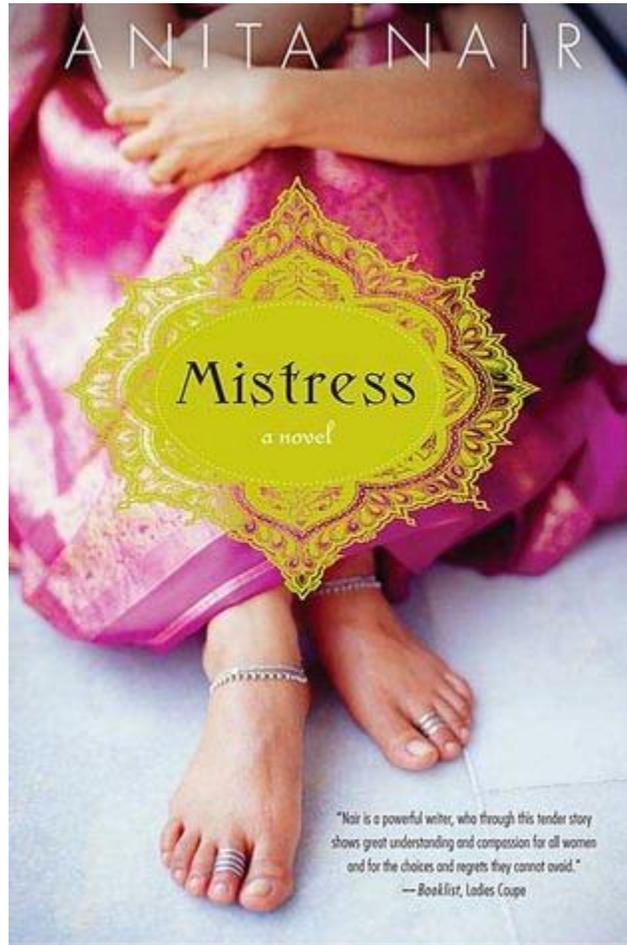


The Image of New Woman K. Annapurany and M. Anita



Abstract

The new women pushed the limits set by “male dominated society.” More women were winning the right to attend the university or college; some were professionals and becoming Lawyers, Doctors, Journalist, and Professors. New women in the United States were participating in post-secondary education in larger numbers by the turn of the 20th century. The women’s liberation movement opened the door for women in literature. New women fiction dealt frankly with sex and marriage as well as women’s desire for independence and fulfillment.

Keywords: image of new woman, dreams and desire of a women, relationship between husband and wife in the society.

Introduction

Gender equality and women empowerment are the issues which picked up momentum in India in the last three decades. There has been a shift, not only in the policy approaches but also in the image of women themselves. This 'new woman' is self-reliant, emancipated and happy individual, who is sexually uninhibited, intelligent, confident and assertive. She lives with a heightened sense of dignity. This 'new being' has been projected in the context of contemporary world as an individual with freedom of choices in the fictional works of many post-modern Indian Writers. Through their novel, they have successfully projected the urges, dreams and desire of a woman, in particular -- the middle-class housewife, who refuses to be bounded and suffocated by her surroundings. Indian writers like Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, Namita Gokhale, Anita Nair, through this novel, have successfully and skillfully brought to the surface, these new women issues like dilution in relationships, pre-marital and extra-marital affairs, and sterility of life, man-woman relationship, their inner fears, oppression and suppression faced in and outside home. Literature is in fact the most explicit record of the human spirit. It is a medium through which essence of our living is made paramount by linking it to imaginative experiences. A creative writer must have the perception and analytical mind of a sociologist who provides a record of human life, society and social systems existing at that point of time. In *mistress*, Anita Nair depicts the changing relationship between husband and wife in the society. Husband – wife alienation resulting from lack of communication and temperamental compatibility forms the theme of *mistress*.

The Image of New Woman in Anita Nair's *Mistress*

Anita Nair is one of India's popular female writers. She depicts through her expression, the present condition of women in society, with wit and humour. Story telling is an art and she does it exceptionally well. She delves deep into human psyche and allows the reader to enjoy a wonderful journey by presenting absorbing stories that have Colourful and unique characters. She evokes experiences that are drawn from day-to-day life and her approach often enables the readers to suspect the character to be one of their neighbour's or of a friend. Anita Nair, an eminent, leading Indian women writer, writing in English, holds revolutionary ideas about marriage and man – woman relationship. In her opinion, social consciousness of today, is leading us to the point where conditions for better growth of two complementary components, man and woman, would be ensured by their separate and individual development. Her main stress is on development of personality and genius, which is quite difficult to achieve. Economic independence is incidental and not important in man – women relationship, what matters most is the importance of surroundings and environment. In *mistress*, Anita Nair depicts the changing relationships of husband and wife in society. Her concept of a free woman transcends the limits of economic or social freedom but relates to her mental and emotional attitude and wellbeing. *Mistress* is a grand saga of relationships. The novel deals with several themes like art and adultery, excitement of new found love, ennui in conventional relationships, squalor and ugliness of love, abuse, dashed hopes and dark family secrets what holds the novel *mistress*, on pre-marital, non-marital and extra-marital sex is the way, the author binds it with Kathakali, a popular and rigorous dance form of Kerala. The principal protagonist is a Kathakali artiste of international repute. The different cases of interplay between the characters are expressed through *Navarasas* - the nine phases of human emotion.

A Story of Radha: Dreams and Desire of Woman

In a way this is the story it tells. Of a tumultuous journey to achieve peace. The journey taken by Shyam, the rejected husband, Radha, the longing-for-something-else wife and even Koman, Radha's uncle – the master of Kathakali - an art form that's a difficult mistress. It takes years of excruciating practice to perfect, but the final product can only be appreciated by a knowledgeable few. 'mistress' is also about what it means to be an artist and how an artist can find peace without losing the fire that adds the edge to their art. This story is utterly beautiful and I urge you to read it. It offers so much more than its 'romance-in-exotic-setting' sort of cover would have you think. She has researched and put on all the superficial technical aspects about Kathakali and life here, but even a small child would be able to make out that she has not gone deep into the life and hearts of the people here. It is rather an evaluation of a metro-brought-up mind about our lives and surroundings. And any attempt to portray life without going deep into it avoiding the inevitable misery and filth associated with it would be a failure. Live life like our great writers, let life experiences be source to pass on lasting impressions to our minds and hearts using heartfelt imagery, instead of using pages just to fill with words. Write with your heart and not with your head would be my humble message to the author.

Navarasas: Relationship Between Husband and Wife

The novel is based on the Navarasas (expressions) of Kathakali. The Navarasas being Sringaram (love, beauty), hasyam (mirth, laughter), raudram (anger, fury), karunyam (compassion), Bhibatsam (disgust, aversion), Bhayanakam (fear, dread), viram (strength, heroism), Adbhutam (wonder, amazement), Shantam (peace). Nair has weaved a story around the characters in the mistress as they go through these varied emotions. One of the characters is a Kathakali artist. He stays near a resort that is managed by the husband of his niece. A foreigner comes to meet him, allegedly to write a novel and in which he wishes to feature the Kathakali artist as one of the characters. The Kathakali artist speaks about his life starting with the life of his father. The niece who is not happy with living under the thumb of her husband is drawn towards the foreigner and they end up having an affair behind her husband's back. The Kathakali artist is aware of it, but lets his niece have her way. Not a bad read. Read the novel for its presentation. But it seems a trifle too artificial to read that everybody in the mistress is involved in some kind of illicit relationship sometime or the other. It appears the lifestyle akin to the high society rather than the middle class. The novel explores the depth of relationship between Shyam and Radha. In their relationship we find that Radha's role as a wife blocks her freedom. Nair, who is a sensitive writer, can delve deep into people's personalities and take the reader on a wonderful journey of relationship. Radha rejects her husband's oppressive environment and she rebels against the false materialism and vulgarity of society. She even virtually rejects her marriage. She distrusts love as a form of male possessiveness and does not want love to be an aspect of male domination. In the process of knowing her past, she is transformed into a new being. This transformation gives her the inner strength to submit to Shyam's wish to take her back to home. Mysteries are an indictment against men who believe in holding their women in their grip

Conclusion

The image of new woman in Anita Nair's mistress uses Kathakali as her metaphor for life; the novel is sectioned into nine parts, each named after one of the Navarasas, 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 images are full of twists, and the novel 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 novel mistress from a writer who does not hesitate to challenge herself, a mistress original in both structure and content. A must-read for any lover of literature.

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