches in the same college where her husband is a Principal. The story of Margaret Paulraj is very sorrowful. Listening her story Akhila remembers about her mother's argument that "he knows best. We have never had to regret any decision that he has taken, even when it was on my behalf"<sup>1</sup>(14) Once Akhila forces her mother to do some work, her father says that "If I wanted a working wife, then I would have married someone like that."<sup>2</sup> (13) "I want my wife to take care of my children and me. I do not want her so caught up with her job that she has no time for the house or for taking care of my needs."<sup>3</sup>(13) Margaret Shanthi is the student of M.Sc. Chemistry and also a gold medalist. After M.Sc. she wants to do Ph.D. but her husband Ebenezer Paulraj asks her to complete B.Ed. In male-dominated society women are not able to take her decision. Either she is bachelor or married. Before one day of her marriage, her mother comes to her and says:

"How a good wife never says "No" even she is not in mood"<sup>4</sup> (102)

In Indian family, girls are always treated as the burden of the family. Before marriage it is said that she is 'PARAYA DHAN' and that is why, mother always learns her house hold works and others. When Margaret is getting married, everyone teaches her how she has to manage her in laws house. After marriage she does everything for the happiness of her husband. Everything is going well. Eighteen months after they discovered that she is pregnant, she is very happy, wants to call her parents and tell them the good news. She is very excited and wants to stand on the rooftop and holler. "I am going to have a baby"<sup>5</sup> (104) but on the other hand Paulraj is quiet and withdraws. He tells her that

"Margaratham, I am not so sure if we should have a baby now"<sup>6</sup> (104) He says Margaret for abortion. When she asks that how is it possible. He says "I have spoken to the Doctor at length about this and she said there was nothing to fear. At seven weeks, that thing in your uterus is little more than a

zygote"<sup>7</sup> (105) listening to the word zygote she looks up in surprise because Paulraj uses scientific terms. After more debate she agrees for abortion with broken heart. She always thinks about her baby day and night. She finds herself unable to forget her baby.

In ancient times it is said that only men are able to take decision because he is the only member of the family who earns money for the livelihood of the family but at present women are not able to take their own decision while she is earning as equal as men still she is living under dependence syndrome either it is religious, culturally or ethnic group. In modern times women are educated and managing their profession and personal life both very well still she lives under the pressure of her husband and sometimes her son also. Margaret leaves her decision to do Ph.D. and goes to hospital for abortion. Women have not any desire in patriarchal society. Margaret dances in her husband tunes in her whole life and passes her life according to her husband's taste. She does not have courage to take a step against him.

For the first time she feels angry. Anyhow she aborts. After coming back to home, she feels herself alone and thinks about her baby who is now no more. In this novel Anita Nair presents the crude nature of men. One hand Paulraj loves her so much and on the other hand he does not care her feelings and pains while he always addresses her my sweet girl, my little baby, my little darling etc. When Paulraj was offered the post of principal of the S.R.P. Trush School four years ago, they left Kodaikanal to come to Coimbatore. His life becomes very busy. Margaret tells that when she is married, Paulraj wants to do his share of the house hold chores. He insists when she refuses his offers of help but after things begin to sour between us, she realizes that he treats the house like hotel. Every day he claims upon her for the household works like fooding, dusting, washing clothes etc. He also does not like new maid. After passing of the time, they blamed to each other to be irresponsible.

In this society a less number of men share the house hold work with their wives. They think that it is not their responsibility to maintain house hold work. On the other hand women manage both

sides after all she suffers her whole life. She cannot do anything according to her wish. Margaret has gone through physical, mental and spiritual crisis throughout her life. She starts to hate him and the day she realizes her hatred toward him, she feels liberated from some unknown clutches:

"I MOUTHED THE WORDS: I HATE HIM. I HATE MY HUSBAND. I HATE EBENEZAR PAULRAJ. I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM"<sup>8</sup> (98)

At last when she finds herself helpless, plays a trick with Paulraj and she gets success in it. Paulraj, who had the pride of himself, now became very fat man, a quiet man an easy man. A man who no longer needs the caterie or defaced books. A man whose fondness for eating blunted his razor edge. For the second time she becomes pregnant and born a girl. Now she is happy with her daughter and husband.

Anita Nair elaborates the story of the other passengers of the coupe named Prabha Devi was only 15 years old, her father moves her from the family owned school to a convent school. She is a very attractive girl. Her skin remains fair, dewy and spotless while other girls of her class had acne. One day asks her mother to go to cinema with her friends. Her mother shakes her head nervously and says "I don't think your father will like it".<sup>9</sup> (170) In patriarchal society everything is depending upon the man. Everything is done according to the choice of the men. Are the women not capable to do anything without the help of the men? Her father found her a husband when she was eighteen years old. Her mother was not happy listening this news. When she felt bereft, her husband says to her:

"What do you want to do? Keep her with your for life? Have you ever heard anything so sacrilegious? You were always a strange one"<sup>10</sup> (171)

Here Anita Nair presents the reality of the family. Women could not wait to get rid of their daughters. Girls are never understood as the part of the family. As they become eighteen years old, parents start to looking of groom. She marries Jagdeesh.

Their life was going on very well. Once Jagdeesh's friend Pramod comes to house during afternoon, when no one was in the

house except servants. Pramod came there with his little niece. When does Prabha Devi asks him to take something? He replies me no.

He tries to seduce her. When she opposes him, He said

"Oh come now, cerling her wrists with his fingers, pulling her towards him. 'Quit playing the good wife will you."<sup>11</sup> (182)

Women are always considered as a commodity. When she opposes Pramod, he blames her pretending to be a good and loyal wife. Women are not safe either it is home or outer world. If woman takes single step against man, she is rejected in male dominated society. Here Pramod is the symbol of male domination. If she fulfills his desire, she is called good a woman. Woman is safe neither in the shadow of her husband nor in her single life. If a woman lives alone, she has to face the shower of the questions in the society.

The main protagonist of the family, Akhila thinks about herself that what a life is, she remembers her past when she was in love with Hari, younger of her. She meets her into the train. After some meetings, one day Hari tells Akhila that he wants his birthday gift. She asks about his wish. He wants to see her nude in her birthday night. She agrees for that due to her true love towards him and goes out of station for two days. After two days, when they return from there Akhila asks him never to see him again because she was not comfortable with him due to the age gaps between them and also fear of society. Every time she thinks that she is old while Hari is young and handsome.

Often it is seen that females are very sensitive towards their relation while males are not. Women are not remote playthings who work according to someone's order. At present the condition of women is not much better. In male-dominated society women are restricted by the head of the family. Women are not inferior to men. Prabha Devi does not bend up before husband's wishes. When Jagdeesh shares his feelings about the baby, she ignores it. She takes her own decision to ignore her pregnancy against her husband and in-law's wishes. Another example of Margaret, when she finds herself failure to manage her relation with

Paulraj, plays a game with him and by hook or by crook gets success in her plan. Marriage cuts off a woman from the mainstream of the life and pulls back her from achieving her goals. Most marriages are successful only when the women show major attraction to the house hold affairs. In the most of the families, the men are the head of the house and wife a counselor who assists or helps but not the dictator. Women are the un-paid servants who work day and night despite it she is not respected. She cannot express her desire. According to the modern society a woman should be a good daughter, sister, wife, mother and so on. Indian society also believes that woman should always depend on some man in her life. Anita Nair's characters of *Ladies Coupe* have their own pain and sorrow but they overcome their own life in the society. Men and women are complementary to each other but, even in modern era, women are not considered as equal as men but treated as the weaker class. The women are the invoiced creature of the society. Anita Nair's portrayal of women in her novel *Ladies Coupe* brings out this fact clearly. Women writers of Indian writing in English are good to analyze the complex issues like complexities of human relationships, man-woman relationships, woman's psyche and her potential.

"The changing pattern of man-woman relationship is presented not only in the novels but also in films and television serials. Bold themes and diverse issues are now being taken up by the media. The mosaic of stories highlights the fact that man-woman relationship is a very complex and subtle issue."<sup>12</sup>

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