

Identity Formation through Subversion of Gender Roles in Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

The study entitled, "Identity Formation through Subversion of Gender Roles in Nair's *Ladies Coupe*" focuses on female struggle against the established social rules and values that discriminate and torture women. In such ideologies women are weak, submissive and dependent upon men in each and every context.

In the research, subversion refers to a sort of resistance initiated by women to overthrow the century long rooted and rampant injustice, exploitation, oppression and suppression etc. in the name of so-called social norms and value constructed by males. More obviously it reflects the rising voice of voiceless women presented in the novel *Ladies Coupe*. The current study primarily explores the spirit of equality between women and men, strongly opposing to any superiority or inferiority in terms of gender. As the gender itself is a social construct, the traditional role determined to male and female may not be justifiable and logical.

Nair's narrative, *Ladies Coupe* deals with the constant struggle of women for their freedom. Existing traditional social norms and values hinder in raising the voice of females which make them a docile object, weak, unsecured and constrained within domestic walls. The characters seem to overcome the traditional gender role to create their own identity. Furthermore, women are first controlled by father in childhood, then by brother, later by husband and finally by sons which clarifies the fact that women have not got their freedom yet as they are strongly bounded by the norms which actually favors the male. This handover of females vividly depicts how their identity is captured by males only for their own sake and benefits.

The subversion of traditional gender role in the novel has been displayed with the help of different female characters like Akhila, Janaki, Margaret Shanthi, Sheela, Prabha Devi, Karpangam and Marikolanthu. They struggle against various forms of

dominations in different contexts. For instance, Akhila travel alone for Kanyakumari which is against the traditional norms that woman should not leave their home without a company of family members. Similarly, one of the co-passengers Margaret Shanti chooses flattery as the weapon to bring down her husband Ebe's self-esteem and feed him with fatty food to turn her husband a fat man, a quiet man, and an easy man who sought for food and sex. This is also a kind of resistance by Margaret Shanti. Sheela in the novel has to face sexual abuse by her friend's father, Nazara. She felt ashamed and hurt but later she develops confidence to protect herself by taking a decision that she would never go to her friend's house. Additionally, Karpangam is a widow but unlike other widows she puts on Kumkum and colorful clothes. Marikolanthu is the most pathetic character of the novel whose childhood innocence is destroyed by Merugesan and by making her pregnant. Marikolanthu deniesto feed her newly born son child. In this reference she has expressed her hatred and anger towards male even though the child is her own.

This thesis unfolds how women are traditionally constrained to be dependent on men and are crippled to realize her own strength. She has presented her women characters struggling and they finally get agency to defy patriarchy. Her women have been portrayed as intelligent, questioning women who are not contented with the injustice and rebellion against them. So Anita Nair's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and see it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors. Sudden dramatic changes on the mentality of the protagonist turns the mode of the novel. Akhila, who is engaged on the house hold activities and family member after her father's death become powerless when her brother grown up. Very soon after the death of her mother she become a radical figure who dares to challenge

the patriarchal code of conduct that confines women as submissive, docile, innocence and weak figure and she buys a one way ticket and left her home in the search of strength, self-discovery and independent that leads her ultimate victory.

Akhila is a representative of the females under dogged and manipulated in the realm of patriarchy. Anita Nair's women raise the question of their way of life consolidated by patriarchy, and see it not only as the site of their oppression at home and in society but also make it a field of battle to vanquish their oppressors. Sudden dramatic change on the mentality of the protagonist turns the mode of the novel. Akhila, who is engaged on the household activities and family member after her father's death become powerless when her brother grown up. Very soon after the death of her mother she become a radical figure who dares to challenge the patriarchal code of conduct that confines women as submissive, docile, innocence and weak figure and she buys a one way ticket and left her home in the search of strength, self-discovery and independent that leads her ultimate victory.

The issues that are presented in the novel are the common issue in our society and especially for the Indian society the novel is the cry for independence from the long rooted feudalistic patriarchal society. After the publication of this novel it has achieved various remarks on the work of the novelist and the issue of the text that is raised in the novel. Issue of common Indian society is very strongly presented and it is linked with male domination values. On the other hand, story of Akhila and co-passengers raised voice against the long rooted patriarchal system in our society. After the publication of Nair's novel Ladies Coupe has been taken from different angles. Many critics debate regarding on the issue of women in the Indian society and the presentation of Nair Silvia Flavia in her research paper writes:

In “Ladies Coupe” Anita Nair deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies a relationship of inequality. The story is an attempt to show how, in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms, but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security. Though Patriarchy is a common concept in every woman’s life, Anita Nair depicts carefully the diversity within each woman, as she did not want to put the lives of women to one ideal. (1)

As it is clearly stated in the above lines that the issue is related with the issue of gender domination. Inequality is the main problem that exists in the Indian society. The story of Akhila shows that to what extent women are oppressed in the society. Love, protection and assurance of security is not thinkable in patriarchal society for women.

Similarly, Narendra K. Singh states that the conflict between self and society is the main issue in the novel. Participation of self and society is the main source to find out the truth. This is exactly what is mentioned in the novel through Akhila and her co-passangers. He further says:

The subtle by- play between society and individual develops a sense of self through participation in social interaction, and yet possesses a feeling of separation from others, is a fundamental social processes a feeling of separation from others, is a fundamental social process which perpetuates culture and society. Literature of all ethnic groups around the world deal with the issue of relationship between self and society in many ways. This becomes part of socialization process. (35)

Here, Singh evaluates that Akhila and other women character, in the novel, are participating in the process of social interaction. The inter active relationship between self and society is the part of socialization process he evaluates.

Similarly, V. Chandra has minutely analyzed the novel; “In those days, they were merely portrayed as the souls of dependence and this dependent can be identified with a couplet from man, the ancient codifier of Hindu law, dutious girl obeys her father, husband sways the wife, son control the widowed mother, never free is a women’s life” (25). Chandra argues that this novel is the vibrant representation of Hindu mythology and law where women have to follow the rule and regulation strictly according to the religion. So, Chandra has focused on religious ground.

The aforementioned instances reflect a fact that the extremely repressed condition begets the reaction as the way of subversion of traditional gender roles to counter the so-called constructed norms and values. Subversion is the upside down in the established ideas, norms and values. Subversion in literary and cultural theory is usually understood, broadly, as a matter of the reversal of established values, or the insertion of other values into them. It is a widely used topic in the socio-political culture. The relationship between this mostly cultural or ideological subversion and the actual subversion of existing social relations is a hotly contested topic. Theories like, Marxist, feminism and not the least some trauma theories have more or less used subversion as the resolution of their apex debate. In this case, literary and cultural theory which has developed from a critical standpoint, whether Marxist, feminist or any other theories which emerged due to the prevailing suppression, has become concerned with debating the extent of subversion's potential, presence or extent. As such, any debate on subversion normally takes place in close relation to a debate on its opposite: repression or restoration. Theorists associated with the school, especially

Stuart Hall, emphasized how texts are used subversively. Such a reading stressed the active agency of the subject, focusing on the misuse, assumption and rereading of texts by supposed ‘consumers,’ as well as the production of subcultures and countercultures. Such agencies presented a new critical, political approach to culture which didn't simply analyze relations of power or the presence of ideology, which had been the focus of much Marxist scholarship. However, this agency was mostly theorized as present merely in the reception of texts.

The act of declining patriarchal establishments is to subvert something that makes oppressive forces and turn them into something that challenges the oppressor. Institutions such as Gender can be subverted by acts such as extreme performance of one’s assigned gender or the adoption of criteria for a gender other than one’s “own”. To engage in subversion is to use the patriarch’s “rules” against him, making his intended meaning into something completely different. One does not need to use material means such as clothing to subvert gender, one can also subvert gender through the act of re-contextualization. For example, taking a heteronormative song, movie, or tradition and placing it in a queer setting.

Ladies Coupe revolves around women’s sufferings from male dominated traditional norms and values in Indian context, which can be generalizable in other context as well. In the novel, women generally are submissive, weak, unsecured and dependent upon men. They are bounded within the domestic walls. If women travel anywhere then it is amazing for them to believe and trust. Padma one of the sister of Akhila is surprised when she finds Akhila’s pack for outing alone and comments:

How long will you be gone? Padma’s eyes glinted with doubts as she watched Akhila knew what Padma was thinking. Is she travelling alone or is someone going with her? A man, perhaps. Padma nostrils flared as she could smell the

stench of illicit liaisons. 'A few days, 'she said. There was a certain pleasure in being ambiguous, Akhila decides when she saw the look on Padma's face.

(5)

Padma can be taken as the victim of the traditional gender norms and values because she is guided by its code of conduct. Despite the fact that single women's travelling is taken as an amusement and surprise, Akhila decides to travel decides to travel alone to rebel against male supremacy:

Akhila read the board above the line. 'Ladies, Senior Citizens and Handicapped Persons. 'She did not know if she should feel angry or venerated. There was a certain old fashioned charm, a rare chivalry in this gesture by the Railway Board that pronounced women shouldn't be subject to the hustle and bustle, lecherous looks and groping hands, sweaty armpits and swear words that were part of the experience of standing in the General Queue. But why spoil it all by clubbing women with senior citizens and handicapped persons?

(6)

Women are compared with handicapped and senior citizens. They are not able to do any of the activities what males can do. Akhila is irritated and the expression of irritation at the situation is associated with covert form of resistance.

Ladies coupe is a story of six women who coincidentally met in a train journey.

In this fiction, Nair's protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and tells her too, seeking in them a solution to the question that has troubled her life: Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? This is the question they discuss between them. Sheila Ruth analyzes the male dynamics:

Patriarchy, then has determined in very large part the nature and quality of our society, its value and priorities, the place and image of women within it, and the relation between the sexes. Therefore, to comprehend our lives and experience, we must understand the dynamics of patriarchy – what it is and how it works. It is embodiment of the masculist ideal. (44)

Patriarchy is linked to the male character that has determined the sex role in the society. It fixes the place of women. And the society has to embrace it. For the better understanding of our lives in this sense we must understand the dynamics of patriarchy.

These women try to revolt against the patriarchal system. In this regard Sunita Sinha explains, “Nair’s India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man’s patriarchal role in our traditional society but also implies the existence of an alternative reality” (149). The story switches over from past to present and present to past and hence, even other than the five women in the compartment, other women and their stories are told.

In Nairs narrative, Margaret Shanthi’s story explores the female domination by males. A man like Ebenezer Paulraj is unable to see and praise the worth of the women. She married Ebenezer Paulraj at her own choice and at the immediate willingness of her family. She was a Chemistry teacher but the one who had been a gold medalist. Initially Margaret did not understand the deeply rooted male egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj. Though at times she felt the pain of it she convinced herself saying, “He was Ebe. My Ebe. He was right. He was always right” (109). As Indra Devi comments, “She silences her aspirations in order to what Ebenezer wants her to be”(220). Ebe is simply a male chauvinist when he takes the power to ask Margaret to

abort the baby off, the first baby off, when she conveyed him the good news with all happiness. He continued to thrust upon his decisions over her deciding about her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing:

What's the point in working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn't suit you. Cut it off. You will look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob. Do you really have to go to church every Sunday? I don't think it is wise to eat bhelpuri from these roadside stalls. (105)

Margaret patiently receives all of their attacks. In a realization of the male dominance, she executes strategies to prove her strength. Later, she responds to Ebe's authority, she joins other by abandoning him and continue their train journeys.

Akhila is surprised to hear her mother's marriage to her uncle. Women are compelled to marry with the same family bound if male don't find girls outside. Akhila's uncle marries with nephew because of the beauty of her. When Akhila surprisingly comments:

'But Amma, how could you have agreed to marry your uncle?' Akhila asked her mother once. 'It's so unnatural.' 'What's unnatural about it?' she had demanded angrily. 'It is a perfectly accepted norm in our community. Who do you think you are to question it? Her mother threw her a dirty look and suggested that she go out and bring in the washing. 'An idle brain causes idle thoughts. ,' Amma said darkly. (11)

Akhila's mother represents traditional woman who surrenders her life and totally admit to their male counterparts. She do not show any sorrow at the marriage but she defends it by saying the custom. She is fully convinced to colonize by male.

The oppression of women has singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. Female body is taken as important factor. In this sense KetuKatrak analyzes:

A politics of the female body includes the constructions and controls of female sexuality, its acceptable and censored expressions, and its location socio-culturally, even materially, in postcolonial regions. Third world women writers represent the complex ways in which women's bodies are colonized. Similar to anti-colonial struggles for independence on the macro political arena, women resist bodily oppressions by using strategies and tactics that are often part of women's ways of knowing and acting. (8)

Ketu explains that patriarchy has made female body as a means to oppress colonized by the male.

As Ebe was becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypocritical, Margarat was unconsciously compelled to teach him a lesson. She was taken to a height of anger as Ebe started throwing insults on her in front of his favorite Coterie. When he says to Coterie," When I think of Chemistry, what comes to mind is the odor of rotten eggs" (130). The anger in her bubbled for she thought how he had turned the evening into another moment of triumph for himself. Nair further writes:

All that was good and noble about my life that he had destroyed. I thought of the baby that died even before it had a soul. I thought of how there was nothing left for me to dream of and the words rose to the surface again: I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM. What am I going to do? (131)

Margrate uses her intellect to face the continuous tortures and sufferings from her husband such as she flatters Paulraj to control his self-esteem. She feeds him with

fatty food to make him a fat man, a quiet man and an easy man who frequently triggers her for food and sex. As Dr. Swarnalatha Prasanna analyzes:

By making him fat she erodes his self- esteem and feels he is an easy man to live with now, in and out of health institute. Margaret gains self-esteem by eroding Eb's self-esteem. She succeeds in achieving her emotional fulfillment keeping the family ties impact, though some justification contains a modicum of sense. (69)

Margrate shows that the women could vanquish the domineering man. She makes the self-esteem by eroding Ebs's self-esteem and she becomes successful in keeping the family ties impact. The above strategies adopted by Margrate in order to resist against male egoisms is a form of subversion in traditional gender role.

Sheela is a person, who acknowledges the manifestation of femininity through her grand-mother. She not only brings out the need to assert the individuality of the female self-hood but also finally evokes the issue of female child abuse. She feels ashamed and hurt at the unwanted touching of Hasina's father Nazara:

One Sunday afternoon when Sheela went to their house, rushing in front the heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lips, Nazara had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time. Therefore, Sheela mopped her face with a hanky each time she entered Hasina's house. Another time, the bows on the sleeves of her blouse had come undone and as Hasina and her mother watched, Nazara knotted the bows. (66)

Sheela is unable to open her mouth against the physical abuse on her, but developed confidence to protect her from it. Even Sheela's friend and her mother were able to understand the man's attempt to touch her unnecessarily but they were helpless. When

Nazara knotted the bows in her sleeves, “She saw the hurt in Hasina' and mother's eyes” (66). She takes right decision that she would never go to Hasina's house, to protect herself from the vulture eyes of her friend's father. Even from the child eyes here Nair presents the sense of resistance towards the male hegemony who only thinks female as the object to entertain and serve man.

In a society men have controlled the conceptual arena and have determined social values and the structure of institutions it is not that women have lost their power. Society knows how women are oppressed and how the gender role can be subverted in the society. Women take various actions against the man. As the story of Sheela, story of Celine is also pathetic as she is also raped by her father's friend, she become pregnant and have to abort and leave that place for ever:

Everyone in the housing colony knew about Celine. Of how she had go to play in her friend's house and of how the friend's father did thing to her that friend's father are not supposed to do. So Celine became pregnant and both the families left the Colony and the town in disgrace. Celine and her parents moved to a place where no one would knew about her abortion. And the friend's father went to a faraway town where he would find plenty of young girls to ruin, everyone said. (65)

Through this incident Nair presents the unjust treatment of men towards women. Here we can see that how man abuses his power for sexual satisfaction to young girls, who is similar to his daughter. Exposition of man this type of crime also can be taken as defiance of male domination in the society.

As Suresh Kumar and Leema Rose comments, “Patriarchy shows its ugly face from the cradle to grave” (43). Parents are more concerned about the boys than the

girls. Nair chooses the character Prabha Devi to emphasize this issue. When Prabha Devi was born, her father has commented like this:

Prabha Devi's mother, though, was pleased with her daughter. "I have someone to leave my recipes to. Someone who'll treasure my jewelry. Someone who will want to be like me. Someone who will say- in my mother's house, this is how we did it..." Prabha Devi's father started down at her disapprovingly and muttered, has this baby, apart from running my business plans, addled your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance. (169).

The above discourse explains that the daughter is a burden in the view of father in a family but her mother thinks that the arrival of daughter in her life is the matter of great happiness. In the same way, directly expressing sexual desires by women with her husband is not considered to be a good character of an ideal woman in the view of Jagdeesh. Jagdeesh and his parents expect a baby from Prava Devi very soon but she implicitly rejects it by saying... "I want a baby too. But not just yet. Once a baby comes, nothing will be the same." (179)

Prava Devi does not want to be a machine to produce babies and spend boring life as the desire of males. Judith Butler opines in this point:

The feminist appropriation of sexual difference, whether written in opposition to the phallogentrism of Lacan (Irgray) or as a critical elaboration of Lacan, attempts to theorize the feminine, not as an expression of the meta physics of substance, but as the unrepresentable absence effected by (masculine) denial that grounds the signifying economy through exclusion. (37)

Feminine is not expression of meta-physics of substance, but as the un-representable of absence affected by masculine denial. This is reflected in the story of Prabha Devi.

But on the contrary her mother is quite opposite against it. The main factor that determine in the society is economy and the man is the one who control over economy. Prabha Devi's father hatred at the time of her birth is evidence that women are supposed as a body only who have no importance at all. The father's desire for son to run the business is an example that a society itself is bias that doesn't let women to overcome in a mainstream.

With the help of Karpagam, Anita Nair presents that women can challenge the deeply rooted conservative social practices that draw a discriminating line between male and female. She comments:

I don't care what my father or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me didn't we as young girl wear colourful cloths and jewelery and a botto? It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not or whether her husband is alive or not? Who made these laws anyway? Some man who couldn't bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continues to be attractive to other man. (202)

Karpagam is a courageous woman who has made an effort to destroy the existing social taboos. Widows are not allowed to wear colorful cloths and jewelry in the society but in the case of male there is no restriction. She opposes the traditional restrictions of wearing Kumkum and colorful things. Here, she subverts the traditional gender role. The character is presented here by writer to encourage the remaining depressed females who still are under the grips of the unwanted rules and regulations. Karpagam in the novel is the role model who not only celebrates her freedom but gives voice to other marginalized females.

Nair presents Marikolanthu as tragic woman among all the characters. She has to confront several painful incidences in her life since her childhood. As she is a girl, she is rejected and neglected to be sent to the town school:

We'll send your brother to the town school when the town comes but we can't afford it on my salary alone, 'Amma said. 'You do understand, don't you, that it would be impossible for me to send you to the school by bus every day. It's not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself... there is too much at risk.' (215)

The above discourse clearly illustrates that the discrimination between male and female starts to appear with their birth and continues up to the grave. Daughters are not sent to school out of home because they are thought to be weaker; more unsecured, and may become a victim of sexual abuse and so on in comparison to sons. This is orchestrated norms that have constructed such a web from where no women can easily escape. This is how gender discrimination is rampant in the society.

Marikolanthu's childhood innocent is lost by Merugesan, she shows extreme abhorrence towards all males irrespective even towards her own son:

...Yet when my son was born, all I felt was revulsion for the child. My mother would bring him to me and ask me to let him feed at my breast, and a tremendous loathing would feel me. I would trust him away screaming, Take him away. I don't want him near me.' My mother would heat cow's milk, dilute it with water and feed this to my son who drank it greedily. Even than he was a quite child who demanded nothing. (220)

Marikolanthu is against the norms and values of patriarchy that she has denied to feed her newly born son child. It means that she is very much oppressed by the patriarchal values. If one is suffered more from something then one starts to hate in the same way

as Marikolanthu is doing. Showing such extreme abhorrence by Marikolanthu towards patriarchy regardless of her own son child is her radical movement against the social norms.

Valerie Bryson says that radical feminist theory has become “the most fundamental and universal agenda against female domination, and its aim is to understand and end this; here patriarchy is a key term” (181). She further explains:

Women as a group have interest opposed to those of men; these interest unite them in a common sisterhood that transcends the division of class or race, and means that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation.

Man power is not confined to the public words of politics and paid employment, but it extends into private life; this means that traditional concepts of power and politics are challenged and extended to such ‘personal’ area of life as the family and sexuality. (181)

Family and sexuality have become the key instruments for the patriarchy to oppress women and they come out from that web of patriarchy women have to struggle themselves. In this sense traditional concepts and power is challenged by the power and politics which is extending world through various theories of feminism.

Marikolanthu is telling her life story to co- passengers, she is presenting the realistic and humble picture of women who is oppressed by the man and later on she struggles against the norms and values of the patriarchy:

During the course of the next few days, I learnt that my life had changed forever. I was not to hug my brother or cuddle up to them when we slept; I was not to light the lamp, or touch the pickle jar or the curry left plant in the courtyard or to stove, or even enter the kitchen on the day the blood came calling; I was to always to cover my bosom with a davani; I was to wash my

hair every Friday and smear my face with green turmeric paste to prevent pimples and any ungainly hair from growing; I was to avoid company of men- young and old alike- as men couldn't be trusted. (225)

Here, what should be noted is that her life is changed because she knew her reality and she came to know that she and other women like her are oppressed by the male dominated society. That is why she is avoiding the company of man. She came to the conclusion that men could not be trusted any more as these men show their dominant nature everywhere.

Marikolanthu is able to raise question with her about the so called husband protection. She is sure that neither her mother nor Sujita had their husband look out for them, but for them, 'a fulfilled woman was who was married' (246). For Marikolanthu nothing is more cruel than a man's raping of a women and so she finds little fault in the missy's love for each other and experiences a kind of content and happiness to give her love for each other and experiences a kind of content and happiness to give her love for Sujita, more than her husband did. Marikonthlu never wants to tie of her life with a husband. She is thirty –one she lives alone and wrestles with life, making a living of her own. Nair further explains:

She neither wants to reply upon her brother nor wants a penny from Sujita or her husband but decides to make her living of her own, working as a servant maid in a house. She defines her as important women. Her strong aversion for the physical brutality attempted on her, evokes a strong aversion for her son Muthu. But at the end she feels ashamed for have in rejected him and even using him. (5)

She has willingly made her face brutal and she is happy on that because she doesn't want any men being attracted towards her. She wants to be independent and work as a

servant but neither wants a penny from Sujita or from her husband. As further Indra Devi observes that in the end she decided to measure happiness as Muthu's mother.

Nair presents Akhila's mother, to express how women are strong conservative of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitation on women. Akhila's mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife with her theory that a wife is always inferior to her husband for she believes, "He knows best" (14). According to her:

A good wife learnt to put her husband's interests before anyone else even her father's. a good wife listen to her husband and did as he said. 'There is no such thing as an equal marriage, 'Ammma said it is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is when one wants to prove one's equality that there is warring and sparring all the time. (14)

Akhila's mother is conservative that she does not understand the oppression of women in the society. She takes her husband as a god who knows everything. She has already said that women are inferior to man. She is fully dependent on her husband but does not want to be dependent on her own. When Akhila says that she is good in singing and can earn money for her and her mother explains:

I don't approve of what Karpagam's mother is doing. All kinds of people come into their house. Do you think your father would allow such coming and goings on here? Don't you know how strict he is? Anyway, do you think your father would let me? "If I wanted a working wife, then I would have married someone like that," He told me when we were first married. "I want my wife to take care of my children and me. I don't want her caught up with her job that she has no time for the house or of taking care of my needs. (13)

Akhila's mother is psychologically influenced by the patriarchal norms and values. Following almost all the decisions that made by her husband even after his death is the acceptance of deep rooted hangover of traditional gender role. Akhila's father is the product of Patriarchy Company and it is his basic characteristic in this situation.

The novel at last presents the Akhila's life story that is after she reaches in Knayakumari. Here, she is sure that she won't return to her home again and she would enjoy her life thereafter. In this context she says:

But Akhila is certain that she won't let her family use her any more. Look at me, she would tell them. Look at me: I'm the women you think you know. I am the sister you have wondered about. There is more to this Akka. For within me is a women I have discovered. I am a woman who stands in her won strength and I am here too. (170)

Akhila is not well known by her family member though she has done her best to uplift the standard of the family. She subverts her gender role by working in the bank which is not allowed for women, but when her brother grew up she was confined within the four walls of her house. This is the image that is created by the patriarchy in the society. She further says that "women's oppression causes the most suffering to its victims, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, although the suffering may often go unrecognized because of the sexist prejudices of both the oppressors and the victims" (49). This has already clarified that women suffering has mostly suffered its victims.

This is only because of sexual prejudices:

Patriarchal ideology exaggerates biological differences between men and women, making certain that men always have the dominant, or masculine, roles and women always have the subordinate, or feminine, ones. This ideology is so powerful, said Millett that men are usually able to secure the

apparent consent of the very women they oppress. Should a woman refuse to accept patriarchal ideology by casting off her femininity—that is, her submissiveness/subordination—men will use coercion to accomplish? (52)

The gender is a social construct. Biologically, sex is natural but the society determines the superiority and inferiority between male and female respectively. From the very initial phase of the society they create such hierarchy in the society and make follow others. In contrast, Akhila discovered about herself and know about her that self-consciousness is the ultimate solution. In this regard she explains:

She gets up too leave and feels his eyes follow her down the road. Akhila discovered that she likes being alone. She has no more doubt about what her life will be life if she lives alone. It may not be what she dreamed it would be, but at least she would have made the effort to find out. And perhaps that is all she needs to ask of life now. That she be allowed to try and experience it...

(271)

Akhila has discovered from this journey that she wants to live alone. She did not have to listen to do this or that. She is free in this new place and she realizes that free life is better than the oppressed life. This is her life experience. She meets the young men in the bank of the sea. She establishes good relation with him and she later decided to seduce to experience sexual relation. This action can be taken as the subversion of traditional gender role in the sense that traditionally men have been seducing women sexually and physically. In this situation Anita Nair further explores:

I know what I want to do, So why do my dreams leave me so despondent, she asks herself one morning. That is the day Akhila decides to seduce the men.

One final act to consummate her decision. Where the body goes, the mind will follow, she tells herself, repudiating all that has been instilled in her. One feats

of courage, to read where she never been gone before. If there was a mountain, Akhila would try and climb it. She feels lust crouch in her temples and demand that she do its bidding. (272)

Akhila wants freedom; she tries to seduce a man. That is her ultimate decision. That is her final act to consummate. She says that where the body goes mind follow the same path. From the above line it has become clear that she has never experienced the sexual activities till the age of thirty. She compares sex with a mountain and says that she has never dared to climb the mountain, now she makes courage to climb the mountain.

Further, Akhila the very next day while reading the newspaper find that the men have committed suicide along with his family member. Akhila comment in this case as:

The father of the family administered poison to his wife and four children and then hung himself from the hook in the ceiling. In the note he left behind, he talked of hopelessness. He had AIDS and he didn't want his family ostracized because of him. He knew of no other way to protect them from discharge and unhappiness, he wrote. Did his wife want to die with him? What about his children? Akhila thinks. How dare he take lives as if it was his right to decide whether they lived or died? (273)

Man thinks that the family and the member of the family are their property. They can do whatever they want but it is not true they cannot do whatever they want. They have no right to take others life. This reflects in the Akhila's opinion. Here, the question that is raised by Akhila is very important and voice to the entire voiceless women to overcome with a new identity to celebrate the freedom.

Akhila is waiting a man in the sea bank. In the very morning time the man comes as per her wish and Akhila wants to have relation with him. The experience she talks about it is like this:

Akhila stares at young man as if to inscribe his features in her mind. He is there, faithful, fawning, and still unable to hold her gaze. He will not make the move, she knows. Was she won her game or lost it? Akhila wonders. Don't be a coward now, she tells her sternly. You want this. You need this. You have to be able to do this. She takes his hand in her and says, 'I'm staying at the hotel sea Breeze. Why don't you come by later in this evening?' (273)

Akhila wants that the man should do something but the man did not go forward. She thinks that the man is not going to do anything, so she goes to take the first step and she holds his hand and she calls him in her hotel room. She tries to muster up all the masculinity within herself and uses sexual offer as the tool of manipulation. A few hours later he comes to her room where the man is ashamed to do what she wants. She describes the moment:

He moves closer. She thinks she can hear his heart beat. Why, he is afraid, she laughs. He is looking to me to help him out. 'Do you have a condom?' she asks. He hasn't thought about it, she knows. He turns on his heel to leave. Just for a second, she thinks that she has dampened his ardor. Then she realizes that he will be back. (274)

In this context, Akhila adverse her nature as the woman defined by the tradition. She subverts the traditional gender concepts where woman should not initialize the sexual proposes, rather she does so, by pacing herself as a sexual abuser. Women's different reactions to pornography, or their use of it in their lives, dramatically highlight the

general differences on sexual matters. Women should use pornography to overcome their fears about sex, to arouse sexual desires, and to generate sexual fantasies.

Women should feel free to view and enjoy all sorts of pornography, including violent pornography. In this sense Rosemarie Tong says:

Some radical-libertarian feminists even invited women to engage in rape fantasies in which men “had their way” with women in bed. The same woman who derives sexual pleasure from playing Scarlett O’Hara–Rhett Butler sex games with her boyfriend would protest loudly were he actually to attempt to rape her. Just because a woman wants to explore whether power games are part of what makes sex “sexy” for her does not mean she wants to serve as an object for male violence in real life. (54)

Pornographic representations of men which are sexually dominating women somehow harm women in real life, women should engage in an entirely open-minded and non-defensive examination of pornography, saving their venom for real rapists.

Anita Nair has shown man as submissive in sexual power in the novel and women forward in sex matter intentionally to import the sense of subversion for traditional gender role. Akhila makes love with the man who is almost failed. In this regard she further explains:

He is impatient to enter her. She wriggles on her back and guides his hands to her breasts. ‘Slowly, slowly,’ she says, ‘I’m not going anywhere,’ but he can’t hold himself back and part her legs. A spasm of hurt grabs at Akhila is swamped by lust. A lust which evolves, sustains and withdraws into itself. A lust that radiates the hurt of fire. The energy that define life. Akhila is lust. Akhila is shakti. Akhila is Akhilandeswari decimated into ten entities. (274)

Anita Nair has shown women as the source of power in the novel. She compares women as ten incarnations of goddesses as Durga, Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvanshwari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumathi, Bagla, Matangi and at last Kamala. Kamala is taken as the full pure consciousness of the self. In this sense she gets full consciousness in the play. In this sense she explains:

This is Akhila is. Together and separate. Akhila knows this as her body moves through a catacomb of sensations. One wave after another hurling her through an underground stream that had remained dammed for so many years. Akhila has no more fears? Why then she walks with a downcast head? She throws her head back and voices her triumph. (275)

Akhila gives her identity of both togetherness and separateness. She gets consciousness in the sense that she has challenged the social norms and values and she has subverted the traditional gender role. Traditionally men used to seduce women but now women have used men as sex toys and she is fully satisfied with herself of doing that. In this sense it can be taken as her struggle against the male dominated society.

In this way, the above discussion tries to reflect that the concept of gender is social construction. More obviously women are chained by the male dominated tradition which compelled the women to be dependent on men, made them psychologically powerless. Nair explicitly argues that women should not be treated as machine to produce baby and object of entertainment for male. Women should be equally portrayed as creative, critical, intelligent, powerful, respectable and rebellious as males. Women also should get equal roles as males get in all the contexts. All sorts of discriminations upon women in the name of gender should be strongly punished by laws. Last but not least male and female both have the same importance; if any

discrimination happens only because of femaleness then they should subvert the traditional gender role and make their identity.

The study tries to highlight the tremendous courage of women to compete with male in each and every aspects of human society. In the novel *Ladies Coupe* by Anita Nair, the woman are in the search for their equal place to stand freely just like male. The women openly expose themselves in the rebellious nature in order to protest against all kinds of male dominations, oppressions and injustices. Women have subverted in various ways against the repressive force that they encounter and when they are portrayed as passive human creatures. The different characters in the novel have showed that women are also equally powerful, independent, self- directed, intellectual and creators of their own future as males by challenging the century long rooted and rampant traditional gender role fixed by male dominated society. By the law of nature too, it is not justice to discriminate and treat the female as a second class human creature. Thus, in one way or another way, women are resisting to get rid of the traditional gender chain made by males in our collective work.

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