



## Feminine helplessness in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

Subhash Singh

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Dyal Singh College, Karnal, Haryana, India

### Abstract

The present paper focuses the mental health of women who attempted to be dutiful wives for their husbands. However, the ego of a male-dominated culture damaged their sentiments and desires, resulting in tragedy and helplessness in married life. Radha has embraced her married life with Shyam and despite the fact that she dislikes Shyam, she has transformed herself into a typical Hindu wife. She wants to begin tuition, but Shyam won't let her. Sadiya is another female protagonist in this patriarchal society who is struggling with helplessness. Sadiya is a teen from an Arab Muslim family. Sadiya's love for Sethu, along with the severe religious regulations that forbade it, resulted in catastrophe. Anita Nair has addressed themes such as gender discrimination, social conditioning and feminine helplessness, the husband-wife relationship and women's suppression, and sexual exploitation of women both within and beyond the marital framework.

**Keywords:** Helplessness, exploitation, humiliation, religious

### Introduction

Anita Nair is a renowned author from India who has gained recognition on a global scale. Anita Nair was born in Kerala. She was raised in a Madras suburb. Her father was a factory worker. She moved to the USA to study journalism when she was twenty-four years. When she authored her first book, a collection of short stories, she was already employed as an inventive director of an advertising agency in Bangalore. She said her advertising profession farewell and decided to concentrate on her writing. One of Anita Nair's well-known novels is called *Mistress*. The 'Navarasas' are portrayed in the novel by the author. It refers to the nine expressions that are mentioned in the Kathak dance. The husband and wife's relationship is the subject of the novel. Anita Nair's *Mistress* contrasts the situation of the Kathakali art form, which is on the verge of extinction, with the position of women in society. The plot of *Mistress* centers on a European musician who travels to India to research a biography of a well-known Kathakali dancer who now resides with his niece and her husband. It tells the narrative of two strangers who fall in love and the effects their relationship has on those who are close to them. Anita Nair expertly conveys to the reader her expertise of feminist writer. She revealed the helplessness of women in the novel, *Mistress*.

### Methodology

This research paper aims to display the different characteristics of feminine helplessness in the novel, *Mistress* of Anita Nair. So the technique of research would be analytical, critical and qualitative. As it needs more literary works.

### Discussion

Radha, a sophisticated young woman who is conscious of her strength, served as our first introduction. She was working while living away from her house. When her husband made her aware of her weight, she felt humiliated and realized she had been taken advantage of. She fell in love with her senior boss, who was already married and had used

her as a playmate. But she has to deal with a lot of issues and the results of the same, which is that she got pregnant. Her father finds Shyam as a bridegroom for Radha and she accepts the marriage. Both are distinct from one another; Shyam is a traditionalist, whilst Radha is a modern and independent woman. Shyam believes that women are inferior to men; hence he never involves her in his business dealings. He is continuously attempting to impose his will on her.

"Why are you like this, Shyam? You seem to want to rule me. You won't let me breathe. It isn't right." (*Mistress*, 203)

Radha has embraced her married life with Shyam and despite the fact that she dislikes Shyam, she has transformed herself into a typical Hindu wife. She wants to begin tuition, but Shyam won't let her. She also wants to start crutches for kids, but Shyam won't let her. Shyam does not want to force her wife to be self-sufficient. He is aware of her strength that she is better educated than him and worked in a corporation prior to marriage. She was continually trying to satisfy her, but his macho ego was not happy. Her patience was tested when she was unable to become pregnant after eight years of marriage and his sister blamed Radha for this. Although males are also accountable for the reproduction problem, Shyam believes that he should not have any problems because he is a guy. Shyam would never embrace Radha's uniqueness. As a result, he never enables her to begin tuition or a crutch for the children. So, she was limiting herself. According to Shyam's patriarchal Hindu tradition, a woman should be preoccupied with domestic tasks and should not interfere in her husband's business or speak openly about her oppression. Shyam's attitude was too much for her to bear. And, Radha was helpless to do anything.

Sadiya is another female protagonist in this patriarchal society who is struggling with helplessness. Sadiya is a teen from an Arab Muslim family. Her father was one of the village's six chiefs; therefore the family must adhere to strong orthodox patriarchal Muslim norms and traditions.

There is no freedom for a girl to pursue an education or travel near the seashore. Many girls her age are married, but Vappa, her father, appointed a teacher to instruct her at home and she is still not married at the age of fifteen. Girls in Arab families were married at the age of eight or less. Sadiya enjoys discovering new things around her. She falls in love with a Hindu boy named Sethu. She used to refer to him as Malik, a Muslim whom she desired to meet. Her love for Sethu, along with the severe religious regulations that forbade it, resulted in catastrophe. When her father learns of this, he brands her with a heated iron rod. She considers herself to be Eve from *The Paradise Lost*, who first disobeys the forbidden thing to flee from home, and then falls in love with a man of a different religion. She wanted freedom, which is why she married Sethu, but she is unaware of the ramifications of her marriage. She is overconfident of her being Kahirs of Arab heritage so she makes a decision to execute customs on their new born child affirmed in Kuran. She was concerned for her child state, when she was having her delivery.

“What kind of life would it have anyway, with no ancestry to speak of, no family, not even a religion or a God to call its own? (*Mistress*, 197)

Sethu all the time attempts to comfort her that baby is appreciation of love reward from God. This is our child. Sadiyaa wants to raise her child with authentic Muslim principles because she is in a vulnerable situation and Sethu agrees. She has named the child Omar Masood and wants to perform the Muslim ritual of fitra, which consists of five acts of cleanliness in Islam. Then there is the issue of inter-religious marriage. Husband and wife fought over the circumcision of their newborn child. But Sethu refuses to do so since it could harm the newborn child. Sadiya tries to persuade him, but Sethu refuses, claiming that it is up to the child to decide when he is old enough. But Sadiya was unconvinced by Sethu’s words. She says,

“I made a mistake. I can’t allow my son to make the same.” (*Mistress*, 228)

Sadiya believed she was in charge of her son, who would be an infidel in the world. So she chooses to quit and retire to the sea for her final rest. Sadiya’s innocence led her to mistake Sethu for Malik. This is our orthodox patriarchal society, which forces us to follow the ritual passed down from the husband’s ancestors rather than the wife’s. This is her helplessness, the result of her innocence and gender discrimination. Her motivation is to find freedom rather than equality. She desired to explore the world with her own eyes and to become acquainted with people and places. Her tragedy symbolizes a rigid society that does not allow women to be free and independent. Her inner soul’s mental suffering drove her to commit suicide, which she saw as her only alternative. She didn’t know much about the world because she never stepped outside. Both Hinduism and Islam have rigorous regulations for women, and if they disobey, they face retribution. There are other complicated connections to be addressed in this novel, including one between Angela and the aging Koman, who has a way for much such intimacy. Koman tells an interesting love story

between Sethu and Saadiya in a fabled Arabipatinam. So, feminine characters in Anita Nair’s novel, *Mistress* come from dissimilar religious conviction, showing thus the variety of Indian culture and fighting with their problems and helplessness.

### Conclusion

As a result, it is concluded that Anita Nair exemplifies the subservient position of women in conventional tradition-bound Indian society. She has addressed themes such as gender discrimination, social conditioning and feminine helplessness, the husband-wife relationship and women’s suppression, and sexual exploitation of women both within and beyond the marital framework. Anita Nair’s *Mistress* tells the narrative of women and men who go through emotional turmoil as a result of betrayal, disillusionment, shame or a sense of guilt. A woman’s life in a patriarchal society is governed by the moral and social code of her father or husband and breaking this code might lead to catastrophe. Thus, this paper examines the mental health of women who attempted to be dutiful wives for their husbands. However, the ego of a male-dominated culture damaged their sentiments and desires, resulting in tragedy and helplessness in married life.

### References

1. Nair Anita. *Mistress*, Penguin Publication, 2005
2. Mathuramani K, Kumari G. Anita Nair’s Women -A Study, Pune Research: an International Journal in English,2016:2(5):1-7
3. Tamilarasi N, Andrew J. Cultural Identity in Anita Nair’s *Mistress*, Journal of Critical Reviews,2020:7(7)4266-4269.
4. Satve Ashwini S. A Literature Review on Gender Role Portrayed in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Anita Nair, Scholarly Research Journal for Humanities Science and English Language,2017:4/20:4811-4818. Retrieved from <https://www.srjis.com/pages/pdfFiles/149457544155.%20prof.Ashvini%20satve%20HEL.pdf>