

JOURNEY MOTIF IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPE

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ABSTRACT

Most of the Indian women novelists write about the feelings and emotions of women. One among them is Anita Nair. She is an Indian novelist, who is best known for her novels, poetry, essays, and short stories. According to Psychoanalysts, a journey is a voyage of self-discovery. Anita Nair's characters discover their self through physical as well as psychological journey. There is always a change in the behaviour and personality of their characters. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair skillfully presents both the physical and mental journey of Akhila. How Akhila came out of social and psychological problems with the help of education and experience is discussed in this article.

In the novel, *Ladies Coupe*, Akhila is torn between family duty and desire for education and love. Her desire for education remembers the words of Malala Yousafzai who also fights for the education of women. Malala says, "They will not stop me. I will get my education. If it is in home, school, or any place." Her statement clearly shows that no one can stop the education of women. (Malala, 2013: 261) Like her, Akhila feels that education gives freedom to her. So, after getting job, she continued her studies through a correspondence course. Her desire for education is explained by Anita Nair as, "On her thirty-fifth birthday, she decided to get herself an education. She enrolled in the open University for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Akhila chose history as her main subject." (85). This is her first step towards deciding on her own. This article explains the life of the protagonist Akhila and how she discovers her true self and seeks independence through her journey starting from Bangalore to Kanyakumari is analyzed clearly.

KEYWORDS: WOMEN, PSYCHOLOGY, PHYSICAL JOURNEY, MENTAL JOURNEY AND TRANSFORMATION.

INTRODUCTION

When women thrive, all of society benefits, and succeeding generations are given a better start in life. (Kofi Annan, 2015:106) So, women writers knowingly or unknowingly work for the development of society through their writings. The purpose of this research is to analyze the journey motif in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*. The research problem discussed here is how the education of women and the experiences they face in life help the protagonists to face this world. Though it seems to be about Indian women, it is also universal.

Anita Nair is one of the significant Indian women novelists writing in English. Her novel *Ladies Coupe* was published in 2001. In this novel, Anita Nair projects Indian feminism and the feelings of women through the characters in her novels. Through this story, the novelist stresses the importance of living a life of one's own. To live an independent life, education is important. Dr. Kumar's observation aptly explains the importance of education of women: "Education is milestone of women empowerment because it enables them to responds to the challenges, to confront their traditional role and change their life. The world of humanity has to wing one is woman and the other is man. Meet until both wings are equally developed can the bird fly. This statement focused on the importance of women in our society." (Kumar, 2012:1) Women empowerment is possible only when women become economically self-dependent and they participate actively in different decision-making processes at home or outside. How the protagonist in *Ladies Coupe* achieves success and become 'a New Woman' in life through her journey of life is discussed in this article.

JOURNEY MOTIF IN *LADIES COUPE*

Anita Nair's second novel, *Ladies Coupe* has acclaimed worldwide recognition and was translated into more than twenty-five languages. This novel talks about the journey of a middle-aged Indian woman named Akhila. She is a forty-five-year-old Brahmin unmarried woman. After her father's death, she got his job. She works as a clerk in the income tax department. She felt that she had never got the chance to live her own life, always fulfilling the roles of the daughter, sister, and aunt. Dissatisfied with her life, she leaves home to live an independent life, she gets a train to Kanyakumari. She lies to her sister Padma that she is going to Kanyakumari for official work. But, She travels to Kanyakumari in search of independence.

When she tries to sleep on the train, she remembers her father's life and death. Her father Pattabhi Iyer was an honest man. He never accepts bribes. His superior Koshy spreads the rumours that Pattabhi Iyer accepted bribes. Because of that her father threw himself before a fast-moving car and was crushed to death. After his death, Akhila is the breadwinner of the family and supports her mother, brothers Narayan, Narasimman, and her sister Padma. After getting the compassionate appointment, Akhila passed her pre-university exam. Anita Nair stresses the need for education for

women. Charles Meion rightly observes that “Education is a potent tool in the emancipation and empowerment of women. The greatest single factor that can incredibly improve the status of women in any society is education. It is indispensable that education enables women not only to gain more knowledge about the world outside of their hearth and homes but helps her to get status, positive self-esteem, and self-confidence, necessary for courage, and inner strength to face challenges in life.” (Charles Meion, 2019 :137). Now, her brother Narayan becomes a mechanist and Narasimman becomes a postgraduate teacher. Both of them are settled and married. Her sister Padma and her children are living in an apartment. Akila wants to live by herself in her apartment. But her brother Narayan advised her to live with Padma and work for the betterment of her children. No one including her mother never bothered about Akila. They never think about Akila’s marriage, her needs, and wishes.

On the train, especially in *Ladies Coupe* (compartment), she met five ladies: Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Marikolunthu, and Sheela. These six ladies (including Akhila) talked from the kitchen to world. Even though they differ in age and educational background, their stories have a common thread -the predicament of Indian women in a patriarchal society. Through these ladies’ stories, Anita Nair depicts Indian social norms and women’s inner urge for freedom. After listening to these ladies, Akhila realized that she had given society an unnecessary power to rule her life. The Co-Passengers ideas help Akhila to think and to reflect on her life. Train journey changed her journey of life. In the end, she plans to live a life of her own.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TITLE *LADIES COUPE*

The title *Ladies Coupe* refers to the lady’s compartment on a train. On the train, these six ladies discussed their problems freely. These six women’s meeting was not planned earlier. It was incidental and an important one.

The protagonist’s name Akilandeshwari means the earth. It signifies the whole, completeness. Another connotated meaning of Akhila is one who rules the world (Akhilam). The names of her brothers Narayan, Narasimman, and her sister Padma are all names of Gods and Goddess. Indian people gave such ‘Namas’ (names) to their children, so that they can chant the ‘Namas’ (names) of God often by calling their children.

Anita Nair used symbols to show the character of Akhila. Akila used to wear starched cotton sarees to the office. It shows her character. She is also stiff like her sarees. She never shows her feelings and desires to her family.

The place Kanyakumari means the virgin Princess. ‘Kanya’ means virgin and ‘Kumari’ means young girl in Sanskrit. Devi Kanyakumari who lives in Kanyakumari is the Goddess of virginity and penance. It is a practice that people choose to receive the Diksha of sannyasa from Kanyakumari in ancient times. The novelist compares Akhila to Devi Kanyakumari. Akila is also a virgin like Goddesses Devi Kanyakumari. Devi Kanyakumari has taken care of people living in Kanyakumari for more than 3000 years. Like her, Akhila takes care of people at her home. According to the Puranas, Kanyakumari Bhagavathi Amman is none other than Goddess Parvati. To kill Panashura, Goddess Parvati comes in the form of a virgin and saves people. Whereas in the case of Akhila, to help her family she becomes a virgin. After killing Panasura, Devi Kumari waits for Lord Shiva to come and marry her. Here, after completing her duties as the breadwinner of the family, Akila waits for her bridegroom.

Another connotated meaning is Kanyakumari is called, ‘The Land’s End’. Without any purpose, Akila plans to reach Kanyakumari. But earth never ends. So, symbolically Akila has a new life of her own.

INDIANNES IN *LADIES COUPE*

After her father’s death, Akhila is the breadwinner of the family. But no one gives importance to her. Akhila’s mother proudly says, “I had you.” (85). At the same time, she did not realize the truth that nobody is for Akhila after her death. And nobody cares for her marriage and her longing to have a family and children. “In their minds, Akhila had ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster.” (77) As a traditional mother, Akhila’s mother insists her to seek permission before she steps out. Akhila boldly says, “Amma, I’m their elder sister. Why should I ask them for permission to go on an office tour?” (150).

New women have to oppose family, society, and men to assert their identity. Studying the feminine psyche is an effort to liberate women from those structures that have marginalized them. As Stephen Frosh points out in *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Self*, *Psychoanalytic feminist theory aims at creating a language*, “of the unconscious, of the impulses, anxieties, wishes and contradictory desires that are structured and restructured by our immersion in social order.” (2). Psychoanalytic feminist theory aims at helping women to come out of their psychic fear and anxieties from the effect of social restrictions. And it helps them to be emotionally free. Anita Nair frees her protagonist from social restrictions and psychological fears. The fellow passengers’ stories give answers to Akhila’s question: “Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? The novel ends with Akhila’s decision to continue her relationship with a man whom she loves. Earlier she did not accept him because of fear of society. Hari is younger than her so in the beginning she thinks that society opposes her marriage.

AUTONOMY OF WOMEN

When Akhila's sister Padma asks her to seek permission from her brothers to live alone, Akhila says, "For heaven's sake, I don't need anyone's consent. I will do exactly as I please and I don't give a damn about what you or anyone else thinks." (Anita Nair, 2001:204). It shows her autonomy.

In the hotel 'Sea Breeze', she met a young boy who resembles her former lover Hari. She talks with Hari. What has she decided? Is she going to renew her relationship with him? The writer leaves the choice to Akhila. Since Akhila is independent, she will decide her life. She has learned from other passengers' experiences that she is free and happy on her own. She wants to live a life of her own against what her family and society dictate about her life.

In one of her conversations with her brother Narayan, she clearly explains her plan in life: "For twenty -six years, I gave all of myself to this family, I asked for nothing in return. And now when I wish to make a life of my own, do anyone of you come forward and say . . . you deserve to have a life of your own." (Anita Nair, 2001: 206).

SUMMATION

After traveling on the train, she realized what life is. Here, in this novel, her journey is not only from Bangalore to Kanyakumari but also from darkness to light, dependent to independent. Through her journey of life, she gains self-confidence, makes independent decisions and also gains peace and happiness. Through this novel, Anita Nair portrays the truth that in the name of society and tradition, women are living for the sake of others not living a life of their own. Through this novel, Anita Nair fights against the patriarchal society and male domination. The novelist presents feminine sensibilities through these women characters. The foregoing discussion brings out the artistry of Anita Nair, the journey of women in a traditional society and transformation. This novel is an eye-opener for women's freedom.

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