



# ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

English Literature

## EXPLORING THE STRUGGLE FOR SELF-IDENTITY IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPE

**KEY WORDS:** Identity, Subjectivity, liberation, Patriarchy, Struggle.

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### ABSTRACT

Since identity is central to issues that feminism must address regarding agency, sociality, the body and personal identity, identity has long been a prominent topic in feminist philosophy. As Simon De Beauvoir said, "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute- she is the other," Being the other means that you are merely a thing, not a subject or an agent. In modern era women also strike for identity, liberation, subjectivity etc. Because the society has still not been able to give recognition to women. Nair is one of the most famous feminist writers in contemporary India. Her novels are the voices of women they demand for all those opportunities that have not been able to get until now. This novel is the mirror of society that tells us the real condition of women.

Indian women authors of English-language focus on women issues as a major theme in their works. Anita Nair is one of the most famous female novelists in English. She has an extensive knowledge of female psychology. In her stories, she delves into the difficulties and concerns faced by women. Her works depict quest for independence and self-identity of women. It includes the major idea of her female characters. She tries to grasp the issues and struggles faced by women. In her writings, she presents a realistic portrait of a modern woman. The main female characters in her works are always looking for purpose and significance in life. Like many other prominent authors, Nair is best known for her novels *Better Man*, *Mistress and Lessons in Forgetting*. She has also written many poetries, fiction, essays, short stories, and crime fiction. *Ladies' Coupe* attempts to describe women's desire for self-discovery. The title of the novel, *Ladies Coupe*, refers to the women's second-class reservation section. Every woman in the cabin was middle-aged. These women are sharing their stories about their lives, experience, struggle between the societal norms and self-empathy. This paper examines the theme of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*—the quest for identity and self-discovery. Nair depicts the struggle of a woman who refuses to give up on her unique identity and to go with the tide. Her literary works depict the path a woman takes from self-neglect to self-affirmation, from self-denial to self-assertion, and from self-sacrifice to self-realization. Nair, a renowned expert at portraying the suffering and annoyance of a woman, provides a realistic account of the trauma that her characters experience. She presents the character very vividly in her novels and writes about common people's lives that make her works realistic and strong. Her works are like a mirror that explicitly display women's condition in society as well as the male domination.

Identity refers to the distinct characteristics, qualities, beliefs, values, and experiences that make an individual or a group recognizable and unique. It encompasses a sense of self-awareness, affiliation, and personal continuity over time, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Identity can be multifaceted, encompassing aspects such as cultural, ethnic, gender, religious, and personal identities, shaping one understands of whom they are and how they relate to the world around them. Identity encompasses the memories, experiences, relationships, and values that create one's sense of self. Identity is a combination of your physical and behavioural traits that define who you are. In identity theory, the core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self, of the meanings and expectations associate with that role and its performance.

Six female characters uphold cultural and traditional norms.

After spending the better part of their lives as slaves, they turned to attempting to control their male companions. All characters are trying to find their place in a male-dominated society. To examine the identity problem, self-detection, oppression, and challenging circumstances faced by women, *Ladies Coupe* is a best instance. The events of the story alternate between the past, the present, and the future. It is intended for six female characters to cross paths during a train ride. The challenges, complexities, humiliation, disappointment, loneliness, betrayal, and abortion that each of these characters had experienced in their lives were introduced. Since ancient times, female identity has been viewed as a secondary status in the society. Females' priority and position is consistently neglected in a male-dominated world. Women have always found themselves in such a place in the society, which makes them integrate into the mainstream extremely challenging. The patriarchal nature of Indian society makes it dispiriting. The status of women is also influenced by the caste and class systems. For instance, there are numerous regulations that govern higher-caste women because they were formed by the male culture.

The protagonist is forty-five years old Akhilandeswari, who is single. There were only six middle-aged females in that specific section. Akhila is such a fearless woman, and she never backs down from her demands that women and men be treated equally. Therefore, she chooses to develop her own identity and escapes the patriarchal and male-dominated society. Akhila was the pillar of her family as the eldest daughter after her father's death. Akhila introduces herself to the other five characters in this manner. "I am forty-five years old, and I have always lived with my family..." [LC 20]. Behind her words, there would be a lot of meanings. It shows how she sacrifices her life for her family. She feels that to fulfil the needs and wants of her family she must sacrifice her wishes and desires. "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" [LC 20-21].

Therefore, the narrative begins with the following description of Akhila's life: "Akhila is that kind of lady who follows the rules and dreams about the rest, which is why she gathers symbols of optimism similar to how kids gather ticket stubs. For her, hope is mixed up with unfulfilled fantasies... Akhila is aware that these are only delusions brought on by wearing clear glasses. Thus, Akhila is this. Without rose-coloured glasses, without a spouse, kids, house, or family. Akhila's siblings eventually got married one after another, as time went on. However, nobody considers her wants, preferences, or wishes. Akhila feels despite not having her own identity.

She has always been a personification of another person. She hopes that someone will finally view her as a complete person. Her biggest desire was to be independent, live in her own space, do whatever she wanted, and not feel constrained or afraid of criticism. Through the character of Karpagam, Nair has raised awareness in society about the demands made by women and their need for self-expression. She is portrayed as a strong woman attempting to reach her potential in a patriarchal society. She breaks social customs and expectations because after the death of her husband, she is expected not to wear colourful clothes and Kumkum only wear white.

Prabha Devi is an experienced figure in the novel. Her background was perfect; she grew up in a wealthy family. She had everything a girl ought to have. On her eighteenth birthday, she married Jagdish, a diamond merchant. After recognising that, she forgets to be herself in the process of being a nice wife, a good daughter-in-law, and a respectable mother. She married when she was eighteen and learned to strike a balance between being what she wants to be and what she expects to be. Prabha Devi's life serves as an example of the value of travel, as she experiences a metamorphosis after visiting New York. Before recognising that, her new routines were ineffective for her. Then, she goes through brief physical and psychological changes and feels, "How lucky I am to be me!" (Nair, 2004, P-139). During childhood, a female must depend upon her father, during youth upon her husband; her husband being dead, upon her sons, if she has no sons, then upon the near relatives of her husband, in default, upon those of her father, if she had no paternal relatives, upon the sovereign, a woman must never govern herself, as she likes.

The tale of Marikolunthu describes how caste, class, and gender systems in India treat Dalit women, who are impoverished, at the bottom. In a patriarchal world, they are treated like an object by the society. Thirty-one-year-old Marikolunthu is a single mother. She suffers from two types of oppressions. Being from a low-income family, she endures physical torture, rape, and poverty. She tells the story of how her mother was employed as a chef in the Chettiar family's home, one of the wealthiest in their village. The elites oppressed her even as a young child. Her mother had to take care of the house while she went to work, and she was not allowed to receive an education. She worked at the Chettiar's home while her mother was in critical condition. Murugesan, nephew of Chettiar's, sexually assaults Marikolunthu. Marikolunthu predicament is representative of how powerful people take advantage of Dalit women and attack them without having to face any consequence. Even as he is raping her, Murugesan says to Marymount- "No one will believe you. You might think that you are our equal, but you are not. I am the Chettiar's nephew; his daughter-in-law's brother and you are only the cook's daughter. No one will dare question me." (LC 240)

Anita Nair creates the novel Ladies Coupe, incorporating many aspects of life. The characters in this book come from every caste, class, and level. Thus, the characters can convey the many phases of South India. The protagonist's life is completely unclear at the beginning of the novel. Akhila has experienced a great deal of life confusion. She is aware of the traditions, culture, and customs. She has always been afraid of the society that the male supremacists govern. Ultimately, though, she makes her own decisions and chooses to live a solitary life. She decided to stick with her name, Akhilandeswari and does not need a surname. The author attempts to convey that women and men are equal through her writing, but she never makes explicit criticism of patriarchal society. There is no justification for discrimination based on gender. She made the point that both men and women can carry out their duties. They must therefore be treated fairly. In this book, Anita Nair tries to illustrate how society tells women they are "just a woman" and views them as affluent or

impoverished. The female group is consistently viewed by society as secondary. As a result, there are many intricate connections between their emotional pain, loneliness, frustrations, etc. Akhila can relate to and empathize with other characters because of this. This paper is an attempt to draw attention to the current state of women's affairs in modern-day India and their ongoing battle to establish their self-worth.

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