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Shifting of Paradigms from Private Sphere to Public Sphere in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* □

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Abstract

The present paper intends to present the cultural as well as social conditioning of a woman when she finds her unable to articulate words into meanings in public sphere. It may be because of her unrecognised positioning in public sphere or she is considered nothing, but as role player only in social discourse. A woman finds her comfortable in private sphere which is closet or private space. My paper intends to discuss all these issues as well as submits some suggestions how she could be recognised as well as how she could feel her strengthened and liberated in the social as well as cultural paradigm.

Keywords: Public sphere, social conditioning, scripts, culture, liberation, identity, fluid identity, role and performance, language and space, wild zone.

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Anita Nair has basically dealt with woman's independence and liberation of her individuality that she does not realize because of the scripts and assigned roles to her credits. The research paper covers the span of public sphere and private sphere where a woman does not respond in the same manner as she was interfaced consequently she is silent in the public domain. Public and private domain is created through political agency to undermine or control the behaviour of a woman through cultural scripts and language. The undergoing agency creates such a binary opposition, hierarchy of relationships between man and woman behaviour through language as well as negotiation of environment. Woman needs space to articulate her conditioning in the society that space can be achieved through her presence in the public domain. Public sphere creates the environment in which a woman does not feel comfortable to respond/convey her views. Hence, she creates her own zone of articulation of language and speech. Elaine Showalter has given a name to this zone and that is "wild zone". We call this place wild zone for its privacy as well as exclusiveness. Through this zone, she can realize herself with confidence and full

independence. She can touch her bodily organs as well as emotive expressions. She is very close to herself. This private place can be of her closet, washroom or cosy and comfortable space.

Anita Nair has expressed her concerns through her well-received book, *Ladies Coupe* (2001) where she advocates for woman's liberation and independence. She believes that a woman should not be treated like performer of roles but she has also enough scope and space to be in the mainstream. Her services to the family, society and nation can be undermined as a part of social conditioning or structure. She should be given enough space to realize her experiences as volunteer one. Social paradigms are not made exclusively for women only. Woman can do the same services what a man do. Hence, the society cannot be decisive for her roles and performances. Anita Nair's narrator, Akhila, 45years old lady, single, is an income-tax clerk by profession. She has never her own life in different roles assigned to her credit. She asks to herself, where I am and who is I. Akhila comes in the contact of a number of women and their stories through which she seeks solution to the question that has been with the life. Akhila has some questions and they are; can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?

These are the questions which ask for the identity of a woman, does woman exist or she is not the part of the discourse. A woman is role player or anything else needs to situate her positioning. Through Janaki Anita Nair has mediate her discourse about the relevance of marriage in the life of a woman in general and Janaki in particular and she has also focussed on the articulation of public domain. Thus:

Janaki didn't know what to expect of marriage. All through her girlhood, marriage was a destination she was being groomed for. Her mother and aunts took great to perfect what they called the skills of marriage-cooking and cleaning, sewing and pickling...she wasn't expected to know what it really meant to be married, and neither was she curious about it. It would come to her as it had to her mother, she thought.(25)

Sushila Singh in her book, *Feminism* believes "man" or "woman" are in fact the effects of complicated discursive practices.(55) Anita Nair has also challenged the artefacts of history, culture and scripts which restrict the position of women and do not give space to access their existence or identity beyond the discursive limit. Bell Hooks has also accepts the discursive challenge and submits her view that one should "speak in tongues." Hence, she talks about the exclusive identity of woman shifted from the society has a cause to articulate her identity apart from the public sphere. Thus:

I am located in the margin. I make a definite distinction between that marginality which is imposed by oppressive structures and that marginality one chooses as site of resistance- as location of radical openness and possibility. This site of resistance is continually formed in that segregated culture of opposition that is our critical response to domination. We know struggle to be that which pleasures, delights, and fulfils desire. We are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us new location from which to articulate our sense of world.(153)

Radical feminists believe that women's liberation requires technological competences through which one can eradicate the unequal balance between man and woman's relationship. Bearing and caring of the child should be the responsibility of the government. The child birth and child care must be the accountability of public domain. Shulamith Firestone says that the role system should be abolished. "The role system must be abolished, in its entirety even in its

biological aspects. The radical feminist conception of human nature is neo-Freudian. Firestone believes with Freud that “the crucial problem of modern life is sexuality” (*Dialectic of Sex* 209). Anita Nair submits her view with the concept of an ‘ideal woman’ every woman has to achieve this destination for her own identity. Akhila’s mother teaches her daughter how one can become an ideal woman in societal frame. Thus:

Amma had her own theories on what a good wife ought to be like. First of all, no good wife could serve two masters- the masters being her father and her husband. A good wife learnt to put her husband’s interests before anyone else’s, even her father’s. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he said. ‘There is no such thing as an equal marriage,’ Amma said.’ ‘It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony.... A woman is not meant to take on a man’s role. Or the gods would have made her so. So what is all this about two equals in a marriage?’ (14)

In the matrix of identity a woman has to play two roles; one for her social conditioning and other one for the woman in itself so she has no her self esteem or existence other than society. Her roles are relative and conditioned. She cannot leave her centre which is exclusively made for her if she wishes to cross the centre her works will not be marked or recognised so she has to follow the words of centre. She doesn’t have space like man in the ambit. She is not an independent entity but relative and dependent. Therefore, Marxists thinker suggests that a woman should be given economic flexibility and freedom to select her profession. She knows herself better than being discussed by somebody else. Women should not be given works like housekeeping or caring of child but they should be given the important positions in the society. They can lead the society. They are the dependent workers but coordinative being. Women should not be discriminated on wages. Men and women are the parts of the system. There is no hierarchy like caste, gender, creed, colour and community.

Akhila’s feeling of tiredness as well as concern seems to us when it brings to her notice that a woman is not complete without a man in her life. But, the opposite of the same is not applicable. She wants to analyse the mind of a woman as well as creates discourse in the social system where man is always honoured in the land of heaven while on the other hand woman is not considered human alike. The texts create the narratives through which Nair has submitted her opinions. Nair has also submitted a group of women who are being ruled by different set of systems. They cannot be pulled together as they do not seem to happen less than one category as they come from various social groups and ideology. Akhila says:

‘They are nice women but they are the kind who don’t feel complete without a man. They might say otherwise but I know them and women like them. Deep in their hearts, they think the world has no use for a single woman.’ (94-95)

Nair has advocated for her statement through the character, Akhila and she opines like this that a woman needs space to interact with and communicate her opinions that a woman’s body is not only the subject which can be discussed one and all. Akhila says that she will not surrender herself before a man who considers her relative artefacts. Akhila states:

Akhila sets herself a little game: if he makes the first move, I’ll go no further. I don’t want a man trying to broaden his horizon with my body. I don’t want to be another experience. She walks to the bench. He is waiting there for her. A grin tugs at her lips. She bends her head to hide it. When she lifts her face, he sees an Akhila who wears the ghost of a smile. (272)

Nair has quoted a very powerful statement given by Rebecca West who says that we will never give rights to anyone to use our feelings or put us on margin. Thus Rebecca statement states:

Were it possible for us to wait for ourselves to come into the room, not many of us would find our hearts breaking into flower as we heard the door handle turn. But we fight for our rights, we will not let anybody take our breath away from us and we resist all attempts to prevent us from using our wills.
(Foreword to *Ladies Coupe*)

Public and private sphere is a space where one can address oneself to. A man can address himself through the public sphere but a woman doesn't feel comfortable to address from or we can say that a man uses the language in this domain woman cannot. Therefore, the radical feminists suggest that a woman has to shift her sphere from private to public for her recognition as well articulation of language. Woman has to respond in the same language to which she asked for. In radical feminist's writings especially who have written during 1990s phase they used sexual discourse as a tool to give answer in the same order what they didn't do earlier. Women can be recognised and validated if they are shifting their sphere from private to public. Anita Nair has also took this challenge and argued in the light of her arguments that a woman has to seek her destination; self esteem and self recognition. On the jacket of the book, she mentions the position of a woman:

Meet Akhilandeshwari, Akhila for short: forty- five and single, an income-tax clerk and a woman who has never been allowed to live her own life- always the daughter, the sister, the aunt, the provider. Until the day she gets herself a one-way ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari, gloriously alone for the first time in her life and determined to break free of all that her conservative Tamil Brahmin life has bound her to.... As she listens to the women's stories, Akhila is drawn into the most private moments of their lives, seeking in them a solution to the question that has been with her all her life: Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?(*Ladies Coupe*)

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