



Chain of Custody

Anita Nair

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Gritty and graphic, this mystery probes sex-trafficking rings, with empathy to their victims.

Anita Nair's *Chain of Custody* is a gripping mystery set against the backdrop of India's hustle-and-bustle cities and landscapes.

When a thirteen-year-old girl goes missing in a busy market, it's 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 a nearby lawyer? Borei Gowda and his partner Santosh must solve the disappearance, and they hope to find her alive, before she is sold or worse.

The novel immediately introduces its lead character with all his vices, presenting them in a way that makes him refreshingly human. Inspector Gowda is a complicated individual. He is married, but he still feels an attachment to his mistress, his college girlfriend, Urmila. He is morally complex, an adulterer and a pessimist. Despite his controversial private life, his heart is shown to be in the right place.

His investigation thrusts him into the dark and disturbing world of child sex trafficking, an underground but extremely common problem that is often pushed into the shadows. The book is less a mystery than an investigation into a massive underground world, a subject that rarely sees the light of day.

The novel is gritty. It does not shy away from dark themes and violence, and is very much rooted in harsh realities. It occasionally switches perspectives to give voice to a young girl imprisoned in a brothel and forced to service its customers. Each character has his own struggles and demons, from young children living in poverty to the main character himself. The investigation takes many surprising turns, leading to an ominous conclusion.

Chain of Custody is a graphic, satisfying read that delves into a controversial subject in a sympathetic and humane way.

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