

Self - discovery of women in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

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Abstract

Anita Nair is a famous Indian novelist who writes her books in English. She is best known for her novels *A Better Man*, *Mistress*, and *Lessons in Forgetting*. Her novel, *Ladies Coupe*, examines the experiences of women's different lifestyles by journey. The main theme of this novel is self-discovery from the subjugation of Indian male-dominated society. Here, *Ladies Coupe* refers to the reserved ladies' compartment in the train. Anita Nair's most novels were written about family, relationships, social position, and gender inequality. In Indian society male is believed to be superior to ladies and overwhelm them. Indian English Fiction is a reflection of society. This paper focuses on women's suffering and their own identity.

Keywords

Women, Sufferings, Dominated, Self - discovery, Society

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1. Introduction

Anita Nair was born in Shoranur in Palakkad district of Kerala. Nair was educated in Chennai before returning to Kerala, where she gained a B.A English language and literature. She is an Indian novelist who writes her books in English. She is best known for her novels *A Better man*, *Mistress* and *Lessons in forgetting*. She has also written poetry, essays, short stories, crime fiction, historical fiction, romance and children's literature. The majority of 20th Century novels depicts the woman issues and related their status in Indian Society. Anita Nair is an acclaimed Indian author known for her contributions to contemporary literature, especially in the portrayal of female experiences and identities.

As a contemporary writer herself, she is part of vibrant community of female authors who have made significant impacts in recent years. Some notable contemporary female writers, alongside Anita Nair include Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chimamanda Ngozi, Zadie Smith, Margaret Atwood; these authors like Anita Nair have enriched contemporary literature with their diverse perspective and unique storytelling styles, offering profound insights into women's lives and societies at large. In Indian English fiction women writers analyzing issues of woman, made a victim of society etc.

Anita Nair plays vital role in examining women's lives and their psyche within the context of south Indian family, representing women in their traditional roles as mothers, wives and daughters. Her works are strolling around feminism and searching for women's identity. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair focuses on marital relationship including marriage and divorce, social and cultural, and psychological issues. Anita Nair in her novel *Ladies Coupe* attempts to show that how people in India still treat women as inferior and how they get a substandard position in the society just because of their

physical distinctiveness.

Ladies Coupe is a novel published in 2001. The novel follows the journey of a middle aged Indian woman named Akhila as she travels to Kanyakumari in her search for independence and on the train is *Ladies Coupe*, swap stories with five different women who inspire her to live her own life. *Ladies Coupe* explores the experiences of different woman by journey. The main theme of this novel is self-discovery from the subjugation of Indian male dominated society. Anita Nair, a living postmodern Indian woman writer in English has earned much critical attention and has been applauded both in India and abroad as a significant novelist.

2. Self - discovery of women in Anita Nair's Ladies Coupe

In the post-colonial era, the world filled with the domination of male (or) patriarchy. So, No one thinks about female, they also have equal rights for their education, writings, and knowledge. Women must have freedom and independence because all are equal. So, Indian women writers decided to express their own feelings, views and anger through their writings in the post-colonial for two major reasons because of this, "It was importance for experience of women under the patriarchal influence to come out to the forefront and expose the undue cruelty be held on them by me: this paper focuses on the sufferings of women and how they are suffered by male and how they got self-discovery.

Anita Nair compared her novel to Chaucer's the *Canterbury Tales* told by a band on pilgrims of their way to the shire of St. Thomas at Canterbury. They are a collection of stories in frame. '*Ladies Coupe*' Anita Nair depicts six women in a railway compartment each having a story to tell, by the journey they share their story to one another and they become

strong and powerful. Ladies Coupe is the story of six women. They meet in The Compartment of train by travel.

Akhila or Akhilandeswari, is the Brahmin heroine, whose life is not good and not in her control because of her father was dead. So, after her father she takes over all the responsibilities of family because she is the eldest of her family. She works as an income tax clerk and she was forty five years old. She has to act as a daughter, sister, aunt and provider of family. She decided to move away from her family and responsibilities. So, she decided to go on a train journey. In the train journey, she meets and listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and tells her too, seeking in them a solution to question that has troubled in their own life: "Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete?" The story switches over from past to present and present to past.

Akhila, who is most crushed by the member of her family because she is the eldest member of the family. So, she has done her all duties to her family. She is expected to be an obedient daughter, affectionate and motherly sister and everything but she was not recognized as the real head because she was a woman. As a woman, she has her own dreams and desires, but she didn't concentrate that, she sacrifices everything for the happiness of her family. She lives her life for family, for the society but not for her.

Akhila's mother expected her, she goes somewhere to get permission from her brother "Perhaps you should ask you brothers, for permission first" (150) when sometimes Akhila argued that she was the eldest of the family, why she should ask permission from them but Akhila's mother replies "You might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family" (150) When Akhila boldly told Padma about her decision to live alone, she without reluctance says anyone's, "Do you think the brothers will consent to this? Do you think they'll let you live alone?" (204). When Akhila says for her defiance, "For heaven's sake, I don't need consent" (204), Padma mocked at her telling, "They are the men of the family" (204). Why a woman cannot live alone when she earns money and when she has a good education? The reason is that the society permits her to live with her family but it is not applicable for men. But at the end she decided to fly, Akhila's resistance was stronger than theirs that she boarded the train to Kanyakumari.

Anita Nair portrays certain characters like Akhila's mother to express how women are strong conservation of the patriarchal society that has framed strict social, political, economic, educational limitations of women. Akhila's mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife, according to her wife is always inferior to her husband.

Janaki Prabhakar, the first woman, Janaki is the oldest woman among five, comfort wife and confused mother. Janaki was married to Prabhakar at the age of eighteen throughout her girlhood, marriage was a goal she was being well groomed for and her relationship with her husband is a friendly love. Janaki Prabhakar's struggles are primarily centered on her

traditional role as a house wife and her journey towards self-realization. She gets married at young age and devotes her life to being a dutiful wife, daughter and mother, doing what is expected of her in a conservative society. Janaki's life is so intertwined with her duties towards her family that she loses her own sense of identity aspirations, but this is often suppressed. Janaki's life is marked by a depended on her husband for both financially and emotionally support.

Sheela is the fourteen years old who is so sensitive, a complex and multi-dimensional character. Her character reflects of the challenges faced by many women who struggle to find their identity in the society. She enters in the train at midnight. She fought with the shock of the death of her grandmother. Sheela becomes victim of male dominating society because Hasina is Sheela's friend. When Hasina's father touched to Sheela then she feels hurt. One day Sheela went to her friend house, that time Hasina's father misbehaved to her like unwanted touching, but Sheela did not open her mouth, because he was the father of her friend Hasina. So this way woman was sexually abused by Indian society. After Sheela decided she never got to her friend's house. So, this way Anita Nair shows by this story unjust treatment of women by man, this way man has physically abused to women, woman become victim of the society.

Margaret Shanthi is another narrator of the ladies coupe. She was married to Ebenezer Paulraj whom she loved a lot and she wants to married him. They are married. Paulraj is the principal of that school in which Margaret teaches they are after complete the M.Sc., but Margaret Shanthi is the student and also gold medalist. After completes her post-graduation. She wanted to do Ph.D. but her husband said to her complete B.Ed. In the male dominated society, women did not take decision in their own life. A central aspect of Margaret's characters is in the conflict between the professional success and her unfulfilling personal life. Margaret's journey in the novel involves her struggle to find self-worth and happiness in the face of demeaning marriage. Her story highlights the importance of self-respect and the need to stand up against emotional abuse.

Anita Nair elaborates her story in this novel; Prabha Devi is another victim of male dominated society. Prabha Devi is portrayed as a traditional Indian woman who initially lives a life that is largely defined and confined by society norms and expectations. Prabha Devi's life is largely defined by her roles as a wife and daughter in law. She struggles with the loss of her own identity and desires as she conforms to the expectations of her family and society. Prabha Devi's relationship with her husband is complex. She experiences a lack of emotional and intellectual connection, feeling that her marriage lacks the companionship and understanding the desires.

Marikolunthu story is so tragic and as a child she becomes victim of male dominated society. Marikolunthu's life is marked by extreme poverty. Her struggles are compounded by the lack of basic resources and opportunities, which is a

stark contrast to some of the other characters in the book. She endures physical and emotional abuse. Her story includes instances of exploitation both in her personal and professional life, which is a harsh reality for many common in similar situations. Like the other women in the novel, Marikolunthu is on a journey of self-discovery. Her struggle is not just against external circumstances but also an internal battle for self-worth and identity. Marikolunthu's story adds depth to ladies coupe, illustrating the intersection of gender and class in the context of women's struggles.

3. Conclusion

Anita Nair shows us realism of Indian society and male dominated society. In this novel Anita Nair shows how the women are suffered by men and how they lose their identity in the male dominated society. Indian people believe her women are inferior to men. They have no knowledge about women also have capable for take their decision. Our Indian male society must need to change their thoughts and behavior for women. Anita Nair portrays condition of male society and Indian Society.

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