

Skokie Public Library's Book Discussion Guide

Ladies Coupé by Anita Nair

- What does the coupé represent to the women? What does it represent to the reader?
- Could the stories told by the women have been told to any of their own family or friends?
- Was Appa's death accidental? Explain your views. p51 & 57-62
- When someone loses a parent, should a child feel the need to take over that person's role and responsibilities in the family? p. 74
- Akhila said she grew a shell around herself to protect, deflect hurt and pain or she would have gone insane. What was she protecting herself from? p. 43
- Why was the rest of Akhila's family so self serving? In their minds, Akhila had ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster. p. 83
- Did she allow it or was she a victim of circumstance?
- Why didn't Akhila tell Padma she wanted to live alone? pgs. 169-170
- Why did Padma need to make Akhila look inadequate to feel complete? p. 173
- What does the egg symbolize for Akhila versus Padma?
- When Akhila was observing Janaki and her husband on the railroad platform and thinks of her own parent's relationship, why did the phrase "The children of lovers are no better than orphans" *resonate with her*? p. 10
- Throughout her segment in the novel Janaki talks about "a certain age" that she had reached. Her doctor referred to it when she couldn't sleep, she could see it take its toll when she looked into the mirror or when her husband kept calling her "mummy" instead of her own name or their nicknames for each other. Why did Janaki react so strongly to a seemingly natural state of things—that is, reaching a certain age? p25-40
- What do you think Janaki means by the repeated expression "when you get to a certain age"? p.25-40
- Why did the author choose to have a teenager as one of the passengers? Sheela was only 14. Was she telling her story or the story of someone else? Explain. p67
- When Sheela applied makeup to her grandmother's face, her mother and aunt became enraged. What was your feeling about Sheela's act? p79
- If Sheela continues to allow her instincts to rule rather than do what was expected of her, what kind of future do you foresee for her? p. 145
- Margaret's mother says it is "the woman's responsibility to keep the marriage happy" while Prabha Devi states that women set the tone of a marriage. What do you think about these statements? p. 119, p. 199
- Prabha Devi's mother discovered that a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell – to be shunned? p. 180
- What did swimming represent to Prabha Devi? p198-206
- Why do you think Margaret applied her knowledge of science and chemistry in particular to personal aspects of her life? (Was this a coping mechanism or did her chemical assignments to various people ring true?) p103-4 & p126-128
- Was it ok for Margaret to have expectations of Ebe? p. 120



Skokie Public Library

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- Why does Ebe (Margaret's husband) feel the need to impress others? i.e. certificates on the wall, crossword puzzle accomplishment, his jogging in places he will be noticed, his contingent of fellow teachers (the coterie) p133 (crossword) 124 (certificates) 129 (running)
- After the abortion, Ebe says to Margaret, "My little girl! My darling child... I like you like this... so untainted and clean... I never want you to change." Should or Could Margaret have responded to Ebe? p. 118
- Do you feel Margaret found sufficient revenge against her husband by overfeeding him? What was her worry concerning her daughter? p142
- While the women were telling their stories, Akhila thought that all of the women needed to justify their failures. Why? p.144-145
- Do you think any of the men in their lives need to justify their actions/failures?
- The author seems to stereotype various men as harsh throughout the story? Was their demanding behavior needed for the women to be able to tell their stories?
- Why do you think Mari told no one about the rape? P253
- How could Mari be so caring and loving toward Prabhu papa (Sujata's baby) and have no regard for her own child? p. 232 What changed her mind? Was the reunion bittersweet? P.281
- How likely could any of the stories happen in the United States?
- How does the author use description to bring her country alive?
- Which woman do you most sympathize with and why?
- Would any of Akhila's traveling companions been happier had they never married versus living their current lives?
- Akhila experienced quite an interesting trip. Do you feel the experience changed her character? If so, how? Did it answer her original question? Can a woman successfully live alone? What answer did the ladies of the coupé provide?
- Whose story gave Akhila the courage to call Hari? p.290
- How much did their identity change as a result of departure of British "control"?
- Do you think these women's need for approval is reflective of
 - All women
 - Indian culture
 - Themselves
- The intimate liaison between the young man on the beach and Akhila was interesting. Why did she insist on anonymity between the two of them? p. 285-289
- How would Akhila's life had turned out if she had stayed with Hari?
- Should Akhila have married Hari? Would she have been treated better or worse by her family?
- With whom is a woman's greatest devotion – her husband or child / children?