

Anita Nair's Detective Fiction, Cut like Wound and Chain of Custody: a Comparative Perspective

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to make a comparison of Anita Nair's two detective novels, *Cut Like Wound* (2010) and *Chain of Custody* (2016). The comparison is based on five features of crime fiction proposed by Mylida Danyte, a well-known critic of detective fiction.

The first feature is social realism which reflects the moral and ideological values of the dominant class. The locale in both the novels is the same place, the city of Bangalore and its suburbs. The general atmosphere in the city smacks of corruption, greed for wealth and a pervading moral degradation manifests in crime and violence.

The second feature introduces the crime, and the confident detective reestablishes the order. In *Cut Like Wound*, it is serial murders while it is girl trafficking and child labour in *Chain of Custody*. In both the novels, crime disturbs the social equilibrium.

The third feature is violence not described in detail while the detective does not use it nor is he threatened by it. True to this feature the Inspector Borie Gowda is never in a hurry and investigates the crime with full confidence. He neither resorts to violence nor is he afraid of violence.

The fourth feature is minor romance where sexual gratification is the motive for crime. Avarice and vengeance constitute the major motive of crime in *Cut Like Wound* whereas in *Chain of Custody*, avarice and sexual urge, land mafia, girl trafficking and child labour.

The fifth feature is the role played by analytical investigation, irony and suspense. In the novels, Borie Gowda's investigative methods marked by his analytical thinking and reason indicate at times manifest through the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the characters.

In conclusion, it may be stated that Anita Nair, besides being a successful novelist of social, cultural and historical issues, also proves herself equally successful in writing crime-thrillers or detective novels like *Cut Like Wound* and *Chain of Custody*.

I. INTRODUCTION

Anita Nair is a famous women novelist in modern Indian English fiction. Starting from 1999 with the publication of her first novel, *The Better Man* she has produced nearly a dozen works including fictional and non-fictional works. Much of her concern seems to be the predicament of Indian women portrayed in the form of fictional characters. Yet she can't be called a feminist novelist for the reason that her literary oeuvre as a long spectrum that includes not only the issues of feminism but also those pertaining to other issues viz., historical and detective fiction. Her major novels are *The Better Man* (1999), *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2005), *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010), *Cut Like Wound* (2012), *Idris Keeper of the Light* (2014), *Alphabet Soup for Lovers* (2015) and *Chain of Custody* (2016) in addition to children fantasies, short stories etc. such as, *Adventures of Nonu*, *The Skating Squirrel* (2006), *Living Next Door to Alise* (2007) and *Magical Indian Myths* (2008), established her status as a significant artist. With the play *Nine Faces of Being*, she has got the recognition as a playwright too. The story is adapted from her third novel *Mistress*. Anita Nair has also published collection of essays *Good Night and God Bless*(2008) which has an autobiographical element.

If *Idris* is historical in the theme, *Cut Like Wound* and *Chain of Custody* are detective fiction while the remaining may be described as novels of social realism. In this paper an attempt is made to consider her two detective novels,

Cut Like Wound and *Chain of Custody* as crime thrillers and to show that Anita Nair has accomplished equally in writing social realistic novels and detective fiction.

II. DETECTIVE FICTION

Detective fiction or crime thrillers constitute an important sub-genre of modern fiction as Milda Danyte proposed. This includes detective stories, spy stories, suspense thrillers, crime thrillers, hard-boiled or noir fiction. She has given a list of nine characteristics of Golden Age crime fiction which have been clubbed into five features for the purpose of this paper, which are used for a comparison of the two selected novels thematically. In other words this comparison is limited to main and subthemes of these two novels and this paper has nothing to say about Anita Nair's unique style and other dimensions.

III. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

The first feature is social realism which reflects the moral and ideological values of the dominant class. The locale in both the novels is the same place, the city of Bangalore and its suburbs. The general atmosphere in the city smacks of corruption, greed for wealth and a pervading moral degradation manifests in crime and violence.

The general socio-cultural and moral values represent those of the higher middle class to which late

Ranganathan, Borei Gowda, Urmila, Michael and others belong. Characters in *Cut Like Wound* like Ravikumar, the municipal Corporator and his younger brother alias Chikka, presently belong to rich class though their roots were from the poor and working class. Growing as a street fighter, then into a gangster, Ravikumar rises to the status of a municipal corporator amassing a lot of money and property through his political and criminal activities. He maintains a closed circle of criminals, and mafia leaders, and is ready to go to any extent to fulfill his goals. His younger brother Ramesh alias Chikka highly educated unlike his brother gets addicted to sexual perversion through sexual abuse practiced on him by Ranganathan when Ramesh was a boy of nine years old.

Similarly in *Chain of Custody*, characters like Sanjay Rathode, Pujari, MLA Papanna, Inspector Borei Gowda, Urmila, Santosh and his father, and others belong to the level of higher middle class family. A lawyer by profession, Sanjay Rathode is involved in land-mafia, child-labour, trafficking of girls, child-abuse etc. His chief assistant-cum-agent is Pujari, who employs several others like Rakesh alias Krishna, Mohan, Siddarth and Suraj in the operation of the criminal acts under the direction of Sanjay Rathode. Thus Pujari acts as the main functionary in the network of the above-mentioned criminal operations. As in the case of *Cut Like Wound* in this novel also Borei Gowda, the Inspector of police investigates crime.

The second feature introduces the crime, and the confident detective who reestablishes the order. In *Cut Like Wound*, it is serial murders while it is girl trafficking and child labour in *Chain of Custody*. In both the novels, crime disturbs the social equilibrium and it is restored by Inspector Borei Gowda.

In *Cut Like Wound*, after Ranganathan's murder by Ravikumar when Ramesh was twelve, Ramesh becomes a sexual pervert. To gratify his unnatural sexual urge, he goes out in the night in the guise of a beautiful woman calling himself Bhuvana, wanders on the streets to attract young men. In the process he or she traps five young men in a period of one month and kills four of them when they recognize his identity. The four victims are Kothandaraman, a middle aged pharmacist; Liaquat, a young man, a street boy and a catamite of chicken Razak; Rupesh, the young son of Haryana Joint Secretary and Mohan, a young Keralite working as a steward in a Kerala restaurant near Marathahally. The modus operandi was the same i.e. hitting on the head and strangulation of the neck with a ligature laden with glass powder. Two other murders, those of Ranganathan and Sanjay, Bhuvana's lover are perpetrated by the corporator Ravikumar, the first murder out of vengeance and the second murder for destroying evidence of his drug mafia.

Likewise in *Chain of Custody*, the narrative opens with the murder of Sanjay Rathode by Gita, the crippled wife of Pujari. The investigation of this murder leads to the exposure of crimes mentioned-above. Girls like Moina and Tina from Bangladesh, Nandita (i.e. Daughter of Shanti, Borei Gowda's cook and servant maid), all these are

unmarried teenagers. They are brought by force or under the influence of chloroform by sub agents like Mary, Mohan and others, for mercenary benefits. Rakesh alias Krishna induces orphan boys from Bihar etc. into child labour and appoints them as house servants to Sanjay Rathode. Some of them attempt to escape but they are caught again and employed in a textile mill etc. Mohan sexually abuses boys like Abdul. Pujari pretends to be a pious man with spiritual aspirations. He visits a local temple of the Mother Goddess very frequently along with his wife Gita, a crippled woman, who is well taken care of by her husband Pujari till the last moment, mistakes her husband for a pious and clean man. It is only in the last moment in their encounter with Sanjay Rathode that Gita realizes how sinful her husband is and that Sanjay Rathode is responsible for the degradation of her seemingly innocent husband, that she hits Sanjay Rathode on his head with a stone statue of the Buddha which leads to his death.

The third feature is that violence is not described in detail while the detective does not use it nor is he threatened by it. True to this feature, the Inspector Borei Gowda in both novels is never in a hurry and investigates the crime with full confidence. He neither resorts to violence nor is he afraid of violence. However in *Chain of Custody* there is a description of how violently Moina is raped almost every day till she faints. So is the case with the rape of Tina by Mohan. A certain degree of violence is also depicted in the way how Sanjay Rathode treats his boy servants by beating them and subjecting them to starvation.

The fourth feature is minor romance and sexual gratification is the motive for crime. Avarice and vengeance constitute the major motive of crime in *Cut Like Wound* whereas in *Chain of Custody*, avarice and sexual urge, land mafia, girl trafficking and child labour are the motives. For instance, the illicit love between Borei Gowda and Urmila, the artificial or unnatural love between Bhuvana and Sanjay are examples of minor love and romance in *Cut like Wound* whereas the same love between Borei Gowda and Urmila, the love affair between Pujari and Gita during their youth which leads to their marriage and which lasts long even after the accident that makes Gita, a life-long cripple till her murder of Sanjay Rathode; the Rakesh's love for Nandita which makes him to take risks to save her from the brothel house; the unexpressed attraction between sub-Inspector Santosh and his colleague Ratna are instances of minor love and romance in *Chain of Custody*.

The fifth feature is the role played by analytical investigation, irony and suspense. In the novels, Borei Gowda's investigative methods marked by his analytical thinking and reason are at times manifest through the verbal and nonverbal behavior of the characters. Both in *Cut like Wound* and *Chain of Custody* police Inspector Borei Gowda is the chief investigating officer and detective. His assistant, Sub-Inspector Santosh and ASI Ratna assist him faithfully and meticulously in the investigation of crime. But the major credit of linking missing threads of crime and analyzing available data and

evidence and finally arriving at the correct inference and finding the criminal and the motivation of crime, goes to Inspector Borei Gowda. The support extended to Borei Gowda by his beloved Urmila and friends like Michael, is also noteworthy in both the novels. Throughout the process of crime investigation, Borei Gowda never loses his balance, nor does he resort to violence. In the same fashion he is not threatened by the predictable violence from his enemy and he conducts himself with dignity and self-respect when his corrupt superior officer ACP Vidyaprasad attempts to thwart Borei Gowda's progress in crime investigation. The hurdles created by the criminal as well as by the envious police officers at different stages of investigation create a sustained suspense in the narratives of the two novels. In addition, Irony or Satire play an important role in the form of dialogues and comments made by different characters like Urmila, Gowda himself, in both the novels and like Rakesh and Pujari in Chain of Custody.

IV. CONCLUSION

The above analysis clearly illustrates that the two novels Cut Like Wound and Chain of Custody by Anita Nair conform to the features of the detective novel outlined by Milda Danyte and proves that Anita Nair is an expert in writing detective novels also.

However in this paper the comparison is mainly thematic. Similar comparative studies may be carried out with regard to narrative techniques like point of view, characterization, setting, symbolism, style etc. of Anita Nair's fictional oeuvre.

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