



# इतिहासाचार्य वि. का. राजवाडे मंडळ, धुळे या संस्थेचे त्रैमासिक ॥ संशोधक ॥

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# ‘Women’s Rebellion’ in Anita Nair’s - “Ladies Coupe”

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## Abstract:

Anita Nair is an internationally acclaimed Indian English novelist. One of her most well-known novels, “Ladies Coupe” is about six women from various backgrounds who meet while travelling by train. Her book “Ladies Coupe” presents a narrative of female defiance, which explores the struggles and triumphs of the women characters as they challenge societal norms and expectations. They find their own ways to self-awareness, empowerment, and emancipation through their acts of rebellion. The present research paper aims to highlight the theme of ‘women’s rebellion’ in Anita Nair’s novel “Ladies Coupe”.

**Keywords:** defiance, struggles, social norms, empowerment, autonomy

## Introduction

Literature has long been inspired by ‘women’s rebellion’, which gives voice to the unwavering spirit that defies social norms. As Virginia Woolf once remarked in her extended essay “A Room of One’s Own,” “Lock up your libraries if you like, but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind” (Woolf, 1977, p. 83). Woolf conveys the indomitable determination of women to shatter the constraints of social rules and claim their intellectual and creative autonomy with these words. The above citation captures the essence of women’s rebellion as a force that transcends physical limitations, enabling them to assert their legitimate social status and shape their own destinies. Anita Nair’s

“Ladies Coupe” portrays the women’s struggle for agency and autonomy and tries to raise public awareness of social issues.

Margaret Shanti, a fellow traveller in the “Ladies Coupe”, is a shining example of women’s rebellion in the context of male dominance. Though Margaret chose to marry Ebenezer, she soon realizes her husband’s absurd nature. He was a controlling, mean individual. He was the novel’s worst example of male dogmatism, a cruel immigrant. Margaret is unconscious to Ebenezer Paulraj’s deep-seated male egoism because her devotion to him has rendered her blind. She transforms from a determined and talented student who wants to design her own career to becoming Ebenezer’s dutiful wife. He holds full command of her. She is required to work wherever her husband is employed. She is confined to the role of a silent observer. After becoming a school principal, he becomes more domineering. At that time, she realises her hatred towards him, which makes her to feel liberated from something.

Margaret is subject to his dominance both inside and outside the home. Ebe was becoming increasingly selfish, overbearing, and hypercritical. Unknowingly, she was driven to impart a lesson to him. She employs flattery as a means of reducing Ebe’s self-esteem. Because it was very easy to flatten him for him, flattery was merely the truth. Considering his hatred for food, she flattered him and fed him fatty food from dawn to night, until he became a fat man, a gentleman, and a comfortable man. This significant change



in Ebenezer is described by Margaret herself that he is man who no longer requires the company of damaged books now. His love for eating dulls his sharpness and intellect. Margaret, who is responsible for satisfying Ebe's hunger and sometimes his sexual desires, becomes increasingly sought after by him. By fulfilling these needs, she becomes indispensable to Ebe, and as a result, Ebe transforms into a person with whom she can live once more.

Further, Margaret strongly takes the responsibility for the transformation of Ebenezer Paulraj into a fat man. It means that his fatness was not a natural occurrence or the result of divine intervention, but her own actions or influence that led to his weight gain. This implies a sense of power or control on the part of women over men. Thus, Margaret is successful in her attempt to teach Ebe a lesson. In this connection, T. Varalakshmi says that Margaret undermines Ebe's self-esteem while boosting her own by making him fat. This strategy allows her to find emotional fulfilment and maintain a strong family bond.

Karpagam is Anita Nair's stout character who demonstrates a growing determination to break free from the societal constraints and assert her own desires and choices. She is described as a strong woman attempting to define herself in a patriarchal social structure. She is the most rebellious and exceptional woman because she wears the Kumkum and colourful dresses after her husband's death. Karpagam is an outspoken individual. She asserts as

**I don't care what my family or anyone thinks. I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me didn't we as young girls wear colourful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? It had nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. (Nair, p. 202)**

Karpagam brings out the reality of the society. She emphasizes the fact that wearing colourful clothes, jewelry, and a bottu as young girls was not limited to married women or dependent on the status of their husbands. She questions the basis of the laws and rules that govern how women should dress and behave, especially in relation to their marital status. Karpagam calls the authority that imposes these societal expectations on women into question. She questions whether such rules are fair or justified, claiming that they are arbitrary or imposed by individuals or institutions with vested interests in controlling women's lives.

In this regard, Simone De Beauvoir is of the opinion that gender identity is a social construct acquired over time, shaped by societal expectations, cultural norms, and personal experiences, rather than a fixed, innate characteristic. Her rebellion is overt when she declares, "I live alone. I have for many years now" (Nair, p. 202). Karpagam encourages Akhila to understand her own strength and independence. She also assures Akhi that she can make her own decisions and follow her desires. The advice is living alone and giving priority to her own needs and create a self-sufficient existence. Nair, here, conveys the message of self-empowerment and taking charge of one's life to create a fulfilling and independent path.

Akhila, the novel's main character, is well educated and employed, but struggles with double duty and lacks relief, believing family ties are essential for survival. So, after her mother's death, she lives with Padma, believing she is her sister. She encounters challenges and receives guidance from her family, but these factors cause her to question her value and sense of self. She departs from her family in defiance of social expectations in order to find freedom. According to Akhila, she was born with many abilities and potentials, just like men. She dislikes having her life decided by her siblings. She aspires to lead a self-sufficient life. She enjoys living a happy



single life instead of getting married. As she states, “All I am trying to do is convince myself that a woman can live alone.” (Nair, p.21).

Akhila’s rebelliousness is evident against the patriarchal dominance when she requests her Amma for the weekend with an office group. Her mother tells her that she should ask for her brothers’ permission. Akhila reasoned that being an elder sister, she should not have to ask their permission. Amma just replies that she might be older but she is woman not a man of the family like her brothers. Akhila wants to live alone after having a lengthy conversation with Padma. She asks, without hesitation, if the brothers will approve her decision to live alone or independently. Akhila rebelliously answers, “I don’t need anyone’s consent” (Nair, p. 204) Akhila also emphasizes her age and experience as reasons for her independence. She is determined to live life on her own terms and is unconcerned about the opinions or judgments of others, indicating a strong sense of independence. Padma mockingly reminds her that the men in the family are dominant, implying that their influence and authority may still be a significant barrier to her desire for independence and self-determination. This demonstrates a conflict between Akhila’s desire for autonomy and the patriarchal norms or expectations that may limit her freedom and choices within the family.

Akhila’s siblings make every effort to persuade her not to live alone. According to Narsi, a woman should not live alone, and society has many concerns about her. Additionally, he insists that people in society may discover that her family has given up her. Then Akhila expresses her frustration and longing after dedicating twenty-six years to a family without expecting anything in return. she questions why no family members acknowledged their sacrifices and encouraged independence. Akka questions Narayan, “...why shouldn’t I have alone? I’m of able body and mind. I can look after myself. I earn reasonably well” (Nair, p. 206).

It demonstrates how Akhila questions patriarchal society’s preconceived notions about what a woman should be. She is very aware of and conscious of her subordinate status in the family and society. She therefore makes an effort to make it better and decides to protest and fight against the social norms that are widely accepted. Even so, she is prepared to take responsibility for her actions. Without any assistance of her family, she has decided to live alone. She is advocating for more than just equality; she also wants to be taken seriously as an individual. She dislikes being in her family’s control, neither by her sister nor by her brothers. She wants to maintain the freedom to choose her own course for her life. She questions

In a nutshell, Anita Nair’s “Ladies Coupe” depicts ‘women’s rebellion’ as a potent force for empowerment and self-realization. The novel emphasizes the significance of questioning societal standards, cultural expectations, and gender roles through the characters of Akhila, Karpagam, Margaret, and others. These women redefine their identities and prepare the ground for a more inclusive and equitable society by claiming their autonomy, reclaiming their independence, and sharing their stories. “Ladies Coupe” serves as a motivating example of the determination and resilience of women, inspiring readers to embrace their own defiance and pursue personal fulfilment.

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