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A detailed still-life composition featuring a quill pen as the central element. The quill is positioned diagonally, with its tip resting on a scroll of aged parchment. The scroll is secured with a red wax seal and a red ribbon. In the background, a lit candle in a brass holder casts a warm glow. In the foreground, a glass inkwell with a quill inside and a red wax seal are visible. The entire scene is set on a dark wooden surface.

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Akhila's Escape to Kanyakumari – A Travel in Search of 'Self'**Vasanthi Vasireddy***Associate Professor of English, Dhanekula Institute of Engineering & Technology, Vijayawada (A.P.) India***Abstract:**

Some people travel in the hope of escaping all the monotony to find a more peaceful kind of life. And travelogues help us explore the infinite world. Anita Nair's 'Ladies Coupé' is not a travelogue but it presents a vivid picture of a woman's journey, a journey to an unknown place and a journey inward-searching self. In the novel, tired of the deceitful attitude of the family members, Akhila plans to go to Kanyakumari. And on the way, in her lonely trip she meets different people. In her long train journey, the pleasant atmosphere of the ladies coupé allows her interact with five other women, Janaki, Margaret Shanti, Prabha Devi, Sheela, Marikolanthu. This paper analyzes how their experiences help Akhila comprehend her own quest for a better life.

Key Words: travelogues, vivid picture, peaceful**'Ladies Coupé' – the Theme:**

This is a story of Akhilandeshwari, Akhila, a woman who has never been left free to live her own life. She is an income-tax clerk, forty-five and single. After the death of her father she has become the head of the family and serves everyone – as a daughter, as a sister and as an aunt. Once she gets herself a one-way ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari; without any notice to the family - travelling alone for the first time in her life. She resolves to free herself for sometime of the entire burden and of her deep-rooted Tamil Brahmin life. In the pleasant atmosphere of the ladies coupé, Akhila gets to know her fellow travelers. In the course of action she tries to make clear the dilemma, her endless insight into woman's life – 'Can a woman stay single and be happy, or does a woman need a man to feel complete?'

About the Writer:

Anita Nair, born January 26, 1966 is an Indian English-language writer. Her novel 'Ladies Coupé' has been elected as one of the five best in India. It was rated as one of 2002's top five books of the year and was translated into more than twenty-five languages around the world.

The Journey - Analysis:

The theme chosen is very close to the actual life in the suburbs. Through the narration of the stories of women of diverse backgrounds, the author develops the pace which makes the reader move from a state of self-protective, cautious ideology into a state of sublime understanding. They cover from simple household dealings to complex social issues. All the stories collectively make a rampant picture of women's sensitive approach to their lives; which in turn

formulate the trend of rediscovering their lives.

Akhila, Akhilandeswari, the protagonist is an income-tax clerk, forty-five and single, takes up the responsibility of the family; after her father's death. She sacrifices her personal life, gives up her education and takes the burden of all the family members.

Despite her devotion, she is been controlled; in the name of tradition. Her mother used to say "A good wife learns to put her husband's interests before anyone else's, even her father's. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he said. There is no such thing as equal marriage, Amma said. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband."

Vexed of their selfishness, she decides to escape from the monotonous mockery of her life. She plans a lonely trip to Kanyakumari.

Her agony is clearly revealed in the form of remembrance of her difficult times. She tries to do rather contrary things to her Brahmin cult; be it tasting a boiled egg or unusual feelings for a strange person, responding to his touch in a crowded bus.

Janaki is a satisfied woman. She is been well taken care of in her parents' house. In her marital life, she becomes a pampered wife. She rather lives to fulfill the deeds of her husband. Though she is portrayed a confused mother considering her children selfish; comparing them to her husband she is recognized as a woman who inclines to be conventional.

"I am a woman who has always been looked after. First there was my father and my brothers; then my husband. When my

husband is gone, there will be my son. Waiting to take off from where his father left. Women like me end up being fragile. Our men treat us like princesses. And because of that we look down upon women who are strong and who can cope by themselves."

Margaret Shanti is a chemistry teacher. She is married to Paulraj, the principal of the school she works in. In the initial stages of her marital life, she used to feel that she is been neglected. Later her love transforms into hatred. She messes up the whole life. By cheap tricks she makes her husband depend on her.

"Ebe slowly became a fat man. A quiet man. An easy man... Since I was the one to appease his appetite, he sought me more and more."

Prabha Devi is a proud daughter to her parents. Being perfect in everything she pleases everyone. She becomes a good wife and good daughter – in-law and enjoys her marital life too. She is fortunate to shape her life as per her wish. By gratifying the usual family responsibilities she makes her husband rely on her. She corrects her mistakes and becomes cautious in giving undue importance to others.

"The woman her mother had hoped she would be. With eyes forever downcast and busy hands; embroidering, pickling, dusting, birthing babies, preserving order and bless in the confines of her home and all the while chanting to herself: this is who I ought to be, this is the way to be happy"

Sheela is a fourteen year girl. She is a bi sentimental and subtle in her family relationships. She recalls her association

with her grandmother who has died just then. She is been introduced as an able girl who can do anything. She is confident go ahead of her times. She dresses up her dead grand mother's body as per her wish.

She follows her grandmother's view, "You must not become one of those women who groom themselves to please others. The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy."

Marikalonthu is utterly ill treated by everyone. Despite her suffering, she restrains her might to move forward - what she believes in. She doesn't have the benefit of her childhood. Her parents' weak points become barriers in her life. Despite her modesty she is been violated by them and becomes a mother to an illegitimate child.

Her willpower – leading life on her own is quite remarkable.

Perceptions – Self Sensitivity:

Akhila realizes that her feelings are not strange. Every story makes her recollect an incident from her life, which makes her compare to their lives.

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Akhila's father lives on his discontented job. She pities the dilemma of her mother; the one who believes in "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?"; on becoming a widow expected her daughter, Akhila to play the man of the house.

Akhila listens to others, shares her own opinions and correlates their experiences. Her eternal dilemma – 'whether a woman needs a man to complete her or whether she can stay single and happy?' finds a solution. Her co passengers suggest her - she must decide for herself.

Finally Akhila tries to bring harmony into her life. She is ready to face all the challenges. She doesn't feel bad to eat eggs, which is not accepted by her devoted Hindu family. After her mother's death, she wants to live alone. She is hates her sister's view – expecting Akhila to contribute her salary even after her marriage.

She substantiates her affair with Hari, a younger man. She considers him the source of joy. She realizes that a woman today needs a man – not to fulfill her dire needs but to fulfill her life, a companion.

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