

SEARCH OF IDENTITY IN ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE*

T. Sankari Thilagavathi

M.A., B.Ed. MPHIL Research Scholar

Department of English

Mother Teresa Women's University

Dr. A. Subashini

M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil., Ph.D

Assistant Professor, Department of English

Kamaraj College, Thoothukudi

Abstract

This research paper focuses on the "Search of Identity in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe". Anita Nair is a feministic writer whose prime concerns are women's rights and identities. Her common theme is the search of identity by her characters. In her writings, women are always portrayed as the species to struggle for identity in the male centered society. Not only women are deprived of their identities, but also they have to struggle for their basic right of survival. Identity is of high importance to every individual. But it is a pity that women struggle for it.

Keywords: *Identity, Struggle, Male Domination, Chauvinistic Society.*

Introduction

Anita Nair is considered to be one of the established writers of the contemporary period. Her writings has been widely accepted by the readers. *Ladies Coupe* (2001) is the first book to be published by Picador USA. It has been translated in several languages around the globe. Anita Nair's characters are portrayed in a very realistic way with a feminine perspective. One of her common themes is struggle for identity in the male dominant society. It is hard for the women to have an identity. Even though, women has empowered in the modern India, it is still a struggle for the women to struggle for their own individual identity.

Identity is a state of being given the ability to communicate with other people in a community. Identity, in a nutshell, is the acceptance of an individual by the society. Women are often deprived of their identity. Their identity is not defined by their self. They are identified for their roles played as a mother, a sister,

a wife, a daughter and a worker. Their self identity is always a question unanswered

The *Ladies Coupe* gives a picaresque description of the efforts of women to find their identity in the society. Nubile opines that *Ladies Coupe* is the best example that vividly portrays the conflicts of women who are struggling to establish their identities in a male dominated society that is completely biased with gender, class and castes. The female characters in the novel are presented as the conditions of Indian women without exaggeration. The six women travelling together in the ladies coupe are depicted as the typical representation of Indian women who struggle for their identity.

Anita Nair portrays the lives of six women in this novel. She shows women the ways for finding the liberation on their own. Akhilandeswari is the narrator in the novel. She is the protagonist. Akhilandeswari is a middle class woman, born in a Brahmin family. Up to the age of 45, she stays a spinster. She is infuriated at her own state, she has been dreaming to be free and to have her own space. Her hunger for freedom and experience urges her to go on a long trip by train. 'Can a woman live by herself?' is the nagging question that troubles her all life.

Enslavement within the Family

Akhila was just a nineteen year old girl, When her father died. The teenage period is the period when girls dream about their future. But she had to shoulder the responsibility to take care of her family. Though she is elder than her siblings and even after becoming the care taker and the breadwinner of the family, she has to get the approval of her young brother if she wants to go out. Even her mother forces Akhila to be a subservient woman by asking permission from her brother.

Margaret loves her long hair. But her husband compels her to cut her long hair, even though he knows that his wife loves her hair. She always obeys her husband, bottling her emotions inside her. Her emotions come as an outburst, when she is asked to abort her first conceived baby. His concern for her is revealed as he dismissed her as someone of no significance. Even then, Margret reluctantly goes to abort her baby, her husband wished her all the best. For the first time, she felt angry. She is furious about his 'All the best'. She was angry and felt hurt by his wishing. His words stabbed her heart like a knife. She was shocked by his

indifferent attitude. She finds it disappointing to know that her husband was not guilty about his sin of aborting his baby.

Janaki is portrayed as the example of a good wife. She is married to Prabhakar and leads a happy comfortable marriage life. She is brought with the lesson that it is her prime duty to serve her husband who is like a god to her. She should live for his husband's desires. But only later she realizes her submissiveness. She enrages at her husband's long period of dominance. She revolts when she completely understands her husband's strong dominance over each one in the family.

Women play many roles as mother, sister, wife and so on. Whatever role she may possess she is mostly treated as a servant. It is expected from a woman that she should do household chores, take care of her family and be a backbone of the family in all aspects. If she is a working women, she has to go for her job in addition to all her other chores and duty. Indian society is still a male dominant society. Even when a woman shares the financial needs of her family with a job, most men do not even care about thinking to shares her other duties.

Akhila's mother is portrayed as an ideal Hindu wife. She depends on her husband to take any decision, even if it has to be taken regarding her life. She has an unshakable belief that her husband knows the best. In her belief she also advices her daughter Akhila abide by her father's words and decisions. After the death of her husband, she leads the family to be under the control of her son. She forces Akhila to seek her brother's permission and stand by his decisions, only due to the reason that he is a man.

Subjugation by the Society

Anita Nair emphasizes the subjugated plight of women in the Indian society. She is encouraged to write for subjugated. Anita Nair is a strong writer who demonstrates a deep understanding and compassion for all women and their inevitable choices and regrets. She portrays a woman who is not completely cut off from her family's social ties, staying on track and protesting against injustice and humiliation.

Akhila had a love with a Hari, a guy younger to her. She broke the relationship with him fearing the reaction of the society when the love is disclosed. At last, Akhila is a transformed woman with a strong transformation and enjoys

sex with a stranger. Later, after listening to all the women's stories in the ladies coupe, Akhila decides to live her life for herself not for the others. She rediscovers herself. She herself calls Hari, her love from the past.

A wife is considered to be ideal in the context of the Indian society, only if she obeys her husband and stands by his decisions. Margret Shanthi is a gold medalist in Chemistry but she is still dominated by her husband, Ebenzer Paulraj who gives first importance to her career rather than her desires. Like most Indian husbands, he never tries to understand her feelings or desires. He fails to be a good husband to her. He always gives importance to his own feelings and desires. When Margret expresses her wish to do doctorate he denies her ambition. He also forces her to work as a teacher.

Women even with high level of education or holding a high position in a job or occupying a high stature in the society, most of them have to struggle for their identity. Whatever or whoever they may be, Indian women continue to struggle in getting an identity. Although India has made great strides in science and technology, certain old fashioned customs still prevail without any change.

It is a shame to witness the gender discrimination still prevailing in our society besides many developments in modern India. Anita Nair tries to affirm that the only major difference between a man and a woman is their biological difference and nothing else. She strongly protests the oppression and subjugation done to women on the ground of gender. She holds strong objection to the demoralization and suppression on the basis of gender difference. Anita Nair powerfully believes that woman are powerful. But they subjugate themselves to man. They forget the point that their destiny is in their hands. She also encourages them to stand up for themselves even when the world itself stands against them.

Treatment as Baby-Makers

The next lady passenger is Prabha Devi. She is pretty and has conscious about it. She is made to marry Jagdeesh, when she is only eighteen years old. After her marriage, she lives a machinery life. She is forced to get pregnant. Her parents and in laws are stressing her out to conceive a child soon. Women are made to live for the sake of others. Margret and Prabha faces similar situation. Margret is forced to abort despite her desire to beget the baby; on the other hand, Prabha is forced to

conceive a baby even though she is not willing to conceive. However they are both compelled by their respective husbands to live against their desires.

Sexual Harrasment

Marikolunthu is the most pathetic passenger. She is portrayed as an realistic picture of woen suffering sexual exploitation. She is born of low caste. She is raped by an upper-class man, Murugesan. Though her rapist is known, he is not punished. She begets an illegitimate child. She experiences poverty, rape, social injustice, class discrimination and physical torture. Her mother takes care of her child and gives shelter to them. But once her mother dies, she becomes neglected like an orphan, despite having two younger brothers. But after that she decides not to depend on anyone. She becomes an independent woman.

Sheela is a fourteen year old girl. She is the youngest of the six. But she has deep insight. She is a victim of sexual abuse by older man. But Sheela faces sexual harrasment by her friend Hasina's father, Nazar. He tries to seduce her. She feels unsafe and embarassed when he wipes the sweat over her upper lip with his finger. When he knots the bows in her sleeves, Sheela never visits her friend Hasina's house again. With this character, Nair exposes the abuse of women by men.

Conclusion

In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair questions the status of women in the chauvinistic society. Though her characters initially suffered for identity in the male dominated society, they empower themselves and redeem themselves in the end. Her characters had lost their identities, self respect, strength and independence in the web of male chauvinism. Anita Nair has followed a journey from dedication to self-reliance, from self-denial to self-determination.

To eradicate patriarchy the men, women, family and the society should change their attitude and behaviour. A man should treat her as his equal. He should give her space and liberty. He should not impose his authority over her. He should discuss with her and value her views before making a decision. A woman should also develop herself mentally that she does not need a man to be happy or safe. She should live independently and take decisions of her own.

The family is highly responsible for the gender discrimination. A girl child is given meagre or no importance at all. Meanwhile a male child is brought up with

atmost care and priority. In majority of the families with a male and female child, the male child grows with the attitude that the female child is a creature that need not be respected or cared. If the treatment of girl children is changed positively, then there would be a drastic change in the society. The society too has a vital role in the abolition of gender discrimination. It should demand that both the man and woman should have learnt some basic cooking and household chores. They both should possess equal responsibility in running the family in all domains.

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