Appendix I

The Book of Thousand and One Nights

Collection of Oriental stories of uncertain date and authorship. The frame story, in which the vengeful King Shahryar's plan to marry and execute a new wife each day is foiled by the resourceful Scheherazade, is probably Indian; the tales with which Scheherazade beguiles Shahryar, postponing and eventually averting her execution, come from India, Iran, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey, and possibly Greece. It is now believed that the collection is a composite work originally transmitted orally and developed over a period of several centuries. The first published version was an 18th-century European translation; Sir Richard Burton's *Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (1885–88) has become the best-known English translation.

Thousand and One Nights or Arabian Nights, series of anonymous stories in Arabic, considered as an entity to be among the classics of world literature. The cohesive plot device concerns the efforts of Scheherezade, or Sheherazade, to keep her husband, King Shahryar (or Schriyar), from killing her by entertaining him with a tale a night for 1,001 nights. The best known of these stories are those of Ali Baba, Sinbad the Sailor, and Aladdin.

Although many of the stories are set in India, their origins are unknown and have been the subject of intensive scholarly investigation. The corpus began to be collected about the year 1000. At first the title was merely indicative of a large number of stories; later editors dutifully provided editions with the requisite 1,001 tales. The present form of *Thousand and One Nights* is thought to be native to Persia or one of the Arabic-speaking countries, but includes stories from a number of different countries and no doubt reflects diverse source material.

The Book of One Thousand and One Nights

Queen Scheherazade tells her stories to King Shahryar.

The Book of One Thousand and One Nights (Persian: حزار و یک شب Hazār-o Yak Šab, Arabic: كتاب ألف ليلة و ليلة Kitāb 'Alf Layla wa-Layla; also known as The Book of a Thousand Nights and a Night, One Thousand and One Nights, 1001 Arabian Nights, Arabian Nights, The Nightly Entertainments or simply The Nights) is a medieval Middle Eastern literary epic which tells the story of Scheherazade (Šahrzād in Persian), a Sassanid Queen, who must relate a series of stories to her malevolent husband, King Shahryar (Šahryār), to delay her execution. The stories are told over a period of one thousand and one nights, and every night she ends the story with a suspenseful situation, forcing the King to keep her alive for another day. The individual stories were created over many centuries, by
many people and in many styles, and many have become famous in their own right. Notable examples include *Aladdin, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*, and *The Seven Voyages of Sinbad the Sailor*.

### History

The nucleus of the stories is formed by a Pahlavi Sassanid Persian book called *Hazār Afsānah*[^ii] ("Thousand Myths", in Persian: هزارافسانه), a collection of ancient Indian and Persian folk tales. During the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid in the 8th century, Baghdad had become an important cosmopolitan city. Merchants from Persia, China, India, Africa, and Europe were all found in Baghdad. It was during this time that many of the stories, which were originally folk stories, are thought to have been collected orally over many years and later then compiled into a single book. The later compiler and translator into Arabic is reputedly storyteller Abu abd-Allah Muhammed el-Gahshigar in the 9th century. The frame story of Shabrzad seems to have been added in the 14th century. The first modern Arabic compilation, made out of Egyptian writings, was published in Cairo in 1835.

### Synopsis

The story takes place in the Sassanid era and begins with the Persian king Shahryar. The king rules an unnamed island "between India and China" (in modern editions based on Arab transcripts he is king of India and China). When Shahryar discovers his wife plotting with a lover to kill him, he has the pair executed. Believing all women to be likewise unfaithful, he gives his vizier an order to get him a new wife every night (in some versions, every third night). After spending one night with his bride, the king has her executed at dawn. This practice continues for some time, until the vizier’s clever daughter Sheherazade ("Scheherazade" in English, or "Shahrastini", a Persian name) forms a plan and volunteers
to become Shahrayar's next wife. With the help of her sister Dunyazad, every night after their marriage she spends hours telling him stories, each time stopping at dawn with a cliff-hanger, so the king will postpone the execution out of a desire to hear the rest of the tale. In the end, she has given birth to three sons, and the king has been convinced of her faithfulness and revoked his decree.

The tales vary widely; they include historical tales, love stories, tragedies, comedies, poems, burlesques and Muslim religious legends. Some of the famous stories Shahrazad spins in many western translations are *Aladdin's Lamp*, the Persian *Sind bad the Sailor*, and the tale of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*; however Aladdin and Ali Baba were in fact inserted only in the 18th century by Antoine Galland, a French orientalist, who claimed to have heard them in oral form from a Maronite story-teller from Aleppo in Syria. Numerous stories depict djinn, magicians, and legendary places, which are often intermingled with real people and geography; the historical caliph Harun al-Rashid is a common protagonist, as are his alleged court poet Abu Nuwas and his vizier, Jafar al-Barmaki. Sometimes a character in Scheherazade's tale will begin telling other characters a story of his own, and that story may have another one told within it, resulting in a richly layered narrative texture.

On the final (one thousand and first) night Sheherazade presents the King with their three sons and she asks him for a complete pardon. He grants her this and they live in relative satisfaction. The narrator's standards for what constitutes a cliff-hanger seem broader than in modern literature. While in many cases a story is cut off with the hero in life danger or another kind of deep trouble, in some parts of the full text Scheherazade stops her narration in the middle of an exposition of abstract philosophical principles or abstruse points of Islamic theology, and in one case during a detailed description of human anatomy
according to Galen - and in all these cases turns out to be justified in her belief that the
king's curiosity about the sequel would buy her another day of life.

The work is made up of a collection of stories thought to be from traditional Persian,
Arabic, and Indian stories. The core stories probably originated in an Iranic Empire and
were brought together in a Persian work called *Hazar Afsanah* ("A Thousand Legends").
The Arabic compilation *Alf Layla* (A Thousand Nights), originating about 850 AD, was in
turn probably an abridged translation of *Hazar Afsanah*. Some of its elements appear in the
*Odyssey*. The present name *Alf Layla wa-Layla* (literally a "A Thousand Nights and a
Night", i.e. "1001 Nights") seems to have appeared at an unknown time in the Middle Ages,
and expresses the idea of a transfinite number since 1000 represented conceptual infinity
within Arabic mathematical circles.

The first European version (and first printed edition) was a translation into French
(1704 - 1717) by Antoine Galland from an earlier compilation that was written in Arabic.
This 12 volume book, *Les Mille et une nuits, contes arabes traduits en français* ("Thousand
and one nights, Arab stories translated into French") probably included Arabic stories
known to the translator but not included in the Arabic compilation. *Aladdin's Lamp* and *Ali
Baba and the Forty Thieves* appeared first in Galland's translation and cannot be found in
the original writings. He wrote that he heard them from a Syrian Christian storyteller from
Aleppo, a Maronite scholar, Youhenna Diab, whom he called 'Hanna'.

John Payne, *Alaeddin and the Enchanted Lamp and Other Stories*, (London 1901)
gives details of Galland's encounter with 'Hanna' in 1709 and of the discovery in the
Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris of two Arabic manuscripts containing *Aladdin* and two more
of the 'interpolated' tales. He instances Galland's own experience to demonstrate the lack of
regard for such entertainments in the mainstream of Islamic scholarship, with the result that
complete copies of the genuine work were rarely to be met with, collections... and the fragmentary copies which existed were mostly in the hands of professional story-tellers, who were extremely unwilling to part with them, looking upon them as their stock in trade, and were in the habit of incorporating with the genuine text all kinds of stories and anecdotes from other sources, to fill the place of the missing portions of the original work. This process of addition and incorporation, which has been in progress ever since the first collection of the Nights into one distinct work and is doubtless still going on in Oriental countries, (especially such as are least in contact with European influence,) may account for the heterogeneous character of the various modern manuscripts of the Nights and for the immense difference which exists between the several texts, as well in actual contents as in the details and diction of such stories as are common to all.

Perhaps the best-known translation to English speakers is that by Sir Richard Francis Burton, entitled The Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night (1885). Unlike previous editions, his ten volume translation was not bowdlerized. Though printed in the Victorian era, it contained all the erotic nuances of the source material, replete with sexual imagery and pederastic allusions added as appendices to the main stories by Burton. Burton circumvented strict Victorian laws on obscene material by printing an edition for subscribers only rather than formally publishing the book. The original ten volumes were followed by a further six entitled The Supplemental Nights to the Thousand Nights and a Night which were printed between 1886 and 1888.

More recent versions are that of the French doctor J. C. Mardrus, translated into English by Powys Mathers, and, notably, a critical edition based on the 14th century Syrian manuscript in the Bibliothèque Nationale, compiled in Arabic by Muhsin Mahdi and rendered into English by Husain Haddawy, the most accurate and elegant of all to this date.
In 2005, Brazilian scholar Mamede Mustafa Jarouche started publishing a thorough Portuguese translation of the work, based on the comparative analysis of a series of different Arabic manuscripts. The first two volumes of a planned five or six volume set have already been released, making up for the complete Syrian branch of the book. The remaining volumes will be a translation of the later Egyptian branch.

The Book of One Thousand and One Nights has an estranged cousin: The Manuscript Found in Saragossa, by Jan Potocki. A Polish noble of the late 18th century, he traveled the Orient looking for an original edition of The Book... but never found it. Upon returning to Europe, he wrote his masterpiece, a multi-levelled frame tale.

Adaptations - Literature

Edgar Allan Poe wrote a "Thousand and Second Night" as a separate tale, called "The Thousand And Second Tale Of Scheherazade." It depicts the 8th and final voyage of Sinbad the Sailor, along with the various mysteries Sinbad and his crew encounter; the anomalies are then described as footnotes to the story. While the king is uncertain- except in the case of the elephants carrying the world on the back of the turtle- these mysteries are actual modern events that occurred in various places during, or before, Poe's lifetime. The story ends with the king in such disgust at the tale Scheherazade has just woven, that he has her executed the very next day.

Two notable novels loosely based on the Arabian Nights are Arabian Nights and Days by Naguib Mahfouz, and When Dreams Travel by Githa Hariharan. The Arabian Nights has also inspired poetry in English. Two examples are Alfred Tennyson's poem, Recollections of the Arabian Nights (1830), and William Wordsworth's The Prelude, Book V (1805).

Appendix II

Das Mahavidyas - Ten Incarnations of Goddess Shakti

From www.mahavidyas.org

The Ten Mahavidyas are known as Wisdom Goddesses. The spectrum of these ten goddesses covers the whole range of feminine divinity, encompassing horrific goddess's at one end, to the ravishly beautiful at the other. Mahavidya means (Maha - great; vidya - knowledge) Goddesses of great knowledge. These Goddesses are:

- Kali the Eternal Night
- Tara the Compassionate Goddess
- Shodashi the Goddess who is sixteen years old
- Bhuvaneshvari the Creator of the World
- Chinnamasta the Goddess who cuts off her own head
- Bhairavi the Goddess of decay
- Dhumawati the Goddess who widows herself
- Bagalamukhi the Goddess who seizes the tongue
- Matangi the Goddess who loves pollution
- Kamala the Last but Not the Least
Birth of Das Mahavidyas

Once during their numerous love games, things got out of hand between Shiva and Parvati. What had started in jest turned into a serious matter with an incensed Shiva threatening to walk out on Parvati. No amount of coaxing or cajoling by Parvati could reverse matters. Left with no choice, Parvati multiplied herself into ten different forms for each of the ten directions. Thus however hard Shiva might try to escape from his beloved Parvati, he would find her standing as a guardian, guarding all escape routes.

Each of the Devi's manifested forms made Shiva realize essential truths, made him aware of the eternal nature of their mutual love and most significantly established for always in the canons of Indian thought the Goddess's superiority over her male counterpart. Not that Shiva in any way felt belittled by this awareness, only spiritually awakened. This is true as much for this Great Lord as for us ordinary mortals. Befittingly thus they are referred to as the Great Goddess's of Wisdom, known in Sanskrit as the Mahavidyas. Indeed in the process of spiritual learning the Goddess is the muse who guides and inspires us. She is the high priestess who unfolds the inner truths.
A Brief note about the Das Mahavidyas

Kali - the Eternal Night

Kali is mentioned as the first amongst the Mahavidyas. Black as the night (ratri) she has a terrible and horrific appearance. The word ‘ratri’ means "to give," and is taken to mean "the giver" of bliss, of peace of happiness. Read Kali Mantra

Tara - the Compassionate Goddess

Literally the word 'tara' means a star. Thus Tara is said to be the star of our aspiration, the muse who guides us along the creative path. Read Tara Mantra

Shodashi - the Goddess who is Sixteen Years Old

The word 'Shodashi' literally means sixteen in Sanskrit. She is thus visualized as sweet girl of sixteen. In human life sixteen years represent the age of accomplished perfection after which decline sets in. This girl of sixteen rules over all that is perfect, complete, beautiful. Read Shodashi Mantra

Bhuvaneshvari - the Creator of the World

The beauty and attractiveness of Bhuvaneshwari may be understood as an affirmation of the physical world, the rhythms of creation, maintenance and destruction, even the hankerings and sufferings of the human condition is nothing but Bhuvaneshvari's play, her exhilarating, joyous sport. Read Bhuvaneshwari Mantra

Chinnamasta - the Goddess who cuts off her Own Head

The image of Chinnamasta is a composite one, conveying reality as an amalgamation of sex, death, creation, destruction and regeneration. It is stunning representation of the fact that life, sex, and death are an intrinsic part of the grand unified scheme that makes up the manifested universe. Read Chinnmasta Mantra
**Bhairavi - the Goddess of Decay**

Bhairavi embodies the principle of destruction and arises or becomes present when the body declines and decays. She is an ever-present goddess who manifests herself in, and embodies, the destructive aspects of the world. Destruction, however, is not always negative, creation cannot continue without it. Read Bhairavi Mantra

**Dhumawati - the Goddess who widows Herself**

She is the embodiment of "unsatisfied desires." Her status as a widow itself is curious. She makes herself one by swallowing Shiva, an act of self-assertion, and perhaps independence. Read Dhumavati Mantra

**Bagalamukhi - the Goddess who seizes the Tongue**

The pulling of the demon's tongue by Bagalamukhi is both unique and significant. Tongue, the organ of speech and taste, is often regarded as a lying entity, concealing what is in the mind. The Bible frequently mentions the tongue as an organ of mischief, vanity and deceitfulness. The wrenching of the demon's tongue is therefore symbolic of the Goddess removing what is in essentiality a perpetrator of evil. Read Bagalamukhi Mantra

**Matangi - the Goddess who Loves Pollution**

Texts describing her worship specify that devotees should offer her uccishtha (leftover food) with their hands and mouths stained with leftover food; that is, worshippers should be in a state of pollution, having eaten and not washed. This is a dramatic reversal of the usual protocols. Read Matangi Mantra

**Kamala - the Last but Not the Least**

The name Kamala means "she of the lotus" and is a common epithet of Goddess Lakshmi. Lakshmi is linked with three important and interrelated themes: prosperity and wealth, fertility and crops, and good luck during the coming year. Read Kamala Mantra.
Mahavidyas

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopaedia

Mahavidyas (Great Wisoms) are aspects of Devi in Hinduism. The Ten Mahavidyas are known as Wisdom Goddesses. The spectrum of these ten goddesses covers the whole range of feminine divinity, encompassing horrific goddesses at one end, to the ravishingly beautiful at the other. The name Mahavidyas comes from the roots maha (great) and vidya (revelation, manifestation, knowledge, wisdom).

In the Tantric tradition, these are identified as:

1. **Kali**
2. **Tara**
3. **Tripura Sundari**
4. **Bhuvaneshvari**
5. **Bhairavi**
6. **Chhinnamasta**
7. **Dhumavati**
8. **Bagalamukhi**
9. **Matangi**
10. **Kamalatmika**

The Mahabhagavata-purana and Brhadaharana-purana provide a slightly different list of the Mahavidyas: Kali, Tara, Chinnamasta, Bhuvanesvari, Bagala, Dumavati, Kamala, Matangi, Sodasi, and Bhairavi. The Guhayatiguyha-tantra associates the Mahavidyas with the ten avatars of Vishnu, and states that the Mahavidyas are the source from which the avatars of Vishnu arose. All ten forms of the Goddess, whether gentle or terrifying, are worshiped as the universal Mother.

Worship of the Mahavidyas

In their strong associations with death, violence, pollution, and despised marginal social roles, they call into question such normative social "goods" as worldly comfort, security, respect, and honour. The worship of these goddesses suggests that the devotee...
experiences a refreshing and liberating spirituality in all that is forbidden by established social orders.

The central aim here is to stretch one's consciousness beyond the conventional, to break away from approved social norms, roles, and expectations. By subverting, mocking, or rejecting conventional social norms, the adept seeks to liberate his or her consciousness from the inherited, imposed, and probably inhibiting categories of proper and improper, good and bad, polluted and pure. Living one's life according to rules of purity and pollution and caste and class that dictate how, where, and exactly in what manner every bodily function may be exercised, and which people one may, or may not, interact with socially, can create a sense of imprisonment from which one might long to escape. Perhaps the more marginal, bizarre, "outsider" goddesses among the Mahavidyas facilitate this escape. By identifying with the forbidden or the marginalized, an adept may acquire a new and refreshing perspective on the cage of respectability and predictability. Indeed a mystical adventure, without the experience of which, any spiritual quest would remain incomplete.

Kali (Sanskrit: Kālī, Devanāgarī: काली) (Pronounced /kəːliː/) is a goddess with a long and complex history in Hinduism. Although sometimes presented as dark and violent, her earliest incarnation as a figure of annihilation still has some influence, while more complex Tantric beliefs sometimes extend her role so far as to be the Ultimate Reality (Brahman) and Source of Being. Finally, the comparatively recent devotional movement largely conceives of Kali as a straightforwardly benevolent mother-goddess. Therefore, as well her association with the Deva (god) Shiva, Kali is associated with many Devis (goddesses) - Durga, Badrakali, Bhavani, Sati, Rudrani, Parvati, Chinnamasta, Chamunda, Kamakshi or kamakhya, Uma, Meenakshi, Himavati, Kumari and Tara. These names, if repeated, are believed to give special power to the worshipper. She is not to be confused with Kali, the male demon from the
Mahabharata and Kalki Purana who is the personification of Kali yuga, whose name is spelled with a 'short' a and a 'short' i.

Kali is a feminine form of the Sanskrit word "kala," meaning "time". It also means "black". Kali has therefore been translated variously as "She who is time," "She who devours time," "She who is the Mother of time," "She who is black," and "She who is black time". Kali’s association with blackness stands in contrast to her consort, Shiva, whose body is covered by the white ashes of the cremation ground (Sanskrit: 'śmaśan') in which he meditates, and with which they are both associated, hence Kali’s epithet ‘Śmaśanā.’

Kali properly transliterated from Sanskrit is Kālī (spelled with a "long" a), which should not be confused with the common Sanskrit word properly transliterated as Kali (spelled with a "short" a), meaning "terrible." They are grammatically unrelated, the first being nominal/ablative the latter adjectival. This "terrible" Kali is another similarly named deity who acts as the personification of Kali yuga. Frequent confusion comes in interpreting the Kali yuga," or "terrible age," one of the four great ages (yugas) of Hindu cosmology, as conflated with the goddess Kali. This is mostly due to her appearance, which is often described as terrible and fearsome. In fact, the goddess Kali should not be confused with kali yuga, as her name has a separate and unrelated meaning. Hinduism, the Goddess Tara (Sanskrit: Tāra, Devanagari: तारा) meaning "star" is the second of the (ten) Mahavidyas or "Great Wisdom(Goddesses)". Tantric manifestations of Mahadevi, Kali or Parvati. As the star is seen as a beautiful but perpetually self-combusting thing, so Tara is perceived at core as the absolute, unquenchable hunger that propels all life.

In the Hindu epic The Ramayana, Tara is the name of Vali’s queen. Vali is the monkey king who is killed by Rama, at the behest of his brother Sugriva.
The oral tradition gives an intriguing origin to the goddess Tara. The legend begins with the churning of the ocean between the Devas (Hindu Gods) and Asuras (Hindu Demons). The Deva Shiva drank the poison that was created from the churning of the ocean (in the process turning his throat blue and earning him the epithet Nilakantha), thus saving the world from destruction, but fell unconscious under its powerful effect. Tara Ma appeared and took Shiva on her lap. She suckled him, the milk from her breasts counteracting the poison, and he recovered. This story is reminiscent of the one in which Shiva stops the rampaging Kali by becoming an infant. Seeing the child, Kali's maternal instinct comes to the fore, and she becomes quiet and nurses the infant Shiva. In both cases, Shiva assumes the position of an infant vis-à-vis the Goddess

Tripura Sundari, also called Shodashi, Lalita and Rajarajeshvari, is one of the group of ten goddesses of Hindu mythology, and these goddesses are collectively called mahavidyas. The other nine mahavidyas are Kali, Tara, Bhuvaneshvari, Bhairavi, Chhinnamasta, Dhumavati, Bagalamukhi, Matangi, and Kamalatmika.
Images & Iconography

The following fig.'s A-J are renderings of all ten Mahavidyas and their corresponding yantras:

Fig. A "Dasa Mahavidya Kali"
Fig. B "Dasa Mahavidya Tara"
Fig. C "Dasa Mahavidya Tripura Sundari"
Fig. D "Dasa Mahavidya Bhuvanesvari"
Fig. E "Dasa Mahavidya Chinnamasta"
Fig. F "Dasa Mahavidya Bhairavi"
Fig. G "Dasa Mahavidya Dhumavati"
Fig. H "Dasa Mahavidya Bagalamukhi"
Fig. 1 "Dasa Mahavidya Matangi"

Fig. 2 "Dasa Mahavidya Kamala"
Appendix III

Personal Interview with Anita Nair, the Writer

Excerpts from an Interview with Anita Nair, the Writer, by the Researcher, on 02.02.2007

Simple and straight forward, unassuming but focused, committed yet casual, Anita Nair was also punctual and benign in her dealings with anything that concerns common good. It is this composition of diagonal nodes in her disposition that struck me very much. When I met her for the first time on [2 February, 2007] a cool morning of late winter, I was surprised to see her so fresh – there was not a single sign of fatigue or sleeplessness - after an early morning drive, say, 4 to 5 hours, from Shoranur to Coimbatore by car. I managed to steal some precious minutes in her busy morning programme on that day. She remained composed and cheerful throughout. Some excerpts from that conversation are given below.

Interviewer the Researcher: Is there any plan or scheme that you follow in your selection of themes and writings? For example, first, the Better man- a story about men or a man. Next, it is Ladies Coupe- out and out a female subject. It is followed by Children’s fiction. Why so? What is the idea?

Interviewee Anita Nair, the writer: As a writer, I would hate to repeat myself in terms of theme. Hence the subjects of my novels tend to be very different from each other. However there is one recurrent theme that is buried deep within the warp and weft of the narrative. Namely that in the relationship between individual and society, I have always stood up for individual happiness rather than societal acceptance. That, if there arises a conflict between individual happiness versus social acceptance, individuals ought to be strong enough to put their own beliefs first.
The Researcher: After more than fifty years of Independence, still we are struggling to get 33% reservation in the Parliament. Do you think the contemporary woman is much more liberated than her predecessors?

Anita Nair: The condition of women in India has certainly undergone a change from the time the western world began to form an opinion of Indian womanhood. But this has been a slow and gradual change. Education, financial freedom, career opportunities etc have improved the lot of the Indian woman. But the woman in the village remains untouched by these factors that have in many ways helped the urban woman if not liberate herself from the tyranny of the traditional culture, at least circumvent it.

For it is the traditional norms that keep a woman tied down and the fear that if she were to swerve from the accepted path, she will be ostracized. Radical change would necessarily mean that she be at odds with the original culture. To cast the yoke of tradition off, she has to do what is radically opposed to what she has been taught is her role in life. The fear of society. The fear of being a misfit. This is a great impediment to personal freedom whether it is for a man or a woman. And in a country that has always considered women to be inferior beings, women are that much more hesitant to assert themselves or ask for their rights. The contemporary Indian woman; On the one hand she is aware of her rights and the need for an identity. On the other hand tradition dictates that she submerge it in her role as mother and wife... how does she cope. What does she do? Like she has always been taught, a good Indian woman could resort to the scriptures for help. But what does she find there? Is she to be Sita, modest and chaste for the world to see, or a Radha, willing to pleasure her lover Krishna in bed, or be like Kuntz, a Dhrupad's flair for managing, not even in the scriptures can you find a parallel for the superwoman the contemporary Indian woman is expected to be...
The Researcher: If so, what are the impediments? The age-old traditions or certain rites and rituals or male dominated family and cultural practices or Hierarchical Hindu family and religious structures? What are issues that you have dealt with in your writings?

Anita Nair: Culture and tradition are part and parcel of any civilization leave alone India. It is true; history influences the life of any individual as well as the society. But in the family it is the relationships and their words and actions that mostly inspire or instigate or influence the lives of the children. Perhaps it's because of our pre-conditioning. Perhaps it is the effect of the stories told to us by our mothers and grandmothers. I remember one story my mother used to keep telling me when I was growing up—there was this girl who had got married and was sent back to her parents because they did not know how to cook! It was a cautionary tale, but I don’t ever remember her telling me the importance of things like knowing how to change a light bulb, for instance.

The Researcher: How do you choose your themes or subjects of the novels/what are sources of inspiration? You appear to be our next door neighbour and yet you are able to focus on women of all walks of life—maid servant to mistress of the house, from Indian middle class or upper middle class women to working class women, from teenager to senior citizen women—all these women are found in your novel Ladies Coupe.

Anita Nair: Thirteen years ago, I climbed on the top berth of a ladies compartment in a train from Bangalore to Madras and discovered an unexpected world. Once the door was closed and the blue night lamp switched on, the middle-aged women began a conversation that riveted me to my sleeping berth. It was “a no-holds-barred conversation on mother-in-law, daughters-in-law, husbands, everything. “I think it is the confined space and the fact that you are talking to strangers, someone you’ll never meet again. It is like a confessional box, you are assured anonymity. Besides, who ever listens to women, except maidservants perhaps, so
when they get a chance they really talk. Their candour, the subversiveness, their subtle strength and courage inspired my novel, Ladies Coupe. In Ladies Coupe, one can expect to meet six women who are from the vast majority of Indian women—the suburban and rural women—who still have little control over their lives. It is a book I wanted to write very much because it disturbs me.

The Researcher: What is the significance of the inclusion of the “Mahavidyas’ in the novel Ladies Coupe?

Anita Nair: For too long now Indian womanhood has been saddled with images of only the benign and pure, which is a burden for any living breathing woman. As she is made to keep forever under wraps all aspects of her. And it was necessary. I thought that Akhila understands that to be a woman in full, it means to be not only good and patient, generous and giving but also to be malevolent and lustful, vindictive and nasty. Only then would she be a complete being...

The Researcher: What about your next narrative? A novel or any other genre? Since you have already tried your hand in writing Poetry, do you intend to switch over to any other mode?

Anita Nair: There is no difference in the subjects that I choose to write about, be it poetry or prose. What happens is that every day there are several times when I chance upon a word, idea, picture, and scene or even thought and think – here’s a story. But what ultimately gets written is an idea that is so powerful that it refuses to dislodge itself no matter what happens. For me what is supreme is a good story and a character driven narrative... naturally this is what motivates me to write the kind of books I do...literary fiction that doesn't get lost in the jungle of lyrical prowess and intricate verbal vines...and hence the writing process is much more arduous.