

Inquisitiveness to explore the Truth in Anita Nair’s *Lessons in Forgetting*

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Abstract:

Tradition, Culture and Patriarchy are the major factors that influence the Society. The relationship between an individual and the society is always reciprocal and influential. Effective functioning of an individual is related to either family or Society. Anita Nair touches boldly on the varied aspects of individuals and reflects on the complexities they encounter in the journey of their life. Anita has portrayed two different stories in the novel *Lessons in Forgetting*. She has interconnected Meera, a striving mother and JAK, a father in chaos. The novel focuses on these two central characters who overcome the challenges and sufferings of their life and also their determination to emerge against the social crisis and finally forgiving the offenders. This paper aims to explore the quest of a father to find the hidden truth of the fatal accident that led his daughter to a comatose state.

Keywords : Society, Sufferings, Challenges, Quest, Truth, Forgiveness

Anita Nair asserts the irony of Indian Society through different angles. *Lessons in Forgetting* centres on two different characters Meera and JAK, Meera a forty four year old cook book writer, wife of an ambitious man named Giri who abandons her and their children along with her mother and grandmother. JAK, Prof. J.A.Krishnamurthy is a cyclone expert who in his late forties is relentlessly in search to find the mysterious truth behind the fatal accident occurred to his teenaged daughter Smriti, which resulted her to a lifeless comatose state.

Meera is a passive woman whose life revolves around her family and the Lilac House, where she has spent her life with her mother Saro and her grandmother Lily, an actress years ago. The house plays an important role in her life, as it is the cause why Giri, her covetous husband belonging to a lower middle class family traps her to marriage and years later collapses their married life when she strongly denies on his persuasion to sell the house. His target being unfulfilled, one fine day in a party, he leaves her and their children. Meera realises that she and her children had been abandoned and understands that “she has been so blind.” (42) “Meera

never dreamt big dreams. She had no desire for designer clothes, diamonds or expensive holidays. In those hard years after her father's death, she learnt to worship at the altar of enough. That was all she ever hoped for." (41) It was Giri, who was the "god for her enough" (42) But it was after reading his mail she realises that "Giri had wanted more than enough" (42). Though desperate, to support her family, she very soon joins as an assistant to Prof. JAK, who dropped her and Nikhil, her son to their house when she was left alone by Giri at the party. His abandonment made her life in chaos. To meet the financial needs and the responsibilities of her family, she finds a job and joins as the assistant to JAK. Eventually they both get close to each other without guilt. Even though they find succor in each other's company they have their own individuality and boundaries within them. At an instance, when Saro, Meera's mother dies in an accident, it was JAK and not Giri who gives her the strength to tackle the situation.

Prof. Krishnamurthy, a cyclone expertise in USA, deserted by his wife, Nina; has two daughters Smriti and Sruthi of which Sruthi stays with Nina and Smriti remains with her father JAK, who returns to India to find out the cause of his daughter Smriti's accident that led her to a comatose state. He regrets for letting her to go to India all alone. The novel also focuses on the parent-child relationship. Nair has employed the narrative technique which helps to explore the fundamental and crucial features of parent-child relationship. Smriti wishes to study in India and with the complete support of her father she reaches India for her Undergraduate studies. She becomes a social volunteer of a group studying in Bangalore as she wishes to be a socialist. But the little girl knew only very little about the dark side of the world that she sets her foot in. She met her friend Shivu at the Stree Shakti Forum. He and his theatre company had been invited by the forum to conduct a workshop. Rupa, the Coordinator of the Forum plans to conduct a play on female foeticide. She wanted the play to be taken even to the little towns including Dharmapuri, Salem, Madurai in Tamilnadu. Stree Shakthi has planned to have all their representatives there so that Shivu could train them. Smriti too took part very actively in the play. She reaches Manjikapuram with her friend Rishi Menon. She gets injured by a bit of broken glass at the beach. She visits the nearby hospital for treatment and there she finds many pregnant women coming to the hospital to know the sex of the foetus. She also learns that they were forced for an abortion if the scan report shows to be a girl child. Smriti feels it to be illegal and hence she starts collecting proof against it. Abandoned by her boyfriend she thinks of dealing the case by herself about the clinic that does foetus scan and foeticide. She meets Chinnathayi, whose daughter dies at the nursing home during the abortion.

Smriti decides to collect proof against the illegal deed and Chinnathayi had promised to help her. But Rishi warns her as the wrong doers threatens him,

"These are dangerous people. This isn't America and you are not Erin Brockovich...You can make a fuss about what's happening once you are out of here. But it isn't safe to stay on!"(295)

As she proceeds with her findings, they send her a message in the name of Chinnathayi asking her to come to the beach. She falls into their trap. She is physically abused by a gang and is wounded brutally. Chinnathayi was a mute witness of the brutality and all she can do was to watch it muffling her horror by scuffling the end of her sari into her mouth and pressing her

granddaughter, Vana's face into her side so that the child saw nothing nor heard nothing. Brown Miller states that “in a sexual assault physical harm is much more than a threat; it is a reality because violence is an integral part of the act.” (*Against Our Will* 40)

JAK's meeting with different people to investigate the truth finally ends with the meeting of Chinnathayi,

“She moves deeper into the house. The man doesn't cross her threshold. He stays resolutely on it. ‘I am Smriti's father. Do you remember Smriti?’ Chinnathayi takes a deep breath. ‘How is she?’ she asks quietly. His expression doesn't change. ‘It would have been better if she had died,’ he says in a voice devoid devoid of all emotion. ‘Yes, it would have been better if she have died,’ Chinnathayi agrees, turning away. Her face is in the shadows.” (308)

Chinnathayi had seen those three brawny animals who didn't leave their meat tearing in excitement beyond her scream. She was the mute witness of the human mind in all its twisted forms.

JAK's search for truth thus reaches a dead end. He confronts truth in its entire enormity. He realises that it is not just a teenage relationship but a larger social issue that Smriti chose to fight. But when women stands or raises their voice against the evils in the society they are being silenced. He feels proud about his daughter after knowing the real cause of her comatose state. To him, Smriti has attained the ultimate aim of one's life by taking up a social responsibility and thereby JAK attains a kind of relief and satisfaction. Instead of taking revenge he takes up the decision to forgive everyone. Meera consoles him and shows motherly affection to Smriti. Meera's agony seems to be nothing when compared to the tragic incident that JAK undergoes with his daughter. This picturises on the element of life being torn out and being rebuilt. It also throws light into the major issues faced by innocent women in the society.

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