

Reclaiming Female Identity: Feminist, Gender, and Queer Perspectives in Anita Nair's *Ladies Coupe*

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Abstract: Ladies Coupé by Anita Nair (2001) is a powerful exploration of women's inner lives amid the confines of a patriarchal Indian society. Six women from various backgrounds are brought together in the book, and their voyage together in a women-only train cabin serves as a metaphorical setting for self-realization, resistance, and storytelling. This essay analyzes Ladies Coupé from feminist, gender, and queer viewpoints, emphasizing how Nair subverts patriarchal conventions, questions conventional gender roles, and emphasizes non-normative identities and wants. The study shows how the book explores marriage, parenting, sexuality, and autonomy by concentrating on characters like Akhila, Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Sheela, and the transgender character Marikolanthu. In addition to representing women's hardships, the paper contends that Ladies Coupé redefines identity as fluid, self-fashioned, and inclusive of queer experiences. Through its narrative structure and thematic concerns, the novel emerges as a significant feminist and gender-conscious text in contemporary Indian English literature.

Keywords: Feminism, Gender Studies, Queer Theory, Identity, Patriarchy, Anita Nair.

Anita Nair describes circumstances or occurrences in which characters are killed or injured. Because of the Feminine identity of the characters in her books, Anita Nair describes situations or events in which characters are injured or killed. Historically, men have been known to be more aggressive than women. However, Anita Nair's novels use reality to demonstrate the feminine identity and the nature of the female characters. Women have strong opinions and are demanding attention or action with a lot of force. It's an attack on a society that's dominated by men, a way for them to weaken their control.

This paper aims to study the image of women's nature at social, family and financial level. In epics and legends, women are portrayed as Sakthi's incarnation to convey her identity and assertive nature in the world. There are many facets to their existence and existence in this world. She plays the part of a mother, sister, wife, and daughter, and she has a severe hold on social, familial, and financial bodies.

God created a beautiful woman to balance man. Due to their endurance, women naturally lack physical and mental strength. But they suddenly say how they feel, and she gets spoiled in a fight with her counterpart for that. Anita Nair deals with men, women, nature, real life, and social convention, which look at how men and women interact with nature and with each other and society. Literature from all over the world is dominated by depictions of women. Literature has had women as its inspiration and central theme. Anita Nair emphasizes the importance of raising women's awareness of the ways in which Indian women are exploited by society and individuals even today. Her female protagonists are aware of their marriage's unfair treatment. When she finds a man unsuitable for being an equal partner, they boldly leave their homes; until such partners are ready, such women will become weaker in isolation. She also looks at Indian society's hypocritical attitudes toward aggressive women and the idea of chastity. Anita Nair shows how her female characters take a strong stand against vital human and familial relationships by breaking free from their unhappy martial bonds.

Through her two books, "The Better Man" and "The Ladies' Coupe," Anita Nair has established herself as a very interesting storyteller. Her novels are also largely gyno-centric, with female protagonists occupying the "center" of the narrative, and they portray without reservation the complex issues that educated women who lead lives outside face. They discuss the challenges that women today face when they share a home and work with men. Anita Nair depicts female protagonists who, depending on their preference, satisfy men through sexuality or martial arts. The women in Anita Nair's stories are also seen as liberated, even bordering on permissive when it comes to sexuality. However, they are all women who are in good health and are able to make the necessary adjustments in their personal lives with typical realism and intelligence.

In a nutshell, she provides a synopsis of the current fashions that are gaining popularity among the wealthiest urban women who are on the verge of releasing themselves from the shackles of their conventional ways of life. Janaki weds Prabhakar, one of the characters in "Ladies' Coupe." She has been happily married for forty years. Her husband initially desired to exert control over everyone. When her husband was in a bad mood, she considered starting a rebellion against him. She yells, "You just want to control him," as she felt "a queer rage uncoil within her." You want to oversee everyone. You want everyone to follow your orders. Because women used to be too strong to control men, Janaki takes her husband into her hands to control him aggressively. With the help of their strength, modern women control everything, including their families. As a result, Janaki exerted strong control over her family and husband.

In her life, Margaret Shanthi experiences numerous physical, mental, and spiritual challenges. She never stops evolving until she reaches a happy state. Her wedding to Ebenezer Paulraj is like something out of a fairy tale. She initially says "yes" to everything her husband asks, but then he starts completely controlling her. Despite her desire for a Ph.D., she is compelled to complete a B.Ed. because her husband demands it. When he becomes principal of the local school, he exerts an increasing amount of control. He begins to annoy her by criticizing her cooking and housekeeping. She was forced to have an abortion because she was such a beautiful and well-off wife.

She hates him, which she absolutely does not like. As a result, Margaret Shanthi turns her life against herself. Food is Margaret Shanthi's only source of consolation in life. She suddenly decides to use a clever tactic to win back Ebenezer, who loves food and sex. She starts treating him to food and sex to make him fat and lazy. He is currently unable to work. She had previously been completely subservient to her husband. He is now entirely in her hands. She frequently takes him to the hospital for checkups. Sexual stereotyping can be used to describe Margaret's repression. She has to behave like a good wife.

Marikolanthu has a poor upbringing. Her mother is a cook for a chettiar family. Additionally, she is employed to care for Sujata Akka's son. She adores the child and shows much affection while hating her own child Muthu. Murugesan raped Muthu, and Muthu is the result. When she sees Murugesan's body burning on a pyre, she experiences a life-altering moment. When she sees Muthu, she is surprised to learn that she feels guilty about her own child. She finally makes the decision to take care of him and compensate him for everything she had lost. Marikolanthu experiences extreme social, familial, and financial repression. She resented Murugesan, that filthy animal, vehemently.

As the spoiled young daughter of a wealthy family, Prabha Devi has had a happy life. She enjoys her role as a wife and daughter-in-law and is married into the wealthy Jagathesh family. She wants to be like those women with swinging hair and confident strides after her trip to New York. She is extremely conscious of how she looks. Because she wants to avoid becoming pregnant, she suggests to her husband that a thin rubber covering be used. She believes that her beauty will be destroyed because of the pregnancy.

She is ready to have sex with Pramod, a friend of her husband's, when she meets him. She is, in Pramod's words, "one of those women, and she feels jolted out of her artificial world" when he returns home. At that point, she undergoes a complete transformation, beginning to enjoy her life with Jagathesh and forgetting her beauty and charm. It is possible for a woman to be prepared to confront any challenges she may encounter.

Mukundan is introduced to Ravindran's wife, Anjana. Mukundan suddenly gets the impression that his wife is about to start an affair with Anjana and start living together as a married couple. He is unable to provide her with the conjugal bliss known as sex due to Ravindran's inability to conceive.

As a result, she has made the decision to permanently exclude her husband from her life and has begun the divorce process. Because of this, she accepts Mukundan in life and grants him forgiveness for his wrongdoings. The patriarchal nature of man's behaviour toward women other than his wife has been established. It demonstrates how aggressive he is. She can go to the extent of violating the so-called morality and code of conduct that were developed by the same irrational men when the women protagonists in her novels take it as their right to live and live happily. To find her identity is a form of aggression that involves moral violations. As they begin to place more importance on themselves, women are becoming more aggressive than usual. To be considered altruistic, she has lived her life serving others by making numerous sacrifices. To call her aggressive now is to be egotistical.

Meenakshi is one of the characters in Anita Nair. She is Mukundan's cousin and used to be close to him. Meenakshi used to talk to him about her thoughts when she was younger. Meenakshi is not permitted to accompany Mukundan on their field excursion. He will think of a covert way to get away. Slowly and she gradually begins to vanish from his memory. After a while, Meenakshi falls in love with the kathakali dancer Balan. In today's world, a woman can determine her ideal partner, disregarding the enticing words of an insincere lover.

The woman who makes the right decision goes in the right direction. After having had difficult lives with men in their lives, all of these characters assert their individuality. They all acquire a strong sense of confidence to make positive or negative decisions about their lives because of their experience with the vile lifestyle. Their lives demonstrate that women are not helpless beings or deplorable victims; rather, they demonstrate that they can achieve everything they require on their own, even with the assistance of men. However, one ought to give their conscience a role.

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