

Chapter 3

"Being Oneself and Pleasing Oneself": Realising the Feminine Self

Feminist movements have gained equal opportunity and dignity for women, and feminist groups generally concentrate on women's empowerment, individual advancement and self-realisation. The works designed by present-day women authors hold the view that people share equal positions and places in society and point out women's improvement, recognition of their status, and their aspect as autonomous human beings in society. In her book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan states that " for women, as for men, the need for self-realisation, independence, individuality and self-actualisation is as important as the sexual need with as serious consequences when it is thwarted " (35). This chapter deals with writers' treatment of self and the identity of female characters. The idea of self-realisation and asserting self in a postfeminist context is discussed here. The authors portray females as someone capable of affirming their uniqueness by achieving an improved sense of determining their prospects than sufferers of undesired life conditions. These writers seek to bring out disputes encountered by a woman as an individual at home and in society.

Marriage is a significant social establishment in Indian culture which affords security to the couple, especially women. Whether such a traditional concept of marriage could equip a person with conditions decisive for the individual's advancement is still a matter of much debate. Marriage in such a social set-up is detrimental to a human being's progress and realise a person's true personality. In Indian English literature, the question of identity develops into a crucial issue. In a country like India, for ages, a woman's plight is to play the role of a daughter, a spouse, and a parent. She cannot focus on a separate identity as a human being

because she has to play various roles. At present, privileged women, with their learning and material benefits, have the power to express their voice, their desire to be liberated and have a space for the expansion of identity. The idea of the feminine self has always been a debated subject. Historically and traditionally, a woman's 'self' is related to confirming the private domestic circle. It is easy to neutralise her position as a virtuous and supportive wife, a vulnerable sexual partner, and an empathetic and nurturing mother in a typical patriarchal setting. The concept of womanhood has been correlated with attributes, behaviours, and roles associated with women. It is absolutely a social construct rather than a biological or the influence of natural, cultural, and social factors. The present study focuses on female figures who realise their inner selves through traditionally acknowledged feminine roles.

Contemporary Indian Women Writers are primarily interested in individual variations and diverse issues that Indian women essentially confront. Their works centre on women personalities who are reluctant to compromise their aspirations and perspectives for familial bonds and social commitments. Those women characters possess an inner urge to obtain their liberties as independent individuals and discard what constrains them from pursuing their objectives. Discarding conventional aspects does not mean ceasing to be feminine but giving preference to feminine qualities and features as they advance in realising their goals. They aim to uphold themselves and identify a space of their own without rejecting traditional feminine ideals. This chapter analyses the female figures of the select texts with the central assumption of postfeminist sensibility 'being oneself' and "pleasing oneself" (155), as Rosalind Gill identifies. The female characters of the selected texts hold back their life; satisfying themselves by realising their feminine self through different life encounters is the study's primary concern.

Ancient Promises, a semi-autobiographical novel by Jaishree Misra, is the story of Janaki, a Malayalee girl from Delhi who is married to a typical Kerala household. She feels miserable with the patriarchal family system existing there. She encounters several problems in her life. She was in love with a north Indian boy, and as her parents discovered her affair, they hastily arranged a marriage with a boy from a wealthy business family in Kerala. Later her marriage proved to be miserable with an uncaring husband, dominating mother-in-law and other relatives. Her life became tragic as she became the mother of a child with special needs. She realises that no one, including her husband, will not help her raise a child with special needs. She develops a special bond with her child that, as a mother, only she can make her daughter better. She aspires to get a scholarship from a foreign university to continue her studies. She successfully pursues her education; meanwhile, she meets her old lover Arjun, and he offers her a happy and better life. Janaki suffering from her hopeless marriage is forced to accept a life with Arjun. Her experiences as a mother become a means to realise her inner self. She identifies the role of a redeemer to her daughter Riya as she devises her ways to make her daughter better from her disabilities. There are several instances in the story through which Janaki recognises her inner spirit, and through that life experience, she attains true emancipation.

The primary focus of the novel revolves around the happenings between two sentences "my marriage ended today" (3) and "tomorrow, the next chapter would begin" (305). The narrative in the first person opens with the separation of Janaki from her husband. Janaki's predicament about her past and future sounds like "what would you have done if someone had offered you a temporary period of happiness? Would you grab the chance with both the hands and then use every trick available to you to get an extension of sorts?" (3). She states that she had picked up the ninety-

eight days of joy and struggled for an extension. This shows an individual's yearning for a better life who endures many troubles, which makes her bold to accept a life comfortable to her as a human being. In her married life, she encounters many painful situations worth mentioning. The experiences that she passes through as a wife and as a mother of a girl with special needs benefit her to realise her true feminine self. The writer, through several instances, hints at the miserable life of a middle-class woman in the portrayal of Janaki.

The story commences with the wedding ceremony of Janaki, which turns into a significant matter in the novel. In her mind, she is too quick and unaware of marriage. Her marriage was a hurried one. She was compelled to concede to the marriage and did not know what to demand in married life. Janaki's perception of marriage is associated with her uncle's marriage "that was I thought happened after all weddings, a gradual wiping away of tears and more people to love and be loved by"(39). She fantasised that a pleasant household and generous in-laws awaited her in the subsequent days. To her disappointment, she is taken by a heartless and escapist husband, a ruling mother-in-law, and other relatives. She does not feel comfortable in her husband's household. Within days she understood that she was unacceptable in that family and that her life would be pathetic. Miserable conditions in the Indian family structure, where a woman finds less space to acknowledge her individuality echoed here. Heilbrun's idea that wifhood means abandoning a woman's self becomes relevant in this situation.

Janaki's husband's uncaring and cold attitude is evident in many incidents. A wife silently suffering in her in-laws' house is the traditional image in Indian English Fiction. The marginalised position of a woman as a wife and as an individual is pictured in the novel. Her pregnancy and the baby's birth are received coldly by her

husband and in-laws. As soon as she got pregnant and told Suresh about it." He looked confused, and I hoped a little pleased. But all he said was, "Amma and Sathi will know what to do. I'll ask them to take you to see Dr Gomathy" (113). She wondered why Suresh had accepted the news of her pregnancy with the same apathy he already displayed. Without any doubt, it could be said that he fits into the mould of a typical patriarchal stereotype. "His response to my early sorrow had been complete disbelief that a child of his could have any sort of problem"(131). As she requires support from her husband, Suresh's withdrawal from life becomes longer and longer, making her hopeless. This forced her to become highly attached to her daughter. She is confused by her in-laws untouched attitude towards Riya. "Their rejection of me, though hurtful, was something I had been able to rationalise. But Riya? She was their flesh and blood" (131). These incidents make Janaki realise that the whole responsibility of her daughter is hers, and she has to undergo so many hardships to make her daughter better.

Motherhood and extreme attachment toward her daughter become a means to improve her self-esteem to realise her inner strength. Even though her husband and in-laws are not pleased with her attitude, she could care less about it. Her duty toward her daughter binds her sole aim in her life. She transformed herself into a redeemer to Riya. Aloofness from her husband and Maraar family initiated an intimate relationship between the mother and the daughter. As a person to comfort Janaki in her miseries, Suresh proved an utter failure. She felt nobody is there to support or console her with her problems. Acknowledging the traditional role of motherhood, she can be regarded as a woman enjoying the pleasures that conventional womanhood gives; it echoes McRobbie's words that in postfeminist discourse, females are seen enjoying all sorts of traditional roles.

Later Janaki realises that the only choice in front of her to make some meaning in life is to become a promising mother to Riya. In her life, motherhood is a prospect that guarantees her optimism. After that, she realised that she alone could accomplish something for her daughter. She must discover alternatives to make her better. This determination awakened her inner self, and she speculated about ways required to better Riya. For that, she explored various schools, including special schools. To her, it is evident that there is no remedy or treatment for her. She simply requires a withdrawal from a prejudiced world. She wants to take Riya abroad, where she can ensure her better living condition.

The essential thing that makes the writing of contemporary women writers unique is their characterisation of female characters who have control over their lives. Janaki's endeavour to make Riya better turns into a way to have the life she desires. Meanwhile, she met her teenage lover Arjun on her visit to Delhi for her scholarship. Arjun assured her to set up a new life with him, bringing fresh hope and contentment to her life. When she disclosed her plan of separation from Suresh and to go abroad to pursue her studies, Suresh became revengeful towards her. Convincing others, as she has a mental illness, will make others believe that it was not his mistake that Janaki demanded a divorce. "It was preferable to have people sympathise over a mad wife than to bear the shame of one who wasn't mad but wanted to leave him!" (225). With her mother's courageous actions, she was rescued from a mental hospital. The writer shows the instances of domestic violence through this. A wife who questions her husband and in-laws suffer a lot in her life. Janaki's life serves as an example of it.

Misra contrasts an individual woman's life both in a patriarchal social system and in a domination-free environment through the life of Janaki. Her life in London contrasts with her life in Kerala. In London, she enjoys a joyful and pleasing life with

Arjun. Those ninety-eight days are the reward of God for the anguish and miseries that she experienced in her married life. Without her daughter, life turned worthless, and she yearned to have her daughter with her. When she returned to complete her studies, Suresh provided her divorce because he intended to remarry. To him, a daughter with special needs seems like a burden. At the novel's climax, Janaki is full of hope of having a comfortable life with Arjun, and the story closes with " Tomorrow, the next chapter would begin"(305). Janaki's bitter experiences in life catalyse her to realise her inner self. She is in the role of a devoted mother who discovers her virtues, and these situations provide her with a big idea of self.

Motherhood plays a significant part in Janaki's life. Mothering becomes a turning point in her life. She recognises her inner spirit and capabilities when she confidently confronts the troubles of bringing up a child with special needs. There is a solid and deep-rooted bond between her and her daughter because, to her, this daughter was the entire means of assurance to have a happy life. She was sure that both she and her daughter would be unacceptable in the Maraar family, building a sense of uniformity between them. Life without her daughter was a thing unbearable for her. The days she spent without her daughter in London shows the intensity of grief that she bears. Without Riya, she felt a large void in her life that nobody could fill. To her, motherhood is the ultimate hope to continue her life as a human being.

In Indian tradition, motherhood is a glorified position. A mother occupies a supreme position next to God. According to the postfeminist view, motherhood is a virtue that a female possesses, which makes her unique. Previous feminists relegated this feminine trait, which is considered a burden for obtaining liberation.

Postfeminists argue that women being indifferent to their innate virtues may create confusion and frustration in life. As postfeminism advocates authentic experiences in

women's lives, the experience of motherhood cannot be disparaged. A middle-class woman's struggle as a mother is accurately represented through the character of Janaki's concern for her daughter, the hardships she faced in her married life, delight, and hopes that she undergoes in her path towards self-realisation, picturise the plight of a middle-class Indian mother.

Secrets and Lies depict the story of four women who are fortunate to continue a long-term friendship since their school days. This novel comprises the story of Bubbles, wife of a prosperous businessman Binkie Raheja, Samira, wife of Akbar, a corporate lawyer; Anita, who is on BBC Radio and leads a single life and Zeba Khan, a Bollywood celebrity. Both Bubbles and Samira continues in a troublesome married life because there is no alternative to them. The tale seems attractive because it is generally believed that women often experience long-term friendships with their classmates in an Indian social setting. After marriage, most of the women's acquaintances come to an abrupt end. Women get less chance to cherish their friendship because a married woman has to abandon all her desires, aspirations, and acquaintance for the well-being of her family. The story praises the friendship between Anita, Samira, Bubbles, and Zeba Khan. They were inseparable companions at school and are lucky to maintain the same relationship growing up while having separate existences. Bubbles and Samira, devoid of a comfortable life, find solace in the warmth of the mutual relationship between friends.

Initially glancing into Bubbles Raheja's life, a pampered, exhausted wife of billionaire Binkie Raheja, her words show her comfort in the loneliness. She is presented as someone "in a state of unusual tranquillity that morning as none of the family was at home" (10). She paints her toenail, which was the discretion of a Thai pedicurist in a posh parlour. Performing these meagre tasks offers her an odd

satisfaction that she cannot describe. Frequently this task transports her to her teenage days.

Moreover, she considers it as a form of dissent against her husband and in-laws because she feels that "Binkie would loathe the sight of his wife sitting in as public a space as the living room performing such an ungainly task for all the house staff to behold." (10). Even though she lives an extravagant life, she is troubled in her married life and feels worn out. Performing the tasks her husband hates shows her feeble rebelliousness towards her husband.

The predicament of a traditional Indian household is that a wife is always controlled by her husband and in-laws. Bubbles often feel that her mother-in-law has complete control over her life over her husband. Her most essential task in life is to follow her mother-in-law in every aspect. She has no identity, nor does anyone in the family consider her an individual human being. Bubbles neither occupy a place in Binkie's personal nor business life. She considers herself a person with less self-importance in Binkie's life. Because she believes she does not possess any skill or intelligence to receive any appreciation from her husband, she never understands her husband's words when she enquires about the problems he deals with. She always recalls her mother's access to her father's personal and business affairs. She realises that her husband knowingly tries to keep his distance from her; the writer hints at the Indian family set-up, which unacknowledged a woman's role as a wife and mother in the family structure. Her mother-in-law grabbed her role as mother, and her children are raised according to her mother-in-law's wishes. In the role of a wife and a mother, she has no existence. She is viewed as an appendage to her husband and her mother-in-law. She senses a complete loss of her 'self' in her married life.

Heilbrun's concept of complete loss of self and self-worth of a woman in the role of wife can be applied to the life of Bubbles as a wife. She has nothing to regard herself as a worthy individual. Because she is married at the early age of eighteen after completing her school education, she is not an intelligent girl, and she and two younger sisters. Her only choice was to marry a wealthy man as early as possible. Her father always says, "What can college vollege teach you beti?" (147). When she informed her mother that she proposes to join college instead of getting married, her mother suggested that "All your friends will be going to college because all your friends will be getting marks. What marks are you going to get, Hanh? Zero that is what. Marriage to a rich boy is the only scholarship you are going to get beti"(151). She, too, felt that she would be in some polytechnic or textile designing with her poor marks or something lowly like that. Education and a career are essential in a woman's life. It provides women to recognise their position in the family and society.

The only preoccupation in the life of Bubbles is to be a dutiful wife and daughter-in-law. She constantly feels envy when she sees independent women who have separate existences. She is distressed about business parties, and she reveals to her friends that "As for me, the last party I remember enjoying was your seventeenth birthday party Sam" (108). She generally assumes that she was undoubtedly happy when she was a teenager; her married life never assures her of the life she expects. Loss of self-worth and personal space becomes a common phenomenon in Indian marriages—an individual feel trapped in the patriarchal setup of married life.

In the patriarchal society, a woman is taught to be shy and submissive for her well-being; the writer severely criticises this concept. Bubbles share fifteen years of married life with Binkie and find it hard to be equally confident in his business life. Sometimes she feels ashamed to expect more from her husband because she is

enjoying a fully luxurious life in all aspects, and she ought to be grateful for the money she has to lavish on herself. She blindly accepts her secondary position and values other material pleasures of luxury for compromising her individuality. Only Anita possesses a life worthy because "Anita, for instance, had in such abundance a result of the authority she enjoyed to be herself and what she wanted without seeking permission or needing approval" (193). She believed that it would be callous to question her husband and family. She yearns to have full authority over her life as Anita, at the same time, feels guilty about asking her husband for more space for her self.

Subsequently, Bubbles is fascinated by her fitness trainer Giovanni because Binkie constantly retains a distance from her; furthermore, she does not feel him attracted to her from the first days of marriage. He regularly prefers to remain out of her way because he likes the same for her. She often believes it is a means of his British sort of upbringing. One day she accidentally discovers her husband's homosexual relationship with his friend James. The writer conveys that this incident neither shocked her because it gave her a chance to go ahead with her passion for Gio.

In Indian English Fiction, the image of a woman who does not confine to the traditional roles and questions the injustices she faces is generally considered a phenomenon of contemporary writing. Modern women writers regard it as one of their favourite themes in their writings. Bubbles returns from Delhi with renewed strength and determination. She has made three firm resolutions in her mind after many speculations. First of all, she will be the individual she feels comfortable with. She will further mention to Binkie his responsibilities, and unless he admits that, she will hereafter lead a completely separate life. At the novel's climax, there is a change in her perspective; she has decided to end her relationship with Binkie. At the meeting

of four friends in Delhi, Zeba Khan, a Bollywood superstar, decided to launch a charity group to support Mumbai Street kids and abused kids. She requires a lot of travel and support from her friends. She anticipates that both Samira and Bubbles will support her, and Anita offers her help in publicity as it is easy for her. With that assurance, Bubbles returns to London because she is confident that her friends will be there for her in any situation, making her firm in her choices in life.

In Indian social contexts, the institution of marriage assigns traditional roles to women, irrespective of their likes and dislikes. Bubbles served the Raheja family as a dutiful daughter-in-law without any objection. Despite Binkie's coldness, she tried to be content with other comforts which sounded trivial to her. She resolves to move forward with what makes her 'self' comfortable and pleases her as a human being. Identifying her husband as a homosexual man added oil to it, and she felt complete relief rather than offended or annoyed. She can quickly establish her decision without remorse because the treatment that her husband and his family returned to her justifies her decision to have a better life. Her unfortunate circumstances force her to choose a life outside her family.

Samira Hussain is the wife of a corporate lawyer Akbar. She consistently appears envious while watching her neighbour Francisca who holds strict fitness management. Her neighbour is always eager to show the photographs of her holidays. Whenever Samira looks at these pictures with more fun, something arrests her heart because she cannot recollect these types of amusing moments in her life. Akbar is not a bad husband, but they seem to have a chance of less fun than couples like her neighbour. She could not recall Akbar ever doing something absurd solely to make her laugh.

Women caught up in the self-sacrificing role of an Indian woman is drawn through the life of Samira. She is constantly seen as struggling to win her husband's admiration. She often assumes that she never got a chance to win her husband's appreciation from the early days of marriage. She had given up her part-time job in a library due to the enormous disparity in their income because Akbar earns more than her and does not need any financial support to run the family. Akbar develops a sarcastic attitude towards her because of her being overweight. Initially, he shows his scorn through little jokes that he hates being married to an obese woman. He occasionally underestimates overweight individuals, but she has given less care to this criticism. When her husband gives her a gift of an exercise kit as a birthday gift forces her to become too conscious of her weight and realises that she further cannot win her husband's mind. In the characterisation of Akbar writer attacks the general notion that if a wife fails to meet the standard of a husband, she will lose her importance in his life. Samira accepted her inferior position as a wife from the early days of marriage. She allowed Akbar to oppress her needs and aspirations by undiscerning her individuality. The complete subjugation of herself made her a mere shadow of her husband.

In the role of a perfect homemaker, Samira is calmly admitting to Akbar's unmindful stance toward her emotions. As he is a busy corporate lawyer, she cared not to make him worry about her stupid issues. She is highly delighted with her friends Anita and Bubbles indeed. When these three friends chose to visit Delhi in December, and when asked, she suggested it to her husband; she replied that Akbar is friendly to her, "Akbar has been quite sweet this past three or four days. Coming home usually early in the evening and asks after her day. He had even suggested they have dinner in a restaurant together tonight, not something they had done in a long

time why I spoil his mood unnecessarily" (161). From this, it is evident that Samira avoided opening up her mind to her husband. She is caught in a dilemma about her relationship with him, and she cannot fully assert her needs and discover limited space for herself in their married life. She is in perpetual fear of losing her husband's interest in her after increased weight.

The conventional 'pativrata' image of an Indian housewife is pictured through the character Samira. The writer violently criticises those who find fake pleasures in these traditional roles. She is of the judgment that her husband had loved her absolutely for four and a half years. It was the time around she was pregnant with Heer, their daughter; he appeared annoyed and irritable as she became a mother and put on weight after the delivery. At first, she believed her husband concentrated too much time in his office due to his crucial career. Once Anita had told her that he might change when their daughter grew a little bit and enjoyed their company. She must give him space and time for it, but things worsened over the years, and she accepted his fleeting visits. "Sometimes nearly to pick up a fresh set of clothes, for an evening appointment. And when did he pop in, she felt sure it was more to check on Heer than on her" (265). She felt unwanted by him. "Sam has just been shunted further and further into the fringes of Akbar's life, eventually becoming someone who turns on the lights of an evening and arranges the flowers and drew the curtains on the world... and even such that symbol things she did not always do very well"(266). She has turned into an instrument in his mind he is never concerned about her feelings. She identifies a complete loss of herself and dignity in her married life as an individual.

In patriarchal ideology, a wife is treated as merely a sex object and an inessential thing. Samira's life serves as a suitable example of this concept. She tries

to recall "when Akbar had changed from being the charming suave man, she had fallen in love with to the remote stranger she was now married to. She could not understand why his main source of entertainment seemed to lie in belittling other people especially her"(65). He invariably carries a harsh attitude towards her friends and makes unfair remarks about her gang of friends. Samira never questions or expresses her hatred towards him for his unfair comments. She, with despair, endures his humiliation and personal tortures on his part.

Akbar's attitude to Samira's vacation trip to Delhi with her friends is utterly ruthless. He abruptly revealed his plan for a Kenyan Safari with their daughter. She sorrowfully realises that it provided Akbar with an excellent chance to exclude her from the trip. Akbar looks much relieved that she already has separate plans. "But why would the thought of taking me be so unbearable for him? Had I really become so hateful? Was I too fat, maybe to haul herself easily into jeeps? Why or why had she allowed herself to become a figure of embarrassment to her husband rather than someone he could be proud of?" (270). When she further disputes with Akbar, he puts his chair back, scratches the floor, and leaves the house; she feels that he is silencing her. When Samira tries to question him, he violently leaves the house as a means to silence her. Akbar is a typical example of a dominant and insensitive husband who never considers a woman to have a separate individuality and self.

Economic independence is an essential factor that makes a woman liberated from subjugation and oppression. Samira's trip to Delhi promises her the courage to choose a better life. While in Delhi, she admitted to her friends that she was happier with them than with Akbar. Her miserable situation as a woman without economic independence is expressed in her words, "what the hell would I do with myself and Heer, I don't even have a bloody job" (375). She fears that by separating from her

husband, she could not support her daughter and find ways to meet her needs. So that she sticks to her troublesome family life. Generally, women endure all hardships because the harsh realities after stepping out of married life may be unbearable without an economic footing. Samira's situation suggests it. Zeba Khan assures Samira a place in her charity organisation, which asserts her convictions regarding a better life.

In the postmodern world, women are very progressive in overcoming patriarchal values with their new perspective. Samira, back in London, plans to establish a new life, and she prefers to know about the role she partakes in Akbar's life. "She would stay calm and peaceable for both her and their own. She was sure that Akbar would get agitated and storm wherever it was" (380). She demands that Akbar be more serious about her and her family than his regular withdrawal from home in the name of his busy career. If he does not transform into a better person, she is courageous enough to break her married life and initiate a new way of life that satisfies her.

The experiences of Bubbles and Samira in the role of wife echo Beauvoir's concept of women in patriarchy. Simone de Beauvoir observes that "Man can think of himself without a woman. She cannot think of herself without a man. And she is simply what man decrees. She appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him, she is sex absolute sex, no less" (54). Kate Millet shares a similar view that women occupy an inessential part of patriarchy. In the role of wife, both Samira and Bubbles are regarded as inessential things by their husbands.

Anita's single life serves as a comparison with Bubbles and Samira. Bubbles and Samira are worried about their family life; on the other hand, Anita is annoyed

with her single life and hopes to initiate a relationship with Hugh, a colleague. She already has a broken relationship and is critical of men. She is a brilliant girl from her school days, so her parents were not anxious enough to prepare her to do commonplace things such as housekeeping. When Anita decides to invite Hugh to her house, she seems ashamed to realise that she is a lousy cook and cannot excite him. Bubbles and Samira constantly perceive Anita with the eyes of envy that she is independent to do what she pleases as Bubbles frequently think of what she is devoid of and what Anita has. "Anita, for instance, had in such abundance a result of authority she enjoyed to be herself and do what she wanted without seeking permission or needing approval" (193). She is single and has complete authority over her life. Anita fits into the image of a self-possessed female individual with her ways of life. She becomes a comfort for both Bubbles and Samira with her assertive personality.

Anita is a woman who never sacrifices her personality and identity for anyone, and she experiences several relationship breaks due to this. She could hardly adapt to an individual who never considered and respected her identity as an individual. Before the trip to Delhi, she had a terrible exchange with Hugh. She sensed that this relationship too is moving to an edge like the previous ones. She is not reckless about him as in earlier relations and prefers a solid relationship with him. So, she confesses to him for her rude words. In contradiction with Bubbles and Samira, she initiates a perfect companionship with Hugh.

Meanwhile, Bubbles and Samira are more or less on the brim of ending their marriage. Anita's disposition as an autonomous individual gives her complete control over her life. She can be regarded as a perfect example of a postfeminist woman who leads a life as satisfying to her self. Her confusion regarding her relationships,

relationship breaks, and her longings as a female sound that of a postfeminist woman Bridget as Mc Robbie identifies in *Bridget Jones' Diary*.

Zeba Khan is a celebrated Bollywood actor who leads an extravagant lifestyle. She cunningly employs her charm to obtain her requirements from others. This trait was evident from her school times; she built up a romantic affair with her chemistry teacher Gomez to extract chemistry question papers for the exam. This attribute goes on while she turned into a film star, and she procured significant roles from the directors like Shiva Mirchandani. She belongs to a highly conventional Muslim family. As she becomes a film star and hears about scandals concerning her relationships, her parents keep their distance from her. More or less, she lives a life of solitude. When she and her friends visit Miss Lamb and realise the tragic history of Lily, she is sorry for her. After that, she plans to launch a charity group to support Mumbai Street kids; she includes exploited children. She finds out different paths to make her life meaningful other than that, she yearns for her friends to support her in this new endeavour. For Samira and Bubbles, this affords some optimism in their dreary life.

Afterwards is, the story of Maya narrated from the perspective of a male character Rahul. Maya is the protagonist of the story. Her dejected married life and her attempts to escape from it become the tale's main thread. Maya suffers a lot in her life due to her husband Govind's suspicious nature. She is drawn toward Rahul, a foreigner who resides in her neighbourhood. She absconds from her family life and runs off with Rahul with her daughter Anjali. This incident made her parents disown her. They performed her death rites similar to 'padi adachu pindam vekkal', a terrible punishment conventional families perform when a woman causes serious disgrace to the name of an old established family. She starts a life with Rahul in London, and

after three years, she dies in an accident. The whole story is narrated through the flashbacks Rahul recalls.

Afterwards is different from other works of the writer because it is entirely told from a male perspective. Rahul Tiwari narrates the whole tale. The story commences with the death rites of Maya, which were performed three years before she died. Maya belongs to a traditional family named Pulayil Veedu. She was alive when her death rites were performed. She and her daughter escaped from her married life with a north Indian guy (Rahul) who was her neighbour. This brought tremendous shame and dishonour to the name of an ancient and noble family. So, her parents, notably her father, asserted to renounce her by conducting the death rites. As Pulayil Varma's is an ancient distinguished family from which Maya belongs, she repeatedly claims that belonging to an old family is a burden, which hinders her autonomy as an independent individual. Maya feels trapped in her undesirable married life from which she cannot escape.

Rahul recalls his life in Trivandrum. He arrived there to join for mridangam class and resided next to Maya's house. Rahul's words highlight several events to show Maya's pathetic condition. His encounters with Maya brought her close to him. She often creates situations to get in touch with him. Rahul often wonders about her intention to be close to him. Maya finds a suitable way to escape from her married life by getting too much close to him. For that, she creates situations to develop intimacy between him. By initiating a friendship with Rahul, she seeks his help to slip away from her marriage life. To a woman having a relationship outside marriage is regarded as a disgrace. She is always stigmatised by society and considered a person with loose morals. In Maya's life, too, this caused so many troubles.

Maya invites Rahul to her home when her husband is away for a business trip. Rahul's hesitance towards her invitations shows that he does not prefer to be in trouble with his neighbours. Late Maya assured him, "don't worry, my husband is away. Touring again, she said the last bit with an air of resignation" (36). She suggests that her husband is not an evil man; he is not pretty friendly. From Maya's words, it is evident that her pitiful existence as the wife of a suspicious man forced her to behave unfairly to a stranger. Her desire to have a comfortable life and rage towards her husband in words," then he cannot control me forever he has to learn that" (48). Her revolt against a life that hinders her freedom as an individual is displayed here.

Incidents that lead Maya to agree to her parent's decision to her marriage seem worth mentioning. An individual girl who has no choices in the decisions regarding her future life is still relevant in the Indian social milieu. Sometimes, a girl feels muted in expressing her distaste and obliged to obey her parents; in Maya's life, too, these repeats. The writer criticises arranged marriages which provide limited space for the likes and dislikes of an individual.

Maya's marriage dropped her education and her desire to complete her course. She said, "I had thought I would be able to as it still is in Trivandrum. But Govind was not too keen"(44). She, without much education, cannot pursue a career and have a separate existence. Later she seeks help from Rahul to acquire a job so that she can support herself and her daughter. Her attempts to break away from a monotonous life are evident here. Govind's real character is clearly expressed in the words of Maya, "he is just...just suspicious." (54). He is sceptical about her, which makes him never let her go to college or the shops or make friends or anywhere except to see her

parents. He prefers that they come to see her in their house. Maya's circumstances in her married life unfold the miserable life woman caught in unhealthy relationships.

The writer stresses domestic violence issues and physical and emotional tortures an Indian wife endures through the character Maya. Maya's parents are unaware of the fundamental problems she passes:

they sort of knew, they must know maybe not the full extent of his possessiveness. But what they want to say is that I live in a nice house have a nice car a husband who gives me everything. They do not want to see the other side of that. Do you know people think I am so lucky? They think I have everything a woman can want. But I can imagine how all that can frame utterly meaningless when you have to deal with this thing everyday suspicion (55).

Rahul consoles her and assures her that it might become better over the years. She, too, assumes that by becoming a father, his attitude might change, but nothing gets better as time passes. Sharing a relationship with a man with over-possessiveness and suspicion leaves her in complete trauma.

Misra's violent criticism of male-dominated Kerala society can be seen in the characterisation of Govind, Maya's husband. Govind is depicted as a man with a suspicious attitude towards his wife. He is like a tyrant who prefers complete submission to the part of Maya. Govind is a self-made businessman, and his parents are so reliant on him for everything, and they will never mention anything against him. Not only that, Govind prefers to maintain a bit of distance from them. He does not encourage his family's interference in his family matters. He tries to create a fake image that he is so dutiful and extremely anxious to show off his role as a responsible husband and son.

Govind's excessive pride in life was his reason for choosing Maya. He married her, and she laughed sarcastically and pointed out, "good looking girl, good family, convent educated... But once he got me, he did not know what on earth to do with me" (56). Rahul replied, "so he put you safely away into a little cage." (56). Maya admits ironically, "you must admit it is a nice cage the three bedrooms three attached bathrooms stainless steel sink in a full tile kitchen" (57). Maya feels caged in her married life. Later she decides to free herself from her miserable condition through her firm determination to continue her studies.

Like Janaki in *Ancient Promises*, Maya too escapes with a man from her hopeless married life. For her, in a critical situation, there seems no other alternative. In Maya's situation, she is compelled to act likewise because she longs to escape from a tragic life. As her parents are not ready to accept her anxieties, she has no other choice. Maya's situation can be applied to Indian women who most often endure such problems in their lives.

As a representative of the new woman, Maya chooses her destiny. With the help of Rahul, she initiates life in England. She embraces her way of life by not negotiating to lead a frustrated life, and she liberates herself by adopting what makes her comfortable. She renounces her life with Govind because of his possessive and dubious nature. She feels caged in that life. As an individual, she gives prime concern to her autonomy. She is fearless enough to liberate herself from anything that impedes her liberties as a human being. Rahul is a means to get away from her married life.

As the title indicates, Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe* offers a narrative concerning the chance encounter of six Indian women from different backgrounds and vocations in their train journey. The novel opens in a lively railway station where

Akhilandeswari (Akhila) waits for the train to arrive. For her, the trip is a withdrawal from her old life and to recover a better new one. She is a single woman who works in an income tax department. She realises that it is her first journey alone on an express train, expecting the train. For her, the journey is to find an answer to a question that constantly disturbs her mind. She, in the coupe, meets other women passengers and expects that her fellow passengers will provide her with an answer as the journey ends. Six women passengers, including Janaki, an older woman, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanti, Sheela, and Marikolanthu. Each passenger narrates their observations regarding their life in marriage and women in general. As the journey ends, Akhila is transformed into a person with new perspectives on life.

Akhila reflects that she has never gone up on an overnight train to a place she has never been before. She is introduced as " So this then is Akhila. Forty-five years old sans rose-coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children, home and family. Dreaming of escape and space. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect" (2). She prefers Kanyakumari because it is the meeting place of the three seas. The Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and the Arabian Sea, a silent male ocean and two restless female seas on either side. She chose this place because she had put her life on hold, like the Goddess Kanyakumari. The multi-coloured sand of the beach was regarded as the remains of a never-served wedding feast.

The quest for identity and self are dominant themes in *Ladies Coupe*. Contemporary women writers consider the search for identity and self a suitable theme to express the new type of women in Indian English Fiction. In search of her 'self' as a human being, Akhila plans to embark on a single journey. There are five other women Sheela Vasudevan, Prabha Devi, Janaki Prabhakar, Margaret Shanti, and Marikolanthu. As she waits for the train, her attention turns toward the elderly couple

many a time. To her, they seem like "they belonged together". Many questions cross her mind "What is it about marriage that makes it possible for men and women to match their lives, dreams and even their thoughts in such a complete fashion?"(10). This shows her constant dilemma in marriage and relationships. She cannot figure out the role an individual woman plays in marriage.

The writer simultaneously depicts traditional women and women with modern outlooks. Akhila's mother is a typical portrayal of the conventional 'Sita' and 'Savitri' type woman. Her mother is devoted and submissive to her father in all aspects. After her father's death, her mother's grief seemed only to increase with every passing year. In Akhila's words, her mother has lost more than a husband. Her mother married her uncle as per the Tamil brahmin custom so that Akhila's father is a part of her mother's life from the moment she was born. That drove them too intimate and together in every aspect. Her mother is highly devoted to her father and detested dominating her husband. To Akhila, the idea of marriage is always related to her mother's blind convictions.

The novel progresses with the narration of each woman passenger's life experiences and their perspectives regarding marriage and women's life. They are voiceless women of the male-dominated world and feel free to express themselves in a place exclusively for females. The women break the silence and communicate with each other. They long for a sympathetic listener and a longing to be heard. In the coupe' fellow passengers share their words regarding themselves. As they overcome their strangeness, Akhila shares her confusion regarding marriage and the question that haunted her. The question regarding her identity always torments her. She constantly fears that she will be lonely in the future and that nobody will be there to take care of her. More than that, she is disturbed by the thought that " Can a woman

stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?"(13). She needs answers to all these questions. She expects her fellow passengers to help her find a better solution to her confusion. The journey is also a self-discovery and transformation for Akhila and all women.

Prabha Devi is the first woman to introduce herself. Prabha Devi's question regarding her single life puzzled Akhila because she does not have a correct answer. Here, Akhila represents a single working woman who shoulders the entire responsibility of the family. The other women passengers are from different life situations. They are suitable enough to give essential information regarding their experiences. The thought that the other women passengers are from different life situations gives Akhila new hope. She is forced to remain single because she has to look after her family; it is too late for her to marry when she settles with her siblings. After her father's sudden death Akhila had to accept the role of a family caretaker. Since her father had died in harness, she is offered a job in the income tax department. She was hardly nineteen at that time. She has to look after her two brothers, a sister and a widowed mother. Hence, she takes up the responsibility that her father left. The life of Akhila mirrors the identity conflicts that a single woman in Indian society confronts.

The journey turns out to be a means to get answers to the questions that consistently torment Akhila. She adopted the position of the guardian of the family when she was nineteen years old. As years went by, her brothers Narayan joined a tank factory as a machinist, and a postgraduate Narsi found a teaching job. She seemed highly relieved as her obligations were minimised. "Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?"(77). When Narsi expressed his wish to get married, no one could find fault. Akhila was surprised "why doesn't he think of his

elder sister, who was still unmarried and working for the family. Doesn't she have dreams? Akhila waited for Amma's and Narayan's attitude, but they did not speak about her marriage. Every member, including her mother, is silent about her future. "Even then, amma and her brothers never asked what about you? You have been the head of this family ever since Appa died. Don't you want a husband, children, a home of your own?"(77). She understands that she has transformed into a spinster in their minds, and they are oblivious to her emotions. Subsequently, she had to marry off her younger sister, Padma too, and she was thirty-four years old. In the eyes of her family members, Akhila is devoid of emotions and aspirations, and they regard her only as a family supporter.

The monotonous routine life of an Indian woman is pictured through the life of Akhila. After Padma's wedding, she felt a vacuum in her life. Until these years, and she was utterly restless for her family as her liabilities were over, she appeared uneasy and bored. Every day she had the same way of life, travelling to the office, coming back on the same train, the same route, and was exhausted from a daily routine. She and her mother visit the Shiva temple every Monday. She is captured by the statue of Nandi at the temple entrance. To her, Nandi reminds herself, "unlike all other Nandis, this is rested with its back to the sanctum sanctorum. An aberration like me. She told herself with a wry smile every Monday"(78). This Nandi secures the devotees from enemies. Like Nandi, she too shelters and holds care of her family and everybody regards her like a stone statue who never has any feelings or desires. This Nandi, by turning back to his lord, had desanctified the temple. Like this, Akhila turns away from her instincts to have a husband and family complete her obligations. She feels cold and hard like that stone statue without any tenderness towards life.

From Margaret's observations of life, Akhila reflects that she is entirely liable for her life and justifies the failures she committed. Margaret's concept of love and marriage is strange to her. Akhila had a love affair with a man named Hari, who is younger than her. She drops that relationship in fear of her family and society. Whenever she thinks of him, a thought of a mistake creeps over her. When her mother died, she remained alone, and agreeing with her brothers and sister, she managed to get a transfer to Bangalore. She stays with her sister Padma and life with Padma seems disturbed. Padma looks at her as old enough to take care of her and announces it to her neighbouring friends. She had given a distorted picture of Akhila to the neighbouring ladies and repeatedly informed them that she was strange to them, and she endured her merely because it was her duty towards her. Akhila yearns to be separated from them to lead her content and calm life. Akhila is already disgusted with Padma's interference in her life. An individual woman who leads a single life is always perceived as abnormal by society. The community constantly scrutinises them, and Akhila is much concerned about it.

Prabha Devi can be considered a woman belonging to the transition phase towards liberation. She is neither too much conventional as Janaki nor as modern as Akhila. Her perception of marriage is pretty similar to Janaki's. Akhila regards her as a confident and comfortable woman. She sounds like an individual fully assured of her likes and dislikes. At forty-five, Akhila recognised that she is still experiencing life from the side-lines. Her childhood friend Karpagam showed her how her life must be. Karpagam is a widow who is extraordinarily independent and fearless than Akhila. Karpagam is despised by Akhila's selfish family, who don't acknowledge her desire and happiness. When Karpagam sought her if she is contented with her life, Akhila had no answer. Later she said, "happiness is being allowed to choose one's own life to

live in it the way one wants, happiness knows one is loved and having someone to love. Happiness is being able to hope for tomorrow" (200). In Karpagam's view, Akhila doesn't feel what happiness is. She does not have a life and family of her own. When Akhila thinks of her identity, she cannot find out because "she was always having an extension of someone else identity Chandra's daughter, Narayan's Akka, Priya aunt, Murthy's sister-in-law. She wished for once someone would see her as a whole being (200). She yearns that Karpagam will be able to sense her real suffering. Her inner conflicts are expressed in these words. By living for others, she lost her identity as a human being.

The expression of repressed desires and longings of an individual finds new manifestations towards the novel's climax. Akhila yearns to be with a man, to release her senses to explore and seek gratification. She does not require a husband but a person who can cherish her and fill her silence and share all of himself. Karpagam advises Akhila must choose to remain alone and that her sister is mature enough to look after herself. She is educated and employed, so she should look at life for herself. Karpagam is determined to recommend that she must not think much about the world and be firm in her decision to live a happy life. The first thing is to ask her sister and family to leave her home. However, Akhila is not sure about settling alone because she is afraid to think about how she can manage things independently. Karpagam persuades her that if she can get along alone, why cannot Akhila. Karpagam says she is married but is a widow and has a daughter who is twenty-three years old, and they managed to settle a living of their own. Akhila cannot accept it because she still has the kumkum and colourful clothes. Karpagam added that she detests the manner of a widow and ignored what her family and others assumed. Akhila senses a hopeful and self-susceptible woman in Karpagam, and she presses her to have a world of her own,

where her needs appear first. Akhila thought Karpagam is like a goddess who has shown up to bring her out of her dilemmas. Karpagam is a woman who is rebellious against traditional conventions and societal behavioural patterns.

To become a free individual is a strenuous task in a convention-bound society. The job is much harder for female individuals because society has prescribed some behavioural patterns to its individuals. The individual who does not conform to the set patterns is ostracised from society. For Akhila, it takes one month's preparation to become ready to declare her plans for a separate life. She discloses to Padma that she proposed procuring a single-bedroom flat which is sufficient for her. Padma is stunned by her intention and claims she has taken care of Akhila's house all these years and says Akhila is envious of her having a husband and children. She further asserts that Akhila must seek the approval of their brothers. Akhila replies that she is forty-five years old and elder than all of them and knows what to do and does not care what everyone else feels about her then Padma demands that they are the men of the family; their words must be regarded.

A single woman is generally considered as a person with some defects by society, and this concept is vehemently criticised through these incidents. When Akhila's brothers learned about the plan, they opposed it vigorously because they believed that a woman could not manage to live alone. However, she is sure about her actions; she gives her whole life to the family and seeks nothing in return. No one ever asked about her desires and dreams. Nobody ever thought about her needs and longings, similar to any other human being. When she chooses a life of her own implies nothing improper. Padma reproved her by adding that she may have a love affair and did not want anyone to spot it. Akhila could not bear Padma's words, and she slapped Padma. Her brothers demanded that she should follow other people's

views before going ahead with her plans. Only then would she understand how challenging it is to be alone as a woman. They wanted that she may change her mind about this, but she is glad about her intentions and already determined to work for it.

Akhila reached Kanyakumari with revived vitality. Now she is not a helpless woman, and she is clear about her intentions. She won't let her family use her anymore. She has discovered the real woman in her. As she spends her time, she is planning for her future. She determines that she still loves to be alone, but needs some experience, so she decides to woo a man named Vinod and tries not to get acquainted with him. She craves to recapture the lost Akhila, who once was a spirited young woman when she was in love with Hari. She invites him to the hotel. She does not require another adventure with a man, but she prefers to set a little game that is competent in initiating a new relationship. she spends a night with that young man. That night she felt that she had let lust reign over her. " A lust that radiates the heat of the fire. The energy that defines life Akhila is lust. Akhila is Sakthi"(274). She feels that she is transformed into ten entities of Sakthi like the Kali, Tara, Sodasi, Bhuvanewari, Bhairavi, Chinnamasta, Dhumati, Bagala, Matangi, and Kamala.

That night showed her many things, including insight into her true feminine self. Now she notices that her body goes through a catacomb of sensations. She had regained the invisible Akhila and her feminine spirit that remained doomed for many years. She suffers no more fears and is not ready to walk with a downcast head. The following day, she awakens with Hari on her mind. Last night had proved that the thought that she could not love any other men like she had loved Hari was wrong. Anything is possible, and she dares to pick up her life from where she had left behind. She seeks Hari and her life equally. She opens the address book and decides to connect with Hari; she picks up the phone and places a person-to-person call to

Madras. As he is unavailable, she remains for one more hour and is determined to leave for the railway station. After some while, Hari calls back, and the novel ends.

Akhila, towards the end of the novel, is the image of an individual who oversaw her life and peace of mind. This journey is a route to her self-realisation. As she attended to other women passengers' stories, she felt that to have completeness as a person, she must open life to different experiences, which gives her new visions to handle her life skilfully. She decides to contact Hari to regain the lost happiness that she had forsaken for the sake of her family. She is never going to settle for others. She is now ready to acknowledge everything she renounced earlier to fear others' concerns.

Janaki opens her story very slowly with deliberately chosen words. She mentioned she is a pampered woman; first, there is her father and brothers to look after her. After marriage, her husband picked up the position. When her husband passes, their son will look after her from where his father left. She sorrowfully adds, "Women like her end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that, we look down upon strong women who can cope by themselves (23). She had been brought up with the idea that a woman's duty was to get married, be a good wife and mother, and home is a woman's kingdom. She has tried hard to build one for her. One day abruptly, she lost enthusiasm in her life. Now she senses an emptiness in her life and in her convictions. She never gets a chance to be a capable, independent woman and is exasperated with being delicate. Now she reflects that her life will be better if she is alone. She feels distressed about all that drives her powerless.

The limited role of a woman in an arranged marriage is highlighted through the character Janaki. She got married to Prabhakar at the age of eighteen. It was an

arranged marriage. She does not know "what to expect of marriage. All through her girlhood, marriage was a destination she was being groomed for" (25). Her mother and aunts took excellent care to make her skilled in marriage by perfecting cooking, cleaning, sewing, and pickling. However, she does not know enough about the married way of life and does not need a yearning to know it.

The writer mixes up different phases of women's development. Janaki can be considered a conventional woman who happily accepts her subordinate role as a wife in the family. Under the care and protection of a devoted husband, she did not choose to feel critical about men because her husband would constantly be there for her support. He upholds her in all her flaws and considers her a delicate woman who cannot manage without him. After long years of marriage, their relationship paves the way for friendly love, which is her sole relaxation in life. She loathes her husband's attitude that he makes others feel that she is a woman with less strength. One day, their daughter-in-law said she is fortunate to have a husband like him because her husband helps her in everything. She realised that she could not do a single thing without his help; this thought left her with a sense of inadequacy. Her husband tells their daughter-in-law about an incident that happened years back with much delight. Janaki rescued their pregnant neighbour by courageously admitting that lady to the hospital with the help of a truck driver. Whenever he mentions it, she feels that it is the only worthwhile deed she has ever done in her whole life. Being a weak woman, Janaki cannot express her desire to be treated as an equal partner. She blindly follows the ideas that her mother passed on to her.

The loneliness and instabilities that an older woman suffers are portrayed in the life of Janaki. When Janaki's son suggests her lonely situation after her husband's death, she manages to ward off that conversation. He held on that she could settle

with him after his father's death. She appears not to wish to think of it either. She feels like being in her husband's security every moment and yearns to die first. She is alarmed by thinking of sleeping alone, waking up alone, and staying alone. From these incidents, it is apparent that she requires a man to feel complete. She wants to transfer this perception to Akhila. However, after her conversation, Akhila looked distracted. She did not get a clear picture of the situation. So, she expected others to explain their story. As she is still confused in her questions regarding single life, she desires to hear other passengers' words. She confesses her desire to get liberated and, simultaneously, longs to be under the care of her husband. A confused woman with a conflicting identity is seen in Janaki.

The views of Janaki are not sufficient to give a satisfying answer to Akhila, so she assumes that other women passengers will help her to find it. Next, it is Margaret Shanti's turn to speak about herself; from her first remarks, it can be assumed that she has similar views about marriage as Akhila. When Akhila replied that she is an unmarried woman, Margaret admitted why should one marry if a person is contented with one's single life. Hearing Janaki's story, she appears very annoyed because it left Akhila to assume that she was committing a huge mistake by living alone. To her, "they are nice women, but they are the kind who do not feel complete without a man. They might say otherwise but I know them, and women like them. Deep in their hearts, they think the world has no use for a single woman" (95). She is of the view that a woman needs a man. Still, it has nothing to do with making a woman complete. After hearing her story, Akhila will realise why she says it. "when I have, you will understand why I say that a woman doesn't need a man. That is a myth that men tried to twist into reality"(95). Margaret's words is an eye-opener to Akhila. She gained the

strength to face her life courageously by discarding other people's opinions regarding her life.

Margaret is a chemistry teacher; she has a unique manner of classifying people with metals and minerals. She analyses herself as water, the universal solvent, "Water that moistens. Water that heals. Water that accepts. Water that flows tirelessly. Water that destroys"(96). As she is water, a very familiar thing, her husband dismissed her as someone of no significance. So, to her, life's sole objective was to show him " what the true nature of water is and how magnificent its powers are." And " that water is to be weighed carefully, or it will weigh upon you! That was the first lesson I had to teach him"(96). Until these years, she was in a frozen solid state. She gets transformed; in her words, there occurred a chemical change.

Generally, a girl is flooded with advice before marriage. Elders take a particular interest in advising women to become the perfect wife. But no one ever cared about informing boys about their role as a husband. This double standard of society is criticised violently through the character Margaret. The night before the wedding, her mother turns to advise her on how she must be a perfect wife. "She told me what it meant to be a wife. Of the loyalty that was demanded of me. Being faithful and putting more effort than a man would make a marriage a successful partnership. She told me how divorce often resulted when a woman did not make that extra effort"(102). Her mother further told her about 'sex', which her mother called the physical side of marriage. "How a good wife never say 'no' even if she isn't in the mood" (102). After her mother left, her father showed up with advice, and she wondered what he had to tell her. Her father said Ebenezer was a good man and would make her happy. Even though he looked strong and capable, he was soft-hearted and sensitive. So she must take much care not to hurt him. It would be

unbearable for him. She thought she would never even dream of hurting him, so the advice was useless, and they would be happy together. The advice from her parents reminds her of the popular make-believe that a woman has to look out for her husband's welfare primarily.

Extreme devotion to a husband who never considers his wife as an individual is a recurring theme in the works of Indian Women Writers. Margaret's early days of marriage show this; she describes her marriage as "she was so drunk on her feelings for him, that all she wanted to do was to be with him. Please him. Show him in thousand ways how much she loved him. Everything else was unimportant" (104). When she got pregnant, everything got changed; his words "Maragatham (as he calls her because Margaret and Shanti were common names, she deserves a more lyrical one and also 'Maragatham' means Emerald in Tamil, a precious greenstone) I'm not so sure if we should have a baby now" (104) shows uncertainty in being a father. He suggested that she might work for her doctorate or do B. Ed as they were not settled. Before having a baby, they must be appropriately established in their career. Till then, they have themselves, each other and what more is required.

A complete surrendering of her desires and aspirations, Margaret doesn't have a choice of her own all was according to her husband's wish. To his preference, she cut her hair, ceased going to church every Sunday, avoided eating bhelpuri from the roadside stalls, and entirely for his own sake, had an abortion too. He added that there was nothing to worry about and everything was arranged; all she had to do was to go along with him. She is uncertain about the decision and worries the church would not permit it. Regardless, she wants to ward off this and feels guilty about it. He said many things to prepare her to believe that it is not a sin and justified his intentions. He secretly arranged everything and forced her to have an abortion despite her reluctance.

She felt enormous regret and remorse at the hospital for this cruel deed. She consoled her inner self by thinking that he knew what was best for them. This echoes that her husband's over-emotional attachment degraded her role as an individual. She is entirely under her husband's control as the traditional woman in Indian culture.

The authoritative and dominating attitude of males deprives women of their basic instincts. Men prefer women to be like dolls who play according to their wishes. A woman does not have personal space for her advancement in a married relationship. Men prefer women to be their shadows. Margaret's husband's authoritative nature is an example of it. Ebenezer always calls her 'My little girl one night in his sleep; he fumbled that he loved her calling 'Ebe' and it reminded her to be a little girl, and he hated her change and wanted to remain like this all her life. This is the reason he forced her to have an abortion. He does not prefer her to transform into a woman with a woman's changes after motherhood. He is selfish enough to make her conform to his needs by aborting their baby. This left a shock in her she thought, "Where is I in all this? Margaret Shanti, the woman. In Ebe's eyes, had I ceased to be? What did he see me as? A little girl, he could rule and mould, make love to and jolly around? It was as if he negated all that was grown-up and womanly about me... What would happen to us when I changed? When does time catch me and leave its marks? (111). This incident changed her devotion, affection, and everything towards him. She indeed thought of separation. Her innate desire to become a mother is marred in this situation. As an individual, she feels unjust for denying her privilege as a human being.

Ladies Coupe' raises many questions which are still relevant in contemporary society. The novel discusses confusion and conflicts in the mind of a woman who wishes to get separated from her husband. Her acceptance in family and community

after separation. Margaret was baffled by these questions when she thought of leaving her marital relationship. She had so many questions in her mind. What should she do after leaving him? Where shall she go after it? Is there anybody to convince her that she has done the right thing? Is she able to place all the things behind and initiate a new life of her own? Will anyone be there to offer support to hold and a shoulder to cry upon? These questions troubled her much. Her family's admiration and respect for him had deepened over these years. It would be tough to convince them about his true nature. Her real consolation in her present life was that despite her defects, overweight, barrenness, and melancholy disposition, he has still stuck by her; for this, she thanked god. When she informed her mother about her sadness in her life, she replied that "it is a woman's responsibility to keep the marriage happy. Men have so many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of marriage oiled"(112). This leaves her exasperated to think that marriage is exclusively the female's responsibility. Everybody considers males as busy, and women have nothing to do. She was sure that her parents did not wish to hear anything that spoils their harmonious retired life. Hardly anyone had ever been divorced in their family. So, by separating from her husband, she must be prepared to leave her family. Though she never conceived, she always longed for a baby and became a mother.

By leading a life without any self-worth, Margaret's sourness towards her husband intensified as time passed. There are more complaints, and she feels estranged from him. She loathes all related to him. Earlier in their life, she used to love every little thing and shared every thought in her mind with him. However, as years passed, she noticed that he didn't listen or had no concern about it. They battled over silly little things. She ceased to talk to him, and when they communicated,

everything ended in quarrels and complaints. The thought of the unborn baby tormented her mind. Every time she thinks of it, she despises him vigorously and repeats, ' I hate him' numerous times in her mind.

Rebelliousness and conflict in Margaret's self are relieved by doing what Ebe hates. She secretly buys big chocolate bars and eats them when he is not in the house. When she is not contented with it, she opens condensed milk tin and has it. The pleasure of having these things made her neglect discontentment in her life. When she became fat, an odd sort of pleasure sneaked into her mind that she no longer is his 'little girl. He always has to show off his interest in music and everything. Even though he did not own any fondness for it, he exposed his passion for Mozart, Beethoven, and great masters before everyone. He boasts that the efficiency of a school principal requires too much imagination. That is why most schools have principals who are English or History teachers. The subject, he believes, is the driest and most boring is chemistry. When he thinks of it, he remembers the odour of rotten eggs. Margaret regards these remarks as an insult to her identity.

A woman enduring all sorts of suffering without any choice is pictured through Margaret. She hates his pervasion of drawing human genitals in book margins bearing his signature. She felt suffocated by marriage; anger and hatred bubbled in her daily. She understands that he had wiped out that good and noble about her life. He made her life devoid of hopes and dreams. Every time she thinks of him, she hates herself and her life. As she deals with everyone similar to a chemical substance according to their different characteristic attribute, she treats him as "concentrated sulphuric acid, H₂SO₄, Hydrogen Sulphate, King of chemicals. Oil of Vitriol. Given to extreme, capable of wiping out all that was water, fluid and alive" (120). By these years, she is fed up with his commanding attitude in school toward innocent children

and at home. Her attempts to get separated from him will not work out, and she is confused about what to do with her life. Most commonly, women encounter similar problems in life. Their dilemma concerning life after separation forces them to endure all sorts of troubles in a relationship.

For all that he committed to Margaret and her disgust and resentment drove her revengeful against him. Her first blow to him is on his self-esteem about his physically fit and magnificent figure. At first, she transformed herself into that 'little girl' that she ceased to be and wooed him as before. Morning, she cooks tasteful dishes which she once used to cook. Ebe can be flattered easily, and she made him eat big breakfasts, lunches, dinners, evening snacks, and late-night snacks. She treated him like this for a year. The change she expects in him begins to work out "Ebe slowly became a fat man. A quiet man., An easy man., A man who no longer needed the coterie or defaced books" (134). Thus, he turns into the man whom she loved before.

Afterwards, Margaret becomes a mother of a girl. This way, she took an act of sweet vengeance upon him. She says, "when you add water to sulphuric acid, it splutters at first. But soon it loses its strength; it loses its bite. The trick is to know when to add it, and how much"(134). This is the strength of water, which is ever undermined. Like this, a woman's real potential is buried elsewhere; when a person understands it, the actual renewal takes place.

Before leaving the train, Margaret encouraged Akhila that "if there is one virtue I have, it is immunity to what people think of me. Naturally, this makes them dislike me even more. People do not like to think that their opinion of someone means nothing to that person. And when it is a woman... the thought is intolerable" (136).

She advised that Akhila must suspend what others would think of her; life will become accessible to her when she drops it. She has to look for herself, and no one else will undertake this for her because her family is insensitive to her needs and aspirations. When Margaret's marriage turned out to be against her expectations, she skilfully managed to drive her life according to her wish by artfully taming her arrogant husband. She relates a woman's power to water, which is capable enough to destroy the king of chemicals. As water is everywhere, without shape, colour, odour, and taste, it is flexible to any circumstances. So, people assume water is incapable of power. However, its actual capacity is hidden; it will be evident to everybody when the moment comes.

After Margaret's story, Prabha Devi begins to talk about herself and her views concerning marriage and relationships. Prabha Devi belongs to a large, prosperous family with a Jewellery business. Her parents have four sons, and herself against her father's expectation of a baby boy. But her mother was pleased and convinced her husband by saying, "we have four sons. A daughter can do no harm. Besides, when it is time for her to be married, you can choose a family that will aid your business interest" (169). Her father says, "a daughter is a bloody nuisance"(169). Her mother's assurances sounded better to her father and gave him many prospects to expand his business, and he felt glad that his daughter would provide enough profit to him. He was a man who expected life was a means of profitable business. Her mother was thrilled to have a daughter, but she never openly affirmed that because it was against her husband's views. To her, "a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell. To be shunned" (170). She is acquainted with obedient women who are shadows of their men. Her mother and other older women in her family belong to this category.

For a woman, education becomes a means to make her perfect in the eyes of her suitors. A girl's self-advancement is not stressed at the time of teaching. Prabha Devi had been given a convent education because it would groom her well and make her fashionable to speak excellent English and fit to enter a good alliance in the future. Her mother took particular care to preserve her charm and complexion so that she would be fair in her future husband's eyes. When she turned eighteen, her father came up with a proposal from an only son and heir of a prosperous diamond merchant. His name was Jagadesh. Her father can also open a diamond section in their four jewellery stores with this marriage. After her marriage, she had to do what all other women do after the wedding. Wait for her husband to come home, for the babies to be born, their first step, their first word. she felt fortuitous to have a steady life of her own. Her words indicate that a woman has nothing more to do in family life. She felt trapped in the mould of conventional family life.

A woman's urge towards liberation and freedom is evident when Prabha Devi gets complete control over the house. Her in-laws have to go to a funeral; she and her husband remain at home, and her mother-in-law gives control of the household to her by handing her the keys. As she was in complete control of the house, "she walked towards the pond where white lilies bloomed, goldfish swam, and frogs lived, all in perennial wetness of content. She pulled up her sari to above her knees and stepped into the pond" (178). She enjoyed switching on a bit of fountain and splashing, rippling the water. When her husband comes home, she takes him to the pond. He feared his father because no one was allowed to play like this in the lovely lily pond. She relished every moment of her freedom, which she had never been able to celebrate. He, too, followed her despite his mother's advice that wives often make husbands take the wrong path, and it was up to the husband to accept or discard the

suggestion. She is overjoyed with the autonomy she longed for and thinks how lucky she is. She is a woman with an unquenching thirst for freedom.

In Indian society, an autonomous individual, especially a woman, generally believes in liberal attitudes towards everything. Prabha Devi's life after her New York trip indicates this. A woman who possesses a modern outlook is sometimes mistaken for her liberal attitude. After the trip, she ceased to be the woman she was. She wears trendy clothes and discarded sari, which she used to wear, a new Prabha Devi is seen in every aspect. She prefers to be a woman she had seen in New York, "Their lives were ruled by themselves and no one else. Such poise, such confidence, such celebration of life and beauty. Prabha Devi wanted that for herself"(177). She had to practice the walk: upright stance with squared shoulders pulled in the belly and gentle but provocative swing of the hips. She began to wear three-inch pointed heels, which made the whole process easier. Then she made several trips to the beauty parlour to learn how to apply makeup. She packed away her saris and preferred silk kaftans. These incidents show her thirst to become a free individual with complete control over her life.

This novel raises many questions which are considered taboo by society. Prabha Devi's preference for delaying motherhood shows her control over her life. She suggested to her husband that she does not want to be a mother soon because when a baby comes, nothing will be the same, and she was young too. She demands that he must use condoms to avoid pregnancy. The conversation about sex leaves her husband embarrassed because, according to him, sex is something people do beneath the cover of the night and a thin sheet. It was not meant for conversation. This forced him to think that he had committed a huge mistake by taking her abroad. Her husband

objected as his parents were impatiently waiting for a grandchild, and they had been married for a year.

A woman has to encounter so many undesirable circumstances while proclaiming her individuality. A man named Pramod misbehaved with her because he mistook her for her liberal attitude. This incident hit her and shook the dignity and self-esteem that she carried with her. She resolves that she must suppress all her looks that pass erroneous messages. Sorrowfully she locks away that gay energetic young woman and unlearns every manner she acquired. She decided not to ask for anything and must be contented in her way of life as it appears. She must go back to being the woman as in her earlier days. She locks herself in the role of a simple homemaker as her mother aspired from a confident girl with passions and needs that she turned into a woman who demanded too little and devoted all of herself.

In Prabha Devi's concept, there are three types of man-woman relationships. First, a woman must show her man that she is incapable of doing anything beyond the periphery of home. Her man will manage all things. At first, he will care for and protect you. But it will not last for long, and he turns to be a tyrant and will control your every thought. Next is if a woman is independent enough to manage things herself, and when a woman needs her man to hold and cherish her or share her sorrows, he might not be there. Because he thinks she will cope alone. So, an intelligent woman must choose a middle path that is more suitable. She wants to advise her daughter about this path which her mother had not told her about while grooming her to be a perfect homemaker. Her ideas show her excellent understanding of her role as a woman in the family and society.

Prabha Devi is determined to learn to swim by herself and told her husband that she had enrolled in a baking class for three weeks. Her husband is surprised to see the woman she had once been:

She prepared to learn by watching the kids learn at the pool. For three days, she did nothing but kick the water in arcs. She struggled to dive underwater to keep her eyes open. On the fourth day, she did not find the need to cling to the bar but held it with just the tips of her fingers and tried to remain afloat and keeping her head in the water and held her breath. On the fifth day, she moved away from the bar and rested a leg on the pool's sidewall, gathered as much air as she could in her lungs, and moved forward to reach the rubber ring the pool attendant had given her. But she sank and felt like drowning, thinking she was not ready to get into the water. On the sixth day, she tried to float on the water with the help of a ring. As the pool is only four feet in depth, she does not need to be alarmed by the thought of drowning. So she, without the help of the ring, tried it and was successful. On the seventh day, she took a rest and that she felt she had regained her lost spirit and femininity, which she had locked away many years ago. On the eighth day, she had new speculations about life: "desire spawns desire; fulfilment begets fulfilment (195).

Prabha Devi understands that what one gives to life comes back manifold. Her suggestion to Akhila is that she must confidently choose what makes her pleasant and must know a woman's self-worth; only then she will be able to find actual gratification in their life.

Marikolanthu is the last remaining passenger in that coupe'. She is excluded from the group of other women for no reason. She is thirty-one years old and works as

a servant for a foreigner, an English woman who is a doctor. The doctor is posted to Nagercoil, so she will set up her house before she arrives, and her son is accompanying the doctor. When Akhila inquired about her family, she said; that Akhila is extremely curious about others' families. She says she is unique from others "because you have all led such sheltered lives, yes even you. I heard each one of them tell you the story of their lives, and I thought, these women are making such fuss about little things. What they ever do if real tragedy confronted them? What do they know of life and the toll it takes? What do they know of how cruel the world can be to women?"(209). She is slightly embarrassed by other women in the coupe' because they all assume that she is different and does not fit into their group because of her low and uneducated look.

Marikolanthu is of the notion that women are powerful and can perform everything as men and, indeed, much more. For this, a woman must seek that vein of strength in her that is hidden and does not appear itself naturally. When women realise it, everything will be more accessible. She narrates how she discovered her inner strength. She was born in a village named Palur, near Kancheepuram. Her father was a farmer; they were not rich but were peaceful. She had two brothers. A few days after her ninth birthday, her father died of some disease that even doctors could not cure. Her mother has to seek the work of a servant at Chettiar Kottai. Chettiar Kottai is an enormous house with countless rooms, annexes, and a wealthy family. Her mother's culinary skills are well known in the village, and on special occasions, she was often called in to help at Chettiar Kottai. She began her life as a housewife before she became an adult. When her mother leaves for work and returns late in the evenings, she has to take care of the home and perform every duty. Her mother constantly grieves that she had robbed childhood from her.

The miserable condition of girls in rural villages is pictured here. From their childhood, they have to face the harsh realities of life. Later her mother decided that she, too, is required to support her in Chettiar Kottai. Therefore, her schooling came to an end. Moreover, her mother could not afford to send her to school along with her brothers. They have to find a new school in town; her mother fears letting a young girl go to school every day by herself to the city. So, she was forced to drop her studies and set up her life as her mother's helper in that huge house. She quickly became friendly with Sujata Akka, the wife of Chettiar's son who adores her very much. Marikolanthu's main task is to take care of Sujata Akka's son. She says she spent all maternal love on this child, and when she became a mother, none had left for her own. Her world revolves around Sujata Akka and her son; nothing was significant than them. She served them for three years.

Marginalised life of rural people is portrayed through the life of Marikolanthu. Sujata Akka discovered that it is not desirable to have her there as young men walk around with her husband and brother-in-law. So, she sent her to Vellore, where Sujata Akka's aunt lives. She had to serve two lady doctors searching for a young girl to be their servant there. Vellore is a different experience for her with two foreign ladies, Missy V and Missy K, and their old gardener Periaswamy. She served them happily for three years. She seems delighted at Vellore. The missies taught her English and assures her that they will offer her a job as a helper in the hospital when she turned eighteen. So, she must finish her SSLC and can do a nursing assistant course. She is equally surprised and suspicious of the improbability of the relationship between Missy K and Missy V. Every night, she sees Missy K leave her room and walk to Missy V's room.

Women belonging to the lower class have to face many problems compared to middle-class or upper-middle-class women. The life of Marikolanthu is an example of it. When her mother fell and cracked a bone, she had to take up her mother's role as a helper at the Chettiar family. She unwillingly takes up the job. She longs to get to Vellore; when her mother is all right, she decides to go, but her mother insists on waiting till Pongal. The day before Pongal, something tragic happened to her. She is raped by a man who is a distant relative of the Chettiar Family. She fears her mother's reaction to the incident. So, she keeps it a secret. She assumes that once she is back to Vellore, she will be capable of dismissing the incidents from her mind. She will not return to her village after that. Nevertheless, she cannot return to Vellore because she has to take care of Sujata Akka, who caught up with jaundice. Later she too becomes ill, which everyone mistakes as jaundice, but actually, she is pregnant. Her mother cannot believe her story, "you were raped, and you kept quiet about it. A man steals your virginity, and you think nothing will change. You expect me to believe that?" (243). Afterwards, she mentioned those events to Sujata Akka. She sought her help because the man who raped her belonged to the Chettiar family. Her mother insisted that Sujata Akka must find some way to arrange her marriage with that man, which is the only solution to the problem.

A woman denying her victim status and against general notions of society is seen in Marikolanthu as she is not ready to marry him. She does not bear setting up a relationship with that man. Her mother cannot tolerate her coldness towards this issue. Her mother pathetically grieved about her future, that nobody would marry her, and her daughter's life was over and have nothing left behind. Marikolanthu tried to soothe her by stating that though her life paused on its path, she did not need to restart it with the help of a person who was responsible for the entire problem. So, she

determines to go elsewhere to someplace where no one recognises her and will kill herself. Sujata Akka came up with a plan to terminate the pregnancy, and after that, she could return to Vellore. There she will be able to get a job. As there will be no marriage arranged for her, that job will be a security for her.

While hearing the word 'husband's protection,' Marikolanthu felt cringy because she felt that her mother and Sujata Akka didn't know its meaning. The men in their lives had done nothing; to make them fulfilled. She regards a man's protection like a cobweb floating through the air. If she opened her mind, it would be considered arrogance, so she kept quiet about it. She was taken to her mother's aunt Periyamma who lived in a village near Salem. She is an older woman and lives alone. She knows some traditional methods to terminate the pregnancy. However, she gives birth to a baby boy, and she does not want to see the child and told Periyamma to take the baby away or kill him. She is uncaring and aloof towards the baby and returns home. On some days, she left for Vellore leaving her baby with her mother. When she reaches Vellore and discovers some tension between Missy K and Missy V. She does not feel anything wrong with the strange relationship and assumes that nothing could be worse than a man raping a woman. Later she has to leave Vellore because Missy V left Vellore, and Missy K is going to Bangalore, and she cannot get a job as a helper in the hospital. She returned to her village. She joined the Chettiar family to care for Chettiar Amma, a mad woman. When Chettiar Amma died, she became an assistant to Sujata Akka, the mistress of the house. Back in her village, she hesitated to see her son or even didn't care about his love. Her duty ends with the money she provided for his care, and she warns her mother not to expect anything better from her.

Opening a different and secret relationship with Sujata Akka becomes a turning point in her life. Sujata Akka is distressed about her relationship with her

husband. She felt disdain towards him, and a physical relationship with him is displeasing to her. She is doubtful that her husband goes to other women and does not want to be mad like her mother-in-law. Subsequently, they built up a relationship where her task was to please and satisfy Sujata Akka. This continued, and she began to reside with her mistress in the Chettiar Kottai. Her prime concern was to make Sujata Akka contented and harmonious. She accepted her husband Sujata Akka's husband to her body when he was at the house. She does this because he will not seek another woman as she shows inclination towards him. If she is available, he will not trouble Sujata Akka. She is sure that they neither loved her nor needed her. After her mother's death, everything went upside down.

The tragic life of poverty-stricken people of rural India is evident in the life of Marikolanthu; her son is left behind uncared after her mother's death. Her brothers disowned their responsibility, but when she returned to Sujata Akka. She discovered her husband's relationship with her and demanded to leave the house. She calls her a strange woman who acts as a friend to her in the morning but feeds on her husband's lust at night. The justifications and confessions were out of place. She leaves the place without accepting the salary that Sujata Akka gave her and feels devastated. Things got worse as she identified growth in her womb. She first decides to ask Sridhar Anna, but while she accepts some money from him, she is more likely to be a whore, who gets money for letting a man use her body, so she gives up that plan. She took her son to a loom and mortgaged the boy for the next two years for five thousand rupees. Thus, she found the money for treatment. She underwent surgery, and when the pain disappeared, she worked for various households as a cook. Later, she decides to find money to procure her son back, so she goes to Missy K in Bangalore.

Marikolanthu insisted that Akhila must seize the management of her destiny. She must have authority over her happiness. She has been a surrogate homemaker, surrogate mother, and surrogate lover throughout these years. These years she lived for other people and gave prime concern to others' pleasure and aspirations. Her life had taught her that living life to satisfy others is utterly insignificant. She is beginning to live for herself, and others are unimportant. Marikolanthu demands that Akhila must focus on herself and her happiness.

Karpagam is a childhood friend of Akhila. She is pictured as a character who directs Akhila toward the right path when she is at an impasse in her life. Meeting with Karpagam becomes a turning point in her life. Karpagam is a widow but never appears in a pathetic state of a widow. There is a confident, independent, and self-reliable woman in her. She feels hatred toward Akhila's family when she knows that Akhila is still leading a single life. She vehemently condemns them, and why are they not regarding her as a human being with desires and hopes. She considers Akhila's family selfish as they failed to realise that she deserves some happiness of her own. When Akhila mentions that though she had passed the age for marriage and did not require one and is staying with her sister Karpagam held the view that she did not live alone because she is educated and employed. By doing so, she can have a life of her own. She encouraged her to stop looking around every few minutes and stop bothering what others think if she pursues her 'self' honestly.

For Akhila, Karpagam is a real inspiration to establish a new life. She regains the courage to voice her likes and dislikes, and her impulse to choose a life that makes her peaceful is from the confidence that Karpagam passes to her. Akhila acknowledges her as some goddess who has come to lead her out of the dark life. Karpagam maintains a critical view of society's attitude towards widows. When she

became a widow, she was not ready to follow the custom codes. She detests the idea of wearing white clothes, which remind her of looking like a corpse ready for the funeral pyre. In her view, it is an essential feminine trait that women like to wear colourful clothes, jewellery, and kumkum. It is not a privilege sanctioned by marriage. It has nothing to do with whether a woman is married or not, whether the husband is alive or dead. In her words, these laws were made by some men who couldn't bear the thought of their wives continuing to be attractive to other men after his death. So, when she became a widow, she didn't give much relevance to the custom which denies a woman her basic instinct. She did not care about what her family or anyone thought of her. As an individual, she has the right to choose how to live. This view changed the life of Akhila, which provided her with a new perception of how her life must be. Karpagam has a vital role in modifying Akhila's life and happiness. She is a survivor, not a victim of problems. She prefers Akhila to be like her.

Akhila's decision to have a solo trip to Kanyakumari is after her meeting with Karpagam. Persuaded to live a life of her own, she determines that she requires answers to some questions that torture her. Her journey to self-discovery starts after the meeting with Karpagam. Karpagam showed her that life will be beautiful when her needs and happiness are given primary importance. So, for making Akhila a woman who singles out her self-worth and autonomy, Karpagam deserves considerable appreciation. Karpagam acts as a driving force in Akhila's life and opens a new world of confidence and self-reliance in front of Akhila.

Mistress is a novel narrated from the point of view of three individuals Radha, her husband Shyam, and her uncle Koman. As the study concentrates on a female character, considerable attention is provided to the characters Radha and Saadiya. Radha is a depressed and confused woman. She detests her existence as a wife to

Shyam. She owns many reasons to despise Shyam and condemn everything regarding him. Shyam is the owner of a resort Near- the Nila; the whole story is set in the background of the river Nila. Shyam, a businessperson with enough cunningness, uses every opportunity to advance his business.

Radha always takes a derisive approach toward her husband's likes and dislikes. She regards him as mean and a pretentious person who is pleased to show off his possessions. Their personalities never blend; they move as two parallel lines that never meet. Her attitude towards her husband was evident from the very beginning itself. A foreigner named Christopher Stewart visits their resort; he carries a cello, and Shyam inquires what it is when Chris explains it; Shyam tries to joke with his words; that time, Radha's reaction is expressed as " I turned away in embarrassment. He was not just a sham; he was uncouth boor, this husband of mine" (9). She hates his exaggerated sense of self-worth and his habit of blaming her family often.

Shyam shows off his list of things like a shopping complex, a rice mill, a row of houses, a rubber plantation, a mango orchard, and a line of coconut trees to everyone, leaves Radha embarrassed. She detests the importance he gives to money in his life. Radha is of the idea that money is not everything a man needs in his life. With strangers, he likes to picture himself as a glorious man. Sometimes when Radha feels low and sad, she prefers his support and consolation, but it never happens. She sometimes thinks he will do anything, even if she asks for a moon, and hates asking him to do what she likes. They have been married for eight years, and she says their physical relationship is a mere routine ritual. She cannot say that she is unhappy with him, but she is not happy. "I can't say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no highs, there are no lows either. Some would call this content even"(53). She knows that she is a possession to him, a much-cherished one. He does not need an equal, he

wants "someone to indulge and someone to Indulge him with feminine wiles"(53). She contrasts her married life to a butterfly that she caught as a part of a biology project at school. She caught a butterfly and pinned it as if it were alive. Its wings spread to display the marking that she was insensitive to its yearning for freedom, and she feels that now she is like that butterfly devoid of individual liberty and choice and clings desperately to her married life.

From the very initial sight of Christopher's foreign traveller, Radha appears to be fascinated by him. Christopher (Chris) had visited the place to have an interview with Koman, Radha's uncle, a Kathakali performer. She regularly meets Chris while at her uncle's house and feels more interested as the days pass. They have conversations regarding her uncle's interview, Kathakali, Hindu mythology, and her uncle's life as a performer and a human being. She shares her opinions and views concerning various subjects that she never does with her husband. Through all these, she becomes more drawn toward him. As she seems attracted to Chris, she wants Shyam to love her more. She appeared guilty for thinking of another man lying in her bed with her husband. Shyam frequently expresses exaggerated comments about her beauty and likes her being beautiful and charming herself for him. He wishes her to be a more beautiful simple homely girl than a sensible woman. He considers that she delights in his extravagant compliments about her, and it will make her suppose that their marriage was a blissful one. She always feels despair in their marriage because she regards herself as not suited to him. He deserves someone better, a woman who enjoys his pride and sugar-coated words.

Shyam repeatedly complains about her lack of concern in his pursuits. They often encourage a conversation about the early days of marriage. She asserts that they two have two diverse opinions on everything: music or films, political parties, and

even the choice of plants in the garden. As the years pass, they avoid the topics they dispute; thus, they have no conversation. She assumed that if she was busy with something, she must be able to get rid of the thoughts about Chris. She forcefully tries to drive him from her mind. As the interview progressed between Chris and her uncle, he asked her to transcribe her uncle's voice because of his difficulty in interpreting his tone. She acknowledges it cheerfully because she gets an excuse to visit him regularly, and if Shyam knew about it, she would say that she does not wish her uncle's words to be distorted. The moments she spent with Chris were seen as extremely glad because she felt certain intimacy while they were together. When Shyam asked her about how long do the interviews last. She says she is unaware of it. She wished "it would never end. As long as Uncle tell his story, Chris was his captive"(107). She expects Chris to be there for a long time. Her interest in Chris can be considered a rebellious act towards her dominant husband.

The pathetic situation of a childless woman and society's insensitive attitude towards them is severely criticised in the work. Women are often stigmatised in these situations even though a couple shares equal responsibility. After two years of their marriage, Shyam's sister Rani Oppol inquired about her plan to get pregnant. She said they would have one when they were ready. She constantly expected that a child would bridge the distance between them. Nevertheless, she would not get pregnant. She sadly recalls an incident when she visited Rani Oppol's house, and there was a ritual named 'seemantham' in their neighbouring house, but Rani Oppol openly forbids her by saying, "I don't think you should come with us. You know how people are; they think a married woman who hasn't had children for so long is a macchi. They will not like it. It is inauspicious to have a barren woman at such function... the evil eye" (114). She went through extreme bitterness of this incident.

Radha's marriage to Shyam is a bad memory for her. She suspects that Shyam accepts her despite realising her lousy past, maybe because of her father's offer of a considerable dowry. She believes that his love for her is connected to her wealth and considers this marriage a profitable business deal. He regarded her as a delightful possession, like owning other things like a hotel, shopping complex and a plantation. She always feels an absence of genuine affection and concern in their relationship. Shyam's intense urge to possess her more than love is the essential thing that builds their relationship. So, she explores the fantasies that a love affair offers with Chris. Their meeting became frequent, and her Uncle and Shyam were equally suspicious of her. She spent late nights with him in her husband's absence. Uncle warned her that there is no justification for infidelity, but she said she loved him and that he is a fire in her blood. She regarded her marriage as something hopeless and exasperated by his over-possessive and outrageous attitude of forcefully taking her liberties as an individual.

Women showing rebellious attitudes toward their husband's domination by indulging in love outside marriage is a recurring theme in many novels by recent writers. She sought comfort in Chris, which became an exclusive means of liberation from her unhappy married life. Her mind was free of remorse while thinking of Shyam, which she had experienced earlier. She feels torn between two men, and she thinks this feeling is similar to her mother, who married both her father and her father's brother. She never tries to love her husband and thinks Shyam always considers her possession which he tactfully earns from her father. Shyam is her cousin, but she does not even have a closeness towards him, even though they knew each other before marriage. She does not give much importance to him after meeting with Chris. She feels spirited, happy and complete only in the company of Chris.

Extra-marital affair with a foreigner manifests her desire to show vengeance toward the patriarchal domination of the family structure. A woman with sexual autonomy and liberal ideals can be seen here.

The characterisation of Radha is different from other female characters that usually appear in recent novels. She feels guilty about her deeds when she discovers Shyam is a sterile person. Later Chris discloses himself as the son of an earlier foreign lover of her Uncle; Radha feels betrayed in her life. If Chris is his uncle's son, she has made a massive mistake by having an incestuous relationship with him. A sense of guilt engulfed her mind as she betrayed Shyam and Chris. When she learned that Shyam is sterile, she felt sympathy and hated herself for not understanding him. As a penalty for deceiving Shyam, she keeps away from Shyam's life. She neither chooses a life with Chris nor continues a married relationship with Shyam. She wants to lead a life of her own because she felt humiliated by behaving so callously in her married life.

Saadiya maintains a unique personality compared to Radha. She is presented through Koman's memories. Koman is the son of Saadiya and Sethu. She belongs to a very conservative and orthodox Muslim community of Arabipatanam. They are the descendants of Arabs and are proud of their ancestry. Women of their community lead secluded life. They are not allowed to step out into the common alleys without the accompaniment of their men. They had secret alleys used only by female folk of the community. The male community impose specific rules: "None of you shall go out unless we are with you. No man may look at a woman unless she is his wife, sister, mother or daughter. If a woman comes in his path, he must turn his head back on her and let her pass"(97). They built secret alleys connecting a side door or a kitchen door. Women can use the secret alleys and men the common alleys. Common alleys

are not meant for women. They can only step into the common alley only with their men. Saadiya belongs to a Muslim community ruled by religious officials, including her father. They set some rules for the women in their community and make them accept blindly that all these rules are for their welfare.

Saadiya, the daughter of Haji Masood Ahmed, a religious official of Arabipattanam, is a girl who yearns for freedom and has an inner urge to experience the outer world:

Saadiya stared at the square of blue above her head. Twenty feet by thirty feet. That was the measure of her sky, the peripheries of her life. She touched the grey walls of the terrace roof. Even if she stood on her toes, she could not look over the wall. It stood a solid six feet and two inches high, ensuring she would never see what was not meant for her eyes, ensuring that she was not visible to anyone. Saadiya felt what was by now a familiar sense of despair. Would she like her sisters and every other woman born here to live and die hidden by these walls? Was there never to be a way out from here? (99).

Her father constantly cautioned her that Arab blood ran through their veins; they were navigators who had crossed the blue seas and established their path there. Whenever she understood her confinement, she wished to tell her father that " if it is their blood that runs in our veins, then it is inevitable the way I feel. There is singing in my head that says there is so much to see, so much to do, so much to know. It isn't fair that you men get to go wherever you want; see and do whatever you like, and I am expected to be content with this patch of blue and this maze of alleys"(99). This shows her frustration in leading a secluded life. She is the only person who questions her underprivileged plight as a woman in the whole community.

A woman's life confined in four walls of her home and longing for freedom is pictured in Saadiya. She craved to step outside the secret alley and explore the world outside. When she visited Nadira, her sister's house, she was fascinated by the pictures she had seen in a book that Nadira's husband acquired on his trip to Singapore. " Saadiya couldn't read the words, but there were pictures in it. Of places, blue seas, and green hills. Of roads that ran endlessly and gardens that had no walls. Saadiya could not stop looking at the pictures. They gave her yearning a greater edge, a sharper definition"(101). The picture of the world outside Arabipatanam gave her more dreams about the beautiful world outside. These pictures accelerated her desire, and she wanted to enter the world outside.

When she reaches Nadira's house and finds it locked, a secret desire pulls her feet. She decides to reach the common alley with the thought that there would be no one and no one would know it. She took away the black fold of cloth that covered her face at the secret alley. While she reached the common alley and enjoyed the blue sky, she accidentally bumped into a man on a bicycle. With horror, she realises that her face is exposed and to her misfortune, she is spotted by Zuleika, her family's servant. The servant did what was expected of her. She informs her family, and her father does what Saadiya anticipated. "He had Zuleika heat an iron rod till it blazed a fiery orange, and with tears in his eyes, he laid it on my calf. This hurts me more than it will hurt you, he said. But I can't let you go unpunished for risking the honour of my family"(130). Her father placed it three times on her leg and said, "it is your age. You feel the need to break the rules. This is my Saadiya; good girl is still the restlessness in you. The next time you feel the need to break your reins, remember how your flesh melted and how my heart broke"(130). Even though she faced brutal

punishment, she did not feel guilty about her deeds. She does not cease fantasising about the sky with no end.

The women living in Arabipatanam are allowed to see the sea once every year, but all the men there go to the beach every day as they go to the mosque. Women of the Muslim community of Arabipattanam lead tormented life, and they have no communication with the outer world, so most of them believe that these rules are for their security and well-being. It is Saadiya who felt the urge to break out of this confinement. All the other women unknowingly enjoy the oppression as a blessing to them. They fear their men and the harsh punishments meted out to them if they protest, only Saadiya showed the inner strength to combat the ill-treatments.

The man she meets in the common alley is Sethu, an assistant to the doctor. Sethu fell in love with her at first sight, and she, too, is fond of him. As she is a person who explores new experiences in her life, she decides to continue the affair and decides to face courageously all hardships that come. She has a strong and unbending attitude which she does not compromise. She took bold decisions about her future. She challenges her father when he arranges a marriage for her. When she took a rigid stand against her father's decision, her father disowned her, and she married Sethu. When she became pregnant, she decided to name the child a Muslim name and bring him up as a true Muslim. However, Sethu opposed it violently; he agreed that their son would choose his ways when he is a grown-up. " You keep saying my, my, my... He is my son as well. My blood is in him. What's wrong with you, Saadiya? You sound like a fanatic, you should like one of the idiots in Arabipatanam. you choose to give it up, so why are you inflicting it all on this little child" (228). It is a severe blow to her inner self. Sethu said if she thought that she had made a mistake by marrying a non-muslim, she could leave and go back to her family, leaving the child with Sethu.

She left the house with a broken mind and committed suicide. She does not want to compromise her identity as a faithful Muslim and her attitude at any cost. When she felt that her identity is questioned, she defended it by taking her own life. She cannot resolve the confusion that if Sethu too disowns her, there is no place for her to go; the only comfort is death which she sought.

By a close evaluation of the texts, it can be assumed that each of these characters doesn't choose to be the victim of destiny or fate, but they struggle to rewrite their life in such a fashion as desired. By examining the life of Janaki, it can be understood that even though she had a love affair, she acted according to the wish of her parents. After marriage, she decided to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. However, due to her husband and in-laws' cold and negative attitude, she senses her married life is an utter failure. Her efforts to become acceptable by becoming a mother are also futile. From that life, she has nothing to hope for. So, she tries to live that life as she desires. She continues her education by completing her degree and post-graduate courses.

Meanwhile, she met her old lover Arjun. As he offers her a happy future life, she chooses it happily. She has nothing to think about when shown a life that she dreams of and gets rid of her unhappy and desperate life. She has no other option, and it is quite natural to accept what makes one happy thus, she rewrites her life according to her wish—more than anything, she chose that life for the well-being of her especially needed a child. Life with Arjun is a bonus; she gets in the way of her efforts to build a better life for her and her daughter. For the sake of her daughter, she acts courageously and boldly. Her acts are a means to bring about her inner strength and individuality. The journey to a new life is a path to her self-realisation.

Though Maya seems flirtatious at first, the real reason behind it justifies her act. When she shares her sorrows with Rahul, she concludes that only she can help her get out of her miserable life. So, she decides to resume her education, if her husband likes it or not. When she gains a job and can stand by herself, she will escape from her married life. She felt caged in her life as a married woman. Her husband tramples her freedom and liberties. As a free-willed individual, her yearning for freedom becomes the motivating force towards accomplishing her individuality. She is not ready to compromise her identity for the sake hopeless marriage.

Secrets and Lies is the story of a group of women who have been friends for a long time. Each of these women faces different problems in their life. Bubbles, the wife of a millionaire, is bored of her monotonous life and has no reach to her husband's personal and business life. On the other hand, Samira is disillusioned by a dominant husband, who lacked interest in her as she grew oversize after being a mother. Her individuality, personal interest, wishes, and opinions are devalued daily. She tolerated it because she had no other choice. On their visit to India, both she and Bubbles was offered a job at Zeba Khan's charity organisation. They felt a new sense of courage by this that they could live by themselves even if they left their family. When they become fearless about their life and risk their married life to gain new happiness, they realise their space and individuality. Her fundamental transformation occurs when Bubbles decides to be comfortable for herself and not others. She chooses to go ahead in her relationship with Gio as she discovers her husband is gay. Samira, who has no choices in her family life and is a mere shadow of her husband, acts boldly by questioning her husband. She wants to know about her worth and place in his life. She dared to forego that relationship if he is not ready to change his attitude.

Anita and Zeba lead single life in contrast to Bubbles and Samira's. Anita can only adjust to a person who accepts herself and her individuality. That is why she has unsuccessful relationships earlier. With Hugh, she is happy as she has enough space to express her personality and flower her identity. Even though Zeba has many drawbacks, she is a person with some responsibilities toward society because she feels she has more to do in the community as an actor. She decided to begin a charity group for Mumbai Street kids and abused kids. These two women had found their own space. However, Samira and Bubbles had only started their efforts to identify their space by the end of the novel.

Women characters of Anita Nair share similar aspects. The female characters in *Ladies Coupe*: Akhila, Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret, Marikolanthu, and Karpagam, are powerful enough to transform their lives as they desire, though they are considered powerless by menfolk and society. All of them have an individuality of their own. The stories they share make readers realise that the life situations and problems they faced inspired them a lot to become empowered. From the age of nineteen, Akhila has been the guardian of her family. She is responsible for bringing up her siblings, settling their life and taking care of their needs. Both she and her family cared less about having a life of her own. Later she realised that living for others' wishes is a worthless life. So, she chose a life where her happiness and desire came first. As she is bold enough to lead a single life, or she may reunite with her old lover or find another man, the choice is absolutely hers. She is no more reluctant to discard her wishes and desires for the sake of others. By the end of the journey, she realised what she lacked in her life. The journey is a quest to identify her 'self' and identity.

Janaki and Prabha Devi have broadly similar views about life and relationships. They depend too much on their partners and have a shared individuality. However, in their inner self, they crave for freedom. Prabha Devi has her own choice of space that she draws out from her life. She can quickly become assertive and self-reliant when she wishes to be. She has her likes and dislikes in everything, but Janaki contrasts her. She is emphatic in associating with her husband. She was made to believe and internalise it by her husband. Her life experience made her think that she is fragile and had lived someone else's life. So, she longs to be strong and independent. She feels that she can do things better without being dependent on her husband.

Margaret is a clever woman who wisely handles her controlling and selfish husband. She is powerful as water, which dissolves everything. From her, Akhila must gain the courage to not care for others too much in her life. Marikolanthu's life becomes an inspiration to Akhila. She has faced so many more hardships than any other woman in the couple. Despite these, she tries to be happy in her life by designing it in her own way. Marikolanthu's life motivated Akhila to develop a strong individuality of her own. Karpagam is a woman with liberal ideas. Her words and ideas are the driving force for Akhila's urge for freedom. Karpagam insisted her to have a life of her own, where prime importance is given to her happiness. Karpagam is a widow but has her views regarding her life. She focuses less on others' attitudes and cares less about what others think. She says her life is easy because of her confident stance, and she wants Akhila to transform herself. Karpagam has a special place in making Akhila a self-reliant personality.

Radha in *Mistress* is different from other women characters selected for the study. She carries a rebellious attitude throughout her life. She has her own choices, but her marriage is not her happiest choice. From the shock of a betrayed love affair,

she had nothing to do but agree to marry Shyam. Due to this, she felt a vast space that nothing could bridge. Real love and understanding are lacking in their married life. That is why she falls for the foreigner. She lived alone when she realised her mistakes, neither with her husband nor Chris. She is content with being alone and wants a free life without personal ties. Saadiya carries a different personality than Radha. She is stable and has a determined attitude which forces her to embrace death. Her identity conflict of being a true Muslim is strong enough to take bold actions when Sethu challenges her. She realised that she had failed in her choice by marrying a non-muslim and continuing in that relationship would be miserable to express her individuality. She had no place of shelter; the only option in front of her was to take her life.

In all these works, women do not try to act within the frames of being intelligible women. They uphold their feminine roles to make their life fit and suitable in society. Though they have rebellious attitudes against different societal notions, they show how much success will be a woman when she becomes a strong-willed individual in society. They never deny what is feminine but perceive it as a valuable tool to realise themselves. The characters never try to repudiate their role in the family as mothers, wives and daughters but make it more desirable as suited to discover themselves. Their primary concern in life is to make themselves comfortable by recapturing their life as pleasing to themselves by realising their feminine roles and self. Even though they break family ties and indulge in relationships outside marriage it can be assumed that they prefer to move to a more comfortable zone. From a failed relationship, they move to relationships which offer them space to assert their self and a life pleasing to them.