

## Scrutinizing Emancipation of Female Characters in Anita Nair's *lessons in forgetting*

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### Abstract

In the modern era, the marriage between a man and woman is considered in a materialistic aspect with less importance to value of relationship promises. Anita Nair is one of the prominent woman writers of Indian writing in English who portrays the women characters as strong individuals of the society. Most of her novels explore the themes of bonding towards family and relationships, freedom of women, positive development in the lives of female protagonists and gender inequality. *lessons in forgetting* is not an exception; the female characters face dependent on family members, yearn for love and struggles to establish their self-identity. The women even experience betrayal, gender discrimination and female feticide. However, Anita Nair presents her female characters in a unique manner throughout the novel, since they do not give up their pursuit for happiness in life for any kind of struggle, they tend to proceed further and make their own way towards the enlightenment of their destination. *lessons in forgetting* emphasis on female characters with self-realization on their own significance as an individual with value and dignity. This paper aims to examine the way how female characters in the novel emancipates themselves by their strong determination and willingness towards building their life based on their choice of living after hardships.

**Keywords:** Liberty, Marriage, Second Chances, Hope and New beginnings

Anita Nair is a best-selling Indian novelist, poetess, short story writer, and essayist, born in Sharanur, Kerala, India (1966). Her major works include *Mistress*, *A Better Man*, and *lessons in forgetting*. She is awarded the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 2012 for her dedications to literature and culture. Anita Nair contributed language and screenplay to the film adaptation of *lessons in forgetting* with the lovely spark of hope for every woman in society, paving the road for her to obtain a national film award. The novel demonstrates story within story techniques and interlinks sub-plots with central plot till the end. The protagonist, Meera and also the other female characters build the successful path towards their own life after the departure of their husband. “Why is this happening to her? All this grace, such joy, all of life heeding her budding” (1) denotes Anita Nair at the beginning of the novel.

Meera, the protagonist, is a cookbook writer well known for her recipes among the world created by her corporate husband Giri. She aspires to be noted and liked by others as evident in the party. She tries to hide the delight in her when someone compliments for her physical appearance. The relaxation of her perfect day vanishes when she learns that her husband disappeared abruptly from her life. She questions herself for the change and dislike of her husband towards her and she screams her emotional misery in silence for few days.

She finds out through an email that he is no longer interested in her and moved out of their family. The reason she discovers is her husband's unaccepted plea to sale the Lilac house due to his sinking business. Meera witnesses the unfinished email of Giri, “Sometimes I think I could strangle her. She refuses to listen to reason. I tried explaining it to her... But I can't stop seeing the figures the property developer quoted.... She just needs to be persuaded. I will wait till I catch M in a more affable mood. There's nothing else to do. After all, it's Madam's lilac house” (40-41).

Meera, unlike other women in society, does not bury her individuality when her husband abandons her. She takes responsibility to take care of her family and starts her journey in search of a job to balance the financial necessity of her family. Meanwhile, when she is hired as professor JAK's personal assistant, it focuses on resolving her need of a perfect supportive life partner through mutual understanding. He was in the good books of his

daughter Smriti but the unpredictable change of time made him to wander in search of the true happenings of the incident in order to find out the cause of his daughter's ill state of health, Anita Nair emphasises the importance of parenting language, "You shared with them all that life had taught you about life itself so they could avoid the mistakes you made. And yet, when they choose to make their own mistakes, you had no option but to be there for them" (68).

The emancipation of Meera occurs when she recognises Giri's desire for divorce and freely moves with another lady, and she establishes a new life for herself that helps her family and work rather than repressing herself with gossips of society. She also accepts Smriti with all her differences and yet chooses to treat equally as her daughter. She is a fantastic example for every woman in society who has been deceived by her spouse and is left without hope to not live like a caged bird, but to discover her own way of leading a meaningful life.

Kala Chiti is another female character who, in a different way, comes to the end of her wedded life. Her hair used to be thick and long, and it weighed her down and pained her neck. She wishes to chop her hair into a reasonable length, but her parents have never allowed her to do so. They believed that the long hair would attract a good bridegroom and when they found a match to her, he adored her hair to the extent of calling her as Vaidehi, but they are terribly not connected in terms of love. The words of a child might turn the nature of life from heavier to lighter within a fraction of second. Anita Nair represents this fact through Kicha's words to Kala, which made a significant change in her life, "what you see, actually sense and feel at that hour, will change you for life.' I smiled at his intensity. At his choice of words...What shall I call it? Hope? Freedom? Peace? ... I wanted it forever. That feeling of being on the threshold of something momentous" (198).

Kala isn't given the same amount of care and attention she has, before chopping her hair a little without informing it to her husband. She was named for breaking their trust and none of the family members engaged with her the way it is supposed to be earlier. After seven years of not having a kid, Ambi decides to marry again and offers that they live together as sisters in the same house. This experience prompted Kala to leave her pointless marriage and depart from Ambi. She serves as an example for all the women in the society to choose their self-respect upon any circumstances. Kala never reproached him, she chops her hair as she pleases and choose to live alone for the rest of her life as Anita Nair demonstrates with the powerful lines, "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” (206). When Kitcha finds out the truth, he hates himself for her condition, but she rejects, insisting nobody is to blame for what happens in other people's lives.

JAK recounts his childhood memories where he is called as Kitcha and pampered by his father and mother but the wave of life hits them in other way. Kitcha's mother, Sarada Ammal is another woman who is abandoned by her husband in the name of devoting his life in sanyas and heading to pilgrimage. Sarada Ammal could not accept the decision to end her marriage life and worried what she would be able to accomplish without him and how she would nurture Kitcha without his help. She did not act against her husband's wishes or disagree with his ideas, yet this is a tragic event in her life. Her emotional state was literally devastated as a result of the sad incident, “‘I clung to him. I shouldn't have. When people stop loving each other, they shouldn't stay together. It doesn't do anything good,’ Amma continued. ‘I should have understood his happiness. I should have let him go when he first wanted to’” (149-150).

She then used wait for him at all significant events, dressed in a way that he liked and cooking all of his favourite recipes in the hope that he would return home. However, as the days pass, she notices that her husband does not return home. She is among the strong female individuals who rises up, continues her education, and flourishes as a Mathematics teacher, and finds a job for the welfare of her son and to satisfy their living essentials. She eventually falls in love with her co-worker, a Physics instructor, and marries him while Kitcha is still sixteen years old. She cares about Kicha, and it's clear that when it comes to her own life, she has every right to choose her second life and move on.

Following that, Kala Chiti and Kitcha stayed for each other in a beautiful mother-son relationship. It highlights that a child may not grasp his mother's decision at an early age, but when he experiences the world, he better understands it as stated by the author Anita Nair, “‘Kitcha, who could already interpret the hue of the water, density of the clouds, and in whom there was a genuine sensitive, ought to have found the empathy to take his mother's hand in his and forgive her of whatever guilt she may have felt by telling her, ‘You must marry again. And this time, Amma, choose a man who loves life. Not one who wants to run away from it’” (234).

All of the female characters opt for second opportunities in life and are not completely shattered by the absence of their husband. Anita Nair shows female characters as great individuals who face adversity but surpass the limits set by the family and society based on marriage issues. Women persisted with their obligations and opted to stand out for their rights while men chose to abandon their families, finally laying a strong basis for a better life. The women succeed in fulfilling their roles as mother, daughter, and wife, and the novel demonstrates that women are not objects to be abused psychologically, but rather fight back and stand on their own two feet.

The novel depicts how all of the female characters move on after incredible life-changing tragedies and discover new paths that allow them to shine even brighter. This is a wonderful handbook for all women in society who, due to family obligations and cultural pressure, repress their goals to fight back. The novel's growing female characters urge ordinary women to seek a lovely new beginning after enduring the storms of life. Carly Fiorina, an American businesswoman rightly points out a feminist as “a woman who lives the life she chooses.... A woman may choose to have five children and home-school them. She may choose to become a CEO, or run for president.”

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