

A Psychological Perspective of Female Characters in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* and Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

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Abstract: *Doris Lessing and Anita Nair, both are the eminent women writers, writing in English. They hold revolutionary ideas about marriage and man- woman relationship. It moves around the world to keep the lives enriched with feelings. Doris Lessing in her worldly praised novel The Golden Notebook has presented the man-woman relationship in a better way to depict that how one gender oppresses the other. She has shown the image of these marginalised women in the image of its protagonist Anna Wulf. Since from the beginning of her life she has been the victim both within and outside the family. Anita Nair also has presented in her novel Ladies Coupe, modern Indian women's search for identity in male dominated society. Both the novels primary focus on psychological exploration of inner self of its female characters. Lessing and Nair permeate deep into the inner psyche of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and bring out their issues, which are mainly because of the psychological and emotional inequalities in a society. Since the beginning of this world Women have been quite suppressed and oppressed both outside and inside of her family and this transfer is expressed by the quest for self-identity. This quest for identity leads to self discovery which pervades in the selected novels of Doris Lessing and Anita Nair. Their concept of a free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom, but relates to her mental and emotional attitude and wellbeing.*

Key Words: *Oppression, Psychological exploration, Inner psyche, Psychological and Emotional Inequalities, Subjugation.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Doris Lessing is the Nobel Laureate in English literature has mostly written on the post war scenario. She is the most fearless novelist of the world. Her main themes of writing are communism, feminism, mysticism, etc. Her works are of wider scope since the day they were produced to till date. Lessing has produced most extra ordinary works addressing the current issues of love, man-woman relationship before and after marriage. The Golden Notebook published in 1964 is the considered as the revolution rather a sexual revolution. Lessing perfectly shows the themes of woman's breakdown since from the beginning of the novel. This breakdown is the backbone of the whole novel. From the very beginning of the novel, we find women all alone that leads to alienation and then mental breakdown, "The two women were alone in the London flat. 'The point is, 'said Anna, as her friend came back from the telephone on the landing, 'the point is, that is, that as far as I can see, everything's cracking up.'" (Lessing 25) This thought by the Lessing's protagonist Anna Wulf shows that she has been completely dissatisfied with her life and for her the whole world is cracking up. Her mind has been so much affected that it has an apocalyptic perspective in the perception of life. Anna Wulf always battles in her life. As a writer she battles for her writing block, as free women battles for life and as a mother and lover/wife battles for her personal desires. Her mind is always full of the thoughts of death and destruction and also goes the Jungian Psychotherapist. She feels the lack of feelings. She talks to her psychotherapist Mrs Marks that even in her dreams finds negative thoughts that more disturbs her life, "I took dozens of dreams to Mrs Marks today- all dreamed over the last three days. They are of the same quality of false art, caricature, illustration, parody." (Lessing 216) She doesn't need anything from life but only bothers about her daughter who is every treasure in her life. She has lost everything in her life:

People are pleased to see her. But she only cares one person in the world, her daughter, Janet. . . . It seems to me that ever since I can remember anything the real thing that has been happening in the world was death and destruction. It seems to me it is stronger than life. (Lessing 216)

The Anna's mental disability shows her effect of both the internal and external world on her psyche. There are so many reasons behind it but one of the reasons is her failure in her personal life, especially with Max Wulf. They married but their marriage was incompatible. Instead of love, she felt sexually repulsive from Max and after the birth of their daughter Janet, they divorced. Then she had a love affair with Micheal, a psychologist by profession. He also leaves her alone. Kumari and Prasannasree in their research article entitled as *Between Spaces of Silence and Violence Re-Critiquing Doris Lessing's Anna Wulf from The Golden Notebook* state it as:

Her depression is aggravated by the abrupt end of love affair with Micheal, a medical practitioner. Abandoned by her lover and unable to get over him, Anna feels frightened, vulnerable and sick. Disheartened by unsatisfactory relationships with men. . . . Anna at forty feels life is cracking up.

Fragmentation torments her life, both at the personal and professional levels. (Kumari and Prasannasree 26-27)

This fragmentation is clearly visible through her writings where she keeps four different notebooks to record her feelings. Like the notebooks she has divided her life into fragments. Shenli Song in her research article *Alienation and Isolation---Problems of Modern Society in Doris Lessing's The Golden Notebook* states:

In the Golden Notebook, the key issue was human relationships, especially the relationships between men and women as a key image of modern humanity or inhumanity. Sexual liberation, from the female side and sexual restructuring, from the male, were necessary. (Song 165)

Anita Nair is one of India's popular female writers. She depicts through her expression, the present condition of women in society, with wit and humour. Story telling is an art and she does it exceptionally well. She delves deep into human psyche and allows the reader to enjoy a wonderful journey by presenting absorbing stories that have colourful and unique characters. She evokes experiences that are drawn from day-to-day life and her approach often enables the readers to suspect the character to be one of their neighbours or of a friend. Anita Nair, an eminent, leading Indian women writer, writing in English, holds revolutionary ideas about marriage and man- woman relationship. In her opinion, social consciousness of today, is leading us to the point where conditions for better growth of two complementary components, man and woman, would be ensured by their separate and individual development. Relationship plays a vital role in human encounter. It is the music of life. Without it no physical or mental aspect can be given a name. It moves around the world to keep the lives enriched with feelings. Anita Nair has presented in her novels, modern Indian women's search for revival of relationships that are central to women. Anita Nair reveals that her concern is with the exploration of human psyche. She explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists. Indian women writers have established their own identity in the field of writing by exploring female subjectivity in their literary offspring and striving to bring an identity for Indian women, had highlighted various untouched and unnoticed facets of life which an Indian women faces since from her birth. Literature is in fact the most explicit record of the human spirit. It is a medium through which essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experiences. A creative writer must have the perception and analytical mind of a sociologist who provides a record of human life, society and social systems existing at that point of time. In Indian society, the centre of family in principle considered to be its 'woman', she is called as the wife of home, she not only have to marry a man but to the whole family, and it shows how domestic life is interwoven with the life of a 'woman'. In Indian tradition, a woman is given the name of goddesses like 'Lakshmi', 'Saraswathi' and 'Sakthi' who are adored in every household for their divinity and the women are also expected to manifest this divinity in their daily life. The burden of such expectations does become a form of oppression for the women. Thus, the women, who have to magnify themselves to become 'Lakshmi', 'Saraswathi' and 'Sakthi' see themselves only trapped in every situations. They realize that the conferring of the 'Devi' status is only ideological, because in real life, Indians have not given their women what they have given to 'Devi' in the cosmos. From the exalted position of goddess of worship in the Stone Age which celebrated matriarchies or social order with women in charge, the position of women has greatly deteriorated down the ages. The Indian woman is particularly conditioned by tradition and conventions and willingly accepts the responsibility of being the custodian of the family and prestige. It is widely acknowledged that family constitutes the dominant milieu and constructs the primary identity of women. It defines and prescribes the social roles that women will play in familial terms: daughter, wife, and mother. Thus family becomes the major site of women's oppression. An Indian woman in this 21st century is yet to seek identity as a human being with equal status in the family in which she is born and in the family to which she is married. Anita Nair's primary focus is on psychological exploration of inner self of Indian women. Anita Nair permeates deep into the inner psyche of the depressed women by virtue of their feminine sensibility and psychological insight and brings out their issues, which are mainly because of the psychological and emotional inequalities in a male dominated society. Since the beginning of this world Women have been quite suppressed and oppressed both outside and inside of her family and this transfer is expressed by the quest for self-identity. This quest for identity leads to self-discovery which pervades in the selected novel of Anita Nair. This search for self is the predominant theme with the Anita Nair's novel *Ladies Coupe*. The women in this novel are suppressed and subjugated by their own family members. In this novel, Anita Nair depicts the changing relationships within family and a society. It is actually about the chance of meeting six women of different age, class, and experience namely- Akhila, Janaki, Margaret, Sheela, Praba Devi and Marikolanthu in the *Ladies Coupe*, compartment of Indian Railways. The metaphor Coupe is symbolic of their existence and the space they occupied in life and in society. Akhilandeswari commonly known as Akhila, the protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and gives her too, wants to find a solution to the question that has troubled Akhila throughout her life: Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? *Ladies Coupe* has depicted some bitter facets of women's life regardless of their geographical, cultural, religious, social or economic differences. Whatever they are, or whoever they are, all these women have one thing in common, that is, "subjugation"; and the first site of this subjugation is the family itself. The novel opens with, "a sense of escape, of leaving, of running away, of pulling out, of escaping" (Nair 1). At the age of forty, she starts her search for self-identity. Now at the age of forty-five, she wants to leave all the horizons. She wants to cross all the illusions of the society, "So this then is Akhila,

forty-five years old. Sans rose coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect” (Nair 2). The root cause of all economic and social problems was the lack of education and this gave men a reason for refusing political rights to women. By narrating the stories of these six women, the novelist moves them from a state of passivity and absence into a state of active presence, from the kitchen and the bedroom to the street and the world at large. These are the stories, which together make a single story, of women rediscovering their bodies. The coupe becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from patriarchy, one that is not characterised by false binaries. Akhila lived in a South Indian Brahmin family with her father, mother, two younger brothers and one younger sister. Her father was the lone breadwinner of the family. When Akhila completed her pre-university course with first division, all at a sudden her parents stopped her further education. She was very anxious to learn more but the family forced her to stop her education. They have considered that her education is completed and now she should learn how to perform the household chores. Her parents didn't bother for desires, “Her parents considered her education complete and she was expected to fine-tune all her housekeeping abilities in preparation for the day she would be married.” (Nair 48). The women's identity in their culture has been compared with Kolam, she should know her role in the family:

A sloppily drawn kolam suggests that the woman of the house is careless, indifferent and incapable. And an elaborately drawn one indicates self-absorption, a lavish hand and an inability to put others' needs before yours. Intricate and complicated kolams are something you reserve for special occasions. But your everyday kolam has to show that while you are thrifty, you are not mean. . . . Your kolam should reflect who you are: a good housewife” (Nair 50).

Mary Ann Fergusson in her book *Images of Women in Literature*, 1973 states that: In every age women has been seen primarily as mother, wife, mistress, and as sex object-their roles in relationship to men! (Fergusson 4-5). Akhila is the head of the family after the death of her father and had the responsibility of every family member. As her brothers got job, Narayan as a machinist and Narsi found a teaching job, she felt relaxed in her life as she has made her siblings to earn their livelihood. Now she can think of herself and her own desires and feelings.

Narayan joined the tank factory as a mechanist. Narsi became the first graduate and then postgraduate and found a teaching job. Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen: Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?”(Nair 77).

Akhila was the bread winner of the family, she was not considered as the head of the family and her needs and desires were least bothered. Her brother decided to get married, as he was a man, he did not ask for anybody's permission to get married. When he told the family that he was going to marry the principal's daughter:

No one could fault with his choice and there was nothing anyone could say except perhaps – Don't you think you should wait for your elder sister to get married before you think of a wife and a family? But who was to mouth this rebuke?” (Nair 77).

And both Narayan and Narsi had their weddings in the same hall, on the same day and time. Akhila waited for Amma or her brothers to say something about her marriage but they never asked, “What about you? You've been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don't you want a husband, children, a home of your own?” (Nair77). Nobody in the family bothered about her. . Even her mother whom she expected to speak for her and for marriage remained silent. Akhila became a sort of feeling less creature for them who can only earn for them and fulfilling their demand. She has been subjugated in her own family first by her parents who stopped her education and then by her siblings who thought of their own family and life and not of their elder sister who has been very loyal to them since their father died. She became the victim of her own family. Though Akhila had done her duties, all that of a head of a family to her brothers and sister, she was not recognized as the real head, just because she was a woman. For her own family, Akhila was no more a woman, she has been ceased to be a woman and has already metamorphosed into a spinster.

2. CONCLUSION:

After analysing both novels through their protagonists' Anna Wulf and Akhila their marital and personal lives, it is clear that lack of love, trust and understanding leads towards a breakdown of these female characters by disturbing them psychologically. The theme of breakdown forms the back bone of both these novels of Doris Lessing and Anita Nair, *The Golden Notebook* and *Ladies Coupe*. Dissatisfied with the love within family, they crave for the true love outside their family but still fail. They only face failures in their lives. In *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila craves for the love from her family and she feels strange and disillusioned within her family full of her parents and siblings. They always treat her thing that is made only to work and serve them without her own feelings. She finally realises all it and wants to live all alone without being a member of the family that bother about her feelings and emotions. Same is the case with Anna Wulf who fails in her life as a wife, as a lover. Her relationship outside marriage also proves disastrous and leaves a permanent effect on her psyche. Anna marries Max but didn't share bond of love with him. It leads to their unhappy marriage and finally gets divorce. At last we conclude by saying that both family and marriage have an important role to play in the positive psychological development of a personality otherwise it ruins the whole personality of a person.

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