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Culture & Values in Ladies Coupe

Dr. Ashish Gupta
Professor & Head
Department of English
Government Girls College Betul, India

ABSTRACT

In Indian literature, there is a long tradition of poetry, epic, drama, short tales, and essays, but the novel is a more recent literary genre. In the beginning, Indian English novels stood out as the most comprehensive form of life expression. As a result, it has to be investigated and examined from the standpoint of history and historiography. The main concerns in the early stages have been Indianness and Indian sensibility, the East-West encounter, the sectarian conflicts, and economically exploited and oppressed members of Indian society. The author of the story is a man and an artist who writes with knowledge of everything that beautifies and enhances art. But what he would write must not only shock mankind but also not completely reject the demands of art. While the younger generation is more environmentally, politically and socially aware of the current challenges, Indian novels are guided by their authors in the framework of environmental interest.

Keywords: tradition, epic, short tales, investigated, beautifies

Environmental literature is a cutting-edge viewpoint in the literary world that promotes ecological terminology and methods to literature. The idea of ecological thinking in literature appears to have first surfaced in the nineteenth century, but it wasn't until the late twentieth century that this idea began to gain significant recognition in an effort to raise awareness of the environmental crisis and strengthen the connection between literature and the environment. In addition, it is presumed from the writings of poets and writers that nature and literature have always shared a close bond. Human beings serve as a link to sustain environmental ethics and values in literature between these interactions. The novel is a type of emotional expression that allows readers to see the



motivations that drive the people who make up society. The writers' socio-environmental, socio-cultural, and economic perspectives serve as the framework for this formation. Numerous facets of the sociocultural, socioenvironmental, socioeconomic, sociopolitical, and socio educational conditioning of the society are included in this frame. In addition, concerns related to multimedia, globalization, civilization, and industrialization significantly influence societal consciousness. Numerous examples of these viewpoints can be found in Indian novelists' works. Indian novelists are exceptionally astute observers of Indian society.

Anita Nair, is greatly inspired by Indian culture and values philosophy and nature. She has spread awareness of Indian culture over the world by blending elements of Indian history, culture, and way of life into her creative works. Her articles mostly focus on contemporary Indian women and the struggles and difficulties they face. She also expresses her strong concern for the environment and modern India's sociocultural ideals. She has made a significant contribution to raising awareness about ecology and its impact on contemporary life by covering a variety of issues. She is prominent living artist in the realm of Indian writing, of this century, known for her novels, poetry, prose, essays, articles, book reviews, travelogues and non-fiction, she is a literary artist gifted with great proficiency and deep scholarship. In her works, Anita Nair mainly focuses on the prevailing human condition of the people. At the same time she shows great skill in interweaving her stories in the Indian scenario. Exhibiting an individualistic flair in her writing styles Anita Nair's novels display an awe-inspiring depth, and the main thrust of her novels is the confrontation between the self-actualization and family responsibilities of the individuals. Almost all her novels are rooted in Indian culture and the characters and settings are invariably Indian. Her stories may be said to be ideological as well as practical, based on the structure of Indian middle-class families.

Anita Nair was born in a small town, Mundakottakurissi near Shoranur in Kerala on January 26, 1966. Her fellowship from the Virginia Center for her first story book. *Satyr of the Subway* (1997) enabled her to move to Virginia Center to pursue her education in Creative Arts in 1998. Her visit to her grandparent's house urged her to know the warmth of Kerala. Presently Anita Nair lives in Bangalore with her husband and son. During her literary life Anita Nair, she has been recommended for the Booker Prize at least three times. She has been selected for the awards such as Pen/Beyond Margins



Award in the USA, and Orange Prize long list in the UK. Anita Nair was awarded FLO, FICCI Women Achievers Award in 2008, Montblanc Award in 2009, Women of Substance Award by the Times Group in 2010 and JFW Women Achievers' Award 2011 conferred by the Sathyabhama University. The Kerala Sahitya Academy felicitated her in 2012 and in the same year Arch of Excellence Award was bestowed on her by the All-India Achiever's Conference, New Delhi. She was awarded the prestigious Sahitya Akademi award for her contribution to Children's Literature in 2013. Her novels have been translated into more than twenty languages.

Anita Nair emphasizes the social consequences of culture in relation to how it affects the environment. The biosphere is imbued with cultural characteristics, and in her works, she simultaneously praises the purity of the biosphere and highlights the intricate relationships between man and nature. Religion and culture are intertwined, and religious reflections on the power and beauty of nature reflect civilization. Despite being a feminist, she subtly incorporates her ties to culture and nature into her works. It takes an eagle's vision to see her concern for the environment. Her book *Ladies Coupe* explores the inner lives of people and their ties to the natural world. In her writings, Nair displays both more interest in and hatred for Indian civilization and culture. She depicts her characters' intrinsic connection to nature and ties them to their cultural upbringing. Her characters serve as representations of the people's past and present cultural environments. The book *Ladies Coupe* illustrates how culture plays a dualistic role and demonstrates how women and nature are inextricably linked. She closely examines many Indian cultural traditions in this book.

Anita Nair compared her book to Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which is narrated by a group of travelers on their journey to the Canterbury shrine of St. Thomas. They are a group of interconnected short stories. Similar to this, Anita Nair portrays six women in a train car in *Ladies Coupe*, each with a unique tale to tell. Nair transitions from a condition of passivity and absence to a one of active presence by telling the stories of six different women, taking the reader from the kitchen and bedroom to the street and the wider world. These experiences collectively tell the tale of women rediscovering their bodies. There are certain tales that serve as a metaphor for a utopian society freed from patriarchy and devoid of false dichotomies.



Six women are travelling together in a train car called a Ladies Coupe, and Anita Nair tells their story. It mostly illustrates the collapse of social standards and the innate desire for freedom. Akhilandeshwari alias Akhila, a 45-year-old bachelor working as a clerk, was raised in a traditional Tamil Brahmin family. After her father passed away, Akhila is left to take care of her family. Her sisters and brothers mature, get hitched, and seldom give thought to Akhila's wants and requirements. She has never been able to lead her own life or assume her own identity. Akhila wanted for once that someone would recognize her as a whole human because "she was always an extension of someone's identity; daughter, sister, or aunt" (Ladies Coupe 201-202). Akhila encounters five distinct women during route to Kanyakumari: Janaki Prabhakar, Prabha Devi, Margaret Paulraj, Sheela Vasudevan, and Marikolunthu. Despite the fact that they had never met before, they exchanged life experiences. The tragic plight of Indian women in a patriarchal social structure unites their experiences despite differences in age, educational attainment, and cultural upbringing.

The oldest of the six women in the Coupe, Janaki, is raised in a conventional family where she is trained to be a submissive daughter, a devoted wife, and a loving mother. All her life, guys have taken care of her. My father and brother came first, followed by my husband. My son will be eager to pick up where his father left off after my husband passes away. Women like me eventually become vulnerable. Our guys are treated like princesses (Ladies Coupe 22-23). She has always had a man watching out for her. It would be her son who would be shielded first by her father, then by her brother, then by her husband, and finally by him. She understands the need to declare one's self-identity and freedom to live one's own life and the futility of being an obedient wife and caring mother.

Sheela, the youngest of the six, is fourteen years old and speaks about how males have abused women as children. One Sunday afternoon when Sheela went to their house, "rushing in from the heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lip, Sheela felt guilty and hurt at the unwelcome contact of Hasina's father Nazar. With his forefinger, Nazar had wiped it forward. Her flesh felt his finger for a considerable amount of time (Ladies Coupe 66). "She noticed the hurt in Hasina and her mother's eyes," Nazar said after tying the ribbons on her sleeves (Ladies Coupe 66). Sheela made the wise choice to protect her by deciding "She will never go to Hasina's house again" (Ladies Coupe 66).



Nair has highlighted the mistreatment of women by males through this character. Another member of the Ladies Coupe, Margaret Shanti, is a successful chemistry teacher who is in a troubled marriage to the school's principal, Ebenezer Paulraj. He is intense, egotistical, and uncaring toward his wife. Although Margaret wants to divorce him, she refuses to do so out of fear of what people will think. She feeds him fatty meals so she may make him fat and dull as retaliation.

Prabha Devi is a talented woman who “walked with short mincing feet, her head perpetually low, suppliant; womanly” and whose embroidery was created with stitches so minute you could hardly see them (Ladies Coupe 170). After her marriage, the weeks leading up to her forty'th birthday passed by in a flurry of unimportant days. When she came to the realization that she was becoming a good mother, a good daughter-in-law, and a decent wife. When Prabha Devi loses sight of how it feels to be herself, she must learn to find a balance between being who she wants to be and who is expected of her. A swimming pool's shaft enables her to recognize the importance of this balancing act.

The most heartbreaking story is about Marikolunthu, a mother of one who is 31 years old and an unmarried victim of a man's passion because of her poverty, which forces her to go against established social and moral rules. She now has an illegitimate child as her child. She has gone through physical abuse, rape, lesbianism, and poverty. “I had a distorted, bitter, and restless spirit. When I thought about the past, the void I was currently experiencing would sometimes grow more urgent (Ladies Coupe 266). Akhila came to the realization that she had given society an unneeded authority to control her life after spending one evening in the Ladies Coupe and interacting with the five women. Akhila's biggest question—” Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does she require a guy to feel complete? —was answered thanks to these women and their testimonies. She therefore deduces that she reconnects with the gay man she had fallen in love with but had shunned out of fear of society.

Through a variety of female characters and their shared experiences, the author of Ladies Coupe effectively describes women's struggles and how they seek refuge in nature. Nair opposes discrimination against women and the environment and promotes women's right to self-sufficiency. She has investigated the sense of forfeiture, the unsettled spirits, and the confined conditions of women in the tight social patterns in the novel Ladies Coupe. She delves deeper into women's inner selves and reveals their



search for identity. She describes the story of a woman's quest for strength and independence in every woman in this book, for instance. The story is "a classic example of diverse roles of women from different origins in India and their attempts to gain an essential identity in their family as well as in the society and how they inevitably end up with a fleeting identity," (Ladies Coupe 176). Six diverse women, with varying socioeconomic statuses, are profiled, each of whom struggles to forge her own identity in society.

Anita Nair begins the book by telling the tale of Akhilandeswari (Akhila), the protagonist, who runs away from her life and ends herself at Kanniyakumari. Nair illustrates the dual significance of Hinduism in the context of India's myriad customs and traditions by using the protagonist of the story, a Brahmin by birth. According to Hinduism, the Brahmin community holds nature in higher regard. Brahmin women worship the tulsi plant in the hopes that it can heal their physical problems and keep them well. However, the same religion also limits the development of women and keeps them inside a specific perimeter set by the male-oriented society.

Through her use of natural elements to represent women, Nair's fascination in nature can be seen. She links the natural elements with her female characters. She calls the main character a piece of nature. Her depiction of various night time scenes as seen from the train window demonstrates her preference for the splendor of the natural world. According to her description, the moon rides on her shoulder. She moves by a collection of nighttime scenes, each one framed by the glass. A house's light; A family was huddling close to a fire; A barking dog a far-off town; River water that is dark and greasy; a dangerous steep. (Ladies Coupe 2) Due to the nighttime darkness and moonlight reflection, the water seems slick and black in the dream. Indian ladies excel at adhering to the country's traditions and culture. Through the persona of Akhila, Nair illustrates this idea: "...everyday Akhila drew was a scientific experiment that she assessed every morning. Akhila had to sweep the ground first before misting it with water to reduce the amount of dust (Ladies Coupe 50). Women get satisfaction in beautifying nature. They have a strong connection to all elements of nature, including earth, air, and wind. This is demonstrated by the character of Akhila. Margaret, who is oppressed by her rigid husband Ebenezer Paulraj, finds happiness and hope in



conversing with water, while Marikolunthu, who is raped by Murugesan and left alone by her family, finds fulfillment only in conversing with worms, trees, and rocks.

Nair implies that the novel's characters consistently uphold their ancestors' customs. For instance, the farmer and Marikolunthu's father, Shanmugam, refuses to give up farming in exchange for money. He claims, "To repeatedly murder God's creatures and benefit from their demise. I'm happy to be a farmer. The only creatures who perish as a result of me are those that my plough cuts into, including those I unintentionally kill " (Ladies Coupe 213). Nair's great concerns for tradition, nature, and fauna are represented clearly in the development of the character Shanmugam. Nair highlights how much farmers care about the environment and how they would never intentionally harm a living thing. They appreciate nature, and nature provides for them like a mother.

Her books explore the various ways that nature and women have been used culturally. Nature is devalued and subordinated by man's covetousness in the materialistic patriarchal world, just as women are. Nature is made to play the part of the downtrodden while man assumes the oppressor role. She poignantly makes the cultural argument that embracing modern culture opens the door for the emergence of new ecological issues. Through the character Marikolunthu in her book Ladies Coupe, Nair demonstrates how this patriarchal culture abuses both women and the natural world. A woman named Marikolunthu, who is 31 years old, resides in the little village of Palur, which is close to Kancheepuram. She is employed at the Chettiar fort as a maid. The Chettiar, who also owns a silkworm farm, is a dominant figure in the community. He makes his fortune by eliminating those worms. Nair notes that "The wretched, naked worms spun silk and wrapped it around themselves to cover off their embarrassment. However, even then, the Chettiar forbade them from being. He removed their silk from them after boiling them " (Ladies Coupe 212). Marikolunthu feels sad for them because he has compassion for those small worms. She is sexually assaulted by Murugan, the cousin of the Chettir, and the lives of worms are ruined. The Marikolunthu narrative eloquently explains how the patriarchal culture is able to enslave women and environment.

The term "cultural dualism" in literature refers to this conflict between the traditional and modern cultures. Traditional culture is regarded as dynamic in this sense since it upholds a harmonious interaction with the environment. In contrast to modern culture,



which is referred to as corroding culture and causes the collapse of the entire ecosystem, it is also known as a fluid movement. Modern man neglects nature because of his admiration for technology, which fuels environmental deterioration. In *Ladies Coupe*, the summer season serves as a metaphor for the passage of time and the fleeting nature of life. The heat and humidity of the season mirror the characters' struggles and frustrations as they navigate through their own personal journeys. The summer is described as oppressive and overwhelming, with the sun beating down mercilessly on the characters as they travel by train. The heat also serves to heighten the characters' emotions and amplify their feelings of longing and regret. In the novel, summer is also a time of change and transformation. The characters are forced to confront their pasts and make decisions about their future as they are exposed to new experiences and people. Through the scorching summer heat, the characters come to realize the importance of living in the present and cherishing the time they have.

In Indian culture and folklore, women are confined indoors during this month to protect them from the sun's harmful rays and rituals that are carried out to appease God's wrath and request rain. In her book, Nair makes superb use of this myth. As she explains:

Akhila's myth is an important aspect of her character. The novel explores the idea that everyone has their own personal myth or story that they use to make sense of their lives and experiences. For Akhila, her myth is rooted in her connection to nature and her desire to understand the natural world. Throughout the novel, Akhila is depicted as being deeply in tune with the natural world and she is often seen collecting and pressing flowers, and she has a keen interest in botany. This connection to nature is linked to her feelings of isolation and disconnection from the other women in the train. She finds solace in the natural world, and it serves as a source of comfort and healing for her. Akhila's myth is also linked to her desire for freedom and self-expression. She is shown to be a strong-willed person who is determined to live life on her own terms, even though she is constantly struggling with the expectations of society. Through her journey on the train, Akhila begins to open up and share her thoughts and feelings with the other women, and she develops close bonds with them.

Whereas Sarasa Mami is also another main character, her myth is rooted in her desire for control and order in her life. Throughout the novel, Sarasa Mami is depicted as a



strong-willed and determined woman who is determined to maintain control over her life and the lives of those around her. Her role as a mother and her desire to protect and care for her family she is shown to be fiercely protective of her daughter and is determined to ensure that she has the best possible life. This desire for control is also linked to her feelings of guilt over her past mistakes and her desire to make amends for them. She is desire for independence and self-sufficiency. Throughout the novel, she is shown to be a fiercely independent woman who is determined to live her life on her own terms. The bleached and grey leaves of the enormous ficus tree at the end of the street trembled in the heat. Near the culverts that ran down one side of the road, dogs were huddled. Within minutes, mirages swam before one's eyes. Moving quickly, Akhila went to Sarasa Mami's residence. Although the neighbors did, she didn't care about the heat or the desolate roads. If someone saw her, they would figure out a way to warn her mother about the dangers of leaving a small child like Akhila alone in the street. (Ladies Coupe 52)

This in-depth account of summer demonstrates Nair's strong awareness of Indian beliefs. In India, people revere plants and trees in the hopes that they may treat both their bodily and mental ailments. The Brahmin-traditionally raised figure Akhila reveres the tulsi plant with a deep regard that conveys the legendary bond between women and nature. As a result, the novel not only advocates for feminism but also emphasizes the mythical connection between nature and women.

In her novel Ladies Coupe, Nair highlights the struggles of women and the ways in which they are oppressed by patriarchal societal norms. She also portrays the natural world as a source of strength and inspiration for her female characters, and often depicts them as taking an active role in protecting the environment. In her novels, Nair also incorporates a social ethical perspective by addressing issues such as social inequality, caste discrimination, and the impact of modernization on traditional communities. She uses her work to highlight the ways in which these issues affect the lives of her characters and to critique the societal norms that perpetuate them. Overall, Nair's novels often use an eco-feminist and social ethical perspective to examine the intersection of women's lives and the environment, and to comment on the ways in which societal norms and values impact both. Anita Nair emphasizes the social consequences of culture in relation to how it affects the environment. The biosphere is



imbued with cultural characteristics, and in her works, she simultaneously praises the purity of the biosphere and highlights the intricate relationships between man and nature.

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