



# Subjection of Women in Anita Nair's Mistress

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## Abstract

Anita Nair is a renowned Indian English writer. Anita Nair is an Indian novelist, travel writer, essayist, poet and a short story writer. She also writes stories for children. She writes about the ordinary lives of men and women. Her novels are set in the Indian background. She portrays women's struggle in a patriarchal society and the subsequent tension that underlie. Her women are strong and they overcome the barriers that restrict and limit their individual space in the family and society. Anita Nair highlights all the shades of sufferings and dilemmas of educated middle-class Indian women in her novels. Nair's fictional world is overwhelmed by the presence of women characters influenced by the modern education and thinking, economic freedom and employment opportunities.

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Anita Nair's *Mistress* juxtaposes the state of the dying art form of Kathakali and the condition of women in the society. *Mistress* is the story of a European musician, who comes to India to write a book about the life of a famous Kathakali dancer now living with his niece and her husband. It's a story about two strangers falling in love and about the impact this love has on the people around them. Anita Nair masterfully passes her love for Kathakali on to the reader, along with the scent and feel of the setting. The characters are as deep and complex as the subject. The book is divided into sections that take inspiration from elements in Kathakali itself, giving it a layer of subtext.

In the novel, *Mistress* focuses on domestic sexual violence. Though Anita Nair is not a feminist, her stories delve deep into the expectations of married Indian women and the choices they make within the relationships. *Mistress*, the story revolves round the Kathakali dancer Koman, his niece Radha, and a travel writer, Christopher Stewart who comes to India to write about Koman. The locale of the novel is the banks of the river Nila in Kerala. Koman, a famous Kathakali artist, and her niece Radha receives Chris at the

railway station. From their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are deeply impressed by this young man. Radha is a true representation of the modern Indian woman. In spite of her origin as a daughter of a middle-class traditional family, while studying and in the years following her education, Radha became well aware of her possibilities. Living in a large city away from home, having a job and later even a lover, she likes to think of herself as of an independent young woman who can freely decide about her life.

Mistress is a colourful vibrant novel set in Kerala with Kathakali as a background. The novel is set in the backdrop of Nila and an institution which teaches performing arts, possibly Kerala Kalamandalam. Two stories unfurl in this book. The first is the story of Radha, and Shyam, and of a travel writer Chris, who comes to Kerala to meet Radha's uncle, Koman, a famous kathakali dancer. While Koman and Radha discover themselves strangely drawn to Chris, Shyam turns out to be a helpless observer as Radha grips Chris with a passion and wildness he cannot figure out. The second story is what Koman tells Radha and Chris, the story of his own complicated past and his parents, a mesmerizing account by all standards.

The first is the story of Radha, and Shyam, and of travel writer Chris, who comes to their riverside resort in Kerala with a cello and a tape recorder, to meet Radha's uncle, Koman, a famous kathakali dancer. While Koman and Radha both find themselves strangely drawn to Chris, Shyam becomes a helpless observer as Radha embraces Chris with a passion and recklessness he cannot comprehend.

Koman is both an observer and participant in this story, making no judgments, except those he reveals to the readers. The second story is that which Koman tells Radha and Chris, the story of his own convoluted past and his parents, a fascinating account by all standards. The tale takes us all over Kerala and Tamil Nadu, to the unique town of Arabipatnam, and to various other places. And it brings us to kathakali, with fascinating insights into the training and performance of this traditional dance form, which is drama as well as dance. The book is in the first person, but does not have a single narrator; as in a dance-drama, each of the players is allowed to speak for himself. Shyam voices his thoughts, and Radha voices hers, and we see them hurting each other, the misunderstandings deepening through the trickery of words. As Nair goes further into their past, we begin to understand the complexities of their relationship, to comprehend the injustice of it all.

While it is Shyam who draws the most sympathy, Radha is not really a v rather, she is vulnerable and insecure, too. But it is Koman's point of view that is the most interesting. With his knowledge of kathakali, a dance form which is entirely based on the epics, he looks upon mankind with a wisdom drawn from the heroes, princes and villains of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He recognizes every nuance of emotion as one he has experienced, as part of a vesham, or a role in kathakali.

In minor gestures and fleeting expressions, the minds of all are revealed to an artist who is trained to interpret emotions with a finesse and perfection. The author uses kathakali as her metaphor for life; the book is sectioned into nine parts, each named after one of the navrasas, the nine emotions or the nine faces of the heart...love, contempt, sorrow, fury, valour, fear, disgust, wonder and attachment...their traditional names,

of course, are used. Each section begins with a wonderful piece on that particular rasa, in the voice of the teacher, giving examples from nature to teach his students how to bring the expressions onto their faces.

The book moves from Shringaram to Shantam, and each time we get an inkling of what is to follow. The language is superb and the structure unique. The plot is full of twists, and the book is powered by the colourful complexities of many characters. Through all the incidents, Nair searches for deeper meanings in art and life. Thought-provoking and absorbing, this a brilliant book from a writer who does not hesitate to challenge herself, a book original in both structure and content. A must-read for any lover of literature.

The story of this love triangle is told from the overlapping first-person viewpoints of these central characters and, with its structure of three 'books' of three sections each, the narrative mirrors the arc of a kathakali performance, in all its colour, drama and heightened emotions. As a meditation on how the past influences our decisions and destiny and how art is forged from personal experience, *Mistress* could have been a worthy but weighty read. It is wholly redeemed by the author's infectious passion for kathakali and its performers and her lightness of touch when it comes to intimate human relationships. This is a sensitive and nuanced work which makes a persuasive case for the continuing relevance of this ancient art form in modern India. Anita Nair deserves high praise for her willingness to tackle the big themes of meaning and desire in art and in life.

When travel writer Christopher Stewart arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to meet Koman, Radha's uncle and a famous kathakali dancer, he enters a world of masks and repressed emotions. From their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are drawn to the enigmatic young man with his cello and his incessant questions about the past. The triangle quickly excludes Shyam, Radha's husband, who can only watch helplessly as she embraces Chris with a passion that he has never been able to draw from her. Also playing the role of observer-participant is Koman; his life story, as it unfolds, captures all the nuances and contradictions of the relationships being made-and unmade-in front of his eyes. the story is set on the banks of river Nila that instils the beauty of art, wonder of creativity and depth of love and passion and the pain of infidelity. Koman is a renowned Kathakali artist, Christopher Stewart, Chris a travel writer visits the *Matt* to interview him, but a deep attraction develops between Radha, Koman's niece and Chris, complication sets as Radha is married to Shyam.

There are more complicated relationships in this novel to be explored one that between Angela and aging Koman, Koman has a way for many such intimacy. There is an intricate love story that is told by Koman between Sethu and Saadiya in a mythical Arabipatinam. The novel comprises nine chapters named that goes by *navarasas* and each chapter revolves around the title.

The female characters in Anita Nair's novels come from different religions, reflecting thus the diversity of Indian culture, which would be difficult or- impossible to generalize. Anita Nair is a contemporary Indo-English novelist who has presented the plight of Indian woman. This novel deals with tradition and modernity in the contemporary India. Anita Nair has demonstrated the subordinate position of woman in the orthodox tradition –bound Indian society. She has taken up issues of gender discrimination and social

conditioning of women, husband-wife relationship and the suppression of women and sexual exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame.

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair presents the story of women and men who experience emotional crisis as a result of betrayal, disappointment and shame or the feeling of guilt. In a patriarchal society, a woman's life is controlled by the moral and social code, of the father or the husband, and flouting of this code can result into tragedy. There are nine chapters of the novel divided into three books, and the nine chapters represent nine elements of the „Rasas“ from the Indian classical poetics, which are Srirangam, Hasyam, Karunam, Raudram, Verram ,Bhayanakam, Beebhalsam, Adbhutam, and Shaantam which describe the prominent emotional state in the life of the characters portrayed.

Anita Nair presents the inner state of women who tried to be an obedient partner for their husband in the ego of male dominated society hurt their feelings and desire which convert into tragedy or dissatisfaction of married life. She has to obey everything even if she doesn't want to but still, she is always treated as a property of a men and her emotions never consider to be take care of.

### Work Cited

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