

SUFFERINGS AND PREDICAMENT OF MEERA IN *LESSONS IN FORGETTING*

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Abstract :

Anita Nair's novels poignantly capture the multifaceted experiences of women, highlighting their struggles, resilience, and quests for identity within the constraints of a patriarchal society. Her three novels, viz, *Ladies Coupe* (2001), *Mistress* (2003), and *Lessons in Forgetting* (2010) present a crisis in the lives of central female protagonists, namely Akhila, Radha and Meera. Anita Nair's fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* is a touching story of redemption, forgiveness and second chances in life. The novel depicts the stories of women facing varied issues existing in a patriarchal society such as gender inequality, love, betrayal, sexual, domestic violence, female foeticide and rape. Nair has vividly depicted the predicament of the central protagonist, Meera in the novel who emerges as a new woman and succeeds in restructuring her life during the course of her life. Meera loses her individuality while carrying out her role of a devoted wife of Giri. She seems to be emotionally and economically dependent on her husband, allowing herself to be swallowed up by Giri. She has confined herself to be an obedient wife of Giri as she doesn't aware of her strength and independence. It is only when Giri deserts Meera for another woman that Meera is able to find out her strength and self-identity. The present paper intends to examine how Anita Nair has delineated Meera's sufferings and predicament in the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*.

Key Words: Patriarchal, Identity, Predicament, Betrayal, Sufferings

Introduction :

The exploration of feministic issues in literature offers profound insights into the socio-cultural dynamics that shape women's lives and identities. Anita Nair, a prominent Indian author writing in English, has significantly contributed to this discourse through her novels. Her novels showcase various feministic issues like women's struggle for independence and self-identity, their quest for identity, gender discrimination, the suppression of women, domestic, sexual violence, and exploitation of women within and outside the marital frame. Nair's fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* is a story of women's quest to move on in life as Nair shows how educated women try to assert their individuality in the male dominated society. Nair's portrayal of Meera's character shows how a woman can deal with difficult situation calmly and assert her identity and individuality in the male chauvinistic society. After her husband's desertion, Meera's predicament and sufferings have been brilliantly and vividly

portrayed by Anita Nair. The present paper is an attempt to examine how Anita Nair explores women's predicament and sufferings through the depiction of Meera's character in the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*.

Predicament of Meers in *Lessons in Forgetting* :

Lessons in Forgetting is a touching story of redemption, forgiveness, compassion, recovery and second chances in life. The protagonist Meera has been shown as a gracious, well-educated lady and writer of cook books. She is married to Giri who comes from a comparatively poor social background. Meera blindly considers that Giri loves her truly and never thinks of his greedy intention. She seems satisfied in leading her role of a devoted, corporate wife with her seventeen-year-old daughter, Nayantara and nine-year-old son, Nikhil. However, at Sunday's brunch Giri disappears mysteriously. Eventually Meera learns that Giri has abandoned her for another woman.

After the death of Meera's father Saro seeks refuge in the Lilac house for herself and her nineteen-year-old daughter Meera. Meera has the responsibility to take care of Saro and Lily. Meera never envisions big dreams in her life. Meera has a postgraduate degree in English language and literature and stewardship of Lilac House. Meera is not ambitious and has been leading simple life with Saro and Lily as she knows, "Enough to retain dignity and not have to ask reluctant removed relatives for a temporary handout. Enough to live as they did" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 41). Meera's life changes suddenly when the Lilac House is chosen for the photo shoot of Coconut Kisses by an advertisement agency. Giri, one of the crew members of a photo shoot, falls in love with Meera. Meera also utterly and hopelessly falls in love with Giri as he calls her his pet goose, goose girl of the lilac house. However, Meera is unaware of Giri's true intentions of marrying her. Meera only wants to marry Giri and doesn't want to slip away him from her, "She wanted him. Poor Meera. She never asked what he wanted. Her, the lilac house, or together what they represented" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 36). When Giri asks her to be his corporate wife, Meera happily agrees to become a corporate wife and the woman behind his success and thinks that they both will build their lives together. She puts away all her doubts and suspicious when Giri asks her to live in the lilac house after their marriage. Afterwards Meera transforms herself and becomes the corporate wife of Giri. She becomes the bestselling author of a cookbook. It is only after Giri's disappearance from a Sunday brunch that she realizes his ambitious and greedy nature.

The novel begins with narration of a vivacious Meera who feels as if she can't stop smiling. She is very happy in the Sunday brunch with Giri and Nikhil. She realizes that she is having a splendid time in the party as she feels, "And this is the life she so wanted. Meera knows for certain that there is nowhere else she would rather be" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 8). She feels herself protected under the patriarchal authority of Giri. She considers herself Hera, the earth goddess, corporate wife and Giri as Zeus. Suddenly Nikhil informs her about Giri's disappearance from the party. Meera tries to hide her worry and bewilderment. She becomes desperate to think about Giri's disappearance. She thinks, "My Giri is not Zeus. He does not frolic with nymphets or even goddesses. He is prone to fits of rage; he is ambitious. But he is eminently trustworthy" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 10). Afterwards Professor Jak drops Meera and Nikhil to their home.

Meera suffers and goes on thinking about Giri and his disappearing act from the party. She feels, “And Giri, she wanted to scream. What is this game you are playing? Where have you gone?” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 25). At home she starts thinking of excuses that she can make for Giri’s absence. Giri’s disappearance causes her to panic and lose her composure. She asks herself if it is her denial to sell the Lilac house that makes Giri to abandon her. Ashish Gupta points out, “Meera finds it difficult to manage, financially in Giri’s absence. She finds her life full of clichés. She does not agree to sell the Lilac house because she cannot sell the house as her grandfather has taken the house on ninety-nine years lease. The house has to surrender to the original owners after forty five years” (Gupta, 109).

Meera suffers due to Giri’s sudden absence but she is hopeful and tells herself repeatedly, “What else could it be? She grasps as desperate women do at any straw to prevent her thoughts from going down one particular, obvious alley. A narrow, dark, fetid lane called the other woman” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 39). Then she tries to console herself by telling herself not to panic. Meanwhile, she opens Giri’s email account and in the draft folder she finds an unfinished email and comes to know about Giri’s true feelings and intentions. She stares appalled at the unfinished mail of Giri: “Who was he writing to? And who is this Giri? Where is such rancour and bitterness coming from?” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 41). She finds out Giri’s hatred and malice for her as well as his greedy nature.

The following morning Meera thinks about her petrified future and in the span of sixty seconds: “her mind leaps, vaults, hops, skips, tumbles, cartwheels, gyrates and contorts into a million possibilities of anguish in waiting” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 69-70). At breakfast, Meera has to inform Saro and Lily about Giri’s sudden disappearance. Precisely eighteen hours after Giri’s disappearance, Meera receives email from Giri informing her his clarification for leaving abruptly from the party. Meera suffers after reading Giri’s email and thinks if Giri has left her and what he means by their life together weighed on him.

Meera gropes within herself and thinks what she is going to do and cope in her life without Giri. She knows that her mother and grandmother are not easy to live with. After her marriage she cannot bear for Giri to reprimand or ridicule them. She recalls how she would comfort Giri after his arguments with Saro and Lily. Meanwhile, Saro and Lily read Giri’s email. Saro consoles Meera that she is a good wife and Giri will never be able to replace her. When Meera informs Nayantara about Giri’s disappearance, she suffers to hear her daughter’s allegiance to her father. Nayantara’s accusations haunt Meera: “Meera thought, how is it that my life has never risen above a series of clichés: Big house, poor inmates; boy comes on work to house, falls in love with house and girl; they have two children – boy and girl; man rises in career, wife trails him, happy to be his helpmate; the crisis of middle-age; man abandons wife; family divides – boy with mother, daughter declaring her allegiance to the father...” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 76).

After some days Giri meets Meera in the coffee shop to discuss about his disappearance from the party. There Meera reads a disavowal on Giri’s face and she realizes that she has lost him: “And in that stance, arms tight against his sides, his feet at ease, his face clenched and his eyes obtuse, Meera reads a disavowal. Even before he speaks a word, she knows. She has lost him” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 79). Meera suffers to know that Giri wants to start his new life

and there is another woman in Giri's life. She feels alienated as Giri's betrayal causes a vacuum in her life.

Shocked by Giri's betrayal, the heartbroken Meera finds strength in herself as she begins to economize to run their house and nurture her children. She decides to publish cookbook and communicates her publisher, Randhir to publish her next book. However, Meera suffers when Randhir does not agree to publish her book. When Nikhil offers his iPod to sell, Meera suffers and thinks that Giri has robbed her son's childhood, "Somewhere in your new happy home in your new happy life, I hope it occurs to you that you have a child who has resolutely willed his tongue to never again utter 'I want', or 'I need'" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 91).

Meanwhile, Meera starts finding a job so that she may be able to give financial support to her family. The abandoned wife tries to be protectress. She wants to reinforce herself in her life. She succeeds in gaining the job of the subtitling editor which she thinks is not at all dignified job. Meanwhile, Sheela, the director of PR firm, offers Meera a job of a research assistant of Professor Jak. Meera accepts the job of the research assistant which she thinks will make her less undignified. Thereafter the devastated Meera succeeds in reorganizing her life and in gaining her identity. She soon realizes the difference between Jak and Giri as she recalls, "Giri was always living up to an image of himself and he wanted her to do the same" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 132).

When Vinnie becomes Meera's friend, she tells her about Giri's betrayal and abandonment. Vinnie supports and encourages Meera to lead her life boldly. Meera no longer thinks about Giri. However, she suffers occasionally when she thinks of Giri: "But she thinks of him often and though it is with a rancour that stings, she misses him a thousand times a day. It creeps up on her rather abruptly, that moment of irretrievable loss, the emptiness, a cruel hand squeezing her heart with a cold clutch and causing a whimper in her: Oh Giri" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 169).

Meera suffers when Nayantara gives her Giri's letter containing his explanation for the legal separation. Meera suffers when she sees distraught Nayantara for Meera knows that children want to live happily with their mother and father under one roof. Her sufferings can be further seen when her mother dies in an accident. She suffers as Giri doesn't offer any kind of help for the crematorium process. At that time Jak provides assistance to Meera. Meera feels dejected. As Meera's own grief binds her tongue, she finds it difficult to console Lily who has lost her daughter. When Meera observes Lily and Nayantara in depressed mood she suffers, "How would she bear it if something happened to her daughter? How does Lily? Until now, it has never occurred to her that grief can have its own weightage. What is worse? The loss of a parent or one's own child?" (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 227).

Gradually, Meera emerges as a new woman as she succeeds in restructuring her life. Pavani J. Reddy aptly remarks, "Meera, though very much disturbed, puts on a brave front and tries to readjust herself calmly to the changed circumstances. She moves with her children to greater adjustment along with her mother and grandma" (Pavani, 133). She becomes financially independent and carries on her responsibilities as a mother and daughter. She attends Vinnie's party at her home on her own. Meera finds her inner strength when she boldly deals with

flirtatious fellow, Raj in the party: “Now that she has dealt with the wolf, Meera is confident enough to gambol with the lambs” (*Lessons in Forgetting*, 186). Her grandmother, Lily also encourages her to live her own life and become a new woman. Jak also encourages Meera to carry on her research and write books. Towards the end of the novel, we see Meera and Jak come close and decide to start a new beginning.

Conclusion :

To sum up, Nair’s portrayal of Meera’s character shows predicament of an Indian woman like Meera who gets betrayed by her husband. At the same time Nair also shows how an Indian woman can deal with difficult situation calmly and assert her identity and individuality in the male chauvinistic society. After her husband’s desertion, Meera no longer remains a weak woman but turns out as a new woman who copes with all the adversities of life. Meera emerges as an independent and emancipated woman in her life.

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