

# The Feminist Politics: Demonstration Of The Feminine In Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

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*Abstract: This article attempts to invigorate the feminist ideology that lies dormant in Anita Nair's fiction, Ladies Coupe especially. Confined to the parameters of character analysis, I have subjected to the novel into identifying various categories of women who are operative throughout. After her renowned success generated by her novels-The Better Man (1999), Ladies Coupe (2001), Mistress (2003), Lessons In Forgetting (2010), Cut Like Wound (2012) and Idris Keeper of the Light (2014), Nair has been recognized as a unique feminist voice. She possesses a renowned feminist ideologue that cuts through the pages to submit various configurations of identify which eventually generate types of womanity. For which, this article uses the post colonial structuralist backdrop, which I hope, will help in fulfilling the objective of my scrutiny. I do hope, it would help anyone for that matter, in the analysis of Nair's fiction as against the backdrop of the post structuralist scenario. Significantly and specifically as well, Ladies Coupe encompasses a plethora of subjects including the Indian women stereotypes. Yet, the mainstay of the novel, Akhila, is found to have been a cultural deviant, which firmly pushes across the table, Nair's feminist ideologue. My analysis of the novel is encircled by a post structural analysis of Akhila, as the following article proceeds...*

*Ladies Coupe* is Nair's second novel which chronicles the lives of five women in a ladies coupe Akhilandeswari called Akhila, comes as a radical woman. A spinster of forty five, Akhila is appointed as a clerk in the Income Tax Department on compassionate grounds. Her rebellion begins early in the novel contesting her mother's mythical ideologue that "it is best to accept that the wife is inferior to her husband" (*Ladies Coupe* 14). Akhila breaks the barriers of her Brahmin familial system by positing an intimate bond with Hari much younger to her and even shorter to her. Hari is a man of Akhila's choice. She is found wearing starched cotton sari which advances the idea of stubbornness in Akhila's mindset. Her quest for a wholesomeness of being begins with a journey she embarks on a train. We are exposed to other women like Margaret Sharthi, a chemistry teacher, obviously an object of sex to her husband Ebenezer, Prabadevi a self contended woman and Sheela Vasudevan who is a victim of her mother's ideologue. These are just only a few. Apart from that, we are a witness to a victim of child molestation by name Mari kolundhu.

Akhila refuses to be confined to her sex imagery for she feels that a woman has to stay in compliance with man's chauvinist claims. She is not ready to subject herself to "masochistic prostitution of her body to a desire that is not her own and that leaves her in her well known state of dependency" (Irigaray 385). Nair frowns upon such ideological state of human mind to which both the genders are victims. Hence, we find Nair taking up a feminist stance by negotiating the masculine constructs of power, oppression and aggressiveness. According to Luce Irigaray:

For woman is traditionally use-value  
For man, exchange value among men.  
Merchandise then. This makes her the  
Guardian of matters—whose price  
Will be determined by subjects that is—  
Workers, tradesmen, consumers, ... [and]  
Women are marked phallically  
By their fathers, husbands and  
procurers. (389)

Akhila playing the masculinist roles, is one of the novelist protest against the domination of male hegemony. She radically breaks the hegemonical constructs characterized by “some correspondence between cultural ideal and institutional power, collective, if not individual” (Cornell 77). She begins to revalue the feminine experience. She has been on a constant lookout for that intricate thread that links that multifaceted experiences of women. Eventually, the evolution of the radical feminine begins as we observe. “Akhila had never felt anything like this before. An unfurling... quiet flowering” (*Ladies Coupe* 139). She is always there to assert the point, “I don’t want a man trying to broaden his horizon with my body. I don’t want to be another experience” (272)

Pathetic enough, Akhila has also been exploited by her sister’s family which looks upon her for sustenance in life. Her sister, along with her family, comes and stays in her apartment advancing the mythical subjectivity of womanhood. Though Akhila does not like this, she has to come to accommodate then on humanitarian grounds. Naturally, Akhila’s character brings forth Nair submission of feminist ideologue as having been punctuated by Humanism. One of the reasons why, Akhila accommodates human company, but never is accommodated in it.

While Akhila remains a mystery, she seems to have incorporated the noble vision of the body as encribed by D.H. Lawrence who says, “My great religion is a belief in the blood, the flesh, as being wiser than the intellect. We can go wrong in our minds. But what our blood feels and believes and says is always true” (47). To Akhila, any life which makes a woman devoid of her own natural urges is a genetic deviancy and hence, devoid of substance. Akhila’s perception of the woman’s body particularly her own runs parallel to the idea of sovereignty of body elaborated by Vijay Tendulkar, a renowned dramatist who says, “it was your body...so blissful, so near to heaven...[which] took you high, high, high above yourself into a place like paradise (118).

Akhila stands in contrast to Prabha Devi, a domesticated woman in the novel. She has been oriented to please her husband who only makes her arrive at her discovery of her body: “desire spawns desire: fulfillment begets fulfillment: A kiss for a kiss; A caress for a caress; what one gives come back manifold” (195). As a victim of sexual molestation, Marikolundhu has been found to be burdened with hectic household chores in the house of Sujatha who forces her into a lesbian intimacy. At one point, Marikolundhu has to appease the perversions of Sujatha’s husband.

Anita Nair fixes Akhila as against these victims as diametrically opposite. While these other woman accept the mythical submission of woman, akhila enacts a mythical subversion of woman. She promptly sets aside the patriarchal assignments as Chris Weedon observes:

The term “patriarchial” refers to  
Power relations in which women’s  
Interests are subordinated to  
The interests of men. These power  
Relations take on many forms,  
From the sexual division of labour  
And the social organization of  
Procreation to the internalized  
Norms of feminity by which

We live. Patriarchial power rests  
On social meaning given to  
Biological sexual difference (68).

With the portrayal of characters like Akhila, Nair wishes to be concerned with the representation of a new woman. Also, she wishes to bring forth the changes a woman should adopt in a post structuralist ambience. A sense of culturalessness has been found to be rooted in the post structuralist scenario. Hence, a woman has to be terrible beauty to contest the masculine constructions of feminity. Akhila can be taken as a cultural sample of “post structural feminism which is concerned with the cultural construction of subjectivity (Parker 227).

Akhila is Nair’s new woman who attempts to grasp the point that the binary opposition with the traditional woman will certainly tend to work a way of seeing a typical woman. She draws “rigid boundaries between what is acceptable and what is not, between self and non-self, truth, falsity, sense and non-sense, reason and madness, central and marginal, surface and depth” (Kristeva 115). She has committed herself to an aggressive political struggle against the signification phase. Woman as a cultural signifier has been attempted to be alienated and finally eliminated.

Akhila has clinched this identity that as James Williams writes, “The subject must separate from and through image, from and through objects” (42). Thus, Nair’s Akhila is able to situate herself as an autonomous being. Paradoxically, to others like Akhila’s sister, she is “a pale ghost of a former self. A woman with shallow cheeks and a droop to her mouth” (*Ladies Coupe* 198). Yet, Akhila’s younger sister Padma’s reference may be cited as inference:

She [Akhila] is not like us. She is not  
Interested in any of the things that gives us  
Or any normal person. She likes to  
Be left alone. And she can be very  
Scatting if someone tries to draw her out of  
Her shell. I have no intention of asking her  
To join us (164).

While Akhila, to Nair, A terrible beauty is born.

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