CHAPTER-IV

THE CULTURAL MILIEU

In Freud’s psychoanalytic theory of personality, the conscious mind includes everything that is inside of our awareness. This is the aspect of our mental processing that we can think and talk about in a rational way. As per this concept, the recent Indian writers in English are irresistibly conscious to bring out the cultural moorings in their work. They could seldom escape from bringing in, the cultural milieu, with a quest for cultural values, cultural order and stability, cultural disintegration, cultural degradation etc., in their writings. In recent years, Indian writers have made a special place in the world literary scenario through awakening an interest in the riches of Indian culture and civilization as well as the changes it had undergone. India has been experiencing a vast change in the social, political, religious, economic and scientific fields that has been captured and highlighted by the contemporary novelists. Like Arundhati Roy, who in The God of Small Things has not forgotten the small things in life like the insects and flowers, wind and water, Anita Nair has presented a meticulous observation of such small things invariably in all the four novels. She has focused on the cultural background of the important characters, their relationship between culture and life, the adoption and diffusion of cultures giving rise to new problems and various aspects of culture.
Anita Nair is a writer who is aware of the Indian culture and hence has portrayed a frank picture of its cultural milieu. In the four novels *The Better Man, Ladies Coupe, Mistress* and *Lessons in Forgetting* she has brought out Indian culture, its values and its disintegration. Her narrator characters narrate the past and as they do so, their memory provides the cultural environment of their past. They make it interactive and tell us how culture plays a vital role in the life of an individual. They revive and amplify the memory of the past that is broadly related to the cultural environment. As the narrator characters unravel their past, it is found that the novelist has made a minute observation of the cultural milieu. As Anita Nair was born in Kerala, educated in Chennai and is living in Bangalore she does not fail to present a vivid, beautiful and realistic portrayal of these three cultures and the present and past milieu it has formed. Culture takes its shape, as society takes it to and hence society experiences a change as there comes a change in culture.

There is a plurality of meanings for the word “Culture”. Raymonds William says that the Grolier International Dictionary defines culture as “the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions and all other products of human work and thought characteristic of a community or population” (6). E. Tylor Says “Culture is a complex whole that includes knowledge, belief, art, moral, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (6). In the words of Day
Derby the exemplification of T.S. Eliot is, “Culture includes all the characteristic activities and interests of people” (18). From these definitions it is obvious that society and culture are inseparable. Anita Nair has drawn a close relationship between culture and society. She has chosen her novels as a medium of minute feelings to reveal the innate quality of mankind that forms the society, where this formation is structured by traditional and cultural perspectives on all social dimensions. In all the four novels, she has not only presented the colours, scents and geographical landscapes of places but also has taken an intense look at the society as a wholesome package of occurrences that unapologetically debunk recognized culture and conventions of the society inclusive of love, dependency, and betrayal with a frank cultural back drop.

Robert Pinto says, “Culture can be perceived through social stratification. In every society, one finds a division based on various factors. It could be religion, economy, caste etc., (106). Caste system has been practised in the Indian society for centuries. It is deeply rooted and firmly planted in the Indian soil and has poisoned the thinking of the society. Disgraceful behavior towards a caste or castes has degraded to the state of untouchability. Anita Nair has faithfully and realistically presented this in her novels. Like Mulk Raj Anand who presents a truthful portrayal of untouchability in his famous novel Untouchability, Anita Nair presents a faithful and realistic portrayal of untouchability in The Better Man. Untouchability is
contagious disease that eats into the vitals of our social structure. It is an evil that gulps into the vitality of a healthy nation. In The Better Man, Anita Nair shows how Kamban, the postmaster at Kaikurussi, son of a man who emptied buckets of shit from every house, was treated as an untouchable by the upper caste people. Kamban was always kept at a distance, nothing beyond postal transactions. Kamban himself was shrinking into himself, extending friendship to nobody “as though afraid that they would think nothing of hurling a stone at him, simply for the pleasure of hearing him yelp” (147). Anita Nair beautifully brings out the feelings of a man of a lower caste, when he is invited by an upper caste man to his house. When Mukundan invited him for a cup of tea in his house, “for a moment Kamban’s eyes widened, the whites of his eyes spilling a secret fear” (147). The hesitant Kamban came for tea, but met with shame through the words of Krishnan Nair, who said that he could not serve tea for the son of a shit remover. Though Kamban is not doing the work his father had done, he is still considered an untouchable. Though the lower caste people meet with a change in their education and employment, the society is not ready to accept them as their equal. So Krishnan Nair could not accept Kamban entering their house as it would be a sacrilege for them. This could be related to the words of E. M. Forster quoted by Amarnath Prasad, “He is a disgusting as well as disquieting object to the orthodox as he walks along the public roads” (169). But Mukundan seems to speak revolutionary words against this:
Has not Kamban eyes? Has not Kamban hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same food, subjects to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as we are? If you prick him will he not bleed? If you tickle him, will he not laugh? If you poison him, will he not die? (149).

Though Mukundan speaks so to Krishanan Nair, he too has felt the same disgust along with his section manager, Shri Ramappu in his factory in Bangalore just because he is a “Harijan”. As Pramod Kumar Singh says, “Even naming them as “children of God” (Harijan) does not instill any sense of social security and respect for them”(138). When once he had offered his used cigarette to Mukundan he refused to share it. And Mukundan was helpless when he faced the piercing words of Ramappa, “I am sick and tired of men like you who think that being born in an upper caste gives you the divine right to treat the rest of us like animals” (148). This is a clear portrayal of the society that refuses to change inspite of various advancements, no matter in a village like Kaikurissi or in a city like Bangalore.

In the words of Robert Pinto, “Culture depends to a great extent on genetic, geographical, economic and social conditions” (230). The Better Man has a depiction of the geographical and climatic conditions of Kerala. Every year the Malabar monsoon begins on the day the
schools reopen after their summer vacation. When Mukundan comes back to his native village he hears the car driver speaking, “Of rain that waited for clothes to be hung out on lines to dry, for children to set out to school, and for people to leave their homes without an umbrella before it came hurtling from nowhere” (23). As the novel opens it depicts the landscape of Kerala, starting with the Pulmooth Mountain and the hill where Sankar’s Tea club stood. It is an exciting thing that every house has coconut, cashew, pepper and pala tree in its garden. This is depicted in the novel as, “Mukundan’s ancestral house is surrounded with bamboo copse and cashew groves. The pala tree’s fragrance fills the night sky” (128).

Every region has its own food that is a part of its culture. Robert Pinto observes, “The food habits indicate the culture of people. To a great extent the food habits depend on geographical conditions” (105). The novel *The Better Man* shows the fondness of fish by the Kerala people. Anita Nair brings out the fondness of fish by them, through the way they clean it and cook it. This is seen when:

Ajana cleans the shrimp in her left hand and twisted its head off with her right hand. She peeled the shell and then pulled the legs away from the body of the crustacean, tugging at the tail to release it from the rose-tinged flesh within (65).
In Kerala food is seldom prepared without the smell of coconut. They prefer the domination of coconut and coconut oil in every food. We find an instance of this in the novel as Krishnan Nair takes much care for coconut to dominate the curries:

Then he would pound them with a mortar and pestle. He would fry coconut silver till the air was fragrant with browning coconut... A cupful of coconut oil... Then ground paste, the chopped chicken, rock salt, coconut milk and a cup of coconut water (263).

Not only food but also dress is another important factor that reveals the culture of people. Mundu is the most preferred dress of men and women in Kerala. Whenever Krishnan Nair visited Mukundan he was in his mundu. Mukundan used to watch him from the window, “Krishnan Nair trudging up the hill in his saffron coloured mundu, and grey half-sleeved shirt” (36). And it is said that Valsala, the beautiful woman in the village would, “wrap in a thin mundu, spreading her hair out to dry” (129). Moreover women of Kerala are often blessed with a black, healthy hair and a rich complexion that is their main attraction. And Valsala represents this as “she is a woman who attracted attention by her blooming complexion and a head of jet-black curly hair. As their hair is a rarity they take much care of it, “Valsala steeped curry leaves in warm coconut oil and added a pinch of camphor dust. In the twilight when the oil was green and cloudy she rubbed it into her hair and washed it
with crushed hibiscus leaves” (129). Also women in Kerala never felt their dressing complete without lining their eyes with Kohl. They even take much care in preparing this, “Valsala lined her eyes with Kohl she had made herself from lampblack, camphor and fine coconut oil” (129).

It is the culture of the village people to garter in a tea shop and sit on the benches to chat. It is also unimaginable for a village without a toddy shop. All these have come alive in Nair’s pen. The culture of a typical village in Kerala is depicted through the scenes that include Shankar’s Tea Club and Che Kutty’s toddy shop, “The benches filled in Shankar’s Tea Club” (6) and “Night after night, month after month the men of Kaikurussi flock to his shop to fill their bellies and numb their minds with Che Kutty’s fresh coconut and palm toddy” (6).

It is of necessity to be aware of the culture of modern politics. The selfless political leaders who struggled for India’s independence and upliftment of the poor are dead. Their places only have been replaced by the modern politicians who are interested in feathering their own nests. They are invariably impervious to the sufferings of the people. Even if they volunteer to help them there would be a personal gain behind the move. In The Better Man, the people of Kaikurussi, though villagers, have a better understanding of the politicians. They are dissatisfied and even disgusted with the politicians who exploit their poor economic condition to buy their
votes. But they don’t seem to be ignorant of this but are courageous to make an open comment about the modern politicians:

   The State Government has declared that as part of the Onam festivities, an extra kilogram of sugar is being made available at the state-run fair-price shops—they are trying to buy our votes with a kilo of sugar. There is no electricity in the state. There are no jobs for the educated. Rice and kerosene cost the earth. Who do they think we are? A colony of ants to be satisfied with a kilo of sugar? (135)

   In the words of Thangeswari, “Culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (165). Culture is the interpretation of objects and social practices. In the ancient past it was unwritten Indian law that a widow should not remarry. But this practice is undergoing a change now. Even in rural villages remarriage of a widow is being accepted these days. This is true with Damayanthi, a young widow who is married to Bhasi. It is not only a widow-remarriage, but could be an inter-caste marriage, and both of them have made it successful through their love for each other, “I lean over and look at my wife Damayanti and our child sleeping in the crook of her arm. Once the two of them were my universe, I have the two of them and that was enough” (182). While there is a focus on such a successful marriage, there is also a focus of
an unsuccessful marriage that results in murder due to the over-
growing lust. Valsala, the wife of Prabhakaran Master falls into an
illegal relationship with a young man called Sridharan, that results in
the murder of Prabhakaran Master. Their lust for each other has
taken them to the extreme of brutality of slicing the body and burying
in individual pits:

It may be called that Sridharan, twenty-nine, along with
Valsala, wife of Prabhakaran Master, had brutally killed
the school teacher in his bed on the night of 14 July in
Kaikurussi village. The body was then disembered and
buried in individual pits in a coconut grove owned by
Sridharan (143).

Indian culture could not be separated from its deep-rooted
social maladies like caste system, economic injustice, women
suppression, dowry system etc. In Ladies Coupe Anita Nair highlights
the caste-ridden culture of Indian Hindu society as the protagonist
belongs to an orthodox Hindu Brahmin family. When Gupta says
about this caste-ridden Hindu society:

The caste system, as it is understood broadly, divides the
Hindu into various status and groups and puts them in
different positions in traditional hierarchy, thereby
causing social inequality in terms of superior or inferior.
The principal criterion underlying the caste system is the
principle of natural superiority which is an endowment of bodily purity (20).

In *Ladies Coupe* the mother of the protagonist Akhilandeswari is an orthodox Hindu-Bhramin. Always she is particular in choosing a Brahmin hotel to have her lunch. She takes pride in being born into a high caste Bhramin family. Though she does not like the lunch served in “Dasaprakash”, a Brahmins Hotel, she does not want to try somewhere as she is worried if it could be of a different caste:

She pecked at the food as if she hated every crumb and yet when Akhila suggested that they try another restaurant, Amma was vehement in her protests. ‘What is wrong with Dasaprakash? It is one place where bhramins can eat without worrying about who’s doing the chopping and cooking or even the washing-up. Haven’t you noticed that even the boys who serve us wear the sacred thread (77).

Also it is the Hindu Brahmin custom to shave the head of a wife and to make her wear a saffron sari after the death of her husband. Akhila’s mother has to do the same after the death of her father. But Akhila does not let her do so as she says, “I won’t let you shave your head or exchange your pretty madisars for a saffron sari” (76). Moreover there are so many rituals to be performed by the family members. If someone dies in a Hindu Brahmin family, one of the
rituals is that they should keep a bowl of rice and water for the dead every day as they believe that it would feed their hunger and thirst. In Akhila’s family they performed this and also other rituals for her mother:

Akhila cried every night when she cooked a bowl of rice and placed it with a jug of water so that Appa’s soul hovering in their house wouldn’t be hungry or thirsty…

When Amma dressed as a bride before dawn broke on the tenth day and the other widows gathered around her and stripped her of her marks of marriage (59).

As Kanna Muthiah avers, “the novel probes, scissors and prods Indian society that is class conscious and largely caste conscious” (45). India is a cradle of many religions. As Robert Pinto says, “It has sheltered and nurtured them through the centuries and allowed them to grow in their own way” (109). Every religion has its own rituals, custom and places of worship. In Ladies Coupe we can find the description of a Shiva Temple. It was the Thirumulavayil Shiva Temple in which grew the rare lingam and yoni flower. Something special about the temple is that “unlike all other Nandis the one here rested with its back to the sanctorium” (78).

It is a compulsory custom of the Indian society to demand dowry, when a boy marries a girl. It is equally practised by every section of the society but varies in degree and magnitude depending
on the social status. In *Ladies Coupe* we could find such a custom practised. There is no reference to this when her brothers’ marriages were performed. But after that Akhila’s responsibility increased as she had to make up a dowry for her sister Padma’s marriage:

Padma was twenty-one by the time Akhila put together a dowry for her. Gold jewellery; a diamond nose-stud; a steel almirah, a cot and a mattress; stainless steel and bronze cookware; silver lamps, a gold ring and an expensive wrist watch for the groom; and twenty thousand rupees in cash (78).

According to the Brahmin culture, women should not water the plants or light the lamp during their menstruation. If they did it, it was a sacrilege. But Akhila does not perform any of these and she is badly criticized by her sister Padma to her apartment friends, who are from Banglore. Anita Nair throws light on those orthodox rituals practised by these people, no matter how modern their environment is. Padma comments on her sister Akhila thus:

Sometimes she isn’t even a practising Hindu. She won’t light the lamp in the puja room or go to the temple or observe any of the rituals we Brahmins do. When she has her periods, she continues to water the plants and if I object she bites my head off (164).
We notice an important phenomenon occurring in the society namely the craze for western culture. People are easily attracted to it for its set culture of individual liberty. Especially Indian women who are under strict patriarchal codes are easily addicted to this culture. In *Ladies Coupe* Prabha Devi was brought up and given in marriage to a strict patriarchal family. So when there is a sudden introduction to the western culture she could not resist admiring and following it. She admired the confidence and liberty that the women in America had. So she too wanted to be like the women she had seen in New York. Their swinging hair and confident stride attracted her. It seemed to her that they knew exactly where they were going and once they went there, they did what they had to. Their lives were ruled by themselves and no one else. “Prabha Devi wanted that for herself”(177). When she was in her mother’s house she did not use any artificial things to make her up, but only gram flour face pack. But after her visit to New York, “Prabha Devi came back from a holiday with a whole set of acquisitions. The vials of perfume; a make-up kit; lingerie frothy with artificial lace and dreams of Taiwanese women: (177). When she was in New York she had even learnt to apply make-up.

More recently Indian novelists in English have grown conscious of the political violence that prevails all over the country. They portray how the politicians wield enormous power and use the public to express their opposition to any idea or their condolence for any
political leader’s death as and when they wish. It has become a practice of the society to create confusion and violence on the occasion of the death of any political leader. The writers also do not fail to show how much the innocent public love some political leaders. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair presents a clear portrayal of such public restlessness either espousing or despising the politicians. She throws light on the fact that buses and trains would not be off the road on the occasion of a political leader’s death and people would be frightened to come out of their houses during such days. She describes how the grief for a dead man turns into violence and harms the innocent public who are in no way connected with it. When Akhila came out to the street to board the train to her office she is warned by several men to keep herself indoors as *Puraichi Thalaivar* (“Revolutionary Leader”) is dead and definitely violence will break out:

*Puraichi Thalaivar* is dead. He died this morning. There is going to be trouble so you better stock up on provisions. I’m sure you don’t remember this but when Annadurai died, the city went mad. This is going to be as bad or perhaps worse. Buy whatever you can and go home quickly” (145).

As the man warns Akhila, violence breaks out soon. Akhila walks back home buying some vegetables and provisions. She finds a group of men huddling in street corners and some of them were brandishing sticks. Large scale violence was imminent:
Millions grieved for the dead man. A grief that soon turned into violence. Shops were broken into and looted. The opposite party members skulked, afraid the mob anger would soon turn towards them (146).

It has become a political culture that some people kill themselves on the death of their leader. “A few people killed themselves unable to bear the thought that their Thalaivar was dead” (146). In other words the political parties take pride in such deaths. On the other hand, there are some people who really grieve for their leader’s death out of their profound love and respect for him/her. They even take him for a father or a guardian or a demigod. Indeed his loss is a great one for such innocent poor people:

The rock-salt seller wept collecting all his sorrow. Poor people like us have lost our only protector. There will be no other man like him. What is left for us in life?

*Thalaivar* is dead. We have lost our father our guardian (145).

Thus Anita Nair has seriously and painfully recorded in her novel the tragedy of recent politics and people’s blind acceptance of it. She has presented a clear picture of the cumulative misery of the public in the hands of the politicians.

As Robert Pinto says:
We notice an important phenomenon occurring in a society, namely one culture influencing another culture. The influence of the West particularly of the British, on India has been tremendous. It may be because they were in India for a long period and were seen by people as rulers or superiors as well as symbols of power and authority. Many people in India tried to imitate them in their dress, food habits and language (120).

In the novel *Ladies Coupe* this attitude of the Indians towards the West is brought out through the character Marikolathu, as she has a liking for their colour, food and, above all, their independence and dignity. She had come from her village to Vellore to serve the two foreign doctors Missy K and Missy V. Their white skin and blue eyes attracted her. As she was brought up in a village she did not know anything about the condensed milk the missies took in. But she likes it very much and often tastes it and vowed to buy a tin in future to eat it herself. She was also crazy of the shampoo they used:

I tasted the strange foods they stored in the fridge and often dipped a spoon into the condensed milk tin and licked it off. Someday when I had the money, I would buy a whole tin of condensed milk and eat it up all by myself. Once I used a bit of Missy V’s shampoo to see if it would make my hair wave like hers (230).
When she is with the Missies she is sure that they would help shape her future. She likes their life of independence and dignity and longs for such a one, “Each night I dreamt of independence and dignity” (235). She also wonders at their behavior. Before coming to the Missies she is ignorant of lesbianism. But she finds some difference in them. She observes them carefully and interestingly, “Every night, I watched Missy K leave her room and walk past me where I lay curled on a mat in the corridor between their rooms and go to Missy V’s room. In the early hours, she crept back to bed” (210). Missy K talked to Missy V as if she were the husband and Missy V the wife. “Sometimes I caught Missy K caressing Missy V’s face with her eyes. It sent a line of goose bumps down my back (233).

Marikolanthu is influenced by their lesbian relationship and this is carried away by her to Sujatha in the Chettiar Kottai. She did what Missy K did for Missy V, “Such need. I thought of how Missy K’s eyes had followed Missy V. I began to comprehend that Sujata too was filled with the same longings that had made Missy K seek Missy V... Was I the same? I wondered” (260). By doing this she feels happy that being a woman she is able to cater to the physical needs of Sujata. She is confident that the spirit of independence and dignity has been transferred to her from the Missys by adopting their culture.

It is of importance to be aware of the failure of justice in the society. Society has become so corrupt and indifferent. It has made it compulsory that justice is denied to the poor and so the rich thrive in
crimes. In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair brings to light how Marikolanthu is denied justice just because she is born poor. Marilolanthu is raped by Murugesan, the relative of the Chettiar family, for whom Marikolanthu’s mother works as a cook. When Murugesan rapes her, he is very confident to say that nobody would question him:

No one will believe you. You might think you are our equal, but you are not. I’m the Chettiar’s nephew his daughter-in-law’s brother, and you are only the cook’s daughter. No one will dare question me even if you tell them (240).

When Marikolanthu is found pregnant she reluctantly tells her mother that Murugesan was the one who had raped her, but the mother refuses to believe it, “you think I’m a fool to believe Murugesan would do something like this” (244). Here Anita Nair brings another aspect into the focus – i.e. the village culture where it is their law to give in marriage the girl to the man who raped her. When her mother tells Sujata that Murugesan is the person who has raped Markolanthu Sujata immediately says, “If only you had told me on the night you were raped, I would have brought it up with the Chettiar and insisted that Murugesan marry you” (244). When Sujata takes this matter to her husband he blindly says that he cannot do that as Murugesan is his relative and Marikolanthu is only a poor cook’s daughter, “Do you expect me to sever relations with my brother for the sake of a servant,
no matter how precious she is to you? I want you to steer clear of this . . . . do you understand?” (245).

Culture involves social practices and rituals. In *Ladies Coupe* we find instances of the social practice of aborting the foetus inside the mother’s womb. Anita Nair shows the methods adopted by the village people to abort the foetus without clinical help. When Marikolanthu is pregnant her mother takes her to her periamma who lived in a little village called Arsikuppam, near Salem. She did not believe in doctors. So she herself made every traditional attempt usually done by the villagers to abort the foetus:

Periamma did. With slices of golden yellow papaya, and toasted sesame seeds rolled in jaggery syrup ladoos. With green jackfruit cooked and sautéed with mustard and curry leaves. With the sap of a wild plant that grew in clumps. Periamma snapped the fleshy, rubbery stalk of the plant and a milky fluid oozed out. This will finish off the weevil growing inside (248).

While a person is dead there is a custom for every community to perform the funeral in their own way. When Murugesan is dead and as his dead body is carried away, urchins dance and whistle to the drum beat:

Rose petals and marigolds, Chrysanthemums strands and lilies of the valley—the air was heavy with the fragrance of
flowers and incense. Urchins danced as they always did at funerals, twisting and wriggling their bodies with a manic joy, light on their feet, whistling through their teeth to the rhythm of the drum beat. (245)

Anita Nair explores the realities of life in the country. Her sensitive understanding of the problems of contemporary Indian society is an outcome of her minute observation of common folks.

As Pramod Kumar Says:

Indian rural society is sick with taboos and inhibitions of its own making; the feelings of caste and untouchability; the ritualism that passed for religion, the wide-flung cob web of superstitious faith. Hardly this superstitious faith could be eradicated (27).

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair presents a careful depiction of Hindu Brahmin culture. She also draws a photographic record of the superstitious beliefs of these people. It is a village in Tamil Nadu. The village could not be called a village of Hindus, but a village of Brahmins, the most orthodox Brahmins. According to them if people of any other religion or caste enter their village it will be a sacrilege. Even if they are in need of a doctor to medicate them they will not allow him into their house, but to their cowshed and take the patient there. The doctor shares his experience in the village often to Sethu his helper. Sethu listens to him with astonishment:
It isn’t just a village of Hindu, but a village of Brahmins, the most orthodox Brahmins I’ve ever known. They’re so strict in their “madi” that they will sprinkle the road with chaani once we have walked or cycled past. They would like to obliterate our presence with cow dung or water. If one of them was ill, they would ask that I attend but because I’m not one of them, they would bring the patient to a cowshed—if the house had one. If there wasn’t a cowshed, they would bring the patient to the side of the road and that’s where I would have to examine him or her (88).

Since they were orthodox Brahmins they were very strict in such rituals and customs. And they were also strict vegetarians. But more than this, Anita Nair exposes the superstitious beliefs that they had associated with their religious faith. Dr. Samuel is shocked to hear a young woman in that village say, “I know I am barren. I can’t give birth to human babies. But the gods have blessed me. I am the mother of snakes now” (89). He is shocked to see the woman showing a four meter long band of tape worm stuck together and call them babies. Dr. Samuel is sure that such tape worms can come only from beef or pig’s meat. But it is the belief of the woman to say, “They are my snake children. ‘Go my babies’, I tell them every day, I take a coconut shell of milk and turmeric for them” (89). But through the confession of the woman’s aunt, the doctor comes to know that these
orthodox Brahmins started taking pork, as the Goddess of Small pox, Periya Amman, had told them in a dream to their priest:

Many years ago when the smallpox epidemic was raging, our priest had a dream. He told us that the goddess of small pox, Periya Amman, said that if we wished to let the pox bypass us, we must eat pork. The thick layer of fat of the pig would serve as a talisman. It would protect us. It would keep us alive and our skins would remain soft and smooth, unpitted by scars... We did it because it was a dictate from heaven and no one dared disobey. Ever after, small pox, cholera, plague, jaundice, none of this affects us. As you can see, it works for us. We've never been ill (91).

By portraying this superstitious belief Anita Nair shows how the society is hypocritical when it comes for its benefit. As Dr. Samuel says, “They think all the rest of us are untouchables. But to save their skins, they’ll eat even pig’s meat” (91).

Religion in Indian society plays a vibrant role in the development of humanity. It also plays an important role in culture. Robert Pinto says, “Religion has been considered the soul of culture” (107). Religion develops humanity, but at the same time marks certain discriminations within itself. As Sinha and Agarwal observe:
Religion has laid emphasis on some values and standards and has formulated principles for the guidance of human life. But along with this, it has also propagated some set norms and principles and encouraged some ceremonies and rituals and practices, the impact of which on human life has not discontinued even after the attainment of independence (186).

In *Mistress*, Anita Nair seems to point out how the Muslim religion has set norms and principles that is partial against women. She presents a realistic picture of the place named Arabipatnam where ceremonies, rituals and practices are strictly followed by Muslims. Little boys and men are free to go out whereas girls and women are kept indoors, “Even the little boys playing a game on one side of the road wore white and on their head were skull caps of white lace. But there wasn’t a single female in sight-child, girl or woman” (99). Women here are married at a very early age of thirteen. Saadiya who is the youngest of the four daughters is fifteen and unmarried whereas, “her three elder sisters had been married off when they were thirteen” (99). The novel shows how women were concealed within the alleys that snaked through the entire town, connecting not only kitchen smells but also the bruised heart of women. But the men were free to go along main entrances and the streets. “Alleys two feet wide were made for women, paved with stone”(98).
Every religion has its own religious traditions, customs, festivities etc. In *Mistress*, we find the description of the customs followed by the Muslims. Saadiya is very particular in pursuing these for her baby boy, though she has married a person who is not a Muslim. We find Saadiya insisting upon the five acts of cleanliness in Islam:

There are five acts of cleanliness in Islam. Shaving the pubic hair, plucking the hair under the armpits, shaving the moustache, clipping your nails and circumcision. Only then fitra achieved. Fitra is an inner sense of cleanliness, which will make him a good Muslim. Without the Khitan his acceptance into Islam won’t happen (70)

In the novel *Mistress*, there is also a backdrop of Christian faith and belief in the town Nazareth. Anita Nair does not fail to show how Dr. Samuel and the three nurses named Charity, Faith and Hope, as per word of the Bible were very much dedicated in their profession. They did not hesitate to treat cholera patients walking around stools as they believed that through this they served God and they were His instruments. Once when a cholera patient says, “You are God in disguise” (49), the doctor tells him, “I am just an instrument of God” (50). As a Christian Dr. Samuel often makes references to the Bible. Whenever there arose a doubt in Sethu’s mind, when he asked the doctor, immediately the doctor answered him quoting a verse from the Bible. When Sethu says that he is an orphan, the doctor consoles him
by quoting a verse from the Bible, “Don’t say that Sethu: For those who have none, there is God. Whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Ruth 1:16” (38). In this story of Dr. Samuel, Anita Nair throws a parallel between the divine intervention that had taken place in Nazareth once when people were swept away of cholera and the one in the Brahmin village when people were affected by small pox. But she also marks a difference in the demand of the Divine. In Nazareth the Christians believed that only God had saved them from the disaster, and the priest named Father Howard vowed to make the entire parish confess their sins and the cholera came only once a year, whereas before it was four times a year:

And when it seemed that nothing but divine intervention would help, the priest here, Father Howard, made an offering. He vowed that the entire parish would come to confession every day. Spare us, we'll confess our sins and do penance for our trespasses, he prayed. He fell on his knees and I am told he stayed there for a whole week, pleading and beseeching. And the epidemics ceased to be. Now cholera comes just once a year (47).

Here one could find how much importance the Christians give for confession and repentance as they believe that every disaster is the wage of their sin as their religion has taught them. As Dr. Samuel says Seth, “Nazareth was afflicted by God’s curse. Why God chose to
curse Nazareth. It has as many sinners as any other town of this size does” (47).

Another big divide one could find in the society is the hiatus between the rich and the poor or the employees and the employer. This snobbish attitude is a never ending one in India. In *Mistress Shyam* is projected as a snob, “You are a snob, a bloody fucking snob!” (72). He is very conscious about his supreme class as an employee. He does not like his wife Radha mingling with his employers and sharing meals with them as he thinks of his dignified place in society:

You are my wife and you have a place in society. It is not about superior or inferior. You are breaking protocol. You are erasing lines between the employer and the employee. You are negating my position and I cannot allow that (72).

Art becomes a part of culture. Every region has its own traditional art which is looked upon with pride and respect. But the true spirit and respect for art is descending with effect to modernization these days. It is even used for business purposes and at times even made itself a business. Here Anita Nair shows how the modern culture takes art easily. This is because, as Robert Pinto says, “modern civilization has made life so complicated and sophisticated that the modern man has lost his sense of meaning in
life” (121). Hence it is quite easy for the modern man to abhor the real meaning of art. Shyam is an ever-running business man who craves for nothing but money. Though he is a native of Kerala he is disrespectful towards the traditional art of Kathakali. He thinks that he could use Kathakali as an attraction to draw foreign visitors to his resort. So he does not hesitate to have a Kathakali performance in his resort. Even as a performance in the resort he does not want it to be in its full-traditional form but just as something colourful:

At a few resorts, they take the tourists for a performance and they tell me that the tourists love it. I am thinking why don’t we do the same? Not a full performance, mind you. My guests would fall asleep. Just enough to interest a western audience. We could choose something form Duryodhana Vadham or Prahaladacharitam. Something vigorous and colorful ... and gory (300).

Materialistic success of modernization has brought down the value of arts. In earlier days art was considered sacred for an artist. He loved it more than he did himself. But in the present days art has been commercialized. In Mistress, there is reference by Koman to of one of his students who uses Kathakali to meet his needs. And here Koman blames the society and not his student. Koman says that it is his basic need that has made him a slave to such betrayal of the art.
I have a student who is a full-time employee in a film studio. After eight years of intense training, do you know what he is reduced to doing? Every morning he does a full costume, including the crown, and waits. He waits, hoping that one of the sets in the film city will require his presence. But I am not blaming my student. My heart goes out to him. But he has to eat, he has to live and Kathakali equips him to do nothing except perform. I blame the society that makes a mockery of this art. A Kathakali dancer has no place in the modern world. He is an endangered species (302).

Religion, in Indian society that is believed to play a great role in the development of humanity, has set some principles for the guidance of human life. It also encourages some ceremonies, rituals and practices, the preaching a philosophy of blind submission to nature, to the established places of worship and to the prevailing customs and traditions. As Agarwal and Sinha say:

The modern man though highly awakened, rational and educated, finds himself incapable to shake off some of the dominant factors influencing his life and philosophy. For example, faith in Swamis and Sanyasis, belief in the moral dignity of the renunciation part of human existence, now-a-days (186).
In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair seems to show, how the faith in the institution of Sanyas or the renunciation of worldly goods and attachments for the sake of spiritual pursuits, results in the disintegration of families. One of the protagonists, Jak's father goes in for Sanyas, renouncing the family. He is least bothered about by his son and wife, “his father made known his decision to join an ashram. To renounce the world. Their world” (14). As he moves to the ashram, Jak’s mother Sarada Ammal suffers from a sense of non-belongingness, “Neither a wife nor widow, who am I?” (17). Through this Anita Nair highlights the fact how foolishly man at this modern age “renounces the world to attain a state of freedom and enlightenment as enshrined in the Vedas as Brahmacharya, Grahasthya, Vanprastha and Sanyas” (Agarwal, 187). She attempts to raise the question, “Does this kind of enlightenment of an individual, mean to push his family in darkness?”.

*Lessons in Forgetting* is a novel in which the milieu is cosmopolitan Bangalore becomes the background setting. On the completion of this novel, Anita Nair has said in an interview:

However for the first time I have just finished set in Bangalore. It trawls the city and different strata of the society. Bangalore and Kerala to me represent two ends of the spectrum. Bangalore is very cosmopolitan and has its aspects of urban life. It represents a life style that is fast and happening. (np)
In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair deals extensively with the modern urban culture of Bangalore, drawing characters from the modern corporate world, thereby depicting its culture and the milieu. The emergence of multinational corporations has transformed the face of India. In the words of Shoba:

> With the boom in IT sector, which started two decades ago and easy internet access at every street corner, the world trade manipulated such potential factor and a corporate culture thrived in the country resulting in a paradigm shift with reference to the lifestyle in India. The new corporate culture stands in sharp contrast to the previous generation of clerical culture.

The novel revolves around page-three parties, easy food lifestyle anxieties, apprehensions and insecurities of the rising Indian middle class including questions about career, inadequacy, marriage and family conflicts in a changing India.

The modern corporate culture thrives in its own readiness to eat junk food. People go crazy for pizza, calamari rings, tartlets etc, which are declared expensive by themselves. Moreover fat deposits on their bodies. Inspite of this awareness they couldn’t help themselves in it. Meera after Giri, has forsaken the family could not meet the ends of the family. But her son Nikhil, unaware of this, asks for a pizza. The ladies of three generations Saro, Lily and Meera speak against it:
'Can we order a pepperoni pizza?' Nikhil said 'No', Meera snapped. 'You had pizza three days ago!' It's not good for you to eat so much pizza', Lily chuckled. 'All this junk food will show itself twenty years from now. You will be a very fat man'. Saro added, 'Pizza doesn’t grow on trees. It’s expensive' (31).

In the novels *The Better Man* and *Mistress* where the culture of Kerala becomes a backdrop, it is found how the people of Kerala couldn't imagine a food without coconut and the efforts they take to grate it, fry it and add it in different forms to the food they cook. But in *Lessons in Forgetting*, in the typical corporate world, it is obvious how much the corporate wives have an aversion for coconut and coconut milk. Meera is a cookbook writer and when she has written a recipe for Thai prawn curry it is criticized badly by the other corporate wives as they feel it tiresome to do something with the coconut milk:

The Thai prawn curry had come in for much criticism in the rodent’s review. Something to do with the coconut milk and how tiring it is to actually make it yourself, etc. Especially for the women who are battling with sloppy home help (7).

As Meera reads the review she fumes. Here the author draws a difference between the natural coconut milk and grating used by men and women of Kerala and the ready to use preserved coconut milk and
powder available in cities to make the work easy for women. When Meera finds that addition of coconut milk for preparing prawn curry is the reason for criticism she is astonished if the women do not know about tetrapaks coconut milk or powder:

Hasn’t the woman heard of coconut milk in tetrapaks?
You snip the end with scissors and pour. Or there is coconut milk powder that you stir into water with a spoon and if a spoon is unavailable, the tip of a finger will do.
Can’t even the most harassed of cooks manage that?
Meera fumed reading the review (7).

Page Three Parties have become a compulsory part of urban Bangalore culture. It is a party exclusively for the sophisticated corporate families. It is where even the middle-class families try to make them up sophisticated for such parties. It is a sort of party where all beautiful people, emerge from beautiful homes in their trendiest beautiful attires. In Lessons in Forgetting there is a true portrayal of such parties in which people maintain their dignity by giving fake smiles, exchanging fake words and giving striking poses for photographers. Meera the protagonist, the corporate wife of Giri attends such parties, as she knows that her husband will be pleased to be there to be one among the beautiful people of Bangalore:

The beautiful people with their heads pertly held, fingers wrapped around glass stems, striking poses as
photographers foxtrot from group to group, clicking, capturing beautiful moments. Eventually they would all meet and play at the upper epidermis of emotion. That is the nature of such parties. You network with a drink in one hand and a smile on your face, clasping hands (5).

The more the modernity, the more is the disappearance of traditional food and drinks. Coke has replaced traditional drinks like coffee in cities like Bangalore. Even if there is coffee there is no Indian coffee but varieties of imported coffee namely Colombian, Brazilian, Kenyan etc. When Vinnie, Meera’s friend goes to a café and orders for filter coffee she is surprised to know that except South Indian coffee, every other coffee is available there:

‘Two filter coffee please,’ Vinnie says, ‘We don’t have South Indian coffee ‘I don’t believe this.’ Vinnie’s mouth curls. ‘Here we are in Bangalore, South India and you have what is that? She peers. Columbian, Brazilian, Kenyan . . . and no good old South Indian filter coffee (104).

It is the culture of the modern corporate people to wear variety of dresses to match varied occasions. It is expected of them to appear young and fashionable. Though Meera is forty years of age, she is compelled by Giri to wear a chiffon skirt as if she were twenty as it
was the set fashion of the corporate world. So Meera wears a chiffon skirt for a brunch reluctantly:

Meera’s face fell. ‘I am forty-four year old, Giri. I can’t dress like I am twenty. Mutton dressed as lamb, etc., ‘I have a daughter who’s nearly twenty years old’ Meera began abruptly. It looks so silly for me to dress like she does . . (107).

Meera who puts on a skirt for a brunch, wears a sari for another party. She attires herself in a sari, adorning with some jewellery of Chandelier earrings and a bead anklet. Unlike the women of Kerala, the modern women of Bangalore do not like their hair growing long and black. They find them fashionable with a coloured, short-cut hair. Even Meera has a short-cut hair, as her friend Vinnie insists on her to look more fashionable.

Modern civilization has given rise to sexual promiscuity and moral degradation which is highlighted in the novel. For Vinnie Meera’s friend marriage is just for name sake. She does not hesitate to have a sexual relationship with a boy, with the knowledge of her husband Kishore, “Vinnie and he share a home and a business. For the rest, they lead separate lives” (184). Vinnie openly says that she has to be with Kishore as she feels marriage is a circle of security, “It is the circle of security that has us engaged” (185). Vinnie has a sexual relationship out of marriage with a boy Arun much younger to
her. She very well knows that she cannot marry him, but does not want to disdain the relationship:

Vinnie’s lover had announced to her in bed that afternoon that he would never marry her. He had apparently coiled a strand of her hair around his finger and said, ‘And I am not the marrying kind, you know that, don’t you Vinnie?’ (214).

Here Anita Nair brings to light how the young boy in cities, gambol with married women for money. Arun did not love Vinnie but her money. To get that he took advantage of Vinnie’s lust and loneliness:

All of it a slaking of lust and loneliness. It was what he and every fortune cookie knew but her husband didn’t: a woman needs to be loved, not understood. Vinnie clutched her purse tight. In that mature voice of his when he asked for money-‘only a loan, you understand, I’ll return it as soon as my transfer comes through’. Did she love him? She didn’t know. But she needed him and was petrified of losing him. And yet, to give him the money, would be changing the trajectory of ‘the thing, whatever it is’ as he called their relationship (103).

Vinnie’s attitude towards marriage and having an extra marital affair is passed on to Meera too. Meera, the fragile Meera after a long time thinking, admits Soman into her, after Giri has left her. Though
she hesitates initially, she is convinced by the encouragement of Vinnie, “I’ve been through it. So what I am saying is, this thing that’s sprung between you and Soman, you have to give it a chance, allow it to be born before it can die” (215). So Meera thinks that she has to do something to balance with the loss of Giri in her life. In the end that is what settles it, “The spill of loss that makes Meera throw all her apprehensions over her shoulder. She needs this: a pinch of salt to safeguard herself from years of desolation. Meera lets Soman lead her into a room” (220).

There is a transition of values in the modern society of India. Transition of value includes the disintegration of the institution of marriage and family and the individuals of the family lacking in morality. Not only Vinnie and Meera but also Jak, Nina’s husband has extra marital affair with so many women. Jak has a different attitude towards this as he convinces himself saying that he never goes towards women but at the same time does not disdain it, if the proposal came from a woman, “He didn’t go looking for it but he didn’t disdain it either when it came his way” (13). Jak realizes the folly of his, this conduct of him when he comes to know that his daughter Smriti was with a boy in a beachside hotel:

He was in a Florida beachside home, fucking a colleague’s wife against a wall. And when she murmured her willingness, biting on his shoulder he could excite with his magical incantations of filth: Bitch. Whore. Did
someone say that to Smriti? The thought wrenches itself out of his mind” (49).

In the society every professional has his own social responsibility. A physician is said to be a God in human form. But as civilization becomes modern, more than social responsibly, money matters a lot. In Lessons in Forgetting, there is a doctor who practised against the law and moral obligation of his profession. He revealed the sex of the baby in the mother’s womb for the sake of money. He even arranged for an abortion if it was a girl child.

Of discovering the existence of a visiting scan doctor who sat in a room with a board outside that read, ‘Sex of the child will not be revealed here!’ Of hints and signs for an extra fee-of an abortion arranged if the scan revealed a girl child’ (297).

In recent days there is a craze for going abroad for higher education and lucrative job. People often have a longing to make their settlement abroad. America is always a dream to their eyes which they want to come true. And people from abroad are treated with much respect. Jak one of the protagonists of Lessons in Forgetting makes their craze as a tool to gather details about the tragedy of his daughter Smriti. He comes to Mathew’s house to make enquiries whom he suspects to have been with Smriti when the tragedy had taken place. When he introduces himself as one who is from America,
he is treated with much respect by the family, especially by Mathew’s father Mr. Joseph John. Jak captivates them by saying that they send Mathew to America for his higher studies, “You should think very seriously about sending Mathew there for higher studies. And so the seed of imminent migration was sown” (143). Joseph John believes whatever Jak says. When Mathew hesitates to have a talk with Jak, Joseph John is angry at the idiotic behavior of Mathew and a heated argument goes on between the father and the son:

Here is this man, all the way from America. . . What’s wrong with you? Instead of making an impression on him, you are behaving like a frightened bridegroom! Go on, talk to him. When he goes back, I want him to consider you as a serious candidate for his course’. ‘Chachan, you don’t know who he is’, Mathew begins. His father holds up his hand. ‘I know. I know that your future lies in his hands. So go and be as he expects you to be!’ (144).

People from all over India would like to have their studies and settlement in America. But Smriti, Jak’s daughter wants to take up her sociology in India. When she discloses her decision to move to India for her undergraduate degree Nina could not hold back her anger. She highlights the fact how Smriti was different from other kids who dream of entering US through any means:
Kids from all over India, from even small towns want to come here, dream of studying here and you want to go there. If you want to be a sociologist, then it is the US you should be in. India! I don’t believe this with you Smriti! (123).

In society one culture influences another and influence of western culture of the Indian borns has been reflected in the novel through the relationship between Jak the cyclone expert and his wife. Once people migrate to the west they hate everything that is Indian. Nina, Jak’s wife who is pleased with Indian decorum, modesty and everything of India, later seems to be exactly the opposite of what she had been. Once Nina is displeased with her daughter Smriti piercing and wearing studs in her eyebrows, the nose ring, the under lip, tongue etc. She tells her “It’s merely western”. As Indian culture is steeped in a kind of modesty and decorum, it would certainly disapprove of a seventeen-year-old girl sitting on her father’s lap and Nina finds it unpleasant when Smriti does the same for which Smriti says, “Don’t be like those Indian parents we know”(121). Nina who is once proud of Indian spices, miniatures, Kathakali and Chola bronzes, seems to be lost to say that she seems to remember “India with a leaky tap in the garden and bird shit in the patio”(150). She even goes to the extent of breaking her marital relationship, “Well Kitcha, if you love India so much, why don’t you go back?” (150). She is quick to change with the Western culture that paves the way for the rift to get
widened and widened, that makes them live as strangers to each other’s dreams and bodies. She even refuses to care for the daughter Smriti, where there is no trace of Indian motherhood at all and at the end says, “I don’t want you to come anywhere near Shruti. I will get a court order if I need to. I won’t lose another daughter to you, to India” (69). The intensity of her hatred for India is revealed when she says that she will not lose her daughter “to India” (69).

The society that has a craze for Western culture, has an indifferent attitude towards the NRI culture in India. The money-minded Indian doctor who has scant respect for his professional ethics, blames the NRI’s for having their Western thoughts after coming to India. When he hears from Jak about the tragedy of Smriti he blames the NRI’s and draws a difference between an Indian girl and an NRI girl:

You NRIs. You don’t understand the grown-up girls need to be with their mothers. You think this is America. You send your daughters back filled with all the permissive ideas you teach them in the West and then when something goes wrong, you blame India for it. She was here with a man, I hear. A man . . . a group . . . Would any Indian girl be so bold? They may have been classmates, but she was alone and who knows what transpired? Didn’t you or her mother teach her what to do and what not do? (54).
Shivu, Smriti’s friend shows his disapproval of the NRIs by calling them NRFs that meant Non Residential Fucks. He shows his contempt for the NRIs when he says this. He calls it the NRI tradition, having plenty of money to hook up with someone:

The NRFs, we called them. The Non Resident Fucks . . .

There is a kind of hangout place near the college. They play good music and it has a hubbly bubbly. Most of us go there after college. . . But it was the foreign girls who came there as regularly as the boys did. They had money to spend. And I suppose it was like one of the places where you could hook up with someone. It was like a tradition (120).

Rishi, Smriti’s boy friend, is very frank to tell Jak that the NRIs used to be flinging around money and an Indian like him couldn’t afford to fulfill her needs. He calls this to be the NRI type:

She was used to flinging around money. I mean, she was this typical NRI type! She drank mineral water and kept moist wipes and hand sanitizer in her bag. And I was just a middle-class boy. The truth was, I couldn’t afford her (265).

Anita Nair not only portrays the fashionable and modern culture of the corporate people, but also their anxieties, apprehensions, job insecurities, their struggle to maintain their dignity in their corporate
society, their questions about their career, inadequacy, marriage and family conflicts.

As K. Balachandran says:

Great thinkers like Aristotle considered family as a federal society which unites three different groups or societies namely, the husband and wife, the parents and children, the master and servants. Also Leibniz, the German philosopher argued that the family system contained four societies, the above mentioned three plus, and the family as a whole. So family is a society in miniature (3).

So what happens between Meera and Giri is an instance of the entire corporate society. The tension, love, betrayal, greed, attitude, etc. of the corporate society is brought out through the marital life of Giri and Meera. Giri is not satisfied with his job in the corporate world. He feels insecure and also his self-esteem eroded as he has to keep his place in the corporate world. So he wants to quit it and go in for a business for which he thinks Meera’s ‘Lilac House’ would be the only means:

Does she for a moment understand what I have to put myself through, “day after day? Does she know what I have to do to keep my place on the corporate ladder? The endless dents to my self-esteem? The fear of being made
redundant or, worse, passed over for a promotion? What does she know of any of this? (41)

After coming to the corporate world Giri comes to know the demerits of it, but before coming into it, making a foothold in the corporate world had been his biggest dream. It was a world that he had never known, “First the Regional Engineering College, where his eyes widened at a world he never knew existed. Then the IIM in Ahmedabad Campus recruitment ensured that he found a foothold in the corporate world” (36).

Giri was a middle-class boy. He remembered his father in his yellowing banian and dhoti in Palakkad. Stepping into the corporate world he wanted to make up a gracious living which he could not do with his family. So he was attracted towards Meera’s gracious living and her Lilac House. He was overwhelmed at the finesse of Meera’s family and their modern life style. To make his life modern and respectable in the modern corporate world, he was compelled to marry Meera falling in love not with her but her Lilac House:

He thought of the riches laid out before him. A bride with social graces and a beautiful old home. A grandmother who referred to Sir Richard Attenborough and Satyajit Ray in the same breath. A mother who breathed finesse. Giri had never known such people before. He thought of his father in his yellowing banian
and dhothi in Palkkad. He thought of the old decrepit house and relative as stringy and penurious as his father. Giri exhaled. With Meera, he would be able to move on. Finally he would be free of the yellowing past and the stench of making do Meera. His. Like the Lilac house (37).

Giri made careful plans about where he would be by the time he was thirty, forty and forty-five. He thought that thereafter would be the playing fields of his life. To accomplish this, he needed to round off the edges that still clung to him from the small-town, lower middle class boy he was. Meera would make this possible, he knew with certainty. She would make it possible with the discreet, elegant and old money. He married Meera for this only reason, but once when she refused to sell the house and make money that would enable Giri, as he believed to make their life firm apart from the corporate job, he did not hesitate to forsake Meera and the children, “Then there is the house. I asked you, begged and pleaded with you to sell the house. With the money, I would never have had to work for someone else. But you wouldn’t listen” (81).

Meera switches on the computer and finds an unfinished email where Giri has poured out his rancor, against her as she was not willing to sell the house. Meera is shocked to see the true colour of her money-minded Giri and understands that Giri has left her and her family for the sake of money, “And yet, where is Giri”(40). Money that
has curbed the husband and wife relationship of Giri and Meera is a social happening. To quote K. Balachandran:

Husband-wife relationship is an important aspect of the family life which reflects the socio-culture of a country. Money culture mars the real love of the social set-up, results in socio-cultural degradation in a family which in turn reflects in the society. Though this happens within the four walls of a house it becomes a social problem (4).

The societal chain is strengthened by the chords of families which constitute the relationship between husband and wife, mother and daughter and father and daughter. In the words of Balachandran, “The relationship between a mother and daughter seems to get thinner and thinner in the modern society (5). Every mother thinks that her relationship with her daughter should be infallible. But unfortunately this fails in Meera’s life. Nayantara, her daughter is a very modern girl that she takes to smoking. When Meera finds a cigarette butt floating in Nayantara’s toilet bowl, a kind of fear and sorrow tussles in her. As she musters up courage to ask Nayantara, “I know you are smoking. How dare you” (253), Nayantara with little feelings for her mother slams the door and rushes out of the room. She doesn’t want her mother to make such enquiries as she says, “I don’t want to discuss it” (253). It is not a problem that runs between Meera and Nayantara but a societal change and cultural
degradation where a nineteen year old girl smokes and expects her mother to keep away from her privacy.

Thus in her novel *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair has portrayed how modernization and the greed for money result in callousness, death of tradition, culture and social values. As this chapter has made an assessment of the cultural backdrop in the select novels of Anita Nair, it reveals how the basic human needs like love and compassion transcend all cultural, linguistic and social barriers. The next chapter attempts to make a close examination of the literary style, plot, structure, form, narrative techniques and stylistic devices employed by the novelist in the select novels.