

Indomitable Spirit of the Feministic Characters in Anita Nair's *Lessons In Forgetting*

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Abstract

Indian women writing in English is recognized as the major contribution in Indian Writing in English literature. Anita Nair, India's best-selling author of fiction and poetry, always had an affinity towards writing fiction which encourages women to pursue their life under all the situations. Nair relates to the role women play in their lives and it is reflected in her work. This research paper aims to explore the elements of feminism in Anita Nair's *Lessons In Forgetting*. The paper seeks to study the work of Nair's *Lesson In Forgetting* and deals with various problems faced by the women characters such as female foeticide, gender discrimination, love and dependence on family members. The paper also explains briefly how women overcome such problems to move on with their lives. As per the title, the lessons that were taught to women are forgotten only to lead the ensuing, happiest life. Feminism lies not only on worries and depression but also on happiness and expectations.

Keywords: Anita Nair, *Lessons In Forgetting*, Feminism, Forgiveness, female foeticide, redemption, independence.

Introduction

Anita Nair, a popular Indian English writer has to her credit many novels, short stories, travelogues and creative writings. For her, feminism in the Indian context is about recognizing the importance of female self and to be able to nurture it. She is of the view that a woman's emancipation is tied to the roles she has to play in life. Her appeal is universal and bears the marks of the society. *Lessons In Forgetting*, one of the Anita Nair's important novels, is a story with hard to forget nuggets. Nair had curved a story line, which appeals to all the sections of the society. It's a story of the real people in the real world with recent burning issues of today's society. It is also a story of forgiveness and redemption and circumstances like midlife crisis, female infanticide, page three parties and many other burning issues. She has presented the story with passion mixed with emotions.

An Analysis of *Lessons In Forgetting*

Lessons In Forgetting has a story that inspires, moves and motivates you to take up the responsibilities that one has. Meera, the main character, a beautifully groomed corporate wife is a successful writer of cookbooks. Things were going on fine but one day her husband, Giri, a disillusioned corporate honcho, fails to return home after a party and the whole family's responsibility, which comprises her mother, children and grandmother and along with that the

running of the Lilac house. When Giri walks out on his homemaker wife, life starts rumbling and falls down like a pack of cards around Meera, who till then was leading quite a secure life under the shadows of her husband. The circumstances are the result of indifferences that grows between Giri and Meena and the gap between them widens. Giri couldn't cope up with the stress of the falling and sinking business and wants to sell off their old but sprawling bungalow in Bangalore to which Meera disagrees resulting in his leaving the house. With husband not around, life becomes harder for Meera who has never looked into the financial aspects of life. She is portrayed by Nair as the sacrificial lamb. The status of women in contemporary India is evaluated with a number of burning issues determining their position.

Anita Nair had presented the main character Meera as a person who becomes strong and determined when circumstances demand. With the plot of Meera, another story runs parallel to it with the Philanderer cine star and professor J.K. Krishnamurthy, JAK to friends, the storm predictor. JAK settled in USA, faces turmoil and storm in his real life also. All the characters come together as they are connected with a common thread as crisis in life brings them together and helps them identify their problems and seek solutions.

Nair had taken up many important issues of contemporary world and had delineated them perfectly with perfect ease and simplicity. She has made her characters triumph and emerge victorious and we find them not bowing down in the face of crisis. Instead they stand up with their head held high and with a positive attitude. The characters in the novel talk about forgetting and finally come to terms with their second life. Nair has portrayed two very different stories in this novel which move one after another interlinked till the end of novel and in which the women characters are beautifully depicted especially the protagonist Meera, who plays her part as a cookbook writer, daughter, mother and wife.

“Meera and her husband Giri, son Nikhil, were found in a party there she meets her friends some applauded her for giving such tips to cook in her book and one praises her for Thai prawn recipe”

(P6 *Lessons in Forgetting*)

Meera's perfect life gets upturned when Giri deserts her. She lives in denial for many days, comforting her son, her mother and her grandmother that he will be back home soon. But when days turn into weeks and weeks into months, she realizes that she is alone now waiting for nobody to return. She turns into an emotional wreck, trying to cope up with the loneliness and pain. JAK and Meera are both devastated and lonely. Their pain can be easily perceived and felt by the readers.

The story of JAK and his daughter who is in a vegetative state adds to the strength of the novel. Meera also does manage to stay on her feet in the absence of Giri. Meera trying to cope with a marriage that failed overnight and Prof. Krishnamurthy looking for the truth behind

his vivacious nineteen year old daughter Smriti's catatonic state. All these look like pages torn from the book called **life**. Smriti exemplifying the irony of her name is endlessly locked in a combat with memory, making grotesque faces and emitting grunts and growls like a wild animal in pain but is unable to express. Her father watches her helplessly in despair and is unable to reason out, only searching for the elusive truth behind the 'freak accident' of her daughter. His daughter's jubilant life has been reduced to rumbles for the rest of her life. The helplessness of the characters makes us realize that fate rules our lives and we have to quietly submit ourselves to it.

Kala chithi is another female character and aunt to JAK also undergoes the same problem that Meera has already undergone but in a different manner. Ambi husband of Kala chithi keeps on adoring her hair but not her and one day he abandons her because of incapable of bearing a child and chooses another woman to get married but Kala chithi paves a new and starts to live with Sarada.

"I finally had a reason to leave him. Not even my father could fault me for this. I was the wronged wife. So I left him before I went, I cut my hair at the nape of my neck. I gave it to Ambi. A long braid woven with jasmine and Kanakambaram. This is all you ever wanted of me. Keep it. And let me go, I said, walking out." (P 232 *Lessons in Forgetting*).

Nair is successful in engulfing the readers into mystery regarding the circumstances and incidents that take place, plot after plot, scene after scene. She seems to be playing with the plot structures which she very effectively arranges sequence after sequence in the novel with each and every character in the right place.

All the male characters in the novel have made a great impact on their heirs but the female characters are worthy beings because they have accepted their new life with responsibility and expectations. It is not that male characters abandon female characters in the novel. It is all about female characters searching for different ways of happy living.

Nair seems to forward the message that destiny says it all. It is a very strong point which determines the course of a person's life. Whatever condition Meera and Dr. J.K. Krishnamurthy and all the characters, including J.K's aunt Kala chithi who has a story of her own, are in is because of destiny revealing a new side of life. When two broken lives meet, they manage to bring love, and more so, companionship into each other's lives. Anita Nair has also brought in Greek mythology and constantly compared Meera to the Queen of Universe, Hera.

Conclusion

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Lessons in Forgetting' has everything to entertain and from page three parties to female foeticide to pictures of corporate lives to simple human emotions and feelings which are sometimes hard to express as man falls short of words to express but can show only through expressions. With a fast paced narrative style and sophisticated way of presenting things and juxtaposing two different and diverse worlds makes Anita Nair's *Lessons In Forgetting* an intense and complex novel. In a nutshell, Nair delineates the trauma of female characters and leads them towards alleviating life with happiness.

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