

The Female Phase in the Selected Novels of Anita Nair, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Arundhati Roy

The title of the proposed research work is “The Female Phase in the Selected Novels of Anita Nair, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Arundhati Roy”. Showalter detects in the history of women’s writing a female phase (1920 onwards) which looked particularly at female writing and female experience. Seen in this angle, the female characters of the selected novels of Anita Nair, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Arundhati Roy depict the modus operandi by which they subvert the existence of their male counterparts. It is done with a motive to win over them to achieve their end. They redefine the female role to crush and demolish the patriarchal mind set and seek to achieve the central position. The novels chosen for study are *Ladies Coupe by Anita nair, Agnisakshi by Lalithambika Antharjanam and The God of Small Things by Arundhati Roy.*

The social conditions depicted in the novel and the modus operandi devised by the female characters to subvert the motives of the male characters are of unfathomable significance in the social

front. It tells us of the significance of the existence of the female characters who retain the balance of the society while adhering to diverse rituals and practices. The role of the female characters thus becomes vital and significant. The reactionary women expose the angularities of men and hence the malpractices of society. Motives of the action of the female characters are analyzed in the feminist angle.

Analyzing the novels one by one, one arrives at the following details. *Ladies Coupe* tries to deal with the opposition between ideological appearance represented in the material world and the reality represented in the material oppression of women. The central character Akhila helps us to see how it is a perfect example of the second phase advocated by Showalter. The feeling to get away however has been dormant, yet persistent all through her years of slogging and that is seeking fruition in her endeavour to undertake a train journey.

Lalithambika Antharjanam's novel *Agnisakshi* cast before us the world of Namboothiri men and their rites and mode of worship which estranged the female dispensation from anywhere near their performance. We see that the heroine has left home and domesticity for a political undertaking and finally for a religious cover up. She

becomes a renowned “Mathaji” who wants to forget the “Purvasramam”.

The God of Small Things depicts the struggle to fashion female autonomy in the context of a life in a Syrian Christian family in Central Travancore. The female character Ammu tries to crush the male domination in her own way through sexuality. She fights against the role model mind set and the cultural identity of the archetype of women of the traditional Syrian Christian families.

Anita Nair, Lalithambika Antharjanam and Arundhati Roy speak about women and their experiences. Throughout the world the treatment meted out to women is the same according to all these writers. Their main focus is on the thoughts and feelings of women whose ideas are not accepted by the society in which they live. They are conditioned in such a way that they cannot break out of it and when they do so, they face a miserable situation in their lives. They have posed many questions to the society at large but have not got any answer.

The themes that run uniformly across all the three novels are women’s suffering, subjugation, oppression, frustration, sexuality,

freedom, alienation, identity crisis, caste discrimination, transgression, mother's infidelity, emotional insecurity and social issues. A critical reading of these books reveal feminist ideologies in the society in general. They condemn the patriarchy system in the male dominated world and they speak for women's rights.

My study has been organized in five major chapters. Each chapter focuses on feminist ideologies embedded in the works of these three reputed authors. Chapter I deal with an introduction and theory which is being followed in the study and the major trends in feminism in general. Chapter II deals with the book "*Ladies Coupe*" of Anita Nair titled, "A voyage of rediscovery for Akhila" which explores the female phase. Chapter III deals with the novel "*Agnisakshi*" of Lalithambika Antharjanam titled "Awakening of a woman to explore the incomplete self -Thethi", an in-depth analysis of the lead characters who bring out feminist ideas. Chapter IV discusses "*The God of Small Things*" by Arundhati Roy titled "A taboo breaking protagonist in a patriarchal society - Ammu" from a feminine perspective. Chapter V is the conclusion which summarizes all the chapters and substantiates the main ideas discussed in this thesis with reference to the novels studied.

If we were to review these three books from a triangular perspective we note that all the three main lady characters in the novels suffered traces of all the above. Be it Ammu of *The God of Small Things* or Akhila of *Ladies Coupe* or Thethi of *Agnisakshi*, none of the three enjoyed the privilege of expressing their desire for satiation of their biological needs. Ammu's disaster with her first husband was conveniently overlooked by her entire family who failed to take note of the fact that she was also not past prime of her youth and her wrong choice in matrimony cannot nail her down for the rest of her life. Akhila's family members conveniently looked at her as a man in lady's attire as it suited their needs to have a money making machine with absolutely no encumbrances. Sad that even a mother fails to take note of the fact that her eldest daughter who had sacrificed for the welfare of her siblings needed to have a life of her own. As for Thethi, it is pathetic that a well read youngster, fully aware of the shastras chose to overlook the fundamental requirement of his life partner. While he focused on keeping his promise to an elderly grandma for whom he performed final rites, he failed to take note of the fact that he had the responsibility of giving his wife the pleasure of motherhood.

While both Ammu and Chacko get back to their hometown to survive on the wealth of their parents, the treatment meted out to both the siblings is vastly different. Despite not contributing to the family treasury, Chacko himself regards his sister Ammu as a secondary citizen. Patriarchy is so embedded in their minds that even the mom adopts a one-sided view of her daughter's plight while she dotes on her son. In Akhila's home her brother who grows up comfortably with her hard earned money and steps unhesitatingly on to the threshold of matrimony, surprisingly, does not even think he has a duty to help her settle down with a family of her own. Thethi's well read brother who ensures that his sister gets educated and breaks the shackles of Namboothiri household in her mother's place overlooks the fact that she needs to enter a family that will promote her talent.

The psyche of women of different strata caught in their existential struggle for life has been a fertile ground for Indian women novelists. Anitha Nair also belongs to this category of novelists who have focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society. Her marvellous understanding of the minds of women is depicted beautifully in her novel Ladies Coupe which captures women's overwhelming problems and challenges. She emphatically puts

forward the view that the graph of women exploitation is not showing signs of relenting; on the contrary it is shockingly rising notwithstanding our modern times. Women continue to be victims of circumstances constantly endeavouring to live up to the varied roles they are expected to uphold and in the process their soaring ambition and will to assert their freedom takes a backseat forcing them to combat unimaginable sufferings.

The author poses many a taboo question on the role of women in contemporary India. Her India echoes a system of a sex-role and oppression of women under patriarchal organization. Patriarchy under the garb of cultural and traditional forms tries to repress, and humiliate women. Her novel sounds like a discourse on feminism. All her characters are subject to gruelling experiences of domestic oppression at the hands of their families and each of them acquires resilience to battle and also to discover their inner source of strength, capability and dynamism.

Women should not be ashamed of any stigma attached to them for e.g. widowhood, divorcee status, spinster status etc. they should realize their true potential and strength and this requires the capacity to manage differences and the willingness to respect them. Women

should engage in a full fledged battle for survival and improve relationships rather than submitting to harassment and suppressing the rights of an individual. Since each person is different from one another and each has his own idea of self-esteem and self-respect, a willingness to face new challenges and come up with innovative ideas to tackle issues has to spring from within.