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SOCIAL REALISM

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ABSTRACT

Indian culture is even today cloistered, customary and demands a special code of conduct from women. Gender bias continues to rein supreme, with the woman playing a largely subservient role in a male dominated civilization. The woman is emerging from her essentially restricted role to the front stage both on the domestic front as well as the world at large. Anita Nair's novel Ladies Coupe poses the query whether a lady can be alone and yet happy. The novel seeks to understand Indian women undergoing a metamorphosis and even a catharsis in the modernized ambience of cities. The personality is the distinct trait of a person. It is a self-organizing, interactive system of thoughts, feelings and aspirations which exemplifies the uniqueness of a person. As all the human activities are centered on these endeavors in pursuit of the self, the quest and recreation of the self becomes the predominant concern of authors of all genres. In Anita Nair's novel, her characters have come out of their struggles in their quest for self identity. Her novels explore the freedom of the woman to fulfill herself basically as a human being. The present article intends to explore the penetrating for the self and recreation of it, to redefine the role and the quest of female to move on in life.

KEY WORDS: *post colonial, feminist, society, realism.*

INTRODUCTION

Anita Nair is one of India's living woman authors who have carved a distinctive niche for herself. Based in Bangalore, the IT capital of India, Nair has strived to write novels with a distinctive South Asian flavour in content and style. She tells her story with a distinct, incisive and pithy directness which makes her unique. Her characters are drawn from different walks of life and are realistic. Nair has emphasized that her characters interact and cause tensions allowing the narrative to unravel at a brisk pace. Her ideas are very identifiable, relating to common sensibilities. Though her story is not meant to be universal, yet, its theme is universal. Anita Nair was functioning as the

resourceful executive of a marketing organization in Bangalore when she narrated her first story. A compilation of small stories called Satyr of the Subway was marketed to Har-Anand Press. The book won her a companionship from the Virginia Center for Creative Arts. Her next book was released by Penguin India and was the first book by an Indian writer to be published by Picador, USA.

Ladies Coupe was released in 2001. Looking back, towards the mid-nineteenth century more and more women began to write in English. a few of them, such as Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain, formed a world of feminist ideologies. In Sultana's nightmare she talks about a world dominated by women; a world which has

imprisoned men in a male equivalent of zenanas. She creates a earth that is much healthier than the one men managed. In her woman's world, there are no wars and there is constant scientific progress and love for the environment. Women's script in the 20th century encouraged towards a medium of modernism in which womanist and feminist statements were joint with political messages. The script of women such as Hamsa Wadkar conveyed a truthful impression of a world of expert women whose careers in TV and stage segregated them as a class apart, yet subjected them to the same cruelty and force of patriarchy. In her life history, Hamsa Wadkar talks about her life as an actor from the age of eleven, her wedding to a doubtful and rude husband, the birth of a daughter, her existence after eloping with another man, the custody she faced at his home along with two of his other better halves, and her rape by a impartiality of peace.

Ladies Coupe is the story of a woman's search for strength and independence. The central character is Akhilandeshwari, Akhila for short: forty-five and single, an income-tax clerk, and a woman who has never been allowed to live her own life - always the daughter, the sister, the aunt, and the provider. Awaiting the day she gets herself a one-way permit to the seaside town of Kanyakumari, splendidly alone for the first time in her lifetime and determined to break free of all that her traditional Tamil Brahmin life has jumps her to.

The man-woman relationship is probably the most intricate one and the author sheds some light on it, though it must be admitted that most of the novel is written from the point-of view of the women. Men seem abrogated to playing secondary roles. Yet they play an important role in the woman's life for they subjugate her to this level. In this context, Nair had been questioned whether she is a feminist. But she replied, "I wasn't thinking about gender. I had a story to tell. I was exploring certain issues that were important to me"

Ladies Coupe is a strange about women in South Asia. But it talks about universal factors in the man-woman relationship. It explores themes of alienation, loneliness and lost opportunities. It delves into subjugation and dominance within the portals of marriage. It could probably be termed a "defiant" novel since it seeks to analyze the emotions of single as well as married South Asian women. It could be epoch making, for this theme hasn't been explored by many writers of the sub-continent. Insidiously it seeks to ask whether these women are on the thresh-hold of

"liberation," if we take "liberation" to be "freedom from bondage," be it of the mind or body. In Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* her heroine breaks free from the portals of marriage and seeks salvation in the arms of another man, even though he is a low-caste Parvan, an untouchable. While Nair's single heroine finds a lover and the married women seek different ways out of their difficult marriages. The winds of change have certainly been fanned in the Indian social scene.

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 not at all hesitates to tell the fact, however sour 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. (LIF.29)

The earlier Indian women novelists have portrayed woman as silent sufferers, the upholder of traditional values and ethics, the strict observer of social taboos, an essence of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their successors, a being with no space for herself, a woman without an identity and so on . The Postcolonial women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Nayantara Sahgal, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee, Gita Hariharan, Anita Nair, Manju Kapur have brought about a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters in their novels. Women writers redefine women in their literature. The nature of the self is something complicated. It is a constant thrash about going on within every human entity to find coherence among the

selves. The innumerable selves within oneself are a source of constant conflict and lack of harmony inside a human being leads to the hypothetical question of the identity of the self.

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 simpleton life. She never aspires big dreams.

Meera never dreamt big dreams. She had no desire for designer clothes, diamonds or expensive holidays...Enough to keep roof over their heads and food in their bellies. 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 banyan 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" (LIF 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". 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" (LIF 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" (LIF 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" (LIF 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 fetus if it's a girl. Soon there may come a day when there are no women left (LIF 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.

CONCLUSION

To sum it can be said that Anita Nair is a one of those Indian English novelists who with her impressive technique of novel-writing give a real description of women's wretched condition in Indian society. On one side Nair explores women's agony and on the other side she suggests a number of ways to fight back against these agonies to make their life a fruitful and peaceful one. Her women characters are not weak; they are courageous and possess an impressive audacity and will power to fight back against social evils. Anita Nair's novels can be considered a microcosm of female world. 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 cause 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, Minjakapuram. 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.

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