

Search For Love In Anitha Nair's *Mistress*

S. MANJULA

Research Scholar,

PG and Research Department of English,

KunthavaiNaacchiyaar Govt. Arts College For Women,

Thanjavur

Dr. A. SABURUNNISA,

Asst. Professor,

PG and Research Department of English,

KunthavaiNaacchiyaar Govt. Arts College For Women,

Thanjavur

Abstract

*Indo-Anglian novelists, particularly women writers, have operated powerfully on the impact of women's liberation. Apart from them, Anitha Nair is a noteworthy activist of the Post-Independent India who has portrayed the woman in her difficulties. Her women characters are distinguished from Indian women community. The majority of the Indian women novelists concentrate on women's concerns and difficulties. Her novel raises questions about the role of woman in contemporary postcolonial India. Love is the basic need of human life and without it human existence becomes dry & mechanical. In her novels there is a striving, there is a need to be loved. On the whole, it becomes obvious that love, intimacy and marriage are the basic problems of human life. The aim of this paper is to focus the longingness of Radha and her search for love in **Mistress**.*

Key words: Postcolonial, Love, Longing

Anitha Nair, a writer of repute has many novels to her credit. The well mixed combination of tradition and artistic integrity makes the lives more appealing in her works.

She examines the lives of women and their psyche in the background of the limitations imposed by the society. She treats women with their traditional roles such as mothers, wives and daughters. She has an intense emotional relationship with her characters. Her works of fiction disclose the consequence of communal suppression on women folk. The article presents a literary criticism of the novel, *Mistress* by Anitha Nair, focusing on the social status of women in India. The novel depicts the Indian Woman as a good wife within the confines of family and marriage, as an object in an arranged marriage, a property of her husband, and as the weaker sex needing the protection of her husband. The conflict between love & family loyalty as lived by women characters in the novel is described.

Mistress, set in picturesque Kerala and with kathakali as a background, Anita Nair's *Mistress* is colorful, vibrant and appealing. The main protagonist is Radha, a beautiful woman in her early thirties who is married to a man she does not love. The novel begins with the arrival of Chris, a foreigner to a small fount in Kerala Chris has come to write a book on Radha's uncle (Koman) who is an acclaimed kathakali artist. Kaman's story is interwoven into this tale. Radha is attracted to Chris & they have an affair. Radha's husband Shyam is aware of this attraction throughout but he retends not to notice. He is a small time businessman running a resort who is simply happy being married to Radha. Shyam loves her but she always looks down upon him. What is remarkable about this novel is that Radha never makes excuses for her behaviour, she has no qualms about lying and cheating her husband. Shyam understands that she has no feelings for him but is unable to confront her.

Mistress is set on the banks of river Nila, which instils in one's heart, the beauty of art, wonder of creativity, depth of love and passion and the pain of infidelity. Like the river the plot is a journey to self-realization. *Mistress* revolves around the like of Radha, Shyam and their morbid marriage against the backdrop of the narratives of Radha's uncle Koman, the Kathakali dancer and teacher, who lives only for his art.

Anitha Nair's *Mistress* (2005) is an illustration of how sensitive and masterful an Indian English writer could be in portraying personalities with varied emotional textures stretching beyond stereotypes in the process of regaining humanity in the backdrop of a creative attempt to interpret an Indian classical art form. *Mistress* tells the appealing story of a female's goal. The novel in par with the liability, codes of tradition and modernity in present India, the novel entwines a triumvirate of craving that plays out by means of Radha's deficiency of longing for her business-man- husband Shyam and her rising thirst for Chris, a tourist writer and cello player from America in pursuit of his own stories. *Mistress* is a rejuvenation of womanhood saga, to facilitate reading *Mistress* from the principal point of womenfolk, it can be argued that Nair's distribution of Radha-Krishna story from the Hindu mythology, claims from a variety of old fashioned and current interpretations on the Lord Krishna. *Mistress* (2005) which is one of the most beautiful novel. The manner in which two stories unfold in the novel, show the masterful narrative technique of the novelist. The whole novel revolves around the four main characters. Radha and her husband Shyam, her lover, Chris, and her uncle, Koman. The amount of intensive study that must have gone into the making of this novel is commendable; Within a perfect framework of the nine emotions – love, contempt, sorrow, fury, valour, fear, disgust, wonder and attachment. The first is the story of Radha and Shyam and 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 feel themselves compulsively drawn by the personality of Chris, Shyam becomes a helpless observer as Radha embraces Chris in a passion, he cannot comprehend. 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 unique town of Arabipatnam. The novel 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, Radha voices hers, readers see them hurting each other the misunderstandings deepening through the trickery of words.

Nair's postcolonial novel *Mistress*(2005) narrates the fascinating tale of a woman's desire unfolding along the fault lines of tradition and modernity in contemporary India, the novel weaves for us a triangle of desire that plays out through Radha's lack of desire for her businessman husband Shyam and her growing desire for Chris a travel writer and cell player from America in search of his own stories. In order to read *Mistress* as a feminist point of view *Mistress* is the story of a woman, Radha, who is married to one man but desires another. Radha's husband is aptly named Shyam another name for the Hindu God Krishna, while Radha's love interest is named Chris, arguably a westernized reworking of the name Krishna. The novel's invocation of the Radha-Krishna love story from Hindu mythology is in other words, quite apparent. In *Mistress* we came to know how Radha's absence of desire for her older husband Shyam has left vacant an emotional space within which her desire for the American travel writer and cello player Chris is born. Through Radha's eyes, we see Shyam, as a materialistic businessman who understands neither art nor aesthetics who constantly embarrasses Radha by exhibiting,

"a carelessness that is so typical of him", and who in her words 'wasn't just a Sham, he was an uncouth boor, this husband of mine" (Nair 9)

And so, when Chris arrives at the resort owned by the couple, we see the differences between the two men from Radha's perspective. Chris understands Radha's yearnings for music and poetry, her oblique references to Yeats. Radha's uncle Koman says in despair;

"Her face is radiant. Her eyes throw him a sidelong glance. Chris turns to her. His smile gathers her in his arms. I think of Nala and Damayanti. Chris, I see, desires Radha. And she, him. (29)"

Radha's desire for Chris back to the contempt she feels for Shyam. Ironically, she feels that it is Shyam who holds her in contempt and treats her, his wife of eight years, as a valued but lifeless object :

“a kept woman a bloody mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights” (73)

Mistress treatment of Radha's desire and agency once again shifts our focus from disembodied devotion to bodily defiance. And then there is Chris, who to Radha seems at first to be all that her husband is not: modern, liberated, intellectual, sensitive and accepting of a woman's equality and opinion. She realizes that Chris is dogmatic in his own way, and that his 'modernity' is completely circumscribed by his own location and identity. Radha is dismayed to realize that their sense of history, of politics and even of ethics is different and runs deep. Interestingly after this discord, Radha then begins to liken her situation to that of the ravaged country whose ravaging was purported to be for its own good. Radha's unease at Chris westernized approach to desire, an approach she finds unacceptable after Shyam's possessive and traditional love. This unease in her experience of desire with Chris is not necessarily any lesser than the unease and unhappiness, she feels with Shyam, though for clearly different reasons. The nature of Radha's desire thus reveals the same hybrid in-between that informs the novel's over all narrative logic. It is a desire that yearns for release even while questioning the morality of its own yearnings, a desire, that is both pleasurable affirmation and painful lack, a desire that seeks to break through the constraints of culture but is unable to find meaning wholly outside of it. Radha's desire is ultimately resolved through her rejection of both men the 'traditional Indian' Shyam as well as the 'modern American' Chris.

Husband's love – A Shyam : Increasingly, Radha is aware that her husband's love is only a Shyam& her marriage is meaningless. A young travel writer from the west,

Christopher Stewart, arrives with a cello & a tape recorder to include Koman's life in his book. He spends a lot of time with Koman & his beautiful unhappy niece, Radha. Radha is compulsively drawn by the personality of Chris. Shyam becomes helpless observer as Radha embraces Chris in a passion he cannot comprehend.

In Radha's rejection of Shyam there exists an implicit critique of the normative Indian woman desire and its implication in the discursive construction of Indian culture and the nation.

Drawn into Extra – Marital Relationship: Radha is drawn into a sexual relationship with Chris. It is a form of protest against cultural norms that deny a woman any expression of her sexuality. It voices feminists' continuing concern with giving women control over their bodies providing them with the power & knowledge to enjoy their sexuality and have two children if and when they wish. So he forces himself upon her, claiming it as his right & unmindful of her right to refuse, while Radha's mind condemns it as rape. From this instance Nair discusses the act of marital rape through the character of Shyam, in the context of sexual violence.

In Radha's rejection of Chris, there exists a liberal western feminism and the latter's discursive colonization of third world women.

Mistress, as an exercise in postcolonial feminism, right ends on an inconclusive note. We might conjecture that the child born of Radha's desire and 'fathered' in different ways by both Chris and Shyam depicts creative space and a new politics of an open futurity. Fiction in this sense is uniquely positioned to transcend the crisis of politics by allowing for the envisioning of critical utopian alternatives. The narrative resolves Radha's dilemma by third space of agency that is, at least as of now, unnamed, neither the property of its 'self' or its 'other', this desire might, with time, bring to fruition more nuisance journeys of freedom.

Radha reaches a destination while she is backed up by others opinion, by cruel, by anxiety, or by fight. The Theory determines that if the self develops in a wide open, flexible, broad was then at that point a person would advance on the path to self-realization. She contemplates sensibly and arrives at the postulation that running away is an irrational idea. Thus the writer Anitha Nair powerfully pictures the search for love through the character of Radha in a nice manner.

References:

De Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, 1953, Trans and ed. H.M. Parshelles
Harnondsworth: Penguin, 1983,p.445

Nair, Anitha. *Mistress*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, India 2005.

Sinha, Sunita. *Post-Colonial Woman Writers New Perspectives*. New Delhi:
Atlantic Publishers & Distributers, 2008.