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**PSYCHOSOCIAL ANALYSIS OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN  
 ANITA NAIR'S NOVEL *LADIES COUPE***

*Sandeep Kumar*, Research Scholar, Department of English, Indus International University, Bathu, Distt. Una (H.P) India

*Dr. Rakesh Kumar*, HOD Department of English, Indus International University, Bathu, Distt. Una (H.P) India

*Neha Parbhakar*, Research Scholar, Department of English, Indus International University, Bathu, Distt. Una (H.P) India

**Abstract:**

*The problematic situation of an individual in society has been a dominant theme of literature. But as civilization has advanced, it has assumed new dimensions with women all over the world clamoring for equal rights and opportunities comparable with men. The rigid patriarchal set-up resists with all its might the efforts of women to gain equality of sexes. Consequently, women all over the world especially educated women in advanced countries form pressure groups and even take to the streets their struggle to gain equality with their men folk. It is in this context that Anita Nair's 'Ladies Coupe' presents women's struggle in a patriarchal society. Problems of gender discrimination, exploitation, oppression, and abuse of a woman's body are highlighted in this novel. The characters present a befitting picture of socio-cultural challenges faced by women in contemporary Indian society. The misery faced by the women characters affects their psychology; Shanti starts hating her husband and while Prabha Devi has to accept the dominance of her husband as she is economically dependent on him. Akhila, a financially self-dependent woman slams the doors on her family and decides to live all alone. Akhila's liberation is psychological, not physical. The paper aims to relate the impact that socio-economic conditions have on the psychology of an individual especially of women in a rigidly patriarchal society.*

**Keywords:** *Psychology, Struggle, Patriarchal Society, economical condition, Identity.*

Anita Nair is a renowned writer from the Southern part of India. She is a sensitive writer who explains the tribulations faced by women in a patriarchal society. Her eloquent writing style helps readers to engross till the end. Her novels have gained world recognition and have been translated into thirty-one languages. She has written some of the best-selling novels namely '*The Better Man*', '*Ladies Coupe*', '*Mistress*' and '*Eating Wasps*'. She has earned honor and respect by presenting her characters realistically.

This novel deals with the six female characters, namely Akhilandeshwari, Janki, Prabha Devi, Margret Shanthi, Marikolanthu, Sheela and who have taken control of their lives. Akhilandeshwari (Akhila) is the protagonist, a 45 years old "spinster" in this novel. These six women represent different socio-economic backgrounds of India. Socio-economic conditions of the individual affect the individual's psychology which is presented by Anita Nair in this novel. The man-woman relationship has been affected by the power structure prevailing in a patriarchal society. It helps to understand man-woman relations. The economic and social background of a person is directly linked with the problems faced by a human being which are either psychological or physical and Anita Nair has tried to emphasize these psycho-social problems by presenting her six characters who face these challenges in their journey of life. Some of the social evils which affect the cognitive development of women are deprivation from education, dowry, sexual exploitation, subjugation, oppression, financial exploitation, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and

inferior position in social structure and masculinity from birth till death. Psycho-analysis of six women is done by Anita Nair which shows the psychological liberation from an unstable personality to well defined human being who has a definite opinion and action strategy for any situation. Akhila is an Income tax officer who plays different roles in her family like a daughter, a sister, and the only provider. These women have different backgrounds which foreground the foundation of their oppression and discrimination faced by them on various stages of life. Here, the novelist uses the protagonist to share the plight of women exists in Indian society. The projection of women and their subjugation by their counterparts have been exploited by the novelist. Society has played a vital role to control the psychology of women. Social rules and regulations have been made by the male dominant society without the consent of women. These are norms suited to patriarchal society and have a deep impact on women's psychology. In Indian society, women are seen as the caretakers and play a vital role in the sustainable development of the life of a family. By analyzing the psychology of women, several dimensions open up for discussion related to feminist issues and their abilities to emerge victorious after shattering these societal decrees.

Psychoanalysis theory is propounded by the 19<sup>th</sup>-century psychologist Sigmund Freud. Psychoanalysis means a reflection of the human's inner mind, desires, and feelings. Human efforts whether it is conscious or unconscious undergo a series of psychological process which controls the function of the body. Psychoanalysis of the characters helps to understand the novelist's feelings, the comfort zone of writing, desires, motives, etc. The psychology of the author has an unfathomable impact on the characters of the novel. *Ladies Coupe* speaks about women's problems and challenges. There are six women and all have different milieu. The real challenge is to recognize women's problems that prevail in society and provide solutions.

Akhila wants liberation not physical only but also psychologically. To liberate herself, she leaves her home and chooses a journey that helps her know the real meaning of life. She meets six women in a train coupe. Every woman has her journey of liberation from society. It is a well-established fact that women are limited by patriarchal and conservative thinking. Women's psychology is always hampered by the patriarchal society. Gender discrimination has caused a certain effect on the psychology of women which causes their acceptance of male dominance in life. Anita has used contemporary society to describe the inner reality of women. The protagonist faces gender discrimination and even though she is the breadwinner for her family, the dominance of male members can be seen in this novel. She cannot take any decision by herself. She cannot go anywhere without the permission of a male member of the family. Even her sister told her that she should ask her brother before purchasing a new flat. Patriarchal society plays an important role in influencing the psychology of women.

Men and women are treated differently in society and have developed different psychological paths. In India, society puts many restrictions on girls, and the psychology behind this act is to keep girls safe and society blames girls for any mishappening. Social and economic structures persist in Indian society which directly affects the psychology of women. Anita Nair describes the situation of women deprived of education in the name of women's safety. Anita Nair uses the character 'Marikolanthu' to present this issue. She could not study because of the financial condition of her family and her family thinks that she is not safe by bus when she travels alone to the city.

"Pre-scientific days" had no definite interpretation of dreams. Earlier, it used to be called the manifestation of a higher power, it may be demoniacal or divine. After advancement in sciences, this mythological interpretation of dreams changes into a psychological aspect. According to Josie Malinowski, dreams cannot be clearly defined and used the definition of neurology that is all conscious experiences in sleep. Scientifically, human sleep can be divided into two parts: rapid eye movement (REM) and non-rapid eye movement (NREM). NREM is further divided into three stages: stage 1, stage 2, and stage 3. These stages depend upon the different brainwaves which are generated due to electrical

activity in the brain. Neurologists mapped these electrical activities and study the dreams. Some of the common characteristics of dreams are visuals (you can see), world simulation (virtual reality), embodied (own physical body), narrative (like a story), sudden change (jump from one place to another), feel real (virtual reality), emotions (scared, happy, sad, guilty, confused, anxious, in love, angry or any other emotion), fortunes (happier things) and misfortunes (accidents, illness, falling over natural disaster), threat (like fight or flee), bizarre (incongruous in the real world) and social affair (dreamt about some people we know or we do not know). The author has used the social affair characteristic of a dream to present the inner reality of her character.<sup>9</sup> (Josie Malinowski, 2020) Anita Nair has used a dream to reflect the inner reality of her character 'Akhila'. In train coupe, Akhila gets a dream which expresses her sexual desire, and in dreaming her family members restrict her from fulfilling her sexual desire.

The projection of Janki in the novel is to unearth the psychological differences between the old generation and the new generation. A generation gap has been clearly expressed by the author. There is always a gap between one generation and another generation. This change happens due to technological advancement, media, cultural change, introducing new norms and regulations, effects of globalization, the industrial revolution, means of communication, and availability of various kinds of literature. Social media has made massive changes in the psychology of the youth. This change is due to the digital active technology which is part industrial revolution. These changes help youth to get jobs and economic independence which include women.<sup>10</sup> (Suad M.A.S. Al-Lawati, 2019) Modern studies show many reasons for this generation gap. Age is another factor that naturally affects the thinking patterns which creates a mental gap. Some of the causes of the generation gap are lack of understanding of children, mistakes are not tolerated, children are considered replicas of parents, and too many comparisons.<sup>1</sup> (Kritika Choudhary, web 2021) The culture and lifestyle of the younger generation is changing rapidly due to the comfort provided by technology and services. The question of this advancement is questioned on many grounds (Ashok Balakrishna). Ashok Balakrishna says in his article

Such is the pace of technology that even those in their thirties are unable to catch up with the younger lot.<sup>2</sup> (Ashok Balakrishna, web 2020)

Due to the advancement of technology, women are more independent in respect of money and can take independent decisions. Women's Economic prosperity helps to uplift their conditions in society the world over. Janki is one of the six passengers who is the oldest among all the passengers and believed in conservative thinking and her thought is the product of conventional psychology of the society in which women have always required a protector and their duty is to make their husbands happy. She is cared for by her husband and earlier by her brother. She is happy with the role performed by the women in their life. Her conventional thinking about women that they are part of the home clearly expresses her psychology which always sees women as subordinate to men. She emphasizes the role of man in the life of a woman. But Akhila is a psychologically stronger woman and she leaves her family and responsibilities to find her identity. Financial independence makes a woman stronger in society and accepts her role in the family.

Self-awareness and transformation in psychology are some of the major concepts dealt with by Anita Nair in this novel.

Transformation in the psychology of Prabha Devi helps to understand the position of women in the context of the power structure. She accepts the domination of her husband. She emphasizes the necessity of man in the life of a woman. Her story tells about the psycho-social control over women by men. A woman is psychologically controlled by man; not in the present time, but it has continued from times immemorial. It is not possible to control the sexes in the child. But the presentation of Prabha Devi's father's psychology shows that the female sex has been depicted clearly in this novel. Disappointment on the birth of Prabha Devi shows the mental make-up of her father. Typically, male-dominated Indian society wants a male child instead of a female child. The sex ratio of boys and girls in many states of India reveals the unfortunate

condition. According to the report published by the Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, which is a part of the Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, based on the census conducted in the year 2011, some states like Punjab, Haryana, and Arunachal Pradesh have less than 900 females against 1000 males. The condition of some Union Territories like Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Chandigarh, and Daman & Diu has further deteriorated as they have less than 800 female children against the 1000 male children.<sup>3</sup>(Census of India, web 2021) Sex determination during the pregnancy is the main cause of this deficit. Still, conservative people in India believe that the birth of a female child is a curse and they even kill the child in pregnancy. Anita Nair uses her character to present the psychology of conservative people of India and the evil still prevails in society.

Another psycho-social aspect that affects human beings is the existing power structure in society. If someone is poor, it means nobody will believe him. His/her relevance in society has been tested on the verge of his/her economical condition. Marikolanthu was raped by a rich man named Murugesan and she is psychologically forced to think that nobody will believe her story about sexual assault because she is destitute.

Paromod also advances towards Prabha Devi because she wears western clothes. This sexual advancement is due to the poor thinking of a man about a woman and who cannot digest a woman's liberation. Here social construct has played a vital role in the construction of patriarchal thinking.

According to Indian Mythology, hate is one of the nine emotions that a human being carries within oneself. It is a very strong emotion and when studied in the light of human psychology, it opens many dimensions of thought which help to understand the psychology of hate. Margaret Shanti is another character who is traveling in the coupe and the psychology of hate can be seen in her story. She hates her husband because he has forced her to go in for an abortion without her consent during her first pregnancy. Her husband does not want child taking as it hindrance in the progress of her career. She takes her revenge on Ebenezer Paulraj by making him dependent upon her by introducing a lot of fat in his meals.

Gender oppression is part of gender inequality which promotes male dominance. Another character 'Marikolanthu' shows anger on her illegitimate son who is born because she has been raped by Murugesan. She hates her son and continues till the death of Murugesan. Marikulathu has faced sexual violence. It is a well-established fact that women in all spheres of the world face discrimination based on caste, gender, religion, and creed. No doubt, the violence against women takes place in many forms which include domestic violence and rape of women especially child rape. Domestic violence, child trafficking, child labor, deprivation from school, dowry-related violence, anti-women practices in the religious performances, preference for male gender during the birth, rape, sexual assault, marital rape, poverty, sexual assault at the workplace, sexual assault at home by relative and violation of rights of migrated women are some of the categories under which violence against women happens. According to Mona Dandwate and Neeta Audichya, Anita Nair uses her psychological insight, and her skill to present the story of Marikolanthu shows the contemporary condition of women in rural India.<sup>2</sup>(2019)

The story of Sheela and her grandmother emphasizes the psychology of beauty. Beauty is an ancient concept, although some people see it as a modern concept. Sheela is a fourteen-year-old young girl who has been taught beauty by her grandmother. Her grandmother does not want her to look and behave like her mother who is dull and unattractive. Grandmother wants to look beautiful even before her death. She wears her ornaments in the night which reflects the urge for beauty in her mind. She tells her granddaughter how a man becomes interested in a woman.

The effect of the surrounding environment on the psychology of Margaret Shanti has been seen by understanding the language she uses to describe her inner feeling. She uses chemical formulae and chemical names to describe the qualities of her companions. Her husband, Ebenezer Paulraj forces her to change her psychology about family relations. Her husband's act to abort the pregnancy is the fundamental

question mark on a woman's self-reliance and self-respect. So this suppression of psychology causes a permanent transformation in the behavior of Margaret Shanthi. Feminism is a strong, fundamental, and continuous struggle against the inequality faced by women in all spheres of life.

### **Conclusion:**

The progress of civilization has been judged by the condition of women in society. There is no doubt that women have done remarkably well in recent years and the condition of women has changed in developing as well as in developed countries. Developing countries have looked into this matter of women empowerment. In developing countries, women still do not have equal rights due to the male-dominated society and patriarchal thinking. But The Indian Constitution has made a remarkable change in the life of women by providing equal rights and opportunities in all spheres of life since Independence. Hindu marriage act also provides equal rights to women. Hindu Code Bill provides the right of equal property to all daughters. But many evils still prevail in society.

The author also uses experiences and vocabulary to show the contemporary reality of society. The writer has raised some of the contemporary issues like forced abortions, rape and sexual advancement, and sexual assault in "*Ladies Coupe*". It can be deduced that these are the psychosocial problem that affects the human behaviors and cause a massive imbalance between the sexes. It hampers the law of equality and opportunity. Psychoanalysis of dreams helps us understand the human unfulfilled desires or hidden desires. On analyzing the power of structure, it can be concluded that the voice of poor people has been suppressed and the condition even worsens when patriarchal thinking resists change of women's situation. The psycho-social analysis shows the importance of social 'construct' and its effects on human life especially women. The psychology of hate helps to understand the behavior of human beings. The psychology of beauty helps to understand the desire of a woman. It is concluded that women want to look beautiful at all ages. Finally, every character has been transformed in this novel and attains happiness in the end. They understand life and align themselves with the different aspects of life to remain happy. Through the analysis of "*Ladies Coupe*", the researcher has deduced that human beings forget their real condition behind the curtain of social status and respect and the difference between sexes has increased with time. The socio-economic condition of women has improved; the differences between sexes have been reduced with time.

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