



THE INDIAN SENSIBILITY IN ANITA NAIR'S LADIES COUPE

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Abstract

Sensibility is, particularly, capacity to respond to aesthetic and emotional stimuli. The stories written or read inadvertently make us perceive the psyche of both the writer and the characters created by the writer. Portraying the story of a woman's search for strength and independence; Anita Nair's 'Ladies Coupe' focuses on the latent strengths which every individual has. Though ladies do not disclose their life stories to each other in journeys, the protagonist, Akhila gets to know her fellow travelers in the intimate atmosphere of the ladies coupé which she shares with five other women, Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Sheela, and Marikolanthu in her long train journey to Kanyakumari. This paper makes an effort in asserting the very nature of Indian Women; sharing experiences by emphasizing the Indian sensibility of women in identifying themselves part of the Indian tradition and culture.

'Ladies Coupé' – An Overview:

This is a story of Akhilandeswari, Akhila - forty-five and single, an income-tax clerk, and a woman who has never been permitted to live her own life. She has always been a provider – as a daughter, as a sister and as an aunt. Once she gets herself a one-way ticket to the seaside town of Kanya kumari; surprisingly alone for the first time in her life. She determines to liberate herself of all that her customary Tamil Brahmin life has bound her to. In the convivial company of five other women in the ladies coupé, Akhila gets to know her fellow travelers. In the process she tries to find out an answer to the basic question which has

been in pursuit throughout her life – ‘Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?’

Character Analysis – The Indian Sensibility:

Akhila, the protagonist gives up her education to take up the responsibility of the family ; after her father’s death. Though she performs the role of a provider perfectly, she is not allowed to live her own life. Tired of their self-indulgence, she makes a decision to take vacation so that she can have time to think of herself and her life ahead. And on the way, her lonely trip to Kanya kumari she meets different people. Through their experiences she tries to analyze her own quest for a better life.

Her Indian sensibility is clearly shown in her tensed moments – trying to do something contrary to her Brahmin family background; from the simple thing of tasting a boiled egg to a strange thing of responding to a man’s touch in a crowded bus. Like any other common Indian woman she gets back to the same life and tries to accomplish her life with her young lover whom she rejects in the beginning for fear of the refusal from the society.

Janaki, is portrayed a happy woman, been taken care of by her father and brother in her parents’ house and in her marital life - a pampered wife who prefers to live only for husband. She is significant - being a confused mother treating her children selfish; comparing them to her husband.

Margaret Shanti, is chemistry teacher who is married to Paulraj, the principal of the school she works in. In the beginning she feels that she is been neglected and her love transforms into hatred and indulges herself in putting cheap tricks into practice, making her husband depend on her.

Prabha Devi, is a proud daughter to her parents – being perfect in everything. She enjoys her marital life also, being a good wife and good daughter – in-law. She is also privileged to create her own cherished life with her husband besides fulfilling the usual family responsibilities.

Sheela , is a fourteen year girl. She is a delicate girl who remembers her relationship with her grandmother who has died just then. She is portrayed as a capable girl who can think beyond the ordinary social settings. She dresses up her dead grand mother's body as per her wish.

Marikalonthu, is utterly ill treated by everyone but withholds the strength to stand for what she believes in. She never enjoys her childhood; her poverty becomes an obstacle to choose the best in her life. Despite her innocence, she faces the difficulty of being a maid in the merchant's house and becomes a mother to an illegitimate.

Her determination in facing the problems in a challenging way is highly appreciable.

Reflections:

It is very common in India - on long train journeys, travellers share food besides being curious about the personal issues of others. Akhila, though unwilling in the beginning, listens to others, shares her own opinions and in the process learns to appreciate others with their experiences.

She seeks their help in making her decisions. Akhila questions them of her eternal dilemma - whether a woman needs a man to complete her or whether she can stay single and happy? But they advise her that she must decide for herself. Though disappointed, she later comprehends this suggestion.

While listening to the other women, Akhila realizes that her feelings are not strange. Every story makes Akhila recollect an incident from her life which makes her compare to their lives. Akhila's father, a common man keeps up his moral values at his job though being mocked at and cornered. He lives through his discontented job to earn a living. Akhila's traditional mother has always taught her that a perfect woman is the one who mingles with everyone and adapts to the family setup, saying, "A woman is not meant to take on the man's role or the Gods would have made her so. So what is all this about two equals in a marriage". But the same woman; on becoming a widow expected her daughter, Akhila to play the man of the house. She justifies her affair with Hari, a younger man – considering him the contentment. She doesn't feel bad to eat eggs, a food her devoted Hindu family considers

unclean. Her agony is seen in her disillusioned status - to live alone after her mother's death. She is shocked to hear her sister's view – expecting Akhila to contribute her salary even after her marriage.

Learning:

The dilemma that she goes through at every point of her life comes to an end. She learns that there was a time when a woman needed a man for protection but now she needs a man for companionship, a partner who would share her ups and downs. This realization makes Akhila get back in touch with the guy she fell in love with, someone whom she could not accept for the fear of the society.

She learns from everyone's experience and as the journey an end, Akhila is ready to act, act according to her wish. She comes back to her place with renewed energy, with the courage of organizing her life.

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