



## Ladies Coupé

*Anita Nair*

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Meet Akhila: forty-five and single, an income-tax clerk, and a woman who has never been allowed to live her own life - always the daughter, the sister, the aunt, the provider - until the day she gets herself a one-way ticket to the seaside town of Kanyakumari. In the intimate atmosphere of the all-women sleeping car - the 'Ladies Coupe' - Akhila asks the five women the question that has been haunting her all her adult life: can a woman stay single and be happy, or does she need a man to feel complete?

This wonderfully atmospheric, deliciously warm novel takes the reader into the heart of women's lives in contemporary India, revealing how the dilemmas that women face in their relationships with husbands, mothers, friends, employers and children are the same world over.

## Ladies Coupé Details

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Author : Anita Nair

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## From Reader Review Ladies Coupé for online ebook

### Sally says

Wonderous kismet library find, this book. Glad I stumbled across it while shortcutting through the "N" aisle. Picked it up because of it's pretty and colorful paperback spine, to be honest. The book lived up to all the glowing GR reviews and back cover promises.

Tells the individual stories from first person point of view of every one of the five ladies sharing an overnight car on the Kanyakumari Express from Bangalore, India. Overarching story told from the perspective of Akhila, arcing from her childhood to a pivotal decision made in her 45th year. Ends with a happy gasp and the proclamation: "It can't end already!"

Can't wait to read another wonder by Anita Nair.

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### Meghana says

I was hooked onto this one after just a few pages. Not because the writing itself was great or the plot was really inviting, but mainly because for the first time in a long time I could actually relate to the protagonist; not in the sense that I went through the same experiences as *Akhila*, but the author drew out the joys and sorrows of the characters and extended them to the reader in a way that not just makes you see, but also *understand*.

The story is about Akhila, someone who is at a crossroads. Should she continue her boring, spinster life where nothing ever happens, or actually fight life back and demand from it what was cruelly snatched from her? She seeks out the answer one night during a journey in a ladies' coupe - a cabin in a train specially reserved for women passengers - from her fellow travellers.

Will their life experiences and advice give Akhila the courage to claim her life back? Read to find out!

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### Jonayla says

Lo empecé con miedo a lo que me podría encontrar: no me convencía del todo eso de el libro entero se limitase a que 6 mujeres que se encuentran en un tren contasen su vida. Sin embargo, me ha encantado. Me parece que hace un gran retrato de lo que es vivir en una sociedad donde la mujer es un mero complemento del hombre, en la que depende de éste para todo. Cuenta seis historias muy diferentes, aunque con algo en común: mujeres que están hartas de que las cosas tengan que ser tal y como son. No sabría con cuál quedarme de todas las historias: quizás lo mejor es verlas en su conjunto. Sea como sea, merece la pena leerlo.

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### Irene says

a ladies coupe is a special room with second class reservation for overnight trains in india. this book is about six women (the "I" changes depending on the story teller) who met each other inside that coupe. (a coupe, my housemate told me this morning over breakfast, is a car body type that has a fixed roof among others; a convertible coupe has a moveable roof but still has the rigid structure of a coupe.) the novel opens with this: *"this is the way it has always been: the smell of a railway platform at night fills akhila with a sense of escape."*

a very feminist novel - feminism strongly runs through it without being uttered. i learned a lot.

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### **Vani says**

Can a woman live alone and be happy or does she always need a man to give meaning to her life? Through a prose that is as insightful and multi layered as it is thought provoking, the author questions a society that denies any happiness to a woman except that which comes to her through her family or her husband as if she has no identity of her own. Can a woman not seek out happiness on her own terms just as a man would? What about women who choose to break the canons of this society; are they condemned to the life of an outlier? We find out.

Akhila or Akhilandeshwari is a middle aged single woman and has spent her life following the rigorous norms set for her by her Tamil Brahmin community, except now, as she stands on the cusp of youth and old age, she finally begins to question if she feels truly satisfied and fulfilled. Her journey of self-discovery takes her aboard a train in a Ladies Coupe to Kanyakumari where she meets several other interesting women, all of whom have had different experiences in life-- from a 'cossetted' Janki with a perfect to the T husband to the 'wilful' Margaret Shanti who tamed her wayward man, from an 'insensate' Mari who was raped as a child and grew up hating men, to a 'perceptive' Sheela who is way too mature for her age, Akhila has heard it all and must now make her own choices. What will she decide? Or if it was you, would you still seek out a man to complete you? – A man who could give meaning to your life? I liked the book. Nice read!

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### **Melissa says**

I really enjoyed this book. Nair provides several snapshots of the lives of several Indian women who have struggled to find themselves in an extremely rigid society. Her language is quite lovely, and each woman's story compells you to read further. I'm left feeling grateful for the choices available to me, and reminded that many obstacles are common to all women.

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### **Gattalucy says**

#### **Dondolati dal ritmo lento di un treno**

L'espeditore smaccato per raccontare di solito mi mette a disagio... se hai da raccontare... e racconta!!! Questo poi non mi ha convinto per niente: che le donne si raccontino, è vero! che lo facciano meglio tra sconosciute, pure, ma che questo raccontarsi segua il filo di un viaggio, indipendentemente da chi ci sia nel tuo scompartimento... beh, è poco verosimile, anche se sei sicura che ci sarà comunque per forza una donna...

A parte questo alcuni racconti sono coinvolgenti, altri affrettati, e comunque tutti gli uomini finiscono per essere caricature esagerate...un po' troppo anche per me!

Ciò che ho salvato è la colonna sonora: il ritmo lento di un treno che mi riporta all'infanzia, quando i treni donodolavano con un ritmo che ora non sento più...ma come allora adesso arrivano comunque in ritardo!!!

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### **Prerna says**

The premise is interesting. Six women travelling in a ladies coupé, each taking turns to tell the story of their rebellion and their subsequent empowerment. But the book didn't really wow me. It kept me hooked, but even while I read it, I kept feeling that this book could have been written so much better.

First of all, all the six stories seem to be about the same thing in the end. How someone/something tries to keep these women down, how they refuse to be controlled and suppressed, how they face hardships because of this and how they eventually become empowered and definitely wiser. There really could have been a little more variation to the story. Not all Indian girls have to rise up in arms to live a full life. This novel on the whole makes it seem like it's a sad case for women in India. But then I guess that is what the author set out to portray. I'm not sure...but I just felt there could be a little more variety in the stories.

Next up, the writing literally made me laugh out loud sometimes. What does "Love is methyl alcohol pretending to be ethyl alcohol" even mean?? The writing just seemed so forced. The one thing that particularly stood out for me were the bad BAD metaphors. Really, you expect better writing from someone who has been recommended by Khushwant Singh (though come to think of it, it seems quite apt...one not-so-good writer recommending another :P).

And the end? Badly written. I refuse to believe that someone who has led as conservative a life as Akhila can just one fine day get up and sleep with a total stranger just because some women on some train told her their stories. I don't, in the first place, understand why the writer needed to make Akhila sleep with someone to show that she had finally broken away from whatever was enslaving her. There are other ways you know! All in all, the book did not enrich my life in any way, but I also do not regret reading it. Sometimes you just HAVE to read some "just average" book.

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### **Ms. Gee says**

So far, this is a wonderful book. This is one of those books that I actually picked up a few years ago, started reading (probably on vacation) and just never finished. I'm now getting back into this classic story told thru the eyes of an Indian woman, but a classic story that can be seen/told around the globe. Def. a book that you want to curl up with and continue reading as the hours pass! :)

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### **Book'd says**

#### **To begin with:**

One of the most sensitive family drama I have read in a long time.

I have been reading lot of rave reviews about Anita Nair's work since long. After reading the praise for the book at the back cover from around the world compelled me to buy the book without a single thought.

### **The Story:**

This is the story of Akhilandeshwari aka Akhila, 45 year unmarried woman from a traditional family. She is a breadwinner for her family consisting her mother, a sister and two brothers after the death of his father. Akhila is a income tax office clerk and has been portrayed as a very responsible and strong woman who lately decides to live her life on her own terms and starts off her journey to Kanyakumari in the Ladies Coupe' of the train.

The fellow passenger women boards and alights the train one after the other. They bonded with each other during the journey and author shares the stories of their own life and that makes this book a highly dramatic and engaging read.

Akhila's journey continues in search of the answer for her single question: whether a woman can lead her life alone? As the story progresses, all six women and their life stories leaves the reader with unanswered questions about the miseries they have gone through.

### **Praise for the Author :**

Anita Nair is a flawless writer and this book explains well about his international presence in literary world.

### **Synopsis :**

The way of writing and the narration of this book creates a wonderfully warm surrounding around the reader. A highly recommended read for every literature lover.

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### **Emanuela says**

Scritto con stile scorrevole dove si alternano descrizioni ambientali molto colorate dagli oggetti in uso delle donne indiane, i sari o i fiori carnosì dalle tinte forti che contrastano con i grigiori dell'anima repressa delle protagoniste, che si raccontano le rispettive vite durante un viaggio notturno in treno.

Ciascuna soffre della subalternità sessista e lotta contro la povertà o il pregiudizio, non tanto diverso da quello che si poteva vivere da noi ancora nella metà del secolo scorso.

Molto forti e toccanti le esperienze di violenza. Per tutte tenace il desiderio di riscatto e di emancipazione e ciascuna, a modo suo, la raggiunge, se non altro nella convinzione della propria unicità.

Ammetto che non è il genere di romanzo che preferisco, ma l'autrice riesce a dare ai personaggi una caratterizzazione decisa. Questo soprattutto il pregio del libro.

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### **piperitapitta says**

#### **Tutto in una notte**

Un viaggio in treno in compagnia di altre cinque donne, compagne occasionali per una notte, nel vagone riservato alle «cuccette per signora» cui il titolo fa riferimento, è il pretesto per Akhila, la protagonista del romanzo, per riconsiderare la propria esistenza sacrificata al bene della famiglia di origine e l'escamotage per l'autrice per tratteggiare i ritratti di sei donne indiane diverse tra loro ma unite dalla propria condizione - non

proprio occidentalmente esaltante - di donne.

Donne che rivendicano la propria unicità, stanche di essere considerate tali, da se stesse in primis, solo in funzione del proprio ruolo di figlie, sorelle, mogli, mamme, amiche e che vorrebbero per una volta nella propria vita, vissuta solamente in funzione degli altri, porsi al centro dei propri pensieri e delle proprie azioni: libere di scegliere e di decidere.

I profumi ed i colori indiani però non sono riusciti a prendere il volo nella mia mente e nonostante pensi che la costruzione narrativa di fondo fosse buona, sono dell'idea che non sia stata poi sostenuta da una valida struttura che consentisse al romanzo di non perdere unità e armonia.

Credo anche che i troppi termini indiani all'interno del romanzo, privi di spiegazioni che mi aiutassero ad orientarmi tra cibi, religione e usanze - il solito glossario a fine libro o anche delle banalissime note di pagina sarebbero state gradite! - non abbiano giovato troppo alla fluidità della storia, relegando quasi sempre chi come me non è conosca l'India proprio come le sue tasche, al ruolo di spettatore, senza permettergli di salire anche lui a bordo del treno per lasciarsi trasportare da storie di un altro mondo e dal lento dondolio dei vagoni.

Il fatto che poi, qua e là, scivoli un po' sul romanzo rosa (oscillando tra i vecchi Harmony e i più audaci Blumoon) e che tutte le figure maschile ne escano piuttosto demolite, penso che possa essere considerato un altro limite di questo romanzo dalle troppe pagine per poche e concentrate emozioni.

Forse, riflettendoci a lettura ultimata, posso dire che quello che mi ha stupita ed in certo senso emozionata di più per la sua diversità dalle nostre abitudini, è stato proprio scoprire dell'esistenza in India di queste *Ladies coupé*, le vetture in cui sul treno è permesso a donne, bambini e vecchi, di viaggiare separati dal resto della massa: un'attenzione che non si capisce bene fino in fondo se sia poi da considerare un privilegio oppure una discriminazione.

Divertente e interessante invece l'appendice che propone alcune ricette indiane a fine libro e che non mancherò di provare!\*

\*(*Mai fatto, naturalmente, anche perché a suo tempo ho restituito il libro a chi me l'aveva prestato che a sua volta l'ha dimenticato in un vagone della metropolitana*)

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## **Prash says**

full of cliches. the prose is un-illuminating. the stories of the five women are so banal one'd almost shudder to meet them in real life. supposed to be a text -book for writing in univs. as interesting as a textbook really.

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## **Linda says**

Akhila has always thought of others, never herself. Since her father died, she has become the provider of the family. The other siblings have been married off, and she has turned 45 years old. She is not married and have no children. Does a woman need a man to feel complete? Is it possible to have a purpose on one's own?

The author investigates the woman's destiny with a feminist approach. Women who don't accept their place, which is to belong to a man and serve him, are treated badly. Akhila has dreams, but is afraid that people think badly of her.

One day, Akhila leaves her former life and embarks on a journey. She shares a train coupe with five other women, which all tell her their stories, which helps her make a decision and create a new life with her own dreams, love on her own terms, exploring her desires and sexuality.

It's wonderfully written. The prose adjusts to the characters. A teacher in chemistry is seeing the world from the chemistry point of view. It's beautiful description how people affect each other and develop, just as substances react and becomes something new. It is also a funny book at times, as when the same woman are tired of her strong-willed, self-absorbed husband's behavior towards her and other people, and feeds him into obesity.

All in all, it is an interesting book about Indian women and their search for liberation.

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### **Smitha says**

I had great expectations for this book and have waited for almost a year or more to read it. Finally when I laid my hands on it, somehow it let me down.(And co-incidently I read it during a train journey, but not in a ladies coupe. ) It links the lives of 6 women from various backgrounds who happen to be in a ladies coupe of a long distance train. And as expected, their lives are not beds of roses. Except for one or two, all had quite okay lives from Indian standard, and the common thing they had was that they were strong and decisive. The book was not very fast paced, and at some points I had a feeling that it doesn't happen so in real life.. On the whole, a readable book, but not a five star one for me.

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