

EMOTIONAL FRIGIDITY OF MEERA IN ANITA NAIR'S LESSONS IN FORGETTING

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ABSTRACT

“A woman is the full circle, within her is the power to create, nature and transform”

- Diane Mariechild

The dignity and destiny of a woman is seen in marriage. The absence of reciprocity of care thus produces feelings of depression, lack of communication and alienation. It is the ideal of womanhood not to voice grievances. The post-colonial women writers have brought about a tremendous change in the trend of depicting women characters. The deepest concern with these writers has been a demarcation of inner life and subtle interpersonal relationships. The self is the most complex and interactive system of individual. Anita Nair's fiction explores the freedom of the woman to fulfill herself basically as a human being. The present article aims to explore the searching for the self and recreation of it, to redefine the role and quest of women to move on in life inspite of various hardships. To explore more about the concept I have chosen Anita Nair's fiction *Lessons in Forgetting*.

Keywords: *Women, Self, Moving-on, Emotional Frigidity and recreating self.*

I- CAREER ACHIEVEMENTS OF ANITA NAIR

Without the mention of the name Anita Nair, will leave the contemporary Indian English Fiction, incomplete. With a style of her own, the writer has taken the glory of one of the best authors in

India. Anita Nair is a Malayali by birth, who is currently residing at Bangalore. The publication of the short story collection *Satyr of the Subway*, marks the beginning of Anita Nair's career as a writer. Her 2001 publication, *Ladies Coupe*, has been published by Picador, USA, fetching the writer a remarkable success and paramount glory.

The *Better Man* (2000), *Lessons in Forgetting*(2010), *Mistress*(2003) are some of her other bestselling novels. Anita Nair is considered to be one of India's thirty power women in India acquiring many awards and honours for her sheer contribution in the field of literature. She received the FICCI Women Achievers Award in 2008. In 2009 Montblanc honoured her with the launch of the special Edition writing instrument in India, for her novel contribution to literature, enforcing cross cultural endeavors and enlightening experiences. She was honoured with the JFW award in 2010 for her literary versatility. The movie adaptation of the novel *Lessons in Forgetting* won the national award in 2013 and also was the part of Indian Panaroma at IFFI 2012. In 2012 she was given the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her contribution to literature and culture. In 2014 she was shortlisted for the Hindu Literary Prize. In 2017 she was honoured with the Crossword Book Award.

II- THEMES OF ANITA NAIR

Anita Nair sinks her teeth into various themes like betrayal, abuse, disrespect of women, money, homosexuality, religious bias, cultural, casteism, untouchability. Familial crisis is another important theme Nair throws light upon. Rapid changes are taking place in the family and in the society in the name of modernity. The modernization has paved way for a tremendous change in the roles of both men and women in various aspects. Marital relationships are falling apart since individuals prioritize their self - enjoyment and freedom. Even in Indian society individuals

prefer to live in relationships and lifestyle. Anita Nair explores deeply about the cultural changes happening in the Indian society.

The self is the distinct trait of an individual. It exemplifies the uniqueness of an individual. Pursuit of the self, the quest and recreation of the self becomes the predominated concern of authors of all genres. In Anita Nair's fiction, her characters have come out of their struggles in their quest for identity. The earlier Indian women novelists have portrayed woman as voiceless sufferers, the upholders of traditional values and ethics, an essence of tolerance and patience, an exemplar to their successors, a being with no space for herself, Simone De Beauvoir Remarks: "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological or Economic fate determine the figure that the female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, intermediate between male and eunuch, which is described as feminine" (Beauvoir 295).

The post-colonial women writers like Kamala Markandya, NayantaraSahgal, Anita Desai, ShashiDespndane, Bharathi Mukherjee, Gita Hariharan, Anita Nair, ManjuKapur have brought out the hidden secrets by highlighting significance of portraying woman as an individual rebelling against the traditional roles, breaking the shackles of exploitation and oppression, awakening with a sense of identity, to assert their individuality.

Women writers redefine women in their literature. The nature of the self is something complicated. It is a constant thrash about going on within every human entity to find coherence among the selves. The innumerable selves within oneself are a source of constant conflict and a lack of harmony inside a human being leads to the hypothetical question of the identity of the self.

Lessons in Forgetting is about the female protagonist Meera, who lives in Lilac house with her grandmother Lily, her mother Saro and two children Nayantara and Nikhil. Meera's father Raghavan Menon falls in love with Charo, a Bengali woman, marries her and has a girl child, Leela. Leela becomes a part of the Hindi cinema as a famous actress with the name of Lily. Leela marries a Hungarian painter, gets settled in Bangalore in Lilac house and they have a daughter named Saro. Saro grows to be an independent woman of unique taste. She falls in love with her best friend's brother and marries him. They have a daughter Meera, the protagonist of the novel.

The novel portrays two more major characters Professor Jak and his daughter Smriti. Both the characters play a significant role in the novel. Through the character of Smriti, Anita Nair has given herself a chance to throw some light on female feticide incidents, which prevails globally in many countries. Literature and every literary writer feels it their moral duty to project the societal issues and Anita Nair has not failed to do so. A society must grow in a healthy way and an unhealthy sex ratio will not pave way for a healthy society. In the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair not only focuses on the sufferings of women in family bonds but also creates awareness to her readers about female feticide which is on the rise in Indian society even till date.

III - DECEPTION AND DESTRUCTION OF RELATIONSHIP

Meera's life turns upside down when the Lilac house is chosen for photo shoot. Giri, being the shooting crew happens to meet her and falls in love with her. Giri is swayed by the richness laid before him. Giri being a calculative person of his future predicament has found a job in the corporate world to achieve a polished lifestyle. Meera considers herself as "Hera" the Greek goddess sincerely waiting for the love of her Zeus, Giri. They have two children Nayantara and

Nikhil. He suggests her to be socialized soon she becomes a cook book writer. Her life is led by him completely. Giri wants to start his own business to achieve his dreams so he wants to sell the Lilac house, but Meera rejects it.

Hence, one day, in a party, he deserts Meera and disappears from her life. Meera finds it difficult to manage, financially in Giri's absence. She realizes that Giri has accepted her as a package. After Giri's departure Meera feels miserable to manage things on her own. She picks up a job as a research assistant to Jak, the cyclone expert, "We shall overcome she thinks" (LIF 93). Giri starts a new life and demands divorce. With her new job Meera fulfill her responsibilities as a mother, a daughter and she slowly accepts that life has more to offer, even though she does not know exactly what is in store for her.

Anita Nair suggests that woman should support and help woman at times of need. When Giri cheats on Meera, she gets the support and confidence of various women in her life. First and foremost it's her mother and grandmother, who helps her to accept the void created by Giri in her life. Slowly Meera gains confidence to face every single day. The thoughts of her familial responsibilities keep her active always. She doesn't want to express her broken self in front of her family because Meera is well aware of the fact that she is the pillar of the society.

She decides to sideline the thoughts of Giri and focus in her career and to regain her inner confidence. The various female characters that passes by her life, gives her the spark to move on in her life. Meera feels: "There is no knowing what will happen next in our lives, Meera thinks, walking past the gates of the lilac house" (LIF 90). Vinnie is another friendly character whom Meera meets in her life. She consoles her and provides her the confidence to face life alone.

Meera feels refreshed after her meeting with Vinnie. She says: “ I am sure whatever is troubling you can be resolved” (LIF 104). She encourages Meera to start a new life of her own.

Abandonment is always painful, one more thing Meera has to deal with. Anita Nair stresses the support received by Meera by other woman which helps her to face life. Kala chiti is another embodiment of boldness in the story. Anita Nair as portrayed kalaChiti as the daring woman, who stands up for her own freedom and justice. Kala Chiti decides to break her marital bond in order to overcome the depressing powers of her own husband and in-laws. Kala Chiti was astonished to see the convincing power of her husband for his second marriage, since they are childless , even after seven years. Kala Chiti felt her self-respect crumbling into pieces. She decides : “That was Ambi’s greatest weapon: to be the most reasonable being even when he was crumbling your life and self-respect into a million pieces... I cut my hair at the nape of my neck. I gave it to Ambi..... This is all you ever wanted of me. Keep it. And let me go, ‘ I said, walking out.” (LIF 206)

Anita Nair has beautifully pen down various women characters at different ages and different stages, fighting the battle of survival, as we analyze we see that women characters in the novel are of different ages, Meera and Vinnie are similar in their age, we have the aged group Meera’s mother Saro, her grandmother and Kala Chiti and even the young group Nayantara and Smirithi. The writer projects the different perspectives of life by the woman of different age groups.

Amongst all the trials and tribulations in her life. Meera gains a great support and confidence from her mother Saro, who insist Meera in keeping up standards. Meera recollects the words of her Mother: “ Your life may fall apart, your heart maybe breaking, but by keeping a semblance

of order in your routine and day, your life will be yours again, Saro said” (LIF 227). Even after the loss of her mother, her words keep Meera alive and active. Nair states that a woman needs a diversion and a purpose, to overcome the battle of life.

All the more the values of forgiving and forgetting make them to move on in their life. The writers makes her readers to analyze the fact that, when a sense of betrayal, makes our life to get stuck at a point, the wise way to overcome it is to distract ourselves. She states: “ Kitcha had been glad when she found the job. It was precisely what she needed. A diversion and a purpose.” (LIF 232)

IV - SMRITHI'S BATTLE FOR THE DYING DAUGHTERS

Female feticide is increasing day by day in India. The battle against sex selection has proved to be long drawn out but some signs are visible that demonstrate that the fight can be won. Due to sex selective abortions, millions of girls go missing even before birth. India is a land with a culture, which adores the female gender but in its dark side, the country also stands with a highest rate of sex selective abortions. Anita Nair has spotted this particular social issue in her novel *Lessons in Forgetting*. Economic condition is the basic cause for the sex selective abortions. It is a known fact that globally many prefer male babies rather than female ones, which helps them to carry the family lineage and gain status in the society. The practice of dowry seems to be the root cause for these sex selective abortions which paves way for the unhealthy sex ratio.

Smrithi is the second leading character in the novel that rebels against the existing social order, such as dowry system, female feticide etc. she makes her life down for the noble cause. The novelist through Smrithi presents the image of a new woman who is educated, courageous and

capable of creating a path of their own in his patriarchal world and moreover her plight, cautions the young mind against the containment and exploitation. Nair says:

The booming treacherous sea waited, but anything was better than what these predatory beasts could do to her. And then the monster king of the rubbish – the giant twisted log that lay on its side – rose with the wave and came to slam against her head. (LIF 318)

Smrithi, the daughter of cyclone expert Jak, resides with her father after the legal separation of her parents. Inspired by her father's Indian stories, she comes to India in pursuit of her higher studies; she represents the mistakes identity. For an awareness campaign she goes to her father's village, Minjikapuram in TamilNadu with her friend, Rishi Soman. When she visits a hospital there for treating glass injury she is shocked to see there, many pregnant women who have come for scanning to find the sex of the father.

If it is a girl child, they do abortion either willingly or forcefully. She tries to collect proof against all this for making a report Dr. Srinivasan and his men pass a wrong message to Smrithi using Chinnathayi's name and they cause severe injury and damage to Smrithi's life, "She feels his eyeballs move beneath her lips. She thinks again of what he must be seeing. The broken child.His lost daughter.The break with eternity" (LIF 320).

V- CONCLUSION

Lessons in Forgetting is about forgetting the lessons that are taught by male dominant characters. The novel brings out gradual changes that happening women and advocate femininity through different phases of women's life from marriage and being a wife, a mother, a daughter and a friend. Once they find themselves in the dark they are capable enough to bring them back to the

light. In a nutshell, Nair delineates the trauma of female characters and leads them towards alleviating life with full of happiness. All they have to do is go further. Whatever happens, their life must move on through a life beyond the life. Maya Vinai states:

Smrithi in *Lessons in Forgetting* is a victim of such a mistaken identity. Men in India are still unequipped to face such a kind of modernity, which is an off shoot of progressive western education and upbringing . . . she appears freak in the eyes of her community since she demonstrates the possibilities of her society to a group of people who are not yet ready to either grasp these possibilities or acknowledge them. (118-119)

We explored how a woman, from her very childhood, undergoes a long apprenticeship in gender role construction and how by eulogizing her role as a self-sacrificing, caring and nurturing person, she is bound to the confines of her home. In Indian culture, the segregation of the sexes is customary. The masculine and feminine codes of behaviour prescribed in the religious texts are literally revered and to liberate the mind from the shackles of these accepted prejudices is not easy, for it is deeply fabricated in Indian ethos. A true ethnic of care of women is in demand in a family set up. Anita Nair states: “a woman needs to be loved, not understood” (LIF 103).

VI - REFERENCES

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