

THE PHASES OF WOMEN'S LIFE IN THE SELECT WORKS OF ANITA NAIR, MANJU KAPUR, AND SHASHI DESHPANDE

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Abstract:

The present era, through literature, has witnessed a change in men's attitude towards women who have been asserting their identity. In this aspect, the contributions made by Anita Nair and Manju Kapur are immensely more remarkable through their characters in their novels. Anita Nair and Manju Kapur analyze the predicament of women and bring to light the social injustices and oppressions inflicted on women and make them liberate themselves to assert their freedom and self-identity. There are three stages in women's awareness of the self-growth. In the first stage, the woman senses the coercive role of patriarchy yet gradually succumbs to it by making expected choices to cater to men's world. The second stage is felt when she recognizes patriarchy's subjugating and exploitative role in her life and strives to carve out her space without altering the given socio-cultural structure. The third stage, which assumed the point of departure, is seen when she revolts against the disciplining and discriminating norms of the patriarchal structure and openly registers protest against it. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is a novel that portrays women's experiences from almost all strata of life very poignantly. In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair presents a different class of woman who is neither modern nor traditional-bound. She is not an orthodox lady but a lover of Indian culture and tradition. She does not cross the boundary line but suffers a lot in society. Shashi Deshpande's novels present a sensitive portrayal of womanhood without ever seeming to be defensive about it. Her themes and motifs are based only on women's lives and problems.

Keywords: identity, social injustices, Indian culture, and Social Culture

The 21st century has witnessed a dramatic change in the affairs of women. In the present time, feminist writers have been partly responsible for women's increasing awareness regarding their status in society. The present era, through literature, has witnessed a change in men's attitude towards women who have been asserting their identity. In this aspect, the contributions made by Anita Nair and Manju Kapur are immensely more remarkable through their characters in their novels. They have made a rich contribution to gender experience and deep insight into the female mind and areas of feminism. Anita Nair and Manju Kapur analyze the predicament of women and bring to light the social injustices and oppressions inflicted on women and make them liberate themselves to assert their freedom and self-identity.

There are three stages in women's awareness of the self-growth. In the first stage, the woman senses the coercive role of patriarchy yet gradually succumbs to it by making expected choices to cater to men's world. In other words, she does not traverse the limits the patriarchy prescribes. The second stage is felt when she recognizes patriarchy's subjugating and exploitative role in her life and strives to carve out her space without altering the given socio-cultural structure. The third stage, which assumed the point of departure, is seen when she revolts against the disciplining and discriminating norms of the patriarchal structure and openly registers protest against it.

The women characters in the select novels of Anita Nair and Manju Kapur belong to the three categories with their individual choices - to remain within the threshold, to be on the threshold, and finally, to take a bold plunge to cross the threshold of patriarchy. They search for equality and their justified space within the set norms of a male-dominated world. To attain this, they significantly struggle to change and evolve a new system, not radical but within the normative sanctions of patriarchy. They fight against the "dependence syndrome" (Chaman Nahal 17) to gain individuality and freedom from oppression. The keyword remains changed from a self-effacing, subaltern, subjugated, dominated, and dwarfed woman to an independent, autonomous woman of selfhood who can contribute equally to society's holistic development as a person in her own right. The agency of

change is located in the insurgent or the subaltern. Moreover, in any society, women are the chief preservers of tradition. In a sense, no change, howsoever momentous, becomes complete or absolute unless it involves them and carries them along.

In the first phase of the novels, the women characters of Anita Nair, Shashi Deshpande, and Manju Kapur are portrayed as being under the refuge and confines of the traditional patriarchy. An in-depth study of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* and *Lessons in Forgetting* and Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman* and *Home* brings to light the belief systems and value-patterns that bind the women characters to the age-old traditions, taboos, and societal constraints. They also highlight the stagnant characteristics of the old patriarchal system and its threshold boundaries, which remain a strict watchdog of society regarding fidelity, chastity, and women's duties. They also explore such issues as education, marriage and home, and the mother-daughter relationship.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is a novel that portrays women's experiences from almost all strata of life very poignantly. The women who remain within the prescriptive rules of society and the boundaries are seen questioning their status, and their mute submission is only to recoil and yield wholly to patriarchy. All characters do not remain subdued, neither passive nor assertive, neither overbearing nor submissive. They act according to the nature of the situation. A typical example is Akhilandeshwari. Akhila in *Ladies Coupe* is a forty-five-year-old single woman who works as an income-tax clerk. After the accidental death of her father, she became the earning head of her family. "I am tired of sharing you with everyone. I want you to myself" (LC, 38). Though her younger brothers and sister got settled in their lives, she was not relieved from the responsibilities as no one in the family was sensitive enough to recognize her in any other role. Her exploitation continues at the hands of her own family till her childhood friend Karpagam prompts her to search for herself; she seeks her autonomy after meeting the other women in the lady's coupe of the train. They all share their life experiences, and Akhila gets her clues and proceeds to live for her.

Manju Kapur portrays women of three generations against the nation's struggle for independence. The characters, namely Kasturi, Ganga, and Kishori Devi, represent the general environment of the patriarchal society. They have been conforming themselves to the standards of the patriarchal society. Because of it, man-woman relationships have no conflict, rift, or tension. They represent different shades of the feminine psyche prevalent in the patriarchal society. "If you have acquired real knowledge, then give no place in your heart to memsahib-like behaviour... see how an educated woman can do housework thoughtfully and systematically in a way unknown to an ignorant, uneducated woman" (DD, 131). Kasturi is an educated wife who represents an era of the late 19th century; Ganga is the wronged wife of Professor Harish, and Kishori Devi is a traditional all-sacrificing mother. Among the three characters, the striking commonality is that they never blame the patriarchal set-up for their miseries and are faithful votaries of a male-centred world.

In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair presents a different class of woman who is neither modern nor traditional-bound. She is not an orthodox lady but a lover of Indian culture and tradition. She does not cross the boundary line but suffers a lot in society.

Sarita in *The Dark Holds No Terrors*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, Sumi in *A Matter of Time*, and Urmi and Mira in *The Binding Vine* are the victims in married life who suffer the arrows of pain. In her introspection, she finds herself emerging as an individual. But her first step towards being assertive comes when she refuses to give the key to the flat to Mohan when they visit Dadar's apartment for a hideout. Shashi Deshpande's novels present a sensitive portrayal of womanhood without ever seeming to be defensive about it. Her themes and motifs are based only on women's lives and problems. Her plots and sub-plots provide a pointer to the catatonic status of women in the tradition-bound, male-dominated, middle-class society of contemporary India. Women who are victims of such pathogenic misogyny have prepared the backdrop of most of Deshpande's novels. These women have suffered the atrocities of men in silence and without protest. Their inner turmoil, flabbergasted emotional resilience, and relational bondage have been suggestively juxtaposed against the desperate struggle of her

protagonists to define and obtain a self-hood, thus putting it in a sustained and sharpened focus to indicate the changing dynamics of man-woman relations. Deshpande narratives bear the authenticity of a woman's signature. Shashi Deshpande's women's concept of freedom is not Western type.

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