



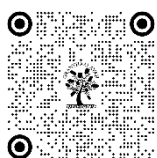


WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND THE QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPE

P. Ishwariya ¹  , Dr. B. Ajantha Parthasarathi ²  

¹ Research Scholar, Research Department of English, Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University Madurai, India

² Assistant Professor & Research Supervisor, Research Department of English Sri S. Ramasamy Naidu Memorial College Affiliated to Madurai Kamaraj University Madurai, India



Received 07 November 2022

Accepted 20 December 2022

Published 09 January 2023

Corresponding Author

P. Ishwariya, ishwariyasasi@gmail.com

DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2SE.2022.247](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v3.i2SE.2022.247)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Copyright: © 2022 The Author(s). This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

With the license CC-BY, authors retain the copyright, allowing anyone to download, reuse, re-print, modify, distribute, and/or copy their contribution. The work must be properly attributed to its author.



ABSTRACT

Anita Nair was a realistic writer who depicted people's real-life situations in her novels, and she was a unique writer with enormous proficiency in creating more fascinating novels. Anita Nair vividly conveyed the sorrows and frustrations of women in society. In a patriarchal society, the difficult challenge for a woman was to discover her identity and equip herself with the necessary skills and qualities. Anita Nair's work *Ladies Coupe* depicted six female characters and their life stories. Akhila, the protagonist of this story, travelled by train to attain independence and to discover her individuality. This novel not only dealt with subjects such as Women's Empowerment, Quest for Identity, Women's Sufferings, and so on, but it also expressed the characters' inner thoughts and mental psyche. Akhila began her journey in this story by pondering whether a woman needed a man to be happy or if she could be happy as a single woman. She took a train to Kanyakumari and had the opportunity to travel with five other women in the compartment, and she was able to come to a conclusion after hearing their stories. This Research paper examines the good characteristics of women who have overcome adversity in their lives. It also shows how women empower themselves as capable people in society and begin to find themselves and establish a strong identity in society.

Keywords: Identity, Patriarchy, Independence, Empowerment, Traditional Norms

1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper laid the groundwork for women to discover their self-identity and enhance women's empowerment in a variety of ways, including no gender bias, equality in status, educational proficiency, and the acquisition of new skills through education. Anita Nair was a fine writer with a distinctive way of expressing herself. She was a talented writer who created various works that

infused the Indian sense. She explored all important issues in her writings, including familial bonds, self-realization, patriarchal hurdles, suppression, inequality, gender bias, and philosophical principles. She presented an unpleasant issue that occurred in society. This research paper threw light on the quest for how women transformed themselves into able people who were capable of dealing with difficult situations. It tackled the subject of how women might survive in the world without a companion, or whether women needed men to fulfil their lives. Anita Nair was a multi-talented writer who could write both fiction and nonfiction. She also translated a number of works. Anita Nair began her writing career with a collection of short tales titled *Satyr of the Subway and Eleven Other Stories* (1997). Her second work, *The Better Man* (1999), was her debut novel. She then authored her third book, *Ladies Coupe*, which was her second novel. [Friedan \(2010\)](#)

2. OBJECTIVES

The Research Paper entitled Women's Empowerment and the Quest for Identity in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* analyses the novel *Ladies Coupe* and evaluates how it tried,

To bring out Women's Empowerment.

To identify the Individuality in social classes.

To eradicate Patriarchy and bring women to equal strands.

To establish self-identity and freedom.

To depict the transformation of modern women in society.

3. PERPLEXING STATEMENT

In this novel, *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair depicted the lives of six female characters from various social classes. The author depicted a woman's self-identity in society in this novel. Akhila was in pursuit of her own identity in this novel. In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Mary Wollstonecraft correctly identified the importance of self-identity (1992) [Manjula and Saburnnisa \(2016\)](#)

“I do not wish them [women] to have power over men, but over themselves”

- A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1992) Chap 4

Mary Wollstonecraft correctly stated that women do not need to control men, but they should have the power to rule themselves. She had to establish her own identity and freedom. Anita Nair emphasised the importance of self-identity in allowing women to successfully create their own lives. Akhiladeshwari was the main character in the novel *Ladies Coupe*. She was perplexed:

“Akhila leaned towards her and said, ‘As far as I am concerned, marriage is unimportant, companionship, yes, I would like that. The problem is, I wish to live by myself, but everyone tells me that a woman can't live alone. What do you think? Can a woman live by herself?’ (LC -21)

Akhila examined her own thoughts in this novel and for this, Anita Nair used the Stream of Consciousness approach. Her thoughts were flowing forward and backwards in order to bring forth Akhila's recollections in this novel. Akhila was on a mission to discover her identity and individuality, so she began pondering on her thoughts. She lost her self-identity and her life for the welfare of her family. She planned a trip from Chennai to Kanyakumari to find an answer to her question. She might encounter several women on her journey and ask them questions to find out the answer. [Mistry \(2020\)](#)

4. QUEST FOR OUTCOME

Identity Crisis, Individuality, Women's Empowerment, Quest for identity, and Women's Emancipation are some of the themes explored in this research paper. Women should empower and enrich themselves with values that will take them toward a peaceful life. [Nair \(2015\)](#)

“There is no force more powerful than a woman determined to rise”

Bosa Sebele

The woman must be determined to develop without the help of others; she must stand up for herself and her uniqueness. In this novel, Akhila was a strong woman who took up her father's responsibilities after his death and began to establish her own identity. Women should not accept the identities of others; instead, they should build their own identities in contemporary society. [Venibha \(2018\)](#)

5. DISCUSSION

Janaki was the first woman to discuss her life experience. She was the oldest couple in the compartment. Janaki married Prabhakar when she was eighteen to a man who was twenty-seven. Their marriage was entirely arranged. They married and expressed their thoughts and feelings to each other. They had a son named Siddharth, and they both took excellent care of him. Jaya was Siddharth's wife. Jaya was intensely aware of everything going on around her at first, and she also sensed Prabhakar and Janaki's concern. Siddharth's life altered drastically once he married. His attitude completely shifted, and he began to blame Janaki for spoiling the family. Prabhakar became furious when he saw Siddharth's rude behaviour. Janaki and Prabhakar could not tolerate the pain, so they decided to leave the house. Janaki had numerous roles throughout her life, including a faithful wife, a caring mother, and a good mother-in-law. Her husband was always there to protect her. She loved protecting her family. Finally, she realised she was a strong woman in all sorts of situations. [Wollstonecraft \(1996\)](#)

Sheela was the second woman to share her experience. Sheela was narrating the story from her childhood memory. Akhila told Sheela about her grandmother's death when they first met. Her grandmother was an important person in Sheela's life, and she was a role model for her. She called her grandmother as Ammumma. When Ammumma was 69 years old, she had womb cancer. But she was a very powerful woman in her own right. Ammumma loved to portray herself well by dressing appropriately and looking beautiful. She had a procedure for taking care of her clothes. Sheela went out to play with her friend Hasina after school. But Ammumma restricted her from going out and instructed her to stay at home. Ammumma remembered Celine's experience, but Sheela's mother interrupted her in the middle. Sheela was aware of what had happened. Celine was seduced by her father's friend and so she became pregnant, and their family fled the colony to find a place to live for the rest of their lives. Whenever Sheela was at her friend Hasina's house, she felt uncomfortable with her father as he touched her inappropriately. She realised Ammumma's statements were true and stopped visiting Hasina's house. When Ammumma died of cancer, her body was brought to her home. Sheela followed all of her Ammumma's beauty practices since Ammumma wished to be beautiful when she died as well. Sheela could not accept the death of her Ammumma and no one could replace Ammumma's place in her life. Anita Nair projected the

subject of child abuse in this story. In addition, She also portrayed a strong-willed woman in society. [Work Where Women \(2018\)](#)

“Love is a colourless, volatile liquid. Love ignites and burns. Love leaves no residue – neither smoke nor ash. Love is a poison masquerading as the spirit of Wine.” (LC- 104)

Margret Shanthy married Ebenezer Paulraj, a chemistry teacher. She adored him at first and appreciated him much. However, she remained dissatisfied with him in later years. He was a self-centered man who did not spend time with her. Ebenezer was a male chauvinist who began to rule Margret with sugar-coated words. He loved Margret, but he did not want her to be self-sufficient. She gave up her aspirations and wishes because of his chauvinistic attitude. She endured all of his troubles and tolerated them all because she loved him. Margret found out that she was pregnant one day and she was overjoyed. She told Ebenezer about the news as soon as she knew it. Ebenezer was upset when he knew this. He told Margret to have the baby aborted since he was determined to build his future. He saw the baby as a barrier to his future and he tried to convince Margret to accept abortion, which she did without any restrictions. She was so worried and depressed that she killed her baby in her womb. She began to dislike his attitude toward Ebenezer as well. She compared herself to water because water can flow indefinitely and can be dissolved and destroyed. Water has the capacity to create and destroy depending on how it is used. So, she compared herself to water and it is the person's responsibility to treat her good or bad. She reflected on how they treated her. She discovered Ebenezer's weakness in food. Finally, Margaret wanted to destroy Ebenezer's self-esteem. She planned to stuff him with more food and make him fat so he would have to attend hospitals for medical treatment. Through the character Margaret, Anita Nair attempted to eradicate male-dominating conventions. Through her novel, she emphasised women's emancipation.

The next character to share her story was Prabha Devi. Prabha Devi's father saw her as bad luck for his business and hence refused to accept her. Her mother, on the other hand, was delighted that there was someone who would learn her recipes and treasure her jewellery. No one in her family valued her feelings or emotions. She was sent to a convent school at the age of 15 to learn schooling as well as life lessons. Jagadeesh, a diamond trader, was her husband. Her life was good, and she frequently remarked, "How lucky am I to be me?". Jagadeesh and Prabha Devi went to New York for a business trip one day and she saw the women's behaviour there and wanted to adopt it. She soon realised that it would not suit her personality, and she also realised that each woman was unique. Finally, she decided to learn swimming. She believed that she would be able to survive both on land and in water. To discover her identity, she learned swimming without any assistance. She desired to live her life on her own terms and enjoy it. Despite having a happy life, she desired to discover her own identity.

“The sixth passenger rolled her magazine and said, ‘I’m not telling you that women are weak. Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that vein of strength in herself. It does not show itself naturally.’ (LC 209 - 210)

Marikolanthu was the last woman to reveal the story. She was a victim of man's lust and was brutally attacked when she was 19 years old. She was uneducated and belonged to a poor class and she depended on her work to live her life in Chettiar's home. Marikolanthu was so innocent and Murugesan ruined her innocence. She began working as a child to assist her mother in supporting her family. Murugesan,

a member of Chettiar's family, brutally attacked Marikolanthu, ruined her innocence and her life. Marikolanthu, as a young girl, found it difficult to accept what was happening to her. She tried to dismiss all the horrible events as bad dreams. Unfortunately, she was pregnant, and she hated her illegitimate pregnancy. She had a newborn boy, but she did not want to see his face. Marikolanthu's mother looked after him, but it was her duty to care for him after her mother died. In the end, she was sorry for hurting Muthu's sentiments and she later accepted Muthu as her son. Marikolanthu, despite facing numerous difficulties, desired to live her life independently as well as being unconcerned about what society thought of her. She had faith in herself and her uniqueness.

6. UNIQUE STANDPOINT

From the standpoint of the female psyche, this research paper revealed insights into how a woman transformed herself into a new modern woman. Feminism may not only refer to equality in all circumstances but may have varied connotations in this generation. In this research paper, feminism was stated in a new approach, with the addition of emotions and feelings from aspects of the feminine psyche. It was really vital to consider everyone equal, yet equality alone does not bring peace of mind. As a result, thoughts and feelings should be treasured and not shattered or mistreated. In prior studies, feminism represented being equal and free, but in a modern and newly redefined approach, it involved highlighting the mental mind of the woman, which was destroyed by the mental anguish caused by others. The term Psycho Feminism was defined as the mental subordination of women. This concept was applied to encourage women to develop their skills and share their talents with the rest of the world. The psychoanalytic viewpoint healed and safeguarded the mind of women through this idea. Anita Nair introduced the feminist point of view in this story by depicting the minds and traumas of the affected characters. This work was entirely based on feminism since Anita Nair willfully kept the title *Ladies Coupe* to correspond with feminist ideas. She emphasised the mental anguish experienced by women, and also how women's feelings were not prioritised throughout the novel.

7. FINDINGS

Many aspects were apparently examined in the previous research study, but some crucial aspects were concealed within this novel, *Ladies Coupe*. This research work highlighted those hidden perspectives and revealed a new dimension of femininity with reference to the new age. Because feminism does not have to be the same for all ages, it will vary depending on age and practice. This research paper focuses on women's hidden and shattered feelings and brought out their emotional values in their lives. It is more vital to comprehend emotional anguish than physical pain. The phrase Feminist Psychology referred to the emphasis on women's emotional minds and the individuality of women in society. Feminist Psychology started to grow in 1960's and its major concern was against patriarchal theories and male-oriented ideas. At this point, Akhila began to assert her individuality and independence.

8. FUTURE SCOPE

In Indian Writing in English, there is no segregation between discrimination against men and women. Indian culture is multifaceted, people gradually develop their own norms and standards, which become practice. Women writers such as

Anita Nair, Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Gita Hariharan, Arundhati Roy, Kamala Markandaya, and others support women's perspectives in various ways. These female writers act as a bridge between women and their writings, facilitating women's position to grow one level higher from their perspective. Feminism not only strives for equality but also elevates women to a higher level. Tradition plays a vital role in Indian English Literature and this novel explores more traditional practices. Many references in the novel highlight the brahmin and their cultural practices. This novel also emphasises the importance of women's emancipation because all the women in this novel are free to establish their own self-identities and become strong members of society. In this Research Paper, Feminist Theory is reinforced with Psychoanalytical perspectives since the minds of the characters are examined through Psychoanalytical lenses. This study will highlight many aspects of Feminism in reference to Psychoanalysis.

9. CONCLUSION

Anita Nair depicts various types of female characters and their transformations in her work *Ladies Coupe*. In the beginning, Akhila pondered around a question: "can a woman stay single and happy, or does a woman need a man to complete her life?" When she met five other female characters and learned their stories, she decided to meet Hari, Akhila's lover who was younger than Akhila. A woman required a companion with whom she could share her feelings and emotions. Akhila rediscovered herself after hearing the life stories of the women in the coupe. Women were limited to the constraints of tradition, relations, and other societal standards in the male chauvinistic society. Anita Nair takes a different approach in portraying women as assertive, smart, and inquisitive. Anita Nair elevates women to positions of power in society. She attempts to abolish patriarchy and makes women equal individuals.

*"The only way for a woman, as for a man,
to find herself, to know herself as a person,
is by creative work of her own"*

The Feminine Mystique

(Betty Friedan)

As Betty Friedan pointed out, women should find themselves and know about themselves. Through their creative piece of art, they might discover their individuality. When a woman discovers her identity, she can find a way to live her life. Anita Nair presented each female character's identity differently in *Ladies Coupe*. Women have the ability to shape their own identities, yet they are constrained by certain limits and customs. These constraints have an impact on women's internal psyches. All of these are impediments which stop them from developing further in their lives. If such boundaries are broken, they will be able to find their individual space and empower themselves as capable members of society.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

REFERENCES

- Friedan, B. (2010). *The Feminine Mystique*. Penguin UK.
- Manjula, S., and Saburnnisa, A. (2016). Quest for Identity : A Feministic Approach of Characters in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. *International Journal of English Language, Literature and Translation Studies (IJELR)*, 3(2), 474 - 477.
- Mistry, R. M. (2020). Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* : Women's Suffering, Emancipation and Self-Discovery. *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in Multi Languages (IJSML)*, 8(3), 41-44.
- Nair, A. (2015). *Ladies Coupe*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Venibha, P. S. J., and Jaisy, D. L. (2018). Quest for Identity and Self Discovery in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. *Journal of English Language and Literature*, 5(4), 5-7.
- Wollstonecraft, M. (1996). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. New Edition, Dover Publications Inc.
- Work Where Women (2018). *Inspirational Quotes for High Achieving Working Women*. Where Women Work.