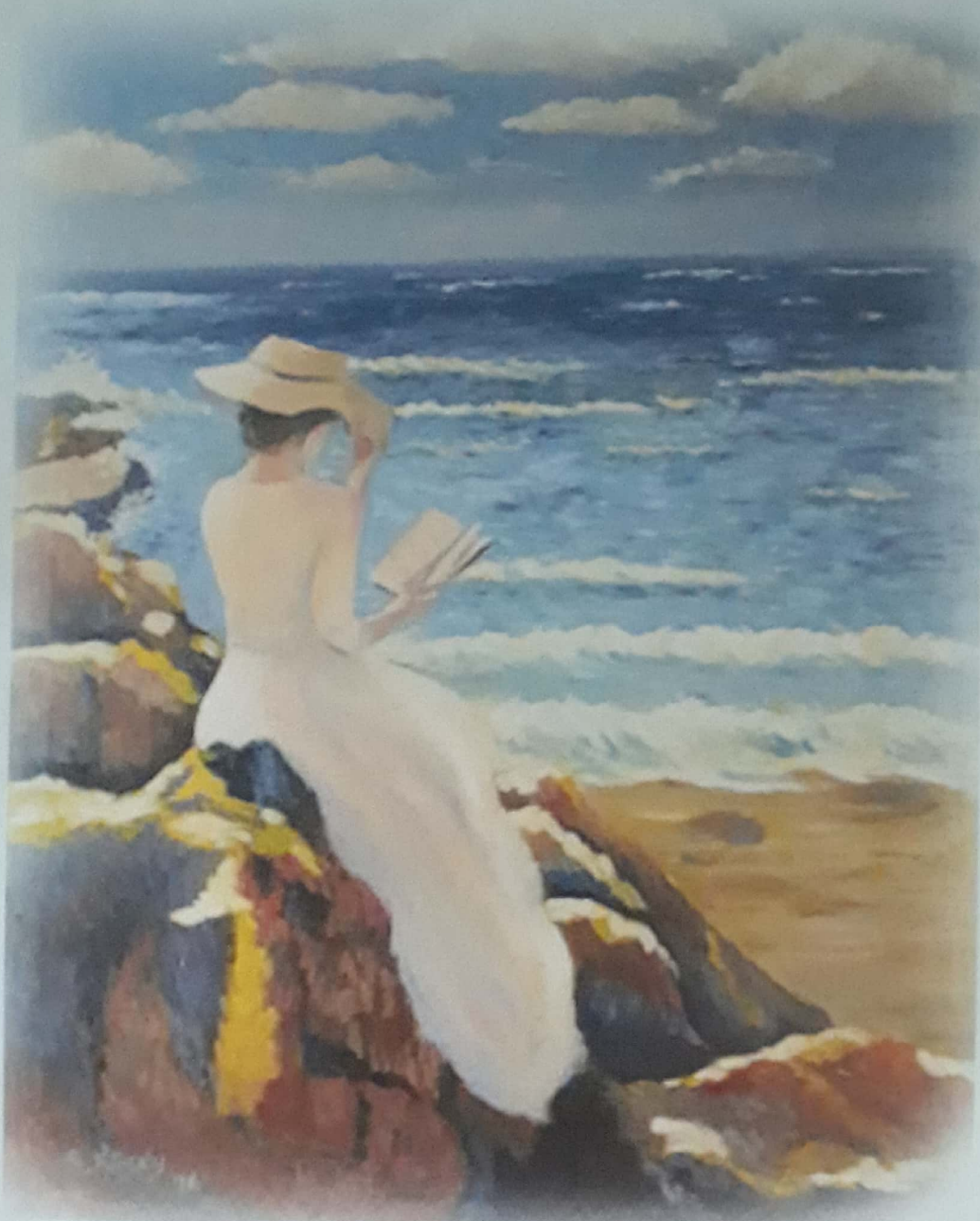


FATHOMLESS OCEAN

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- 9 A Study of Peripheral versus Internal Beauty with
Special Reference to Marge Piercy's *Barbie Doll* 37
U. Anamica
- 10 Gender Stereotypes and Fairy Tales : A Reading 42
Aleena Rosmin Abraham
- 11 Impressions of A Light-Filled Mind: Radical Hope
and Courage in Etty Hillesum's Diaries and Letters 48
Angeline Sorna
- 12 Narrative Techniques in Meira Chand's *A Different
Sky* 37
H.Rakhiba
- 13 The Conquest of the Duo – Helen Keller and her
Alma Mater 63
A. Jaseema Banu
- 14 Similitude in Shakespeare's Portia and Esther in *The
Bible* 70
J. Jaya Queenslin
- 15 Women's Real Denotation of Life: A Critical
Perspective in *Ladies Coupe* by Anita Nair 76
P. Selvarani
- 16 A Study of the Female Psyche with Reference to
Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs in Shirley
Jackson's *The Possibility of Evil* 80
A. Monika

WOMEN'S REAL DENOTATION OF LIFE: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE IN *LADIES COUPE* BY ANITA NAIR

P. SELVARANI

"The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy"

(*Ladies Coupe*, 67)

Anita Nair is a living postmodern and one of the notable Indian woman writer in English with an international reputation. Anita Nair provides perfect examples of victimized women in a patriarchal system. Marriage is still a social condition for women who seeks security and men respectability. The women in the past were completely traditional, uneducated, and confined. They were tamed to live in such atmosphere and had been accustomed to it. They were never let to know and think that there can be a different world outside the four walls of their house. They were totally cut off from such dynamic world. It is so because the men of our traditional society wanted them to be so.

Anita Nair in her novels explores woman's capacity to assert her own rights as an individual in marriage. In her novels, she has presented modern Indian women's frisk for revival of relationships that are central to women. She concerns and explores the emotional ecology of her protagonists. Anita Nair has depicted some of her protagonist as economically independent women but still they were not allowed to live their own life, even major decisions of their life have been taken by others. She has very clearly brought this atrocities in light. Women in modern India may be educated and financially independent but still they face difficulties. Anita Nair being a woman penetrates and experiments on the psychological exploration of inner mind of Indian women in Indian novels in English and brings to light their issues which are the outcome of Indian women's psychological and emotional imbalances in a male dominated society. Therefore, male hegemony and belittling of women ideology is the root cause of women's backwardness and their suffering.

Basically in all Indian writer's novel patriarchy is used as a common concept in every women's life in which they are forced by tradition and customs. Her novels portrayed the status of women in South India and how they were oppressed in the male dominated society and their desires are totally repressed in patriarchal society.

In Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*, pictures the stories of six women, who travelled together in a Ladies compartment. This novel portrays the concept of female rebelliousness against patriarchy. Mainly it explores the women's search for self-discovery and women's desire. The main characters of this novel are Akhila, Janaki, Sheela, Margaret Shanthi, Prabha Devi and Marikolundhu are all affected by patriarchy in different ways. The first and foremost character of patriarchy used here is Akhilandeswari as Akhila. She is the main protagonist in the novel. She is completely subjugated by her whole family that is, her mother Chandra, her two brothers and her sister Padma. Though she is the breadwinner and man of the family, she is squelched by them because she is single, unmarried woman. Akhila's mother is an old traditional woman with the same old traditional thought.

Unfortunately, the mother of Akhila becomes a widow. She expects her daughter to play the man of the house. Akhila continues to play different roles all through her life, sometimes a sister, sometimes an aunt but she never gets to be herself. She never was Akhila until she realizes that she has got nothing from life not even memories to look back to. Akhila decides to bring a change in her life. She wants to do something she had never done before. She buys a one way ticket to Kanyakumari to escape from the responsibilities of her family forever. On her way to Kanyakumari, Akhila meets five different women, her fellow passengers. Each with a story of her own but all of them had one thing in common and that was their search for the real definition of life.

Akhila's interaction with the five women who were distraught in their life under the cruel rule of society. Janaki who had a happy marriage life, though it was an arranged one. But later she realizes that she was tamed unknowingly for years. Margaret Shanthi though married to the love of her life suffers from the anguish of an unhappy marriage. Sheela, a

teenager had the ability to look beyond things. Prabha Devi who after years of marriage learns to strike a balance and Marikolundhu different from all the four women never surrenders to the norms of the society just to gain a right place in the social order. Even though these women have different stories, all of them are associated to one thing that is they are the victims of society. Each of their life will make us to scrutinize what kind of life women are leading in this male dominated society.

The oldest of the women among them is Janaki, who learns to love the man she married. Janaki is always protected by someone who was first protected by her father then by her brother then by her husband and after him it would be her son. Janaki thinks and believes that being a good mother and a good wife are the prime duties of a woman. It is too late to improve her life when she realizes that even a strong and independent woman can make a good wife and a good mother.

The second story is that of a fourteen year old, Sheela. She is too young compared to Janaki, but she surpasses her age in maturity. She accepts her grandmother's death, who had seen it all and done it all. Sheela is different from others that she has the ability to look beyond things and her knack of understanding what others cannot.

The third story is that of Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher married to Ebenezer Paulraj, the Principal of the school she works in. Soon after marriage Margaret finds that her husband is not a good person as she expects him to be. But, on the other hand he is insensitive, self-obsessed tyrannical ruler. He couldn't care for his wife. Ebenezer's every action gradually changes Margaret's love into hatred. In order to take revenge she formulates a conspiracy.

The fourth tale is that of Prabha Devi, who born with a silver spoon and had a perfect childhood. Demure Prabha Devi when turned eighteen, is married to a diamond merchant's son. After marriage, her life becomes a routine process of being a good wife, a good daughter-in-law and a good mother. She passes her life in the blur of insignificant days till one day a week after her fortieth birthday when she learns to strike a balance between what she wants to be and what she is expected to be.

The fifth tale is that of Marikolunthu. As a small girl she worked at the Chettiar's house to help her mother to bring up her brothers. When she grew up her innocence was destroyed by a man. This unpleasant incident changes Marikolunthu's entire life and destroys her spirit. She as now a mother to an illegitimate child. Marikolunthu had seen it all from poverty all through her life, she stood up for what she believed in. Thus listening to the lives of all the five women in the coupe, Akhila is empowered to rediscover her 'self'. She decides that she has to live for her not for others. Eventually, she cuts the rope of patriarchy which have preoccupied her for nearly a decade. She empowers herself and makes a call to her past lover to make a new life with him. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair has dealt with the themes like patriarchy, women empowerment and search for the self. Even though her characters have struggled a lot due to patriarchy, at last they empower and get rid of themselves from a web called patriarchy. Anita Nair presents the struggle of woman who emerge out of such situations, who undergo much pain and suffering. Thus in *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair traces a woman's frisking journey from self-sacrifice to self-realization, self-denial to self-assertion and self-negation to self-affirmation.

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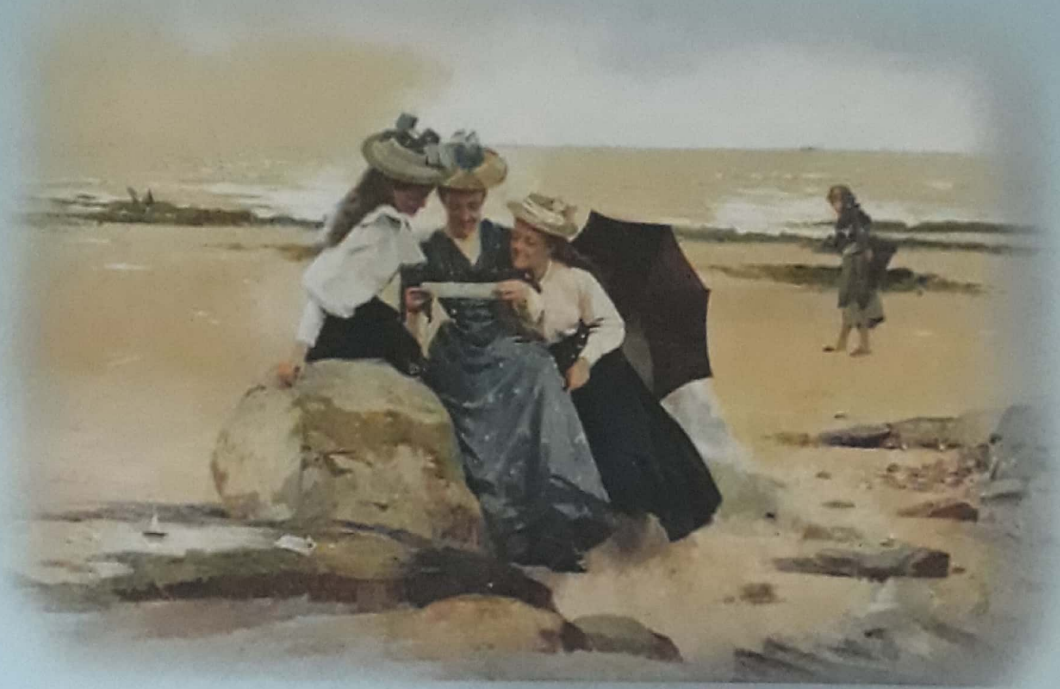
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*They were in their own sunshine,
basking in the golden glow of the Ocean*



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