

## ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPE: WOMEN IN QUEST OF SELF-IDENTITY

---

**Dr. T. Bhaskara Sudha**

Head Dept. of English

St. Joseph's College for Women (Autonomous)

Visakhapatnam, India

---



Abstract:

In the traditional postcolonial society, the challenging question is of women's deliverance. Women writers are more ardent and serious on these issues. Women's efforts to seek their liberation and self-identity started uprising all over the world. Anita Nair, one of the modern woman writers is one such genuine writer, who portrays the realities of women facing in society through the female characters in her novel. Her strength as a writer lies in bringing everyday thoughts desires and doubts women experience. Anita Nair conveys a women's state of mind and the dilemmas one faces with freshness and charm through her protagonists. The research paper entitled "Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe: Women In Quest of Self-Identity" is an attempt to focus upon the self –identity and to detect the complications a woman faces in a male dominant society.

Keywords: Feminism, Self –identity, dilemma, confusion, desires, liberation

#### Introduction:

Indian English writer Anita Nair is best known as a novelist. Her novels 'The Better Man' and 'Ladies Coupe' is one of bestselling works and have been translated in 21 languages. She was born at Shornur, Kerala and took education in Chennai. After that, she returned to Kerala to pursue BA in English Language and Literature. In 2002, Anita Nair was elected as one of the best five writers in India. Her third novel, *Ladies Coupe*, was about women's conditions in a male-dominated society and was told with great insights, harmony, and wit. This novel was also rated as one of the top five books of the year in 2001.

A woman in the post-independence era is aware of the discernment she has to face, the sexual harassment and violence to which she explores in the male-dominated society. Due to education and awareness, women started questioning their self-identity, and recognition and are able to prove themselves. A woman in the contemporary era has developed the urge to create a milieu for the full expression of her emotional and moral self and what is important to her is that the craving to be accepted as an individual, a person in her own right and enjoying the same status as man has always enjoyed down the ages.

Anita Nair is one among those Indian writers in English who with her impressive technique of novel-writing give a realistic depiction of women's wretched condition in Indian society. On one side Nair explores women's agony and on the other side, she suggests a number of ways to fight back against these agonies to make their life a fruitful and peaceful one. Her women characters are not weak; they are courageous and possess impressive mettle and will power to fight back against social evils.

This assessment of her own self is the trait of the women characters in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. In their reaction to role conflict in a patriarchal society, they show the strength to achieve their goals of self-realization. Without surrendering to societal pressures and without breaking away from accepted, traditional, social institutions, these women characters succeed in being individuals.

#### Women In quest of Self-Identity:

This is the main question posed by Anita Nair through the protagonist Akhila in the novel "Ladies Coupe". It is the story of six women which deals with a women's quest for strength and independence. Anita Nair novel echoes the self-realization of women in society. At the end of the novel, we realize that every person possesses some reasonably good qualities and inner strength which even they are unaware of. Six women find themselves together in *Ladies Coupe* traveling, each for her own resolution. This *Ladies Coupe* becomes a platform where each one begins voicing their saga and in the process is both reassured and committed of greater things.

Each chapter of the novel is dedicated to one woman's story: Akhila, (Akhilandeshwari) the protagonist is a forty-five-year-old spinster, who takes various roles, unable to marry due to the hardships. She has considered the "man" of the family is the eldest daughter. She has to

take responsibility for her siblings and mother, and therefore, no one forces her to marry and assumes she is happy with her situation.

Although the bread earner, Akhila was not recognized and designated the status of being the real head of the family“.

Even after mother's death, her siblings, especially sister the Padma took her for granted and Akhila realizes the need to find her own life and happiness and her boards the train to Kanyakumari, where her reservation is confirmed in a ladies coupe, the perfect setting for relieving of memories.

The second woman in the ladies coupe to speak on the issue was Janaki who gets married to Prabhakar when she is eighteen years old and leads a happy, comfortable, long married life for forty years. Janaki leads a happy life until she realizes her submissiveness and her loss of self-identity. She feels some cord of revolt when she finds her husband controlling everybody even their grown-up son. She says to her husband,

Prabhakar's conceited authority, exactness, and precision irritate Janaki. She discovers herself and the true happiness that lies in her, but she is not able to take off the web under which she is covered for a long period. She realizes that her life is not her own life as it's wholly dedicated to her husband and to her son. She is always snagged between home and society

“Indian women are deeply linked to social, cultural, religious and regional features and their identity is thus multi-layered” (Nubile1).

Throughout her life, Janki's husband has been a framework for her and never leaves her alone

Her initial response to Akhila's query

"Why should a woman live by herself? There is always a man willing to be with her.

Women are not self-dependent or able to live their own life, they are always under the control of their parents and of their husbands after marriage. They are not supposed to think about their own freedom they still feel trapped under the chains which emotionally, physically and intellectually affect them. After forty years of Janaki's married life, she realizes that she does not have her self-identity as a human being who is always in the clutches of her husband or son. Nair explores that every woman should try to be cautious about their rights and for the expression of their individual capability.

The third woman who enters in the same couple is Margaret Shanti. She is a victim of male domination. Her husband Ebinger Paulraj tried to control her body, mind, and spirit and never gave a space of her own. Margaret chooses flattery as a weapon to bring down Ebe's self-

esteem. She decides to take revenge on the self-immersed husband by making him fat and less arrogant by feeding him excessively. Margaret Shanti is a representative of all those women who seek some kinds of praise and appreciation from their male counterpart.

"I hate him. I hate him" (131 *Ladies Coupe*).

The next prominent woman is Prabha Devi. The news of the birth of Prabha is deplored by her father in the following words:

She is brought up to become a good bride, the perfect wife, and homemaker. When she turned forty, she started feeling an emptiness in her life and decided to do something for herself to bring back the excitement in life. She learned swimming without anyone's knowledge and this helped her to boost her self-confidence.

The touch of his finger tingled on her skin long time" (66)

The next woman Marikolanthu is the most pitiful woman among the six. She is the only woman in the novel, who had surpassed the worst material as well as an emotional hindrance with a ray of hope and vigor to survive. It is through her story that the issues of rape, notions of virginity, motherhood, heterosexuality, and love are expressed in the novel from a victimized female perspective.

Fighting with life, she experiences a kind of happiness and is being content with herself.

She stands as the spokesman of Anita Nair and imparts words to her while saying,

"I live alone. I have for many years now. We are strong Akhila. Whatever you think you want to. Live alone .build your life for yourself. Where your need come first"

(202 *Ladies Coupe*).

Conclusion:

Every writer has a message which is brought out through composition Anita Nair is no exception she has lots to convey to her readers. The novel is non-linear in nature as for a Akhila's story is concerned, as it is told in fragments in between the stories of other women. As the story continues the tales of other women bring a clear picture to Akhila to know her self –identity, enhancing her to develop an awareness of life. the question posed by her at the beginning of the novel provides an answer at the end. The novel concludes on a note of Akhila's resurgence of life where she tries to visualize her mere future filled with rainbow colors when she finally calls her friend Hari, to meet her.

Reference:

- Anita Nair: ladies coupe-A Voyage Of Self Discovery; H.K.Awatade 3.

- Devi, Indra “Women in Post-colonial India. A study of Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe.” Proceeding of the UGC
- Manohar, D. Murali, Indian Fiction women's Fiction: A Study of Marriage, Career, and Divorce, Atlantic Publishers and Distributors Pvt. Ltd., Delhi – 1994 Print.
- Nair, Anita’s Ladies Coupe. New Delhi; Penguin Books, 2001.Print 2.
- Nubile, Clara. *The Danger of Gender: Caste, Class, and gender in Contemporary Indian Women's Writing*. New Delhi: Sarup & Sons, 2003. Print.