CHAPTER-III

SEEKING THE SELF

The motto “know thy self” was a message of tremendous importance for Socrates. You cannot know anything about the world if you don’t look inside you.

-Bluesacorn

These words were addressed from the temple of the Delphic Oracle to the individual who wished to gain knowledge, inscribed on the top of the entrance of the temple. People in ancient Greece used to ask for advice from the Delphic Oracle when they were in a state of deadlock, as they were unsure about a crucial decision regarding serious existential issues, of personal and public character. They were looking for an answer to the questions regarding their self. They were waiting for a vision. According to Jung, vision is a psychical fact, a goal presented by the unconscious to the individual, something that the individual has to work towards in order to achieve his self. It is a demand that has been expressed to the individual by the psyche in order for him to achieve a state of harmony and happiness with his being.

In the words of Chandra:

The self is the distinct characteristic individuality of a person. The human self is a self-organizing, interactive
system of thoughts, feelings and motives that characterizes an individual. Self is the result of human’s awareness of the individual as a separate entity in the social environment (2).

Carl Rogers, the famous psychologist, defined the self or self-concept as an organized, consistent, conceptual gestalt composed of perceptions of the characteristics of the ‘I’ and ‘me’ to other and to various aspects of life, together with the values attached to these perceptions. The social environment enables people to regard their emotional experience, their own integrity and identity in relation to their past, present and future. Self and society are interconnected and this is a kind of web that is partly under the guidance from self and partly under the guidance from the prevailing social pattern.

The most important archetype to Jung would be what he termed the self. It could be described as the ultimate pattern of psychological life that he characterized it as both the totality of the personality, conscious and unconscious, and the process of becoming the whole personality. It could be described as the goal of one’s psychological life.

Anita Nair is an Indian writer in English who dives a greater depth into the psyche of her characters and successfully brings out their urges, hopes, dreams, traumas and fears on their journey of seeking their self. Her characters undergo a long tiresome swim to
keep themselves afloat as self-defined people in the society. Her characters go through plenty of psychological sufferings as a frustrated housewife, as Janaki Prabakar and Praba Devi do in “Ladies Coupe”, as frustrated working-women with little recognition in the family as Akhilandeswari and Margaret Shanthi in “Ladies Coupe” and Meera in “Lesson in Forgetting” do. Not only women but also she chooses men like JAK in “Lessons in Forgetting” and Mukundan in “The Better Man” who travel an unpleasant journey in the betterment of their self and search of meaning in their life.

In “The Better Man”, the maiden novel of Anita Nair, each and every major character suffers from a kind of psychological problem, that arises out of disappointment, some of guilt and selfishness. Mukundan Nair, the protagonist of the novel suffers from a sense of guilt that, he had been the root cause of his mother’s death. Bhasi has got a past in which he had met with a love failure. Though he seems to have come out of it and become a healer, he has no self-fulfillment till Mukundan accepts him as his friend. Anjana, Mukundan’s beloved is disappointed about her first marriage and finds solace and comfort in Mukundan who is fifty years of age.

Mukundan is at the age of 58 now. Right from his childhood he is not given a chance to bring out his self. When Mukundan was thirteen he discovered the manifest power of the written word, ‘Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life, or whether that station will be held by anybody else, these pages must show’ (14).
When he read these words from David Copperfield his English teacher had given him, he felt his insides quiver with the certainty of knowing. Mukundan realized that this was what he would like to do for the rest of his life. “Write. Make words express the dictates of his mind. With words, he could rule kingdoms, swim treacherous currents, bring tyrants to their knee. I will be a writer, he told himself again and again, hugging the thought with a furtive joy” (15). But his heap of joy was brought down to nothing when his father Achuthan Nair tore not only the sheets of paper where he had written the Brontes and Dickens but also his desire to become a writer. “Let me tell you boy, banish that thought from your mind. No son of mine is going to waste his life trying to be a writer” (16). Even as a child Mukundan found his “self” unrecognized. This attitude of his father created a dislike for him in the boy’s mind. Hence since his childhood Mukundan was forced to get the approval of his father for everything he desired. He was in a situation that if his father was against his desire, he should forget it. Though he dislikes his father he is afraid of him and submits himself to his father’s desires. As Nadine Richters observes:

> Even if he senses his desires he learns to sacrifice them for the sake of his father’s satisfaction. Here living becomes more for the other self than for oneself. He often felt his self beaten. These sacrifices lay the foundation to his gradual loss of identity (101).
So his self is forcibly pushed down to the unconscious. For Freud the unconscious was a depository for socially unacceptable ideas, wishes or desires and traumatic memories. Mukundan’s desires are unacceptable for his father. Bhasker A. Shukla says, “The ego, super-ego and id are the divisions of the divisions of the psyche according to Freud’s later theory. The id contains “primitive desire” (hunger, rage and sex), the super-ego contains internalized norms, morality and taboos and the ego mediates between the two and may include or give rise to the sense of self” (10). Mukundan’s hunger for writing has been paralyzed by his internal fear for his father, but his self that is the ego between the two, even at the age of 58 Mukundan is at the process of seeking his self. He is on the way of searching a life to live for his self.

Nadine Richters observes, “One can conclude that his father’s prohibition not to become a writer is a horriable trauma to Mukundan” (7). The unconscious mind includes the instances of traumatic memories of the past that has its effect on the present. Mukundan does not want to keep the memories alive but cannot help it. Achuthan Nair keeps on tailing his son’s life as, “when he began to live alone and no longer had to fear his father’s wrath, Mukundan still could not bear to read a book. It caused too many inexplicable emotions to surface” (14). Mukundan seems to run continuously away from his self. He is a pitiful creature being at the age of fifty-eight, still floundering in a swamp of uncertainty, afraid of his father
and haunted by guilt. Yet Mukundan had an intention to please his father and create a better understanding between them. When he gets his first salary, with a lot of hope, he buys a pair of leather slippers for his father, but as Mukundan expects, this act seldom brings a change in his father, but is just discarded. Not only this, but also Mukundan remains unmarried being afraid of his father that he would reject the choice made by him. As Ester Fialova Says:

> Even as a grown up individual he is unable to take decisions for himself on his own. The fear ingrained in Mukundan Nair is so deep that he is unable to experience life or living. He sinks further into his cocooned self every time he tries to get the admiration of his father and he fails (11).

When Mukundan comes back to his native village Kaikurussi at the age of 58 after his retirement he is not able to be at peace in his house where his mother had died. He is troubled and tortured by nightmares. He saw his dead Ammuma, his three Cheriyammas and Balammaven staring at him with accusing eyes for having killed his mother. “When he turned he saw them. Sitting there watching him, immobile, silent, but with accusing eyes” (29). Mukundan has an unconscious conflict of being the reason for his mother’s death. He is often reminded of his mother’s last words to him, “Take me with you, son I am so unhappy here” (31). Nadine Richters Says, “Mukundan knows that he has been suffering from his mother’s death for years.
He is haunted by a sense of failure for having abandoned his mother” (3). He carries this conflict within him even when he is sixty. This unconscious conflict has become the source of his neurosis. Moreover his extreme love for his mother is because of his Oedipus complex. The Oedipus complex is a male child’s unconscious desire for the exclusive love of his mother. When Mukundan was a boy his mother had tried to shield him from his father’s cruelty. Now Mukundan suffers from a sense of guilt as he had not shielded her from his father’s cruelty. Mukundan till he is sixty has never realized this trauma and has never made an attempt to come out of it. When he is back in his house Krishnan Nair comes to his rescue. But he is not able to do anything for the betterment of Mukundan’s psyche. Krishnan Nair is not able to sensitize the severity of Mukundan’s trauma as he comes out just with an advice which cannot pacify Mukundan:

“Your mother could have prevented what was happening to her. The heart break. The humiliation. But she chose to remain a victim. So don’t go about guilty for what happened to her. It’s all in your mind. If you want to look around you and see mountains, forests and oceans, you will. Or else you will see little mounds of earth, spare bushes and piddling streams” (7).

Mukundan refuses to look forward but just sticks to his own perception. Nadine Richters rightly observes, “The mountain that was
As Flat as a Field on Top” which is a metaphor for that Mukundan does not see the peak of a mountain to which he could climb ie, he has no aims”(5). Hence Mukundan little tries to overcome his trauma. He runs continuously away from his self. He is a pitiful creature, being fifty-eight, still floundering in a swamp of uncertainty, afraid of his father and haunted by a sense of guilt. The beginning of the destruction of Mukundan’s self is by his father, but in the later part of his life he himself deceives his individuality and blames others for his uncertain life.

Bhasi, the one-screw-loose Bhasi, a housepainter by profession and healer by vocation, makes it his mission to get to know Mukundan and heal him, “I looked at the cracks, the degradation of strength and wondered at what must be the condition of the inner walls, the inner man. And I knew I caressed the sad walls that these could be repaired. You can be healed” (11). Once upon a time Bhasi was Bhaskar Chandran who had all dreams to live his life to its fullest with the kind of education and enthusiasm he had in life as a lecturer in English. He often dreamed of a life that would be sweetened by Omana, his student. But one day when all these dreams and hopes were shattered, he felt that he wanted to cling to the last fragments of self-respect and would have to leave. He had come to Kaikurussi not only escaping a train accident but also escaping the unpleasant remnants of his past. He himself conquers his self as he says:
To human body has a natural in-built capacity to heal itself. To safeguard against trauma and disease. All I do is reinforce that natural vitality. I don’t work miracles. I don’t wave a wand to kill diseases. I simply find a remedy for the baby to fight that disease (9).

Bhasi takes pride that he has been chosen to bring forth from the churned up mud of some wrecked psyche a luminous and complete mind:

A whole being that perhaps God even wouldn’t aspire to create. And that everything that I have done leading up to this moment the decision to come to Kaikurussi, the knowledge I have been steadfastly acquiring, my success with difficult patients, all of it has been in preparation for this day (10).

Bhasi helps Mukundan to overcome his sense of guilt. More than a healer, Bhasi seems to be a friend to Mukundan. Till then nobody has taken care to ask Mukundan:

Tell me Mukundan. Tell me what it is that haunts you so. Tell me off the darkness that clouds your life. Tell me how is it that you have chained yourself to the clock. Tell me why you have about you the smell of a hunted animal. Tell me. For there in lies your escape. Your hope and someday your happiness may be (12).
But Mukundan is reluctant in accepting Bhasi neither as a friend nor as a healer. The same reluctance in taking a decision to take his mother along with him had resulted in her death. Though he is not directly responsible for his mother’s death, he suffers from a sense of guilt for being reluctant. Yet he is reluctant in letting himself to overcome the sense of guilt. But Bhasi’s constant encounter with him results in success. He is made to sit in an earthen jar that is like a woman’s womb. It is his mother’s womb that helps him to rewrite his destiny:

Crouched in the womb, Mukundan called forth his genes. He reverted to his original from a single cell. Bit by bit the embryo of the new man developed. Eyes. Nose. Ears. The three sensory organs. Two hearts fused into one. Budding limbs. Bones. Genitals. Lulled by the warmth of the jar, fed by the soothing drone that washed over him, Mukundan felt himself dissipate. He closed his eyes to shut out the light. Surrounded by blackness, he felt himself split into several selves. All of whom had no claim to the one that had stepped into the urn. Disembodied, he was no longer anything that he had been before. He could separate himself endlessly so that he could be anything he wanted to be. A new man, a new life. Afraid no longer. Capable of so much more than he had ever dreamed off (199).
And so Mukundan has been healed from the hurt that he had carried in him like a secret malignant tumor gnawing at his insides. Hence in Mukundan there has occurred a sudden, dramatic outpouring of emotion that has resulted in the resurrection of his trauma. He has experienced as insight that has made him aware of the source of the emotion of the original traumatic event and he is on his way to become a happier and better person.

Bhasi, though happy over Mukundan’s betterment, suffers from a nameless fear if the betterment could take Mukundan away from him. Bhasi is a healer of the inner man. As he well knows the condition of the inner walls, he knows the inner man’s too. “And I knew as I caressed the sad walls that these could be repaired, you can be healed” (11). But this great healer is in need of a companion to share everything of his. He asks himself why he is in need of such a friendship—“Perhaps what I seek now is a friend like I have never had before. Someone to share a smoke and my thoughts with. Someone who will see life with the same eyes as I do; experience the same lift of spirit when mine soars” (186). Bhasi is afraid that Mukundan the man capable of love and happiness now will make him incapable of love, happiness and inner strength, that would result in losing his power to heal as he says, “For as you discover what you accomplish by yourself, you will realize that you don’t need me any more” (187). So the healer Bhasi has turned into a mere painter Bhasi, the one-screw-loose-Bhasi.
It is quite natural that everyman searches for a recognition in his dwelling place and Mukundan does not escape this. When Mukundan enters Kaikurussi soon after his retirement he thinks that he is of no significance in the village. He finds Ramakrishnan, the powerhouse Ramakrishnan addressed as ‘Sir’ by everyone in the village. When he was a child he had lost his self-esteem that was not realized by his father. But now he is not ready to lose it again. He falls a prey to powerhouse Ramakrishnan’s flattery and betrays Bhasi, who had been a mender of his cracked psyche:

Never respected for the individual he has been, no when he is given recognition, he succumbs to flattery and alienates himself from his well wisher. His greed for recognition and acceptance, importance and adulation had blinded him to everything else (349).

He had given up the love of Anjana, in whom he had discovered a true love and Bhasi, in whom he had found a priceless friendship. Mukundan’s pride of being one among the community hall committee had an end with the death of his father. As Nadine Richters says, “he is struck by remorse and guilt”(12). Achuthan Nair was no ordinary man. He inspired respect. No one could have seen such a turnout for a funeral before. At this juncture Mukundan realized he had done nothing with his life. He felt completely alone and insignificant. He wanted to be a significant person in society and had achieved it, but his self doesn’t consider it to be significant. “What am I going to do,
he asked himself again and again. He no longer knew who he was. It was time he confronted the truth about himself. He could no longer hide behind the layers of self-deceit” (344). He felt bad that he had worn the costume of self-deceit. He found his self null and void in that costume. Now he asks himself “Who am I? A better man than my father or merely an extension of who my father had been? This is what I have to discover” (344). All these years Mukundan had been a creature who had hidden his inadequacies by using his father’s domineering methods as an excuse to explain his own weakness of character. Only now he feels the nakedness of his self challenging him. He has been a selfish being whose world and happiness revolved around the kindling of his fragile ego. He had been a timid man who used his niceness as a disguise to deflect attention from the fact that he had made nothing of his life. He has been selfish, insensitive, brutal, incapable of neither loyalty nor love. So Mukundan has an encounter with his self:

What do I do next? How can a man evolve into what he desires to be? How can he stand taller than his father and create a new line of vision for himself? How can he set himself free of his father’s presence”. There was still life left to live. Who did he have to share it with? I have betrayed the only two people who have loved me and given all of themselves to him-Bhasi and Anjana have used them and discarded them because it suited me to
do so. I was no better man than my father had been.

Perhaps I am the lesser man (346).

Mukundan has never been so alone in his life. Now when Krishnan Nair says that he is going home Mukundan is surprised. Krishnan Nair too has had a past. He has done the same to his wife and family. But now he is on the nearest possibility to discover the happiness of his self. “In the few years left to me, I’m going to try to make her happy, and in the process find some happiness of my own” (347). Before leaving Mukundan, Krishnan Nair leaves a meaningful question to him, “What is the point in surviving if you have no one, to share your happiness or grief with?” (348).

With the question of Krishnan Nair, begins the transformation of Mukundan. One last time he sought the confines of the earthen pot high in the attic. Cradled in its stillness, he called forth the man he knew was there somewhere within him. That being that had eluded him all these years. The confusion of his tortured spirit churned until what rose to the top was the means to his release. It was an end to the repugnance he felt for himself. When he climbed out of the urn, he kicked it on its side and smashed it to thousand pieces. He was confident that he would never need it again. From then on Mukundan did what his conscience told him right. Between the individual and society he made his choice. He wants to be a better man. He wants to know what it is to love and to give and in turn to be loved. He is a
man who had discovered happiness, harmony, contentment and fullness of living.

Mukundan decided that he would never allow his past to damn his passion of loving of giving. He did not want to see the community hall, that entombed failure, his failure as a friend, as a lover and as a man. The new Mukundan wanted no such remnants of his past staring at him every day. So when he explodes the community hall he explodes his past. “That edifice to the man he had been would no longer exist. This was the moment that had eluded him all his life. When he would become a man. A better man than he ever had been. Mukundan felt his destiny flicker, leap and change its course” (361). And that is the betterment of Mukundan’s self, where he decided to choose for the sake of his self-harmony and not for the society.

Anita Nair is a writer who emphasizes woman’s need for self-fulfilment, self-realization, independence, individuality and self-actualization, in her day-to-day life. As Indra Devi says, “Nair is perhaps the most self-conscious Indian novelist who has carved a unique creative niche of making her characters discover their self, out of their own existence” (219). She is very conscious about the inner mind of women that strives for its self amidst their daily happenings of the household, the family relationships, family ties, the joys and sorrows the ups and downs, and the leaps and falls.
In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair brings out the inner conflicts that arise in the inner world of women which often stand as a barrier to seek their self. Like Anita Desai, Anita Nair too deals with middle class family stories. While Desai’s novels depict the mental conflicts coiling their heroines who are unable to come out of it, Anita Nair’s novels depict the sufferings of her women characters, but makes them become their strength and weapon to fight out their predicaments. As Muthulakshmi Paramasivan says, “These women with their strength, indomitable will and undefeatable spirit break all the barriers in life, learn to live by their own rules and finally achieve their goals of self-realization” (1).

A good understanding of ones own self helps a person to step ahead according to his own self-will, which gives him self-fulfilment. But often a person fails to realize his self because of too much of stress, burden and negligence. Though the quest for self springs out often, it takes a long journey for them to discover it amidst all external pressures. Anita Nair makes her women realize the importance of their self.

Anita Nair says in an interview:

To me feminism in the Indian context is about recognizing the importance of the female self and to be able to nurture it. Very often, we Indian women tend to negate ourselves as something that is expected of us. In fact there may be
no pressure at all from extraneous sources for us to do so. Perhaps it is conditioning or perhaps it is lack of self-esteem, we do not consider ourselves important enough and so we tend to put our needs and desires on the back burner.

In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair dives a greater depth into the inner world of women, extracting experiences from daily life and presents a delineation of their psyche which craves for self-fulfilment, self-actualization and self-knowledge. She probes, into their mind and pulls out their strength and courage. Bhasker A.Shukla says, “Self psychology, which emphasizes the development of a stable sense of self through mutually emphatic contacts with other humans” (19).

As Umesh observes:

Anita Nair’s *Ladies Coupe* depicts the problem of self-apprehension and self-identity. She presents the extreme situations arising out of a conflict in the inner configurations of the individual—the conflict between reason and instinct, desire and reality, involvement and detachment (3).

In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair extracts the daily life experiences and presents it with great dimensions, intertwining it with a woman’s search for strength and independence. The central theme of the novel is the existential predicament of the woman as individual. She
portrays six women in a railway compartment who differ in their age, profession, place of living and brought up. They share with the central character Akhilandeswari, their life story, that links her in some way or the other and make her rediscover the possibilities of life. As each woman narrates her experience in her life, Akhilandeswari feels that every woman including her is standing on the threshold of self-discovery to seek for a new destination. Nair has chosen this technique as she believes that there is a lot of power and strength in a woman that does not come out naturally by itself but needs some extra pressure to pull it out. The five women in the coupe are Janaki Prabhakar, a pampered wife and confused mother; Margaret Shanti, a chemistry teacher married to Ebenezer Paulraj, an egoist tyrant too self absorbed to recognize her feelings, desires and needs, Prabha Devi, a perfect daughter and wife who keeps afloat in life by a glimpse of a swimming pool, Sheela Vasudevan, fourteen year old, who has the ability to perceive which others cannot and Marikolanthu, whose innocence was destroyed by one night of lust.

Akhila the protagonist survives alone at the age of forty five. She is born into a middle class Brahmin family that is striving to keep afloat in Chennai. As Sunita Sinha says: “Akhila is a frustrated spinster who has spent her youth by taking care of her mother, siblings and their offspring” (151). After the death of her father who had worked in the Income Tax department, Akhila has to take the chance to work as a clerk in the income tax office. Since then she
takes the responsibility of being the head of the family and thereby shoulders the burden of the entire family. As she does this, everyone in the family becomes selfish to merely use her off and bother little about her desires. She finds them shamelessly living off her, taking her for nothing more than a cash-cow. She is exhausted of taking various roles of a daughter, sister and aunt and decides to get rid of her family and responsibilities and picks up a train journey as a means of escape from them and hoping to seek her self as it is said, “This is the way it has always been. The smell of a railway platform at night fills Akhila with a sense of escape. . . . Akhila has often dreamt of this. Of leaving. Of running away. Of pulling out. Of escaping”(1). As Anita Nair puts her protagonist Akhila in a nut shell “This is Akhila. Forty-five years old, sans rose- coloured spectacles. Sans husband, children home and family. Dreaming of escape and peace. Hungry for life and experience. Aching to connect” (2). While she is waiting for the train, she witnesses a mixture of emotions among the crowd, which she feels is very much a part of her life too that is “Renunions, farewells. A smile. Tears. Anger. Irriation. Anxiety. Boredom. Stillness. Akhila sees them all” (2). She places herself in ladies coupe with her fellow, travelers-Janaki, Prabha Devi, Margaret Shanthi, Sheela and Marikolanthu. As the train moves, all the five share their life story not publicly but with Akhila. Initially Akhila is reluctant to share her story with them but then does it as she is sure that they would never see each other again. When the other women say that it is high time that she must take her own decision, she gets
convinced but finds in her the haunting of a nameless fear as she herself says, “My heart was hammering in my chest and I was paralyzed by a nameless fear. How can I?.. How I am I to manage a home? When I fall ill, what will I do? Who will I turn to? What do I know of life? How am I going to cope?”(2). Hence the train journey metaphorically implies Akhila’s journey towards her self. She is standing at the threshold of seizing it.

There are people who have not been given chance to think of their self or who have not come across situations that would make them quest for their self. Anita Nair has presented one such character and she is Janaki Prabhkar. She is the eldest of the six who had been living a married life for forty years. She has got nothing to worry about life as she has been blessed with a friendly husband. Not only after marriage but also before it she was a cosseted daughter and sister. She has never felt a hostile treatment either from her husband or from her parents. But at this juncture in a train journey she realizes that she has taken up a life that has not given her an opportunity to assert her self. Only now does she realize that she ought to have done something for her individuation.

Janaki says that too much of such things have made her a fragile creature. So she herself accepts that she has developed as a fragile woman as others have dominated her and pushed herself to the bottom, not giving a chance to prove herself. She says that she believed that a woman’s pride and contentment rule over her home.
But later at a certain stage she begins to lose interest and says, "I thought if I were to lose it all, I would cope. If I were to become alone, I would manage perfectly. I was quite confident about that I think I was tired being this fragile creature" (23). So Janaki is able to discover the strength in her but what makes her sad is that she is not provided with a chance to define herself. She speaks with self-realization but to her surprise at the end she says, "Now I know that even if I can cope, it wouldn't be the same if he was not there with me" (24). Janaki is the sort of woman who does not have the need of doing it. She is self-contented of her life pattern but it is not her self-fulfillment. As Jaya Srivastava says, "yet self-fulfillment is a long way and women are victims of circumstances beyond control" (6). Janaki has become a victim of her husband but she tells Akhila that she could not imagine a life without her husband. As Akhila listens to the words of Janaki she thinks if she had committed a mistake in choosing a life to live alone. "Janaki 's soft voice continued to echo in her head. It occurred to Akhila that she was doing it all wrong. She is afraid if it would end in a predicament" (27).

The next portrait is Sheela Vasudevan, the youngest of the six. She is fourteen years of age, but has the confidence to perceive things which others fail to do. She is too young to develop such a mental courage. She has acquired it from her dead grandmother whom she calls "Ammumma" in whom one could find manifestations of feminity. She was a great one for manifestations of feminity. She comes under
the circle of very few Indian women who think that the primary thing in a woman is to please herself. She says, "You mustn't become one of those women who groom themselves to please others. The only person you need to please is yourself. When you look into a mirror, your reflection should make you feel happy" (68). She gave much importance to please herself that every night before she went to bed, she stood by the mirror in her room and splashed her face and neck with calamine lotion. Then she dusted her still smooth face, her lined throat, her plump shoulders and her huge pendulous breasts would take that smell of lavender. Finally she opened her jewellery box, caressed the gold and gleaming gems, went to sleep with the weight of her jewellery on her marked skin. She did it that she should look her best even if she were to die in sleep.

Judes Jalaja says, "Of all the women in the novel, Sheela makes strong feministic comments on the need to assert the individuality of the female selfhood" (122). Sheela seeing the spirit of selfhood in her grandmother develops it in her strongly. As she sees her dead grandmother not more than just a mound of flesh she is upset. She makes up her mind to prepare her in a way she would like to do, least bothered about her family members. "Sheela rubbed her aunt's foundation into her grandmother's face, shoulders and chest. She adorned her with costume jewellery " (76). Sheela does this to please herself inspite of all disapproval from her mother, father, aunts and uncles.
Anita Nair has portrayed Sheela's character not only to bring out the need to assert the individuality of the female selfhood but also the need of a woman to develop as self-protective against sexual abuse. Sheela feels ashamed, hurt and disgusting at the unwanted touching of her friend Hasina's father Naazar. She is unable to open her mouth against the physical abuse attempted on her, but develops confidence and courage to protect herself from it in future, as thereafter she mopped her face with a hanky each time she entered Hasina's house. Then she takes a strong decision that she would never go to Hasina's house. She means "I am a woman who can protect myself" (45). Listening to her story Akhila's fear is lessened. So Akhila is on the way to gain self-esteem through greater trust of the self. She is in the development of a stable sense of self through mutually emphatic contacts with other humans.

Next comes Margaret Shanthi, a Chemistry teacher. Among the five elements that constitute life, she classifies herself as water. She is water that moistens, water that heals, water that forgets, water that accepts, and water that flows tirelessly. At last she celebrates the triumph of herself that says "water that also destroys" (96). All her desires and needs were pushed behind by her self-opinionated tyrannical husband Ebenezer Paulraj. In the beginning she has lived in self-deception under the slogan, "Love separates reason from thought" (111). Her extreme love for him had maddened her thoughts. Beginning with her petty pleasures like having a long hair, eating
bhelpuri in roadside stalls and ending with her desire to pursue a doctorate and to have a baby, in everything Ebe stood there to crush it down. In all these things it was her love for him that blinded her to say nothing more than, "He was Ebe. My Ebe. He was right. He was always right" (109).

For the first time Margaret feels her self esteem eroded when Ebe insults her in front of the coterie and repeats to throw the same insult and finds triumph and pleasure in doing that. He adds to her rage saying, "Frankly if you want my opinion, when I think of it, it is the odour of rotten eggs" (130). It was here Margaret realizes how he had destroyed her “self” everything that would have been good and noble about her life. She thought of the baby that died even before it had a soul. She realizes how her attitude to get a doctorate abroad has been turned out to be nothing. She is agonized as she reflects how her dreams have become wounded dreams. Her mind undergoes a sublimation of her mind when there is a self-realization in her that she has lived in self-deception all these years with her love on him, to bear with him and that has been reciprocated in a way that her husband has thrown on her anger, shame and insult.

For the first time she feels her self-esteem eroded when he insults her in front of the coterie and repeats to throw the same insult and finds triumph and pleasure in doing that. He adds to her rage saying, "Frankly if you want my opinion, when I think of chemistry, what comes to my mind is the odour of rotten eggs" (130). At these
words she dives to search her inner strength and the power to wage
war against an egoist husband. And there lies the victory of her self.
She wages a silent war against him and vanquishes his oppression
living simultaneously with him. She has become a woman of self-
determination to keep him always dependent on her. As she is a
woman of her self she is angry and vexed when she listens to Janaki’s
story that will interrupt Akhila’s journey in seeking her self. So she
tries to take out the hopelessness and fear from Akhila’s mind after
she has listened to Janaki’s story. As Sunita Sinha says, "she tries to
shutter the slogan of a woman needing a man to be complete, by
relating the story of Ebenezer Paulraj and herself "(123).

The next portrait drawn out interestingly with a different life
story is Prabha Devi. Prabha Devi had grown up as her mother had
expected of her. She is married to Jagdeesh who offers all the
luxuries and comforts. As she has got everything in her married life
she thinks that she is the luckiest woman on earth. But this had
been her past. In her present "Prabha Devi always made herself
believe ‘how lucky I am to be me’, but each time she tells herself this,
she is tormented by the memory of an experience that is hard to
obliterate” (98). As Bhasker A Shakla says, "According to Freud,
people often experience thoughts and feelings that are so painful that
people cannot bear them”(7). Prabha Devi is tormented by a sense of
guilt as she had lost her self-harmony long back. When she was on a
business trip to New York with Jagdeesh her husband, she is lost in
the poise, confidence and celebration of life and beauty of the women there. "Their lives were ruled by themselves and beauty" (100). She took hold of all these and continued them coming back to India.

For the next three months Prabha Devi winged her way through the days. She felt quite confident and proud of her beauty. Unlike Sheela’s grandmother she groomed herself to please others. When people shot her admiring looks, she pretended not to notice. But she knew that wherever she went she attracted attention. And she reveled in it,"I am young. I am beautiful " (179). But she did not think that all would end up unpleasantly till Pramod her husband’s friend made his advancements towards her becoming a victim of her entices. “That day she decided to lock away the gay spirited woman who had caused her such anguish. She withdrew herself from life and she became a woman beyond reproach and suspicion.

Prabha Devi was a good wife and an excellent mother whenever she said, "I became a woman, neither heard nor seen" (184). Her inner mind said that she had become the woman who ceased to want more for her self. She realized that she was lacking in something. Though often she said that she was an excellent mother and wife she could not find self-fulfillment. She lacked self-harmony as she was guilty of her past. And moreover her happiness was on being a mother and wife and not living for her “self”. But she never thought she would seek it through swimming and that her desire to learn swimming was a way to assert her self and that could offer her self-
fulfilment. As she dives into the pool of water and keeps herself afloat she feels:

This body that had been the cause of much unhappiness, first with its excessive demands for ratification and then with an abrupt deadening of nerve ends now melted. Life would never be the same again. That nothing else that happened would ever measure up to that moment of supreme content when she realized that she had stayed afloat (195).

Ever since Pramod made her life sour, she was crippled by fear and guilt but then she had overcome them and redefined herself to say "I am afloat. I am afloat. My body no longer matters. I have this. I have conquered fear "(195). Varalakshmi makes a comment on Praba Devi as “She triumphs over her innate timidity and gains ‘peak experience’ of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband as well” (69). She had succeeded in her inward quest for self as she experienced a self-harmony, self-fulfillment and self-contentment.

Aftermath of Praba Devi’s revelation Akhila experienced a heady anticipation that held her that she was right. Perhaps more than any of the other women, Prabha Devi was the closest to her age and manner. She felt herself saying that if Prabha Devi could triumph over her innate timidity and rise above traditions to float and conquer her self she too could do that.
The last woman left out in the coupe with Akhila was Marikolanthu. Her life was different from that of the rest of the women. Anger poured out from her like a stream of lava. According to her, when compared to her tragic life, the other women's were nothing but they were making lot of fuss over trivial things. But all the chain of tragic events of her had made her emerge as a strong woman. All these have made her say, "Women are strong. Women can do everything as well as men. Women can do much more. But a woman has to seek that the strength in herself" (210).

Marikolanthu had a heavy strife in seeking her self. She is a pathetic creature who had been attacked brutally of her mind, body and soul as she was raped in her teen and left with injustice as she was born poor and oppressed and the person who had raped her was a relative of the Chettiar. She had run endlessly with shame, hatred, anger, failure and despair. She had always been a "sister to the real thing" finding happiness under the shadow of anybody else, that of the foreign sisters or Sujata who have been her favourite. She had hardly felt for her son Muthu who was born successfully after many attempts of abortion. She was a cruel mother who sold her son to meet her demands:

So I mortgaged the boy to Murugesan's looms for the next two years in return for five thousand rupees. He would be paid ten rupees a day. Thirty days made three hundred rupees, twelve months would fetch three thousand and
six hundred rupees. All I needed was five thousand rupees (265).

It was January when Murugesan had destroyed her life and in another January his life had come to an end. There stood Muthu as a keeper of graves, the overseer of the dead Murugesan, not knowing that it was his own father. As the flame leapt on his dead body and burnt him, Marikolanthu felt the bitter remnants of Murugesan in her life were burnt. At this juncture, she experienced a self-awakening. She felt ashamed for having used her Muthu. She did not differ from the long line of people who had used her and then discarded her when their need was over. So she decided to measure happiness by living a life for herself living a mother for Muthu. She decided that no longer she would be a sister to the real thing but to be the real thing:

I felt a quickening in my phantom womb. My child was about to be born. I wasn’t going to wage wars or rule kingdoms. All I wanted was a measure of happiness. All I wanted to be was Muthu’s mother. For so long now, I had been content to remain a sister to the real thing, surrogate housewife, surrogate mother, surrogate lover. But now I wanted more. I wanted to be the real thing (268).

All these days she has been a self-sacrificial woman who measured her happiness by making others happy. But then she
transforms into a woman who could find supreme happiness and contentment by seeking a life for her self along with her son Muthu. Marikolanthu feels, as Kahake says, “If I detach love from myself, life becomes empty and without substance. I lose my own self-hood”(5). She is a new woman who starts loving her life. She does not bother about having a son with a nameless father. She is a woman of strength and independence.

The life story of all the five women made Akhila strong. As Kanna Muthiah says “In Ladies Coupe, the real life experience of other women characters produce a sort of psychological treatment to Akila and helps her to take the right decision which enhances her to be a powerful individual ”(49). She had become a woman with a pure consciousness of her self. She had allayed all her fears. She had demined herself for so many years. Now she would no longer walk with a downcast head, she would no longer allow her family to use her any more but she will live for herself. As Sunita Sinha says, “She is empowered to reclaim her lost love and releases herself from the hold of conventions and family expectations” (157). She is going to live her life making herself entirely free of family shackles. She had become the woman who had sought the strength and courage in her family. “I am the woman you think you have wondered about. For within me is a woman I have discovered” (270).

Anita Nair’s third novel Mistress inter-relates five important characters which experience a sense of guilt, betrayal,
disappointment, shame and anger towards their way to seize their self. One of the protagonists Koman is a renowned Kathakali dancer who is in his retirement. As a performer he has retired, but the true spirit of a Veshakaran in him has not retired. Inspite of being a renowned Kathakali dancer he fails to realize his self-worth. Moreover he suffers from an identity crisis right from his childhood. Though he has a quest for self he is not able to seek it easily. Chris plays a vital role in helping him to seek the self.

As Umesh observes:

When one tries to realize self in a half awake, half - asleep state one is led nowhere. It becomes more of a one dimensional picture of self. Koman was led into revealing his past as he answers to queries raised by Chris. At a certain point Koman, who didn’t like talking about himself, finds that he was doing exactly the opposite. He attributes the act of talking about himself as a means of finding himself (16).

He has been brought up without knowing anything about of his mother and a father who visits him scarcely. As Koman reveals his past to Chris he pours out how as a boy he hasn’t been able to address himself in the first person. He has always called himself in the third person:
The boy met his eyes for the first time and said, Koman would like to know the name of the river'. Sethu stared at his son. Then he said softly, 'You must stop addressing yourself in the third person. It sounds weird. Say I. I want to know the name of the river' The boy's eyes fell. Then he raised them and, looked again in to his father's face as if seeing him for the first time. He said, 'I' want to know the name of the river' (122).

Koman in his unconscious mind has had the repressed thoughts of his parentage. But he is able to make up himself with the new family of a readymade mother, brothers and a father who has been there to take him with him after a long period of time. Though he suffers from identity crisis he is able to overcome it through understanding and mastering the repression in the unconscious. As Bhasker A Shukla observes:

For Freud, the ideals of the enlightenment, positivism and rationalism could be achieved through understanding, transforming and mastering the unconscious, rather than through denying or repressing it. (7)

Koman does not deny his past to Chris. Here Chris tries to bring to consciousness the repressed thoughts and feelings of Koman. This is said to be the goal of Freudian therapy or psychoanalysis, to bring to consciousness the repressed thoughts and feelings. Chris acts as a
therapist and encourages Koman to talk in free association with him of the past. Bhasker A. Shukla states, “Classically the bringing of conscious thoughts and feelings to consciousness is brought about by encouraging the patient to talk in free association of the past and repressed thoughts” (5).

As a boy Koman has suffered with the fear of not belonging. He has battled with ‘I’. Unlike other boys he has had no tags, tails or suffixes but is enrolled in a school and has a new life with a ready-made family with a father, mother and two younger brothers. He has a quest to know the belongingness of that - ‘I’? He feels a little relieved as he comes to know that his mother had been a wife and not a bastard. Even after his retirement Koman feels the non-belongingness of him to anyone. Though he has received national awards, they haven’t given him contentment. He wanted to belong to someone. He is seeking for someone, to whom he can belong to. So he asks Maya if she can marry him. “I don’t know. Perhaps I am feeling my age. I long to belong to someone. I want to know that someone else has a stake in my life and well-being. I was beginning to feel “ (311)

Koman is so confident that he is an outstanding Veshakaran. Yet he is unable to realize his self-worth. He is yearning for the criticism of Nanu Menon. He feels a curious trembling running through him. He has been transformed into Keechakanvile, arrogant, lustful. When the crown is placed on his head, the metamorphosis
will be complete. But he expects the crown of Nanu Menon's criticism:

Nanu Menon. They said one word of praise from him could change a Veshakaran's destiny. He seldom went to see young dancers perform. Tonight he was here. Members of the audience and the committee members each one bearing praise as if on a platter. Koman searched their praises. Would Nanu Menon come? (315).

When he finds Nanu Menon has gone he convinces himself saying, "Nanu Menon may not have come backstage, but he couldn't be able to ignore him in print" (315). But the following Sunday when he finds the comment of Nanu Menon saying, "This Veshakaran seems to imagine that there is a Keechakan beyond the poet's characterization. As for the final moment of Keechakan's death what was it, Kathakali or drama?" (316). At this he feels his self esteem torn down. Nothing could have hurt him more. He felt his body tremble. He would have to seek a place within himself to shake off the repugnance of Nanu Menon's words and gather courage. His words had devastated his self. He didn't want to be seen or heard. He didn't want any attention. He wanted to be alone, to lick his wounds and summon back some vestige of self - worth. If at all he wanted to seize back his self he had to forget the review of Nanu Menon.
Koman needed some time to forget his failure. He felt like never he would be on stage again. He needed sometime to wear back his colours and crown as he said to his Aashan, “I feel like I never want to be on stage again. I know I should listen to you, but I feel that I have lost my nerve. I have to find my courage again” (322). So Koman thought that he would turn his back on the world which was unable to recognize his devotion to his art or his worth. He was not able to forget his failure easily. "Who was he? Koman felt diminished, stripped of his own self and worth. Tears welled again. He didn't know what else to do. Then a little voice whimpered in his ear: You could end it all" (323). So Koman wiped away the colours of a Veshakaaran and slipped into the role of a dutiful son, rambunctious young man and, above all, an ordinary being without any artistic pretensions. He was tired and drained of all emotions. He learnt the value of being with people whose minds were contained by the practical needs of everyday. He let it comfort him.

It is very difficult for one to escape the past and Koman was to discover that the past is never left behind. The more he tried to forget it the more it came forward:

One night, when he lit a match, the whit of sulphur rode up his nostrils. For a moment, the familiar moment, the familiar stench of the mannola, the colours he had worn, filked his senses. Another time, a peacock feather
reminded him of the crown he wore as Krishna. Is there no escaping he asked himself (326).

Koman thus dwells on the dilemma whether to become a **veshakaran** again. But the spirit of a true Kathakali artist refuses to leave him. When he went to Chennai to teach Kathakali at the advice of his Aashan he could not do full justice to it as he felt, Kathakali was not given supreme importance. He left Madras and came back to his native land and shared his bitterness with Sundaran, "You see in Madras, they focused on bharatanatyam. Kathakali was an oddity in some ways. How could I stay in a place where Kathakali isn't supreme?" (330)

When he finds Kathakali getting diluted and sold as a tourist attraction and success defined by money and awards he cannot compromise. He feels betrayed when he finds the traditional value of Kathakali losing its purity. He says:

> I can live with the nation that an artist has to do other things in his own field to keep his body and soul together. Like a classical musician singing film songs for a living. But if he compromises on the classical music traditions to make it popular, that is sad, it isn't integrity. Don't dilute an art form; instead cherish and nurture it (417).

Once Koman had been a man lacking in self-worth, yearning for the comment of a critic, but later he matures into a person who does
not succumb to pressure of any sort, no matter how flattering. It is a
time when a well-known film-maker makes a short film about him, a
journalist attempts to make a biography of him and he is invited to
conduct workshops and seminars, where his opinion is solicited and
his presence is required. But the Koman now is to say with
confidence, with realization of his self-worth:

No matter how much Koman had met with shame,
disappointment, his self esteem torn down as a Veshakaran he
discovers that the fulfillment of his self is in Kathakali. As Meena
Devi rightly observes, "Koman, from time to time, is in search of his
identity. At last he finds that his life lies in Kathakali" (345). He
recounts how art gives meaning to one's life. He says to Chris how
Koman, an ordinary man, had been made extraordinary by his art. As
Koman shares:

There have been many interpretations of my techniques
and style. I feel removed from it all. It is of no
consequence to me how I am perceived or what the world
thinks of me, as a man or a dancer. What more do I say,
except that it is enough that I don my colours. It is
enough that I am allowed to slip in to the skin of a
character. When I dance, I know who I am (422).

About his long journey to seek his self he relives his memory and
experiences a self-fulfillment too. To quote Meena Devi again, "Chris
Stewart plays the role of a catalyst, forcing Koman to relive his self" (343). Thus Koman comes to terms with his self burying all sores and regrets.

The next character portrayal is Saadiya who is born in a strict Muslim community. Saadiya in *Mistress* is like most of the women characters who break the laws set out for them as they a have a quest for self. Her self lies in her longing for freedom as she feels everytime she contemplates her life within the walls. As Umesh observes:

> Her motivation is not difficult to trace, as it is mentioned quite explicitly several times; whatever she does is motivated by the longing for freedom. How important her need to follow her decisions, is apparent from, how far she goes when pursuing it. The need to experience true freedom is a stimulus that makes her take one step after another until she meets her limits. (42)

Saadiya is born into a Muslim community with harsh rules for women. Her quest for freedom makes her disobey for the first time to merely walk outside the back alley intended only for women and then wandering into the common alley. Though she is punished severely by her father she couldn't help herself longing for freedom as she says, "I wept for I knew that even though Vappa had done all he could, I couldn't stop thinking of those heady moments of freedom of a sky that was not bound by grey walls" (30). This quest for freedom is the
beginning and the end of her self-searching. When Naik says of this, “Freedom is necessary for a man to realize his potential for a complete life” (12)

Saadiya’s first disobedience is followed by the next of her choice of a man who is everything that her community despises. Sethu is a man with no proper education, no proper job and a man with no proper faith. Saadiya's need to experience true freedom is a stimulus that makes her take one step after another until she meets her limit in her faith. Saadiya craves for her self when she has been in her father's house. But later she realizes herself trapped in her faith. She is not able to give up her faith she craves for a freedom of herself which has been imprisoned by the strict rules of her community. But she does not want to throw away the faith her community has built in her.

Then she said, 'I am a descendant of the original Kahirs. In me is the purest of Arab blood: Islam, as we practice it, is a religion that demands sacrifice. In your village, the Muslims are converts. No matter what, they will never know what it is to be a true Muslim. Everything is compromised to make it acceptable. My son is not a convert. He has my blood (227).

As Umesh observes, "While her life limits the experiences of her faith, she takes a decision that is supposed to free her from both the freedom that limits her soul and the limits of faith that bring freedom
to it” (20). Till the end she has more search of the freedom of herself limiting herself to faith. She reconciles the two longings she experiences and aims at the freedom that death brings her and she has to abandon her son and her man along. Saadiya’s violation of the rules is motivated by the longing for freedom which eventually brings her back to following the rules, although her reputation has been damaged and the limits will consequently be more harsh. In this respect, her breaking the rules can be understood as a bi-product of her search for freedom of self, thus being a limit to itself. Finding the freedom she was actively seeking, she paradoxically abandons everything it offers.

Radha in *Mistress* is a representative of the modern Indian women. She is like Akhila in *Ladies Coupe*, a woman who is in search of her strength and independence. Radha had a past, a shameful past. She had her education in a city away from home and a job too. She liked to think of herself as an independent young woman and this search for independence made her choose a lover too. Her independence was to choose a married man as her lover through whom she became pregnant and thus Radha’s life, her independent life ended up shamefully and she decided to go back to her family. It is her independent way of life that makes her return to her family and marry Shyam and forced to become the traditional woman. She conditions herself to be a self-contained wife to Shyam. As Umesh observes:
Radha impresses him with her self-contentedness and is willing to follow many of her decisions eg. the diet she decides that they follow, yet still he is not able to accept her personality as a whole. Thus Radha finds herself in between her longing for independence which is acknowledged to a certain degree and the traditional role that she is to play (44).

Radha had a quest for “self” and that was why she chose her lover to her satisfaction. But once it ended in shame she had to suppress herself and coil herself into the role of a traditional wife. Forcibly she tries to love Shyam and does not protest against him whenever he makes love as a means to forget her past. Shyam says, “when she responded to my touch. I knew that she was trying to block a memory” (123). But the more she tries to be an ideal submissive wife to Shyam, the more she feels to escape. To please herself she enjoys love and bodily pleasures that Chris offers her. But she is always between her duty to Shyam and attraction to Chris.

Radha is a dutiful wife to Shyam and not a loving one. She is not able to love Shyam when her opinions are seldom respected. She finds her self beaten when Shyam treats her just as a woman who could fulfill his sexual desires:

Don’t I have a right to an opinion? I am your wife.

Your wife, do you hear me? But you treat me as if I
am a kept woman. A bloody mistress to fulfill your sexual needs and with no rights for independence (198).

She turns to social conventions. But once again she seeks for independence as she thinks that her opinions ought to be respected by Shyam. So she is attracted towards Chris who understands and appreciates her needs and opinions. Shyam once looks across Radha’s bedside table and finds a book that read "The story of a woman’s search for strength and independence" (123). Hence Radha’s search for self was her search for strength and her search for independence was her search for a person from whom she could receive love and respect. By doing this she tries to redefine her self-image. Rajan remarks of this as:

Her affair with Chris is such an attempt to engage herself fully in a relationship with a man who appreciates her needs and lets her breathe. This is a second major violation of the rules that is supposed to help her realize herself in a relationship, where she would be just like the women she reads about, able to realize herself. The violation does not however prove to be an efficient one, in the sense that she does not find the space for self-realization she is looking for. Nonetheless, it helps her redefine her self-image and point out what she is and even more so what she is not looking for in her life (45).
Radha keeps running to retrieve her true self. She thinks that she can retrieve it through her struggles and arguments with her husband and an affair with Chris. She finds pleasure in her affair with Chris breaking social conventions of marriage but she is not efficient to realize that such violation of rules hinder her from the self-realization she is looking for. Only when she discovers that she is pregnant there occurs a self-realization in her. She feels guilty and hurt and says, "I am racked by guilt" (397). The more she quenches to retrieve herself the more she runs without destination:

I don't know. I don't know. All my life I have stumbled from one thing to another, persuading myself that this is how it should be. I have never behaved as if I have a mind of my own I have never made a decision. I have let myself be swept along (402).

Radha's mind has been a beast of lust that had stretched its claws, ran a pointed rosy tongue over its lips and draped itself on a vantage spot. She seldom realized that her moments with Chris could not let a meaning to her life. This is observed by Umesh as:

Consciousness is like a log drifting along the tide and at some point of time the characters, each drifting, try to make imitative. In the process many come into the picture who may or may not cause an impact on the life of the individuals. But often the result of this kind of
movement is one is left at the threshold of ignorance.

Ignorance of meaning of life in relation with others (24).

Radha had been ignorant of her meaning of life. She thought that she was drifting in her life with Shyam and tried to get a hold through Chris but at the end left alone with nobody to turn to. She understands neither the meaning of her action nor its result. The extent of her callousness frightens her and hence she decides to leave Shyam. It is her guilt of adultery against her marriage with Shyam that makes her think so:

I have no love left for Shyam. That I cannot love him, I can live with. But I have robbed him of his pride that is to him? It was cruel for worse than the fact that I had never loved him. I must space him his pride, I think I must leave him at least his dignity (397).

She thinks of leaving Shyam but at the same time she does not have mind to go away with Chris as she finds that there has been nothing more than lust in the love of Chris that has carried her away from her marriage:

Do I really think I can make a life with Chris? What do I know of him accept that our bodies respond to each other and that first when we were together, enough. Not any more. The passion is spent and there is little else (398).
Not belonging to anyone Radha flees. She has so many things to look back upon with a curious bitter-sweet sense of loss. Yet she makes her self-contented with the child that grows in her. She starts loving the child:

A child who fills every step and hour of hers with wonder.

She loves it already, and it is this love she wears as a talisman, she has time enough to think of what she wants to do with her life. Count her joys and blessings. She has time (426).

Shyam, Radha's husband, overcomes his poverty by chance of marrying Radha even after knowing Radha's pre-marital affair and that she was pregnant out of it. Right from his childhood he and his mother have been dependent on his uncle for their bread and shelter. Even from his formative years his quest for self begins. He thinks that his self-esteem lies in becoming rich and successful in life. He aspires it and achieves it. As Meena Devi says, "Shyam overcomes his poverty with his strong will and becomes a man of power and authority"(347).

Shyam who runs to keep up his position fails to give love to Radha. He fails to realize the need of Radha and instead tries to satisfy her materialistically. For Shyam his resort is his kingdom. He is very conscious about building up his kingdom and every day does not fail to say the mantra, "Every day and in every way, I will go
under"(160). Meanwhile he understands that Radha has an attraction for Chris. He suffers from shame and insult that turns into anger. When Radha starts coming home at midnights and is unresponsive to Shyam's questions. Shyam turns outrageous and proves his belongingness to Radha by raping her:

You are my wife. I want you to show me some respect.
You are mine, do you hear me: Then I fucked her. The resentment I felt for being tolerated rather than loved, the yearning I had suffered, the loneliness of these eight years, all fused to become a consuming desire to possess her. To make her mine (163).

Shyam is proud that he has succeeded. But his worry is that there hasn't been any sign of a little feet to patter about in their house. This worry is turned to shock, anger and shame, when Radha tells him face to face, "I was pregnant once. So it isn't that I can't conceive. Perhaps you need to find out if you can father a child" (203). He is stunned and fear gulps him to think if he could be sterile. At this moment Shyam finds his self-esteem and self-pride torn to shreds. It even results in self-sympathy. But soon he makes it up as he visits a gynecologist and gets to know that his problem could be solved soon. Shyam meets with shame and disgust when he finds Radha pregnant. At this juncture at first he is angry that pours out as tears. But then occurs a self-realization. All these years he has been a stranger to self-doubt. Now he doubts himself if he has failed to express his love for
Radha. He feels life will be meaningless without happiness and his happiness is in making Radha happy:

So he decides he will give Radha the time she wants. He will not force her or ask her for more than she is prepared to give. He is even prepared to accept the child as his. There he finds an inner peace hurling within, Peace washes over him. It is Shyam, the better Shyam (423).

There occurs the betterment of his self as he keeps away all his ego and pride.

Anita Nair’s latest novel Lessons in Forgetting, presents an intense look at marriage, parenthood, destiny and relationships. It covers a variety of themes such as women seeking their self in Indian society, their dependence on others, other domestic themes like betrayal, redemption, forgiveness, second chance, female foeticide, man-woman relationship and mother-daughter relationship. In this novel, the protagonist Meera is a loving housewife who has been placed comfortable as a corporate wife and a mother of two children. All these years Meera had been the wife of Giri, queen of her world, mother of two, author of cook books, mentor of corporate wives and friend to the rich and celebrated, that she who has everything can afford to be forgiving. She is one among the “women in India who feel proud that they are well protected by their husbands without realizing that they are making themselves helpless.” (Evelyn Shyndya, 198).
Meera is not given a chance to think of her “self” what is her individuation, till Giri, her husband leaves her one night suddenly. Only after she finds her forsaken she starts thinking of herself. As stated by Bhasker A Shukla:

Jung introduced the concept of individuation. An individual can undergo a profound change gradual or sudden-that can manifest from long-repressed intellectual or spiritual needs. This change may be seen as a gift from the unconscious-a warning to take full advantage and not waste this precious second half of life (34).

Meera has never thought of herself. Her life is well contented as 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. Hence Meera is least bothered of herself. The process of seeking her individuation begins when she becomes a totally disoriented Meera when Giri forsakes her and her family one night. The entire family burden is shouldered on the fragile Meera. A fear engulfs her as she has now become the sole responsibility of her children Nayantara and Nikhil and her mother Saro and grandmother Lily. It takes time for her to reconstruct her broken mind and the family.
Meera is a woman who often pushes her self to the unconscious. She doesn’t want to let it grow out as she feels it is not the right time to do so and thus convinces herself. Shashi Desh Pande in an interview with Prasanna Sree says, “Men’s world and female world rarely come together. What the men are doing was not known to women”(149). When once she suspects Giri about his twilight walks out of her sight with his mobile hidden in his breast pocket, and the change in his wardrobe, she pretends not to have seen them and convinces herself telling, “I am not Hera, she tells herself, I will not panic. I will not spew venom or make known my rage. I will not lower my dignity or shame myself. I can live with these shadows as long as it is me he comes home to” (39). So Meera considers it to be a shame on her if she comes out of fear and questions Giri to his face. She is afraid what she would do if Giri leaves her. According to her she is nothing without Giri and doesn’t want the felicity of their lives to be shadowed or tainted or violated.

Meera is unable to realize the truth of her strength within her as she is fully dependent on her husband and thinks that her happiness and fulfilment lies in such dependency. As Evelyn Shindya says, “She is fully dependent on her husband. Though she had a post graduate degree in English, she remains a corporate wife to fulfill her husband’s desire” (199). Meera rested her cheek against his. She would be that happy of a corporate wife, the woman behind his success. It was what she wanted, to be there for him and always near
him. Her state of mind exists as an intangible barrier between her self and dependency.

There happens a traumatic phenomenon within Meera as Giri cuts off himself from the family. As Ajantha Parthasarathy opines of this, “The soft and cozy shell of matrimony which most Indian women snugly fit can break any day and leave the couple exposed to horror and trauma”(127). Hence Meera is emotionally paralysed at the thought that her marriage has become a failure. As Vandana Pathak observes, “The dissolution of a marriage is a very traumatic phenomenon and leaves behind a scarred heart and mind full of intense and serrated memories (56).” All these years she has lived in self-deception. She has little tried to bother that she has her own desires. She is not interested in attending parties, but she joins Giri in order to please him. “Giri must be pleased that we are here with the beautiful people of Bangalore. He will be even more pleased if one of our pictures makes it to Page three” (2). Meera, like every other Indian woman wants to be her husband’s only beautiful darling. Meera desires to become one, like a tall svelte woman whom she sees in the party and here too she desires it, only as Giri tells her. “All I ask of you is upper arms like those!”(3). Only when Giri says this she realizes that she has got a curve on her throat and a fold of flesh has crept upon her chin. So another knot of worry unravels, if Giri will seek someone in her place. She does not want to let way for it and so decides to maintain her physique, “If she doesn’t do something about
hers, she will have bats’ wings very soon. Meera stifles a sigh and takes another plop. The weight lifts. Another knot of worry unravels. Tomorrow she will call fitness one and make an appointment.”(3).

“According to object-relations theory there are three fundamental “affects” that can exist between the self and the other-attachment frustration and rejection” (Bhasker A. Shukla, 26). In Meera’s life all the three become barriers to seek her self. She has other family attachments like her mother Saro and Grandmother Lily. She is totally dismantled at the rejection of Giri. Altogether she suffers from frustration. “Meera gropes within herself, searching for some clue that will tell her how to react. Grief. Betrayal. Anger. Fear. Loss. Resentment. Hatred. What is she to feel?”(73). She never realizes that she can stand on her “self” that is strong and powerful. Instead she feels like escaping from the present. She stands up. The words dry up in her mouth. She feels wrung out. She wants to go home and lie down. “She wants to pull the quilt over her head and burrow herself in a warm, dark place where nothing will change and all is safe and restful” (99).

Balachandran Says:

The quest for real empowerment for each and every woman is within the framework of her individual life, her acceptance, her overcoming, hardless, which she maintains with grit and courage and becoming useful to the society and her own family not losing her self-identity.
She believes in herself. Her mind is more developed in will power (150).

Till Giri was with her, Meera has never had the intention to work though she had a post graduate degree in English. But then she realizes that she is there to take up the responsibility of maintaining the whole family. She urges to become a new woman. A woman who will make her self choose. She becomes aware of herself as an individual and can face boldly the adversities of life with determination and conviction:

They looked at each other, Lily and Saro. This was a Meera they didn’t recognize. A Meera with home economies. A button a call. The pink papers and news magazines cancelled. No more half loads in the washing machine. Lights and fans switched off when not needed. Reheated leftovers. And a measuring spoon that didn’t brim anymore. But they said nothing. The stern cast of her face alarmed them more than Meera realized (84).

Once she was a Meera who had chosen her perfume, lipstick and dress as per Giri’s choice. But now Meera says with determination to the woman in the beauty parlour that she wants a short hair-cut. She feels confident in her starched cotton saree and pearl jewellery:

Give me a new hairstyle. Short. I am. I’ve had this same hairstyle for the last twenty-two years. Ever since Giri
came into my life. And I didn’t want to change a thing. My hair, my home, my dreams, myself. I so wanted it to be what he wanted. But it’s time I became a new woman. Someone I would like to be (177).

Meera is a woman who doesn’t take chances. She doesn’t want to take a second chance in her life. But once in a party in a room full of couples, she slightly becomes a forlorn Meera discovering what it is to be a single woman in a room full of couples. When Vinnie questions her if she could have taken anyone with her, Meera replies with little reluctance, “No there isn’t anyone I want to bring with me” (183). Meera is emerging as a new woman, seeking her “self”, but not the kind of woman what is expected of her by Soman and Vinnie. Often Meera is afraid if she will give way to Sonam and turn against her self. Bhasker A. Shukla says:

Turning against the self is a very special form of displacement; where the person becomes their own substitute target. It is normally used in reference to hatred, anger, and aggression, rather than more positive impulses, and it is the Freudian explanation for many of our feelings of inferiority, guilt and depression (61).

What Meera fears if it would happen and what she wants not to happen, happens at last. She lets Soman feast on her and finds her
thirst quenched through Soman. She suffers from guilt and depression and feels bad how she has cheated her self:

This isn’t her Meera, she tells herself. This is the false Meera. Like there once was the false Hera. I am the false Hera. None of this is really happening to me. It is happening to another woman, the woman he thinks I am. What woman, whether she was Hera or Meera, could remain unmoved when a mouth trailed a line of wet kisses down her spine? The real Hera must have cursed the false Hera. As I curse the Meera I have become (221).

Soon Meera tries to transform and master the conconscious repression that is so painful and moves towards positivising and enlightening her self.

Meera knows what lies ahead. A life to live for her and to love that life. From somewhere in the back of her mind a thought arises, “If you love your life, you are lovable. If you hate your life you become hate worthy”(82). The new Meera starts loving her life as a research assistant to Prof.Jak, cyclones studies expert and fulfills her responsibilities as a mother and a daughter. She starts loving the job, the companionship of Jak, his Kala chithi and Smriti, his daughter:

She will be there for him Meera decides. But to keep herself alive, she will need to dredge all the selfishness that lies deep within her. That she also will ensure that
Jak does not swallow her up, as once Giri did. So Meera
does what she can. She rests her head against his arm.
This is all she has to offer for now. Perhaps one day there
will be more. And a thereafter (326).

Thus she is no more a fragile Meera but a courageous, confident,
strong-minded, self-assertive, self-determined Meera.

A person’s current mental life is influenced by his/her past.
The psychic apparatus habitually represses hatred and aggression
and preserves in one or more unconscious systems of ideas. In
Lessons In Forgetting Jak, the cyclone studies expert has been a
forsaken child. He is haunted by his father’s merciless act of leaving
him as a child and his mother, for his own sake of seeking the truth.
Jak is frightened if he could turn upon into one such father:

It frightened you, the thought of being a father. We bring
to our adult lives what we learn from the adult we knew
as children. How could you be a proper father? It
terrified you that you would be unable to keep the
commitment a child would demand of you. That you
would fail the child somehow. Just as your father did.
Who knew when the time came, how you would be?
Would an innate selfishness emerge? And then there was
the responsibility. What did you know how to bring up a
child? (49).
Ever since his dad left, a ball of fury seemed to reside in his chest. It hissed, fumed, burnt and seethed. “He stared at the sea, counting the waves. He saw the sea wash away the debris and the words he wrote on the sand. Fuck you Appa, he wrote. Jerk. Mother fucker. Bastard. He wrote all the words he had found in the Harold Robbins novels he borrowed from the lending library. A calm settled on him” (16). His soul was quietened for that moment. But he has carried these thoughts in his mind. He doesn’t want him to be a father as his father had been. He doesn’t want to leave his nineteen-year-old daughter Smriti, lying in his house as a tragic embodiment of memory and past violence. He does not know what has happened on her holiday in a small beachside town in Tamil Nadu to make her do so. He cannot rest till he gets to the truth. He is reminded of his father’s words when he left them last, “One day kitcha, you too will know it. A moment of truth and then everything else will cease to be of any significance. Everything else will only seem a deterrent then. An irritant standing between you and your goal” (15). For Jak now, there is a ring of certainty in his voice. Nothing is significant to him. He needs neither Nina nor his job. He is in the journey of seeking the truth, what his self has declared him to.

Sublimation is the transforming of an unacceptable impulse whether it be sex, anger, fear, guilt, whatever, into a socially acceptable even productive form. “For Freud, in fact, all positive, creative activities were sublimations” (Bhasker A. Shukla, 65). The
fear, anger and anxiety that Jak suffers from, have transformed him to a loving and caring father and make him a self-determined person who never lets emotions play between him and his goal of seeking the truth behind his daughter’s tragedy. He determines that he should not repeat his father’s mistake. “Like his father, is he too guilty of parental irresponsibility? How could it be, when all his life, all he had wanted to do was not to repeat of Appa’s mistake?” (151). But he has failed in it. Jak’s self-hate of being an irresponsible father, had made him a self-determined father journeying towards positivity of searching the truth behind his daughter’s tragedy. When Smriti was a baby and wouldn’t sleep, he would take her out of the baby cot and walk her. He had held her to his chest and rocked her each night. As long as he had held her close, she was safe. “How did I forget that? How did I let her go?” (320). This question of self-guilt and self-hate and self-defeat recurs in his mind and makes him affirm his self to seek the truth and that would be his self-fulfillment. On his journey towards this he meets with shame, anger and discouragements as he meets Shiva, Mathew, Rishi and Chinnathayi but he has come a long way from these. “Only he is Jak now searches the skies from the ventilation slats. The mother-of-pearl sheen. It fills him with rapture as it did then. An endless vista of possibilities. He wonders if this is the moment of truth his Appa talked about” (324). But he is unlike his father who was without any guilt of forsaking his son. To overcome this guilt he is in search of the truth behind his daughter Smriti’s tragedy and there lies the true harmony of his self. Nothing is
important to him except this self - harmony and contentment. So he takes off to the way his self takes him to. As he does this with self-determination he finds a ray of hope from Smriti. “A ray of hope comes from Smriti. Catatonia quells. Within a frozen abyss, a tiny vein splinters. A nerve cell is born. A toe wiggles. Smriti. I am Smriti...” (329).

Anita Nair, in the four select novels, has presented an infinite variety of characters both male and female, in their infinite variety of life, exposing the darker and brighter side of their existence. She interiorizes the turmoils and troubles of their mind and their self fragmented and lost in the social predicament. She presents a vivid picture of their inner conflicts, their wounded dreams, their wounded psyche and their strife in their journey of seeking their self. Thereby she has developed and established the fact that there is a process of making of the self in every human in the deepest level of the unconscious, in which an individual grows, develops and slowly seeks the goal of his individuality. In Anita Nair’s fictional canvas the individual is given more importance than the social or cultural milieu. But she qualifies the individual by connecting it with the milieu and that is the locale of her novels. And the next chapter makes a study of this.