

## The Question of Marriage: A Feminist outlook on Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

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**Abstract:** Anita Nair is a working post-modern Indian feminist writer in English. As a woman novelist, she goes deep into the inner minds of oppressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological intuition, and she brings to light their problems, which are the product of the psychology and emotional disparities of Indian women in a male-dominated society. Anita Nair's "Ladies Coupe" turned out to be a great hit. It is the tale of a woman's struggle for equality and the status of women in a male-dominated society. The novel poses the question whether the role of an Indian woman as a representation of other women living under hierarchical patriarchal structures in the sense of collective protest should be confined solely to their role as wives and mothers. In such an environment, the role of a woman is restricted to reproduction, regardless of her own wishes and needs. This paper is therefore intended to point out how Anita Nair, in her novel, answers the question of marriage. habits.

**Keywords:** Anita Nair, Ladies Coupe, Feminism

Feminism in early years focused on only destroying the stereotypes between men and women. They focused on providing men and women a more level playing field. The restrictive gender socialization was the only reason for their prejudice between men and women was the conclusion of liberal feminists. They thought all the sexist problems can be eradicated by a civil debt between both the genders. Liberal feminism is often dubbed with traditional values of individualism and also personal freedom.

These values such individualism and person freedom are common in Western countries. Feminism in general is not easily accepted by third world countries. The early feminist view has its roots in the eighteenth century, and this can be traced back to the famous contribution of Mary Wollstonecraft. There were also other feminist thinkers like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony and Sarah Grimke. They are focused on their view in liberal feminism. All these thinkers actually built their feminist theory from the foundations that was laid down by male liberal thinkers. These male thinkers asserted that as the men are naturally rationale beings and they can impose order on the world. The feminists on the other hand also argued on the other hand that they are also rationale thinkers, and their capacities are equal to men. Thus feminism arose to make efforts to grant women that same rights that are given to men. The early feminist conveyed certain views in their writing, and these views can be seen by many feminist writers of the present day as well.

Their first belief is that they have faith in the power of the rational. They argue in a rationale way for their rights. The second is the basis that both men and women share the same basic rational qualities. Their third belief is the power of education and a particular emphasis on critical thinking. When education paves way for critical thinking it helps individual and the society. The fifth belief that they endorse is that there is a natural rights doctrine, and these rights are inalienable in all the senses. The feminist thinkers of the old school all held such beliefs and their writings were a testimonial to such a thinking.

Anita Nair's novel The Ladies Coupe can also be seen in these symbols of patriarchy. The culture has defined the language, the order and manner to lead a life according to patriarchal viewpoints. The feminist and cultural understanding is imperative in analyzing the novel. It should be noted that feminist and cultural theory are interlinked in many ways and the representation of both in the novel can be seen.

Feminist and Cultural perspectives can be seen in Anita Nair's work commonly. Nevertheless, the work that stood for the feminist thought is Ladies Coupe. The novel certainly is marked by the patriarchal hegemony in the structure of Indian family. Like Kristeva points out about culture, the Indian cultural system is completely written and maintained in a male hegemony. The language, religion everything is seen through the view points of male writers and law makers of the ancient days. The colonizers are gone, but women still seem to be fighting for

the freedom of thought, expression and livelihood. Women in India are simply restricted to do their household chores, and they are praised for their patience and diligence. This false praise without true freedom is vanity.

Modern Indian has changed. Women are free to pursue education and they are also given political rights. The constraints of patriarchy has declined in the recent years. But the clutch of patriarchy is still strong in the domestic life. To assert themselves they have to do it through self-discovery, and self-reliance. The story of Ladies Coupe examines women and how they can become more assertive without the pseudo praise of men and culture. Akhila is the narrator of the story, and she is in search of independence. Ever since her father's death she has been saddled with a lot of responsibilities. She couldn't break out them at any cost. The daily routine of work and look after the family became the most important thing for her. She struggled to find her own identity, and also to discover her self-hood. It is evident that Anita Nair uses the same technique of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in this novel. The characters all crowd in coupe and they share stories just like in the Canterbury tales. This method helps the author to bring out the various issues of women, their different backgrounds are all brought forward.

There are six women characters in the novel, and they are the ones who propel the novel forward. They are narrating their stories in the novel and they tend to highlight all their experiences in the narration. They all can be considered as different types of feminists with different outlooks of the society. These women use flashback as a tool to recollect all the incidents in their life. It should be noted that each women is the protagonist of their own story. Like Chaucer's characters these women are portrayed, and they are all trying to find their way out of a tight situation in their life.

The major protagonist of the novel is Akhila and the novel revolves around her major question on the necessity of marriage. This is an important question in the feminist circles. As mentioned before feminist theory has been grappling with this question right from the liberal movement. While the liberal feminist considered marriage is necessary, and motherhood is an important part of being a woman, the radical questioned this premise. The idea of outliers can be brought in the study of Akhila. The novel also talks about the other travelers, and the problems they face. The question of marriage is examined with different women in the story and what they think. Akhila in the end should make the choice after listening to all the tales.

Akhila is forced to take care of her brother education and she has to marry off her younger sister. The individual needs of her are ignored and even though she is treated with respect in her office, and in home, she suffers as an individual person. She must get married but because of all responsibilities this will not be possible in any way. She is sacrificing her desires and her youth for the welfare of the family. The ironic thing to notice in this narration is that even though Akhila is the bread winner of the family she is not considered as the head of the family. The head of the family has always been a male character, and the patriarchal society does not allow a woman to take the place. In the feminist point of view this is not acceptable. The traditional, and hegemonic idea that only men should be head of the family has long been debated by the feminists. It is a fact that even though women are financially independent, the traditional roles are not given to them, nor the freedom. In the cultural perspective, the Indian tradition has always been male centric. The traditions have kept men in all the important places. The religions, and the myths have also conferred to the male dictum. The responsible Akhila is not allowed to be the head of the family for the simple reason of being a women.

The last person who should answer the riveting question is Akhila herself. The answers from others, and their take enlightens her about the reality of life, and all the problems a young, single person would possibly face. In short the novel is about the emancipation of Akhila from the psychological bondages. She is a journey to discover her own self. It is also a reminder to her that she can be an individual without the pressure of others, and without a make support as such. A woman can surely achieve her psychical and emotional freedom. The final lesson is learnt from her school friend Karpagam, and she is a widow, but she doesn't in any way dress like a widow. This is startling as far as Akhila is concerned.

Karpagam after her husband did not want to lose herself in depression and also shun all the ordinary pleasures of life. This is a good lesson for Akhila as she has let her family of parasites to enjoy every in her expense, and also little caring for her own life. She advises to Karpagam to "live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first. Tell your family to go to hell or whatever"(202). This gave a new perspective to the life of Akhila. The only solution for Akhila seems to be take control of her life, and take control of her destiny. After the meeting Akhila decides to live a life of freedom and not dependency. The character of Karpagam is also shown as a great and powerful character who has taken control of her life.

All the characters in this narrative are victims in one way or the other. The feminist outlook and

cultural outlook exposed their victimhood. Even by the end of the novel when Akhila says to Padma that she will live alone, Padma immediately says, "For heaven's sake, I don't need anyone's consent...I will do exactly as I please and I don't give a damn about what you or anyone else things"(204). All the woman in the family are deeply rooted in the patriarchal system so they are not able to completely understand the bold outlier decision of Akhila. The longing for male touch is also revealed in the novel, and the personal warmth through the touch in this dreamy sensation soothes her. She seeks out emotional nutrients in order to cater her sensation starved body.

Ladies Coupe without doubt is a powerful novel that delineates feminine sensibility, and the fact is all this is shown through the projection of crisis of social and inner urge for freedom. In the end freedom is more important than marriage is the conclusion of Akhila.

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