

# THE RECONSTRUCTION OF WOMEN IN ANITA NAIR'S

“LADIES COUPE”

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## ABSTRACT

Literature is an important element which connects individuals to the society through fictionalized ideas in the changing scenario. Various customs, beliefs, traditions, values are continuously and cumulatively expressed in literature. The Post modern literature is marked as a period that identifies loosely with the Progressive Era and Enlightenment. It is defined with ideology, style and various movements and ideas taken from postmodern philosophy. It is clearly and explicitly visible that the human spirit in literature links with imaginative experience. The Universal reality in the contemporary world is shown through the horizon leading to transitional space and liberation. Indian English Literature has been developing but the Indian women writers were undervalued due to some patriarchal assumptions. Gradually Indian women novelists started taking new dimensions and finding significant place in the field of literature. In the name of culture, women were left behind conveniently in the spheres of education, literature, and philosophy. The women were in stake to express and to manifest their intellectual caliber and potential. Steadily the changing conditions brought women writers to the forefront. One among them is Anita Nair who has emerged as one of India's popular female writers. Her theme of new being, human relationship and position of women in the context of the contemporary world is highly commendable. Her novel Ladies coupe is a novel about female identity and female space depicted in regard to the dreams, hopes, desires, fears, disappointments, failures and deviations in life. In the disguise of culture the characters play their role in a self convincing manner to reconstruct and to rise with the counterparts though in constraints.

Key words: Paramount, transitional, liberation, constraints.

The Indian women writers in English perceived new aspects to portray and reveal the condition of women through their writings which gave an insight to the readers. Writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya, Manju Kapur, Nayantara Sehagal, Anita Nair etc. have played an imperative role in depicting their women characters to the world. The women watch themselves tumble down into the sinkhole created by situation in the patriarchal culture. They want redemption from the male dominated society. In this pretext woman

handles the situation in a kind and unkind manner which are banned for the females. She must learn how to survive from where she realizes that she is defeated. The tale of misery and humiliation doesn't diminish and reduce a woman instead she rises and rediscovers her dignity to be in - par to attain gender equality.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* reflects upon the psyche of women and their search for resurrection from the hands of the protagonists. They want to rise and rediscover their dignity to lead a self - satisfied life. The characters are self designed by the divine or devilish thought experienced in various circumstances. The womanhood is explored by the decision taken to attain the desire and retrieve the hidden craving. Life is not all about women being subjugated by men but the release from all sorts of people who brand themselves as the gate keepers of the patriarchal society. The protagonist plays their role vociferously to grab compassion in the unkind world. The women strive to thrive by fighting the battle all alone with their own justification to live a life of content.

The six main characters from the *Ladies Coupe* justify their conduct and their destiny that has been in store for them. The transformation of the behaviour in few characters is exposed to reveal the right of equality emerging in the women. Akhila, Margaret, Janaki, Sheela, Prabha Devi and Marikolanthu meet in the *Ladies Coupe* and narrate the experiences to reflect upon the truncated life. Akhilandeswari known as Akhila plays the central role as the other five women revolve around her. She was a forty - five years old spinster working as a clerk in an Income - tax department which she got on 'compassionate grounds'. Her responsibilities were manifold after the demise of her father as she had to fill the gap in the name of daughter and sister. The real conflict lies in the care she holds for her family and all that she had to forgo in her young age as she became the autonomous body to carry the errands for the family to survive. The constrictive bars around her loaded by her family members including her mother made her transfer the kindness within her into transgression. Akhila understood her mother's and sibling's mentality which bothered her. She was desperate and dejected seeing the selfishness of her family members. She wanted to run away from the bondage and self-centered people who were greedy for her earnings. A minimal freedom to choose a hotel to have lunch was denied to her by her mother. Once a month, Akhila took her mother out to lunch at Dasaprakash Hotel where they always chose special meals. Akhila would watch in concealed irritation as her mother ate. She pecked at the food as if she hated every crumb and yet when Akhila suggested that they try another restaurant, Amma was vehement in her protests (LC 79). Her service towards her family continues even after her brothers are settled with job and family of their own. Her sister is no exception as she squeezed the savings of Akhila for her marriage expenses. Years pass by and Akhila leads her life monotonously with nothing interesting or valid. Unfortunately for her, none of her siblings were concerned about her life, career or future. Akhila's sister Padma creates an opportunity to stick on to her as a leech for the maximum period to extract the money that Akhila earns. Gradually Akhila starts changing her real self, the transformation from good to bad, kind to unkind, prosaic to romantic and from gent to rude. The inspiration behind the change is nourished by her friend Karpagam. When Akhila asks Karpagam for a solution in her life, she says, 'Whatever you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first. Tell your family to go to hell or wherever.' (LC 202). She shuns her sister's proposal to stay together because she feels the need for privacy. Akhila is thoroughly prepared to lead her life in independence as she reached the point of desperation. She doesn't oppose the running hand of a male passenger in the bus as she starts to enjoy the new experience. Akhila dares to give company to Hari, her co-passenger and finally she plans and plots her trip to Kanyakumari to live a life of complete liberty. Her oppression and repression find new dimensions for resurrection as she has her own justification for her individual happiness. The cover of feminism is thrown away and she jumps out from her nutshell.

The next person is Janaki the senior in the list who was a pampered wife of Prabhakar, married to him for forty years and a confused mother. She is under the impression that she is always safe guarded by some men in life. Janaki believed that her father, brothers, husband and son are her protectors in various stages of her life and as a typical Indian woman she thinks her major duties in life were to be a good wife and a good mother. This character is universally seen in Indian families as the women think that her Kingdom is her family and her home. She becomes unkind to her own conscious by being in the web created in the name of culture. At one point even a character like Janaki realizes that she is living a life of slavery and expresses her thought in a very simple way but the depth of her feelings is manifold. She says, Women like me end up being fragile (LC 22). In her view its women's duty to get married and be under the shade of her husband and it's difficult to be a spinster. Her gender equality is justified in her own way by the unkindness received and the kindness given that gets mutually tallied in every woman's life. She is self content with the equality rendered to her.

Sheela is the youngest of the six women in the coupe; she is fourteen years old girl who is under the guidance of her grandmother and is molded at a tender age itself as she is motherless. Her friend Hasina's father Nazar touches Sheela which makes her uneasy and humiliated. Sheela is able to differentiate between a good touch and a bad touch which stops her from going to her friend's house in future. This decision she was able to make only because of her mental maturity. Sheela is able to keep up to her benevolence through her behavior. She knows how to handle situations and how to keep things at distance as herself appraisal in this artificial world. This balance in her proves her to be far better than the other weak minded characters in the compartment. She is in a position to handle herself with maturity and clarity in comparison to the other women.

Then is Prabha Devi who is born to a mother who was unhappy with a female child and scared that her jewelry and recipes will be carried away by the daughter. Prabha Devi's birth itself signifies the pathetic place of female gender in India as it was unwelcomed to have a daughter. The thought of inequality is stuck as soon as she is born. Prabha Devi's father stared down at her disapprovingly and muttered, 'Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans, added your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance.' Prabha Devi depicts the behavior of what is expected from an Indian girl. Even her games were restricted to that of the kitchen set up and acted as a child- adult. After her marriage to Jagdeesh she was again living a monotonous life like the kind of the Indian women do, get married, wait every day for the husband to return from work, have kids in intervals expected by the family members and keep waiting for something or the other without much purpose. The culture is so deep rooted within the society that the personal disappointments and waitings are barely noted or taken into consideration. Parents also play their part to accomplish the responsibility anchored upon the shoulders. Prabha Devi finds solace in her husband though she was deviated at an instance.

Margaret Shanthi is a person who is really worth mentioning. The initial introduction of her husband Ebenezer Paulraj itself is a great example for the highest sorrow borne by her. To erode his self- esteem and shake the very foundations of his being she plots to hit him with his own weakness. To rid this world of a creature who is allowed to remain the way he was, slim, lithe and arrogant, would continue to harvest sorrow with a single-minded joy. These words show the mean thought bubbling in from the mind of a kind person who was an ordinary, simple, humble girl with minimum desires. The obsessed thought of her husband on personality and beauty were tarnished by her practically in growing him out of shape to prove the vengeance she carried over him. The positive mind converts to negative mind in the due course of the bad experiences and inhuman treatment rendered towards her. She feeds her mind with evil thoughts to hit him back letting

him to face his real life. The thought was really devilish and unkind but she wanted to remove the thorn with another thorn to prove that she is no less in any aspect than her husband.

Finally comes Marikolunthu a cursed soul, from her birth she has seen only miseries. At a very young age itself she becomes a victim of child abuse. She leads a despondent life as she was denied education because of her mother's fear to send a girl child outside but unfortunately she loses her virginity. She was sent to work in a Chettiar's house and to help her mother and brothers survive. A relative named Murugesan from the Chettiar family rapes her and she becomes pregnant. Every female in the world hopes and wishes for education and a successful marriage as two basis entities in life but both are denied to her. She undergoes repression in the name of a poor daughter, rape victim, and an unmarried mother which leads her to find herself in the company of an insane woman. Marikolunthu is really unkind to her son as she shuns his very presence. She gets solace in Chettiar's daughter-in-laws hands and she really turns from what is expected from Indian women by sharing a lesbian relationship with Sujatha. She extends her unfair deeds by having physical contact with Sujatha's husband. When chased from there she gets kindness and comfort in the Missies but again loneliness chases her life when they leave the city. A light spark of mercy in her permits her to give consent to her son to do the funeral formalities for Murugesan, her son's father. Mari attains a selfhood and finds victor within her though she had to alter her fight for equality in a mean way.

Anita Nair's main character Akhila breaks off from the bond of relationship at a point after she realizes that she has no one to shoulder upon. Her responsibilities and ordeals in the family drew her to the saturation level and make her ask to herself – Why shouldn't I live alone? I'm of able body and mind. I can look after myself. I earn reasonably well. Akhila paused when her voice choked with tears, and began again. 'Has anyone of you ever asked me what my desires were or what my dreams are?' Did anyone of you ever think of me as a woman? Someone who has needs and longings just like you do? (LC 206). Akhila's revival empowers herself to prove that equality in gender lies in oneself rather than taking it from the opposite gender.

Anita Nair has understood the inner mind of the Indian women and stands by in justifying the right for equality in the characters according to the situation. Culture changes for human beings as per their desires and circumstances. Anita Nair has provoked the minds of the readers to act according to conditions and live a life with self-justification.

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