

Impact Factor: 8.67

ISSN:0976-8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**16** YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS

**VOL. 16 ISSUE-2, APRIL 2025**

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**

[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **The Existential Feminism in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe***

**K. Nesapriya**

Ph.D. Research Scholar,

Department of English,

Maruthupandiyar College (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University),

Thanjavur-613403,

Tamil Nadu, India.

**&**

**Dr. K. Karthikeyan**

Assistant Professor,

Department of English,

Maruthupandiyar College (Affiliated to Bharathidasan University),

Thanjavur-613403,

Tamil Nadu, India.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15316075>

**Article History:** Submitted-31/03/2025, Revised-12/04/2025, Accepted-17/04/2025, Published-30/04/2025.

### **Abstract:**

Anita Nair reveals the shortcomings of her characters, including their lack of integrity, tolerance, submissiveness, avarice, shyness, inferiority, superiority, love, lust, and fast judgment. They transform to evolve themselves out of their flaw and ride towards either as victims or victorious. She aims at sharp characterization; which strikes with exactitude. The characters fall into four categories physically deformed, psychologically deformed, socially deviant and existential living as separate entities. *Ladies Coupe*, Anita Nair's second book, is her most spectacularly successful work. This novel reminds me of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. In this case, the New Women of *Ladies Coupe* travel to Kanyakumari in order to locate the pilgrims, who travel to Canterbury in order to gain enlightenment. *Ladies Coupe* focuses on gender-related

issues as well as the thrust of class and gender. This paper attempts to the state of weakness of women, inequality among men and women, and the need of power to fight against the oppression. This paper aims to discuss women's vulnerability, gender inequity, and the necessity of power in the battle against oppression. *Ladies Coupe* mainly deals with the struggle of a spinster, Akhila, who has oppressed by the burden of the family members.

**Keywords: Optimism, Freedom, Feminism& Individualism.**

## **Introduction**

Literature has been a mirror for ages, reflecting societal norms, values, and changing roles. It portrays not just the external surroundings but also the interior challenges, triumphs, and complexities of people. The portrayal of women in this literary tapestry is among its most intriguing themes; like their real-life counterparts, they have undergone transformational journeys throughout the author's works. These literary representations of women serve as aesthetic statements and vital windows into the profound cultural shifts they have witnessed.

With a message of optimism for their nation's future, Indian English novelists are artists and revolutionaries without compromising their artistic integrity. The ideas and energy that have been exposed cannot keep the class conflict at bay. The circumstances warrant a critical evaluation of the political and social system. They portray everyday occurrences as well as the moral and economic breakdown of middle-class households in their novels. Through their works, they convey the inner struggles they face as well as their outrage at what they witness and encounter. The novelists actively participate in society rather than being quiet observers. The person who aspires to be free from the subtleties of social institutions was both a key contributor to and the one who initially created them.

Despite their sentimentality, they convey that fighting is the only way to achieve human freedom. They write passionately and unflinchingly about the ordinary everyday lives of well-meaning but socially irresponsible people, infusing anger into those who are already class-conscious and their struggles. These novelists actively participate in society rather than being passive observers. Reading their writings gives the idea that the authors were not only evaluating the society they lived, but also preparing to enter the world they wanted to build.

While talking about the realism in Indian English fiction Meenakshi Mukherjee observes that if placing novels in the past afforded novelist opportunities for tabulation, those who dealt with the present generally attempted to write in the realistic mode. In the sphere of education alone not only had a new language become available to the Indian elite but English had also uncovered new values and opened up new modes of thought, including the ideal of individualism- this ideal was not easily reconcilable with the hierarchical and role-oriented structure of traditional Indian society. The novelists who attempted to present this complex period in fiction were themselves products of this tension. (Mukherjee 68)

Promod K. Nayar states that the women's experiences of women are not expressed by female authors; instead, such texts are frequently disregarded as having minimal or no literary worth. The goal of the feminist movement has been to restore a woman's tradition of writing in which diverse perspectives and values are illustrated, and various aesthetics are utilized, where the woman's experience is not diminished to the way men perceive it should be and, in certain instances, presenting new opportunities for society itself. (24)

Elaine Showalter remarks that women's identities seem to be intentionally exposed to various hardships and indignities, and they are not allowed to communicate

freely. Since that time, writing has become an essential means for understanding women's experiences, which cannot be entrusted only to male authors. The works of female writers from a female perspective seem more authentic, possessing a deeper understanding of their emotions. 'It is crucial to view the female literary tradition in...connection to the broader development of women's self-awareness and to how any minority group discovers its paths of self-expression with the prevailing society.' (29)

Contemporary Indian women novelists in English voice their great concern in an unambiguous way for the loss of human, traditional and moral values aimed relentless urbanization and the far-reaching Western influences. They reiterate in their novels how the spiritual lacuna and emptiness which emerged during the transitional phase have led to the disappearance of age-old cultural and moral values in traditional societies. According to John Sturat Mill, *The Subjection of Women* (1929) was the product of age-long custom and was not the proof of any inherent inferiority in them. (36)

Since independence, India has concentrated on issues like dowries, diversity, rape, women's education, and female infanticide because resolving these issues could guarantee women's equality with men. The Indian government has taken numerous measures to secure women's economic status. The Nirbhaya operation that has initiated to improve the protection and security of the girls has proven to be successful to a large extent. With this background knowledge about the position of women in Indian society, the works of Anita Nair can be better understood and analysed. She pictures the incomplete world of women in her works. Her characters are not fictitious. They are everywhere in the sphere. They are not visible to the world as the mendaciousness that is common in the sexual life of the individual, particularly artificial.

The patriarchy fails to understand the positive power of women, and women are subjugated by the male power.

Many feminist authors make women's anguish, suffering, and agony the central theme of their works. They bring out the relationship and the contradiction between South Asian Society and Western culture. Unlike the women of past days, today's women are a merry mixture of professionals, homemakers, and mothers. They have many dimensions, and shine in new tracks as short story writers, authors and chroniclers. Fascinating, the daily tasks of the household, the relationships in the families and their happiness and sadness become the background of their work.

Biologically, human beings are divided into men and women. The roles parents play in raising their family serve to emphasize it even more. Male leaders are portrayed as dominating, leading, and having a final say in all family matters. Contrary to popular belief, women are assigned to domestic duties such as cooking and childrearing. It is the image depicted down the ages. Because of this there arises exploitative and repressive society of men. Many writers write against the oppressed and subjugated society of women.

Anita Nair's portrayal of a range of life events, her openness with language, and her spontaneity in capturing the struggles of the middle class—her families in particular, and educated urbanized women in general—have earned her renown in Indian English fiction. She deliberately keeps a moderate stance between the lived experiences of Indian women and an ardent feminism which blames male hegemony. At the same time, she chronicles human relationships, the interplay of tradition and modernity, and the tensions generated by it.

Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* is a deep searching into the psyche of her women characters. This novel is a thoughtful discourse on feminism. The female protagonists endure grueling treatment from their families, and they all face harsh opposition when they try to live their lives independently and discover their inner strength and creative potential. All the female characters in *Ladies Coupe* is portrayed with different shades of psyche. Despite of being economically independent, some of her characters are in the hands of others.

*Ladies Coupe* considered as the masterpiece of Anita Nair for its craftsmanship and wide popularity among her readers. The novel's setting is the ladies compartment of the train where six women discuss their life. Akhilandeshwari, also known as Akhila, is 45 years old, unmarried, and employed at the Income Tax department. She was hired there when her father passed away when she was 19 years old. She had been taking care of her mother, two brothers, and a sister ever since. After her mother passes away, she is forced to live with her sister Padma, where she leads a quite difficult life. Her siblings have since established their own families. It is that she boards a train to Kanyakumari to escape from her confined life. They have the confidence to share their stories because they don't have to. The pluralistic responses, anxieties and concerns of women of different ages and social classes facilitate Akhila to take up a new vision of life.

While critiquing *Ladies Coupe*, C.V. Abraham argues that the author uses its central character, Akhilandeshwari, as a textual metaphor to stand for all women who are forced to be stereotyped role players as daughters, sisters, wives or mothers who live their lives subscribing to social strictures and sacrificing their desires on the altar of conjugal obligations (135). Abraham says, "The train journey turns out to be a journey from the state of passive self-sacrifice to defiant self-assertion; from ignorance to enlightenment; from thought to action" (136). The signboard in front of the ticket counter at the railway station which says: "Ladies, senior citizens

and disabled persons” – has significance in the novel. Associating women with senior citizens and disabled persons suggests the dominant theory of power structures in Indian society. Women are less powerful and therefore not equal to men but to older men and handicapped persons in terms of their inefficiencies is the idea conveyed by this.

*Ladies Coupe* immerses the readers in a place entirely for women. Akhila, the protagonist, becomes the breadwinner of her family after her father's demise. Her responsibilities make her put away her desires and aspirations to nurture her siblings. Ungratefully, they dismiss her as an ineffectual spinster. Being fed up with her life she impulsively boards on a trip to a resort that is far away from her place. She travels in a ladies' coupe with five interesting characters. Their life stories varied greatly, and they are all subject to diverse family, social, and economic influences. "I am living only for my husband, not for my unconscionably selfish son," the older woman Janaki claims. Sheela, a teenage girl, laments the passing of her grandma, a strong and powerful woman. The chemistry teacher Margaret Shanthi depicts how she took revenge on her tyrannical husband. The beautiful Prabha Devi, a wife and mother hails from a wealthy family recounts how swimming restored her liberty. She is a woman who torn between age-old traditions and individual concerns.

As other Indian women, she gradually absorbs the traditional values, even if at first she feels that they are the ropes holding her back. She does this because she understands that breaking the tradition will undoubtedly cause the family ties to break. She understands that it is wise to search for freedom without undermining her duties and errands and without losing her individuality. The poor Marikolanthu, a teenager expresses hatred towards her son who is the consequence of the seduction by her master, Murugesan. The intertwining of these stories makes



Akhila frame her life by calling Hari back in her life. When the train arrives at its destination Akhila too gets her destination mentally.

Akhila undergoes all existential frustrations in her life and life's absurdity chases her from the beginning till the end of the novel. When compared to other members in her family Akhila is gifted with good education, knowledge, job and respect however she made to stagnate with all these without being capable of moving further. She is not allowed by her family members to move to the next level in life. However Akhila at one stage in her life examines her own life and becomes authentic to what all she has chosen. She becomes responsible for the choices she makes and thereby proves her autonomy. No matter whether the person on the other side of her conversation through the phone is Hari or not, she transforms her status from 'being' to 'becoming.'

Akhila the bread winner of the family shares her life in office with her colleague and friend Katherine. Katherine has understood Akhila's self centered and realistic caliber. Akhila's strong sense of responsibility does not allow her to avoid them. Though the members of her family consider her as a hurdle she is too good natured to ignore them. She is not able to escape from her family's repression and cruel attitude towards her. She feels muffled, susceptible, and confused. She is dissatisfied and pained, and that destroys her mental peace and harmony.

Marian of Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Women* (1969) is an utter contrast to Akhila where the earlier one ought to feel consumed with passion, however, she just feels consumed to fulfill every woman's dream of marriage and new life at home with children. Badly dependant on the breadwinner of the family, the other family members, Amma, Narayanan, Narsi and Padma

ceased to think that Akhila will have her aspirations and dreams. They substituted her in the place of their father and she had to take care of the family.

This attitude of the family and the numerous responsibilities associated with that made her to be insensitive to her womanhood and alienated her from the domestic life. She inherits a deep-rooted hurt by their family's dysfunction. Akhila being single and lonely struck with a nameless fear of emptiness and vacuum in her life which triggers her to buy a ticket to an unknown place with absolute strangers. Through various dream sequences, Anita Nair illustrates Akhila's longing for a happy married life. In the dream sequence she wears a pure chiffon sari in contrast to the real in which she wears cotton sari with stiff starch. It is a symbolic representation of her longing for flexibility and fluidity rather than rigidity. Her restlessness initiates her to travel alone on the train for the first time. Although she secretly protests, Akhila sacrifices her life for the benefit of the family. She has made to live as a spinster by her family members by suppressing her emotions and feelings of femininity. They have even modified the social terms to their selfish ends, forcing her to earn for the family. It is against the Brahmin ethics.

The unknown identity of Akhila is expressed by Anita Nair's words, "Akhilandeswari mistress of the world master of none" (LC 84). Only at the age of, Akhila has come to know that she has lost her self-identity as a woman and she understands that she leads her life so far with someone's identity. Anita Nair stresses through Akhila how women should come out as individuals. She has to bear many agonies when she is ready to come out of oppression and grow as a new liberated woman. However, she is not allowed to lead her own life. She can tolerate everything in the worst situations. It is the key to her survival. She has questioned her family and wondered why no one has thought of her desires and dreams.

Akhila unexpectedly received a one-way ticket to the coastal town of Kanyakumari one day after the death of her mother. She chooses to break all of her traditional Tamil Brahmin traditions since it is the first time in her life that she has ever been alone. She uses this journey to get away from inner and external stresses. She wants to go away alone to somewhere else to get the exhilaration of doing something individually. The writer makes this journey a weapon for Akhila to get her identity as in travelling one move from unfamiliar identity to the path of restructuring an identity. The writer through the journey to Kanyakumari brings the psychological change in the mind of Akhila in an alien place that gives her the liberty and bravery to find out herself. She realizes that she too needs a family and that itself is the change in her life and she convinced herself to satisfy her ownself.

Psychological disturbance causes Akhila to grow a wall around her in order to protect herself. It is also one of the techniques to deflect hurt and pain. Hari comes as a hope in the life of Akhila, as a light in the darkness but their relationship turns futile. The reason for the failure is that she is elder to Hari by seven years. This behaviour of Akhila can be analysed by social cognitive theory where the individual performs according to the response he receives from the society after they perform. Society has framed the ethical code that a woman has to marry an older man and not a junior. It is being the unwritten but well imposed rule; she is expected by the society to avoid her marriage with a younger man. She is struck by the contemptuous looks of others while in his company. This societal pressure fills her with innate and inexpiable fear which eventually leads their separation and leaves her lonely all through her life.

Akhila, who is economically strong and independent, proves herself to be an active feminist through many incidents. She is not an easygoing woman. She takes time to think about every decision she is about to take. She stands as an example of an assertive woman who is clear

in her thoughts and actions. She always wears starched cotton saris which she strongly feels is meant for orderly persons who are good at planning and thinking ahead. However she is forced by society to undergo existential dilemmas.

The novel's title alone demonstrates feminist existentialism. Despite their sense of self-worth and the fact that they are not in any way less valuable than males, women are compelled to endure some hardships. *Ladies Coupe* is the title of the book. What does it signify? Does it serve as homage to the value of women in society, a tiny, one-of-a-kind temporary palace? Or does placing a woman in a different compartment depict her as an untouchable? Or does it portray women as cruel and helpless beings that society should protect? Whatever may be the assumptions, the literal meaning of *Ladies Coupe* is a separate compartment to provide safety and security to woman. "But why spoilt it all by clubbing women with senior citizens and handicapped persons?" (LC 6) The very sight of this board and the combination of the words in it irritates Akhila, the main protagonist of the novel. In general senior citizens and disabled persons need the help of fellow beings for they couldnot act individually as other normal people, according to Akhila, a woman is in no way inferior to a man. It is pathetic to note that the way she is portrayed shows that she is not safe out of that compartment. It is a feminist view which bears in it the existential problems too.

Akhila thinks of her parents, and a statement by her father comes to her mind. "That because we are so we suited. We are two bodies and one soul" (LC 10). For years together women are cheated by this statement and the only soul that attains self-satisfaction in marriage is the soul of a man. Akhila questions many accepted norms of our society such as marrying one's uncle without bothering about the age difference, a woman should not go alone without a chaperone and a woman should always depend on her husband for economical support etc. Many

women merely exist with tiny satisfactions that they have. For example, Akhila's mother asks her to leave her father's shirts for her to iron. Akhila knows well that he will never mind who irons his shirt.

Many women, both educated and illiterate, believe that their husbands are despotic individuals who are easily irritated and can only be placated by their total devotion. Women who lack knowledge and financial resources frequently make the decision to blindly follow their husbands without question or consideration. When Akhila was young, she used to think that if her mother had money of her own, she would have bought the things that she wished. Though her mother was good at singing, she was not interested in teaching, for her husband had insisted to her, "I want my wife to take care of my children and me" (LC 13).

Akhila, a woman with radical thoughts insisted that her mother not to look like a monster by shaving one's head and exchanging pretty madisars for a saffron sari just because she has lost her husband. When she sees her mother dressed as a bride allowing others to strip her marks of marriage, she cries for she feels this is what it meant to be a woman. Many times she feels bad for her mother who behaves as a typical traditional woman and also shouts at her brothers and sister when they try to raise their control over her. Akhila's mother has her theories and she wants Akhila to inculcate in her how a good house wife should be as per archetypal patriarchal norms. According to her, the family may have peace and harmony, when the family members consider that husband is superior to wife.

Akhila is not a woman without desires. Her wishes to release herself from her familial responsibilities and her sacrifice of her individuality and femininity for the men of her family are understood. She is astonished by her physical desires and suppresses them. She even has a dream

of having a ‘lustful encounter’ with a stranger. Because of this, she has an erotic dream. Her ‘lustful encounter’ dream with a stranger makes her feel ‘shameless creature and a brazen slut.’ Doris Thomas elucidates, “Her personal stagnation is mirrored in her dream” (47). She is forced not to break the stereotypical frame that exists in society. She desires to imagine that a woman can live alone without anyone’s support.

Through this novel, Anita Nair portrays the alienated human psyche of Akhila through self-examination. The type of alienation that Akhila experiences, is family individual alienation. It is exhibited by unfolding the relationship of Akhila and family. All through her life she feels emptiness to always boil within her which keeps on increasing daily. Her responsibility and commitment to the family fill her life with loneliness and emptiness. In her childhood she had dreams of future where she wants to play the role of a good house wife.

After the death of a husband, the life of a wife becomes cursed. When Akhila’s father die, her mother has undergoes the ritual of widowhood. Anita Nair brings out how a widow suffers in the name of rituals after the death of her husband. Akhila’s mother has dressed like a bride, and the other widows sit around her to strip the symbols of her being a married woman. Clara Nubile says, “Amma is deprived of the symbols of marriage” (LC 63). Akhila looks at this and cries “because she knew this was what it meant to be a woman. And then, she never cried again” (LC 59).

In a household, a girl child is viewed as a debt, whereas a boy child is viewed as an asset. It has been assumed that he will support and care for his parents as they age. For a guy, the parents view every expense as an investment, but for their daughters, they must spend enormous sums of money on dowries. As a result, the parents begin saving money as soon as the girl is

born since they view their daughters as a burden. Furthermore, because sons are their heirs and daughters are expected to marry and have sons who would inherit their families, they place a higher value on sons than daughters.

With the help of Akhila, Narsi, her younger brother, becomes a teacher with the pride of being the first postgraduate in the family; Narayan joins the tank factory as a machinist. She feels, "Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, Can I start feeling like a woman again?" (LC 77) The men, the so called men of the family are not ready to let her free. Narsi decides to get married to the college principal's daughter. To her surprise, no one in the family questions him for he has his elder sister Akhila who is not yet married. She insists that both Narayan and Narsi's marriages ought to take place on the same day; with a poor wish that at least now someone would talk about her marriage. But no one asks what about hers. They are working on the perfection of their lives and withdraw from their search at one particular period forcefully by death. Life and its priorities cannot be aligned systematically for what is life and the priority list of one differs from the other. What seems beautiful to one seems ugly to the other, what seems brilliant to one seems utter foolish to the other and the list goes on and on. Similarly, the evaluation about life differs from individual to individual.

Anita Nair depicts how Akhila is unable to satisfy her emotional needs and how she has forced by her mother to take up the family responsibilities. Even her mother never thinks to get her married. Her brothers after getting jobs decide to get married without thinking of Akhila. Among the twenty-four colleagues in her office, she is the only unmarried woman. The lack of her life impinges on her psyche. She realizes the fact that she has been running a purposeless life. "From the Gurukula Stage of life, she had moved directly to the Vanaprastha" (LC 86). Though she has been well educated and economically independent she has not been called an

empowered, a democratic person. The writer has skillfully presented the crucial relationship between girls and their mothers. The novel *Ladies Coupe* explains the cruelty of unjustified gender discrimination of mothers imposed on their girl-children.

The freedom of girls is often restricted by their parents. In India, the importance is given only to sons and not daughters. Akhila has known her mother's preference for her brothers and she cannot tolerate this preference. She is empathetic towards the biased treatment she meets within her family. Her family members have not accepted her existence as a human being. Akhila's mother expects Akhila to get permission from her brother when she wants to go on an office tour. When Akhila says that being their elder sister, she is matured enough to decide on her own, her mother simply replies, "You might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family" (LC 150). No one including Padma, Narsi, and Narayan understands Akhila's psyche as they have powerfully embedded in the patriarchal structure. Akhila is the victim of gender discrimination.

Everyone in the family gets settled except Akhila. No one ever talks about her marriage. Akhila's mind and body longs to have a separate companion for her. She once enjoyed the smell of hair cream, coconut oil, lifebuoy soap and tobacco. She inhales deeply all those masculine fragrances which she has not smelt since her father's death. The biological urge of sex makes Akhila; a bold and self-respected lady allows a stranger's hand to move around her hips.

Anita Nair portrays the train as a space where they can breathe and act freely rather than an ordinary place to sit and stare. Tormented by the insecure life, Akhila's heart awaits comfort in any form. The train has used as a metaphor which provides her safety and security to her painful heart. For the first time in her life, she sleeps peacefully because she thinks the train will



stay awake to take care of her while she sleeps. Throughout her life, she sacrifices all her wishes and is always restless while all others at her home sleep peacefully without worries. Poor Akhila finds comfort in the train journey.

Akhila though brilliant, educated and employed cannot take decisions of her own. For the happiness of an individual, mere employment, finance and family set up are not enough. Apart from these hungers, every individual requires the companionship which can fulfil the psychic needs. Understanding is necessary to accept that women as men have their wishes and expectations. According to Akhila too, marriage is unimportant. What she wants is not marriage but true companionship and the constant question that comes to her mind is can a woman live her life by herself.

Hari is the only one who can calm her feminine heart. He likes Hari because she became afraid of men in general shortly after the bus event. It forces her to interact closely with Hari, who has a boyish appearance. But eventually, she begins to see in a man's eyes everything a woman could ever want. Even though she is sure that it would not be a perfect match her inner thirst for living makes her to accept his love. Akhila for the first time in her life feels happy saying "He makes me happy and no one has for a long time. I had forgotten what it was to be a woman and he makes me feel like one" (LC 151).

Akhila's behaviour analysed with Kelman's social influence factor 'compliance,' where she agrees with others in a conventional family setup instead of leading life independently by dissenting her private opinion. Her innate fear about society and its convictions makes her reject her early love for Hari. Similarly in Manju Kapur's *Difficult Daughters* (1998) Virmati suffers

only because of her mother unlike Akhila in *Ladies Coupe* where she undergoes suffering due to both her mother and family.

In the social hierarchy Anita Nair's women stand little higher to the lower caste people. Even then the caste rules and laws are very hard and harsh against them in certain circumstances. If the untouchables happen to howl a stone or stick upon them, she will be excommunicated and has to make home with them. On various grounds like caste, gender and communal, they burn with turmoil and their fundamental rights have denied and they feel disabled within. Spivak's theory of subaltern draws their limitations as "Disappeared, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling, which is the displaced figuration of 'the third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernization." (61)

Simone De Beauvoir argues that the concept of 'woman,' is a male concept, a woman is always 'other' because the male is the 'seer.' "He is the subject; he is the absolute-she is the other" (231). The pattern of power structure that exists decides the supremacy and authority. The male asserts his supremacy over the female. He authenticates it through his possession and achievements which he achieves by keeping woman inside the confined walls. Even the concept of marriage has viewed in favour of male and for the female it is destination of her life. Nair pictures this feature of society in the life of female characters like Marikolunthu, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Ahkila, Anjana, Valsala, Kala, Radha, Margaret and Saradha. She also presents in most cases the typical mother teaching their daughters; how to be good wife, should suit the in-laws family, hold the reputation of the family, etceteras. The patriarchal system of society suppresses women by burying their thoughts, emotions and freedom at the submerged level.

Finally, Akhila discovers who she is and her potentiality. Akhila feels comfortable with her identity as Hari's lady-love always and fails to identify herself with anybody or with any relationship. Akhila concludes that she cannot give Hari's place to anyone. So, with hope in her heart she makes a call to Hari. The novel ends with the statement of Akhila. "This is Akhila, Akilandeswari" (LC 276). Towards novel's end, one can see Akhila as an individual with her own identity.

By analyzing all the protagonists of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, it is very clear that they all yearn to live their own lives but forced to enter the world of absurdity. In their struggle for contentment and liberation by totally detaching from the cruelties of this male-dominated society, they fall into the doubly cursed hell such as society and life as such. It is no doubt that during of all their existential struggles such as loneliness, anxiety, alienation, deceptions, rootlessness and despair they shine from the beginning to the end without losing their lives and identities. These six feminists prove who they are from their short constructed space in the society and in life. It is no doubt that the life of a vibrant feminist has the power to change many. Here, the lives of five feminists encourage Akhila to attain her.

It is where the success of all these feminists attains its peak position. The lives of these feminists and their existential dilemmas contribute to the fact that whatever can be the consequences of one's action; it is mandatory that the action must be done by the individual purposefully and voluntarily without any compulsion, because every human being has the power to decide their potential. Almost all the characters of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* stress that one's decisions may fail but one should not fail to decide. Akhila is the only character who finds it very difficult to decide on her own however she has guided by all other five feminists such as

Janaki, Prabha Devi, Sheela, Margaret Shanti and Marikolanthu. Thus, the novel focuses on the lives of these active feminists and the existential struggle they face to attain their freedom.

The feminists in this novel *Ladies Coupe* search for remedy within themselves. Though none can escape the absurdity of life, it is in the barrenness of life, these feminists sprout like elegant flowers aware of their short period of time. Amid, in life's nothingness, these feminists shine with their meaningful authenticity, thereby gaining their identity. By analyzing the different sorts of problems and their solutions, it is clear that the world of man and woman are entirely different. It is acceptable that man and woman considered as the same in biological perspective. There is some difference. However what has expected of any woman is 'Accept us with all our differences.'

## **Conclusion**

Feminist existentialism creates awareness to a woman on her strength and weakness and how she ought to overcome all those to attain authenticity over her life. It is what happens in the case of all these feminists. The novel concludes with them all achieving their authenticity over their lives, having passively accepted all that came their way in the beginning and becoming conscious of their own "self" and the outside power that represses them in the middle. The novel ends with the fact that none can escape the absurdity of life. Though the novel ends with their optimistic hopes to prove who they are, there is no specific reference to the characters' attainment of happiness towards the end. All the characters undergo fear, dread, alienation, anxiety, rootlessness and even the absurdity of life, but they never give up their thirst to live their lives as they wish. It is where feminist existentialism succeeds. Always women yearn for recognition; a lack of identity urges them to search for it.

**Works Cited:**

- Abraham, C.V. "Deconstructing Gender Roles: A Reading of Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*." *Litt Crit*, Vol. 42.82 (2016): 133-138. Print.
- Ahuja, Ram. *Indian Social System*. New Delhi: Rawat Publications, 2002. Print.
- De Beauvoir, Simon. *The Second Sex*. England: Penguin Books, 1986. Print.
- Mukherjee, Meenakshi. *Early Novels in India*. New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 2017. Print.
- Nair, Anita. *Ladies Coupe*. India: Penguin Random House India Pvt.Ltd, 2001.
- Nayar, Pramod K. *Contemporary Literary and Cultural Theory: From Culturalism to Eco-Criticism*, Noida: Dorling Kindersley (India), 2010. Print.
- Showalter, Elaine. *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1977. Print.
- Spivak, Gayathri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?" *The Post-Colonial Studies: Reader*. Eds. Bill Ashcroft, Graham Griffiths and Helen Tiffins. New York: Taylor & Francis, 2003. Print.
- William, Raymond. *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. New Delhi: Anchor Books, 1960. Print.