

MARIKOLUNTHU, A VICTIM OF MARGINALIZATION IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPÉ

Y. Mathuri

PG and Research Department of English, St. Mary's College (Autonomous), Thoothukudi
Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu, India

ABSTRACT

Anita Nair is a eminent writer. Among the various Indian writers, Anita Nair is easily accepted as an efficient practitioner of the gem of fiction. The research paper entitled **“MARIKOLUNTHU, A VICTIM OF MARGINALIZATION IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPÉ”** analyses the condition of women in contemporary society. In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, the character Marikolunthu, the victim of marginalization is vividly portrayed, a young woman from a marginalized community in rural India. The concept, ideas and plot of Anita's novel are somewhat different than the ordinary contemporary fiction writers. She tries to describe everything in detail and no one cannot find a rush in narrating a certain context because she has shifted the idea from the city lights to the dawn of villages and her writings consists of major themes like quest for identity, man- woman relationship, patriarchal society, sufferings of woman, woman defiance, woman empowerment. This paper is an attempt to focus on the marginalized segment of the society in order to get some optimistic resolution through the character Marikolunthu.

Keywords: Marginalization, patriarchy, women, struggle, poverty.

Introduction

Anita Nair is the eminent writer born in Kerala. She is novelist, journalist, short-story writer and famous poet also majority of the 20th century novels depicts the women's suffering and their suppressed status in Indian Society. In post-Indian English fiction great women writers such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair etc. depict feminist picture of Indian society. These women writers analyse issue of women, complex relationship of man and woman, exploitation of women in their fiction. Anita Nair is known for her style and depiction of Indian reality in her works. Her best novels are *The Better Man*(2000), and *Ladies Coupe*(2001), have been translated into more than 21 languages around the world. She deals with the life experiences of women, who face

subjugation and traumatic experience in their family life. Nair's *Ladies Coupe* also talks about the middle class women in urban India, educated and conscious of their identity but always moving on a quest for finding their place in family as well as in society. The novel *Ladies Coupe* is a novel particularly about South Indian woman but it takes about universal factors of female subjugation in society and explores themes of alienation, loneliness and lost opportunities in a woman's life.

In post-colonial era, women condition is not much improving and they are not leave clutches of male dominated society. *Ladies Coupe* depicts the story of these women. The story of Ladies Coupe portrays six culturally diversified women, "Akhila, SheelaVasudevan, PrabhaDevi, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paulraj and Marikolanthu". These females are those who break the image of traditional and ideological women and speak against convention of Patriarchy.

The novel follows the journey of spinster named Akhila, a 45 years old single women from a Tamil Brahmin Family, who have been forced to play subordinate role as the daughter, sister, aunt and the provider. Women for centuries have been looked upon to emulate the role of 'Sita' who never had an identity of her own and always live in the shadow of her husband. In the Indian Society women are always considered as weak, vulnerable and dependent on the male counterpart. If she is young it would be her father, if she is married then it is her husband. The protagonist of novel, Akhila is representing such type of a Indian woman, who is unhappy with her life and feels trapped by the expectations of her family and society. She has always been interested in books and learning, but her father insisted her to marry and devote herself to her husband and children.

Marikolanthu is a low -caste woman. When she was young she was raped by Murugesan, an upper- class man and one of the relation of her employers. A ferocious result of the rape came when she became pregnant. She is forced to marry a rapist a filthy animal. She refused to marry him. She is a victim but everyone blames her. The girl must have led him on and now that she is pregnant she's making up a story about rape. The word 'rape' is the most awful word in women's life. When a girl is raped she feels ashamed as she is helpless and unable to protect her own self. When Marikolanthu is raped, instead of showing sympathy, everyone blames her. Here Anita Nair tries to delineate the psychology of all the members male or female in society find fault with the woman who has been exploited as she herself is regarded responsible for her tragedy. Marikolanthu suffering reminds the Delhi

rape case. Recent death of Delhi rape suffer presents a malicious depiction of men's aggressive nature towards women. When this debacle event took place, some conservative people in India put their opinion that a girl herself is responsible for her tragedy because she usually wears inappropriate attire and fascinates men. This type of outlook forces everyone to think that parents should take extra care of their sons and to show them the right path in life. After that disastrous incident, Marikolunthu spends her days in a phase of complete loss of identity. After some time she gave birth to a male child, Muthu. She is unable to love her baby Muthu, an outcome of that hateful incident and of her helplessness and nothingness. One day she sold him to Murugesan. It was time Murugesan paid for what he did to Marikolunthu. He didn't know that this boy was his own son. At this moment, Marikolunthu was flared with happiness and she has a proper sagacity of satisfaction in her mind. When Murugesan died, his body was not fully burnt so Muthu has been given the task to take care of his father's dead body. In these circumstances she accepts her son and starts enjoying the most important part of her life 'The Motherhood'. Becoming a mother in her turn, the woman in a sense takes the place of her own mother: it means complete emancipation for her. Nair sets down her imagination and breezy thoughts in simple words. She is one, among those novelists who made a valiant approach to elevate her tone against the aggression, violence, oppression and exploitation of women.

Marikolunthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry women on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. When she was nine years old, she lost her father due to poverty, her mother work as maid in Chettiyar's house, Murugesan a wicked person one of the relatives of Chettiyar seduced Marikolunthu, she lost everything, she gives birth to an illegitimate baby called Muthu, is taken care by Marikoluthu's mother, after her death nobody is there to support her, even her younger brothers tell her to leave the house with her child Muthu, she decides to live on her own. She does not depend on any other person. She joins the mission hospital as a helper. She defines her as an independent woman. Through she does not have anything she does not relinquish her hope. Thus finally she empowers herself and proves to the world that she can lead a good life.

Marikolunthu's story unveils how impoverished Dalit women are positioned at the bottom of India's caste, class, and gender hierarchies. They are dehumanized in a patriarchal world and treated as objects of lust. Marikolunthu is thirty-one years old and an unwed

mother. She is a victim of double oppression. Belonging to an impoverished family Marikolunthu experiences poverty, rape and physical torture.

As soon as the smells, of a household began to permeate my pores, I left. I was a restless spirit warped and bitter. Sometimes I would think of the past and I would feel a quickening in the vacuum that existed within me now (266).

Marikolundhu's narrates that her mother worked as a cook at Chettiar's house, which was one of the richest families in their village. Even as a child she was oppressed by the elites. She was denied education and she had to look after her house when her mother went for work. When her mother was seriously ill, she was employed at the Chettiar's house. There, she is assigned the task of taking care of a child of Sujata Akka, the daughter-in-law of Chettiar. Marikolanthu is raped by Murugesan. Marikolanthu's situation reflects how Dalit women are exploited by those in power who carry out their attacks with impunity. Even, while raping her Murugesan asserts his power on Marikolanthu and tells her as 36

No one will believe you. You might think that you are our equal, but you are not. I am the Chettiar's nephew, his daughter-in-law's brother and you are only the cook's daughter. No one will dare question me." (240).

The text unveils how Dalit women are perceived as belonging outside the normative structure of caste purity and hence sexual purity. The caste system sanctions the upper-caste man's access to Dalit woman's sexuality, body and labour. Caste-based sexual violence against Dalit women is condoned and considered normal. Marikolanthu hates her son Muthu who is the result of the rape at the hands of Murugesan. She leaves her son at her mother's care and goes to work for the Chettiar family. Sujata Akka, deprived from her husband, develops a lesbian relationship with Marikolanthu. Later Sujata's husband also uses Marikolunthu to fulfill his lust. When Sujata Akka comes to know this, instead of charging her husband, she pushes Marikolunthu out of her household. Marikolanthu's attitude towards her son changes after the death of Murugasen. Marikolanthu, reflects the multiple oppressions on Dalit women. She is a voiceless victim who is forced to motherhood and lesbianism. Such characters exhibit a sense of insecurity due to their traumatic psychic experiences and also due to the collapse of the value system. Thus, in *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair traces a woman's journey from self sacrifice to self-realization, self-denial to self-assertion and self-negation to self-affirmation. The feminist voice is heard throughout the novel.

In general people who belong to the labour class undoubtedly belong to the muted group. The same here is Marikolunthu, when she is found pregnant her mother and Sujata, apologize for it as they just consider it is too late to insist Murugesan to marry her. No one including her brothers cared about her situation. Her mother is least bothered about her feelings but fears that no one will marry her. Nair has clearly pointed out the prejudice of a suffering traditional mother who prefers her marriage is the ultimate end for a female. Anita Nair gives a detailed depiction of the way in which Indian society is so imbedded in the caste system that everything is organized on the basis of castes. She brings out the attitudes of upper caste Indian and lower stratum. Marikolunthu was humiliated, harassed and discriminated against by not only the upper class but also by her own family members. Hurdles are bound to come. It is evident here that insults and humiliations are not only from others but from our own people. The issue is taken to the Chettiar's son Sridhar, he with slight refusal says, "The girl must have led him on and now that she is pregnant she's making up a story about rape." (245) The rape of low class women is a part of ongoing anti-caste struggle, but it has to develop a nuanced understanding of caste-based patriarchy.

Particularly on the query of the social position of the women, Sumit Sarkar rightly points out at the essential deficiency in each stage of every significant autonomous struggle by woman themselves to change relations within or outside the family. At this juncture Beauvoir's expression on man woman nexus in *The Second Sex* can be mentioned:

"man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of man to designate human beings in general, whereas women represent only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity." (534).

The patriarchal structure of our society has given the man an unrestricted power to use the body of a woman in any of the ways whether it may be love making or it may be overriding her body against her permission. So a woman is doubly marginalized first because she is a woman and secondly, she is inferior to man. Hence aggression committed against women, in one form or the other, is a common fact familiar in every region and society, irrespective of the social and economic class to which the women belong. Gender differences survive since of bigotry in the family and societal institutions, social, cultural and religious norms that propagate stereotypes, practices and attitude that are unfavourable to women. For her mother and Sujata, a woman's life and security only lies in her husband. But here

Marikolanthu is able to raise the question in her about the so called husband's safeguard. She is sure that neither her mother nor Sujata have their husband to look after them, but for her fate played a crucial role. Marikolanthu never wants to join hands with a husband. This provides an appropriate ground for probing the shape of identity apprehended by the post moderns. Identity implies the state of being or remaining the same under varying aspects of conditions- the condition of being oneself or itself and not another. However, the self cannot be defined a vacuum and sometimes can only be defined in its opposition to the other.

In a patriarchal society dominated by males, the woman functions primarily within the male-male relationship, particularly when two males want the same female. The structure of this kind of society is homosocial i.e. the nature of social relationships rather than sexual ones. Homosocial relationship is different from homosexual relationship in one sense that is when the former deals with the social relationships between man verse woman, whereas the latter with the sexual relationship between the two females. The homosociality that Sujata cites to negate her desire is what Marikolanthu had used to establish hers and carve out a space of desire within the oppressive confines of the Chettiar kottai. Marikolanthu's obedience to Sujata's sexual progresses her way of protecting and maintaining her relationship. But Sujata cannot tolerate her husband Sridhar having an affair with Marikolanthu. She promptly dismisses her servant without caring to listen to her argument in self-defence. Men of upper class can have occasional or regular relationships with women in the lower caste, the reverse was not even predicted by the class structure. So there are no provisions or choices for such unions in the contemporary caste systems. Marikolanthu's life shows the pain of life in rural Tamil Nadu. Poverty, exploitation and sexual harassment still prevail in rural Tamil Nadu. Mari conceives for the second time, to Sridhar's sexual comforts. She decides to have her uterus to be operated and removed so that she can go to any man without the danger of conceiving. But the doctor demands five thousand rupees for the operation. She makes her son Muthu work in Murugesan's office to earn the required sum of money. Mercilessly she mortgages him at one of Murugesan's looms for Rs.5000/-. At the ideological level the suppressed lower caste women will continue to feel attracted towards modernity as a liberating condition based on the equality and dignity from the traditional occupations that we still consider to be defiling and contaminating. After her mother's death, no one is ready to support her, even her younger brothers advised her to leave the house with her child Muthu. It is the apt time for her to stand on her own. She is no more dependent on any one. She labels her as an independent woman. Even though she does not have anything

such as education, wealth and money, she does not give up her hope. She wants to put an end to all the social evil practices which undermined the women identity in male dominated society.

Marikolunthu realized that she was the only person to love her son Muthu. But at the end she feels embarrassed for having abandoned him and even using him for her selfishness. Anita Nair, with a deep, emotional insight, competently employ the story of Marikolunthu to remark upon the sexual abuse of Indian women from rural background. The society dominated by patriarchal culture tends to lay down the rule that a woman's responsibility towards the family is total whereas any sort of other authority is conveniently denied to her. This society shuns thinking that the woman is strong willed to create disastrous consequences if she is completely ignored. Marikolunthu's character reveals the physical as well as mental suffering due to lack of knowledge. To sum up, Marikolunthu emerges as a new woman who has no social shyness to pursue her life. She is prepared to take on every challenge in her life to become what she wants to be. Nothing can suppress or will be a hurdle to her will to succeed. She seems to be guiding the Indian society to view Indian women with a new attitude and from a better outlook. Nair brilliantly deals with such issues to bring out the bold amends in the character Marikolunthu that establishes her as a new woman with a redefined character.

Conclusion

As far as the empowerment of women in India is gradually gaining its autonomy and control over their life which includes many dimensions. Through this character Nair aims at changing the balance between the sexes so as to create an unbiased society. In order to exterminate this marginalization, care should be taken by every individual. People should try to change their traditional approach and treat women as equivalent to men. Empowerment of this class should be at every point that is personal, family, societal, political, economic, educational etc. People should believe women as an element of the conventional society. It is the task of every human being to treat others equal.

References

1. Beauvoir, de Simone. *The Second Sex*. Trans. H.M Parshley. LondonVintage Books, 1997.Print.
2. Landry, Donna and Gerald MacLean, ed. *The Spivak Reader Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak*. New York: Routledge, 1996.Print.
3. Nair, Anita. *Ladies Coupe*. New Delhi: Penguin 2001. Print.