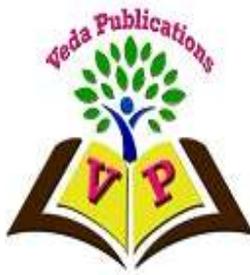


**QUEST FOR IDENTITY AND SELF DISCOVERY IN ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE***P.Starlin Judith Venibha^{1*}, Dr.D.L. Jaisy²^{1*} (Research Scholar, Scott Christian College (Autonomous), Nagercoil.)² (Research Supervisor, Assistant Professor of English, St. Jude's College, Thoothoor.K.K.Dist.)**ABSTRACT**

Anita Nair, a popular English writer was born in Kerala. Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is an attempt to study the identity, self discovery and a voice against female oppression and the problems of women. She portrays different stories through her characters in the novel *Ladies Coupe*. The novel switches over from past to present and present to past. Nair has presented her women struggling side by side because of patriarchy. Her women characters have been portrayed as intelligent and questioning. She analysis six women characters in this novel. Akhilandeshwari, the protagonist is a forty five years old spinster. She takes various roles of a daughter, sister, aunty and the care taker of the family. The narration of the tales is presented in the form of case studies. The novel unfolds itself against the background of a train journey, and each of these characters narrates the story of her life as the train chugs, trundles and troops to its destination. The remaining five female characters also portray women problem and oppression. Thus this study depicts the Identity and Self discovery of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*.

Keywords: *Victim, Survival, Domestic oppression, Patriarchy.*



Anita Nair, like many other writers of mainstream literature, has chosen self-discovery as the central theme of her novel. *Ladies Coupe* the novel takes its title from the second class reservation compartment for women. In the compartment all women were middle-aged. These women started talking about their lives and they swapped stories with absolute abandon. This paper is the study the Quest for Identity and Self discovery in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. Akilandeshwari, the chief protagonist has watched her father lionized by her mother while she and the other children were made and offered first to him. It was only after he had eaten that the children were allowed to taste. She understood that the females are dominated by the males in the patriarchal society. So they felt that they need to come out from such kind of society. But after her father's death, being the eldest child, she takes her father's place as the bread winner in the family. She does not get the same sort of Importance. She might have got equal pay for equal work, but she certainly does not receive equal respect even though the family survives only because Akhila brings home a decent pay packet. She shed all the tears that she had been allocated for a life time. She feels,

Akhila cried every night when she looked a bowl of rice and placed it with a jug of water so that Appa's soul still hovering in their house wouldn't be hungry or thirsty. Appa, Akhila cried, as a provide for you to night, I will have to provide for the family you abandoned so callously. How an I to do it? (LC59).

Akhila is the savior of the family members, but the act of their rescue implies a sacrifice on her part. She is a silent worker, entirely behind the scenes, while all the younger children get their moments understate. Even her own mother carefully avoids wondering about her longings. She understands and feels for her mother, but her mother, having internalized made ideological systems for years, finds it convenient to ignore Akhila's womanhood. Akhila lives not by her own desires but according to the expectations she senses. According to manu samhita, a woman should depend upon a man from her cradle to grave and should never live as an independent entity:

During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons, if she need no sons upon the near kinsmen of her husband, in default, upon those of her father, if she had no paternal kinsmen, upon the sovereign, a woman must never govern herself as she likes (Boder 55).

For twenty six years, with her job in the Income Tax Department, Akhila was able to give everything, time, money and care to her mother and siblings. Her behaviour was ideal according to the deepest promptings of culture which appealed to the role she had to play and not to her identity. This accommodating self-denial was a painful experience often at tremendous psychic cost to her.

Akhila wonders whether a woman can manage without a man indefinitely or whether she is missing out on something that is vital to a woman's satisfaction. Sheela is bewildered by her father's disapproval of the cheeky wit. Akhila is as confused as Sheela, but with help from her childhood friend Karpagam and, later, the co-passengers in the coupe, she realizes she must live for herself. Through the given narrative fragments concerned with Akhila we see her growth and her discovery of a voice and a will.

There was no time to clean her up. She had always wanted to die in her own bed and they had a long drive ahead before they reached home. Her home. Through a haze of pain and humiliation, sheela watched the brothers and sisters get into the van and huddle around their mothers dying body. Daddy stood by sheela's side, stern with disapproval and disappointment. She didn't care. She knew Ammumma would have been pleased. (LC 74)

Akhila determines to break free of her conservative tamil brahmin life by travelling to Kanniyakumari by train where she meets five other women, Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Sheela and Marikolanthu. The train journey becomes a symbol for an introspective journey within each character. The individual journey into these six lives gives us a picture of society.



So with Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* the readers have six women from different social background reflecting their conditions and arriving at certain conclusions which help Akhila to arrive at hers. Akhila begins the conversation after the preliminary introductions and the train is mechanically moving ahead. Forty five years old Akhila has never been away from her family for a single day. This is the first journey she is undertaking alone, hoping to meet other women who would help resolve a problem she has been tackling do women need men? Akhila says:

As far as I am concerned, marriage is unimportant, companionship, yes, I would like that. The problem is, I wish to live by myself but everyone tells me that a woman can't live alone. What do you think? Can a woman live by herself? (LC21)

Akhila wonders whether a woman can manage without a man indefinitely or whether she is missing out on something that is vital to a woman's satisfaction. As the five other women attempt to answer her question she goes deep into their lives. There is Janaki, a pampered wife and confused mother whose marital life spans many years. Next is Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher married to an insensitive man, a tyrant who is the principal of the school where she works. Prabha Devi, the perfect daughter of rich parents and a daughter-in-law who has the household at her command. Then young Sheela, she had seen the death of her grandmother. She is sensitive and she perceives in society what others cannot. The last passenger is Marikolanthu dressed poorly but the expression on her face said that, "She had seen it all, human fickleness and fallibility, and there was very little that would take her by surprise" (LC 18). Her life had been ruined by one dark night of lust. This train journey becomes a symbol for an introspective journey within each character. This individual journey into these six lives gives us a picture of society. Thus all the female characters are searching their identity and also they discovered their selfhood. As Pauline palmer in "Contemporary Women's Fiction: Narrative Practice and Feminist theory" comments:

Writers of fiction takes a micro cosmic unit of society (one particular sexual relationship, one particular family) and use it as a spy-hole into a wide network of social, cultural and political structure (qtd. in singh 29)

The passengers had sent all their inhibitions and talked freely as they knew that these words would never be repeated to harmful effect as these women would probably never meet again. All these women lay bare their hearts to each other. Their experience teaches that women can survive and get her identity and space not by keeping herself isolated from male dominated society but by co-operating with them.

In Kanniyakumari, Akhila tests her new found confidence by taking a lover. That she is able to manage the little encounter entirely on her own terms abuses her. She smiles "That she will have the courage to pick up from where. She left off and begins again "(275). She books a call to Hari. He might be married, he might have move on.

The narratives of Akhila's co-passengers in the coupe fairly come out of them revealing the need of each woman to speak to a sympathetic heart. The novel ends by identifying Akhila with Durga, indicating the potential of women kind. Hence the novel is an explicit visual description of feminine psyche and the passions. Anita Nair express the minutest details of her women characters, bringing alive their everyday dilemmas, desires and thoughts. Thus the study thoroughly deals with the characters quest for identity and self discovery.

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