

Female Solidarity and Emotional Comfort in Anita's Nair Ladies Coupe

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Abstract—This research paper discusses the concept of feminism, female solidarity in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* and emotional comfort. The novel follows the narrative of six women in a train compartment, a journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari, as their shared space becomes a canvas for storytelling, exploring emotions, and the process of self-discovery. The study investigates the ways in which these women, who come from different ages, classes and backgrounds, are bound together by their experiences of being oppressed, silenced and struggling to find a sense of identity in a male-dominated society. The paper examines the process of feminist solidarity through mutual accounts of suffering and helping. It emphasizes the emotional metamorphosis of the characters from isolation to understanding and consolation. The theoretical framework rests on the work of Simone de Beauvoir's notion of Woman as "the Other" and bell hooks' notion of feminist solidarity as a political, emotional and conscious practice. The results indicate that the "Ladies Coupé" is a symbolic feminist environment, as in this space women can temporarily break away from the control of men and express their repressed feelings. They will feel the healing, validation and empowerment through listening and sharing. The study ends by arguing that *Ladies Coupé* represents solidarity as a process, as it is created and how it can be transformed to combat oppression and provide women with emotional freedom.

Index Terms—Female Solidarity, Emotional Comfort, Patriarchy, Identity, *Ladies Coupé*, Anita Nair, Bell Hooks, Simone de Beauvoir, Women's Experience.

I. INTRODUCTION

The renowned author Anita Nair was born in Kerala. She is a well-known poet, novelist, journalist, and writer of short stories. Most novels from the 20th century discuss women's problems and their place in Indian society. Great female authors of Indian English

fiction, such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, and Anita Nair, paint a feminist portrait of Indian society. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé* occupies a singular place in contemporary Indian women's writing. Set aboard an overnight train travelling from Bangalore to Kanyakumari, the novel transforms a mundane railway journey into a profound meditation on womanhood, identity, and the quiet revolutions that occur when women speak openly to one another. Feminism solidarity, and emotional comfort are shown through the experiences of different women who share their life stories, struggles, and emotions. These women support each other and feel emotionally safe while talking about their problems.

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this research paper is to study feminism, female solidarity, and emotional comfort in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*. It focuses on how the six women share their life experiences of oppression and how their interaction creates emotional support and understanding among them. The paper also uses the feminist ideas of Simone de Beauvoir and bell hooks explain how women build solidarity and find emotional comfort through shared experiences.

Feminism Solidarity and Emotional Comfort in Ladies Coupe

Feminist solidarity is a key component of feminist philosophy and global women's liberation movements. Women who labour together, support one another emotionally, cooperate, and understand one another are said to exhibit feminist solidarity (Sreeranjini). It involves women talking about their struggles against gender discrimination, patriarchy, inequality, and societal oppression and supporting one another. Even

though women come from different caste, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, they often face similar challenges in different ways across society. Feminist solidarity becomes essential to the collective struggle against these injustices. They are able to relate to each other's experiences, which strengthens the fight against oppression and provides women with emotional comfort. Emotional comfort is a state of well-being, a sense of ease in one's surroundings and with oneself that gives rise to a particular comfort. It suggests that pleasant and generally positive emotions are more common, without going to extremes like euphoria, while there may also be bad emotions that we have grown accustomed to and whose disruptive power has lessened. (Delgado). Emotional pain, tension, fear, loneliness, melancholy, and anxiety are all lessened by emotional comfort. It provides people with inner serenity and the fortitude to face life's challenges. Simple actions like listening, supporting, caring, and understanding frequently become effective sources of emotional comfort; financial possessions are not necessarily the only method to bring emotional comfort (Littler and Rottenberg). In this novel, feminist solidarity and emotional comfort are shown when all six women share their own stories of oppression and how no one has been listening to them. When they meet and explain their stories to each other, they create an emotionally safe space and find comfort with one another. Everyone feels that there is someone who is there to listen to them, so they all tell each other the stories of their lives. Anita Nair narrates the stories of six women who are travelling together in a Ladies Coupe of a train. Mainly it depicts and connects the crisis of social norms and inner urge for freedom.

Akhilandeswari alias Akhila forty-five, single and working as a clerk, has been brought up in a conservative family of Tamil Brahmins. Akhila bears the burden of her family after her father's death. Her brothers and sisters grow up and get married and they hardly think about Akhila's needs and aspirations (Ambika). She becomes self-supporting but "emotionally crippled" by her complete lack of identity other than duty and sacrifice (Nair). She is expected to provide for her family's needs with her income and labour, but her emotional needs and her personality are disregarded. Patriarchal conditioning imprints in Akhila the idea that she must give up her happiness for the welfare of her family if she is a "good girl". As a result, she has rejected the need for love,

companionship, emotional connection, and independence. She has been emotionally shut down for years, and now feels insecure, lonely and unsure of herself. Akshila's emotional struggle with Anita Nair is well done both psychologically and as a woman's internal emotional struggle that is also constrained by patriarchy.

Margaret seems quiet and submissive at first, but she secretly opposes her husband's dominance and eventually looks for covert ways to rebel against it. The women in the compartment react to her sharing her stories with compassion and emotional understanding rather than condemnation (Ambika). Margaret receives emotional support and validation from their sympathetic listening. She feels emotionally validated instead of disregarded for what may be the first time. As a result, the women's camaraderie becomes mentally and emotionally strengthening. Margaret initially appears passive and silent, she internally resists her husband's authority and gradually seeks subtle forms of rebellion against his domination. When she shares her experiences with the women in the compartment, they respond not with judgment but with empathy and emotional understanding (Dhanalakshmi 74). Their compassionate listening provides Margaret emotional relief and validation. For perhaps the first time, she feels emotionally acknowledged rather than dismissed. The solidarity among the women therefore becomes emotionally healing and psychologically empowering.

Marikolanthu's story presents the most painful illustration of emotional suffering and patriarchal cruelty in the novel. As a poor village girl, she becomes vulnerable to exploitation and sexual violence. After being sexually assaulted, society blames and isolates her instead of punishing the perpetrator. Her experiences reveal the intersection of patriarchy, poverty, and class oppression because poor women are especially vulnerable to emotional neglect and injustice. Marikolanthu experiences deep loneliness, humiliation, and rejection because patriarchal society refuses to acknowledge her suffering compassionately. When Marikolanthu narrates her painful experiences within the ladies' compartment, the women respond with empathy, understanding, and emotional support rather than condemnation (Ambika). For the first time in her life, she experiences emotional acceptance and compassion. This moment powerfully illustrates the

healing potential of feminist solidarity. Emotional understanding allows Marikolanthu to reclaim dignity and emotional strength despite the trauma she has endured. Nair's encounters highlight the significance of female solidarity in breaking gender conventions and empowering women to pursue their rights and objectives. The novel's fundamental concept provides power and support to its protagonists. The women's companionship on the train breaks down societal barriers, creating a sense of belonging and mutual respect (Dhanalakshmi). They provide relief and support to one another through conversations and shared experiences, creating a safe space for them to express themselves without fear of condemnation. Women in Ladies Coupe create connections based on empathy, compassion, and understanding. Despite disparities in age, background, and viewpoint, they share common difficulties and goals. (Mistry).

Feminist Theoretical Approach to Female Solidarity in Ladies Coupe

Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other" provides a foundation for comprehending women's lived experiences in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupé. Beauvoir contends that in a patriarchal society, woman is designated as the "Other," positioned in relation to man, who is viewed as both the norm and the subject (Beauvoir). This theme is vividly represented in the lives of the novel's female protagonists, who describe feelings of emotional suppression, marital dissatisfaction, social control, and a lack of personal freedom. Each woman's tale demonstrates how patriarchal expectations have impacted her identity, with her aspirations and choices frequently pushed aside in favor of family and societal constraints. However, the ladies' coupe becomes a symbolic area in which these women, who are usually positioned as "Others," are briefly free of masculine scrutiny and social judgment. Within this constrained female area, women begin to release their suppressed voices, transforming quiet into expression and isolation into mutual understanding. Beauvoir's theory also helps to explain Akhila's journey to self-realization. Akhila, who has spent her childhood as a responsible daughter and later as a self-sacrificing lady, begins to wonder whether a woman's identity must always be defined by her interactions with others. The anecdotes told by her other passengers inspire her to reconsider her status as an independent subject

rather as someone who fills social duties. Thus, the story exemplifies Beauvoir's notion that emancipation begins when a woman realizes her situation and fights the systems that designate her as the "Other." the novel also shows that when women come together and share their experiences, this "Otherness" begins to transform into solidarity. Within the confined space of the ladies' coupe, the women listen to each other's stories and recognize common patterns of oppression. This shared understanding breaks the isolation that Beauvoir describes and allows women to see themselves not only as individuals suffering alone but as part of a collective experience. Akhila's journey is central here, as she gradually becomes aware of her own suppressed identity through the narratives of other women. This awareness creates emotional connection and empathy, which leads to a form of feminist solidarity.

Bell hooks define feminist solidarity and sisterhood as a political and ethical activity that brings women together to oppose patriarchal dominance, rather than a natural or involuntary emotional tie. Hooks argues that women must band together purposefully to combat sexism, inequality, and oppression in their lives. She argues that without communal action and knowledge, individual battles remain isolated and powerless. Hooks also contends that sisterhood is not predicated on the premise that all women are identical. Instead, women are segregated by class, color, education, and social privilege, and these distinctions must be recognized rather than overlooked. Hooks believes that true feminist solidarity is attainable only when women recognize their differences and continue to support one another through empathy and understanding. This is why she believes that women must actively work together across divides to form genuine feminist ties (hooks). Another crucial part of Hooks' concept is that feminist sisterhood is formed via talking, listening, and sharing personal experiences. When women talk about their problems and other women listen with respect and openness, it fosters emotional support and political awareness. This shared space of storytelling enables women to recognize that their difficulties are not individual faults, but rather part of a wider patriarchal structure. Hooks plainly emphasizes in *Margin to Center* that feminist solidarity is a social obligation, in which women must band together to oppose oppressive structures and promote one another's freedom (hooks). Sisterhood becomes a transforming force only when

women voluntarily choose to band together and foster trust, compassion, and resistance.

Akhila travels with women from various social backgrounds and stages of femininity in *Ladies Coupé*, including Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, and Sheela. They initially appear to be different individuals with their own private difficulties, but as the journey progresses, they begin to share their life tales. This sharing process represents Hooks' theory that solidarity is formed through conversation, listening, and emotional interaction. When each woman describes her experiences with marriage, desire, sacrifice, and self-discovery, the compartment changes into an empathy zone in which women begin to understand each other beyond their superficial differences. bell hooks emphasizes that women need to come together consciously in order to recognize the common structures of oppression that shape their lives. In the novel, this coming together is seen when the women slowly break their silence and respond to each other with understanding rather than judgment. Their conversations reveal that although their circumstances differ, they all experience some form of patriarchal control, emotional restriction, or identity conflict. This realization helps create a sense of shared emotional experience, which aligns with hooks' belief that feminist sisterhood is built through awareness of collective struggle. Akhila's path is important to the feminist worldview. As she listens to other women's stories, she begins to think on her own life and wonders whether independence is possible without emotional connection. These shared tales offer her with emotional comfort as well as self-awareness, demonstrating how solidarity may be beneficial. In this sense, the ladies' compartment becomes a temporary feminist space where women can gather, support one another, and start to create a collective consciousness. *Ladies Coupé* reflects bell hooks' argument that feminist solidarity requires women to actively come together, share their experiences, and build emotional and political connections that challenge patriarchal structures while also offering healing and understanding (hooks).

III. CONCLUSION

In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupé*, the trip of six women in a shared railway compartment serves as a strong metaphor for female bonding, emotional healing, and

opposition to patriarchal norms. The novel clearly depicts that when women get together to discuss their lived experiences, silence turns into expression, and isolation into unity. Through the stories of Akhila, Margaret, Marikolanthu, and others, Nair demonstrates how women, regardless of class, age, or background, experience comparable forms of emotional suppression and gender-based limits. Using Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other," it is clear that women in the novel have traditionally been treated as secondary subjects inside a patriarchal society. However, the ladies' coupe briefly undermines this structure by providing a venue for women to converse freely and realize their common situation. Similarly, Bell Hooks' notion of feminist solidarity and sisterhood contributes to understanding how this shared space becomes significant only when women intentionally gather, listen to one another, and form emotional and political relationships across divides. *Ladies Coupé* eventually demonstrates that female solidarity is not predetermined, but rather developed via conversation, empathy, and mutual support. The emotional comfort that the women experience is more than just personal relief; it is a type of social healing that confronts patriarchal silence. Anita Nair depicts the ladies' coupe as a symbolic feminist space where women rediscover themselves, support one another, and strive for greater self-awareness and emotional liberation.

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