



## A REPRESENTATION OF FEMININE AND MASCULINE SPACES IN ANITA NAIR'S *MISTRESS*

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*The present paper examines the intricate interchange of space, place, and time along with the multiple chunks of physical and symbolic spaces in Anita Nair's Mistress (2005). The novel is situating within the broader theoretical frameworks of spatiality, temporality, gender and the varied avenues of cultural studies. The narratives focus majority of the spaces through the characters like Radha, Shyam, Koman, and Christopher Stewart as they faced interchange of spaces and place to survive. Anita Nair's Mistress (2005) depicts the real-life experiences of her characters as they serve high or low positions which affect the spaces and social status of women in society. She describes how Indian women are exploited even in modern times in their familial, cultural, social, conjugal, emotional, psychological, personal and private spaces. The writer in her narratives, highlights the genuine need for creating awareness with the varied spaces of women so that they can stand independently in the spatial world freedom. She tries to prove that women can change themselves while acquiring a variety of spaces to break the edges of cultural, social, and political domination in patriarchal space. She showcases her male and female characters in the space of larger society wherein they revolt against the various cultural, traditional, social, economic and spatial aspects of the conventional and traditional society. It marks the characters spatial journey towards the universe while changing the socio-cultural norms and conventional way of living.*

**Key Words:** Space, Place, Time, Spatiality, Temporality, Gender Cultural Studies, Social, Political Domination, Patriarchal Space etc.

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Anita Nair's *Mistress* (2005) exposes numerous aspects and conventions of national, international, geographical, political, cultural, social, familial, conjugal, gendered, and feminine spaces that are occupied by the characters, especially women characters in Indian culture and tradition. Anita Nair in her *Mistress* shows how her female characters struggle to create spaces to rebel against patriarchal domination and also to raise their voice to challenge the age-old traditions of patriarchal conventions. They create both real and imaginary spaces to make their spatial existence in society. Nair depicts the struggle of her female characters through the navarasas in the form of the artistic space of Kathakali. Also, they occupy the various spaces through spatial navarasas of human emotions such as love, devotion, disgust, anger, grief, fear, heroism, serenity, and curiosity.

The novel showcases variant themes like suppression of women, patriarchal domination, cultural identity, identity crisis, gender differentiation, gender identities, caste discrimination, spirituality, men-women relationship, emotional insecurity, alienation, and importance of art in human life. Radha, the protagonist of the novel, is a charming, beautiful, enthusiastic, and devoted wife, with a visionary approach towards the spatial world of art. She crosses many spatial boundaries of ups and downs in her life to occupy various spaces to make her life secure in society. She maintains the spatial relations with other characters, in the formation of the storyline of the novel while playing the spatial dynamic roles of a wife, a beloved, a niece, and an artist of the world of emotions. Her role in the formation of spatial relationships integrates the themes of the novel such as husband-wife relationships, including pre-marital, marital, extra-marital relationships. The story of the narrative is set in the natural pastoral space of the riverside resort, Near-the-Nila in Kerala, where the sacred place of artistic Kathakali dance form is located. Kathakali represents the art and artistic world where anybody can create their spatial world of glamour and happiness because it is considered as an Indian cultural heritage in a spiritual space.

The journey of the novel begins with the arrival of the American travel writer, Christopher Stewart who comes to a small town, Shoranur in Kerala to meet Koman, a renowned Kathakali dancer. After crossing the different geographical boundaries he reaches a new land having new culture, tradition, and social setting. He is aware of the cultural shift after crossing the geopolitical boundaries of two different nations. Though he is migrated from his homeland to India, he maintains spatial respect and follows the norms of Indian culture. He crosses international boundaries to uphold his place in another geographical location that provides him a space to achieve his goal. His main intention behind meeting such a great artist is to chronicle the life and spatial achievements of Koman in a book form. Being an outsider, he can understand and respect the socio-cultural, ethnic, religious, gendered and political spaces of the dancer.

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Christopher Stewart visits an imaginary place, where the sacred artistic temple of Kalamandalam is situated on the bank of river Nila. This is the place that suggests the geographical location as a spatial substance, showing the spiritual culture of India. As he reaches the railway station, he is welcomed there by Koman, an old man, Radha, a young lady, and Shyam, not so young man. This three persons represent three different age groups who occupy the cultural, ethnic, traditional and local space of the temple who openly welcome a foreigner into their location.

After the successful arrival in the spatial world of art, Chris enters a space where the complex atmosphere of masks and suppressed emotions are already placed. After the first meeting, Radha and Chris passionately fall in love with each other. Radha forgets her marriage with Shyam and gets fascinated towards the handsome foreigner. She deeply gets captivated by his personality. She vocalizes,

*“I looked at him. With every moment, the thought hinges itself deeper into my mind: What an attractive man.” (Nair 8)*

Nair explores the love relationship between Chris and Radha, using the Kathakali as a spiritual symbol of their relationship to move forward. Chris is a writer, a journalist, a musician, and after all a foreigner to whom Radha meets secretly although she knows that it is against her culture and tradition to form an extramarital relationship with another man. She, in her space, becomes bold and decides to come out from her despised marital life and space. Sometimes, she is ashamed of her relationship with a foreigner. But, she breaks all the cultural norms and brings her away from her cultural space, and intensively involves herself in the spatial world of Chris. She even starts feeling jealous of his affairs with other women. She expresses her jealousy, anger, worry, and disgust like:

*Is there a woman in his life? A girlfriend? A live-in-partner? A wife? I feel jealous corrode me. Who is she? Then I feel Shyam’s breath ruffling my hair. What am I doing, I ask myself. I lie here in my bed in my husband’s arms and think of another man. What kind of woman am I? I feel contempt for myself. I stroke Shyam’s hair. Shyam, I whisper. Shyam, wake up. Shyam wake up and love me. Shyam you must. (Nair 59)*

Shyam, her husband, loves her despite her cunning nature. He suspects that she is attracted to Chris and frequently meets him. It makes Shyam worried and puts him in a susceptible position. His cold intellectuality and less involvement with his wife create disharmony in their marital relationship and that causes his wife to enter an alienated space. His wife’s contact never goes beyond the skin but remains incomplete in reaching

the deep at his heart. Due to his coldness, he fails to satisfy his wife's sexual needs which finally results in Radha's extramarital relationship. Radha in her personal space breaks all the cultural norms and decides to fight against her husband's oppressive nature and rule bounded materialism of society. She dislikes remaining in the male-dominated environment and sustaining the male possessiveness. She expresses her situation by saying,

*"I don't understand what is happening to me, a married woman, a wife. When I married Shyam, I swore never to flout the rules of custom again. How have I become so disdainful of honour, so contemptuous of convention?" (Nair 54).*

Radha, in her feminine space, takes a challenging step to enter the space of freedom and domination-free life. She tries to come out from the conventional system of an unhappy marriage. She breaks all the traditional, marital, ethnic, cultural obligations and revolts against the spatial possessive patriarchal setup of society. Being unsatisfied with her husband, she makes an affair with the man who is not from her culture, society, and even not from her natal place. But, she does not feel awkward about her adultery. She struggles to acquire the gendered space and resolves conflict to expose her own identity. Shyam occupies masculine space and denies Radha to move around in the free space; rather he expects her to live with him as a wife in a subordinate space. She is not permitted to occupy both her personal and professional spaces to take any decision on her own without consulting Shyam. Shyam expects in his patriarchal space that Radha must respect him and his place in society. Shyam proclaims his patriarchal thoughts:

*"You are my wife. I want you to show me some respect."*

*"What do you want me to do? Lick your feet?"*

*'Just show me some respect. You strut about the place with strange men, you come home at midnight and expect me to say nothing. No husband would tolerate this. What do you think I am? A fucking eunuch?' (Nair 163)*

Shyam becomes furious over Radha's adulterous behavior. It is disturbing for him that she does not consider him equal to her in society. She occupies a higher position and place in her space and tries to fly out from the cage of Shyam's confined spatial world. She becomes a victim of her husband's patriarchal space and domination. Shyam in his



masculine space expects more from her and believes that woman should feel and live like a woman only and should not think to escape from the male dominating domain.

Shyam's conservative, conventional and parochial thoughts create a wrong space in Radha's mind, and eventually, her mind and her personal space divert her away from Shyam. Actually, there was another reason too; that compels her to escape from her husband's unsatisfied company. She desperately falls in love with Chris and is attracted to him. She violates the social and cultural norms and crosses all the limitations of human space. She reveals her intensity of newly formed relationship with Chris to her Uncle. Radha vocalizes, "I know, Uncle. Very well. I know the world would think it is wrong. There is justification for adultery, I will be told. But I love him. He is a fire in my blood. (Nair 207) Radha in her feminine space tries to bring out herself from her husband's oppressive, unsatisfied, unhappy, and unfulfilled marital relationship.

Shyam expects that Radha must behave with him as an obedient wife to maintain the social respectability of his family. He tries to keep her in a confined space of his home so that he can dominate her space of feminine power by his space of masculine dominance. Radha is intellectually and culturally superior to Shyam and hence he dominates her to maintain his masculine space. He does not like Radha expressing her talent and her intellectual ability. In his private space he is aware of his inferiority and at the same time Radha's superiority also. Shyam is intellectually, socially, and culturally inferior to Radha, since she occupies both cultural and social spaces to maintain her superiority. Her marriage with Shyam is a marriage of adjustment. Though she is a married woman, she tries to occupy various spaces to show her feminine power. She occupies a personal space for the betterment of her life though it is against the cultural norms. She expresses her agony:

*I wanted to hide myself in a place where there was none of this deceit or compromise. I felt betrayed. I felt used. I felt foolish. More than anything else, I knew that if I stayed I would find a way to excuse his lies and continue to be his playmate. That was the measure of how much I had yielded to him. (Nair 113)*

Shyam is a poor, simple but hardworking and ambitious person who does not get parental love as his father dies in a road accident and hence Shyam shoulders all the familial responsibilities alone from his childhood. Once, in his personal space, he approaches Radha's mother for her consent to marry Radha off to him but because of their unequal social and familial status, Shyam's mother rejects the proposal. Radha's father, on the other hand, as part of the social space, accepts the proposal and allows them to marry. Radha is not satisfied with her marriage to Shyam. She suffers a lot in her traditional marital life due to what she always fights for to acquire her personal space.

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Thus, Nair exposes the psychological, physical, mental, mortal, and emotional exploration of the inner mind or inner space of Indian women with spatial practices. She throws light on the female space and inner mind of the depressed women under her feminine responsiveness and psychological intuition in a male-dominated society. She discloses Indian women's psychological space and emotional space and their imbalances that happened due to the male-dominated society. The novel, *Mistress* primarily deals with the contestation, rebel and compromise of feminine subjects with their variant spaces in the culturally staunch society at the wake of postmodernism.

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