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Akhila's struggle for indomitable self in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

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Supervisor's Recommendation

This is to certify that Mrs. Sunita Chalise has prepared this thesis entitled “Akhila's Struggle for Indomitable Self in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*” under my academic guidance, complying with the format as specified by the Research Committee at the Department of English, Janapriya Multiple Campus, Pokhara. I, therefore, recommend Mrs. Chalise's thesis to be accepted for defense.

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Approval Sheet

This thesis entitled “Akhila’s Struggle for Indomitable Self in Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe*”, Submitted to the Department of English, Janapriya Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, by Sunita Chalise, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Evaluation Committee.

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Abstract

Social consciousness is a feeling that is experienced by all the persons within a society. It essentially means to be conscious of the rules or beliefs prevailing within a society or community which gives them feeling of equality safeguarding their personal interest. It also relates to interdependence of a person and society on each other. All the people have been influenced by the culture, beliefs, traditions and norms prevailing in society. However the extent to which an individual is influenced by the society depends on the circumstances and the level of exposure. An artist possesses a penetrating insight into the reality of things and thus with the help of perceptual and philosophical understanding s/he tries his/her own way to spread social consciousness and awareness among the people and Anita Nair is one of such devoted Indian writers of the present times. She valiantly expresses her views on women's suffering in contemporary Indian society. This Paper represents how Nair tries to spread social consciousness among the people through her novel *Ladies Coupe*. Nair, through this novel, has indirectly encouraged women to be independent without developing antagonistic relationship with men.

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CHAPTER ONE

Subjugation of Women's Self under Patriarchy

Introduction

Anita Nair is one of the notable writers in India. She is famous poet, short story writer and journalist. She has earned honors for her originality, propensity and for her societal dedication. Her career as a writer started in the beginnings of 1990s, with novels and articles published in papers and radios. She presents women characters in novels full of enormous courage. As an Indian woman and the experiences of woman around her she very perfectly expresses the experiences of women understood as the societal-cultural problems of women. Her first novel *The Better Man* (2000) saw her as an artist of immense talent and great content. With this book she also earned the credit of being the first Indian author whose work got published by Picador, USA. Her second novel (third book) *Ladies Coupe*' (2001), being rated as 2002's top five books of the year, went on to be translated into more than 25 languages around the world.

Experience of Patriarchy

Anita Nair's engrossing novel *Ladies Coupe* raises the questions about the role of women in contemporary India. India suffers from a system of sex-role stereotyping and oppression of woman that exist under patriarchal social organization. Patriarchy, in its different forms has tried in many-ways to repress, debase and humiliate women especially through the images represented in cultural and traditional forms. The novel *Ladies Coupe* deals with such issues by asking fundamental questions that do only shake the ideological ground of man's patriarchal role in a traditional society, but also imply the existence of an alternative reality. The novel questions whether the role of Indian women living under oppressive patriarchal system should be restricted

only to their roles as wives and mothers. In such a world, woman's role is limited to reproduction and recreation regardless of her own desires and needs.

Female Experience

Through the 'ladies compartment' or coupe, Anita Nair shares the experience of her female characters with the readers. She places her protagonist in a cross-cultural scenario. She explores the immigrant sensibility, duality and flexible identity. Her characters come from all the parts of the world with divergent social, religious and cultural preoccupations. She explores the multiplicity of themes which centre on her characters' struggle to outgrow traditionally inherited cultural values. Her women characters are docile creatures who believe in wrestling with their own problems rather than trying to dominate their male counterparts.

The Brahmin protagonist Akhila, whose life has been taken out of her control, is forty-five years old 'spinster', daughter, sister, aunt and the only provider of her family. The story is told in first person by Akhila, the protagonist, who is at first presented as a sympathetic figure: she sacrifices her dreams to maintain a modicum of normalcy for her sister and two brothers after her father was struck by a passing commuter bus. She becomes a woman who has always been the backbone of impossible demanding family until the day she gets herself a one way ticket to a resort town, a journey that will ultimately make her a different woman. Nair writes, “So this then is Akhila. Forty-five years old. Sans rose-colored spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experiences. Aching to connect” (2). She is forty five, the middle-aged spinster who is trying to escape from her own life at the stage of through making a journey of a new kind, away from the family burdens.

This is the beginning of a journey of self-discovery and life altering changes. At 45, Akhila awakes one day with a 'fight – or flight' notion. She boards a train's ladies coupe (a

segregated second class compartment found on most overnight Indian trains until 1998) and undertakes a journey from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. After her father's death, she becomes the breadwinner that makes her a martyr in the name of family. She has sacrificed her desires to fulfill her family's wants and needs.

In the Ladies Coupe, she meets five other women each of whom has a story to tell. The stories are all an attempt to answer Akhila's question: Can a woman stay single and be happy at the same time? The central character, as the story progresses, discovers that she had never been living for herself but for others, governed by social pressures. Akhila had badly neglected her 'real' self. But now she decides to come out of the nest because life has become intolerable for her. Thus, the novel deals with the leading character shedding her old self and starting living for herself.

Akhila's mother whom she calls Amma is very traditional woman. Amma has her own theories on what a good wife ought to be like. She is of the view that if one wants peace and harmony in the marital relationship, the wife should accept to be inferior to her husband. But Akhila rejects the ideas of unequal marriage.

Her sibling's insensitivity bogs her down and she develops a keen urge to find whatever little that remains of the real woman in her, prompting her to undertake a distant journey to Kanyakumari. On the train she finds herself in a ladies coupe with five other women. She opens her to them just as they do to her. What develops is a camaraderie so strong and a boundary so strong and bonding that they reveal their deepest thoughts and darkest secrets. The roles these five women portray are our stereotypical Indian women roles, those of the wives with the lost identities, women who have lost their innocence because of evil men, women who have silently

born the burden of running their households, while their families have all but forgotten their needs.

As her journey progresses to the South India, the stories unfold ranging from the ordinary to bizarre. Akhila meets her co-passengers, all women. All of them can be termed as her own altered egos, as they, in one way or other present her own need for independence and self-discovery.

A New Journey to Change the Course of Life

Anita Nair narrates her stories from a wide variety of perspectives, concentrating upon the concept of self within a large society. She has a special eye on characters who are adventurous and explorers, rather than refugees and outcasts and are part and parcel of new changing society. Nair concentrates on the emotional, intellectual and physical responses of a group of characters when they are placed in a situation not routine to them. She feels that psychic violence leaves a stronger impact on the body. Therefore, her women characters make for interesting psychological studies. There is a continuous urge in her women to build up their affirmation to life. True enough, while they attempt to do so, they appear abnormal in their behavior but this is only a bid to live life on their own terms.

The protagonist and five other women characters not only endure life's hardships stoically but in process also emerges stronger, providing sustenance and equilibrium to the entire community. On the contrary, they are docile and submissive simultaneously exhibiting the courage and capability to wrestle with conventional society. The stories of the various co-passengers refer to their personal crises such as loneliness, ill treatment, rape, abortion, madness, betrayal and how each one has coped with them.

Each chapter of the novel is devoted to one of the woman's story. Janaki, the oldest of them is a dutiful wife and confused mother. She was married when she was just eighteen. She loves her husband Prabhakar and son Siddhartha too much. She is just living a traditional life. She even tolerates when her son misbehaves her. She cares her daughter-in law as well. She never criticizes and comments on her husband and son's behaviors. She loves them blindly. She doesn't like to introduce new values of family, as the Gary Cooper woman of Nora Ephron. She feels happy to live as a submissive, traditional wife. So she says, "I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my husband is gone, there will be my son. Waiting to take off where his father left off. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princess" (Nair 22).

The other character, Sheela is a fourteen years old girl who has an ability to perceive what others cannot. She has just attended the funeral procession of her grandmother whom she loved very much. She unfolds her story to other co- passengers. She says that she used to visit her home often. She used to bring many things for Sheela. Even Sheela's name was kept by her grandmother. These two grandmothers and grand-daughter were like intimate friends. The grandmother even used to teach Sheela about dress and life-style, to cope the problems in life. She always wanted Sheela to be bold and courageous and never be submissive and docile woman. But one day, her grandmother got cancer. A lot of treatment was done but it was in vain. After some months, her grandmother died. This incident paves the way for her future liberation.

Margaret, a gold medalist in M.Sc. (Chemistry) is married to a proud principal, Ebenezer Paulraj. Margaret was a brilliant student during her college life. She even didn't care about fashion, love, romance. She focused on study alone. After completing her M.Sc., she was planning to go to USA for PhD. But her marriage with Paulraj ruined her future study and whole

life. He never tried to understand her desires. He always used to boast on his prestige and post. After marriage, Paulraj wanted Margaret to follow his ideas. So he made her a teacher in his own school. He wanted her to live as a traditional Indian wife. So she was unable to continue her further studies. But she never talked boldly with Paulraj. Her individual identity was controlled by her husband. But she has slowly emerged as a complex blend of the 'silent woman ' and 'rebellious woman ' with the experience of her own life. Making her full with the ideas of revenge, tired of husband's domination, she seeks freedom in an unusual fashion. She feeds her husband with direct delicacies, she feeds him until he is fat and inactive thereby, reducing him to a caricature of his former self. Now, Ebenezer is turned to be a weak, lazy person.

Prabha Devi is a typical example of a woman who loses her identity and a sense of self worth several years down the marriage life. But she is somewhat revolutionary. She got chance to visit the USA with her husband. In the USA, she loved the dress style and freedom of American women. Even she also wore Western dress and followed Western life style. After some time, she returned to her home. Then she gave birth to children. She reared her children nicely.

It is one day, while watching the swimming pool that she decides again to be her own self. As she slides into the swimming pool, the water touches her body and she gets a feeling of liberation. For too long she has denied herself the pleasure of being herself. She goes to swimming pool during the day when she is free. At that time, only men used to come at that pool. Women used to come only in the evening time. But she has no free time in the evening. She asks the coach to teach her swimming, but the coach denies. Despite the denial, she dares to learn herself. She looks others and follows them. Later on, the coach looking her courage and

will power becomes ready to teach her. She becomes successful in her endeavor within few months.

Marikolanthu, another passenger in coupe, admits that she was raped. She worked in the house of one landlord named Chettiars. The brother of her maid raped her just for lust. She kept this incident secret for a long time. One day her mother knew some clues of her conception. As a result she confessed her mother. Both went to the landlord's house and told all the happenings. Her maid believed and promised that she should be married with that boy who raped her. But the landlord blamed her that they are doing all this to grab the property. Lastly, the maid also didn't give good response. They met a woman who convinced that the illegal baby would be aborted. But it was also in vain. She gave birth to that illegitimate child. She decides to fight back, takes revenge and feels relaxed and content. She remained unmarried throughout her life caring her son and mother. In spite of the onslaughts of fate Marikolanthu emerges as a strong independent woman trying to strike equilibrium in her otherwise chaotic life.

The novel presents the stories of six ladies. Everyone has her own story. But Akhila is the leading character. She is also dominated by the patriarchal society. But she struggles hard to save her identity which cannot be easily dominated. Akhila doesn't give up her ego. She is a radical character as well. This novel also tries to show how Akhila is dominated, how she struggles and finally how she tries to lead a single life without intervention from any one.

Struggle Against Patriarchal Domination

Anita Nair in her novels focuses only on the marginal position of women in the society. Her characters revolt against the social set up of society. They manipulate and negotiate for propagating the middle class values. During the course of this journey a subtle cultural transformation has been captured. Binod Mishra is the leading critic of Anita Nair. He has

analyzed the diverse aspects of Nair's novels. According to Mishra, Nair's novels raise concern for all classes and groups of people. He even compares her with Anita Desai's novels. Mishra has delivered the following views about this novel, *Ladies Coupe*:

Desai novels depict the mental conflicts coiling their heroines whereas Nair makes her characters suffer and enables them to come out of it. Desai's heroines sulk, sob and submerge themselves in their calamity but for Nair's characters, their sufferings become their strength and weapon to fight out their predicaments. This becomes a matter of debate and as Anita Nair, herself reacts when *Ladies Coupe* is being argued as an important work of feminism by well known publications. (101)

Binod Mishra is of the opinion that Nair has made her characters more revolutionary and radical than the characters of Anita Desai. He says that the heroines of Desai are not revolutionary, they only sob, suffer, compromise and are happy to remain in their own problems. They don't dare to fight against the patriarchal norms and values of contemporary Indian society. Mishra argues that Nair's characters convert their sufferings to strength and weapon to fight against their predicaments. They don't like to remain submissive. Even characters of Nair emerge as new a woman who challenge their families, society and dare to develop new norms and values where women can enjoy freedom and privileges like men.

The famous Indian novelist, Khuswant Singh has also praised *Ladies Coupe*. He extends pity to those women who are inert and passive. But he praises the heroines of Nair's novels who struggle hard to make their identity. He states that it is a story of many Indian women who are sufferings in many ways in contemporary society. He has mentioned his view regarding to this novel in the following way:

Ladies Coupe is contrived. Six women find themselves crammed in a three-tiered women's compartment of a train travelling from Bangalore to Kanyakumari. They have nothing in common save their gender. Some made happy marriage, some were not happy, one was raped and took her revenge another seduced man much younger than her. In a place that was her own. To do as she pleased. To live as she chose with neither restraint nor fear of censure. (23)

Singh appreciates the characters of Nair and says that their stories are representative stories of the real Indian women. These women are sufferings in many ways both in rural and urban settings. Only few of them are enjoying their married lives whereas the rest are only suffering and dominated both in father's home and husband's home. Similarly, some are even raped and tortured. But their voices are suppressed and bypassed. Only few of them have united to fight against their violence and domination. He argues that the characters of Nair's novels challenge the patriarchal society. He also praises them who are strong to save their gender and identity. He says that he is always in a hurry to read the novels of Nair. He keeps the novels of Nair equal to novels of famous Indian women novelists like Anita Desai, Bharati Mukurjee etc.

Tamil Nadu is the prominent critic of Nair. He is interested in analyzing the novel from the concept of patriarchy and female defiance. He argues with the conviction that this novel belongs to the category of feminist literature. He comments that Nair has strongly raised patriarchal domination to women and female struggle for equality and freedom in *Ladies Coupe*.

D. Silvia Flavia, a research scholar at Sarah Tucker College, presents views below so as to reinforce the proposed issue of this research work.

Thus, in the novel, *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair has presented an increasingly common concept of patriarchy in which a woman is constrained by tradition to be

dependent on men crippled to realize her own strength. She has presented her women struggling side by side because of patriarchy but at the end has given them a gesture of defiance against patriarchy. Her women have been portrayed as intelligent, questioning women who are not contented with the injustice and rebellion against them. (52)

According to Flavia the characters employed by Nair are representative of the unique characters who fought against patriarchal society. These characters harbor hope and optimism in their journey to salvation and independence. They don't like to be fully dependent on men but they cripple hard to gain their strength. Flavia argues that the modern Indian women are not ready to be always become inferior, submissive but are ready to defy the domination and suppressions. These women are intelligent, questioning women who are not ready to easily remain submissive to the injustice and domination exercised to them. Such issue is raised strongly by Nair in her present novel *Ladies Coupe*.

K.A. Agalya and S.N. Mahalakshmi, research scholars, have described how Nair has used the issue of feminism strongly in her novel. They praise Nair for raising issue of the female protest against domination and new concept to live self reliant, happy life without intervention from the male domination. They have made the following remarks about Nair's *Ladies Coupe*.

Ladies Coupe is a novel about contemporary Indian society, about the awareness of the conflicts between one's aspirations, visions in life, the treads of intolerance, anger, violence and the survival of one's traditional values and ideas still in the present circumstances. Anita Nair is perhaps the only Indian woman novelist who has made a bold attempt to give voice to the frustration and development of women in a patriarchal world. (3)

Agalya and Mahalaxmi argue that *Ladies Coupe* is about contemporary Indian society. They say that the awareness seen in the present Indian women, their intolerance, anger and violence are raised strongly in the novel. They even take Nair as the only Indian women novelist who has made bold attempt to give voice to the frustration and development of women in a patriarchal world. They regard that this novel provides encouragement to the modern Indian women who are deeply influenced by Western values. Most of the Indian women after marriage remain housewives, leave their study and break their career. But some of them want to continue their study even after marriage. Similarly, some modern Indian women don't like to remain married but like to remain lonely, unmarried. Such issue is raised by Nair in her novel making Akhila as a symbolic and representative character.

According to Navtej Sarna, *Ladies Coupe* is best example of increasing women's awareness for self-independence and equality. Sarna argues that this novel has raised issues that women are moving to the stage of awareness and self-dependent. They are ready to cope with the problems alone even if they don't get support from the family. Even they try to live a lonely life. Sara's view is expressed in the following excerpt:

But in Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, the six women retain this unfair advantage, as they ponder the question, thrown like a tantalizing black leather gauntlet in the centre of carriage by the protagonist Akhila. "Can a woman cope alone?" In the sisterhood of their privileged space the women base their resentment against a male-dominated world, recall their small victories and minor acts of revenge against the men who have dominated or used them. (24)

Sarna takes this novel as a good example where female characters are presented as strong women who dare to live and cope alone. These women couldn't blossom their internal feelings before but

they have got chance to express. *Ladies Coupe* is a sisterhood to share their problems. After a long discussion, all the women characters decide to live independent life. Sarna argues that Nair has extra talent to present characters lively. Even the dialogues used by her are heart- touching, the real voices of suppressed voices of contemporary India. The domination, suppression exercised upon the women is described beautifully. He takes Nair as a realist novelist who doesn't like to follow other women novelists. She doesn't like to make her women characters weak, submissive rather prefer them emerge and act as strong women characters as we see in Western feminist novels.

Chapter- 2

Resistance of the Masculine Order

Background

Women are deprived of the right to natural expression of psychological and physiological needs and drives. They are expected to live up to the images men have conjured about them. This all eventually creates a diseased and unnatural personality in women. The influence of stereotypes and the need to live accordingly destroys the humanity in females.

Patriarchal ideology always presupposed the female's beauty as 'beauty' or 'fair' or 'pretty' is the basic needs to be accused by female. Thus, the narrator's stress upon female character's physical appearances is the result of the stereotypical gaze of masculine society since the evolution of human civilization. Philosophers from Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine to Aquinas, Hobbes and Rousseau have also depicted women as inferior and immature in their intellectual potential. Plato labeled women as third grade citizens quite incompetent.

Aristotle declared that the female was female by virtue of the lack of certain qualities. So he considered women to be an unfinished man. This stands as a dehumanizing and demoralizing tendency of a philosopher like him. He said that the rational soul is not present at all in a slave, in a female it is imperative, and in a child underdeveloped. This exemplifies that Aristotle has demonstrated that a prominent philosopher like him blundered in reasoning owing to his prejudices toward male centrism. The blind followers of Aristotle continued to believe his theory throughout the middle Ages and women remained far out from the pivot of social and cultural realm.

St. Thomas Aquinas thought woman to be an imperfect man. He said that form was masculine and matter feminine: the superior god like male intellect impressed its form upon the

malleable inert female matter. Rousseau considered that women should be educated to please and complement men. This was not, of course an accidental proposition. It contains a long history of gender discrimination since mythical and biblical age throughout the human civilization. In the current phase the same discrimination between male and female is privileged in society, which is clearly reflected throughout the text.

The term 'feminism' was first used by the French dramatist Alexander Dumas in 1872 in the pamphlet "L" to designate the emerging movement to women's rights. It gradually emerged to be a worldwide cultural movement to secure a complete equality of women with men in the enjoyment of all human rights-moral, social, religious, political, educational, legal, economic and many others. It studies the domination of women in many fields from different perspectives.

Patriarchy, according to feminist writers, is a major hindrance to the development of women's creativity and position in a society. Social privileges are confined to serve the purposes of men who hold dominating position over women in number of ways. Women were considered slaves, they had no franchise right and they were not allowed to take part in any decision making process. Biologically too, they were supposed to be the weaker sex. Women were kept subdued in expressing their adversities. In response to this condition of women, feminism comes as a struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements, and for equal social and political rights. It is a voice to liberate women from male dominated society. The various feminisms, however, share certain assumptions and concepts that underlie the diverse ways that individual critics explore the factor of sexual difference and privilege in the production, the formed content, the reception and the critical analysis and evaluation of works of literature.

It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concept of 'gender' of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in

identity and behavior are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization.... By this cultural process, the feminine in our culture has come to be widely identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional and conventional. (Abrams 89)

Here M.H. Abrams points out basically two fundamental aspects of feminism. The first is obviously the most neglected position of women in the religious book, the Bible and in Greek philosophical writers to the present. The man is more powerful than woman non- man because women lacked male organ especially the phallus. Thus the phallus becomes the symbol of power in patriarchy that woman lacks in her body. The second aspect is the concept of gender-masculine and feminine. These constructs are mainly culturally biased ones. The culture itself has given masculine a dominating, adventurous, rational creative role and a feminine, a passive, timid, emotional and conventional one. In this way women are subordinated to men in patriarchy.

Patriarchy essentially hinders women from their liberation. The religion and law of the society are in favor of the rule of the father. In this respect, R. Seldon in *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory* points out,

Man's dominance has secured an ideological climate of compliance: legislators, priests, philosophers, writers and scientists have striven to show that the subordinate position of women is willed in heaven and advantageous on earth. De Beauvoir documents here argument with great erudition. Women have been made inferiors and the oppressions have been compounded by men's belief that women are inferiors by nature. (135)

Feminist analysis starts from the point of women's oppression from patriarchy. What exactly patriarchy means is difficult to define. Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* defines a patriarchal government to be an institution whereby half the populace, which is female, is controlled by the half, which is male. Merilyn French defines:

Patriarchy as a system in which men installed a system of power through which they rule over women. Patriarchy is also defined as a society that is run in the interests of men, dominated by male values and ideas etc. Secondly, therefore, as a result of patriarchy all women are common class separate from men. They are all oppressed by patriarchy and to overcome it must unite together. (2)

O' Carol, similar to Kate Millet and French feminists, views that women are marginalized in the society due to patriarchal order which works in favour of men and she stresses the need of all women to unite together to overcome it.

In the discussion of feminism, focus goes on whether there was any matriarchy or not. In pre- historic age human beings usually lived in tribes. They mostly lived on flesh and fruit for survival. They used different tools to kill animals and birds for food. Men and women commonly shared in hunting and cooking. Analyzing the mother rule James George Frazer states,

But in order to dissipate misapprehension, which appear to be rife on this subject, it may be well to remain or inform the reader that the ancient and widespread custom of tracing descent and inheriting property through the mother alone does not by any means imply that the government of tribes which observe the custom is in the hands of women; in short, it should always be borne in mind that mother kin does root mean mother rule. On the contrary the practice of mother kin

prevails most extensively amongst the lowest savages with whom woman instead of being ruler of man, is always his drudge and often little better than his slave. Indeed, so far is the system from implying any social superiority of woman that it probably took its rise from what we should regard as their deepest degradation, to wit from a state of society in which the relation of the sexes were so loose and vague that children could not be fathered by any particular men. (393)

According to Frazer, in ancient tribes too, man and woman relation was not strict. There was not necessarily government of women though there was a system of inheriting property through the mother. He distinguishes the concept of the mother rule and the mother kin in relation to matriarchy.

Aileen O'carrol argues in economic terms women have been placed in inferior position when men started accumulating wealth.

So civilization began when man began to acquire wealth in the form of land, food and animals if a rich man wants to ensure that his offspring alone inherit his wealth, he must be sure that his wife is only mating with him, thus, he has to be in a position of control over her. He needs to portray this as part of the natural order. To accommodate this need society, through the use of religion developed a rationale to justify the inferior position of woman. (1)

Further looking into the condition of the girl another boy Simon De Beauvoir points out that at the moment of puberty boys feel their bodies as an embarrassment but being proud of their manhood from an early age the boys are joyful with an expectation of being liberal and male (340).

The little girl on the contrary, in order to change into a grown up person, must be confined within the limits imposed upon her by her femininity. The boy sees with wonder in his growing hairiness vague promises of things to come, the girl stands abashed before the 'brutal and prescribed drama' that decides her destiny. Just as the penis derives its privileged evaluation from social context, so it is the social context that makes menstruation a curse. The one symbolizes manhood, the other femininity; and it is because femininity signifies alterity and inferiority that its manifestation is met with shame. The girl's life has always seemed to her to be determined by that vague essence to which the lack of penis has not been enough to give a positive shape; but she becomes aware of herself in the red flow from between thighs. (Beauvoir 340)

Here Simon De Beauvoir genuinely brings out different perspectives of boys and girls who begin to differentiate themselves as superior and inferior beings merely because of the biological changes. The biological changes in a boy symbolize manhood and discover himself in socially privileged position. On the contrary girls begin to feel inferiority just because of biological phenomenon of menstruation. It is society that constructs these assumptions to form a huge disparity between the sexes. Phallus, a social symbol holds dominating role in society.

Marriage is another aspect considered an important contractual, cultural and social factor to bring man and a woman upon equal footing. Both man and woman need each other to reciprocate their feelings and experiences. Many feminists raise the question of reciprocity between couples. In this regard, Simon De Beauvoir puts forward her view as:

Marriage has always been a very different thing for man and women. The two sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never brought a condition of reciprocity between them; women, as we have seen, have never constituted a caste making exchanges and contracts with the male caste upon an equality of footing. A man is socially an independent and complete individual; he is regarded first of all as a producer whose existence is justified by the work he does for the group: we have seen why it is that the reproductive and domestic role to which woman is confined has not guaranteed her an equal dignity. (446)

Beauvoir reiterates the fact that marriage brings together both male and female but woman in a true sense does not experience this togetherness. Woman's activities are mostly confined to reproduction, household chores for which she never gains appreciation and recognition. Man enjoys independence after marriage while woman is confined. Hence, marriage cannot link them firmly.

Besides, cultural, social, economic and biological factors associated with feminism, a new radical concept of "queer theory" emerged lately. M.H. Abrams points out,

Queer theory is often used to designate the combined area of gay and lesbian studies and criticism, as well as theoretical and critical writings concerning all modes of variance from the normative model of biological sex, 'gender' identity and sexual desires. The term "queer" was originally derogatory, used to stigmatize male and female same-sex love as deviant and unnatural; since the early 1990s, however, it has been increasingly adopted by gays and lesbians themselves as a non-invidious term to identify a way of life and an area of scholarly inquiry. (254)

This theory emerged as a radical thought and began as a liberation movement. There are different strands of feminism which define and illustrate feminist struggle for defiance of patriarchal domination and try to free the women from the shackles of patriarchal domination.

Psychoanalytic Feminism

Psychoanalysis occupies a central place in feminism. Psychoanalysis is considered one of the major theories to analyze the human mind. To uncover the structure of human psyche, Freud, Lacan and Jung have propounded psychoanalytic theories. These theories are popularly applied to interpret different literary texts. Many authors have borrowed the concepts of psychoanalysis to study the factors that determine the relations between male and female. Analyzing the girl's case Freud in *Feminity* states,

We are now obliged to recognize that little girl is a little man. In boys, as we know this phase is marked by the fact that they have learnt how to derive pleasurable sensations from their small penis and connect its excited state with their ideas of sexual intercourse. Little girl do the same thing with their still small clitoris. It seems that with them all their masturbatory acts are carried out on this penis equivalent, and that the truly feminine vagina is still undiscovered by both sexes. (125)

Thus, there is no discrimination between male and female in the formation of the Oedipal complex.

For a girl too, her first object must be her mother.... In the Oedipus situation the girl's father has become her love-object, and we expect that in the normal course

of development she will find her way from this paternal object to her final choice of an object (Freud 125).

This remains as penis envy as it lacks in the girl. This permanent lack of phallus is inferiority but for the boy the boy it is loss and is a relative inferiority. Sonya Andermahr in *Glossary of Feminist Theory* says,

A central concept in Psychoanalysis, the castration complex occurs during the PRE OEDIPAL stage of infantile development and is closely connected to the OEDIPAL COMPLEX which follows and signals its resolution. It refers to the child's acknowledgement of castration and therefore of the primacy of the PHALLUS. According to Freud, 'castration' functions differently for girls and boys: the girl must accept her absolute inferiority because she lacks a penis, while the boy must accept his relative inferiority, the father's castrating injunction against his incestuous DESIRE for the mother, and the possible loss of his organ.

According to Freud, once symbolic castration is accepted and the boy defers to the father, he then becomes heir to patriarchal law. The girl, however, in accepting permanent lack is faced with three paths: 1) she can reject femininity altogether, which according to Freud will lead to neurosis; 2) she can refuse to abandon her pre-oedipal clitoral sexual pleasure and 'masculine' identification: or 3) she can accept the Oedipus complex in which she shifts desire from the mother to the father, and substitutes a desire for his baby (penis) for wanting his phallus.

(31)

This is particularly noticeable in feminist writers. Many feminists have been drawn to the psychoanalysis approach to study the position established by the biological, psychological and cultural aspects. In 'Feminity, narrative and psychoanalysis' Juliet Mitchell points out, "As everybody knows, psychoanalysis is a talking cure. Obviously the analysis is male or female; the patient is male or female" (420). Mitchell states that psychoanalysis is a method of curing illness by an analysis. The analyst examines the problems of a patient to discover the best ways to cure.

Julia Kristeva's notion of *semiotic* as a Mother-centered realm of expression which opposes the *symbolic* law of the Father Wilfred L. Guerin in *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* says,

She describes a Mother-centered realm of expression as the *semiotic* as opposed to the *symbolic* Law of the Father. Like Lacan, in her mind the prior semiotic realm of feminine is present in symbolic discourse as absence or contradiction, and great writers are those who offer the reader the greatest amount of disruption of the nameable. Like Cixous and Luce Irigaray, Kristeva opposes phallogentrism with images derived from women's corporeal experiences. Such psychoanalytic theory thus attempts, as does Marxist feminist theory, to connect personal with social (204).

In further analysis Juliet Mitchell says,

Psychoanalysts, at one level, are hearing and retelling histories. The patient comes with a story of his or her own life. The analyst listens, through an association something intrudes, disrupts, offers the 'anarchic carnival' back into that history, the story won't quite do, and so the process starts again. You go back, and you

make a new history. Simultaneously with that, the analyst, in analyzing his or her own counter transference, performs the same process on himself or herself, listens to a history, asks, 'why am I hearing it as that?': Something from the analysis own associations disrupts, erupts into that narrative- the analyst asks a question from a new perspective, and the history starts all over again. (426)

Here, Mitchell reveals the process of how the analyst listens carefully to the story of a patient. This helps the analyst make analysis of the story to trace it back to the history of the patient. In this process, the analyst makes different associations of the story s/he hears and cures the patient.

Psychoanalytic feminism holds that there are crucial psychic differences between men and women that have been produced through characteristics path of development such as the oedipal struggle. It also emphasizes that because of biological facts of gestation, birth and nurturing as infants both girls and boys experience union or profound connection with mother or love mother. Later, father isolates him or her from any possible connection or love. The desire of union with their mother is forbidden by the law of father and the desire remains repressed.

In this respect, Juliet Mitchell adds:

There is much current interest in re-reading of Freud in terms of the moment at which sexual difference is produced within society: the moment of the castration complex, the moment when heterogeneously sexual, polymorphous perverse, carnivalesque child has imposed on it the divisions of 'the law'; the one law, the law of patriarchy, the mark of the phallus. At that moment two sexes are psychologically created as the masculine and

the not- masculine. At the point in which the phallus is found to be missing in the mother, masculinity is set up as the norm, and femininity is set up as what masculinity is not. (146)

Mitchell, here, in Freudian terms, uncovers the reality of division between masculinity and femininity. The phallus is the mark that is missing in the mother so femininity is established. Not being the phallus with the mother, society begins discrimination between male and female.

Mitchell “defends Freud arguing that ‘psychoanalysis is not recommendation from a patriarchal society but an analysis of one’, Freud she believes is describing the mental representation of social reality, not reality itself (146).

In this connection, a famous French feminist Helene Cixous, points out

That the differences between sexes may have psychic consequences is undeniable.

But they are surely not reducible to those designated by a Freudian analysis.

Starting with the relationship of the two sexes: to the Oedipal complex, the boy and the girl are oriented toward a division of social roles, so that women

‘inescapably’ have a lesser productivity, because they ‘sublimate’ less than men and because symbolic activity, hence the production of culture, is men's doing.

(291)

Cixous, however, does not agree with Freudian concept as Mitchell supported. The Oedipal complex clearly makes divisions between the boy and the girl in relation to their social roles. This factor is responsible to inevitably consider women with less productivity than man. In addition to it, Cixous chiefly interprets women's position from women's own experiences rather than in line with man's experiences. She is more concerned with women's desire, sexual pleasure,

the unconscious and how to put all those in writing. It is her view based on the Lacanian reinterpretation of Freud.

Stating the usefulness of Freudian psychoanalysis explores the relation between the child and the mother in the Oedipal stage. Mitchell raises the question whether the child exists with its own organization pre- divided heterogeneous or remains in union with mother in oneness as the two sides of the same coin. Law intervenes to form the sides of the oneness and this law is symbolic law. She further extends the reasoning that if the existence of the child with its own organization is possible then the law can be disrupted and the authority can be challenged. The pre- Oedipal and the Oedipal are not separate stages in the carnival (passion) and the churches (authority) do not exist independently. It is the only way to challenge the church is from an alternative symbolic universe. Hence, the symbolic law, a new law that can challenge the dominant law or authority.

Mitchell's view comes as a difference from Lacan's notion of the "Imaginary a pre oedipal stage in which the child has not yet differentiated himself or herself from the mother and has accordingly not yet learned language" (204).

Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud is founded on the post structuralism concept of signifier and signified in relation to language. He says the unconscious is the language of femininity. Lacan says that the imaginary is the realm of the feminine and vital source of language that will later be formed and codified by the laws of the father (Mitchell 204).

Another feminist critic Elaine Showalter in *Feminist Criticism in the wilderness* says:

Generally, however, psychoanalytic criticism has focused not on the capacious bladder (could this be organ from which females generate texts?) but on the

absence of phallus. Penis every, the castration complex and the Oedipal phase have become the Freudian coordinates defining women's relationship to language, fantasy, and culture. (126)

Showalter views that psychoanalytic criticism bases its study of women's writing on the ground of the lack of phallus. Showalter writes ahead, "Lacan theorizes that acquisition of language and the entry into its symbolic order occurs at the Oedipal phase. This stage requires an acceptance of phallus as a privileged signification and a consequent female displacement, as Cora Kaplan has explained.

The phallus as signifier has a central, crucial position in language, for if language embodies the patriarchal law of the culture, its basic meanings are acquired ...

Thus the little girl's access to the Symbolic, i.e., to language and its laws, is always negative and/or mediated by intrasubjective relation to a third term, for it is characterized by an identification with lack. (342)

In Psychoanalytic terms, 'lack' has traditionally been associated with the feminine, Although Lac(k)anian critics now make their statements linguistically. Many feminists believe that psychoanalysis could become a powerful tool for literary criticism, and recently there has been a renewed interest in Freudian theory.

Viewing all these aspects of Freudian analysis of the unconscious by feminists, our focus of study of *Ladie's Coupe* is chiefly based on the concept of women psychology as expressed by Nora Ephron, as he has said in her celebrated essay "The Hurling Ashtray" "Yes, I want to be treated as an equal and not as an appendage or possession or pare rib, but I also want to be taken care of" (19). This means that the women want to be free, independent and self-dependent who

have their every right to decide their choices and they want to be care of male counterpart when it is necessary, at least a psychological support from the male counterpart to fulfill the lack that has remained in them.

Chapter -3

Akhila's Struggle for Indomitable Self

Common Female Experiences

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is the story of six women who meet in a train journey, just by chance. Akhilandeswari, the protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and tells her too, seeking a solution to the question that has troubled all her life: Can women stay single and happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? The story switches over from past to present and present to past, hence, even other than the five women in the compartment, we are shown of certain women who are humiliated and debased. These six women are victims of Indian patriarchal society. Some of them are suffering whereas some are struggling. The story of each woman is remarkable and noticeable to read. Some are struggling against the norms and values of patriarchal society whereas some have internalized the norms and values and are happy to be submissive. These women share their life experiences with Akhila, thus helping to gain her full potential as a woman and grapple with the answers to the questions she's been asking so long.

The novel has also been called a novel in parts, perhaps because the lives and experiences of six women have been welded together by the author into a consummate whole, with Akhila or Akhilandeswari as a magnet in the centre. The unique bonding among the women makes each life story a learning experience for Akhila who contemplates upon the various aspects of her life after each session of tale-telling. It helps her to break free from claustrophobic multiple identities as daughter, sister, aunt and provider.

This paper seeks to analyze the interior journey of Akhila as she realizes by degrees as to how she should live her life and assert her identity of all the saga of the six women, the most

fascinating and most compelling story is that of Akhila, mainly because she is in the process of discovering her own self identity and also because she finally emerges as a skilled obstacle-racing champion of life. The harshness of life and its cruel blows has triggered her inexhaustible springs of dynamism.

Struggle of the Self

While we look on Akhila's life, she is many times directly and indirectly dominated by the patriarchal society. She is even humiliated often but she never surrenders. She is determinant and rigid on her principles of life. If we look her history from the beginning, the patriarchy always has tried to suppress the women in one or many ways. Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. But, in human civilization, women are often allocated a secondary role. As they prefer others' happiness to theirs, women's identity is hidden behind the mask of sacrifice and dependence. Their voices are no better than the voices of the dumb, not audible to the world. But nowadays, women have come up to be courageous enough to exhibit their individualities at all levels. Even though they possess the voices of the dumb, they have made it audible in recent years and they also have started to strike the conventions of dependence. They are ready to undergo the most challenging journey of self-discovery to make the whole world recognize them. So is Akhila, who has successfully reached her destination.

The self is a distinct characteristic individuality of a person. The human self is a self organizing, interactive system of thoughts, feelings and motives that characterizes an individual. Carl Rogers, the famous psychologist, defined the self or self concept as "an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of the characteristics of the 'I' and 'me' to other and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions" (64).

Self, the result of human's awareness of the individual as a separate entity in the social environment, enables humans to regard their emotional experiences and their own integrity and identity in relation to their past, present and future. Self and society are interconnected and this is a kind of web, the construction of which is partly under guidance from self and partly under the guidance from the prevailing social pattern. The subtle by-play between society and the individual by which the individual develops a sense of self through participation in social interaction, and yet possess a feeling of separation from others, is a fundamental social process which perpetuates culture and society.

The researcher has made the use of feminist theory especially related to French and Indian feminism. Colette Guillamin is a French feminist who writes about the discrimination of women on the basis of gender: women are doomed to belong to the "class of women" and they cannot flee this categorization in a male dominated world. Guillamin believes that the specific nature of the oppression of women is caused by the misappropriation of the class of women by class of men, thus reducing women to the state of material stuff. Therefore, the relation between women and men is based on power. Men dominate women in every sphere of the society and the appropriation is not only physical, but also social aspects. Guillamin makes the following remarks regarding to domination of women:

A woman is never anything but a woman an interchangeable object with no other characteristic than her femininity, whose fundamental characteristic is belonging to the class of women. Various intellectuals and anthropologists effect a classic projection, attributing to exotic or archaic societies the reality of women's reduction to the state of an appropriated object which has become a medium of exchange. (Guillamin 178)

The burden of gender has a strong influence on contemporary Indian fiction and it is reflected in the creation of women writers from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Most Indian writers deal with gender in their works. Indian women novelists have forcefully focused on the psyche of women of different vein in contemporary times of never ending existential struggle in their lives. Like other novelists, Anita Nair, an eminent modern novelist has focused on the marginalization of women in Indian society.

Ladies Coupe focuses on gender related issues and on the shove of class and gender. The novel stresses the state of subjection of women and inequity of various kinds and the need of strength to fight against the suppression. The novel primarily deals with the struggle of a spinster, who is captivated under the burden of the family. Anita Nair introduces a gallery of female characters, all distinctive and apart in style, language, mannerism, beliefs and in particular how they choose a weapon and handle it. Nair uses the familiar narrative technique of a shared train journey intersecting with shared confessions.

Of all the narrative of the six women, the most fascinating and most compelling story is that of Akhila, mainly because she is in the journey of discovering her own identity, and also because she finally emerges as a skilled barrier-competing victor of life. Akhila is forty-five, single and she works at an income-tax office clerk. She has never been allowed to be a complete woman in all her life because she has to be the daughter, the sister, the aunt and the provider of the family. Getting fed up with these multiple roles, Akhila tries to break of all her conservative Brahmin life and decides to travel to the seaside town of Kanyakumari as a sense of escape. In the coupe, all the women wonder that Akhila, being fort-five years old is not yet married. Among them Janaki suggests that she can't live her life without support from men. As this moment, Akhila replies as: "As for I am concerned, marriage is unimportant. Companionships yes, I

would like that. The problem is, I wish to live by myself but everyone tells me that women can't live alone... All I am trying to do is convince myself that a woman can live alone" (21).

Akhila wants to live her life in the way she likes. She doesn't like to be dominated by anyone. Her age is not suitable to get married, too. Rather she prefers to lonely, independent life. She accepts that companionship is required to lead the life. Without the help of others, one can't lead one's life. Her desire is to live by herself. She is often asked that she should rather find somebody to care her. But she convinces that she will try her best to live alone. She dares to live in different ways of life.

After her father's death, Akhila as eldest child, at the tender age of nineteen takes her father's place as the bread-winner of the family. And being the eldest child of the parents, she shoulders the responsibilities. Getting a job in the income tax department on compassionate grounds, she not only become the 'man' of the family but also loses her individual choices. But Akhila's great contribution to the dignified survival of her family is certainly not appreciated by its members and they never repay her in any way. She remains instrumental in arranging the marriage of her two brothers- one elder and the other younger the same day, but not one ever thanks if she also wants a husband, children, or a house of her own. Even Narayan doesn't wait her and thinks about her marriage. From this event Akhila feels too sad that she is never asked about her internal desires and wishes. The following lines illustrate this point:

Akhila waited for Amma or Narayan to say something. To broach the subject of Akhila's marriage. When they didn't Akhila swallowed the hurt she felt and let the anger that grew in her flare...Even then, Amma and her brothers never asked, what about You? You're been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don't

you want a husband, children, a home of your own? In their minds Akhila has ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster. (77)

It shows that both the brothers Narayan and Narsi are hurry to settle, get married without thinking about their eldest sister. Even her mother also never asks what her intention is if she wants to lead a martial life or not. They think that Akhila has directly turned from adulthood to old age. If we compare her life with the four stages of Hindu mythology, she has directly moved from *Brahmacharya* stage to *Sanyasi* stage. She can be even compared to spinster, an old unmarried woman who dedicates her life for services, help to others but never thinks of one's personal desires.

Akhila becomes stiff and starchy. The house is in order but the members have forgotten about Akhila's emotion and emotional needs. She handles all burdensome tasks delicately and she's allowed a bigger identity. Not called by her name, she gets the treatment of Akka, elder or older sister, the customary respectful address reserved to women, inside or outside the family group. Even her mother calls her Ammadi. She feels at a conflict with her emotion. The surge in her inner nook tries to kindle her. She suffers an identity crisis. The following lines give the glimpse of this condition.

What Akhila missed the most was that no one ever called her by her name any more. Her brothers and sisters had always called her Akka. Elder sister. At work, her colleagues called her Madam. All women were Madam and all men Sir. And Amma had taken to addressing her as Ammadi...So who was Akhilandeswari?

Did she exist at all? If she did, what was her identity? (84)

She is reminds often of a Tamil film whose heroine is just like Akhila-a work horse and a woman who gives up her life and hope of her marriage. She has watched that film with her

mother. After watching the film, Akhila's mother doesn't give any comment on it. But that film realizes Akhila her real identity-her real life how she is leading. The following lines reflect Akhila's real situation in this regard:

Akhila often thought of a Tamil film she had seen some years before. Of a woman like her who was destined to be nothing more than a workhorse. A woman who gave up her life and love for her family...But ten years later, when Akhila thought of the film, she felt darkness lick at her. Would her life end like the life of the woman in the film? (84-85)

Akhila compares her life to the heroine of that Tamil film. She feels parallel situation between her life and life of that heroine. The heroine of that film also has been destined to be workhouse, nothing more than that. Similarly, Akhila also becomes a workhorse since her father's death up to now, The heroine also gives up her life i.e. gives personal, hopes, desires and only works and lives for her family. The story of that heroine is tragic and sympathetic. After ten years, that film hovers in her mind. Akhila feels as if the darkness is licking her life. She wonders whether her life also may end like the life of that heroine. Akhila finds the story of that film to be her own story. She is confused for her future.

Simone De Beauvoir puts forward the notion that womanhood as we know it, is a social construct, that the inequality of the sexes is not a nature's design, but a result, of various social forces. She argues that "One is not born but rather becomes a woman" (14). In a patriarchal society, Beauvoir observes that men are considered essential subjects (independent selves with free will), while women are considered contingent beings (dependent beings controlled by circumstances). Men can act upon the world, change it, give it meaning while women have meaning only in relation to men. The word, woman, therefore has the same implications as the

word 'other'. A woman is not a person in her own right. She is man's other: she is less than a man, she is a kind of alien in a man's world, she is not a full developed human being the way a man is.

Such is happening in Akhila's life. Though Akhila has done her duties, all as that of the head of a family to her brothers and sister, she is not recognized as the real head just because she is a woman. Whenever Akhila asks her mother to go outside for a trip, she rejects and also asks a lot of questions about her journey. Akhila's mother expects her to get permission from her brothers, the men of the family to go on an office tour as she says, "you might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family" (150). Her encounter with her school friend awakens her spirit to think of a life to live on her own. But even there sprouts the patriarchal domination. When Akhila boldly tells Padma about her decision to live alone, she without reluctance says, "Do you think the brothers will consent to this? Do you think they will let you live alone?" (209). everyone, including Padma, Narsi and Narayan are strongly rooted in the patriarchal structure and hence are unable to bear the thought of a woman living alone. But Akhila's defiance is stronger than theirs that she boards the train to Kanyakumari.

Beauvoir in her masterpiece *The Second Sex* (1949), puts argument that throughout history, women have occupied a secondary role in relation to men, being relegated to the position of the "other" i.e. that which is adjectival upon the substations subjectively and existential activity of man. The myths and cultures as well are so created by men. The women are represented weak, submissive, and dependent on men in most of the myths and cultures of the world. This can be better understood from the following lines:

A woman is lost where are the women? The women of today are not women at all. We have seen what these mysterious slogans mean. In man's eyes- and for the

legion of women who see through men's eye-it is not enough to have a woman's body nor to assure the female functions as mistress or mother in order to be a true women. In sexuality and maternity woman, as subject can claim autonomy; but to be a "true woman" She must accept herself as the other. (100)

After the death of mother, Akhila starts living with her sister Padma. She thinks that she is alone and needs someone to live together. Padma becomes only the housewife but Akhila continues her job. The income of Padma's husband is not good. There are two children of Padma. Even Padma's family are living in Akhila's apartment. Akhila also supports their family-expenses. Padma fears that she can't rear her children without the help of Akhila. But Akhila is many times disturbed by Padma. She can't live there freely. Padma's friends, especially ones who are housewives gather at Padma's home during free-time. They keep on chatting about household expenses, their lives and even about Akhila. They unnecessarily back-bite Akhila. Even Padma supports them. Such domination is experienced seen even while living with own sister. This can be understood from the following lines.

She is not like us. She is not interested in any of the things that give us or any normal person pleasure. She likes to be left alone. I don't know. Sometimes I think she isn't even a practicing Hindu. She won't light the lamp in the Puja room or go to the temple or observe any of the rituals we Brahmins do. When she has her periods, she continues to water the plants and if I object, she bits my head off.
(169)

Padma and her friends think that Akhila is not normal like them. They think that Akhila is not practicing Hindu rituals. Akhila doesn't light the lamp in the puja room or go to the temple. Similarly, Akhila doesn't follow the rituals which a Hindu woman does during menstruation

period. For Hindu women, during menstruation periods, one has to be saved from many things. She has to avoid many things and be untouched from many things. But Akhila doesn't follow all these taboos. Whenever Padma objects and gives suggestions to Akhila, Akhila doesn't pay much attention. It shows that Hindu Brahmin women are dominated by the rituals also. Such rituals are created by men for the women. If she doesn't follow such rituals, she is criticized not by the males but also by the females as it happens with Akhila.

Lack of Identity

Akhila doesn't intentionally like to avoid Padma. She also supports Padma's family economically. Even Padma hopes that Akhila would help her for the marriage of her children. Akhila also doesn't like to live alone but she thinks that she doesn't have her own identity. People take her as someone's relative. They don't take her as a single independent person. She tries to forget all the sufferings of her past. She always hopes that one day people will respect her as an independent woman. That doesn't happen throughout her life. She is always taken as extension of someone's identity. "Sometimes Akhila thought what she hated the most was not having an identity of her own. She was always an extension of someone else's identity. Chandra's daughter; Narayan's Akka; Priya's aunt; Murthy's sister-in-law. Akhila wished for once someone would see her as a whole being" (201). This is how a single woman is treated by the society. She has to be attached to someone's identity in order to be known.

Akhila hates mostly that she does not hold her own self identity. Her identity is always known in relation to her family members. Akhila always wished that once someone would see her as a whole being. She also hoped that one day people would accept her as an independent woman. But that happened never. She is not regarded as a whole being because she is single, an

unmarried woman. If she were a male, the society would have taken her as a whole being, a bold being and an independent hero.

The Hindu patriarchal society doesn't like to respect and give high position to the women. Only males are regarded as superior in all the aspects. Women are respected, accepted in relation to male, whether they are unmarried or married. Before marriage, a girl is always accepted as daughter, sister and after marriage; she is accepted as wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law of some males. Even their economic status, educational qualification also can't change their identity. A woman being a jobholder is also not regarded as an independent wife or daughter. The society wants them to be submissive, traditional, dutiful daughter or wife. Akhila, despite having good economic status and education, is not regarded as a respectful person. The main cause is that she is a woman.

Female Defiance

Anita Nair has used the character named Karpagam to bring awareness of women's demands and their needs for self-expression to the society. Karpagam is portrayed as a strong woman striving for self-definition in a patriarchal social organization. She is a widow but unlike other widows she wears the Kumkum and colorful clothes. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy. She is a radical woman. Her outstanding behavior can be understood from the follow lines.

I don't care what my family 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 girls wear colorful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? It had nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who make these laws

anyway? Some men who couldn't bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men. (202)

Really what Karpagam tells is true. Woman also has equal rights as a man. The males have made taboos for woman about their dress. Woman is allowed to wear colorful dress until her husband is alive. Whenever the husband dies, the wife has to be simple only wearing simple, dull and dim dresses. She is not allowed to wear red colored clothes. But a husband doesn't have to practice such rituals as his wife dies. Karpagam can be taken as a challenging character that encourages Akhila to live alone and struggle. She could be taken as a modern woman. Her defiance is outstanding when she says, " I live alone. I have for many years now. We are strong, Akhila. Whether you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first." (202). More than any other women, Karpagam and her words instill a strong desire to live a life of her choice as Akhila feels, "Karpagam are you real or are you some goddess who has come here to lead me out of this." (202). Thus Nair portrays the character of Karpagam as one who courageously breaks the larger framework of patriarchy that denies personal freedom to women.

In fact the women's psyche and their problems in Indian society are totally different from that of Western society. The lower middle class, rural women, who contribute their labor for agriculture and industrial production, are illiterate and bound by superstition. They are not even aware of the extra burden which is put on them and they suffer willingly. The middle class face a different kind of problem, their education and employment have not give them much relief and equal status. These women have to come with the burden of domestic responsibilities as well as the demands of the career, i.e. double jeopardy. The Indian feminism spans all this. No doubt the availability of the Western feminist theory should not lead us to its indiscriminate application

because cultural contexts must be considered first. This is inevitable because India has a different history, different ethos, different forms of social stratification and patriarchal domination.

Kamala Das, Anita Desai, Shashi Desphande, Shoba De, Anita Nair and a few more writers represent how Indian women writers are weaving feminism in their works. Sashi Dephande, who considers herself a hard-core feminist, defines the liberation in context of Indian Feminism in the following way:

Liberation does not mean casting of your humanity. Liberation never means doing without the family. Liberation does not mean leaving your marriage. We are human beings. Human beings are social animals and we need all these ties. My only thing about liberation is that you don't give into oppressions and cruelty. Liberation means you refuse to be oppressed, you refuse to give up your individuality, and you refuse to do things which go against your conscience. You realize the potential you have within you; you don't let other people tell you what to do. You know what you are worth. You know what your value is. You take that into account, and this is liberation. This does not mean doing away with all ties.

(24)

Sashi Despande defines liberation in relation to humanity. She says that without the support of the family, one can't get liberation. She hints that human beings are social animals and need social ties or relation. Her major focus is that liberation is such a situation where one is not in oppression and cruelty. She says that liberation means one refuses to be oppressed, he/she doesn't do those things which are against one's will and one don't like to lose one's individuality. She focuses more on self-identity. She considers that one has potential within oneself and don't want unnecessary hindrances to do one's works. One should know own value i.e. self-identity. It

suggests that all this can be done in remaining in ties not by doing away, but keeping the struggle go.

Similar case is of Akhila. Akhila, who has good education and employment but hasn't been provided with her much relief and status. She is doing double duty i.e. one of office and one of home. But she isn't getting chance to be liberated. She doesn't search liberation by cutting the ties with her family. She likes to live with them, support them and also hopes support from them. She thinks that family ties are required to survive. So after her mother's death, she doesn't live alone, but lives with Padma thinking that Padma is her sister she will support her during difficulties. She even helps Padma to rear the children. But she gets unnecessary hindrances even at her house while living with Padma. She can't live in the way she likes. She is always guided and hinted by her family. She can't realize that she is also worth, has some individual identity. As a result, she is forced to leave her family and move outside for the search for liberation, an step taken in the course of defiance of the society.

Sashi Desphande says:

I am a feminist; I am a very staunch feminist in my personal life. A woman is also born like a man with a lot of capabilities and potentials. She has every right to develop all that; she should not be oppressed just because she is a female. She has every right to live her female. She has every right to live her life, to develop her qualities, to take her decision to be independent, and to take change of her own destiny. So all these things to me are part of my being a feminist. You may want to live with a partner; it may not be a husband, you may want to live with a partner; you may want to have a child without having a marriage-all these things also are part of it. I don't deny that, but the important thing to me is that you

(women) are in charge of your own destiny, but nobody should oppress you.

Cruelty and oppression should not be there between the two genders. This is my idea of feminism. I am a feminist very much, and I strongly react against any kind of cruelty or oppression against women or any kind of denial of opportunity to women because they are women. (13)

Akhila emerges as a new woman. She feels that she is born like a man having a lot of capabilities and potentials. She doesn't like her siblings to decide for her life. She wants to live independent life and she begins to move like Desphande's view. She doesn't like to get married but live a single, happy life. She also doesn't like cruelty and oppression but her brothers and sister appear as a barrier to her freedom. Akhila, after long discussion with Padma, wants to leave her and live alone. Then Padma tells that Akhila can't live alone because she is a woman and a woman can't cope with difficulties alone.

A long discussion runs between Akhila and her sister Padma. At that moment, Akhila replies- "For heaven's sake, I don't need anyone's consent. Look at me, I am forty-five years old. And older than all of you. I will do exactly as I please and I don't give a damn care about what you or anyone else thinks" (209). But Padma insists that at least she has to ask their brothers Narayan and Narsi. Akhila asks why she should ask them. Then Padma replies- "That's what you think. They are the men of the family" (36). From these conversations, we can understand that Padma insists that her bothers are men of the family, are still the guardians of her and she must ask them before taking such great decision. But Akhila rejects all this.

Narayan and Narsi come to Padma's home and try their best to convince Akhila. Narsi says that it is improper for a woman to live alone and the society raises a lot of questions on her.

He also insists that the society may understand that the family has abandoned Akhila. Then Akhila replies-

For twenty-six years, I gave all of myself to this family. I asked for nothing in return. And now I wish to make a life of my own, does any one of you come forward and say-its time you did this Akka. You deserve to have a life of your own. Instead you worry about what it will do to your individual life. Now tell me Narayan why shouldn't I have alone?" I'm able body and mind. I can look after myself. I earn reasonably well? (206).

It shows that Akhila is emerging as a new woman in Indian scenario. Neeru Tondon, an Indian critic in her book *Feminism: A Paradigm Shift* describes the new woman in the following way:

The 'new woman' today challenges the traditional notions of 'Angel' in the house and 'sexually voracious' image. The 'new woman' is essentially a woman of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society and tries to improve it. The emerging 'new woman' is contemplative about her protest and fight against the general, accepted norms and currents. What is new and different about these women is that they are prepared to face the consequences of their choices. Their protest is not for equality only but for the right to be acknowledged as individuals capable of intelligence and feeling. (127)

Akhila is also a new woman who challenges the traditional notions of woman in patriarchal society. She has a lot of awareness and consciousness of her low position in the family and society. So she tries to improve it, she chooses to protest and fight against the accepted norms and currents. She is even ready to face the consequences of her choices. She has chosen to live alone without the hindrances from her family. Her protest is not only for equality but for the right

to be acknowledged as individual. She doesn't like to be controlled by her family, neither by her brothers nor by her sister. She wants to keep the right to make decision of her own self for her life where she can get her own identity and self-respect.

The Self and Society

This creates tension between her and her brothers. Her brothers try their hard to make her change her decision. Between the discussion Akhila says "I don't have to explain my actions to any one of you. I don't owe you anything. I hope I have made myself clear to you?" (206) when Akhila replies this, her brother's reply "You don't owe us anything. Instead we owe you our lives" (206). It shows that her brothers are now showing the real face of male chauvinism. They want to show that they owe Akhila and Akhila has to follow them and she doesn't have such right to take decision alone. Similarly, they also say that she can't cope difficulties in her life alone because she is a woman. They also add that she is older than them and requires support from them. At this situation, Akhila retorts: "I know I can. I did once before when you were children. Now I can for me, for Akhilandeswari. Nobody's daughter. Nobody's sister. Nobody's wife. Nobody's mother" (62).

Akhila has a volley of questions whose answer she tries to find from her co-passengers who have seen more life and have experienced the basic realities of living with husband, baby, home and mother-in law. Akhila's circumstances enable her to think that a woman could live by herself and that marriage is unimportant. She wonders how her co-passengers, despite their settled lives are living on margin. Most of them have a vacuum in their lives, stories to tell and have innumerable cries. Akhila is curious to know about the experiences of being married and if there was any danger in living alone.

The stories of her co-passengers generate in Akhila a desire for life, a life she wants to live on her own. She too likes her compatriots, should respect her woman feelings and stand her life afresh. Living alone in a sea-resort at Kanyakumari gives her ample time to re-evaluate and re-assess her desires. Discovering a woman within her, she decides to cast aside all that the world would say. She doesn't forbid the boy in his twenties what he tries to flirt her. What makes it more significant is that she takes his hand in her's and invites him to her room. Realizing the fact that the biddings of the body are blind to the identity of her nor is interested in his credentials. Instead, she allows his to rave and gaze over her body with the windows open and lights on. Akhila has of late understood the language of the real being lost in the grammar of becoming. The energies that she has appear to unite in a catacomb of sensations and she determines to renew the bond. She decides to end her bondage and begin the life anew. The yearning to connect the lives of communication she has swapped that symbolizes her recovery.

Most of the characters in *Ladies Coupe*, seem to find the ray of happiness only when they become aware. This awareness is created only when one looks at one's self. This witnessing of one's self can make us stress free. The awakenings in almost all the characters including Akhila, is similar to what Anjali Mishra states, "Awareness that we suffer from stress. Awareness that this stress is caused by the fact that we become the situations that take place around us. Awareness that this habit can be changed. We, actually, are not the situation or the feeling or the thought, but are only witnessing them" (53).

Akhila not only has witnessed everything but also given a serious look at her soul. Her decision to break that long silence and her desire to think of Hari suggests Anita Nair's commitment as a novelist that the understanding in life does not mean regretting lapses rather a

sort of purgation from purblindness she suffers long. *Ladies coupe*, as a whole, is a story of resurrection, the resurrection of self.

Like Akhila, Margaret, Prabha Devi and Marilokanthu are also struggling against patriarchal society. They are also in search of self identity and independence. As we read the story of Margaret Shanti, it is obvious how women are dominated by man-power. Her story demonstrates how a woman could manipulate to get her own way. Margaret's husband Ebenezer Paulraj is the worst example for male chauvinism in the novel. He is like the colonizers who are unable to see and praise the worth of the women, who are like the colonized. A vain and arrogant poseur, he has changed her into a position of submissive silence, making her to be an unremarkable, average kind of woman. As he was the principal, his subtle cruelty to children was repeated in his treatment of his wife.

Initially Margaret does not understand the deep rooted egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj as her extreme love for him that had made her blind. 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 conveys him the good news with all happiness. Not only in that, but he continues to thrust upon this supremacy over her in deciding her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing for he says, "what's the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. So can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn't suit you. Cut it off. You'll look nice with your hair into a blunt bob" (105).

Tired of subaltern position in his house, Margaret finally takes her life into her own hands. She gathers her forces with supreme will power and turns the tables on him. Having learned from his constant playing of games to get his ways, she takes her revenge by inventing

the game that would render him harmless to her, an ineffectual gourmand. She compares herself with water which can be understood from the following lines:

Among the five elements that constitute life, I classify myself as water. Water that moistens. Water that heals. Water that forgets. Water that accepts. Water that flows tirelessly. Water that also destroys. For the power to dissolve and destroy is as much a part of being water as wetness is. In the world of chemicals, water is the universal solvent. Swayed by the character of all those who take it over. But just because I'm familiar, I'm not typical. That was the mistake to be made. He dismissed me as someone of no significance. So I had no other recourse but to show him what the true nature of water is and how magnificent its powers are.

(96)

Margaret compares herself with water, one of the five elements that this world is made according to Hindu mythology. Water has a lot of qualities like moistening, healing, accepting, destroying many things in the universe. Margaret also has such ability to adjust things. As Ebe becomes more and more egoistic, domineering and hypocrite, Margaret is unconsciously compelled to teach him a lesson. She chooses flattery as the weapon to bring down Ebe's self esteem. She flatters and flatters and feeds him with fatty food since dawn till night, till fat finds its home on him, and turns him into a fat man, a quiet man and an easy man who seek for her food and sex and every way she knows. As Dr. T. Vara Lakshmi says, "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 Ebe's self-esteem. She succeeds in achieving her emotional fulfillment keeping the family ties intact though some justifications contain a modicum of sense". (69) The character of Margaret shows that the woman can vanquish a domineering man.

In patriarchal society, parents are more concerned about the boys than the girls. Nair has chosen the character of Prabha Devi to emphasize this issue. Her father was waiting to have a male child be born but she was born. But they accept her, rear her well and make arrangement of her marriage with the son of a rich merchant. Prabha Devi's husband Prabhakar is not a conservative husband but their family likes a traditional daughter-in-law. She doesn't want to define herself within a more mechanical and monotonous life of a homely wife and a mother. She is not satisfied with this life and craves for something more. Moreover she feels guilty for her viles upon her husband's friend Pramod and tries to come out of it. Prabha Devi's weakness does not escape Anita Nair, yet she displays a very respect for her as she has done with every other women. And she activizes the self-actualization by learning swimming on her own out of great desire. As T.Varalakshmi says, "she triumphs over her innate timidity and gains peak experience' of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband as well" (69).

Marikolanthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of the humble and miserable peasantry woman on whom male oppression is forced on heavily and left unquestioned. Even as a girl she is denied to be sent to the town school as her mother says, "Its not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself.... there is too much at risk." (215). To ensure her mother's fear, her childhood innocence is destroyed when Murugesan attempts physical brutality on her. When she is found pregnant, her mother and Sujata regret it as they just feel it is too late to insist Murgesan to marry her. Her mother is least bothered about her feelings but worries that no one will marry her. Even when the matter is taken to the Chettiar's son Shridha, he with reluctance says, "The girl must have led him on and now that she is pregnant she's making up a story about rape" (245). For her mother and Sujata , a woman's protection lies in her husband, as Sujata says, "But if she has a job, that will replace a husband's protection"

(246). But Marikolanthu is able to raise the question within her about so called "Husband's protection". She is sure that neither her mother nor Sujata had their husbands look out for them, but for them, "a fulfilled woman was one who was married" (246).

For Marikolanthu, nothing is more cruel 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 content and happiness to give her love for Sujata, more than her husband does. Marikolanthu never wants to tie up her life with a husband. Till she is thirty-one she lives alone and wrestles with life, making a living of her own. She neither wants to rely upon her brothers nor wants a penny from Sujata or her husband but decides to make her living of her own working as a servant maid in a house. She defines her as an independent woman. 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 having rejected him and even using him. As Indira Devi observes, "In the end she decided to measure happiness as Muthu's mother" Marikolanthu's greatness lies in her struggle for emancipation in spite of being poor and illiterate. She can be called an Indian version of Ibsen's Nora.

The metaphor of the journey is further developed into the metaphor of the destination Kanyakumari, a seaside town with the great vista of the meeting of three seas i.e. The Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. The openness of the scene is symbolized. The openness of the scene symbolizes the range of possibilities open to Akhila, the Akhila who was wrapped in her family situation in a small land-locked town in Tamil Nadu now sits gazing at an azure sky and playing with the sand. Three oceans meet and mingle at her feet, she realized with exhilaration. Her realization of her own independence is an epiphany.

The novel comes to an end by comparing Akhila with Durga, as Shakti, indicating the potential of womanhood. From an image of absence and silence to one of confrontation and assertion, Akhila has come a long way shedding the patriarchal image of women as a silence and an absence, as imperfection and incompleteness, Akhila appropriates the voice and the will that had been the provenance of men, takes an active part in life. Having discovered her true self in shared love, Akhila experiences a sense of pure sensation. The new woman in her is manifested by her body language. She exults in her new found identity and liberty. She cannot make her exuberance. This can be better understood from the following lines:

And so it was with Akhila. Elderly spinster. Older sister. Once the breadwinner of the family. Still the cash cow. 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 woman you think you know. I am the sister you have wondered about. There is more to this Akka for within me is a woman. I have discovered. (270)

Akhila comes to the state of full realization about her identity and life. Once she was the elderly spinster, older sister for her family. She used to be the breadwinner for her family. She was like a cash cow which gives milk enough to sell. She was a source of income for her family. Her family had used her too much. They only liked her to earn much money and bring home. But Akhila turns to be bold and is determined that she won't let her family use her any more. Reaching the sea-shore, she finds that there is one woman in her inner soul. She discovers that woman and wants to lead the life what that woman says. Akhila is fully grown up to a full realized woman one who decides what to do and what not to do in one's life. She is thinks to begin a new life for the first time according to her principles and desires.

Her interaction in the *Ladies Coupe* with the five women-Janaki who had a happy marriage though it was an arranged one, Margaret Shanti who had suffered from the agony of an unhappy marriage, Sheela, a teenager who had the ability to look beyond things, Prabha Devi, who after years of marriage learnt to strike a balance and Marikolanthu, the woman different from all the four women who did not succumb to the norms of the society just to gain a right place in the social order helped Akhila realize that she had given the society superfluous power of ruling her life. These women and their stories helped Akhila find the answer to her biggest question-“Can a women stay single and be happy, or does a women need a man to feel complete?”

There was a time when a women needed a man for protection but today she needs man for companionship, she needs a partner who would share her ups and downs. She is not in need of a breadwinner but in need of someone with whom she can share the bread. Thus listening to the lives of various women in the coupe, Akhila gets down at Kanyakumari as an empowered woman to rediscover her ‘self’. She decides that she has to live for her not for others .Ultimately, she breaks the chain of patriarchy which have haunted her for nearly a decade. She empowers herself and makes a call to Hari, her past lover to make a new life with him not to be her ruler but her companion.

Chapter-4

Realization of selfhood in the Feminine order

The core finding of this research is that Akhila struggles hard to gain her Self. Many times she is dominated by the patriarchy and even by her family, but she never gives her enthusiasm up. *Ladies coupe* is an ideal paradigm of women's writing in India, as it discovers entirely women's identities and their reliable relationship with the tradition, male-dominated culture and gender bigoted restrictions. Akhila does not merely observe everything but has also gives a persistent glimpse at her psyche. Finally, she calls her lover, Hari back to begin a new life. It is a gender friendly novel for women which give confidence and nerve to all women in the society.

Ladies Coupe is gendered spatially which allows women travelers to travel securely and comfortably. It is a place where male space is completely wiped away. Akhila has a stream of questions whose answers she attempts to find from her co-passengers who have seen more life and have experienced the basic realities of living with four corners-husband, baby, home and mother-in-law. Akhila's situation assists her to think that women could survive by themselves and that marriage is inconsequential. She marvels how her co-passengers, although their settled lives are existing, live on periphery.

Akhila is suddenly struck by the condition of individual life. This sets Akhila think that other women are merely patterns of consciousness of a single psyche. All these women, in one way or other, advise Akhila to go against social pressures and to discover herself. All of them are mates not only in her physical journey in the ladies compartment of the train, Ladies Coupe, but also in her spiritual and psychological journey. Akhila is inquisitive to know about the

experiences of being married and if there is any jeopardy in living alone. The stories of her co-passengers engender an inspiration for life in Akhila, a life she requires to live on her own.

Akhila, too, like her fellow travelers of life should respect her womanly feelings and start her life afresh. Living unaccompanied in a sea-resort at Kanyakumari gives her ample time to reconsider and re-examine her needs. She decides to end her burden and initiate a new life. The answer to the question whether a woman can survive alone, is yes, she can, the security provided by marriage is illusive. Women must be courageous enough and claim their own lives and possibilities. The coupe becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is not characterized by false binaries. In *Ladies Coupe*, Nair has created Akhila's character which is universal. Akhila symbolizes the Indian woman whose inner strength when evoked can be an epitome of strength and courage.

Listening to the lives of various women in the coupe Akhila gets down at Kanyakumari as an empowered woman to rediscover her 'self'. The more she wants to get of her life she had lived for other, she desires of more of her life, that is more of Hari and executed her decision to get reunited, connected him over phone. Finally, she succeeds in her defiance against patriarchy. She subverts the repressive forces of patriarchal concepts that have chained her not letting to discover her 'self'.

Akhila is undoubtedly a lucid example of the new women who choose freedom and sovereignty. Women can be strong if they are able to find the strength hidden into their depths. Akhila learns through all these experiences and realizes the shamelessness of clinging it to support organizations, be it a man, be it a woman, or institution, in the end everything leads to nothing but one form of captivity or capture or the other.

Anita Nair gives an answer to the questions whether a woman can survive alone by presenting an insight into the way of women like in India. There is an aspect of sympathy in all women. The author has touched on many controversial and sensitive subjects but all with extreme elegance and caliber. She talks about untouchability, casteism, cultural and religious bias, betrayal, abuse and disrespect of women, domination of power and money and even homosexuality. The novel remains as uplifting tale of womanhood, novel and endurance. It brings out the preferences women make for themselves and options made for them. Akhila's experiences teaches that a female can survive and get her identity and liberty not by keeping herself secluded from the male-dominated society but by co-operative and straggling with them.

Thus, in the novel, *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair has presented an increasingly common concept of patriarchy in which a woman is constrained by tradition to be dependent on men, crippled to realize her own strength. She has presented her women struggling side by side against domination of patriarchy but at the end, her women have been portrayed as intelligent questioning women who are not contented with the injustice and rebelling 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.

From an abbreviated Akhila, she has transformed into the fullness of an Akhilandeswari without sacrificing her independence as a woman, she has been able to make a life with a man. She thus represents the image of new Indian women who could enter into successful and harmonious relationship with men, anchored in mutual freedom and respect without allowing mates and glorified housekeepers. Hence it could be rightly said that Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is not only a very potent novel about the womanish discourse but also of a humanist discourse.

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