

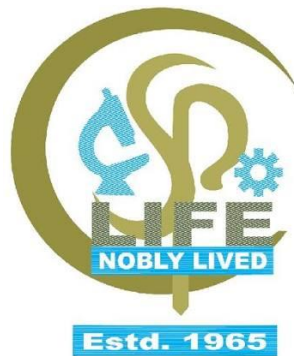
**FEMALE IDENTITY IN POSTCOLONIAL INDIA:  
A THEORETICAL STUDY OF ANITA NAIR'S *MISTRESS***

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## **Declaration**

I do hereby declare that the project report 'Female Identity in Postcolonial India: A Theoretical Study of Anita Nair's *Mistress*' is the record of genuine research work done by me under the guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul's College, Kalamassery.

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## **Certificate**

This is to certify that the project work “Female Identity in Postcolonial India: A Theoretical Study Of Anita Nair’s *Mistress*” is a record of the original work carried out by Bennett Paul under the supervision and guidance of Mr. Binil Kumar, Assistant Professor, Department of English, St. Paul’s College, Kalamassery.

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## Introduction

Postcolonialism refers to an academic discipline which analyses, describes and responds to the cultural legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Postcolonial reading of a text delves into the identity of a person as a colonizer as well as the colonized. This emphasis on the identity as doubled or unstable one is a major characteristic of the postcolonial approach. Postcolonialism is also the attitude of persons according to their specific regions and adapting to western modes of expression along with the native broad mindedness. There are a lot of issues brought in front involving the language, men-women roles, nationalism, slavery, suppression and resistance, and reinventing oneself. The term 'Postcolonialism' is certainly one of the most actively debated terms in the contemporary literary criticism and socio-political studies. It does not merely refer to the conditions of the once colonized territories of the world after the official termination of colonialism there, it also looks into how the forces of colonization extend into the present. 'Postcolonialism' refers broadly to the ways in which race, ethnicity, culture and human identity itself are represented after many colonized countries gained their independence. Postcolonialism as a theoretical literary movement originated in the mid-twentieth century. The meaning of this term is two-fold. It is used both as:

- (a) A temporal marker to suggest the age or period after colonization, specifically the decolonized states. It therefore functions as a historical category that suggests a chronology - from the colonized to the decolonized or post-colonial;
- (b) A specific reading or analytical practice. Here it refers to the intellectual or theoretical practices that emerged in the academics where colonial texts were re-read for colonial ideologies embedded in them. In this sense, postcolonial refers to an oppositional analytic procedure.

The term 'postcolonial literature', not only refers to a phase in the history of a country and the literature belonging to that phase but also to some distinct body of literature having shared features, despite belonging to different decolonized countries. All postcolonial literatures will have concerns with the freedom struggle, rejection of imperial culture and so on. So, the literatures of African countries, Australia, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, South Pacific Island countries and Sri Lanka are all postcolonial literatures. It becomes an attempt to restore the lost dignity of their nation and give due consideration, and then to proceed with the facts of cultural assimilation and convergence taking place during the postcolonial period.

Identity is an unpredictable fact. All should have their own perspective and unique identity. But the conflict between group or a person and another person, or natural force is what drives one into shift. The western idea of enhancing personal achievement is the major fact needed in order to show one's identity and existence. Such achievement pressure load for identity has led to many psychological traumas and each individual require a lot of mental strength to ignore such social pressures and needs to reject and rebel against the odd-fashioned stereotypic mentality of society.

When we discuss the changing cultural identity of women, we need to explore who is responsible for this change. Is it a man who is responsible for changing the cultural identity of the Indian woman or is it a woman who is responsible or is it the society? The first implication has to be ruled out because it is man who has exposed certain identities on woman with the powerful instrument of patriarchal ideology and he is not going to initiate the process of change unless there is compulsion- as the law of inertia would put it; things remain in a state of rest or uniform motion unless otherwise disturbed. Similarly, the third option too has to be ruled out because human society is ruled by the dominant ideology of the superiority of man over woman. Ultimately, the

responsibility of changing the cultural identity of woman lies on the shoulders of woman. The next question that arises in the mind is that whether there is an identity for “the Indian woman”? The phrase “the Indian woman” itself suggests two identities, the national/ethnic identity and the gender identity. Thus, the cultural identity of the Indian woman is a complex social reality.

Anita Nair has a unique position in the literary world. She is uniquely an Indian who writes particularly about Kerala. Her visits to meet her grandparents in Kerala made her perceive the beauties of rural Kerala. She writes with new visions, themes, technical and linguistic devices, with ease and a new confidence. She keeps making experiments in her works and winning international recognition and acclaim, which also ensures a bright future for Indian fiction in English in general and for her in particular. The novelist minutely analyses the significant and far-reaching changes in individuals passing through periods of overall transition. She attempts to reconstruct Indian womanhood in the light of new western ideology, though the content is replete with Indian rather than regional sensibilities and regional social situation.

*Mistress*, as the name suggests is the story of the women, who are suppressed under the traditional spell of the male dominated society and are trying to break the cage into freedom. Most of them are only allowed to be someone’s mother or wife and are not allowed to develop their own talents or to be a part of the new era, where both men and women are considered equal. They are only allowed to reproduce and do the daily chores in the name of cultural traditional values and are required to keep their head down all the time, be that in the house or outside. Women are ill-treated and suppressed with the idea that men are superior over them. In the verses of Manusmriti, it is depicted that no woman shall live her life alone and announces that she must be protected from birth to death by a male such as father, husband and son in every cycle of her life. Anita Nair’s



novel tries to mix history and human emotions as behaviour of the human race and utilises various descriptions of Kathakali.

Written against the background of Kathakali, repressed emotions of characters are unveiled through Navarasas or the nine emotions of Kathakali in the novel. The novel has manifestation of Rasa in many ways from the beginning with a prologue, followed by the narrative and concluding in an epilogue which gives the effect of a dramatic text. The nine chapters of the novel are based on the nine Rasas in the sequence; Sringaram (love), Haasyam (humour), Karunam (sorrow), Raudram (fury), Veeram (heroic), Bhayanakam (fear), Beebhalsam (disgust), Adbhutam (wonder), and Shaantam (peace). Each chapter begins with the description of a Rasa in the context of Kathakali and its depiction by an artist and then it suggests how each character in the novel experiences the main facial expressions of Kathakali.

Simone de Beauvoir in her famous book, “Second Sex” analyses the social identification of a woman as the “Other”. The title of the novel *Mistress* itself states the dubious status of a woman who is opted out from the prime position. The three major female characters in the novel namely Saadiya, Angela and Radha who belongs to different time and space, yet connected to one another, as they can be roughly introduced as Koman’s mother, Chris’s mother/ Koman’s ex- girlfriend and Koman’s niece/ Shyam’s wife respectively, are getting affected by the shift of the environment from their natal place to marital life. But they deserve their distinctive identity that is not essentially attached to these titles in the novel. Saadiya was too young and capable of opting life to death. Angela managed not to a loose grip of her life, because she was emotionally and intellectually balanced. And Radha never cared for society or anyone else. She married Shyam just to get away from the memories of her old love. But her education, experimental wisdom with age and comprehension of self-actualization, enable hers not

to be subservient. Here, Radha's individuality overpowers her female insecurities constructed by society.

Here in this project, the entire work is divided into five segments – Introduction, three Content Chapters and Conclusion. This project analyses, the novel *Mistress* in two perspectives using the theories, Postcolonialism and Identity crisis. These theories give an advanced scrutiny of this book which leads to a new world of meanings.

The first chapter deals with the character analysis of all the main characters in the novel *Mistress*. They are Radha, Shyam, Koman, Christopher Stewart, Saadiya and Maya. Koman connects each character in the story to one another. The ups and downs in everyone's life is portrayed in the second chapter. It gives another phase of interpretation to the novel. The second chapter considers Shyam as a figure of postcolonialism who is the colonizer and the colonized at the same time. Radha is portrayed as struggling with her identity as a woman in the third chapter.

## Chapter 1

### Overview on the characters in *Mistress*

*Mistress*, the novel by Anita Nair explores the social and cultural phenomena in Kerala through the life of certain characters. The novel mainly revolves around Radha, Shyam and Koman, the intricacies of their relationships and how they deal with the ups and down in life. Set in God's own country, Kerala, the novel heavily weaves its native art form of Kathakali into the narrative. The Navarasas set the structural basis for the divisions of the chapters. The main character of the novel, Koman is a Kathakali artist and he tries to draw similarities of the expressions of Kathakali to that of life. The plot of the novel begins when Christopher Stewart, an American travel writer arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to meet Koman, who also happens to be Radha's uncle. After their first conversation, Radha and Koman was in a stressed situation because of his incessant questions about the past. In the going days, Shyam was avoided by Koman and Radha and they were only true concerned about Chris. She cuddled Chris with an affection that Shyam had never received from her. The novel also revolves around Koman and his life story, as it unfolds, captures all the nuances and contradictions of the relationships being made and unmade in front of his eyes.

There are different kinds of characters in the novel, who all make a distinct mark with their unique identity. Even the female characters in the novel appear to live on their own terms. They have a strong sense of identity and brave enough to follow their heart. They make their own decisions and are ready to face the consequences.

Radha, one of the most important characters in Anita Nair's *Mistress* is a very intelligent and well-educated woman. She comes across as an open-minded woman, who has wide thoughts and perspectives about life and has her ideas of how to live life. She is shown to have developed a sense of independence at the age of twenty-two. While

working in a company, she falls in love with the senior manager, much older than herself. She starts going to the pubs and restaurants with him. It turned out to be more of an infatuation than love, which was intensified by the use of alcohol. The man treats her frivolously and she continues to be in a relationship with him for two years. When his wife informs Radha of his deceit, she is ashamed of herself. Radha's father, who is aware of what she has gone through, finds her a groom. She agrees to marry Shyam and is forced to choose the life of a housewife. Radha has to accept her new life. Her marriage to Shyam translates to her way of life, emotions and feelings being suppressed.

She feels trapped due to the norms of the society and its image of a typical, married woman. It is this point Christopher enters her life. She feels an ardent love towards Chris. Shyam also loves Radha but he treats her as an ideal woman. When she is impregnated with Chris, she feels guilty. She ends up in a situation where she keeps fluctuating between Shyam and Chris, "When I think of Chris, what I see is the shadow of Shyam. And when I think of Shyam, what I see is the possibility of escape with Chris" (Nair 398). Chris is compelled to go back to his native place and Shyam remains a question mark in her mind.

Saadiya is a teenager from a very orthodox Muslim family in Arabipattanam. She is a follower of her own desires. Her father, Vapa Haji Masood Ahmed, is one of the 6 chiefs of the Muslim town and is the most respected man in the community. In Arabipattanam, women are constrained to the four walls of the houses. They are not allowed to come out to the mainstream. The roads and sea shores in Arabipattanam were only for men.

When she lives there, she craves for freedom and hankers after the pleasures of life, wanting to explore the world around to see things for herself. From the picture book she reads, she dreams of having a prince to fulfill her aspirations. When she meets Sethu

for the first time, she feels is extremely overjoyed. After falling in love with Sethu, Saadiya loses her consciousness of her religion and beliefs. Saadiya is punished for this transgression by her father. And though he loves his daughter very much, his respect for his religion surpasses the love for his daughter. She leaves her home with Sethu and starts a new life with him. In this marriage, she finds freedom and she began to explore her life. She finds joy in every little thing around her. But at the same time, she keeps reminiscing the beliefs and systems of her religion. There is a conflict arising between her mind and reality. She wishes to reunite with her family and bring up her child as a Muslim. But, she fails to do so and she quits her life by drowning herself into the sea. Saadiya's life reflects the religious concerns in the society and domination of male patriarchy.

Maya is an aged women and a truthful companion of Radha's uncle, Koman. He can freely express his thoughts and emotions to Maya. When Koman is in a state of turmoil, Maya is the only shoulder to lean on. Even though she is at the brim of old age, her mind remains young. When Koman approaches Maya to be his better half, she agrees to it despite being a married woman. Koman always depends on her for psychological support. Maya realizes that a woman feels lonely when she retires from the world of art. Maya decides to accompany Koman with her presence. She is aware of the norms of the society, but she remains unperturbed.

Koman is one of the other protagonists of the *Mistress*. Anita Nair gives wide space in her novel to describe the character of Koman. He leads the entire novel and is the central point who connect all the characters in the novel. His father, being a Hindu (Sethu) and mother being a Muslim (Saadiya). As there were conflicts between her parents regarding their religions, his mother killed herself. Sethu then migrates to Shoranur, leaving his son with his sister to take care of him. While he was a child, he

was treated like an orphan. He joins his father Sethu after a long period, who renames him Koman. When introducing him to the school headmaster, he says “His name is Koman, with no tails, tags or suffixes” (Nair 262).

This scene makes Koman in a conflicting state of mind. Even as a child, he is able to understand what is happening around him. He moves on to another identity and realises the value of one’s identity. He begins to study the art of Kathakali and achieves fame, glory and popularity among the society, owing to his art.

Angela is a foreigner who comes to Kerala to study about Kathakali. Koman teaches her and eventually they fall in love with each other and they starts living together. They move on to London, where Koman is totally dependent on Angela. As Koman finds it hard to adjust to his new surroundings and finally returns to India and re-joins his dance school. He meets Maya in Delhi, who becomes good friends and later turn into lovers. Koman is a good human being, a great artist and an adviser to Radha and Shyam. Also, when he realizes that he is the father of Chris, he apologizes to him.

Shyam, Radha’s husband, is an ambitious and a very hardworking man. He grew up in poor circumstances as his father (who was an army man) died in an accident. Shyam is the one who leads his family and helps them prosper. Shyam expresses his desire to his mother about marrying Radha. But his *oppol* and mother say that it would not be possible because of their unequal status in society. But eventually, Radha’s father approaches Shyam to marry Radha in order to keep their reputation in the society. Even after knowing that she was pregnant from another man before their marriage, Shyam is ready to accept her. His love is pure, but he fails express his affection towards Radha in a pleasant way. He tries to control her life and coerces Radha to do whatever he likes. Though the manner he chooses to treat her leaves her unsatisfied, his emotions are very sincere. He always feels proud of Radha and hankers for her love. When he finds about

the relationship between Radha and Chris, he loses his courage and falls into the state of depression. He realizes that Radha is pregnant by Chris, he never blames her. He accepts that he is to be the father of Radha's child. Shyam is a great man with a wide heart and with honest emotions.

Anita Nair starts her novel with the arrival of Christopher Stewart, who plays an important role in *Mistress*. A well-known travel writer, he reaches in the riverside resort to learn about Koman. He wants to write the story of Koman. He is interested in music and always carries a cello with him. Shyam, the owner of the resort, treats Chris very well because he want Chris to include his resort in his writing. Radha is the intermediary between Chris and Koman. Chris and Radha share a moment of infatuation at first sight and eventually, fall in love. Their intimacy reveal more about the character of Chris, who opens up to Radha about his parents. When his father died, his mother tells him that the man was not his father.

When he asks about his biological father, his mom does not reveal that. The thought of an uncertain paternity is the cause of his arrival. The hidden fact behind the arrival of Chris was that he wanted to know whether Koman was his father. Koman had many affairs, one of which was with Angela, who happens to be the mother of Chris. Despite the complicated situations, the relationship between Chris and Radha became strong. Radha was carrying baby of Chris in her stomach. But Chris can not be with Radha as he returns to his native place. Before his return, he feels guilty to face Shyam and tries to apologize to him. The relationship between them ends in a tragedy and their relationship does not last for a long time. Because of that, this can not be considered as a long-lasting love, but an infatuation. Radha started this relationship only to escape from her suppressed life, but Chris ends up getting hurt by all of them.

## Chapter 2

### Shyam: The Colonizer and the colonized

Post Colonialism refers to the critical analysis of the history, culture, literature, and discourse of European imperial power. It is the academic study of the cultural legacy of colonialism and imperialism, focusing on the human consequences of the control and exploitation of colonized people and their lands. Post colonialism signals a possible future of overcoming colonialism, yet new forms of domination or subordination can come in the wake of such changes, including new forms of global empire.

The novel *Mistress* by Anita Nair is deeply rooted in Kerala with its culture and traditions are highly tangled in the novel. In the early times, Kerala has many classifications economically, politically and religiously. There was a great variation between the superior and inferior. The inferiors were ill-treated by superiors. They could not enjoy their freedom they were forbidden from their rights. Through the actions of the reformers the people of Kerala attained their freedom, but a hidden thought about the variation among the people remained in their minds.

Postcolonial reading of the character in the novel explores a person both as a colonizer and a colonized. This significance on identity as ambiguous or doubled is the major feature of the postcolonial approach. Another leading characteristic of postcolonial studies is the depiction of 'subalterns'. In the words of Gayathri Chakravathi Spivak, subaltern is not just a classy word for "oppressed", for the other, for somebody who is getting a piece of the pie in postcolonial term, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern, a space of difference. Now, who would say that's just the oppressed! The working class that is oppressed can't be termed as subaltern. Many people want to claim subalternity. They are the least interesting and the most dangerous. Just by being a discriminated against minority on the university campus, they



don't need the word subaltern. They are within the Hegemonic discourse, wanting a piece of the pie, and not being allowed, so let them speak, use the hegemonic discourse, they should not call themselves the subaltern. The novel *Mistress* by Anita Nair depicts some of the texture of post colonialism through a particular character.

In this novel, the character of Shyam is portrayed both as colonized and as colonizer. Shyam is a workaholic man, brought up from a poor family. At his young age his father died and his childhood was drowned in hardship. After that, Shyam and his mother relayed on his uncle. To get graduated, Shyam had to borrow money from his aunt and was compelled to work for repaying their dues. Through his dedication, he became a successful business man in the town who is a marketing technique expert. He is an art lover but never an artist.

While analysing the character of Shyam with post colonialism, he is a great colonizer and as well as colonized. The colonized face of Shyam can be traced in his early life. The sufferings that went through his childhood and the poverty, ill-treatment by the society engraved in his mind, made him feel himself as a marginalized. After his marriage with Radha, he lived in Radha's house and he loved being in the sitting room, where once he was not allowed to sit, "When I was a child, I was never allowed to step into this room. Often, I would sneak a look from the doorway. Now it is here I sit when I am at home" (Nair 71).

Shyam remembers how he stayed hungry for long time in his childhood. He wishes to fill his stomach with food but his mother could not provide him as much he wants. His mother was always angry when he told her about his hunger and pride. Neighbours treated him as an object of disgrace. His mother kept on unhealthy relationship with their neighbours and had disapproval with them which resulted in torturing Shyam with their humiliating words. Every day when Shyam took milk to the

teashop, they used to mock at him, “The Maharaja of Cochin His Highness Shyam. And what is this in his hand? A scepter, Oh no, It is a milk can” (Nair 155).

Shyam was very heart broken and want to get rid of such treatments. Their commentary always make him hurt. These circumstances prove how he was colonized by others. Their treatment shows a variation between superior and inferior.

Shyam was never called by his name till his marriage. His uncle used to call him ‘Chekka’ and he was agitated by this call. He knew that this type of humiliations is because of the class variation between his uncle and him. Economically his uncle is above him and he was compelled to sit dumb to his mistreatments. Things take a different turn when Radha enters his life. When Radha came after her abortion, her father tried his best to make Radha’s marriage with Shyam. This is only for her father to cover up their shame from the society. Shyam knows his intentions but he accepts that proposal only for his love, “He looked at me as he was seeing me for the first time. I was not anymore the Chekkan he could dismiss. How easily he spoke my name now” (Nair 120).

The marital life started with fights by Radha, questioning Shyam whether he married her for money. She forced him to break their marriage, scattering all his dreams and his love for her. His presents, words, jokes were considered as bitter things, “We walk up the staircase, two to a row. Chris and his cello; Uncle and I; Shyam and the red-shirted railway porter laden with bags” (Nair 8)

Shyam called Chris as ‘Sahiv’. Sahiv is another word of Sahib. In Hindi, it means master. Shyam denoted Chris as a master. This symbolizes the inner thought of Shyam being a colonized person. That in India at the period of colonization the white people stands for Madama and Sahib. Focusing on the life of Shyam, his family played with his life. They considered him as a person with no voice of his own and an object for earning

money. This is also a theme of post colonialism which the subordinate groups used inferiors for their own deeds.

Gradually Shyam turns to be a great business man. He owned resorts and other business enterprises. A number of employees worked for him. He turned to be a colonizer. When Unni descent from a royal family worked under him, he feels happy and pleasure.

Unni is a prince; a descendant of a branch of the royal family that lived in this region. He has a university degree and little else. When I decided to start the resort, I offered him a job. Look at Unni, I tell them. He is a prince, but he does not mince being reception clerk, travel agent (Nair 24). Shyam introduces Unni as a prince in front of his guests to make an impression among them. He is smart and efficient and in the course of conversation with my guests, I let it drop that he is a prince call them a taxi and arrange shopping expeditions and sell them postcards (Nair 20).

Another appearance of Shyam that develops to his colonizer attitude towards Radha, being a husband Shyam want to control Radha's life. He treats Radha as a mistress meanwhile Radha is an educated ambitious woman who wants to become a teacher. Shyam says that the profession of teaching is very hard and the remuneration will not be paid back as much as the effort taken. Radha ask permission to start a tuition institute or cherub but Shyam also break her dreams and ambitions. For Shyam, Radha is his property which he can mould by his own deeds. A behaviour which makes Radha rebellious as well as dissatisfied with her life with Shyam," I am your wife. Your wife, do you treat me as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights" (Nair 73). Such nature of Shyam to Radha shows the response towards the inferior life he dealt in his early life.

At the end of the novel, Shyam was represented as a great failure that he knew that he couldn't be a father of child of his own but Radha got pregnant from Chris. Even though he is ready to accept Radha and her child. Radha covers herself disgust by the title of being the wife of Shyam. Through that Shyam again becomes a victim of colonization, he is defeated by his surroundings. His life going through the colonized and the colonizer face at some times of his existence. He is aware that he himself is a colonized person, this state of thought makes him to act like a colonizer. Those experiences in his life paved the way for him to explore the path of success in his professional life. But he fails in his personal family life.

The theory post colonialism emerges in the context of the First World War countries dominating the third world for their own needs. They use the colonized countries for their own wealth. Post-colonial literature explores the experiences of the colonized people. Here, Radha is an independent woman who chases her own wish. She mocked the European culture. But she lived in Indian tradition. She wants to hide her identity as a Kerala woman from the sight of the society. Because of that, she used Shyam to keep her reputation and to escape from the defamation she suffer from the society. She never loved Shyam. She has the courage to simply divorce him. She carried him with her entire life for the existence among life. He only gains her hatred, humiliation, ignorance and sacrificed his own self dignity for his love. He tries to direct her to his ways but he also feared that he will lose her. He is in dilemma whether to constrain her to his deeds or to leave her to be free. These circumstances make him a mentally colonized person.

### Chapter 3

#### Analysis of Radha's character using Identity Crisis as a tool

Identity is an unpredictable fact. Everyone should have their own perspective and unique identity. But the conflict between group or a person and another person, or natural force is what drives one into shift. In the novel *Mistress* by Anita Nair, the character, Radha is an educated woman who also embodies modern values. Although she spends her youth with considerable freedom, her marriage forced her into being a conventional, South-Indian wife. There has a constant, waging conflict between the old traditional culture and new culture. Radha finds herself trapped between these two cultures, between these two identities.

Contemporary female writers follow the journey of independent women and their survival, writing about the context of the identity crisis that women suffer in a conventional society. Moving through the wide range of experience of women through the recurring face of patriarchy the women writers depict both the diversity of women and diversity within each woman. The novel *Mistress* shows the experience of a woman who feels caught up between two cultural lives. It throws light upon the growing discontent of modern, independent women towards tradition and offers an analysis of the combined family system, with its particular gendered spaces and hierarchies of power, exploring how this percept of interactions of its members. Upon closely reading the character Radha, we realise that she is adamant of reaching for her dreams and believes in following her desires. She maintains her personal way of life and has developed a sense of independence at the early age of twenty-two. She explores her youth, finds herself in love and enjoys night life by going to parties. But her love interest uses her as a playmate through the influence of alcohol and leaves her impregnated. He conceals the fact that he is a married man and it is his wife who reveals it to Radha. When Radha

becomes aware of his deceitfulness, she is ashamed of herself and eventually aborts her pregnancy. While she enjoyed her modern life, she is hurt by the incident and goes back to her traditional ways. She marries Shyam, but she is unable to love him completely. She acts like a traditional wife and conforms to her duties, but she is unable to express her emotions, feelings and also the rejection she has met with. However, things change when she meets Chris, an American travel writer, who comes to the Near the Nila resort for experiencing the artistic life of Kerala. She falls in love with him. For Radha, Shyam is a man who has helped her maintained her respectability from the mishaps of her early life, but she feels resentful and wants to escape from him and the society that he represents. The relationship that she shares with Chris is a kind of escape from her suffocating life. Shyam finds the truth about Chris and Radha. At the end, she loses her identity and ends up in a state of forlorn.

According to Oxford dictionary, “Crisis is a personal difficulty or situation that immobilizes people and prevents them from consciously controlling their lives”. “Crisis is a state of disorganization in which people face frustration of important life goals or cycle and methods of coping with stressors. The term crisis refers to a person’s feeling of fear, shock and distress about disruption itself”

(Kroger NP)

In the case of Radha, she fails to solve problems in her life. The consequence that she faces in her life leads to a shift in herself or identity. It is temporary in this situation that the person is unable to cope up with solving problems. But this state of temporary changes in one’s life is for limited time. Hence crisis has different meanings to different people. Identity crises are not solved quickly than it affects seriously.

Radha is a representative of the whole traditional wits in Indian society. Their unified behaviour is sacrificing themselves for the happiness of the family. But Radha’s

life is quite different from them. Radha wants to live through her ways. When she has an affair with a married man, it threatens to create disrepute and shadow her father's reputation. Her father tries to resolve it by forcing her to marry Shyam. For Radha, the marriage with Shyam is akin to a sacrifice to maintain her father's reputation choosing to give up her identity. As expected of a traditional woman, she is also forced to a family-oriented lifestyle and her only aim in life is restricted to taking care of their family and giving birth to children. But Radha and Shyam do not have children together because of Shyam's illness. And in her family, Radha is humiliated for this as she is unable to bear children. Shyam's sister Rani Oppol is her main critic, further making the life of Radha very difficult. Shyam's rude approach on Radha to fulfill his sexual gratification leads Radha into a complete breakdown. Their personalities are very dissimilar like the two sides of a coin, unable to have a common ground. While Shyam fails in his family life, he succeeds in his professional life. On the other hand, it is Shyam who becomes the obstacle to Radha's professional life.

He didn't allow her to go with her profession. He never allowed her to work in a private school, start a tuition class or a crèche. She says —I am your wife. Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me as if I am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights (Nair 73).

The arrival of Chris, the American travel writer makes an impact on Radha's life. She connects with him and regains the glory of her life. She is afraid of Shyam and her surroundings, but she hardly resists her desires. She follows them and is completely aware of the fact that Chris cannot be with her and their happiness is short-lived. When Chris returned to his country, Radha fall into another stage of depression as she is pregnant with Chris's child. Radha had life with her loved ones for a short span of time. Though the journey of her life moving through different stages, Anita Nair explores her

life by depicting her pre-marital relationship, extra-marital relationship, estrangement between husband and wife and also the relationship with father and daughter. Radha's father is the main character who accelerates the story. He is the one who forced her to marry Shyam and approaches Shyam to help Radha to escape from the disgrace caused by her pre-marital affair. In Indian culture, dictated by patriarchal norms, women are considered to be inferior. The childhood and early youth of women is dictated by their father and they are compelled to change their life only with their father's instruction. After marriage, this right is transferred from father to husband. Finally, in their old age they are forced to depend on their sons. In every stage, a woman's life is dependent in a male-dominated society.

In the novel *Mistress*, Anita Nair tries to break the barriers built by the male-dominated society in the women's life. It also defeats the thought and belief systems of that culture. It is a kind of cultural transformation. Radha fails in her married life, unable to build a healthy relationship. But she is successful to convey the thoughts and values of a woman's life. She is a bird that flaps her wings to escape from these barriers but remains grounded. She cannot move on because she is also fighting with herself, her hopeless love, the pain of marital life and emotions which remain scattered in her mind. She is unable to find a solution, leading her to a state of identity crisis.

The concept of a free woman is someone who has transcended the limits of economic or social freedom and developed a mental and emotional attitude. This novel, on one level, looks at the turbulence of large families where dependency breeds strong emotions. Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. In human civilization, women are often gifted with foresight, which contributes to the happiness of others. In the earlier days, women were merely portrayed as dependent souls. They prefer happiness of others. Women's



identities were hidden behind the mask of sacrifice and dependency. However, in recent times, women have gained enough courage to exhibit their individuality at various levels. Though they are often silenced, they have made their voices heard and have started shaking the conventions of dependency. A certain percentage of women have successfully reached their destination and remaining are on their way to the destination of 'self-discovery'. Radha finds herself in between these transformation periods. She has the right to break the marriage, but does not go forward with it. This shows the uncertainty in her identity. She fails to convince her family and unwillingly accepts the life with Shyam where she tries being a traditional woman through the steps of her life all the while losing her identity. This dilemma causes the crisis in her life and she is mentally trapped by the fate of her life.

She receives a hope in her life to move on from the relationship with Shyam, when Shyam was aware of her relationship with Chris and she came to be the mother of Chris's baby they can handle it with a practical sense but the reality is Shyam arrives in to the stage of depression. This makes Radha feel guilty and responsible for his condition. This further shakes her thoughts and beliefs, aggravating the uncertainty in her character. She knows that if she takes a stand against Shyam, she would also put herself in trouble. She remains silent and refrains from doing anything. But Shyam reveals that he will accept the baby and agrees to raise Chris's child. The baby leads to the reunion of Radha and Shyam.

Radha finds the solution to her identity crisis with a feeling of hope. Anita Nair completes the image of Radha with the idea of optimism. She is a very powerful and courageous woman, who can overcome all of the consequences of life. The identity crisis is a temporary state of human life which she can solve with her strength and positivity.

## Conclusion

Anita Nair's *Mistress* brings into focus the issue of self-realization and the female protagonists of the novel appear to challenge the age-old norms against women of the society. Those women have the idea of what they need in life and are aware of their 'self' as an individual. The topic of women empowerment and women equality with men is a sensational issue all over the world. Even in India, the issues of gender equality and women empowerment picked up momentum in the recent years. The role of women in the development of society is of utmost importance and it is the only fact that determines whether a society is strong and harmonious, or otherwise.

In many of her novels, Anita Nair had depicted husband-wife relationship. Her female characters are bold enough to fulfill bond and go up to the extent of establishing physical gratification with other men. The faithfulness in husband-wife relationship is lost with a big question on the existence of such relationship. Search for self or identity crisis is no longer confined to the individual. It can characterize a group, an institution, a class, a profession or even a nation. Anita Nair merges fiction with reality and makes female voices authentic. Her fictional women can be seen as a pattern felt as real women in everyday life, self-effacing and self-sacrificing women, one can meet anywhere in Indian middle-class society. Most of them experience the burden of traditions. The control in identity that is imposed on women in the name of marriage by the society is no more a welcome aspect among the modern women who have started looking out for an individual identity with no tags attached to them in the name of any institutions such as marriage and families. It is also evident that Indian writing especially by women writers reached a different phase or rather an advanced stage. The writers are enough to discuss sensitive issues and to break or change the cultural identity of women through their

writings and are least bothered about negative criticism. They paved way to Indian women a life of their own.

According to Indian tradition and culture, women in general are the responsibility of their father, whom after marriage handed over to husband. The description of woman's marriage life, discloses with no shock, dual strands of both the genders. If the bride admits by saying about her impure virginity, it is very problematic and she has to go through the consequences and considered to bring dishonor to the family. But at the same time, if he to depict the entire men and confesses the similar issue, it is not considered an important matter and does not bring a disgrace to the family. Women are also not given choice for selecting their groom and the society does not favour the decision of not marrying anyone. The desires of the brides are never cared by any of the grooms and they are alleged to take care of the responsibilities of her newly wedded home. The responsibility of the bride does not end up by taking care of their spouse and his family, but also giving birth to children as early as possible. Since older days, the men's view about women to reach her complete form is only when she becomes a mother by giving birth to a son and so their generation does not come to an end. As a matter of fact, there is always a warm welcome of regenerating male babies but not open-minded in giving birth to a female baby which arises to complicated issues and can lead up to divorce in many cases. A wife's duty is over as soon as she accomplishes her duty of giving birth to a boy. The women's expectation of giving birth either to a female or a male baby is becoming so mechanical in the present day world. The society's view of the woman who does not have any children will be branded as 'macchi' meaning incompetent. Such women are considered as a bad omen to the respectable family and also are allowed at any family or nearby functions. For the smooth running of their family, she must bear a child from her devoted spouse which

will be accepted by the society. A woman giving birth is established as the dedication towards her husband and this is very much applicable for the arranged marriage as well as the love marriage. Apart from all these, a good wife should discharge their duties very sincerely and dutiful in pleasing her husband and in giving birth to a male heir who will be a legal asset to the husband.

Indian women have to reconcile themselves with the reality: you save yourself - dress up properly, don't go out unescorted or simply stay at home - or remain unsaved. Most of these words is being repeatedly said in order to make the impression that it is the woman's deeds and dressing that led to this mishap. The sad thing to this allegation is that, the women who were raped very properly dressed and were well behaved in the society. It is very much disturbing to the mind is that it appears to be the rising number of children who are being targeted. These kinds of happenings caused very much shame in a country where the girls are considered as goddesses. Referring to the past years, there is higher and better reporting of rape, but the shambolic criminal justice system remains vulnerable to political pressures and allows many of the accused to go scot free - only one in four cases of rape in India end in conviction. Also, both men and women refuse to believe that sexual violence is a serious problem eating away the nation vitals. And most political parties don't appear to recognise and treat it as the crippling social crisis.

Women in Kerala have access to good education, they are encouraged to work though women constitute just a fifth of the workforce. Once educated, they can look after their children and stay at home or they can work but expect no say in who they will marry. Unsuitable marriages between educated women and men in menial Gulf jobs have led to a huge incidence of wife-battering and psychological problems among women. The high levels of alcoholism, among other factors like a medieval mind set

among men, have led to the state's women getting a raw deal. Normal interaction between the sexes is still frowned upon.

Anita Nair has proposed a new philosophy regarding man-woman relationship in the context of modern times. She firmly affirms that social and conventional basis of marriage is being eroded and this would ultimately lead to a situation where marriage may not be solemnized or performed at all. Recently the supreme court of India has recognized the right of individuals to stay together without getting married. This is called live-in relationship. Man – woman may live in mutual companionship. The relationship may be continued as long as they trust each other and as long as the basic emotional bonding subsists. Men and women are complementary to each other. Neither of them can claim any superiority over the other. But in human civilization, women are often allocated a secondary role. However, they possess the power of endurance, affinity, love and foresight which contribute to the happiness of others.

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