

Research Article

Viva la difference in Ladies Coupe and Mistress

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Abstract

This disquisition grills seriously about the concept of ‘Othering’, which refers to ‘challenging the patriarchy’. This challenge arises because women have cat got their tongue. This creates fury. Have their track mind helps them to overcome subjugation, in order to have their identity, if not woman but a human being.

Key Words: Othering, submissive, patriarchy, New Woman

The concept of ‘Othering’ helps one to understand how woman tries to escape from their submissive and oppressive role in their family. This concept helps the readers to know that women are ready to challenge. In other words, woman of ‘Othering’ is viewed to be “Nasty Woman” which tells us how woman tries to work for liberality in order to assume the role of ‘New Woman’.

Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe* has multiple voices because the protagonists in this novel try to obviate the dominance of patriarchy. The sense of subjugation makes them to have fear, and forces them repair to equality. In *Ladies Coupe* there are six women characters, and they belong to different age, experience, and social strata. But, their experiences tell how woman in India are willing to break social or familial taboos. For instance, Akhila is portrayed how she tries to subvert ethics and customs.

Her journey in Kanyakumari bound train helps her attempt to escape physically and psychologically from orthodoxy. Akhila muses this in the following manner:

Perhaps if I let myself, I too will arrive at happiness. A wild
Warming, a magic content, an inner peace, all from knowing
that the past years haven’t been in vain and what lies ahead will
bring forth more than what I have resigned myself to accepting as my lot.(154-155)

The concept of journey is attached to growth and expansion of vistas. The coalescing experiences of fellow passengers assist her to gain confidence that brings change in her behaviour. Nair uses coupe as personal space to reveal the psychological crisis of Akhila along with other characters. When they try to fight against the wilful of predicament, it is apt to mention Dorris Thomas who says this propensity in the following manner:

All the characters of this ‘female enclave’ without exception go
through the gruelling experiences of domestic oppression at the hands of their families

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and everyone of them acquire s an implacable resilience not only to say alive, but even discover their inner source of dynamism and creative well spring. (46)

When Akhila, a central figure in the novel, hears the stories of women, they take her to move forward to answer for the question she asks, “can a woman stay single and be happy?”....or does she need a man to feel complete?”(15).

The stories of co- passengers are also straight. The story content in women’s writings show that the power- struggle between the genders is not over. As Marina Warner points out in her study of fairy-tales and their tellers, “stories... flow with the irrepressible energy of interdicted narrative and opinion amount groups of people who have been muffled in the dominant learned milieus” (11). The stories are about how these women cope with personal crises such as loneliness, ill treatment, and betrayal.

The six women characters relate their stories, and stirring revolt in them begins with sense of dissatisfaction. The awareness of the repression paves way for questioning of the validity and their stubborn as a mule against conventions are honest. Also, these characters manifest a kind of new urge towards their individuality. Their sense of ‘Young Turk’ is a kind of rejection of society and patriarchal oppressions. Akhila’s resilient self begins to have form and shape, when she discerns her own needs. Her enrolment to Bachelor degree helps her to unravel herself more. This is expressed by the writer in the following manner:

She enrolled in the Open University for a Bachelor of Arts
Degree.....there is probably no one more suited to study history
Than a spinster, she though, The trace the rise and fall of
Civilizations. To study the intricacies of what made a certain
Dynasty behaves in a certain manner. To watch the unravelling
of Life from the sidelines. To read about monarchs and
concubines; Wars and heroes; to serve and no more. (85)

Back to Akhila’s journey in the train, Akhila a passive listener metamorphosis’s into an active speaker shedding her fear. A journey is a sense of excitement of being able to do something all by herself. She gathers strength from exchanges and guidance from the experiences of these six strange women. Akhila’s maturity is seen even before the commencement of her journey when she says, “I’m not going to ask them for permission to go on a trip. I’d rather not go, ‘Akhila said, walking out of the room” (150).

Akhila’s discerning mind helps her to recognize when to abide the rules and when to fling them to the winds. This is yet another emerging characteristic of Akhila’s signs of growth. She is in the process of becoming more genuine and truer to her inner self. As Scott Peck observes:

Love is not simply giving: it is judicious giving an judicious
with holding as well. It is judicious praising and judicious
criticizing. It is judicious arguing, struggling confronting,
urging, pushing and pulling in addition to confronting. It is
leadership. The word “judiour” means requiring judgement and
judgement Requirng judgement, and judgement requires more than instince: it requires
thoughtful and often painful decision making. (111)

The ‘New Woman’ in her is manifested by her body language. She is always happy in her new found identity and liberty that cannot suppress her happiness. She tells herself “where the body goes, the mind will follow,... one feat of courage, to tread where she has never gone before” (272). Akhila is seen as embodiment of different forms of the supreme goddess Shakti,

who is a destroyer, and preserver. She is Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhairavi, and so on. She experiences all these forms of Shakti, "as her body moves through a catacomb of sensations" (275). She emerges as a new individual: "This is who Akhila is. Together and separate" (275). Akhila realizes this Shakti in her to assume multiple forms in life: "she becomes Akhilandeswari," (274) - the fullness, who is capable of anything.

Karpagam another woman in *Ladies Coupe*, is a strong woman striving for self-definition in a patriarchal social organisation. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy. She is a radical woman because her outstanding behaviour can be understood from the following lines:

I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am.

And I have as much as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me didn't we as young girls wear colorful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? (202)

Further, Karpagam's courage is outstanding when she says, " I live alone. I have for many years now. We are strong, Akhila. Whether you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first." (202).

Margret Shanthi, another woman in this novel, has fought against patriarchy. She is also in search of self- independence similar to Akhila and Karpagam. Her story demonstrates how a woman could manipulate to get her own way. Margaret's husband Ebenezer Paulraj is the epitome of male chauvinism in the novel. He is like the colonizer who is unable to see and praise the worth of her wife, who is like the colonized.

Tired of subaltern position in his house, Margaret finally takes her life into her own hands. She gathers her forces with supreme Will power and turns the tables on him. Surprisingly, she compares herself with water which can be understood from the following lines:

Among the five elements that constitute life, I classify myself as water. Water that moistens. Water that heals. Water that forgets. Water that accepts. Water that flows tirelessly. Water that also destroys. For the power to dissolve and destroy is as much a part of being water as wetness is. (96)

Anita Nair's *Mistress* also highlights how women have their individuality and they are strong enough to follow the dictates of their heart. For instance, Saadiya, a teenager, is aching for freedom. This is observed when she says,

The life demand, of us that we have a Plank of Avidity. How can we have more if to we don't raise our expectations? How can we be content with just what we have and know? (100).

Further, it is also noted how she longs to have a whale of time:

Saadiya stared at the square of blue above her head. Twenty feet by thirty feet. That was the measure of her sky, the peripheries of her life. She touched the grey walls of the terrace roof. Even if it stood a solid six feet and two inches high making sure she would never see what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone. (99).

Saadiya wants to explore the world around to see things for her. Her unquenchable quest drives her out. Her subversion has come to limelight when she disapproves of her marriage. In a pressurising voice, she informs her father about her mind in the following manner: "you can

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pretend that you don't hear me. But, I will tell the Kazi that I am not willing to marry the man you have chosen for me (144)".

Radha in *Mistress* is also rebelling against Shyam a domineering husband. He prefers "a glossy, silly wife to a homely, practical one. Glossy silly wives are malleable"(61). But, she strongly opposes this mind of him. When her attempt to change Shyam, she breaks traditions, flouts social norms and feels no remorse for her actions. She does feel sorry for the way she has treated her husband, when she has decided to leave alone with her child. As Meena Devi says: "She finally decides firmly that she should lead a life of her own with her child, leaving both Shyam and Chris. She knows that both the men will be hurt by her decision" (346-47).

In fine, the protagonists of Anita Nair are ready to face oppositions from their family, and are ready to pursue their desires of their own. Though they have to face cat and dog life in the family, they are not afraid to have lock horns. In most of the characters, there is no love lost in their family. But, they are very shrewd enough to understand their problem, thereby to escape from back to the wall. Truly, they never view them as big fish. But, they are clever enough to understand the wrong side of the stick, when a storm is brewing in their family. In fact, patriarchal norms may stick their throat and those norms may come down on them like ton of bricks. They never give it a rest to their fight against men of patriarchy who have atrophied self. Always they are not for blamstorming, but they are ever ready for brainstorming.

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