



ANITA NAIR'S *LADIES COUPE*: EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S EXISTENCE

M. A. WASNIK

Assistant Professor,
S. M. B. S. Arts College,
Khamgaon, Dist. Buldhan
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Feminism and education play vital role to bring some revolutionary changes in the status of women. The ideas of fraternity, equality and liberty along with the liberal philosophy of individualism made women conscious of the fact that it is the social processes that determine her life. This contributed to an intense dislike among women to these so called tradition and custom. This is an undeniable situation of patriarchy for every woman. They are always concealed with their identity behind the curtain of customary roles. They must break the chain and live their life not behind these curtains but with the succor of freedom. They can create their own world. By breaking their silence with strident efforts, women are excelling in unconventional roles. This paper explores the women's existence in Anita Nair's novel Ladies Coupe. Existentialism, a 20th century movement has flourished after the Second World War, predominantly by Jean-Paul-Sartre under the fortitude of willing to be. Anita is a noteworthy contemporary novelist in Indian Literature. She artistically describes the journey of her female characters and creates their existence in her novel Ladies Coupe.

Key Words: *Self -discovery, determining, existentialism, choice, freedom, responsibility, woman suppression.*

INTRODUCTION

Anita Nair is considered as a bestselling author of fiction and poetry. Her recognized novel *Better Man* and *Ladies Coupe* translated into twenty languages. She has been recognized as a great soul of Indian English novel. Nair has few other books, such as *Mistress*, *Adventure of Nonu*, *Living Next Door to Alise* and *Magical Indian Myth*. *Ladies Coupé* is the greatest

M. A. WASNIK

1P a g e



novel .It was elected as one of 2002's top five books of the year and was translated into more than twenty five language around the world. This novel gave a status of a creative writer and a spark of feminist. Her novels leave different impact on different readers. Her novels move around the picture of the real life. Her characters project reality without hiding anything from her readers. Society employs many different means to circulate beliefs and ideology. Literature is one of the instruments to carry the ideas further bounded by such massages.

The word existence refers of something is the fact that it is present in the world as real thing. You can refer to someone's way of life as an existence, especially when they live under difficult conditions. Human's existence always remains remarkable issue for the study. So existentialism took birth after World War II, considered an approach.

Existentialism is a movement in philosophy and literature that focuses on individual existence, freedom, responsibility and choice. It based on view that humans define their own meaning and existence in life, and try to make rational decision despite existing in an irrational universe. It emphasizes on the question of human existence, and the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. It believes that individual is entirely free and must take responsibility for him/her. Anita Nair has very nicely, identified this concept in her novel. Akhila is a special character, who creates her own existence in *Ladies Coupé*. It deals with new woman who wants to create her own existence without following the order of social custom and gender discrimination. The novel highlights some elements of existentialism.

"There is no reality except in action .Man is nothing else than his plan; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he is therefore than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life"

Jean-Paul Sartre

The above quotation of Jean-Paul Sartre itself shows the essence of existentialism. It emerged as a movement and also gained its popularity in the years following world war second. Man's existence depends on his action rather than other things. Whoever he /she is ,only recognized by his action and choice .It means his existence comes first, and then comes the reality. An individual is free to choose according to his/her will and take responsibility of his/her decision. In other words, Existentialism is a philosophical theory / approach which emphasizes the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent determining his/her own development through acts of free will. If we analyze this definition we find that basically existentialism gives human being's strength by explaining that we are not victims of circumstances but we are what we have chosen to be. It's an assumption that individuals are



free and responsible for their own choices and actions. On the whole, an individual is a self-determining agent responsible for the authenticity of his or her.

Anita Nair's "Ladies Coupe" depicts the journey as a metaphor of existentialism. It moves round strength of the characters and their self-determinations. When we analysis deeply of the characters of *Ladies Coupe* we find that each and every character shows their choice, responsibility, freedom and desire as a promoter of existentialism in their own way. Some other issues related to women like oppression, suppression and stereotyping of women as a second sex under patriarchal social organization, oppression of women of low caste and their sexuality has focused on the novel. The Brahmin heroine, s Akhila for short: forty five and single, an income –tax clerk and a woman who has never been allowed to her own life according to her desire. She is always daughter, sister, aunt and the only provider of bread for her family after the death of her father and remains a spinster. Those multiple roles fed up. She wants to know her real existence so she decides to go on a train journey away from family and responsibilities, the journey that will ultimately make her identity as a different woman.

"Dreaming of escape and space .Hungry for life and experience .Aching to connect".p 2

The story of *Ladies Coupe* portrays six culturally diversified women "Akhila", "Sheela Vasudevan", "Prabha Devi", "Janaki Prabhakar", "Margaret Paulraj" and "Marikolanthu". The projection of these female protagonists seek struggle to create their identity and existence. Individuality, strength and independence with the succor of freedom and responsibility are main features of the novel. These females are those who break the image of traditional and ideological women and speak against conventions of patriarchy. They define the path to get honor themselves. Nair moves them from a state of passivity and absence into a state of active and presence, from the kitchen and the bedroom to the street and the world at large. These are the stories, which together make a single story, of women rediscovering their bodies. The coupe becomes a metaphor for a utopian world that is liberated from patriarchy, one that is not characterized by false binaries.

Her journey to seaside town of Kayakumari is very significant to find "Akhilandeswari" means her individuality. The journey is a symbol of travelling women's existence. Her real life was lost somewhere in the midst of duties and responsibilities. The question raised by her is that "Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?" This question lingers in her mind up to seeking her existence, whether she is complete in herself or needs of man who completes her life. She undertakes several revolutionary steps like she starts eating egg to fight against injustices related to gender, class

M. A. WASNIK

3P a g e



and religion, she indulges in emotional and physical relationship with Hari, a younger man to rediscover the pleasure of being a woman and she also step ahead to start a journey to discover her own identity and finally emerges as a skilled victor of life. She says

“I am part of ripple that will escape that will escape this city tonight.....I will not recognize. P8 At the end of her experience based journey she regains herself again when she thinks: “That as much as she desired Hari, she desires life more.” P275.

Akhila is accompanied by five other women who have their own confessions of their struggle and comeback to rediscover their existence. The chapter “Oil of Vitriol” depicts the story of Margaret Shanthi, a chemistry teacher. She takes revenge from her husband Ebenezer Paulraj, by making him a fat man to regain her identity. She is stuck with a husband who is the most vicious chemical compound of them all -concentrated sulphuric acid, oil of vitriol. She confesses, “I, Margaret Shanthi,”That water is to be weighed carefully or it will weigh carefully or it will weigh upon you! That was the first lesson I had to teach him .all these years, I was frozen in a solid state” P 96-97.Because of her husband’s dominating nature, she has to sacrifice on the professional front by not doing doctorate and by aborting her child. Her husband was against her doctorate and for their child. He said, “What’s the point in working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed so you can become a teacher”. P 105. But after a continuous struggle for many years she finally decided to take revenge by making him fat. She makes herself “Aqua Regia, Royal water capable of dissolving even gold.” It means she added her softness in the arrogance of her husband to make him what she wanted but by a trick. She says, “When you add water to sulphuric acid, it splutters at first. But soon it loses its strength it loses its bits. The trick is to know when to add it, and how much” P 134.

One of them is Marikolandu , portrays in the chapter “Sister to the Real Thing” . Her name means a plant that appears to look like lavender, but it’s not lavender. Similarly, she is also not the real, but sister of the real thing. Because she was a rape victim, she has to live her whole life as a surrogate housewife, surrogate mother and surrogate lover and a woman who is struggling just because she belongs to marginalize.

The entitled “Afloat” portrays female character, Prabha Devi. She is the daughter of a jeweler and the wife of a diamond merchant Jagdeesh. She regularly makes changes *in her* personality by changing her dressing sense and finally learns to swim. She realizes what her existence so she takes revolutionary steps to break the restricted traditional life. By gradual awakening, she leaves the traditional way of life and changes her dressing sense to gain confidence. On the way to New York when she looked at another lady she wanted to be like that woman because she felt that she is free to choose her lives.

M. A. WASNIK

4P a g e



“Such poise, such confidence, such celebration of life and beauty”. P177.

When she was trying to swim, the first time in her life she suddenly feels that now she is doing whatever she desires to do in her life for the sake of her identity and individuality. She says,” for the first time in many years, you are doing what you want and not what everyone else thinks you ought to want.” P 18

Two more characters are Janaki and Sheela that reflect existential characteristics. The entitled, “A Certain Age” is on Janaki Devi. The title shows the life of Janaki. She is an elderly woman who is loved and protected by her husband and challenged finally by her grown-up son. Here “A Certain Age” means that Janaki was always protected and loved by her husband and in the last when she turned old (means reached a certain age) she was finally challenged by her son Siddharth. He said,“You want everything done your way ,your selfish way . And if someone does not do it the you want it done, ...get them to do it.” P 36. Siddharth’s rude behavior, she feels that she is losing her identity as a mother in the eyes of Siddharth. Janaki is realized now and thought of her mother. She decides not to stay with Siddharth and goes back to her husband to maintain her existence.

Sheela projects in “Go Grandmother, Go” is the chapter about fourteen years old girl .she was very close to her grandmother. Her grandmother says” I like the sound of it, besides; it is my right to choose a name for my grandchild.” She was very influenced by the strong character of her grandmother because she guided her to respect her individuality. Her grandmother advised her: “You must not become one of those women who groom themselves to please others. The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror ,your reflection should make you feel happy” P 67-68. Her grandmother was afraid of her funeral procession because she felt that in the funeral process the way a lady is exposed to others in a much ungroomed way, will rob her grace. She said, when she returned from one of her relative’s funeral: “How could they rob her of her dignity, of her grace?

Because of her grandmother’s wish, Sheela breaks the custom and takes a bold step on her funeral and she grooms her with make-up and jewellery, the way her grandmother groomed herself when she was alive. Though Sheela’s daddy was stern with disapproval and disappointment, she didn’t care and just to maintain the true way of her grandmother’s existence she takes this step because she knew what Ammumma had taught her.

Anita Nair takes a great effort to uncover women characters in order to establish their self-identity, self-discovery and finally their existence. These steps deal with an exploration of the existentialist concept of freedom and responsibility. All the six characters on the basis of their

M. A. WASNIK

5P a g e



freedom as a human being choose the way they want to live their life. They were all in the situation where they were to prove that they can take some serious steps in order to change their life and also to show their individual identity. Akhila , protagonist begins her journey for self-discovery. She starts her journey to Kanyakumari without seeking permission from her family members. She realizes that she as an individual is free to take decisions on her own to change her life. Prior, she realizes that she has lost her own identity and is living life for others, she wants to know what is her real desire and existence so she asks question to herself that: “Did the feel of rain on her bare skin send a line of goose bumps down her spine Did she sing ? Did she dream? Did she weep for reason? P84. Other female characters also get their path of self discovery.

Anita Nair as a writer shows her existential inclinations by raising such question. She recovers the existential concepts of freedom and responsibility in all these characters by giving them freedom to come out of the world of emotional and physical trauma and to live their life which is full of happiness, to realize their own strength and to change.

REFERENCES:

- 1) Nair, Anita. *Ladies Coupe*, New York: St.Martin’s Griffin, 2004.Print.
- 2) Agalyal, K.A. and S.N. Mahalakshmi. “Resuscitation of Relationship in Anita Nair’s Ladies Coupe”. *IOSR-JHSS*. Print.
- 3) Awatade, H. K. “Anita Nair: Ladies Coupe - A Voyage of Self Discovery.” *Indian Streams Research Journal*. Vol. 2 Issue 7, Print.
- 4) Barnes, Anjali. “A Comparative Study of Shashi Deshpande’s and Anita Nair’s Feminism.” *Global Journal of HUMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE*. Vol. 11 Issue 4, Print.
- 5) B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths, H. Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*. New York: Routledge, 1989. Print.