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## TRANSCENDING GENERIC BOUNDARIES - A STUDY OF ANITA NAIR'S CHAIN OF CUSTODY

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### ABSTRACT

Novel as a genre plays a pivotal role in bridging fiction and reality, and this blurring of boundary between the two, calls for an interrogation of the definition of the genre 'Novel' itself. Hence this paper examines how Anita Nair's 'A Chain of Custody' transcends the generic boundaries to connect with reality. While doing so, it seeks to answer pertinent questions such as why Nair prioritizes trafficking of girls over boys, why she chose crime fiction as a genre to deal with this issue, how her narrative technique contributes to the total effect of the novel and to connect with the reality against the background of real statistics of child-trafficking.

**Keywords:** child trafficking, generic boundary, crime mystery

### INTRODUCTION

Novel as an art form came to India with the British. In the world of English literature, Indian writing has proved its ability and utility. The trio, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R K Narayan, made the Indian English novel to begin its journey. As we know literature is the mirror of the contemporary society, we can find more Indian-ness in the Indian novels. The Indian novelists have woven their plots in Indian surroundings with Indian socio-cultural milieus. The story of the Indian English novel is really the story of a changing India.

Among the top women authors of fictional and poetic writing is the famous Anita Nair, a fine writer with a great sense of character, vivid knowledge of South Indian culture and an eye for telling detail. Her writings mainly focus on the contemporary obnoxious condition of human life. Nair's works are a mixture of realism as found in Indian culture with universal appeal. She has been awarded invariably with many prestigious awards, including Kerala Sahitya academy Award and Orange prize for fiction. Her works of fiction has been translated into 21 languages around the world.

Anita Nair's 'Chain of Custody' is a gripping mystery crime novel that starts with a murder scene of a renowned lawyer struck down in his home. Inspector Gowda, an admirable three-dimensional character, who fits the modern template for the flawed fictional police inspector committed to finding the truth, in the pursuit of justice. Nandita, a twelve-year-old girl, daughter of Gowda's maid went missing in the city's bustling Shivaji Nagar market area in Bengaluru. It is a race against the clock to recover her from a deadly criminal ring. And what does her disappearance have to do with the murder of nearby lawyer? Boeri Gowda and his partner Santosh must solve the mystery and hope to find her alive before she is sold or worse.

'Chain of Custody' second in the series of the crime fiction featuring Inspector Gowda. Nair chose a crime mystery to deliver the subject of Child Trafficking as she notes "Crime fiction is still its primary stage in India. The chances of it going global like Scandinavian noir will happen when characters and issues written about have greater dimension than just the usual run-of-the-mill crime scenes". "Crime fiction works because I could explore the

subject as part of an investigation. I can focus on the condition than the individual, remove myself from it," she says.

The novel traverse not the cosmopolitan glitter of the city, but the sordid, depraved alleys of the darker Bengaluru where boys and girls not yet in their teens lose their childhood to violence and prostitution. Nair bridges the gap of novel genre to the reality, by calling Bengaluru through the gut-wrenching peeks into Gowda's thoughts, as

'This was a city where dog ate dog, rat devoured rat, and everyone would get ahead if they dismissed their conscience as a vestigial organ of the psyche' (*Chain of Custody*. p. 95)

The novel is set against a missing girl child, based on the real-life statistics of child trafficking. Moreover, Anita Nair decides to pick a maid's daughter to reflect the fact that poor children are the most affected targets.

Gowda's investigation thrust him into the dark and disturbing world of sex trafficking. As Gowda remarks.

'They didn't see children as children or women as women. They are just commodities, products they supply to meet a demand' (*Chain of Custody*. p. 210)

We hear first-hand from the children who suffer from this pernicious trade. Tricked by other children suborned by their captors, seduced into compromising characters by older youths, or just snatched off the street, these kids are tipped into a hell from which escape is nearly impossible. The investigation takes many surprising turns leading to an ominous conclusion.

Being one of the leading writer, Anita Nair reflects the realities and incidents of the daily happenings in the world of Child trafficking. Nair says,

'I am using my character, inspector Gowda, as a kind of trigger to be able to enter the subject, what I wanted the reader to understand about this problem. For me, he is the best way to make a social

commentary. In a way, I see him as my male alter ego'

Anita Nair's chain of custody blends the elements of commercial and literary fiction to deliver a nuanced study of child trafficking and its players. In our day to day life, Child trafficking is rapidly growing issue. Based on the reports of National crime Record Bureau (NCRB), the trafficking of younger girls (under the age of 18) has grown 14 times over the last decade and has grown by 65% just in the year 2014. Almost 20,000 children and women were subjected to human trafficking in 2016. This is nearly 25% raise from the 2015 which is a large increase from one year to another. According to 'National Human Rights Commission of India' over 40000 children are reported missing every year, of which over 11000 remain untraced. From the information that is known, there is very clear increase, not only over the past decade but also from year to year. This is extremely concerning on the data seems to the point to the assumption that it will continue to raise.

In this novel, Anita Nair, has written everything either based on reports acquired from police station in Bangalore or from Conversations she had with social workers, rescue groups and victims. Her research entailed extensive investigation on child trafficking and prostitution. Nair spent endless hours with Bangalore Oniyavara Seva Coota (BOSCO), an NGO that helps rescue and rehabilitate children caught up in this modern-day slavery.

Anita Nair's Chain of custody exposes the shocking reality of child trafficking in India. Through this novel the readers understand the existing situation of human exploitation and child trafficking in India. The portrays in the novel impacts the readers to think and feel beyond the actual story about the child trafficking in real life. One can easily relate any lonely child in a public place to the young twelve-year old girl – Nandita, who went missing in the story. The novel would definitely create high awareness of child trafficking and would inspire many people to turn into human trafficking activists. The reviewer who read the book would not pass a girl standing alone somewhere, he would ask her what happened and make sure the child is safe and

good. The study shows Anita Nair depicts the covert and growing activity of child trafficking in our society. The paper has attempted to examine how the novel transcends its genreic boundaries and extend in the mind of readers.

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