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Man-Woman Relationship in Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*

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Abstract

The research paper aims to explore the relationship between man and woman in the patriarchal society in Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*. The work of Nair in *Lessons in Forgetting* is an example of feminine writing which portrays the stories of women facing different issues existing in a patriarchal society like gender discrimination, love, betrayal, female feticide, family responsibilities etc. The novel also explains how these women come out of their shells to rebel and live life in their own way. In fact, the works of women writers like Anita Desai, Githa Hariharn, Sashi Deshpande and Anita Nair focus on challenging and rebellious attitude of women against the odds of the patriarchal society. *Lessons in Forgetting* is a story about grabbing the second chance in life without any hesitation. Meera, the protagonist and other female characters face betrayal from their husband and are bound to think what comes next. The novel is a story of two individuals who manage to overcome their bitter past to start a new life. The writer also talks about another female character in the novel named Kala Chiti who also accepted the challenges of life. Her husband left her because she could not bear a baby and married to another lady. Kala Chiti did not think this as the end of her life rather she opted for a fresh beginning.

Keywords- Feminism, Betrayal, rebel, modernity, Marriage and Patriarchy.

Malala Yousafzai, a female education activist, says that she raised up her voice-not so she can shout but so that those without a voice can be heard...we cannot succeed when half of us are held back. Although women carries with her thoughts of modernity but still they struggle to fight back the tyrannical rules of patriarchal society. The efforts go in vain as they have to surrender themselves due to circumstances.

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Anita Nair who is a famous Indian writer is able to portray the women condition and feminism in her novels with wit and humour. Another apprehension which is quite visible in the works of Anita Nair is the man and woman relationship. The other characters of her novel have relationship outside their marriage. Anita Nair in *Lessons in Forgetting* has succeeded in portraying Meera and other woman characters as an individual who can fight all odds of the patriarchal society and are able to create their own world in the absence of their husbands. Anita Nair has tried to bring the attention of her readers on a husband who marries only with the intention of acquiring the property of his wife. *Lessons in Forgetting* divulges about man and woman relationships, family responsibilities, love, betrayal and second chances that life offers to start a fresh.

Anita Nair is one of the well-known Indian novelists of present time. She was born in Palakkad district of Kerala. She completed her graduation with English Language and Literature from Chennai. She got married to Mr. Harish. She is now settled in Bengluru with her husband and son. She has written various women oriented novels; *Lessons in Forgetting* is one of them which got movie adaptation too. Her creative director career motivated her to transform her emotions and thoughts into writing. Her first book titled as *Satyr of the Subway* was published in 1997. The novelist has got global acclamation for her simple yet effective writing. *Ladies Coupe* and *the Better Man* are her finest works which got translated into more than 30 languages.

Male Dominance

Nair has interwoven different stories in *Lessons in Forgetting* which goes one after the other till the end. The women characters of the novel are illustrated beautifully particularly protagonist. Meera was living happily with her grandmother, mother, husband Giri and two kids Nikhil and Nayantara in her ancestral Lilac house in Banglore. Meera was a simple lady who finds joy in doing household chores and Giri was a man with big dreams who always wanted to live his life in a sophisticated manner. He wanted Meera to become a socialite and asked him to write a cookbook for the wives of big businessmen. Soon her books became popular among ladies. This popularity gave Giri an idea to start a business and hold a good position in corporate world. He asked Meera to sell the Lilac house to get money for his business. But Meera could not do so because the Lilac house was under 99 years lease.

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They used to have arguments on this but all the time Meera was stubborn on not selling the house.

Meera with her husband Giri and son Nikhil goes out to attend a party where she was applauded for giving cooking tips in her books by her friends and fans. Meera is a socialite and loves to be praised for her work which Giri never likes. His behaviour is an example of male dominance.

In the party, Meera meets a budding actor who keeps on praising her beauty. Meera wanted to stop him but kept quiet. Suddenly Nikhil comes and interrupts her telling that Giri is missing from the party. Meera started looking for him but one of her friends informed that Giri left the party two hours ago. Meera realised that this is the signal of a big trouble and she became sad. Nikhil kept on asking her about his father and Meera tried to console him. She had decided that she will not disclose this to her mother. Meera was not able to tolerate the pain of Giri's sudden absence in her life. She tried to search out his emails but everything was deleted except an incomplete mail in the drafts. While reading the mail she understood that Giri has left her for the Lilac house. By doing all this, Giri is setting an example of male domination. Giri tried to convince her in the past also to sell the Lilac House but she never listen to him.

All these issues were bothering her but she had a little hope that he will return some day. One day Giri and Meera meet at the coffee shop. She was hopeful of his returning back home but her dreams were shattered when Giri again talked about the Lilac house. Now she realized that he married her to acquire her property. The love that they shared was all nothing but fake. Meera has understood that she will not let her Lilac house go and Giri will not return in her life. Anita Nair has projected Meera as Goddess Hera and Giri as God Zeus in *Lessons in Forgetting*. The god's dominance over goddess is evident from the fact that he left her without knowing her the reason.

What Next?

Now the life is no easier for Meera to live. Till now she was a daughter, a wife and a mother and now suddenly has become the man for her family. She had her grandmother, mother, Nikhil and Nayantara to take care. Nayantara holds her mother responsible for Giri's exit. She wanted that her mother should have given the Lilac house to her father so that this

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situation could have been avoided. Life cannot be so harsh for anyone but for Meera another trouble was waiting. The publisher refused to publish her new book as the news of their separation became public. Giri had promised to buy hundred copies of the books but now the publisher is not ready to take the risk. She has tried all her best to minimize the expenditures and her family was supportive to her. But all these efforts were not enough to live comfortably.

Meera gets the job of an assistant to Prof. J.A. Krishnamurthy whom Nair refer as JAK is a well known expert on cyclone studies. Meera is now financially stable and living a decent life while taking a good care of her family. Meanwhile, Giri demands divorce as he wants to get married to someone else sets an example of betrayal. Meera also decides to move ahead in life. JAK and Meera who both had bitter past comes together to start a new life.

Kala Chiti who is again a strong female character in the novel is aunt to JAK. Her life is also depicts the evils of patriarchal society, male dominance and betrayal. Her husband Ambi used to praise her hair but not her. One day like Giri, he also left home as he finds Kala Chiti to be not capable of bearing a baby and marries another female. Unlike any other Indian women, Kala Chiti decides to start a new life with Sarada.

The female characters in the novel of Anita Nair are the epitome of real life fighters who are ready to face all the odds of life without sacrificing their dignity. They are capable of fulfilling their responsibilities as a daughter, wife, mother or a worker. In a patriarchal society, feminism dies but the writing of Anita Nair has proved that when woman wants to get out of her shell then she fears nothing.

Fight for Social Cause

When woman fights for the society, she has to pay a price. Anita Nair has penned down the pain of Smriti who is the daughter of JAK. Smriti comes to India to complete her studies. She comes in contact with Shivu who works at Stree Shakti forum. Her bold attitude and dedication impressed Mathew and Rishi. She was the representative from her college and because of her interest became active member of the forum.

The coordinator of the forum, Rupa wanted to organise a workshop in Tamilnadu against female feticide. Smriti moved to Tamilnadu to When Smriti arrives at a hospital in

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Minjikapuram, she finds that huge number of pregnant ladies used to visit to determine the fetus sex. If the result shows positive for a girl they did not hesitate to abort the fetus. Smriti decides to fight against this social cause. Anita Nair has talked about this social evil in *Lessons in Forgetting* to aware the society about the existence of it. Her character is bold enough to take action against this issue. Smriti convinces Chinnathayi to help her. But destiny has planned something else for Smriti. She became the victim of the conspiracy of the people who support feticide. JAK was surprised with the valorous attitude of her daughter. After investigation, he found the truth which shattered him. This incidence of *Lessons in Forgetting* is an apt example of male dominance. When a woman stands against the social evil, man cannot tolerate. They try to victimise woman.

Conclusion

Anita Nair has very well illustrated the relationship between man and woman in her novel, *Lessons in Forgetting*. Her male characters are full of ego and are strong followers of male domination on the other hand, the females are ready to rebel against the odds of the society. She did not deviate from her thought of keeping the feminism as her top priority in *Lessons in Forgetting*. This is pretty much visible in all her female characters whether its protagonist Meera, Kala Chiti or Smriti. Nair has been successful in portraying the weaknesses and strengths of Indian women who were once the puppets of patriarchal society. She has successfully penned down the struggles and rebels of her heroines against the conventional role of women. The novel supports feminism through different roles of women be it a daughter, wife, mother, worker or a friend. Male dominance try to shove woman in the darkness but the characters of Nair do not hide under their shells rather they bounce back with dignity and courage. The writer is successful in motivating the woman to live a life of choices rather than empowering patriarchal society by not rebelling. The life of a woman should not end when a man leaves her rather this should be the beginning of a new life.

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