

# Revival of Self through Self-Introspection in Ladies Coupe

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**Abstract :** This research paper projects the exploration of the female psyche in the novel, Ladies Coupe. Anita Nair is a prolific writer in Indian writing in English. Her novels generally focus the suppression of women characters in the hands of patriarchal society. I have studied this novel from the psychological perspective. I have explained that how the original self of the protagonist named Akhila buried deep in terms of societal norms and framed rules and how she revives herself back through her own effort. From the beginning of the novel she is portrayed as a martyr who sacrifices everything for the lives of others. After the death of her father she becomes the bread winner of the family. She never considers her wishes and dreams. While they talk about the marriage of her younger brother and sister she remains numb to voice out for her life. Her life remains incomplete without a husband and children of her own. She is unable to follow what her mind and heart says and seems a fragile woman. After some course of time she begins to resolve her inner struggle. After goes through self-analysis she called her lover Hari and begins her new life with him. She prefers to live for own self after considering the advices from her well-wishers. Thus her psyche gets its completeness after her long time inner struggle

**IndexTerms - Self, Fragile, Self-introspection, Resolution.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

The present paper deals with the examination of self through self-introspection and self-analysis. It explains the gradual progress of mental maturity attained by the protagonist, Akhila. Let's go through the discovering of self along with details from the novel. The novel Ladies coupe denotes the self- journey of women who shared their life experience to one another. It projects on how women get suppressed by throwing away their original self and living as other which obeys men. Here the title gets specified because the train journey in ladies coupe becomes a turning point in the novel. The protagonist of the novel Akhilandeswari begins to live for her own self. In this novel the main concept is based on exploration of female psyche. Unlike the former novel better man it projects on inner struggle and repression of women specifically. There is no concern regarding men since the title itself shows the point clearly. Female characters in the novel initially experience the pain and at certain stage they started to revolt against the dominant forces. Finally they sort out their problem and resolve it by undergoing the self- journey.

## II. REVIVAL ORIGINAL SELF

The present chapter projects the exploration of the psyche of female leading character in the novel. From the beginning the novel portrays her as a martyr who sacrifices everything for the lives of others. After the death of her father she becomes the bread winner of the family. She never considers what she wishes to do and listen her own self. While they talk about the marriage of her younger brother and sister she remains numb to voice out for her life. Her life remains incomplete without a husband and children of her own.

Akhila is that sort of a woman. She does what is expected of her. She dreams about the rest. This is why she collects epithets of hope like children collect ticket stubs. To her hope is enmeshed with unrequited desires. Blue skies, silver linings, a break in the clouds, Akhila knows these to be mere illusions caused by putting on rose- coloured spectacles and switched to metal-framed glasses that remain plain indoors and turn photo chromatic outdoors.

Even the sun ceases to shine when Akhila's glasses turn a dusky brown. So this is Akhila. Forty five years old spinster, dreaming of escape and space, Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect, Akhila was not a creature of impulse. She took time over every decision. She pondered, deliberated, slept over it and only when she had examined every single nuance and point of view did she make up her mind.

Even the saris she wore revealed this. Starched cotton saris that demand much planning and thinking ahead. Not like gauzy chiffons and ready-to-wear poly silks. Those were for people who changed their minds at least six times every morning before they settled on what to wear. Those were for the fickle and feckless. Starched saris need orderly minds an Akhila prided her on being an organized person.

When she was a teenager, Akhila remembered reading a novel about a couple who were passionately in love with each other even after many years of being married. Years later she could recall neither the name of the book nor its plot. As a child her parent's togetherness did not vex her. She was part of that enchanted circle as well. But as she grew up, their playfulness, their affection, the obvious pleasure they found in each other's presence made her feel excluded. Later it embarrassed her. But they remained completely oblivious to her mortification. And even if they sensed it, nothing would deter or diminish what was practically a life-long love affair.

When her father died, her parents had been married for almost twenty two years. Every year thereafter, on the date of their wedding days, her mother wept. She had lost more than a husband. He had been part of her life from the moment she was born. Akhila decided to go kanyakumari in order to relax herself. She came to platform which was deserted. Yet, she felt a hollowness in the pit of her stomach as though any minute the train she was to board would pull into the station and it would be time for her leave. Akhila smiled at her own foolishness.

There was long line at the far end of the counter. A long line of women mostly; Akhila walked towards the station master's office, outside on the wall, she searched the noticed board for the hit of passengers. The sight of her name reassured her. Beneath her name were five others. Sheela vasudevan, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Paul raj and Marikolanthu. The elder lady was Janaki. She begins to share her life experience with Akhila. She is a woman who has always been looked after. First there was her father and her brothers; then her husband. When her husband is gone, there will be her son, waiting to take off from where his father left off.

Janaki married Prabhakar when she was eighteen and he was twenty seven. Theirs was an arranged marriage; the horoscopes matched, the families liked each other and they were considered perfectly suited for each other. Janaki did not what to expect of marriage. All through her girlhood, marriage was a destination she was being groomed for. Her mother and aunts took great care to perfect what they called the skills of marriage such as cooking and cleaning, sewing and pickling. She was not expected to know what it really meant to be married, and neither was she curious about it. It would come to her as it had to her mother, she thought.

"he is your husband and you must accept whatever he does Janaki's aunts had whispered as they led her to the bedroom adorned with jasmine and scented with incense sticks"( *ladies coupe* 25). Men do not really change that much. They bald a little, their eyes grow dim, but they still insist on checking the door after their wives have locked up. He was no different. The beating of his heart slowed him down, sometimes it crashed in his ears, but he did not forget his place as a husband, father and provider.

She did not think he loved her any less because of her mood swings. He just understood that an understanding person always suffers. Not that it was true of him. He did not suffer. She had tried very hard to be a good wife and mother. It was only now, this certain age that had made her so well sensitive. There was a certain something that he and she shared. A tensile connection that is there between most couples who have been married a long time. She did not know how to describe it.

When they had guests, when they had family visiting, when the house was echoing with sounds and laughter and she was in the kitchen dishing up a meal, Prabhakar would hover alongside wanting to help, unwilling to leave her alone. And even if there was nothing for him to do, he would stand leaning against the kitchen counter, clinking the ice in his rum and soda and wait. Sometimes her daughter- in- law got on her nerves. But she deflected any antagonism between them with the composure she had worked hard to acquire.

“When you get to a certain age, nothing matters. You only want to cling to your serenity and leave the dreaming and storming for those with steaming blood in their veins emotions are for the young; the elderly have no use for them either she had decided a long time ago” ( *ladies coupe* 33). Janaki thought of her mother. Distraught at how her children took for granted unable to accept the senility forced upon her, so that all they had to do was humor her. She had vowed never to be like her mother, eyes streaked with tears, voice cracked with sorrow.

Janaki could not do a single thing around the house without his help. She adjusted her breathing to his inhaling the combination of moisture, toothpaste and soap that was his fragrance. He gathered her in his arms and she lay there with her head nestling on his shoulder. Friendly love. Under one blanket everything was possible, she thought as her eyes closed and his warmth slipped into her.

After listened the life experience of Janaki, Akhila felt sympathy for her ignorant beliefs and inability to come out from her comfort zone. Akhila saw herself as a serpent that had lain curled and dormant for years. She saw life as a thousand- pettalled lotus she would have to find before she knew fulfillment. She panicked.

Women like her end up being fragile. She believed that a woman’s duty was to get married, to be a good wife and mother. She believed in that tired old cliché that a home was a woman’s kingdom. She worked very hard to preserve her. And then suddenly one day it did not matter anymore. Her home ceased to interest her. None of beliefs she had built her life around had any meaning. If she ever became alone, she would manage perfectly. She was quite confident about that.

She feels comfortable with her husband. A friendly love with each other made their life beautiful. In the case of Janaki she could not come out from her comfort zone. She confined herself within the narrow and domestical life. Akhila saw herself as a serpent that had lain curled and dormant for years. She saw life as a thousand pettalled lotus she would have to find before she knew fulfillment. She panicked. How and where was she to begin the search? She rested her forehead on the peeling brownish- red window bars. For the rest of her life, the smell of orange peel and rest would be for her the odour of panic.

A sloppily drawn kolam suggests that the woman of the house is careless, indifferent and incapable. And an elaborately drawn one indicates self-absorption, a lavish hand and an inability to put others needs before hers. Akhila’s mother did, the kolam in the pooja room herself. And for that she used fine rice flour and the designs came out of the scrap book of her memories. Akhila hated it all kolams ; the out and inner ones. She hated this preparation, this waiting and this not knowing what her real life would be like.

Akhila’s father died due to an accident. After his death she has the responsible to bring her family. She met a young girl named Sheela. She seems the resemblance of Akhila. Akhila’s brother Narayan joined the tank factory as a machinist. Narsi became the first graduate in the family and then the first post graduate. He found a teaching job. Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen. Now that the boys are men, she thought to start feeling like a woman.

Narsi decided and he wanted to get married. She was the college principal’s daughter and a Brahman. No one could fault his choice and there was nothing anyone could say. Akhila waited for her mother or Narayan to say something. To broach the subject of Akhila’s marriage. When they did not Akhila swallowed the hurt she felt and let the anger that grew in her flare. She insisted that a suitable bride for Narayan be found.

She repressed and buried her wishes, dreams and emotions deep into her heart. She is unable to follow what her mind and heart says and seems a fragile woman. After some course of time she begins to resolve her inner struggle. She decides to live for her own self. After go through self-analysis she called her lover Hari and begins her new life with him. She prefers to live for own self after considering the advices from her wee wishers. Thus her psyche gets its completeness after her long time inner struggle. The novel ends with a resolution of her psyche.

Nair portrays the psyche of the women characters from various backgrounds. There are six women characters in the train who shared their life experience with the protagonist, Akhila. These women characters resemble the typical house wife from south India. Voices of these women raised freely in the ladies compartment. It is in India women get confined themselves with the frame of familial bonding and societal rituals.

Women are expected to live according to the wishes of male. Man decides and shapes the life of every woman. Suppression in various forms displayed through the six characters in the novel. Each character explains the form of depression emotionally. Let's examine the psyche of the six characters elaborately. First one is Janaki, who is an elder among the six. To her, women will be secure and happy when they are with men. She vehemently believes that women are always looks after the father, husband and son. Her belief itself made her feeble both physically and mentally.

The novel is about a train journey taken by the chief protagonist, Akhila to search within her for strength, freedom and answer to many questions that have haunted her throughout her life. The book starts with a description of a busy station, as Akhila embarks on a new phase of her life. What she is leaving behind is years of nothingness. After a rather lonely childhood as responsible Akka to three siblings, she has done the mantle of breadwinner after her father dies. She spends her youth bringing up her siblings selflessly.

For fifteen years her life revolves around work and commuting to and from work. One day she meets a man in the train in which she usually go for work and fell in love. But Hari is younger than her. She grapples with centuries of conditioning, loses, and fails to grab the opportunity to make a life of her own. She gives him up for the ungrateful family. Life continues on the same track until she meets an old childhood friend who though a widow is fresh energized compared with the dull, Akhila. She is the catalyst, the drop of acid on the water of Akhila's life and gives her the strength to leave the home she has set up with her spoilt, parasitic sister.

Having made the decision to leave, Akhila's on a roll. She packs her bags, buys a train ticket to kanyakumari which turns her drastically. Upon reaching kanyakumari she has a one night stand with a young man and then calls up her long-lost lover Hari, who like all princes in all good fairytales has been waiting by the phone. The women in Nair's novel are silent in their male-dominated homes but get a chance to communicate in the special female space of the ladies coupe. Feminine insights are exchanged in this rarely encountered, seldom savored enclosed space reserved for women. She seeks guidance and perspective from the experience of the fellow passengers. The women's narratives reinforce the validity of her dreams and she begins to dare to hope to realize them.

In the Ladies compartment she meets five other women and during the course of the journey she comes to know about their lives, struggles and their answers to questions of identity and happiness. The form the novel takes is such that it can easily be dissected into six parts. It is like six short stories merging into one through the main character and the train journey. The train journey becomes symbol for an introspective journey within each character. The individual journey into these six lives gives the picture of every woman in household life. The passengers had shed all their inhibitions and talked freely as they knew that these words would never be repeated to harmful effect as these women would probably never meet again.

. Akhila begins the conversation after the preliminary introductions are over and the train is mechanically chugging ahead. Akhila is single and forty five years old. She has never been away from the family for a single day .This is the first journey she is undertaking alone, hoping to meet other women who would help resolve a problem she has been tackling that is can women stand alone?. As the five other women attempt to answer her question she goes deep into their lives. The good work Karpagam begins is continued with the sympathetic intervention of the passengers in the coupe. The decision to go on a journey is Akhila's celebration of her newly achieved freedom when she moves into her own flat.

As a child, Akhila has watched her father lionized by her mother while she and other children were marginalized. His favorite foods were made and offered first to him. It was only after he had eaten that the

children were allowed to taste them. After his death, when she, as the eldest child, takes her father's place as the breadwinner in the family. She does not get the same sort of importance. She might have got equal pay for equal work but she certainly does not receive equal respect even though the family survives only because Akhila brings home a decent pay pocket.

In comparison Nair shows us a parallel situation in a neighbor's family. When the man of the house dies, the widow is forced to put her eldest daughter on the street as a prostitute. The detail that both families are Brahmins seems deliberately to have been included to underline the similarity of their situation. As such Akhila's great contribution to the signified survival of her family is certainly not appreciated by its member and they never repay her in any way.

Akhila is their savior but the act of their rescue implies a sacrifice on her part. She is a silent worker, entirely behind the scenes, while all the younger children get their moment's center stage. Her brothers ask for and they get what they want – education, marriage and a life of their own. Akhila is left behind silently hoping they would consider her aspirations and desires too, at least once theirs have been satisfied. But they do not. She has become a useful instrument, a faceless provider. Even her own mother fails to make the life of her daughter. Akhila lives not by her own desires but according to the expectations she senses. She behaves in a self-effacing, unassuming manner that is geared to attract the least attention ensure a near absence.

In the ladies compartment Akhila meets six women from different social backgrounds. Each of these characters narrates the story of her own life on the way. In the coupe first person to narrate the trajectory of her wedded life was Janaki. She had got married when she was eighteen and has had a happily comfortable long married life. Her husband is caring and she has a son and a daughter in law. The only time she had felt some stirring of revolt was when she saw that her husband wanted to control everybody even their grown up son.

When her son made face her husband got anger and ready to leave the home. Then she had discovered herself and knew that in accommodation lay her true happiness. When her daughter in law said she does not do anything alone and she is weak. The word freak affects her psyche hardly and started to think for her. Her spiritual crisis was short lived and she changed to adapt to being the well looked after fragile creature forever.

Sheela is younger than the co passengers. She is a sensitive fourteen year old. She is blessed with an intense insight. She sees the family around her and the relationship between her grandfather, her mother and her brother and sister. Sheela understands the dynamics of grandma coming to her daughter for treatment. Grandma suggested the fact that a woman has to be physically appealing even though she is old. She put make up and sleeps at night thinking that if she died in sleep too she wished to look pleasantly.

Sheela had no memories of cuddling up in her grandmother's lap or of going to sleep in the crook of her arm. Though her mother insisted that when Sheela was a baby, her grandmother carried her everywhere. Sheela called her Ammamma rather than Ammama. Her grandmother preferred it so, for she hated any kind of reminders that she was getting old. Ammamma was ambiguous whereas Ammama meant only grandmother. The logic eluded everyone else but Sheela knew that replacing the vowel made all the difference to her grandmother.

Then came the day before Ammamma was to be admitted to the hospital. Ammamma could not stop eating. It began right after breakfast with a basket of jade green grapes. She ate them one by one, spitting the pips into the palm of her hand. When they were nearly over, she went onto the balcony and hailed a fruit vendor on the road. Ammamma was a great one for manifestations of femininity. She appraised carefully every new woman she saw and most of them were found wanting.

Nevertheless, this was Ammamma's abandoned body and Sheela knew how much she would have hated to see herself as she was now. Sheela fanned the creature's face spooned water into its mouth and spoke to it. There was no time to clean her up. She had always wanted to die in her own bed and they had a long drive ahead before they reached home. Her home. Through a haze of pain and humiliation, Sheela

watched the brothers and sisters get into the van and huddle around their mother's dying body. Her father stood by Sheela's side, stern with disapproval and disappointed. She did not care. She knew Ammamma would have been pleased.

While she was admitted in the hospital those days brought tension in the family. Her parents are stressed and irritable. The flow of guests is tiring. Sheela feels the artificiality of the process. She understands the importance of the role of mother in the life of a girl. Akila got the resemblance of herself with Sheela. When her father died Akhila was sitting at the corner of the room with depression like Sheela clings her bag and sit in the train.

Next passenger is Prabha Devi. She gets married a business man from orthodox Brahmin family and went abroad along with him. When she lives in London she is easily attracted by the westernization. She begins to dress, behave and speak like westerners. She changes and becomes aware of her physical appearance. She spends her time in reading magazines and going to the parlor. She shocks her husband by suggesting him to use a condom and she does not want to become pregnant just then.

She is aware of her sexuality and sensuality and feels proud when appreciative eyes follow her. It is this pride that makes her consciously lure Pramod, but when Pramod comes home thinking her to be "one of those women", she is jolted out of her artificial world. She changes completely. She forgets her beauty and charm. She wished to learn swimming and it seems as an act of emancipation for her. She tried and gets succeeded at last.

The life experience of Prabha Devi gives confident to Akhila. When she thought she is too late to find a life of her own, Prabha Devi story encourage her that age is not an obstacle to change the life. Akila gets clear that life is always made possible. Prabha Devi's swimming adventure underlines the realization that it is never too late to embark upon a new experience. She is able to create a life of her own after years of a vacuous life spent in merely waiting for her husband.

Margaret Shanthi is another passenger in the coupe and took equal part in the turning point of Akhila. She is an MSc chemistry gold medalist who married a prestigious school principal, Ebenezer. She loved her husband at first but after he asked her to abort the child she starts to hate him. She often describes the people with chemical components to characterize them. At last she made her husband fat and dull by cooking him oily dishes. She, who had always been controlled by him, now had him completely in her hands.

In the case of Margaret Shanthi, she married a school principal. When she tried to talk to her mother about the unhappiness that swelled her flash, shadowed her thoughts and tied her tongue. "Every day won't be the same when you have been married to a man for years. There will be bad days and there will be good days. The trick is to remember the good days. And like I have said many times before, it is a woman's responsibility to keep the marriage happy." (*ladies coupe* 112).

Many have so many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of a marriage oiled. "Ebenser is a busy man. The principal of such a large and prestigious school. You must understand this and behave accordingly. Not greet him with your glum silences and bitter words when he returns home after a day's work. Don't I have a right to have any expectations of him? Don't I work as hard as she does and more because I run the house as well? Why do you think he is busy and I have all the time in the world? Shouldn't you as my mother be on my side? Shouldn't you listen to my point of view? What happened to this thing called unconditionally love that parents are supposed to feel for their children?" (*Ladies coupe* 112)

Shanthi made her husband fat man and quiet man, an easy man. A man who no longer needed the coterie or defaced books. A man whose fondness for eating blunted his razor edge. "since I was the one to appease his appetite, he sought me more and more. I tantalized his appetite he sought me more and more. I tantalized his appetite for food and occasionally for sex, in every which way I knew. He needs me like he had never before. And Ebe became a man I could live with once again". (*Ladies coupe* 134)

For the second time, she became pregnant and her baby was born. A girl. Then it became imperative that she keeps Ebe from reverting to his earlier self. For if he did, she could not even begin to think of the evils that would be visited upon us. She had her little girl to think of. While Ebe remained fat, there were no adrenaline surges; no power struggles. All was quiet and calm and watered down in their lives. Shanthi had control over her life.

This novel portrays the repressed female psyche in the confined domestic life. The protagonist, Akhila who is thirty five and working as a clerk in income tax office. Death of her father changed her life totally worse. Being an elder girl of the family her mother or siblings does not care and think of her own life. They just expect her to be a breadwinner of the family. They never worried that she too has flesh and feelings.

Akhila gets tired of her routine life and wants to free from the clutches of her family. One day she begins her journey towards kanyakumari hoping to find a new life there. For the first time in her life she starts to think about her. Now she is new Akhila who gets rebirth through her self-introspection. Instead of thinking about others and living others she remakes her life at the end of the novel. In the case of Shanthi she knew to change her life by following her own heart. She followed her heart and did what seemed good for her.

Ebe became a man she could live with again. She got a daughter and life became better. Every year she brought Ebe to a health clinic for checkup. Margaret after suffering silently for years found a unique way of getting back at society, her parent's attitude and most of all at her husband. Margaret's repression can be called one of sexual stereotyping. Margaret's story demonstrates how a woman can strategize to get her own way.

Marikolanthu's story is the saddest of all as it tells the oldest tale of all, woman as sex object. She is a daughter of cook and continues the same after the death of her mother. Since she belongs to poor family she is spoiled by Chettiar's relative and betrayed by the daughter in law of Chettiar whom she loved most. Marikolanthu has suffered rape and it mares her life completely. As a child a victim of social and economic repression, she suffers. She looks after her house, later she is employed to look after Sujata akka's son. She adores the child and showers him with love but hates her own child, the boy Muthu who is born after many attempts at abortion. He is the result of her rape by Murugesan.

Even though her rapist is known he is not punished life-long. She also ends up a helper like her mother at the Chettiar household, after a brief stay at Vellore with two lady doctors. They had promised her nursing training but after the rape episode they feel she has no compassion and so cannot become a nurse.

The turning point in her life comes when she sees the dead body of Murugesan burning at the pyre and she sees Muthu left to tend to the pyre. She is shocked at the realization that she had reduced her son to a chandala for no fault of his. All the hatred she had felt all her life went up in the flames. She felt guilt and love for her child. She decided to look after him and make up to him for all she had lost.

Marikolanthu suffers extreme repression both social, familial and financial. It is ultimately love that brings her on the right track where she will find happiness and fulfillment. Her struggle has been one of hate for herself and accommodating with humiliating relationships thereafter. Her resolve to bring up her child shows her forming in to a new character. Among those six characters the repression came in various dimensions of familial, social, sexual and financial in their life.

The narratives of Akhila's co-passengers in the coupe fairly tumble out of them, revealing the need of each woman to speak to a sympathetic listener. Each woman has been cocooned in her own silence and longs to be heard. Marriage proves to be another trap and woman feels like a caged animal. It obstructs her growth as an individual.

The other women characters Janaki, Margaret Shanthi and Prabha Devi in ladies coupe, are restricted only their roles as wives and mothers. Their role is limited to reproduction regardless of their own desires and needs. Marriage confines these women within the bond of family and makes them

submissive. The female body becomes the site of violence in the case of the rape of Marikolanthu. She is different from the other women characters because her experiences are far more painful. Lives of those six women made Akhila to be strengthened in her new decision.

Akhila looks back her life. Though she is the eldest of the family and financially independent she is still expected to ask her brothers permission for everything. Obedience is a major attribute of the ideal woman, and her life is restricted. It consists of the office and home, nothing more. She becomes the creature of routine, catching the same train every day, wearing a starched cotton sari each day and minding her own business. In the minds of all members of family, Akhila had ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster.

At certain stage of her life she realizes that life has slipped by her all sixteen years as she juggled with her career and family. In fact she is the only unmarried woman working in her office. The deprivations of life impinge on her life. Marriage, motherhood and child rearing she recognizes hold out infinite possibilities. It gives the reason to live, she thinks. She becomes aware of the fact she has been living life without dreams.

When her mother said about the meaning of kolam and being sincere in drawing that Akhila did not take it as a big issue. It seems senseless to her. She believed that kolam cannot determine anything in her life. Her mother often advised Akhila that kolam is the image of inner mind and memory. "She hated this preparation, this waiting and this not knowing what her real life would be like" (*Ladies coupe* 51). Though she is the eldest of the family her mother did not arrange for her marriage. She kept and treats Akhila as a bread winner of the family.

Akhila thought that when her brother got maturity he will take responsible of the family. She was waiting to keep down the burden of the family from her shoulder. But after her brother got mature and job of his own he did not do as Akhila thought. He thought and planned for his own life. He was not ready to take responsible over the family. "Narsi became the first graduate in the family and then, the first postgraduate. He found a teaching job. Akhila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen: dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?" (*Ladies coupe* 77).

Akhila's yearnings for tenderness, touch and erotic fulfillment are never verbalized. They exist only in her dreams and her unexpressed sub consciousness. She has expressed her physical desires always and so sees an erotic dream and wakes up in a sweat. In her dream, she has the guts to defy her parents and continue on entirely physically passionate love affair while they watch with horror and disgust but, in reality she has no such courage. The bus incident when she let an unknown male hand across her in the crowded bus shows how starved she was of the physical contact that is a natural phase through which every woman passes. She was not a diehard spinster it was her family that had branded her so.

One day she meets a man on a train and falls in love. The passion in her catches fire when she meets Hari. She now experiences the flow of life, as she yields herself to the finger tinkering of Hari. He possesses a special sensitivity to fan the dying embers of love's flame. He adores her and wants to get married to her. In spite of finding mutuality and happiness in this love, Akhila decides to give it up all.

She refuses him because he is younger than her. She desires him but thinking of what society would say, afraid to break the stereotypical frame in which she has been enclosed. She lets the relationship die away. She is sure that people will find fault and make fun of her and make Hari unhappy with his choice. Utterly lacking all confidence in her, Akhila leaves Hari rather than face, confront and answer the predictable verdict of the male gaze.

For five years he keeps sending her New Year cards to which she does not reply. She returns her uneventful life. She grapples with centuries of conditioning, loses and fails to grab the opportunity to make a life of her own. She gives him up for her ungrateful family. Akhila's life is governed by her brothers. She is advised to take any decision, only after consulting with her brothers. She lives with her mother and after her death; though she wants to live alone she is forced by her brothers and sister to live with Padma.

In fact, Padma lives with her and continues her parasitic behavior and her family sponges off her. But she continues to tolerate the invasion of her space and privacy by Padma and her family. Akhila lives not by her own desires but according to the expectations she senses. She has become a useful instrument, a faceless provider for her family and a complete product of the society shaped by the male gaze.

After discussing with those women Akhila started to think what about her own self and her role in her own life. She remembered what Margaret Shanthi said her about life. Margaret Shanthi advised her to stop worrying of what world thinks and start to think for her. “but you will discover that once you stop worrying what the world will think of you, your life will become that much easier to live” (*ladies coupe* 136). Akhila also learned the role of instincts in one’s life from the case of Sheela. Akhila makes her destiny and got highly influenced from lecture of her co-passengers.

While Akhila chose Hari as life partner she was not constant in her choice. She always felt someone watching her. “Every time I look at someone watching us, I can see the question in their minds: what is he doing with an older woman?” (*Ladies coupe* 153). The pricking sense made her to give up him at last. Now Akhila has no worry about the society.

She is clear and strong in her decision. “My life is going to change forever. My life will never be the same again. Akhila chanted this to herself as if it were a Devi mantra. To safeguard. To protect. To bless. To renew.” (*Ladies coupe* 158). “There is more to this Akka. For within me is a woman I have discovered” (*ladies coupe* 270) Akhila came to resort at kanya kumari and wish to continue her life with Hari. She called his number thinking whether he got married or not. Then Hari called her back. The novel concludes with open ending. Finally Akhila came out of her shell through letting her mind to be free and to get completeness.

### III. CONCLUSION

Finally Akhila tried and get succeed to discover herself. She got the mental maturity when she analyzed her life. The solution for her problem lied within her. While she attempts to discover herself she took effort of finding herself and her position in her life. Thus the chapter presents the self-discovery of the protagonist, Akhila.

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