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## **Victim of Marginalization (Marikolunthu) in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe**

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**Abstract:**

*Indian writing in English has acquired a new identity in presenting its real picture of the society. The writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Arundhati Roy and many more have portrayed the picture of the people from the deprived caste that is marginalized section of the society through their novels. In this regard, many women face such social segregation especially women from low class are socially expelled in the patriarchal Indian culture. The set apart ideological pattern, patriarchy, and the over-all notions of patriarchy have impact on the marginalization of a specific group or individual. It is the social process if proper or being made subordinate. Marginalized individuals are also expelled from services, events, and strategies in all aspects. Resulting in poverty, psycho-emotional injure, and its resulting problems often result in tragic damage to life, health, and mind. Women belonging to the lower classes, lower castes, uneducated and the poorest section have diverse levels of marginalization than their better off counterparts. Anita Nair in her novels ably focuses on themes such as gender inequity, subordination, patriarchy, silence, suppression and suffering, rebellion, protest etc. This paper is an attempt to focus on the marginalized segment of the society in order to get some optimistic resolution for termination of this sort of marginalization.*

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

Anita Nair is a salient writer in Indian Writing in English. In her writings she unfolds the different experiences of women in Indian society. In her novel *Ladies Coupe*, she beautifully portrays the lives of six women in diverse background in addition to it she deals with the prominent issue of caste system which is prevailing in India. It is to be noted that caste discrimination is one of the greatest evils in our society. Our important men of the society have tried their level best to remove it from base roots. Only on the basis of class, gender and race, the self is always eroded against the society. Anita Nair in her second novel *Ladies Coupe* heralded a revolutionary attitude against the abuse of Marikolunthu, a character in the novel, the lower caste woman belonging to the poor family. Marikolunthu, whose rape, plainly and symbolically, attached with extreme poverty and class exploitation is on the peak of all other five stories. The intention of this paper is not a mere addition and healing of the marginalized, but entails a major struggle for democracy, impartiality and social integrity that would replace group and mobility for the historically marginalized with reference to Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*.

Marikolunthu is neglected and detested by the upper -middle-class women. The noticeable indications of her class and social grade uplift her fellow travellers to ignore her in the space of compartment; she, too, embraces till the departure of her co-passengers and narrates her life to Akhila. As she belongs to the lower caste, there can be two reasons for Akhila to avoid her one is that she is considered as meek and the next is that her suggestions may be unsuitable for making decisions. Hence she listened to her at the very end of the novel. In addition to it, she is aware that the disrupting part of her narrative would jolt her addressees away from their middle -class contentment, primarily because it has elements that drift furthest away from the perfect womanhood. Since her life consists of violence, rejection of motherhood and prohibited (homosexual) desire. There are different views on marginalization which depends on the recourses available to those people. Mullay describes marginalization as "the need for recognizing that social problems are indeed connected with larger structures in society, causing various forms of oppression amongst individuals resulting in marginalization"(262).

Marikolunthu works in Chettiar Kottai, after attaining her puberty she looks very pretty and in order to save her from the clutches of men, Sujata asks her to depart to Vellore to work as a maid -servant to the two lady doctors Miss V and Miss K. They persistently encouraged her to pass the SSLC examination and then instructed her that they will help her to undergo training to become a professional nurse. Nair here stresses the importance and necessity of education through the two doctors. In western countries they concentrate on being literate in order to have an independent status, thus they both want her to be an independent woman.

Marikolanthu is shocked with the lesbian relationship between the two doctors. they both loves each other and they never care about their homosexual relationship. Through this incident it is very clear that Nair brings forth the notion of identity without being dependent on man. Later she experiences and understands the female companionship within a framework of homosociality. She returns from Vellore to her native place and replaces her mother's place as a maid in the Chettiar kottai. She was loaded with heavy work and without making any complaints she does it perfectly. A luxurious place is reserved only for high class people with having the authority of domination, exploitation and oppression. They use their high class or caste to subjugate or dominate the lower one. The novel explicates in its theme the dominating issues of class conflict which shows the big gap in the life of the rich and poor people.

Her smooth life as a servant-maid in the Chettiar Kottai is messed up and her childhood innocence is ruined by Murugesan, relative of Chettiar. She is seduced in the mango orchard. She stands for poor and depressed peasantry class women on whom male brutality is forced on heavily and her life is left unquestioned. Women are exploited, raped, ill-treated in so called globalised society which is really a shameful thing. It is like so much of human experience is marginalized.

Being born as a girl she is dispossessed of to be sent to the town school to have her minimum education. Her mother says, "It's not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself . . . there is too much at risk." (215). In order to make sure her mother's fear, Marikolanthu's life is destroyed by lust. In general people who belong to the labour class undoubtedly belong to the muted group. The same here is Marikolanthu, 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. Marikolanthu 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. The liberation movement of rural women also shares the patriarchal temperament of the society. The majority of the members were rural landless labourers. Basic elements of the social maintenance such as the preservation of the caste distinctions, patriarchal forms of right in the family, and approval of the inviolability of the Shastra indicates first choice or leaning for a symbolic relatively than substantive change in social practices. 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. Erik Erikson conceptualizes the formation of identity in his *Youth and Crisis* as a kind of psychosocial relativity existing in a sense of personal sameness and historical continuity. He adds furthermore that we cannot separate personal growth and communal change, nor we separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crisis in historical development because the two help to define each other. (33)

Thus identity establish and signifies the self in its relation to various other aspects. But the society, community and history may represent the other aspects. In heterogeneous and truly diverse societies such as in India, the problem of identity for a female becomes a complicated issue in terms of effectiveness of identity in realizing its true potential in reshaping the wider imperative of sustaining and building a genuine society. Nair deals with rape, aggression, alienation and troubled relationship. For Marikolanthu nothing is worse than a man's raping of a woman and so she finds little fault in the missy's love for each other and experiences a kind of comfort and happiness to give her love for Sujata, more than her husband does.

Marikolanthu has to provide sexual pleasure to both Sujata and Sridhar. It is true that women whether educated or illiterate, either from rural or urban, engaged in household or office or any institution suffers varying degrees of physical and psychological violence at the hands of their masters or co-workers. As a result, Sujata becomes a lesbian. She comes to know from Mari about the perverse behaviour of the two doctors Miss V and Miss K in Vellore and decides to behave likewise herself. She draws Mari into her room and enjoys in her companion. The two women are drawn to each other gradually, first as companions and then as lovers.

To distinguish between gender and sex is essential in order to know Gay and Lesbian criticism that issues out of gender studies. Sex and gender, spaced out from being biological and cultural respectively, their affiliation is based on identity and desire. A lesbian is not necessarily a woman who has sex with another woman. A woman could be lesbian if she has lifetime attraction towards the other woman. Lesbianism is also a matter of choice, it is an anti-patriarchal choice sexual orientation is invisible, while gender is visible. 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 vis-a-vis 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. The struggle of educated and rich women for liberation is not the comparable to that of an uneducated and deprived woman. Marikolanthu's importance lies in her struggle for freedom in spite of being poor and illiterate.

The anger she has on Murugesan, and the society which persuaded him from punishment, her failure in making him as the erroneous man with no ethics and the disgust of her son, all comes to an end only at the demise of Murugesan. Fate has played a vital role by making Muthu, an illegitimate son of Murugesan, to lit fire on his corpse without knowing that it is his own father's body. The turning point in her life as well as in the life of Muthu comes when she sees the dead body of Murugesan and Muthu left to tend to the pyre. She is taken aback at the recognition that she had bargained her son to a candle for no fault of his. All the hatred she had felt for her son went up in the flames. She felt guilt and started to show her love for her child. She decided to look after him and make up to him for all she had lost. She would no long be content to become a sister to the real thing surrogate housewife, surrogate mother, surrogate lover. She would be the real thing he would be different from the "long line of people who had used her and discarded her (268).

Marikolanthu suffers severe cruelty both social, familial and financial. It is eventually the affection for Muthu, that brings her on the right track where she will find bliss and realization. Her struggle has been one of hate for herself and long-suffering with crushing affairs thereafter. Her resolution to bring up her child shows her shaping in to a new character. Marikolanthu 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 Marikolanthu 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. Marikolanthu's character reveals the physical as well as mental suffering due to lack of knowledge. To sum up, Marikolanthu 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 Marikolanthu that establishes her as a new woman with a redefined character.

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.

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