



## Relationship Anarchy in Anita Nair's *Mistress*: A Saga of Sentimentalism

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### Abstract:

This paper narrates Relationship Anarchy in Anita Nair's *Mistress*. A well-known writer of India, Anita Nair, is a multi-dimensional writer of India. Whose fiction is translated in more than twenty-one languages all over the globe. She concentrates on the human condition in Indian patriarchal society. Her fictions are a combination of self-implementation and the responsibility of the family. Her characters are capable enough to face any kind of situation. As a woman writer, she elaborates the struggle and the problems of Indian women in the patriarchal society. Her well-known novel *Mistress* is based on Kathakali. Which has navrasas *Sringaaram*, *Haasyam*, *Karunam*, *Raudram*, *Veeram*, *Bhayaanakam*, *Beebhalsam*, *Adbhutam*, *Shaantam* which means Love, Contempt (Joy), Sorrow, Fury, Valour, Fear, Disgust, Wonder, Detachment (Serenity). She applies all the emotions in her characters. Even Anita Nair also narrates the characters from the Bible, the Koran and the Mahabharata in her fiction. And she has combined three religions. Men are always considered rational while women are always considered sentimental, sympathetic and compassionate. The way they handle the situations in different directions and try to get a solution in different ways. In the novel *Mistress*, Anita Nair represents the transformation of the relationship between spouses in the family. This distance between the relationship occurs due to a lack of love and understanding, and the important thing is the lack of conversation between husband and wife. This paper focuses on the term Relationship Anarchy through pre-marital, marital and post-marital relationships. Along with this, stories of Sethu and Saadiya, Sethu and Devayani, Koman and Angela, Koman and Lalitha, and Koman and Maya, Radha and Shyam, Radha and Chris take place one after another.

**Keywords:** Relationship Anarchy, patriarchy, pe-marital, marital, post-marital relationships, self-realization.

### 1. Introduction:

Anita Nair is a prolific Indian writer in English, who is well-known for her creativity as a writer of novels, short stories, poems, essays, children's stories, plays, travelogues and editing works. Anita Nair concentrates upon the real human condition in Indian society. She candelve deep into the human psyche and portrays all the characters as real human beings. She is also a unique narrator in presenting her ideas in an innovative language with the use of rhetoric. Her novels are a blend of self-implementation and the responsibility of the family. Her fiction is based on the ideological and practical lives of Indian middle-class families. Anita Nair narrates society in her way of narration and all the characters of her fiction are powerful enough to face any kind of situation. Which shows her love for literature and real-life experience? Somewhere and the other her experience and the real stories around her can be seen in her writing in a very interesting manner. As a woman novelist, Anita Nair elaborates the struggle and the problems of Indian women in the patriarchal society. Though she is quite interested in reading all types of books.

Even her love for the motherland is easily reflected in her works. Her works are the reflection of her rootedness in Kerala. In her writings, Anita Nair elaborates environment, people, the lives of the people, her attachment and respect for ancestors. While narrating the geographical condition of Kerala, she praises Kerala as *God's own country*. She mentions the principle "Make Do". All the Keralites live their lives according to the cultural and natural way. Ayurveda, Flora and Fauna make Kerala rich and meaningful. Kerala paves the way for Anita Nair to create her own identity. Further, Anita Nair glorifies the greens of Kerala in these words;

*"Nowhere else in the world have I seen so many hues of green. The velvet green of the moss on the wall. The deep green of the hibiscus bush. The dappled green of the jackfruit. The Jade green of the paddy... Leaves. Parakeet's wings."*

*(Where the Rain is Born-writing about Kerala)*

## 2. Mistress:

The tradition of Kerala includes Kathakali as a religious ritual. *Mistress*, by Anita Nair, is a novel that reflects art and adultery. The novel examines the lives of the characters through the medium of Kathakali. This book is having three parts. Each part is having three Rasas. The novel deals with navarasas *Sringaaram, Haasyam, Karunam, Raudram, Veeram, Bhayaanakam, Beebhalsam, Adbhutam, Shaantam* which means **Love, Contempt (Joy), Sorrow, Fury, Valour, Fear, Disgust, Wonder, Detachment (Serenity)**. *Mistress* is the mixture of all emotions of Kathakali visible through the characters. The novel *Mistress* is a realistic portrayal of the Kathakali world. Before writing this novel, Anita Nair has joined one short-term course at Kerala Kalam and Alam, to understand all the mudras and the meaning of those mudras. And she applies all the emotions in the characters. Even Anita Nair also quotes the characters and phrases from the Bible, the Koran and the Mahabharata in her fiction. And she has combined three religions. The novel starts with *Sringaaram* rasa in which, Christopher Steward reaches the riverside resort of Kerala to meet Koman, a famous Kathakali dancer. He enters in the world of masks and emotions. Koman and Radha, Koman's niece, both are impressed by the mind-blowing personality of Chris from the first meeting. Radha gets attracted to him and flows into an illegitimate relation with Chris. Though she is married, her husband, Shyam, comes to know from her behaviour. And Koman becomes a silent witness of the love triangle. Even, at the end of the novel; Koman comes to know about Chris, that he is the son of Angela, Koman's Kathakali student. So, this is the narration about pre-marital, marital and post-marital relationships. Along with this, stories of Sethu and Saadiya, Sethu and Devayani, Koman and Angela, Koman and Lalitha, and Koman and Maya take place one after another.

## 3. Relationship Anarchy:

Relationship Anarchy, better known as RA, is a term coined by Swedish feminist Andie Nordgren in 2006. It is a translation to English of a relationship Anarchy pamphlet by her, published in Sweden. According to Andie Nordgren;

***“Relationship Anarchy questions the idea that love is a limited resource that can only be real if restricted to a couple. You have capacity to love more than one person, and one relationship and the love felt for that person does not diminish love felt for another. Don't rank and compare people and relationships- cherish the individual and your connection to them. One person in your life does not need to be named primary for the relationship to be real. Each relationship is independent, and a relationship between autonomous individuals.”***

### **(Andie's Log- The short instructional manifesto for relationship...)**

- Love is abundant, and every relationship is unique.
- Love and respect instead of entitlement.
- Find your core set of relationship values.
- Find positivity and don't let fear drive your relationships.
- Build for the lovely unexpected.
- Trust is better.
- Change through communication.
- Customize your commitments.

Anita Nair has interestingly interwoven the term relationship Anarchy in her novel. She depicts this term in most of her fiction. Men are always considered rational while women are always considered sentimental, sympathetic and compassionate. Their opinion and concern are never similar. The way they handle the situations in different directions and try to get a solution in different ways. In *Mistress*, Anita Nair represents the transformation of the relationship between spouses in the family. This distance between the relationship occurs due to a lack of love and understanding, and the important thing is the lack of conversation between husband and wife. Anita Nair has portrayed each minute detail very carefully as if it seems the real situation of the day-to-day life of common people. She succeeds to present women's conditions in Indian patriarchal society. She can peep into the human psyche makes readers enjoy the critical situations of different characters. In her conception, she elaborates the social awareness of the current era, in which two souls are competitors to each other, who are trying extremely hard to establish their personalities in society. Financial freedom also plays an important role in a man-woman relationship. However, Anita Nair has given stress to emotional bonding between husband and wife to make their relation strong. *Mistress* is the perfect illustration of changing relationships of husband and wife in society. This novel deals with different themes like art and adultery, the excitement of newfound love, boredom in relationships, dirtiness and ugliness of love and affection, abuse, limited hopes and regression. Also focuses upon religion, marriage, tradition and treachery.

Meanwhile, the unsuccessful relationships are compared with river Nila, which has less water and represents the barrenness of the unhappy life of the characters in *Mistress*. Anita Nair tries to combine this with the traditional dance form of Kerala, Kathakali, through navarasa- the nine phases of human emotion. All the characters are passing through these emotional phases of the human state of mind.

### 3.1 Affection between Sethu and Saadiya:

Saadiya is a very strong character in the novel, who is the teenage daughter of a Muslim family, very conservative, orthodox and rigid family. Vaapa Haji Najib Masood Ahmed, Vaapa in short is her father. He is the most recognizable and one of the six chiefs of the Muslim community. The strong impression of being Arab of the town has been created in the minds of his daughters. He made some rules to follow for women only, even women are not allowed to use main roads and streets, they are allowed to use alleys only. It is said by the male-dominated community that;

*“Rules are necessary. I agree we must segregate and protect what is our own. But I suggest we amend this one to No strangers allowed beyond the Juma during the day and none may stay the night. You can then choose who you invite into your home,” the leader said, listing the rules on a piece of parchment.” (Mistress98)*

While Sethu is a Hindu orphan, a health inspector. He is working under Dr. Samuel Sagayaraj. Unluckily, there is an epidemic in the village. Along with Dr. Samuel, Sethu takes care of affected people, so, the doctor has high hopes, trust and faith in Sethu. And the doctor takes with him everywhere he visits for medical purposes. And Sethu has proven by his service to the people. In Arabipatnam village, Sethu meets Saadiya and falls in love with her. After some time, her family members come to know about their relationship and force her to leave the house. She goes to Sethu and explains everything and the doctor advised them to leave the place immediately. Dr. Samuel is so kind-hearted person who helps Sethu every time whenever he is in a problem. Both of them move to Nazareth, where he gets the job by James Raj and after that Saadiya gives birth to a baby boy. They argue about some rituals which are going to perform on the newly born child because it is very painful and it hurts the baby boy's private parts. Though, Saadiya is from a Muslim community and wants to follow all the instructions given in the Koran while Sethu does not believe in such things. And does not allow her to perform such things upon his newly born child. He scolds her badly and compels her to leave her child and return to his parents. Saadiya is under much stress and commits suicide.

### 3.2 Pertinency of Sethu and Devayani:

After the death of Saadiya, Sethu remarries to Devayani. And have children from her. Though he has a son from Saadiya, he makes some financial arrangements for his son and he has hired one nurse to take care of his son, so he can move on in his life. and the little boy is Koman, a famous Kathakali dancer. The caretaker of Koman gets married and no one is there to look after Koman. Sethu decides to bring him back with them. Devayani is not aware of Sethu's previous marriage and his son Koman. She feels insecure by the arrival of Koman. However, Devayani is quite supportive and proves herself as having the qualities of a good wife. Anita Nair praises her in these words;

*“Devayani was a good enough wife, loving and considerate, and not given to emotional excesses. She smiled easily and seldom lost her temper. She ate well, slept well and loved well...” (Mistress 237-238)*

But Sethu believes that time is the remedy of all types of problems. Like other fathers, he also wants to give good education to his son Koman. Contrary to that, Koman is an average student and he is getting interested in Kathakali. Sethu also likes his idea and encourages him to learn the art of gestures and masks.

### 3.3 Infatuation between Koman and Angela:

Angela is a foreigner, doing her research on Kathakali as part of her dissertation. It is 1971, she gets admission to the Kathakali institute as a short-term student. She is the first woman who gets admission to the institute. She is Aashaan's student for two years. She is a hard-working student who asks a lot of questions. When Aashaan is going to retire, he suggests Koman to teach her Kathakali. She is from Germany and her mother is Spanish, she grew up in England. Koman is playing the role of Nala while Sundaran is playing the role of Damayanti in the Kathakali dance of Nalacharitham. Aashaan says to Angela that choose the person from both of them with whom you want to study. She chooses Koman, when they meet the first time, it is mentioned in the novel that, *“Our eyes met. Mine blue and his a pale brown. Sea and sand. A frisson of excitement flowed between us.” (Mistress 361)*

Koman starts liking the way she adopts the Indian culture and she used to dress like a Malayali girl. And she can speak in Malayalam as well. They spend time together. Angela reads the poetry of Neruda for him and he makes mudras of that word, each gesture is pulsing and alive. Angela believes that she is not just a student, but more than that. They love each other and start living together without marriage. Koman's father suggests getting married but Angela is not ready. They decide to leave India and settle down in London because it is Angela's wish. Initially, they are happy but slowly and steadily problems arise. Koman has to depend upon Angela for everything. And finally, Koman comes back to India. And re-joins his Kathakali Institute.

### 3.4 Intimacy between Koman and Lalitha:

Koman meets Lalitha after returning from foreign when he re-joins the Kathakali institute as Aashaan. Koman proposes to her because he has been loving her for a very long time. But she refuses him because of the fear of his family and society. She knows that she will be considered as a mere mistress of Koman and not an ideal wife. Because Koman has a habit to make illicit relations with women and he is not taking any relation seriously. Lalitha had died of cancer, however, and all they could write; *“His long-time companion succumbed to cancer even as his star ascended.” (Mistress 419)*

### 3.5 Kinship between Koman and Maya:

Maya is Koman's admirer, a married woman. She is having intimate relations with Koman. She lives with Koman for a few days. Koman has been in love with Maya for the last ten years. They talk on the telephone everyday for many years as they are sitting in the same room and talking. There is no secret between them, they talk about each and everything they have gone through. Koman knows that Maya is married and has a kid. This becomes a barrier to her and she denies Koman to live together. Koman gives various offers but she rejects them because of the responsibilities. And tells Koman to let the relation as it is. Their relation is more ideal than physical. Koman is in depression now, he is not focussing on Kathakali and he is not teaching sometimes. The barrenness of his life has tied him from everywhere. He is afraid of being alone again. He wants love in his life, Maya loves him but she has family responsibilities also. And also, she appreciates him as a great Kathakali dancer. Koman suggests Maya get married, Maya denies first but later Koman convinces her that it is an informal marriage, no one knows that Maya is a married woman. Then Maya accepts the proposal. They get informal marriage at Guruvayurjust to give comfort to Koman from loneliness. It is not a registered marriage so there will be no harm to Maya. She enjoys her liberation.

### 3.6 Compromise in Relationship of Radha and Shyam:

Radha is a well-educated girl, working woman. She is a very mature girl at the age of twenty-two. She is an independent girl, who wants to live her life in her way. Initially, she is working in a company, where she falls in love with a senior manager who is very older than her, a married man. She continues her relationship with that guy for two years. It is more than lust rather than love. Because her manager is using her as a puppet in the pubs and restaurants. Then his wife says to Radha about his dishonesty. Radha feels ashamed and decides to leave this relationship but it is Radha's misfortune that she gets pregnant with him and she has to abort that child. Radha's father comes to know about her and convinces Shyam to get married to Radha. Even her father offers a lot of money and property to Shyam. Radha does not love Shyam but Shyan likes her from his childhood and is willing to marry her at any cost. They are contrary to each other emotionally and culturally. Radha wants to be a free modern Indian woman while Shyam wants her to be a traditional housewife only. Radha thinks that;

*"I think that for Shyam, I am a possession. A much cherished possession. That is my role in his life. He doesn't want an equal; what he wants is a mistress. Someone to indulge and someone to indulge him with feminine wiles. I think of some of the cruel acts I committed as part of biology projects in school. I think of the butterfly I caught and pinned to a board when it was still alive, its wings spread so as to display the markings, oblivious that somewhere within, a little heartbeat, yearning to fly. I am that butterfly now."*  
(Mistress 53-54)

Radha makes up her mind and accepts the situation and moulds herself as a traditional wife but she cannot love Shyam. Even Shyam is having less sperm count and that's why after eight years of her marriage, Radha is not able to be a mother. She is not happy in her married life and searches for her love somewhere else.

### 3.7 Amorous Relationship of Radha and Chris:

Radha gets attracted to Chris at the first sight. Though she is a wife of Shyam, fulfilling each need, trying to forget her past but she cannot. But contrary to that, she indulges in lovemaking with Chris. Because Chris always respects her as an individual and as a woman. On the other side, Shyam uses her as a bed partner only. Radha likes Chris and his attitude as well as his politeness. Radha always wants to get this kind of guy. Who love and respect her unconditionally. This is the reason why she infatuates with Chris. Radha always wants to establish her identity but Shyam does not like so he behaves brutally with her. This kind of her husband's behaviour leads her towards Chris. When Shyam is out of town one day, Chris invites her for dinner and Radha surrenders herself for physical intimacy with Chris. When Radha's uncle Koman is aware of this thing. When he asks Radha about her illegitimate relation which Chris, she accepts the truth that she loves him, she considers Chris as a fire in her blood. She believes that her relationship with Chris gives her the real meaning of her life, her self-realization. When she comes to know about her pregnancy, she becomes uneasy and guilty. But she does not consider her relation with Chris as lust. When she sees Shyam is crying for her sin, she thinks that only she is responsible for Shyam's disappointment. She feels disgusted for herself and her affair with Chris. She decides to leave Shyam and Chris both. But in the end, she remains with Shyam and Shyam accepts her child too.

## 4. Conclusion:

To sum up, Anita Nair has notably thrown light on various aspects of human relationships and brings out the effective factors, which are responsible for the change in behaviour of human beings. Anita Nair tries to reflect the reality of society; men have always suppressed and controlled women from the centuries. She has portrayed the real world of women where they are not considered equal but mere subjects and the second sex. And men and women cannot work together for success but men always feel some kind of insecurity from women's success. Anita Nair has nicely depicted all kinds of Rasas through the characters which are a reflection of stages of emotions. As such, relationships between the character of Mistress are shown unhappy and dissatisfied somehow with their partners. Moreover, they want to escape from the bondage of a relationship and fulfill their desire somewhere else. Sethu and Saadiya, Sethu and Damayanti, Koman and Angela, Koman and Lalitha, Koman and Maya, Radha and Shyam and the last Radha and Chris. All the characters are not happy but somehow, they compromise with their relations. Her stories combine the past, present and future.

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