

## **FEMALE LIBERATION IN ANITA NAIR'S THE LADIES COUPE AND THE BETTER MAN**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

The acclaimed writer Anita Nair was raised in Kerala. She is a well-known poet in addition to being an author, journalist, and short story writer. Several works from the twentieth century discuss women's problems and their position in Indian society. Prominent female authors such as Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, and Anita Nair portray feminist images of Indian culture in Indian English fiction. Anita Nair has received widespread recognition as a major writer both domestically and internationally. Her efforts have gained international recognition within a small portion of her profession. A woman's journey gives her the ability to be independent of accommodating and mythical stereotypes. Nair's perspective of women bounces to the surface since the author is female and her female heroines are the crucial focus points of her novels; therefore, her thoughts will undoubtedly show the struggle for individuality. The novel *Ladies Coupe* examines women's fights for identity, freedom, and independence in a world ruled by males. In the novel *The Better Man*, her characters assert their individuality while trying to free themselves from human dominance.

The fight for women's rights in India has changed dramatically due to which several feminist movements have attempted to address concerns including reproductive rights, work, and education. Literature has been essential because it has provided a platform for the voices of women and their experiences in these movements. The struggles and goals of women conquering, which is evolving fast in the world are reflected in Nair's writing, which is representative of the liberation movement.

### **Women Liberation Movement**

The movement for women's emancipation aims to end sexual discrimination and provide women with the same legal, economic, occupational, educational, and social rights and opportunities as men. It first appeared in the latter part of the 1960s and persisted into the 1980s. Women from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds made the WLM branch of

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radical feminism, founded on modern philosophy. They argued that for women to advance from being treated as second-class citizens in their cultures, they needed to have financial, psychological, and social independence. According to the liberation theory, women were more economically and socially independent than males in the 1960s and 1970s, which led to an increase in their crime rates. (Adler, 1975; Hunnicutt and Broidy, 2004) One variation suggests that the gender disparity in all forms of crime merged as a result of convergence in gender roles. Owing to a further variation, women's greater involvement in the labour market opened up new avenues for workplace criminality (Simon, 1975). (Heimer & Coster, 2001) As a means to achieve women's equality, the WLM challenged the practicality of the social and sexual hierarchies that restrict and govern women's legal and physical independence in society, as well as the cultural and legal legitimacy of patriarchy. Mary Wollstonecraft, Harriet Martineau, and Frances Wright faced criticism for being unfeminine and accused of upsetting the natural order for females. The worship of authentic femininity during the progressive era gave rise to the concept of the "New Woman."

The *Second Sex* by Simone De Beauvoir presents an existentialist definition of feminism. Despite being written twenty years before radicalism, De Beauvoir's work had a significant impact on radical feminists. Simone De Beauvoir subtly urges women in *The Second Sex* to establish their autonomy in defining themselves in opposition to males. (Veenus & Singh, 2012) In addition, Beauvoir believed that women should not be forced into parenthood and that marriage was detrimental when it was viewed as a vocation. Women must have gainful employment, yet having a job and a vote does not ensure liberation. She believed that society's values must be re-evaluated to consider women's goals. Men are not viewed as being inherently antagonistic towards women. A well-known representative of the second wave of feminism, Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) frequently examined women's status and independence in her writing. To create fiction of any quality, Virginia Woolf contends in her feminist essay "A Room of One's Own" that "a woman must have money and a room of her own" (16) (Woolf, 2017) As she explains, the concept is insightful and has considerably more facets and ramifications than it may initially appear to have. (Whitney) Discrimination among men and women and the economic and legal power of the sexes were frequently examined in Woolf's writing. She also talked about the future of women in education and society. Women's emancipation was more than just obtaining rights and benefits; it was also about pursuing opportunities to demonstrate what they may term "the second sex."

After independence, Indian women gained awareness of their rights and were granted social, legal, and political protections. Thus, the second stage of the liberation movement or emancipation of women, which includes emotional, intellectual, and moral liberation of

women, becomes the primary preoccupation of Indian feminists. Indian authors forged their paths and received recognition all around the world. The position of women within society is a common theme in modern fiction, which heavily features female characters. Indian women writers have effectively used fiction to address the topic of women: their status, role, and place in society. By delving psychologically into their characters' minds, these female authors elevated their opinions on such subjects. Regarding the bodily and psychological requirements of women as persons, the women portrayed in modern literature differ from those in the past. The New Woman evolved from the old. There are two types of new women in India: housewives, daughters, and moms who desire to experience independence while remaining married. The second kind is career-orientated and financially independent; therefore, she does not rely on anybody for financial assistance. In Indian English writing of the 1960s, an influx of writers brought about a change from the traditional quiet lady to an intellectual woman. These female writers challenged the glorified representation of women. The female Indian English fiction authors passionately and successfully portray the 'New Woman'. This New Woman is passionately and efficiently depicted by the generation of female Indian English fiction authors. Prominent female authors such as Nayantara Sahgal, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Kamala Markandeya, Atti Hossain, Anita Nair, and Jhumpa Lahiri embody this New Woman in their different works. The New Woman is intellectual as well as emotional; she no longer constitutes a blind follower and believer but rather analyses her surroundings and her existence.

Anita Nair is a prominent Indian author. She is an outspoken and forthright writer. Her works deal with real-life individuals. Empowerment contributes to gender equality with males, or at the very least, it reduces gender biased discrimination in patriarchal societies by breaking down stereotypes about women. In India, the postmodern period is a period of shift for women from convention to modernity, owing to numerous rebellions for freedom and Western education. Postcolonial literary texts represent women's emancipation and their battle to overcome social, economic, and gender-based oppression, as well as the numerous techniques and shrewd tactics employed by women to empower themselves in a patriarchal society as represented in the works of Anita Nair.

### **Female Liberation in Ladies Coupe**

Ladies Coupé (2001) wrote by Anita Nair recounts the story of six women who met on a train and discussed their life experiences. It narrates the tale of women's quest for power and strength. Akhila, a 45-year-old tax clerk with no income, has always been regarded as a daughter, sister, aunt, and contributor and has never been let to live her way. Five of the other women in the ladies' coupe, notably Janaki, a devoted wife and confused mother, and

Margaret Shanti, a teacher of chemistry married to the core of poetry and a thoughtless despot, are among the women she addresses in the novel. Prabha Devi, the ideal daughter and wife transformed for life by a glimpse at a swimming pool; fourteen-year-old Sheela, with her ability to see what others cannot; and Marikolunthu, whose history makes us feel sorry for her. These women exude the same serenity at different stages of their lives.

Akhila wishes to discover herself while sacrificing all for the sake of her family. Akhila is a 45-year-old lady. She considers quitting her obligations to find herself overlooked by the individuals she has known for all these years. Her primary priority is providing a decent living for her family. Her father was involved in a car accident; therefore, she became the family's primary earner. Her life becomes mechanical as she earns and meets the requirements of the family. She does not even consider her identity. However, she perceives a disparity in the respect accorded to men and women in society, even in her own family. Akhila provides her duty being the primary carer to her younger brothers and sisters, but she is not considered a genuine boss because she is a woman. Amma expects her brothers in the household to seek their permission before she travels on a workplace trip. "Perhaps you should ask your brothers for permission first." (LC 122) Akhila answers her argument that she shouldn't need permission since she is the elder sister: "You might be older, but you are a woman, and they are the men of the family." (LC 122) When she was a child, her father was the head of the household; therefore, whatever her mother made had to be presented to him first. It is still a popular custom in many households today. In Akhila's instance, despite earning the same amount of money as her father and covering the family's needs under her leadership, she demanded more respect than her father had previously shown. Women frequently face discrimination at work and at home, even when they have jobs, they are still seen as inferior to males. They do not receive the same respect as a man in their position. This prejudice alters Akhila's perspective on self-discovery. Akhila gets frustrated and starts imagining solitude and freedom, she is 'hungry for experience and life' (LC 2). To find the answer to the issue that has consumed her life, asking herself, "Can a woman live by herself?", she chooses to embark on a lengthy train journey. (LC 21). Akhila boarded the train for the exploration of her identity. "Ladies Coupe," which is symbolic of a section of a train designated exclusively for female passengers, is where Akhila is assigned a seat. Yet, it also serves as a place of safety where they may express themselves without restraint from male-imposed limitations. The same section has five other people in it, Akhila queries them on the status of women in Indian culture. Since they are all strangers and will never again meet, they all eagerly share their stories. Moreover, the male-dominated society in India has made them all victims. Other female characters in the story include Prabha, an example of a self-sufficient, career-orientated lady who continuously struggles

with societal expectations of women. She is not married, thus she is frequently condemned for her decision to remain single since society wants her to fulfil her domestic duty by marrying a man, even though she is a teacher. With an excellent profession, others frequently tell her that her life is incomplete without a partner, no matter how much money she makes for herself.

Akhila reclaimed her sentimental and sexual needs. She is exposed to relationships, love, and sexuality through her discussions with the women on the train. For example, Janaki, the widow, and the young woman with a complicated relationship with her lover make Akhila reflect on her choices and desires. Her decision to spend a night with a man indicates her choice to reclaim her sexuality, which is something she previously refused to acknowledge because of guilt and social pressures. The expanding connection with her spouse mirrors her emotional development. She starts to recognise that, despite her loyalty and duty; she has been emotionally aloof from him-not because she didn't love him, but rather because she has never been able to articulate her feelings or wishes. It's a powerful act of liberation as she rejects social criticism and embraces her desires. Akhila's emancipation path revolves around her changing perspectives about marriage. She starts to think critically about her marriage to Prakash and the concessions she made to maintain family unity. Her marriage, which at first glance appeared to be a conventional tie, turns into a place for reflection where she wrestles with what love, friendship, and sacrifice are all about. It is noteworthy that Akhila feels unsatisfied with the notion that marriage is the ultimate aim for women. Despite her excellent wife status, she acknowledges that she has frequently put her family's needs and wants ahead of her own. She concludes that female independence is more than escaping family responsibilities. It also entails regaining the freedom to pursue personal interests and make choices apart from social norms. Her existence is shaped by the roles allocated to her whether it is being a devoted wife, loving mother, and daughter-in-law. She has been asked to surrender to her fate without question. However, this traditional existence leads her to a personal crisis where Akhila searches for a life in which she may pursue her path. In defiance of traditional Brahmin culture and its patriarchal standards, Akhila seeks adventures that question the normative order.

### **Female Liberation in The Better Man**

Anita Nair's *The Better Man* (1999) is a very introspective and moving novel that examines the complexities of human relationships, particularly gender and social expectations. The private lives of the characters are linked throughout the novel, which takes place in the fictional village of Kaikurussi, Kerala. The main focus is on the inner beings of men and women as they grapple with issues of self-actualisation, love, loss, and

identity. The book examines issues of emotional suppression, the urge for sovereignty, and the pursuit of self-discovery while focusing on familial connections and social restrictions. The lives of the two female protagonists, Anjana and Valsala, who each set out on quests for self-discovery and emancipation form the core of *The Better Man*. Anita Nair examines the nuances of emotional suppression, the burden of familial responsibilities, and the silent yet potent search for one's own identity via these characters. Nair explores the emotional complexity of both men and women, showing how their psychological and emotional state of mind influences their lives. Both Anjana and Valsala are frequently the silent carriers of spiritual burdens, expected to put family and duty above their wishes, while the men are shown as emotionally aloof and restrained. Anjana and Valsala, who symbolise two distinct generations and divergent reactions to familial and cultural influences, are both important characters in the story. Nair weaves a complex tapestry of women's lives via their tales, showing how social conventions, marriage expectations, and gender roles mould and occasionally constrain them.

Anjana, who was previously an independent girl before marrying Ravindran, has been her true self with her parents. She fought to preserve her individuality since she was supposed to be distinct from other women. Even with her best efforts, Anjana was unable to continue it. Anjana and Ravindran began to grow apart over the years, leaving Anjana feeling alone and disconnected from the one she had loved. It was clear that Ravindran had no interest in Anjana since he would leave the room if she tried to speak or struck up a discussion. The difference between them ultimately led Anjana to decide to break up with him after giving him many chances to improve. According to Anita Nair's writing, which concentrates on women's emancipation, Anjana is a powerful woman who can make her judgements. As the narrative goes on, Anjana exhibits amazing bravery and resolve as she decides to start her new life with Mukundan. Her newly found freedom and her ability to make her own decisions are symbolised by this courageous act.

The narrative of Valsala depicts the pursuit of love and the fight for individual autonomy, especially for Indian women. Prabhakaran, a schoolteacher, was Valsala's husband, but she was unhappy with her life and finally fell in love with Sridharan. Valsala seemed to have lost all of her feminine emotions. She is compared to a pala tree in her garden that has blossomed and released a strong aroma that entices her. (Patil, 2017) Valsala persisted in pursuing her love for Sridharan despite social pressures to fit in with her community's standards and expectations. Valsala's tale is unique for her unrelenting drive to achieve love and personal happiness in the face of social shame and criticism. Valsala embraced her inner guidance and refused to give in to peer pressure, eventually becoming Sridharan's mistress. Since Valsala acknowledged that sex, love, freedom, and equality are important

sources of motivation and empowerment for all women, her act is a potent illustration of her feminism. Valsala raised significant concerns about Indian social norms and women's gender and sexual orientation. Her narrative is one of metamorphosis, as she became a "New Woman," which defied conventional social norms. So, Valsala represents a motivator to any individual who wants to free themselves from the world's confinement and pursue an independent path in life. She becomes a motivator for all individuals who want to opt for an independent path in life setting them free from the world's confinement.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Anita Nair's *The Ladies Coupe* and *The Better Man* tackle the issue of female liberty by depicting women's complicated struggles with society's standards and their own emotional needs. The women in *The Ladies Coupe* achieve liberation by sharing their experiences, learning from one another's narratives, and acknowledging independence as individuals. Valsala and Anjana in *The Better Man* symbolise two distinct methods towards becoming free of the boundaries of familial, marital, and societal duty. In the two novels, female emancipation is shown as a complex process including mental, emotional, and physical independence rather than as a single, straightforward route. Nair shed light on the ability of women to create their identities and a better way of living standard, whether through Anjana's bold defiance of conventional norms, Valsala's reflective awakening, or Akhila's subdued sense of self in *The Ladies Coupe*. Both works emphasise that female emancipation is about striking a balance that allows women to express their distinctiveness and independence without compromising their intrinsic value. It also emphasises how gender issues are interrelated and how liberty requires dealing with every aspect of the equation. Their personal stories contribute to our understanding of women's struggles for autonomy, self-expression, and the opportunity to build their existence.

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