

**Implications of Feminine Perceptive in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*
and *Lessons In Forgetting***

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Feminism is a criticism of the prevailing social conditions, Which have excluded women from the dominant male culture, social, political and intellectual pursuits. Feminism offers an explanation of the political, economic and social situations of women and it puts forward an explanation of their history with oppression. Post-colonial Feminist literature has always carried the heavy burden of dealing with, not to say unravelling layers of misinterpretation of traditions and religions. The centre of this dilemma is the role of women and her economic and social independence. In the traditional post – colonial society, the problematic questions is of women's emancipation and its women writers are more passionate and serious about it. In this writing, Post – Colonial Indian Women authors have not only exhorted an exposition of the patriarchal ideologies and their oppressive tendencies towards feminist growth and expression but have also envisioned way of counteracting those attitudes. They analyze their varying ideals of feminist emancipation in relation to the roles, the communities play in aiding or in obstructing feminist freedom of all contemporary Indian English novelists, Anita Nair is perhaps, the most perspective explorer of women's world, a writer with the works endorse female experience.

Keywords: Anita Nair, *Ladies Coupé*, *Lessons In Forgetting*, Feminism, Search for self, Self-identity, Suppression.

Introduction

In Anita Nair's fictions, her characters step out, and there are stereo types in their search for self. Her writings explore the freedom of the women to fulfill herself basically as a human being.

This present paper tries to focus how Anita Nair projects the concepts of feminism and attitudes of women, their characters and their upcoming by overcoming their suppressions in her novels.

Implications of Feminism in Ladies Coupe

Anita Nair is a well – known and renowned Indian English Writer. She concentrates mainly on feminism and exposes the condition of women especially in Indian Society with wit and humor. Her novels portray all facts of the lives of women.

In “Ladies Coupe” Anita Nair taken up for treatment the theme of estrangement in marriage, issues of pre – marital and extra – marital affairs. *Ladies Coupé* is a very powerful novel delineating feminine sensibility, despite the fact that this delineation is chiefly expressed through the projection of the crisis of social norms and inner urge of freedom. The Brahmin heroin Akhila, whose life has been taken out her control, is forty-five years old ‘spinster’, daughter, sister, aunt, and the only provider of her family after the death of her father. Getting fed up with these multiple roles, she decides to go on a train journey away from her family and responsibilities, a journey that ultimately make her a different woman. She tries to change the course of her life and family substantially. But it is not possible as she lives in a predetermined world. Neither she is free to realize her goals, nor to translate her dreams into realities. Akhila with son’s husband, children, home & family is dreaming of escape into space. Hungry for life and experience, she sets out for a journey. Anita Nair chooses ladies only, train compartment as the setting of the novel in” Ladies Coupe” she meets five other women, each of whom has a story to tell. Each of the chapter of the novel is devoted to one of the women’s story; **Janaki**, the old women whose relationship with her husband, is a friendly love, **Margaret**, the chemistry teacher whose succeeds disciplining her husband, **Prabha** the rich submissive wife who loves swimming because it metaphorically gives her a sense of achievement; **Sheela**, the fourteen year old whose understanding of her dying grandmother paves the way for her own future liberation; and **Marikolanthu**, whose rape, literally and metaphorically, coupled with extreme poverty and class- exploitation is the culmination of all other stories.

Ladies Coupé is the story of Akhila, who happens to be most subdued, rather crushed member of the family. Akhila is like catalyst whose presence is never noticed, never appreciated and yet whose absence may make all the difference. **Akhila** is a woman lost in the jungle of her duties; sometimes to her mother at other times to her brothers and still at other times to her sister. She is expected to be an obedient daughter, affectionate and motherly sister and everything but an individual. She lives a life designed by the society or family. Like Akhila’s the other characters are also questioning the system and are “searching for their identities and their status both in the family set-up and large social structure”.

Ladies Coupé deconstructs that which is taken for granted the sacred, the traditional, and the ideological. **Akhila** is not given the opportunity by her family to get married and have a family, she is still a spinster as she has to provide and the Brahmin traditions in this case become flexible. **Marikolanthu** a low caste woman is raped and unsurprisingly, she is to blame; “Why does a young woman walk alone?” It is pleasing to note that Anita Nair observes the uneducated, poor and rural women, like Marikolanthu, who boldly reject traditions that define their lives in dependent

relationship with men more strongly than the educated and urban women reject those traditions. Through this depiction Nair Criticizes the formal education reinforces the patriarchal conditioning in men and women. She asserts that education can empower and liberate women only when it is aimed at changing social attitude.

The struggle of educated and rich women for emancipation is not the same like that of an uneducated and poor woman. Marikolanthu's greatness lies in her struggle for emancipation in spite of being poor and illiterate. She can be called as an Indian version of Ibsen's Nora. None can fail to admire her gradual growth through experience from docility to defiance to full confidence. Though not formally educated in school or college, She is rigorously trained in the University of Adversity. Thus she succeeds in her flight with the preconceived notions of gender – roles and develops the existential. In spite of the difficulties and obstacles caused by the patriarchal society, these five women endeavor to channelize their emotions in different ways because of their strong urge to survive. Thus, Anita has offered an affirmative vision thereby upholding the ultimate goodness, beauty and truth of life in *Ladies Coupé*.

Implications of Feminism in *Lessons In Forgetting*

Anita Nair is a prolific Indian writer in English, who has been writing novels, short stories, poems, essays, children stories, plays, travelogues and editing works since 1997. She is best known for her novels - *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe*. She is a bold and straightforward writer. Her novels depict the real life of her characters. Her novels reveal the effect of social conditioning on women. They break the chains of social standards and do not confine themselves to the boundaries which limit women. It is evident that Nair breaks the chains of society in portraying her women characters. She never hesitates to tell the truth however bitter it is. Her novels are the social document of the twenty-first century. The question she raises in the novel, *Lessons in Forgetting* makes us rethink about the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in the traditional society and think about the existence of alternative reality. The novel describes how a woman has to make painful choices in order to assert and retain her sense of self. In spite of their oppression, women resolve to redefine their identity in patriarchal social order. Savitha Singh opines that Anita Nair has done a commendable job in bringing out the positive role and positive transformation of women in the on-going battle of establishing female selfhood. (29)

Lessons In Forgetting narrates the tale of Meera, the protagonist who lives in Lilac House with her grandmother, Lily, her mother, Saro and two children – Nayantara and Nikhil. In 1930s her father Raghavan Menon begins his life in Calcutta. He falls in love with Charo, a Bengali woman, marries her and has a girl child, Leela. Charo dies earlier, therefore Raghavan Menon sends Leela to Shantiniketan where a well-known Bengali director spots her. She becomes a part of the Hindi cinema as a famous actress with the name of Lily. She marries Sandor, a Hungarian painter. They come to live in Bangalore in Lilac House that Raghavan Menon has found them. Saro is their daughter. She grows independent and considers herself to be a woman of a unique taste. She falls in love with her best friend's brother and marries him. They have a daughter, Meera, the protagonist of the novel. Saro's husband dies earlier and she seeks refuge for herself and her daughter, Meera in Lilac House. After her father's death Meera has some hard years which make her to lead a simple

life. Meera's life is changed when the Lilac house is chosen for photo shoot. Giri, being the shooting crew happens to meet her and falls in love with her. He becomes intimate with her and her family too. Giri is swayed by the richness laid before him. For him, she is a bride with social grace and a beautiful old home. Giri, being a calculative persona of his future predicament from the village, Palakkad has found a job for him in the corporate world yet searching for the opportunity to reach the zenith of life. He wants to forget the reminiscences of his father in his yellowing banian and dhoti and the old decrepit house and relatives. He wants to acquire the polished lifestyle. So, he marries Meera hoping to free of the yellowing past. With this intention of social status he marries her, but she is unaware of it : "With Meera, he would be able to move on. Finally, he would be free of the yellowing past and the stench of making do. His. Like the lilac house, L'air du temps" (37). She considers herself as Hera, the Greek goddess sincerely waiting for the love of her Zeus, Giri. They have two children, Nayantara and Nikhil. He suggests her to be socialized and soon she becomes a cookbook writer. Her life is led by him completely.

Giri wants to start his own business to achieve his dream so he wants to sell the Lilac House but Meera rejects it. He is worried about his place on the corporate world and wants more than enough. Hence one day, in a party, he deserts Meera and disappears from her life, leaving her with two children and her mother and grandmother. Meera finds it difficult to manage, financially in Giri's absence. She finds her life full of clichés. She does not agree to sell the Lilac house because she cannot sell the house as her grandfather has taken the house on ninety-nine years lease. The house has to surrender to the original owners after forty-five years. She now realizes that Giri has accepted her as a package.

After Giri's departure Meera's life becomes miserable which she shares as, "We may starve to death, but it will be in gracious surroundings" (111). So, she takes up a job as a research assistant to Jak, the cyclone expert. Giri starts a new life and demands divorce. So Meera decides to give up her old identity of Hera as there is no Zeus in her life. She starts her second life as Giri does. She does not change anything, her hair, home, dreams, herself, as Giri comes in her life. Now, he has left her so she wants a change, which would give her feelings of new woman, "Now that Meera has known it again, she finds strength" (186). She learns to burden Giri less with the demands of fatherhood. So she takes the responsibility of her children. She attends party on her own. She does not need anyone with her. She does not feel awkwardness in the party, which Nair writes: "A woman by herself at a party is like a man by himself" (183). Her realization comes in the way of her decision to start the second innings of her life with Jak, "... she has become will wither and die forever. She will be there for him, Meera decides" (325).

Smriti is the second most important character who rebels against the existing social orders such as dowry system, female feticide, etc. Anita Nair writes:

Despite the laws and regulations, women still find a way of discovering the sex of their unborn babies. If not the women, their families. They abort the foetus if it's a girl. Soon there may come a day when there are no women left. (285)

She makes her life down for the noble cause. The novelist, through Smriti, presents the image of a new woman who is educated, courageous and capable of creating a path of their own in his patriarchal world and moreover her plight cautions the young mind against the containment and exploitation. Smriti, the daughter of Jak and Nina resides with her father after the legal separation of her parents. Inspired by her father's Indian stories, She comes to India in pursuit of her higher studies. She represents the mistaken identity. India makes her an active member of the forum inspired by the slogans of the forum like "The dying daughters of India need you" (153) which creates awareness on dowry, burning the women and female feticide in little towns. For an awareness campaign she goes to her father's village, Minjikapuram in Tamil Nadu with her friend, Rishi Soman. When she visits a hospital there for treating glass injury, she is shocked to see there, many pregnant women who have come for scanning to find the sex of the foetus. If it is a girl child, they do abortion either willingly or forcefully. Smriti finds it illegal and wants to stop it:

'It's illegal!' Smriti's voice rose. They do it here. Why do you think we came here? The scan doctor is not from this town. They bring him from somewhere else, and he tells us if we ask him, the woman whispered ... 'All these pregnant women, they come from various parts of the district... It's because of the scan doctor. And then, if you want it, they'll do the abortion here as well!' (292).

She tries to collect proof against all this for making a report. She meets a woman, Chinnathayi whose daughter dies at the nursing home after an abortion. Smriti wants some paper regarding this issue from her. Dr. Srinivasan and his men pass a wrong message to Smriti using Chinnathayi's name and call her at sea beach. When Smriti comes there, three of them destroy her. They were animals, these men. They tore at the girl and it seemed the more she screamed, the more excited they became... It was the smell of blood" (317). She becomes a motionless, pathetic and frozen figure. Smriti, a girl brought up in the United States has got into the troubles when identifying herself with the fellow Indian woman; she considers it as her duty to amend the social injustice. In the words of Maya Vinay,

Smriti in *Lessons in Forgetting* is a victim of such a mistaken identity. Men in India are still unequipped to face such a kind of modernity, which is an off shoot of progressive western education and upbringing. Smriti with all her frivolousness is also a girl who wants to bring about a reform in the society by her social activism. She is cruelly punished by the male society for her interference in local matters...she appears freak in the eyes of her community since she demonstrates the possibilities of her society to a group of people who are not yet ready to either grasp these possibilities or acknowledge them. (118-119)

Nair writes about how women want to be free to unburden their life through Jak's mother, Sarada. Her husband deserts her with a son for attaining sainthood and her parents blames her for that starts to live on her own with her son Kitcha, i.e. Jak as," Appa's dissatisfaction with everything

around him-his home, his wife, his son” (149). She begins to work in a small school as a primary teacher in Math in the neighbourhood and later completes B.Ed. to be economically independent. When her husband sends her a letter narrating the impossibilities of his return, she understands the real facet of her life and determines to lead a life for hers. So, she remarries a physics teacher from Hyderabad. Thus, Sarada stands as a fine epitome of woman’s struggle to lead a life of her.

Kala Chithi is another example of woman’s confrontation against ancient traditions. She is renamed as Vaidehi after her marriage to represent the ideal qualities of woman and wife. She is a rational woman who raises the question when her sister, Sarada, is considered responsible for her husband’s desertion of home and its duties as: “But how can you blame Akka? Athimbel is the one who went away, all of us know that!” (195). She subdues her pain with the help of Jak. She feels relieved of her pain when washing her hair in the waves as, “For the first time, I felt weightless. On an impulse I opened my hair and let the sea seep through it. My hair rose and neck ceased to ache. I began to laugh” (198). When she cuts hair as how she desires to be Ambi, her husband punishes her by not speaking to her. He becomes normal when she gets back a long strand of hair. When Ambi, her husband decides to remarry, because after seven years of marriage they do not have a child. Kala Chithi leaves him a long braid woven with jasmine and kanakambaram and her married name, Vaidehi. She cuts her hair and offers to him as, “This is all you ever wanted of me. Keep it. And let me go, I said, walking out” (206). She starts to live with Sarada resuming her old name, Kala Chithi.

Meera’s grandmother Lily, after her daughter’s death, becomes lonely. She advises Meera: “I don’t want to talk about the wind or the trees. If they bother you so much, chop them down!” (269). Meera finds Lily’s views as right as men and trees are the same. She no longer worries about pleasing her Zeus, Giri. Lily suggests Meera to start a new life if she has a chance: “It isn’t about cutting your hair or acquiring a new wardrobe... A new look that turns you into a new woman. Get real, Meera. Get real before your life slips away from you” (274). She advises her to be honest with herself and to have her own dreams. It inspires her to dream once more. Lily was proud of her being a national award-winning actress. She wants to help Meera by easing some of the burden on her as she has the responsibility of all family members. Lily decides to go to her friend Zahira, the actress, who gives it all up some years ago and lives in Mysore now with a house full of animal whose son is a very successful television producer and he wants Lily to act in a new series. Lily is too old but excitement in her voice shows how happy she is to work. Thus, she identifies herself with her role for T.V programmer and she is very independent in her decision as, “You don’t have to say anything. I am not asking you for permission. I am informing you of my decision” (273).

Lessons in Forgetting is a story of women’s quest to move on in life. Moreover, they design their future for themselves. Meera, by becoming an assistant of Prof. Jak becomes financially independent, adjusts expenditures and takes the responsibility of her family. She decides to start a new life with Prof. Jak. Sarada becomes a teacher in the school. She also becomes independent. She marries her colleague and starts a new life. Kala Chithi leaves her husband and a name after marriage, Vaidehi. She continues to resume her life with her old name, Kala Chithi. She cuts her hair, which causes weight to her. It shows her resistance against her suffering and emergence as a

revolutionist. She lives with Jak to take care of him. Meera's grandmother, as she remains alone due to Saro's death, decides to stay at her friend house. Smriti's life causes misery is revealed to her father Jak who considers it as his sole responsibility to fight against evil prejudices in India especially in his home town, Minjapuram. The novel ends with a new beginning and learning a lesson in forgetting to move on life. In short, Anita Nair writes about the search of self of her woman characters and their assertion of the individual self.

Conclusion

To conclude thus Anita nair focuses the concept off feministic issues for her women characters to overcome their suppression to enhance the challenge of facing the male dominated society in their lives.

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