CHAPTER-IV

CHANGE OF WOMEN: FROM STEREOTYPE TO ARCHETYPE

Women of every race are the only discriminated group with no territory, no country of their own, not even a neighbourhood. In a patriarchy a poor man’s house may be his castle but even a rich woman’s body is not her own. Somewhere in our lives, each of us needs a free place, a little psychic territory. (Steinem)

Women who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated on par with men in all spheres of human activity. They are subjugated, suppressed and marginalized in the issue of sharing the available chances for accomplishment of their lives, although the reality that each woman slaves for the progress of her family, her husband and children. This troubling picture of woman is not something new or exclusive only to India. This is the predicament of women all over the world. Indian women-writing in English is notable for the extent to which it has challenged patriarchy and the State and opened numerous ways of questioning and interpreting social life. In the present-day world the suppressed people come forward from their marginalized position and try to voice out their concerns. This in turn has a remarkable strength on the writings of this age. The awareness of the writings has also become multi-dimensional where a character is imaginary and is offered with all the follies as well as noble qualities.

A close look at the contemporary literary development depicts the reality that the spectator’s point of view is getting old-fashioned, and writings about marginal people having power to denote level whereas the writings by the suppressed people reiterate the actual experience that becomes a work of fine art, for an effort of art should be exact to life and close to life. Hence, the challenge before the contemporary writer is to carve the unwritten through denaturalizing the natural, for in the traditional set up typical is not accepted but it is
the formed as an experience of culture or tradition. Writers all over the world have started questioning the so-called traditionally holistic customs of life through their works of art. Women writers not only present the vindictive authority of the dominant set-up that proceeds upon their folk but also demands the need to redraft the past which ignored their existence. The female protagonists of the women writers of this century are the real women who realize their status in the patriarchal society.

Today, patriarchy is just one of the hierarchies which continue females behind, oppressed by the traditional system. In all of the texts, though, the traditional notion of what women's position is being questioned and challenged. I therefore observe what the prospect positioned on the women discussed are, how these women are being reminded of those, and the women's reactions to the beliefs. The female characters in the novels come from different geographical regions, have different social and caste background, and profess different religions, reflecting thus the variety of Indian culture, which would be hard or slightly not possible to simplify. Nevertheless, the researcher expects to find common features of the so-called traditional status of women, which is the main focus of the fourth chapter, Unravelling Gloominess to Accomplish Assertion.

As some characters obey the rules to the traditional customs they face, this chapter tries to describe the motives why they decide to do so. The researcher also have an in depth study at what these women have in common and whether or not it is possible to find which female characters are more likely to admit the conventions of society and stick to them. In this scenario, Anita Nair, a fresh writer into the Indian English writing, brings refreshingly frank and straight-forward narrative style to her works. Through her works she portrays her characters as human beings who also feel a longing for their individual space and their worth as human beings who not only weep when ejected their due, but also shed tears to purify themselves of their manners and faults. The present chapter explores the notion that her
female characters are liberated from the male dominated hands by deciding their lives on their own.

*Mistress* is a fascinating novel adoring in relationships. Anita Nair employs the resourceful Kathakali, an art form and Nila, a river flow through the story effortlessly and project the personalities of different characters together in emotions more complex than the art form or the river themselves. The Indian playwrights of nineteen sixties and seventies have adopted the different forms of art, styles and techniques and have made bold innovations and meaningful experiments which go on in the history of Indain drama as a great achievement. Anita Nair, the novelist have endeavoured into own indigineous.

In this novel culture, true emotions, real life and literary expressions merge in the background of the classical dance form, Kathakali together to make the work a true classic. As the novel is set on the background of Nila, the river on whose banks the prestigious art culture in Kerala still thrives. Kathakali, a classical dance form, which is the pride of the place, state and as well as the country, had its birth and nourished growth at Kerala Kalamandalam situated on the banks of Nila. The novel shows very well on how the globalization affected the lives of common Indians also. There is a huge popularity for the art form Kathakali among the foreign nations and many artists foresee this art form as a way for their livelihood. Such a situation arises in Koman’s family as travel writer Christopher Stewart arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to meet Koman.

To begin with, Nair uses the combination of different systems of philosophical or religious belief or practice style of storytelling that combines dance and narrative, a clever politico-aesthetic mixture in which the narrative form of the novel, a form that has often been traced back to its western colonial roots is woven together with the Kathakali dance that depicts classical Indian tradition. However, both dance and narrative as used in *Mistress (M)* are, from their initiation, revealed to be “impure” categories in themselves, thus revealing the
tensions between the east and the west, the global and the local, and tradition and modernity. Thus the “western” form of the novel (western only insofar as it’s historical antecedents are concerned) is culturally localized through its setting, its use of the rasas to establish narrative arch, and its many references to the larger history of the Indian subcontinent. At the same time, Kathakali too loses its chaste status as home tradition and gets globalized, with the narrative demonstrating how traditional dance is mixed up in global economies of exchange.

Nair skilfully narrates this face of the story through Radha’s uncle Koman’s passage in dance, a journey that sees him rise and fall in love and in life. And so he falls in love with his British student Angela and accompanies her to London in the hope that the world would be his stage. His consequent loss of identity, his awareness of the assumed inferiority of his race in a whiter world, and his eventual return to his roots then allows Nair to demonstrate how other Kathakali artists who make light of and condense local art in order to be lucid to a “universal” audience to go on to achieve international success. But at last everything ends in vain for Koman.

The lives of Shyam, Radha and Koman are thrown out of gear when a travel-writer from America, Christopher Stewart, arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to study the world of Kathakali from Koman, Radha’s uncle. The unavoidable thing happens that is Radha and Christopher fell in love with each other and not to know how to call it as chemistry or a sense of longing. Koman witnesses it and tries to counsel Radha. But she avoids and explains him that all through her life she has been dictated and it is time that she makes her own choices. She decides to break off everything and remains a demanding Mistress.

Anita Nair acknowledges the borrowing of her latest novel’s title from Emerson’s statement “Art is a jealous Mistress”. It gives an opportunity for a reader to read and comprehend her novel Mistress in the light of this statement. To her, it is a metaphor that underlines the possessive nature of art and its amoral nature. To Anita Nair, writing the novel
has been an affair during which she felt “possessed” or “Mistressed” by her art of writing the novel. The whole plot of the novel is spread over Book 1, Book 2 and Book 3, and chapter number nine is based on nine Rasas embodied and displayed the dance form of Kathakali is Sringaaram, Haasyam, Karunam, Raudram, Veeram, Bhayanakam, Beebhabtsam, Abbutam, and Shaantam, suiting the feelings and emotions of the plot to the specific Rasas of human life.

As the novel is split into three parts, Nair tells a spell binding tale of Saadhiya, Koman’s mother. The novel begins in Arabipatnam, meant for Muslims. The men in the village will use the main entrances and the streets. The narrow passageway is built for the women to use, which connects a side door or a kitchen door. That is the only freedom for women in Arabipatnam and no strangers are allowed inside the streets and they had very strict rules. The daughter of the leader of Arabipatnam is Saadiya and she is influenced by the expectation regarding her future; Saadiya thinks of her life whether her life too will end in the same way like the other women in the town. Is it the rule that all women born here have to live and die hidden by these walls? She desires to voice out her longings but her community never allows her to speak out about the condition and her voice is muted.

Culture and patriarchal constraints played active roles in restricting Muslim women’s educational and economic participation. The situations of these women were gone so bad that many Muslim women are oppressed in Islamic Societies. They are denied education and other basic rights. These are not unjustified allegation. But one must understand that these oppressive practices do not come from Islam. These are part of local cultural traditions in various countries. The reason for the general proclamation is that Muslim girls need not learn the writing as reading was enough for them since they are kept inside the houses. The conventional system follows in case of Saadiya.
Her father Haji Najib Masood was one of the six chiefs of the town and also the most respected man in the society. Since his father was a very strict man she has no courageousness to tell him what is right and wrong because men are the maintainers of women and also the social set up is that the good women are obedient and do not seek a way against them. It is common for all the human beings to break the laws in certain aspects in the same way Saadiya is thoughtful to see the world and prepares her to walk into the common alley which was restricted street for women in Arabipatnam. On the way to Nadira’s home she grasps,

Life: Life in so many colours and shapes. Life that breathed and walked. Life that chewed and spat. Life that screamed and shouted. Life that mumbled and tumbled hissed and crawled. Life that waited. Life that would never be hers. (M: 102)

When she felt the fragrance of life in the street luckily she came across Sethu with her uncovered face. After seeing Saadiya, Sethu is drawn into features of her and his feeling was kindled and in turn the same thing happened to Saadiya, which is quite natural. Saadiya expecting the hero with the face of Akbar Shah’s second son Salim now faced Sethu. Saadiya’s family is very orthodox and established, as a result of her courageous action she is acknowledged with the red hot iron on her calf by her own father for daring to flout the rules laid down by him. Her offence being that she had just stepped out of the restrictions set down by him inorder to have a glimpse of their town.

Repression in tradition bound countries like India often results in discriminating suffering for sensitive folks and especially women, according to M.Rajeshwar, in his book Preface to Indian women Novelists and Psycho analogists admits that women happen to be the most terrible victims as the social norms and moral codes have been so framed as to be particularly disadvantageous to them. Men can do anything and get away with it, but the moment a woman does something wrong, or something similar, or chooses to break out of the
shackles and demand her rights, she’s the target of contempt, ridicule, and perhaps the worst kind of established or physical violence. It is the state of Muslim women in Arabipatnam. The purdah system ordained by Islam prohibited women from participating in public affairs or pleasurable pursuits. Their lot was restricted to strive for the family and for afforded pleasure and leisure to men. This double standard targeting women was in accordance with the then prevailing social dispensation. A feeling of lack of confidence drenches and women were secluded as a measure to defend them. They were expected to be dedicated and passive, submissive and charitable. Even so, they were not secure from torture, oppression and ill-treatment in every possible way.

This is the status of women in Muslim community. Infact, Saadiya is not only penalized by her father that is the male society, but also she is condemned by her own Ummama and Zuleika, that is even women are against women. Women in the similar group also repress her. All the women in her community have to undergo the same circumstances and they have their limitations. Saadiya thinks of her culpability for the action that has caused anxiety to her family.

I, Saadiya, good girl, with the purest of Arab blood in my veins, branded by my Vaapa and a glance, lay awake. I did not know what it was that nagged at my flesh so. Was it the imprint of Vaapa’s anger? Or was it your burning gaze? Or was it the thought that in a day or two I was to be allowed to glimpse the world that existed outside the gates of Arabipatnam? (M: 136)

The tricky situation pierces in the life of Saadiya at a premature age as she feels affection for Sethu. Her Vaapa arranged a nuptial for Saadiya with Akbar Shah’s second son Salim. For the first moment in her life she prepares herself to voice out her thoughts to her Vaapa about her Malik explicitly Sethu. Saadiya named him as Malik. Her Vaapa didn’t
presume this from his daughter. Everyone in the family pleaded, coaxed, wailed and tortured her to depart Sethu and to marry Salim but Saadiya was strong enough in her choice.

In Islam, Muslim women may not marry non-Muslim men, a term that includes traitor, ex-Muslims, other monotheistic (Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian), non-theistic and polytheistic men (Hindu, Buddhist, Jain and others). Further, a Muslim woman, either by birth or after conversion is not allowed to leave Islam to marry a non-Muslim, because leaving Islam is a religious crime of the rejection of a religious or political belief or allegiance punishable with death. The Quran allows Muslim men to marry women of any religion, but the woman must be virtuous. Hard punishments are also set for women who marry non-Muslims on their own harmony. Saadiya being aware of her religion is ready to live with a non-Muslim and ready to face the consequences.

She considers Sethu to be a Kaafir. Saadiya like her Vaapa was not ready to give up her Malik. Going against the orders of her religious conviction and family, she moves in with Sethu, only to be distressed it soon. When Saadiya leaves home against her tradition, she has luminary in her eyes and admires Sethu. She insists on calling him Malik.

‘But it is!’ Saadiya whispered. ‘You are my Malik. The incomparable one who came from across the seas. Strong and straight, a leader among men, one who could be trusted to brave the ocean and winds and unknown ways. You are my Malik. Don’t you see?’ (M: 185)

Sethu and Saadiya start living as one, devoid of the ceremonial confines of wedding. She makes up to be busy with her domestic doings. Things are very happy to commence with, he went to work, and she waited for him at the doorstep in the evenings. This was the typical duty of the wife in Arabipatnam and so it was easy for her to survive. One day when she was alone in the house she realizes that all the ties between herself and her family are broken. She starts delving deep into herself and her family.
The smooth life is interrupted when a problem arises between Sethu and Saadiya when she demands him to get the Koran. He answers back angrily by getting her not only the Koran, but the Holy Bible, the Thirukkural and the Ramayana. When she persists that she will not disregard the Koran, since it is more than a book, and a way of life, Sethu reacts by mentioning that Hinduism too does that and was an older religion. Saadiya caught between two cultures, that is Muslim by birth and Hindu by marrying Sethu finds even more alienated, lead a marginal life that takes her nowhere. The clash between her loyalty to a dominant tradition and her forceful need to break through the conservative fence has left her in a dual construction of mind where feelings of hesitation and loneliness, and thoughts of confidence and affirmation, alternate with each other. Here she faces unparalleled restlessness and alienation which leads to a severe identity crisis.

The crises in their perfect life begin when she, the wife, shows that she has a mind of her own and embarks on, when she tries to work out her will. She wants her needs to be confessed. As the outcome to this thinking, the battle of her independence has started by her during her young age and now she takes it again with full spirit. Soon after the marriage Saadiya gets disillusioned about the human nature in general. Sethu denies her self-fulfillment and the marriage life leads to the collapse. The relationship between a wife and husband is expected to be not only cordial but intimate and enduring. But this relationship between Saadiya and her husband is an epitome of failure and an emblem of disgust, disappointment and depression. This is so because there was no love between them. Sethu finds hard to understand the attitude of Saadiya and they drift separately without love. Discontentment leads Saadiya to rebelliousness and restlessness. Her anxiety, discomfort, loneliness and isolation don’t encourage her to give voice to her unhappiness over her troubled relationship, rather it prompts her to develop the feelings of guilt, negativity and lack of esteem in facing the challenges of her life.
When the time comes to name her son, again a problem arises. Saadiya completely
gets dejected with the male ego allowing the nation bleed with violence, murder and damage
to other’s faith in the name of religion and God. Saadiya decided to name her son as Omar
Masood. She wants to bring up him as a good Muslim. When Sethu protested, both quarelled
finally he asked her to leave him and his child and go to her native. Saadiya was silent and for
five days she didn’t get out of the room. She feels that unless she comes to terms with the
separations that exist in her past, she can on no account be at peace. So here is a quest for her
real self, her identity. After experiencing many conflicts she becomes conscious her true self,
which frees her from her emotional bondages. When a person becomes aware of his or her
self, reform is predictable. And this is exactly that makes Saadiya evaluate her world in an
intend conduct. And her choice is the tragic end.

As the woman’s right to decide about her marriage is recognized, so also her right to
seek an end for an unsuccessful marriage is recognized. To provide for the stability of the
family, however, and in order to protect her identity she takes rapid decisions under
temporary emotional stress. Like the man, however, the woman can take decisions on her
own. Anita Nair, like Desai, feels the sex-role training is given in the Indian society from the
beginning. This is endorsed in many ways. The myths, epics, folk tales, customs and belief
systems force women to remain in a subjective position. From childhood itself they are made
conscious of their limitations - of the limited space that they should occupy. It is always
hinted that one who crosses the boundary will always be rejected socially. In Anita Desai’s
*Voices in the City* Calcutta is the city of darkness, death and destruction. The city epitomizes
the existential agony of Monisha. Monisha rebel against the oppressive atmosphere of the
city. Monisha tries to reach for her identity but feels that she has
no faith; no alternative to my confused despair, there is nothing. I can give myself to, and so I must stay. . . . Ah yes, yes, then it is a choice between death and mean existence and that surely is not a difficult choice. (121-122) (2)

The city Calcutta and the village Arabipatinam not only symbolizes the existential agony, hostility, resentment and isolated existence of individuals but also assumes the status of the authoritarian form which oppresses and restricts the potential of human beings. In the similar way Nair depicts Saadiya as a victim of alienation in her own land, Arabipatinam where Desai employed Monisha as a victim. She marries Sethu, Hindu by birth. She suffers from inter caste clash. The systems in society are so powerful that they generate conflicts which fragment the identity of the individual. Nair employs the stream-of-consciousness technique to reveal the forces which war on self. Her loneliness, anxiety, guilt in marrying against the wishes of her family all has their growing effect on her deeds. Like a typical Indian wife she is a customary practitioner of the work of repression with its negative and terrible consequence. Karen Horney points out that

quite often the repression of aggression against the male drains ail her vital energy. The woman then feels helpless to meet life. She will shift the entire responsibility for her helplessness on to man, robbing him the very breath of life (111) (3)

The only way to escape and attain individuality for Saadiya is to commit suicide like Monisha. Sethu leaves the boy in the care of Mary Patti and Sister Faith and rarely he visit his son. Sethu named the boy as Koman. Sethu finds a suitable wife after the death of Saadiya. He compared Devayani to Saadiya and said to himself that she was not like Saadiya. In the course of time two sons are born to them. He had to again confront his past when his son from Saadiya, whom he named Koman is brought to stay with him Sethu, the man, the husband, decides that and as an ideal wife Devayani has to accept his past and his son. And so she does, remarking to another woman that had a past wife is better than the present
Mistress. She as a wife is not asked for an opinion just the matter is conveyed. She is happy in the knowledge that in this case she is the present, the fortunate one to enjoy the blessings of a husband, home and children. So she accepts her step son without the murmur.

Sethu’s outlook and his manners are the realistic portrayals of Indian men who act like rulers at home, where they expect that everything should happen under their control. Devayani has been moulded and trained to accept the masculine world and its authority. She is confined to those stereotypes that define her and does not dare to question her husband about his past, she accept everything and decides that home is her world. Women in patriarchal society are enclosed inside and also she is fenced with another world outside. Thus they have no place to be just themselves.

In the case of a woman, it is the external force that dictates her life and her actions. She is not the decision-maker in matters concerning her and therefore, not liable for the consequences. The world, the masculine society, is hence accountable for her condition and any amount of complaints and grumbles are not able to reach the other end and her voices simply goes unheard. This male world is embodied in woman’s husband who is in charge of her, and by default responsible for her miseries. These women defend their integrity and accomplish their need to survive as individuals in the world that still operates on a system of patriarchal conventions. In the case of Saadiya, though hated by her husband she never opts for going away from him to her home instead she stays with him and presents herself as a “victim”. Her only means of revolt are her tears and hysterical acts; these are the forms of resistance that a woman resorts to. Sethu likes Saadiya but like all the Indian men he too behaves like a master and only due to this reason he had conflicts with her.

If Devayani questions her husband she will be conveniently thrown out from his life. Even though she feels fury inside she accepts his past and leads a healthy life with Sethu. This does not mean that she blindly believes her husband it is only for the sake of her
children and the society. Men, especially those in possession of power, continue to remain respectable and such acts are excused as momentary weakness or lack of control on the part of the man. Anita Nair depicts Saadiya as a rebel against patriarchal community in order to explore her own potential or to live on her terms, regardless of the consequences that such a rebellion may have on her life. As a rebellion she destroys herself. Secondly, through Devayani she gives a picture of man and woman in the Indian societies who don’t have the same kind of freedom to express themselves. Women are still greatly dominated by men and the society.

The next story revolves around Sethu’s son Koman and his *Mistress* Angela. Koman grows up into a Kathakali dancer. Kathakali is an ancient, highly stylized dance form from southern India, a combination of storytelling and performance the dancers paint their faces in bright colours to reveal the gamut of human emotions and, with loud, exaggerated gestures and expressions, seen act stories from the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Like the stories and make-ups in Kathakali, Koman’s story too has a lot of roles and his story is captivating. Koman also has a passionate and failed love story to share. A youthful Koman indulged in with Anglo-German artist Angela. Koman is left with no mother. He has a liking for dance. His father protested him when he practices the expressions in the mirror. Later he was enrolled in the school to learn Kathakali. It is set in the surroundings of the river Nila- Kerala’s own Ganges—that is well known for art and literature. Not far from the river is the famous Kerala Kalamandalam, the cradle of dance and music.

Right from the beginning Koman never missed a step. He was grounded in the nine faces of being love, contempt, sorrow, fury, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, peace. Later he learnt to live as a character. The turning point comes into his life, when he met Angela. The institute has a lot of foreign students to train. She is a student of Aashan and he determines to bestow her as a student to Koman, since he is departing from his profession. Koman trains
her and when he trains for his figure as Nala in Nalachitram, Angela is entirely impressed by
the performance of Koman. From that moment she is certain to be present in all his shows.
She notices the difference in Koman despite the fact that when he converses a dialogue he
addressed to Angela rather than Damayanti.

Subsequently both of them became lovers. Then they lived together in the little house
near the river Nila, and discovered a home for passion. As days passed by Koman’s father
reaches the institute to talk about his affair with Angela and also demands him to marry her.
For more than three months both survived mutually and shared all in common but never
considered about marriage. Later Koman felt miserable and stated her that he cannot continue
to be a teacher for her during the day and a lover during the night. Angela doesn’t want him
to feel embarrassed so she decided to give up Kathakali for the sake of her beloved.

Angela never visited to the institute to observe his performance. At that moment
Koman felt a sense of heaviness in his mind that he is responsible for the sickness of Angela.
His mind was in a puzzled state about Angela what to do with her whether to leave her in her
way or to have her with him or to go along with her. When he was bemused by the life of
Angela, her father sends a word through Babu that to make her as his wife, so that the gossip
in and around the village will come to an end. He was captivated of her and he saw life as she
wants him to. She convinced him to leave the village and settle in London. She promised him
with the intention to make a life there and so that he would become popular and known to the
entire world through his Kathakali.

Koman went to London after ten days. Angela settled there before him and made
arrangements so that it would be easier for him to cope with the different lifestyle. In the
beginning everything was ideal in their life. Later slowly the problems begin to take its shape.
Koman was dissatisfied with his life and tried to lead a happy life with her. Angela says,
We were still Damayanti and Nala, trying to make a new life. Our future was uncertain but our love was insatiable. Our life was the scene of the second day’s play.

Then I went to work and the serpent sank its fangs into him. (M: 381)

Their smooth going was interrupted. For just about twelve years Nala and Damayanti lived in perfect delight. In the meantime, Kali waited for an opportunity to destroy their life. Nala lost his kingdom and thrown in the streets unable to feed his wife he pleaded her to depart from him and move to his father’s palace as yet she refused to leave him and also preferred to live with him. Nala never wanted Damayanti to lead a miserable life in the forest and decided to leave her. One day in the forest the serpent poisoned him and he released from his curse followed by that he recaptured all his wealth. Even though he regained all the things which he lost for these years he was not at peace he had something troubled in his mind.

Koman assigned him as Nala and his little house as his kingdom went into the kitchen to wash his feet. Owing to this situation Angela was upset and said him that it was not Shoranur it is London so he has to change his activities. The terms of Angela injured him in addition to that he misunderstood her. He viewed this incident as he was jobless she scolded him. However he sat in the house for nearly three months without any profession. Angela became the breadwinner of the family and he couldn’t able to accept it furthermore he has to be dependent on her for everything. She left the money for him on the table and she cared more for him. He was undoubtedly fed-up in London. When she returns home after her work he questioned her about Ram Gopal, a chief person who provides a chance for the artists from various parts of the world to perform in the stage she gave a reply that he was out of station and many more he thought she lied and never made any effort to meet him.

He always senses only his situation and in no way considered her. He only wanted his desire to be satisfied and he by no means imagined her life. The love he had for her was tinged with bitterness and somewhat additionally along with. Gradually both of them started
to break from each other. Koman found fault with her and scrupulous on her that she made him to depart from his family, home and Kathakali. He lost his craze for Angela along with his counters turned. On account of all these episodes he made up his mind to find a job in London. Through the help of his friend he engaged himself in a restaurant. He has completely disregarded Kathakali from his mind. He is happy with the job he found in the restaurant and had a relief that now he becomes the man of the family by earning and supporting her with his income. He felt that as if he had released himself from the clutches of Angela by earning money. Even he emerges as like other men in the society and starts to suppress her. Angela and Koman’s life obtains a new structure, their life give the impression to exist as,

Our lives began to unravel. My hours were different from hers and we seldom saw each other. I left money on the table, now that I had some, for her to pay some of the bills with and she left me notes to find. We were merely room-mates sharing a bed. *(M: 390-391)*

Instead of establishing his name through Kathakali he became popular through his dishes which he prepared in the Kandhaswamy’s restaurant. Like Angela he too became busy with his work. He imagined that he was isolated and totally ignored by her but this not at all happened only he ignored her. He has a sense of inferiority complex inside and makes her life complicated. Through the novel the author tries to bring out the glaring fact that typical traditional husband who always prefers to be the man of the family. This reflects the views of Koman and the status of men in the society who always dominates and suppresses women.

In order to seek a chance to him to perform, Angela and Koman after a long break went together. She was very cheerful that she was sure to find an opportunity for his talent through Ram Gopal. She doesn’t behave in the way as he thought about her. She contributed her life and made efforts to make him popular in London. In turn she was mistaken by her husband. The same night after the party was over she with full of joy reached home. For a
second time he compared his life with Nala and Damayanti, like Damayanti who restored all the wealth after a long suffering she slept without any sense of grief, yet she did the lot for him he was not contented and certain not to take up Kathakali again. Like Nala he wanted to be isolated from her.

Angela, the love of his life becomes a burden to him to protect and save her. He considered him as an incapable being having no courage to lead his life. He sought to depart from her and to return to his little village only by doing this he can able to recover from his guilt. For his escape from London he gives an example to Chris like in the play Kalyanasoudhiam, when Bheema realizes he realized. He borrowed the amount from his friend and left a note to Angela regarding his dismissal from her life. When the time came at the institute the students accepted him back and were very curious to know about his life in England. He started to perform and loved his profession. From her own experience she understands that men cannot tolerate women who aspire to be successful individuals. Here again, we see that the woman in question, though educationally and intellectually a ‘liberated woman’, does not decide to walk away from the marriage. Instead, she has decided to tackle her marital problems in her own way, and make her husband realize that she has to be treated on an equal footing, without destroying the status quo of her family life.

As Nair goes further into the past life of Koman, she brings out the complexities of the relationship between Angela and Koman, to comprehend the injustices that he had done it to her. With his knowledge of Kathakali, a dance form which is entirely based on epics, he looks upon mankind with a wisdom drawn from the heroes, princes and villains of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. He recognizes every nuance of emotion and even the minor gestures and fleeting expressions but he couldn’t able to understand the feelings of his beloved Angela. In return for playing well the role of the wives, the women are promised to be looked after. The looking after is fitted to the male point of view, as is described in
Mistress in Koman's conversation with his guests about why he keeps Malini, his bird, in a cage.

How different is it [keeping a bird in a cage] different from keeping your wife and daughters at home? Isn't that a cage, too? And he, for it is always a man, would laugh in disbelief.

"How can you compare the two? Birds are meant to be free."

"And women are not?"

"Women need to be looked after," he would tell me, and his eyes would demand:

What do you know about it? You don't have a wife or children to worry about.

(M: 74)

Hardly ever are there any higher expectations mentioned that women are supposed to meet in the relationship to their husbands, be it emotional or intellectual. Being a wife is likes and be prepared that he does the same. Meanwhile, he has another relationship with other woman too, among them is Maya. Both of them had the relationship for nearly ten years. She like Angela also feels a deep sense of affection for him and although being married she makes it a point to call him almost every second and fourth Tuesday. It is much later that Koman marries her at the Guruvayur temple, more so because he feels that he should need a companion with him during his adult age. Finally in the last chapter of the book concluded with Koman, even in his adult age when he was talking about Maya and the happiness with her he never thought about his wife Angela, what has not happened to her whether she was alive or passed away nor she married other man like he married Maya? The essence of Angela was completely wiped out from his hearts because he was satisfied and happy with his life.

The next and third generation story revolves around Radha, Shyam and Chris. Radha, the heroine of the novel was a strong willed and a very beautiful young woman in her thirties.
At its core, *Mistress* is the story of a woman, Radha, who is married to one man but desires another. Radha’s husband is aptly named Shyam, another name for the Hindu God Krishna, while Radha’s love interest is named Chris, arguably a westernized reworking of the name Krishna. The novel’s incantation of the Radha-Krishna love story from Hindu mythology is, in other words, quite evident. When the novel begins Radha was the first girl allowed to pursue her higher studies in college. During her college days we find her getting into a relationship with a much older, married, senior colleague. They were lovers for two years, with him she enjoyed her life and also he made a promise that soon he will marry her. The dream of her marriage was brutally shattered, when his wife came to see her and made her aware of his other previous digressions. This self-satisfaction on the part of the man’s wife speaks dimensions about the state of many a marriage in India today. The wife in this case symbolizes the dependent woman who has no alternative but to accept whatever injustice her husband does out to her. She, the women in the society was even ready to accept his many extra marital affairs as a part of routine. Her argument for her husband not deserting him totally being that he has fathered her children, another common reason for many unhappy couples was that they live under patriarchal society.

Radha soon discovers that she was pregnant and her parents decided to abort the child as she has no choice. Suddenly her father arranges her marriage with Shyam. She unwillingly accepts the decision of her father. Like all intelligent and independent women, Radha too was not satisfied in her married life and her hopelessness is worsened by the actions of an anxious, over protective husband. He is a business man trying to maximize his profits and minimizes his real life without any passion for his private life. Shyam is a successful capitalist who had the bitter taste of poverty but after marrying Radha takes pride in his name brand cars and watches. He possessed a lot of wealth in Kerala the only ownership that he cannot truly own was his darling wife. He was money minded person, he owns a resort and
when he heard about the story being written about Radha’s uncle, Koman, he had invited Chris to be his guest for a discounted rate. His plan was to make Chris to write about the resort in his stories while he writes about Koman, thus giving his holiday resort advertising abroad.

The arrival of Christopher Stewart from London is the root cause for Radha’s loveless married life. The first day in the railway station when they both shake hands and he pronounced her name Ra-dha, at that moment unwillingly a connection was made between the two, a connection that would change the lives of three people, Radha, Shyam and his life. Radha without doubt catch the attention of Chris by giving her phone number. The novelist uses interesting techniques in the novel entwining the dance form of Kathakali and its mythical characters along with the story of Radha. The author uses Navararsas to depict the life of Radha. From Sringaram to Shantham in each of the chapters the first person narratives narrates their lives with reference to Kathakali. Koman while narrating the story to Chris he compares Radha’s husband Shyam with the characters of Bheema and Keechakan in Kathakali. Chris has a passion towards Radha. He creates waves, in the already unhappy marriage; effortlessly he finds his place in the life of Radha. She was drawn towards Chris; she responds to the fire that Chris was able to stimulate in her soul and her body.

Shyam and Radha have been married for eight years. In all these years she doesn’t had the desirability for her husband like she had for Chris.

I don’t understand what is happening to me, a married woman, a wife. When I married Shyam, I swore I never to flout the rules of custom again. How have I become so disdainful of honour, so contemptuous of convention? (M: 54)

Radha is caught in this predicament, first trying to be a suitable wife to her husband but her admiration for Chris makes her to go beyond the traditional values. An affair commences in the life of Radha because of her depressed life with Shyam. An affair that can
add excitement and a sense of purpose to life, and often this activity helps to taste up the state of achieving autonomy, from the hands of the dominating partner. Boredom and anger are the common reasons why Radha had an affair with Chris. Sometimes anger at a husband may cause an affair to start, especially when the spouse is being difficult and someone else is being nice and pleasant.

When she expresses him that she would like a start a business on her own, he yelped to her that he has a status in the society and she has to behave as a wife to him and not to spoil his status in the society. She raised her voice and said that he behaves as if he was superior to her but actually all are human beings no one is superior or inferior in this society. Behind this incident she was very angry and went into her room. As a rebel she started to revolt to her husband but he doesn’t cared about her behaviour. He likes her extremely and he doesn’t react in a way that they are equal and partners in life, he wanted her to be under the control of him. He likes her spending time in the beauty parlour or at the tailor’s shop or at shopping. But if it comes to her spending time somewhere where her intellectual talents are concerned, he laid an end to all her campaign. She stamps of the room door and in the evening she utters that she is going to meet his uncle and says,

I hope that is not going to undermine your standing in the society. Is there anything I can do that won’t? I wanted to teach in one of the primary schools and you said it was too much work for too little money. When I wanted to start a tuition class, you said the same…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. (M: 73)

Such a way of treating wives, i.e. as a property belonging to the husband, is reflected as normal in all the novels of Anita Nair. It matches what Spivak calls the
“tyranny of the “proper”—in the sense of that which produces both property and proper names of the patronymic—that I have called the suppression of the clitoris” (Landry 70). (4)

No matter how modern and enlightened the women are, they all are subjected to a man, at whose disposal they live. For Indian women marriage is regarded compulsory for completion and happiness in life. One of the main assessments of gender discrimination is the domination of a man over his wife; the authority of the male over the female and every woman approve this moral in the relations with man. Radha’s situation represents the unequal status of women in our society.

Shyam’s idea of marriage is to preserve an appealing wife, treat in her wishful fancies and make her dependent on him. He does not want a confident woman as a wife. Radha and Shyam are unable to get along in many ways and she feels suffocated in her marriage. She compares herself to the butterfly she wrapped up and stuck to a board as part of biology assignments in school and feels that her heart aches to fly somewhere departing from her husband. Shyam’s nature symbolizes the typical, Indian governing and trying to rule over every aspect of his wife’s life. The most prepared prototype of Indian society is the roles allotted to man and woman—woman is the devotee, man the administrator. Woman is the victim, man the seeker. Woman is of the home, man of the world.

The lovelessness in her marriage draws Radha towards Chris. But compared to Shyam he is warm, friendly and companionable. He treats Radha as an equal and she is completely at ease in his company, sharing with him things which she cannot tell others including her uncle. Her physical intimacy with Chris is characterized by a spontaneity and ease, but more important in their relationship is a perfect mutual understanding between them. Shortly Shyam spots Radha’s love for Chris and tried to attack her in many ways. Shyam has a linking of this affair and the author gives us his reaction in accordance with various raras—haasyam,
raudram, veeram, bhayankam and shaantham. It would be apt at this point to quote from Bernard Shaw,

Man and wife do not, as a rule, live together, they only breakfast together, dine together, and sleep in the same room. In most cases the woman knows nothing of the man’s working life (he calls it her home life) (11) (5)

Radha tries to break her marriage life with Shyam not only breaks her ties with him but also overthrows the traditional Indian consciousness built on Myths and Legends. Radha is emotionally detached and fairly disdainful of her husband, Shyam. Their matrimony existed only in name, without any effort on the part of Radha to keep it lively. She was unable to create a bond with him and considered that her marriage was already “fractured” as she mentioned to Chris.

She couldn’t conceive again after her marriage with Shyam. Once when she went to her sister-in-law’s home she was insulted by her. Rani Oppol doesn’t take her along to the religious function and stated that she is infertile. Radha is discouraged to visit a social event on the grounds of being childless. Radha was tempted to reveal her wicked past when she has accidentally conceived with a man whom she loved. But she was muted. After a couple of years of marriage her sister-in-law demanded Shyam and Radha to have a child.

Having a child is such a habitual hypothesis that everybody is entitled to question about it. It is very essential in a marriage that the wife has to give birth to children. When she was not able to, she was criticized by the society and her family. In case of Radha, she was able to give birth and she was fertile but her sister-in-law found fault with her rather than her brother Shyam. In reality the trouble was with Shyam that he doesn’t have counts to give birth to a child. His sister does not know and does not for an instant thought about Shyam. The thing here is that if there’s anything wrong in a marriage, it is entirely the woman’s fault, for the man is unblemished-beyond criticism. Shyam too never revealed the truth even to his
sister about his health, in this context he acts as a typical Indian male who would never wanted to be blamed.

Nair also discusses another important issue with regard to Shyam in the novel, which is his sterility. Shyam thinks how a man can have an infertility problem and the problem has to be only with women and not men. Here again an Indian male would feel less of a man if he is unable to sire a child. Radha's behaviour is considered improper by her sister-in-law for various reasons; what they have in common is that it on one hand hardly ever obey the rules the traditional female role that Rani expects her to play, yet on the other hand denies even the role of a modern woman that Radha would like to be. Radha's disregard for both is in her eyes a synonymous to a violation of the rules. Rani Oppol, herself sticking to the traditional image of women, expects others to act in the same way. Rani Oppol thus sees a woman's position as an object, a man's property, more important than her becoming a subject, i.e. someone who takes an active part in the decision making about their lives. They are women as Loomba calls "disappearing women," in the sense that they have no say in the discussions on their position:

From colonial as well as nationalist records, we learn little about how they felt or responded, and until recently, there was little attempt to locate them as subjects within the colonial struggle. (185)

That is also what their traditional role involved: not being considered subjects in any context, neither sought after as such. Due to this various assaults she hated her husband and starts to seek pleasure from Chris. On another occasion she was shocked to find out that Shyam has been maintaining a record of her periods. She expressed her words ferociously. When her uncle asked about the relationship between her and Chris, she replies, ‘Yes, Uncle. He cares for me. We are like twin halves of a being. We think the same way. I am not a sixteen-year-old girl. I know love of mine is real.’(M: 207)
On her way to home, she went to meet Chris in the cottage and there Radha took up the place of cello in Chris. Many times, when these women are left alone by husbands under precarious predicaments, these women do not hesitate in developing extramarital relationship with persons who show sincere affection they thrive for or sometimes for their personal achievements. Here Nair’s woman, Radha appear as split subject who watch her being watched by men but generate strength to attain freedom from the patriarchal society by living life of their own choice through revolt.

What can be noticed here is less a woman’s group and more her helpless inability to be angry for long with the only man she feels desire for, in a situation where he desires many others too. Mythology extricates from Radha’s life situation, her relationship with her husband, and the larger context within which she chooses to become involved in a traitorous relationship; rather than an unsophisticated silencing, there is instead a slighter flattening of the woman’s perspective and organization. Of course, organization is a complex conception. According to a present-day definition projected by Laura M. Ahearn, organization is the socio-culturally reconciled power to act. One of the strongest merits of Ahearn’s formulation is that it avoids a liberal understanding of group as free will is implemented by autonomous individuals. This question is perhaps answered most successfully by a poststructuralist idea of the (gendered) subject. As a result Henrietta Moore proposes a distinction between the individual and the subject; according to her, each individual takes up many subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices such that a single subject cannot be said to be the same as a particular individual. According to Moore, there are dominant and subdominant discourses that are both imitated as well as opposed by an individual’s various subjectivities. In other words, a nuanced kind of organization recognizes that oppositional agency is only one form of group; that organization includes within it aspects of both
contestation and agreement; and that agreement can promote the gendered subject who may find some limited power even within the governing patriarchal framework.

Radha’s attitude towards Chris builds a new moral code of extramarital relationship. Like all the ordinary husbands Shyam monitors her behaviour through his staff and even at times tried to control her but he was not successful in those attempts. She is compelled to stay back in home as Betty Friden rightly remarks that it is essential to be aware of how the very condition of being a housewife can create a sense of meaninglessness, non-existence, nothingness in women. These are the aspects of the housewife role that make it almost impossible for a woman of adult intelligence to retain a sense of human identity, the firm core self or “I” without which a human being, man or woman is not truly alive.

Finally, Shyam knows that he cannot reign over Radha’s mind and hence decides to reign over her body. Overcome by frustration and blinding anger, he forces himself on Radha, and offers an explanation. Later he feels rather satisfied with what he has done and arrogantly says,

Women like to be made to feel like women, dominated and put in their place. Even my Radha. So I wasn’t wrong, after all. (M: 164)

To understand the character of Shyam, it is important to restate the fact that Indian men, or for that matter, men from other cultures, look at women in their lives as their possessions. Nair have brought to the forefront the issue of marital rape, which is seldom discussed in public and in which does not essentially sum to aggression under the law because it is the husband who is the executor. Women have been living in ache and stillness for ages as sufferers of male supremacy and sexual violence. The thought that rape can be used as a tool to control women reaffirms the fact that male sexuality has an enormous pressure on the formation of masculine identity and female sexuality is considered submissive and something to be embarrassed of. Deshpande also brought forth the same issue
in her novel *The Dark Holds No Terrors* through the character Manu. Nair’s *Mistress* and Deshpande’s *The Dark Holds No Terrors* bring into the focus the issue of marital sexual violence making them, in the process these acts are the vital credentials for the better understanding of gender relations in modern India.

When a woman is indifferent to his husband and turns to another man for love or sex, it directly questions the virility of the husband. In this case, Shyam needed to reassert his ownership of Radha and ‘mark his territory’. He wanted to prove that he is the husband and he has complete rights to his wife’s body whether she welcomed the intrusion or not. The very description of the act in the novel shows Shyam with an almost animal like drive to his virility and asserts his position as the husband. His one act of rape leaves a deep scar on Radha whereas, he is quite satisfied with what he has done without a scrap of guilt.

Radha turned to be a bold character after the arrival of Chris in her life. But the extramarital relationship with Chris was unacceptable by her and thought it was a sin that she had committed. She understood that it was against the norms of the tradition, when she saw her husband shedding tears in the bathroom once he witnessed her in the hands of Chris. She seriously views her relationship with Chris and she terribly wanted him around her. Her wounded heart needed a man like Chris who showers sincere love and affection she thrived for in her life. But as their relationship progresses, she realises that Chris is dogmatic in his own way, and that his “modernity” is completely confined by his own location and identity. For instance, in their narrow-minded culture of flexible embraces, their first major argument occurs during a talk on contemporary politics and war. When Chris talks of Saddam Hussein as “evil,” Radha replies angrily by comparing Hussain to Bush and pointing out the latter’s hesitant political motives behind invading Iraq. Chris is irate and reproves Radha, saying that he finds her attitude of forbearance objectionable. Radha is distressed to realise that their sense of history, of politics, and even of ethics is different and runs deep; she hits back by
saying that he will never identify with what patience is about, since it is beyond westerners.

Fascinatingly, after this dispute, Radha then begins to compare her situation to that of the ravaged country, whose ravaging was alleged to be for its own good.

What do I have now? . . . I am a country that has to rebuild itself from nothing. I am a country that has to face recriminations and challenges and I don’t know where to begin. Worst of all, I don’t even know if you will be there to hold my hand through the rebuilding process. So wouldn’t it have been best to leave me alone? (M: 92-293)

So this is Radha, a probing mix of Indian and western sensibilities. She enjoys not only classical Indian dance and music, but also Yeats and American shows. She wears the Indian sari as well as jeans and little blouses. And while a part of her seeks freedom from Shyam’s conventional husbandly deeds, the other part of her is irresolute and troubled of the suspicions that her freer and more equal relationship with Chris brings. For instance, after Radha reminds Chris that they should use protection during intercourse, he carelessly asks her to pick up a few; Radha’s response is very interesting for a woman volubly looking for social and sexual equality. This kind of instances is evidence for Radha’s discomfort at Chris’ westernized approach to desire, an approach she finds objectionable after Shyam’s possessive and traditional love. This agitation in her experience of desire with Chris is not inevitably any lesser than the unease and unhappiness she feels with Shyam, though for clearly different reasons.

The nature of Radha’s desire thus reveals the same hybrid in-betweenness that informs the novel’s overall narrative logic. It is a desire that yearns for release even while questioning the morality of its own yearnings, a desire that is both pleasurable affirmation and painful lack, a desire that seeks to break through the constraints of culture but is unable to find meaning wholly outside of it. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the paradox in Radha’s desire is ultimately resolved through her rejection of both men—the “traditional Indian”
Shyam as well as the “modern American” Chris. The affair between them was merely known to all and now it is for Radha who has to decide with whom she would lead her life either with her husband Shyam or with her lover Chris. At that moment Radha thought about her mother Gowri:

Is this how my mother felt? Torn between two men, feeling like a slut whether she was with one man or the other? (M: 347)

Perhaps by presenting Radha in a more deliberate way, Nair answers the dual ethics followed in our society, where men alone take independence seeking sexual contentment elsewhere even though they are married. According to Manu, a wife ought to remain forever dedicated to her husband and always give pleasure to him while he is alive. After his death, she should in no way think of some other man. Even if the husband be bad of character and looks for pleasure elsewhere, he must relentlessly worship as God by a faithful wife. A brutal husband must be worshipped, but bad wife may at any time be replaced by another wife. However the widow is enjoined to stay faithful to her husband’s memory, a husband after having lost his wife may wed again and again. In such a society, the sexual liberation on the part of Radha is an assertion of her uniqueness, her newly emerged identity.

When Radha at a crucial moment had a discussion with Shyam in regard with her life he thanked her for revealing the truth. But Radha whispered that she would like to lead her life only with him. He examines her entire life including her menstrual cycle and he declared that she is pregnant now and her child needs both mother and father. And besides he acknowledged the truth that he cannot give birth to a child and the child she carries was not his child and it belongs to Chris. Shyam was not willing to accept Radha; he feels that she had betrayed him.

Chris left for London with a note that Koman was his father and he is the son of Angela. Shyam went to the railway station to send off Chris however he can’t face Shyam.
Shyam prepared himself to call back Radha and tell her that it is our child and convince her. Radha was sitting in the rock chair thinking about her past memories of Shyam. She closes her eyes and experiences the newness in her life. Now she is at peace she experienced from all the nine faces in her life. Radha declares,

All my life I have stumbled from one thing to another, persuading myself that this is how I 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. Isn’t it time I assumed some responsibility for my life?’ (M: 402)

The woman’s quest for recognition is satiated when she takes a lover and rejects her husband. The author seems to think it absolutely correct that such selfish husbands deserve such treatment from their wives. Radha has no malice against her husband Shyam for his past activities towards her. In fact, she thanks him as it was his hurt that made her become an independent woman and thus have her choice in life and succeeded in her identity. She also stated that not only she succeeded in her hunt but also in her independence, rather than left behind contented with that of a typical wife.

Anita Nair’s women characters do not frequently take such a severe step. Here Radha become known as the strongest self, though the strength was born out of intermission and lack of hope. This character has at last liberated her from all the restrictions of marriage, the ‘honourable bondage’ that she was handling with her husband for a long period. The man in the story that is Shyam appears as the most disgraceful character, living with his wife’s assets and at the same time torments her in the name of marriage.

In this novel the author describes the affairs of various characters involving in extramarital sex. She also supports sexual liberation, as a part of women’s self quest. In case of Radha and Shyam, Radha had an affair with Chris, Koman and Angela, here Koman marries Maya knowing that she was already married, Sethu and Saadiya, Sethu marries
Devayani, the same thing happened in the life of Sethu’s parents and Radha’s parents. In all these marriages the male characters had caused the trouble in their partner’s life and they found a new company deserting their wives.

In the changing scenario of post colonial Indian society that observed crosscurrents of traditional ideals and newly imported ones, with the task of giving then women characters the specific roles that would fit in the socio-cultural modes and values of the changed society. A new generation of women emerged, embracing the changed values according to which women have a voice of their own, a voice that had been suppressed for centuries. These women, who have the capacity to make free choice and need not therefore depend on the choice of the male, are portrayed in the novel. These new women characters are not however the same everywhere dilemmas are exposed accordingly.

All the problem of women starts with men. All the problem of men ends with women. It will be the apt words for Nair’s next novel Lessons in Forgetting (LF). The problem of the protagonist, Meera begins because of her husband Giri as in the case of Professor Jak, all his problems come to an end due to Meera.

Will it never end? Will the past never leave us alone? (LF: 151)

All it takes is one fleeting second for an entire lifetime to shift its axis (LF: 201)

It is understood that a certain resolution of theme is seen in the works of all twentieth century female writers. Anita Nair’s works of fiction too are no exemption to this script. Her latest novel, Lessons in Forgetting, focuses with the concept of marriages and their dilemmas, love, corporate life, page three cultures, situation of women in Indian society, fate, second chances, parenting, dependence, emotional anchoring, betrayal, female foeticide, forgiving, abiding mistakes and second chances in life and an individual relationships. She merges a complicated network of metaphors in this novel.
An allegory is equivalence between two objects or ideas, communicated by the use of a word instead of another. It is a unique characteristic of the distinctive style of a novelist. Like her earlier novels, the extremely title of the non-eponymous novel *Lessons in Forgetting* possesses figurative suggestions. The designation of the fiction is unusual. In an interview, Anita Nair said that she had a special and effective title for her latest novel and she said that actually, Nair had a different working title, but that began to sound too poetic; it lacked the resonance. Nair wasn’t too happy with it. One fine morning, this title appeared in a flash to her without rhyme or no reason. Probably, that was the genesis of the title. The final endorsement came from her 18 year old son, whose instinct she has trusted for years.

My publishers leapt at it and found it to be apt as well. Moreover, the title and the plot synchronized well. Both the characters in my novel Meera and Jak, have had devastating experiences in life. They need to get past it all and move on. Even the minor characters need to put behind their past lives and surge ahead. The title seemed perfect. (Krishnaswamy)

The significance of the title can be understood from how the past never leave us alone. A dominant element in the contemporary Indian fiction has been the expression of women’s wrecked psyche in the modern world. Anita Nair is one of those few Indian writers whose predominant interest is to highlight the psychic conditions of women that are purely objective. She is considered as a bold and straightforward writer. Her novel *Lessons in Forgetting* depicts the real life of her characters without hiding anything from the readers.

The other point that her novel reveals is the effect of social conditioning on women. Society uses many different means to propagate beliefs. Literature is one of the means to carry these ideas further surrounded by such messages. In this novel Anita Nair talks about the role of a corporate wife and cookbook author in urban India, abandoned by her husband
in her collapse family home, the other is Smriti, nineteen years old girl who is lying comatose and catatonic, whose body as well as character is compressed.

In postcolonial fiction of the twentieth century, myth is used as a framework that encloses and cross-examines historical event, thereby execution as a form of alternative history. Despite the occurrence of cross-cultural symbolic systems and radically hybrid forms of narration, the dominant method of reading myth in postcolonial literary criticism remains dependent on conceptual models that construct myth as originary racial narrative. This particular approach fosters readings of contemporary secular myths of “nation”, “land” or “identity” within culturally monolithic frames. The researcher scrutinize the intersections between early structuralist approaches to myth, and later poststructuralist modification of myth and suggest a postcolonial reading of myth as the ideological coded middle space between sacred and secular narrative. Nair continued influence and adaptability of myth to narrate vastly different historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Meera, the protagonist in Lessons in Forgetting is urban, literate and erudite. She is the mother of two teenagers and one of those women whose career is to be a corporate wife. Meera has no ambitions for herself; she thinks all is well with her life. Meera’s favorite fruit is the pomegranate which is the symbol of Greek goddess Hera, something of a leitmotif for Nair which represents death and the promise of rebirth.

In the Greek myths that Meera loves, there is a goddess who could be her. Hera, wife of Zeus, god among gods, and queen of the universe. (LF: 1)

The story begins with Meera, a cookbook writer, who imagines herself as a Hera and her husband as Zeus. Meera, a successful corporate wife for a husband, daughter in the IIT, an adorable son, a lovely old house in Bangalore, in which she and her family accompanies with her mother and her grandmother. Like Hera and Zeus, she wants to lead her life that is, he made the laws and she always obeyed to his words. Like all the wives in the country, she
too remains the same. Being tied up in marriage with Giri; Meera feels that it is he who provides comforts and gives meaning to her life, in one view and also meaningless in another view. She confirms to the concept of the ideal woman as represented by her mother and grandmother- the one who does not have an independent identity a woman who shed her ‘I’ and loses her identity to her husband’s.

Meera’s life is shaken when her husband walks out on their marriage. Giri leaves home without a word. Meera at this stage shoulders the responsibility for her family as a breadwinner. Giri’s disappearance stuns her and awakens her to her real position in life. Life for her is believed fully in relationship with others. Meera suddenly finds herself traumatized out of her dream life and waken up to the fact that there is no resource of money to run the household. Sometimes it is really hard to stop thinking about the past and move towards future because past is the mirror and even a ladder which always shows what we have turned into our present.

She looks upon marriage as an agreement which makes women so dependent. She thinks love to be an immense cheating, a trick, a fence, a process of making one modest and reliant. To her, sexual intuition, motherly instinct, self care, identity awareness appear usual and meaningful. Anita Nair’s Lessons in Forgetting is the story which throw a small rock of hopefulness and defeat the mirror of past, so that the life can start again. At that moment she decides,

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 to.

Besides Giri is not Zeus. He isn’t a compulsive philanderer, merely a middle-aged man who has had his head turned. (...) Which other woman can lay his table as I do,
or make a home for him as I do? The felicity of our lives may be shadowed, but will never be tainted or violated. Giri will not risk losing any of this. (LF: 39-40)

The story like a pendulum swings back and forth, in past and present, reminding sparkling memories of the past for all the characters. Anita Nair uses the flash-back technique stream of consciousness for the narrative, memory being the source of narration in most parts. Her characters are life-like, almost alive in each one of us. They are allegorical; at times they seem to be attributes rather than individuals. When Giri was in love with Meera, she wants to know the reason what made him to love her rather than to go for educated girls or the young women in the professional world. Though those women are stylish, experienced and also they have careers whereas she is only a postgraduate in English. While she questions him, he says:

‘I don’t want a journalist, a teacher; a brand manager—it’s you I want as my wife. Let me assure you, it takes really a smart woman to be a corporate wife.’ (LF: 37-38)

From the above lines it is clear that he seeks his life partner in the traditional ways of life. Giri is a perfect mould of a modern, educated, self-confidence Indian male who finds it hard to get rid of his conventional role as a man. Giri’s theory of marriage is to keep a sweet companion, treat in her wishful fancies and make her important to repeat the fact that Indian men, or for that matter, men from other cultures, look at women in their lives as their property. Meera is in the vein of all the customary wives she sought to lead her life as a corporate wife accommodating and surrendering all her needs to him.

Meera has to taste the reality of life with Giri’s sudden disappearance and ask herself if Zeus was looking her way. The reality of life is difficult to digest. The Lilac House evolves as an apt symbol for the corroded, dissolution marriage of Giri and Meera. This colonial house in Bangalore is the residence of the couple for Meera’s family—her mother Saro and grandmother Lily. Meera is confused and does not know how to react for her husband’s behaviour and cannot able to jump into a conclusion what he has done was a depression,
betrayal, shame, dread, defeat, dislike, disgust or distinctive. She feels attached to everything in the house for the reason that she has spent her life with her grandparents and parents. Each and every inch in the house remains like a strength of involvement for her. It pains her to think that the house, where she spent her right from her birth to this moment, would be demolished without a trace by Giri.

In the early part of the novel Meera appears as a woman with only negative image of herself that is why she does everything according to the wish of her husband. After the dismissal of Giri from her life, then begins the story of her transformation into a strong, self-respecting and an independent woman. The utter selfishness she had seen in the male figure that had rendered the experiences of genuine human warmth and tenderness strange to her. Meera tries to call back Randhir and decides once again to start her career as a writer. Her constant efforts to compose herself are unsuccessful. Her mind is beyond control and doesn’t know to tackle the situation in her family.

Now she became the breadwinner and caretaker for her family. After many attempts for the survival, Meera’s search now is towards objectivity. Soon the new bonds and obligations crowned with responsibilities make her understand the value and dignity of life. Though she overcomes with a sense of desolation and bereavement, she reminds herself that she must not allow her past to come in her way of doing. At last, she finds a job for her as a research assistant to a professor of cyclones from the University of Florida, Jak or Kitcha, who is here on his own mission. When she discusses the proposal to her family members during the night they offered her different ideas concerning her career.

With the growth of educational and professional opportunities, the educated middle class women, particularly in urban areas, have become conscious of their rights and responsibilities. More and more educational opportunities and employment possibilities are thrown open to women. Exposure to reformist activities, economic independence, and
influence of western feminist movements, all helps women to go a long way in bringing
about sweeping changes in their position and attitudes. Encouraged by a desire to recognize
their target for a new way of life, women began to voice their feelings freely. As Meena
Shirwadkar observes:

As women received education they began to feel an increasing urge to voice their
feelings. The awareness of individuality, the sense of compatibility with their
tradition-bound surroundings, resentment of male dominated ideas of morality and
behavior problems at home and at place of work in our society-all come up in a welter
of projection. (n.p) (8)

In order to move towards a discovery of independent identity and to break away from
the colonial hangover, there was to be a return to the ethics of the indigenous tradition, which
led to an excessive stress on orthodox social values. Harmony and understanding of the
feelings that assists between disagreeing selves and the opposing morals is the true basic
Indian attitude. Meera is now seen as an individual implementing her potential self to a full
use by affirming herself. In her new role as a career woman, Meera is no longer Hera and she
prefers to move into something more decent and beautiful. She feels that the life that she
lived with Giri is narrow and also her identity now make her feel that it barely covers her
needs. Meera on the outlook of the Professor compared him with her husband. All the way
through the discussion with Jak, she comes to know about his daughter Smriti, due to a
mysterious accident she has been reduced to a continual vegetative condition, which caused a
disorder of perception. She appears as a creature, where no one has ever seen in any of the
tragedy documentaries. Through myth and modernity, Nair has held her own, proving an icon
to younger writers. It's about a human being trying to place herself within relationships,
people, and ideas.
Smriti is a rebellious teenage girl, who comes to India to research female foeticide in rural Minjikapuram. The significance of the word ‘Smriti’ is crystal clear. The Smriti here is a symbol of Jak and Nina’s care for and appreciation of memories. Jak decides to discover the hidden truth himself about the event that happened to Smriti. When he reached the small seaside town Minjikapuram he recollected his past memories about his parents. Kitcha’s (Jak’s) father left her mother when he was young. His father turned out as a Sanyasi and left her mother Sarada. His mother resided along with her son in her parents’ home. Alienated from her husband, she comes to her parental house to see her sense of belonging to the world but the same escapes her. On her return to home, her father simply leaves her and goes away. Sarada lives an isolated and lonely life. At times she regrets for having come to her parents house, as she is reminded of her children. In all these memories her husband never figures at all. Everybody starts to find fault with Sarada because she failed to please her husband. A woman is expected to perform in silence with the whims and fancies of her husband.

Sarada’s father was a modest man, in general Brahmins in no way they allow their girl children to college, and they all stop their education after the high school level. But it was her father who insisted upon the necessity of education to the female child and made his two daughters the University graduates. He too find fault with her and admit that just for the reason that of her actions and mannerisms her husband left her. On hearing this scandal Kala, Sarada’s sister protested to her mother not to abuse her sister by these heartless words. She also declared that Sarada’s husband went out only to become a Sanyasi and he doesn’t step out for another woman. She couldn’t bear the words of her own father talking against his own daughter. In the construction of the family if anything goes wrong it was the woman who has to be blamed. In this sequence her father finds a bridegroom for Kala. In terms of Kala, the life is:
Like Akka, I would be on my own if I didn’t make my husband happy. My destiny was linked to his. I had no life to call my own. I was nothing on my own. So when I saw how much my husband loved me, I was comforted. \( LF: 196 \)

As mentioned earlier her father was such an advancing man in giving education to his children but so regressive when it comes to Kala’s hair. He never wanted her to cut off her hair. Due to the effect of her voluminous hair she suffered a neck pain. And the doctor several times claimed her father to shorten her hair but under no circumstances he accepted it. Kala was bold enough to raise her voice only to her mother and she would not open her mouth in front of her father. She was not given any priority to talk aloud the mistakes of her father. Her hair is the only trouble to her in her life. Often she undertakes the neck pain and headache. She experienced a lot of physical illness with her hair and raged in anger towards her mother,

‘What am I do then? Live with this pain till I die?’ I snapped, angered by her inability to see my point of view…. ‘Besides, there is much greater pain waiting for us women in our lives. How can you be cowed down by something so negligible?’

\( LF: 194-195 \)

Kala’s mother with reference to her hair indirectly she conveyed the condition of women. Each and every human being born as a woman should undergo some sort of plight and pains in the life. It can also be taken as a warning given to her about to her forthcoming marriage. Her father fixed a suitable groom for her. Her father was proud enough and in delight when the groom and his family members were very much impressed by her lengthy attractive hair.

Like Jaya was named as Suhasini by her husband in Shashi Deshpande’s That Long Silence, on her nuptial night Kala was given a new name as Vaidehi by her husband Ambi. She was expected to be an ideal wife (Sita) to the ideal man (Rama). Her happiness is
shattered when he revealed his fondness about her hair and furthermore he added to take care of the hair properly and not to touch the hair without his permission. Every Friday in his house she must take hair was and she was assisted by her mother-in-law, sister-in-law and at times even by her husband, Ambi. There was no concern for her longing to her cut the hair. Everyone in his house and in her house wanted her hair. One day when her husband Ambi was out of station Kitcha requested her and both went to the sea. She was completely wet and was scared about her family members. Repeatedly for five days both of them went to the sea and enjoyed, on their last day Kitcha looking at bundling of her hair and it is Kitcha who makes her realize the reality.

He convinced her and no one will even realize the difference, only he, the little boy can able to feel her unbearable agony of her hair. As Kitcha asked her to do she did it since she cannot bear the pain. She relieved herself from the pain by cutting her hair. Though Kala hesitates to cut her hair, soon she realizes that if a young boy can think of her burden, why can’t her husband a grown up, experienced think of her burden. Ambi arrived after two days. He shouted, screamed and said that she has betrayed him. It nearly took a long time to grow.

She pleased and begged her mother-in-law to forgive her for her act. But was no change in Ambi’s behaviour. When her hair reached the same length she could able to realize the same pain. After seven years of their marriage life, she was childless. Her husband decided to marry again; she never protested and finally decided to leave him. Kala now feels that she has to face the circumstances bravely and it is she who has to decide about her life. She utters, that one cannot go back in life, one has to carry on the path of one’s own preference where ever it leads all those ties respected as everlasting and long lasting are further short-lived than a droplet. Before she leaves she cut her hair to the neck and she had a woven and plaited hair with jasmine and kanakambaran flowers and says that is all you ever wanted keep it and walks out as a woman ready to face the life as it is.
Kala’s false hopes are finally crushed. She realizes that all ties between herself and
Ambi are broken. Despite all care and concern, all sacrifice and pain that she carried out
being the wife of Ambi, they had flung her away. She was not willing to share her life with
another woman. A severe identity crisis was experienced as the growing-up girl are
persuaded and conditioned into stereotyped roles. Growth of a real self and complete
personality is invariably thwarted by a plethora of do’s and don’ts. Kamala Das feels the
oppression; tragedy is not death, but growth. Having a child is such a routine principle that
anybody, it seems, is allowed to inquire about it. Kala and Ambi are still childless in their
eight years of marriage. Just like, a marriage is the only credible option for a respectable
single girl, having a child (or several) is the only possible future for a married wife, unless
she is barren. There are many prejudices women without a child must face.

The typical Indian situation through Kala’s words describes how it brings down the
feelings of the female. The Indian wife, like Kala, urges to fit in but miserably fails in her
attempts and ends in isolation from her husband. Finally Kala lived along with her parents.
She found an absolute independence which she will not renounce at any cost. Kala felt,
however, significant a man might be in a woman’s life, there was no loveliness in sharing the
room or bed together if he was the wrong person. Kala emerges out as a woman with strong
will power having her own individualistic approach to life. She was an educated woman
consumed by freedom, equality and justice. She doesn’t like to become another woman
parallel to her mother by accepting and sacrificing the whole life for the sake of her husband.
As a bold attempt before walking out from Ambi’s house as a symbol of liberation from the
cruel hands of the man she in the course of time gained fearless strength and says to her
father:
‘I am not going back. And I will never grow my hair again,’ I said. ‘If you force me to, I will leave home. I will be a whore but I won’t be a wife. Not Ambi’s wife. And don’t call me Vaidehi ever again. I am Kala, do you hear me?’ (LF: 206)

The next narrative Smriti, wants to see a true India and do something to her country. Smriti strongly believes that women should have the guts to articulate themselves and expose the evils of the society courageously. We Indians are familiar with many reasons and gender bias associated reasons. The act of aborting or terminating a foetus whereas it’s still in the womb, because it is female, is known as female foeticide. This can be done after determining the sex of the child before it’s born, through ultrasound scans. This is the fundamental problem existing in Indian Society. The primary discrepancy is something like business. When you invest, you like to get return. When you invest in son, it will give you return but when you invest in daughter, it will give return to others in future.

Anita Nair focuses on female foeticide which is still a problem in 21st century India. It still continues to be unabated in parts of India. To bring awareness to the society the author through the character Smriti voices out the status of the society. As the emerging problem in our country, Smriti wants to do help for the Dying Daughters of India. As Mathew tells her,

Here is your chance to do something. To talk to these women who kill their daughters in their wombs without a qualm. It is not awareness that is needed here. It is to be able to stoke up guilt, regret, remorse, the works…. They need you now. The dying daughters of India need you.’ (LF: 152-153)

Smriti two days before an awful accident in Minjikapuram sends a photograph to her father stating that she is going along with the four team members to conduct “Save the Girl Child” programme. As well as she mentions the three guys through the photograph. Jak tries to collect the news from Chinnathayi, a sweeper in Minjikapuram. Smriti is mentioned as ‘it’ in the novel. She along with her friend Rishi went to Minjikapuram. Smriti was agitated in
opposition to the rules and regulations, women they discover the sex of their unborn babies. She wanted to prove them that even a female child can give pleasure and delight in the life of their parents. All the way through the discussion she came to know about the female foeticide existing in that village. Smriti wanted to cry and shout that aborting a female child was a sin but she knew no one will hear her. Smriti delivered all the messages about the mobile scan system and she went out early. When she returned Rishi tried to convince or make her understand the situation in the village but Smriti replies,

‘I can’t be like you,’ Smriti said. ‘I can’t see and pretend that I haven’t seen.’

(LF: 295).

Rishi as many times pleaded her not to take risks and it was not America to make a fuss about the happening which she had seen in the hospital. The people in the village were very dangerous but she was stubborn in her thought and asked him to quit the place if he was scared about the villagers. Moreover she had a hope that she can able to create the report with the help of a woman whom she met in the bus. Smriti went to the hospital and suddenly a man came out and denied Smriti’s entry in the hospital. She sat opposite the nursing home and within three hours twenty two pregnant women arrived there to take scan. Rishi left the place and promised her by six he will reach to the spot to meet Chinnathayi, her daughter died at the nursing home after an abortion and she had the papers and reports with her. It was the evidence that Rishi and Smriti thought to collect from the lady.

After their dismissal from the hospital early in the evening Rishi was attacked in the lodge. Arul Raj helped Rishi and admitted him in the hospital. He doesn’t know what happened to Smriti. Then only through Chinnathayi Jak found the truth about his daughter. After Smriti left Chinnathayi’s house she was inquired by Srinivasan, he was responsible for the attack of Smriti. Her granddaughter, Kanaka told all the details about Smriti to Srinivasan. Chinnathayi pleaded him to leave her and prayed to God to save her and
moreover it was a known fact that God too sometimes closed his eyes when it comes to women. She was reminded of her past memories. Chinnathayi’s daughter had been married to a monster who tortured her to give birth only to a boy child and not a girl. When Shanta, Chinnathayi’s daughter was expected to give birth she was invited as a midwife to deliver the child. She was very happy that it was a girl but Shanta was very much worried about it. Her husband and her mother-in-law demanded that the child must be a boy and not a girl.

‘Well, we also need girl children. The human race would die out otherwise. What if your mother and mine thought of us as you do now? I was so happy when my Shanta was born,’ Chinnathayi said quietly. (LF: 313)

Recovered from her daughter’s memories she rushed to save Smriti from Srinivasan. Smriti waited for Chinnathayi but there three hefty men approached her. Chinnathayi stood there helpless. Those three of them behaved like animals, the worldly beasts attacked her. She was the muted eyewitness to the effortlessness with which they detained Smriti down and slapped her. One by one tortured her and that wasn’t enough for them. Finally,

Panting. Heaving. Sobbing. Seeking to escape. The booming treacherous sea waited, but nothing was better than what these predatory beasts could do to her.

And then the monster king of the rubbish – the giant twisted log that lay on its side-then rose with the wave and came to slam against her head. (LF: 318)

Smriti in the process of saving the dying daughters of India (female foeticide), Smriti herself became a dying daughter. She wanted to do something to save her motherland. The killing of women exists in various forms in societies the world over. However, Indian society displays some unique and particularly brutal versions, such as dowry deaths and sati. Female foeticide is an extreme manifestation of violence against women. Female foetuses are selectively aborted after pre-natal sex determination, thus avoiding the birth of girls. It was
Smriti who raised her voice against the violence and from the society she received a brutal attack. This was the condition of women in India when they start to voice out their problems.

Meera’s condition reminded Jak of his mother and her son Nikhil reminded him of his own childhood. When Meera met Smriti, she was reminded of her adolescent daughter Nayantara. So the memories are alive and aching inspite of many intellectual attempts to rub out them. On watching Meera, Jak thought of his mother’s words said to him after he had deserted her, ‘I am cursed, Kitcha, that’s what I am. Neither a wife nor a widow.’ (LF: 17)

The conditions of almost all the women are same in this universe. According to the patriarchal society women were given less importance like an object and men uses them and throws away when he feels bored.

Meera though isolated from her husband remembered all her fights with Giri, their moments of mutual togetherness, his insults, his behaviour with the old ladies in the family and his kids, his insistence on selling the house, etc. But Giri as a father to two children and the man of the family never thought about the situation of his family just walked out of the house when he understood that his wife would not sell the house at any cost. He was selfish and behaved like an ideal man in the male dominated society. In that case if his wife had done the same will the society accepts her decision. Everyone will blame her for her act and they will together condemn her for her conduct. Anita Nair’s depiction of Meera’s memories was brilliant and she brought forth her trauma very deftly.

She doesn’t talk about Giri anymore. But she thinks of him often and though it is with a rancor that stings, she misses him a thousand times a day. It creeps upon her rather abruptly, that moment of irretrievable loss, the emptiness, a cruel hand squeezing her heart with a cold clutch and causing a whimper in her: Oh Giri. (LF: 169)

The myth of Hera, in a way, unfolds itself through the story of ups and downs in the life of Meera. Meera was no longer sure who she was. The abandoned wife like Hera has to
be a protectress and look after her children, mother and grandmother. In contrast the real Meera longs for gratification and realizes that she has been cursed by the false Hera. Only because of her curse she imagines that she changes as the false Meera. Her career and involvement with Jak changed her a lot and now she becomes a new Meera no longer worried to please her husband Giri. Unintentionally she develops a liking towards Jak but she is not confident about her marriage with Jak. Even in relationship with Jak, she considers her as a part of Hera.

Myth too has been used as a technique to illustrate the novelist’s vision or point of view. Almost all the novelists of this period have interpreted myth in their own manner so that it may contribute to the expression of their point of view. It does not imply that postcolonial novel is only internal in character. The momentous events which have changed the course of life in India cross-currents of new ideas, scientific and technological revolution all have left indelible influence on the development of the novel.

Meera has always seen herself with other people’s eyes. She is someone’s daughter or wife and mother. In the beginning Jak thought Meera as a silly cookbook writer, a pathetic and an abandoned wife. Later through Jak she felt that she had no self image or identity of her own. Meera controlled her emotions like Hera could control the monster she had created but the multi-headed Hydra reared by Meera, raised itself whenever she wanted to do something for herself and took her to the task for putting herself first. Meera had learnt to shut it in a cave and had submerged herself in being a woman Giri wanted her to be. But now that Giri had abandoned her and went for his mistress.

The new and fresh Meera who stands on her own desire says,

But this Meera doesn’t fear the hissing, many-headed Hydra. She knows how to chop its head of uncertainty off and bury it deep so it stays there. (LF: 307)
From the safety of her secure life Meera emerges all the way through the stress of the two worlds in her as a resolute strong determined modern woman, who is ready to face life, admit her responsibilities directly and not to escape from or evade them. During the process of her role as a breadwinner, Meera also observes that significant co-existence can come only through understanding, admiration and concern, not through suppression or dominance.

Choice of the spouse is the right of both man and woman. The only thing to keep in mind is that choice is perfect only when there is understanding. In the same way, freedom is useful only when there is responsibility-responsibility to one. Freedom is to survive whole within the system, and Meera ultimately feels it is possible.

Meera, after many consequences find a right choice, Jak. Everything about him right from his language, his swift progress through the hospital words and his caring towards his daughter appears to Meera, as if he does everything in perfect manner. Later she realizes Jak’s interest in Meera is not that of a master and slave but that of a man and woman. At that moment she was contented with the relationship of Jak. She decided to walk along with him.

It was seldom that a woman had a second chance to start her life. All her longings, pains and sufferings rushed forward and gave herself to him. She had a hope that Jak will not leave her in any circumstances and will be always with her.

Anita Nair could not find anyone resembling her in the Indian mythology. Nair’s justification of the choice of Hera is explicit and appropriate.

I failed to find an Indian goddess who was the composite of good and bad, strength and vulnerability, love and hate, naivety and manipulation all at the same time. Our myths tend to depict a woman as either a goddess or a she-devil. The only one I could think of was Draupadi but she wasn’t a goddess and her story wouldn’t have fitted Meera’s as well as Hera did. Or even suited someone like Meera who did see herself as the queen of the world. Her world, atleast!
While there may be some character in our puranas, who would have been as apt as Hera perhaps, unless one was a myths expert the chances of stumbling upon a goddess as human as Hera is very unlikely. And Meera isn’t that so it would have been flaw in characterization for me to have used such an Indian parallel. (Kandasamy)

Both the novels taken up in this chapter describe the peculiar problems of women who have for one reason or the other lost the support of their husbands. They embrace themselves up to the situation and the process through which they pass reflects how the social situation determines a woman’s thinking. Life is not a bed of roses for any of them and the way in which they respond to the problems of their lives reflects the difference in the manner in which women of different generations respond to the thwarting of their desires.

Myths and legends that are also products of a male-oriented culture play an important role in formulating the ideas on which woman is to base her life. Certain role-models in every society determine the attitudes and expectations of women and the inherent contradictions in culture make it difficult for women to indulge in their desires. The conflict for Indian women arises when they try to carve out a viable space for themselves in the society which is suffering from Sita-Savitri Syndrome. In the debate on nationalism and colonial history as well, gender and sexuality have been central to the conceptualization, expression and enactment of such relations across the colonial spectrum. The nation/state or its guiding principles have often been imagined literally as a ‘woman’, e.g. The world's two primordial great epics, Ramayana by Valmiki and Mahabharata by Ved Vyasa, both centre around the characters of Sita & Draupadi, who are the archetypes of ideal womanhood from the male view point.

The role women play in literature and life in the past and present in both parts of the globe is almost similar. In ancient Vedic literature, women were deified and there is a patron goddess for every aspect of life but in reality a contradictory state of affairs exists in India.
Various questions arise regarding the actual status of woman such as who is the real woman? Where is the real woman - What is her real entity? Has she an identity of her own? The primordial myths gave woman an identity that is stereotypical and has been reinforced by archetypes for ages. Sita of Ramayana and Draupadi of the Mahabharata are considered to be the two poles of feminine experience in the world. Sita absorbs all inflicted misery and humiliation of the male ego whereas Draupadi challenges the male ego to the epitomic limits of human excellence. Sita accepts, accommodates and withdraws. Draupadi resents, rejects and involves herself in the process of life as a protagonist and yet never transgresses the rules. These two feminine archetypes define the limits of feminine experience in reality, especially the Indian Reality. There may not be an open articulation of the necessity for Indian women to follow the examples of Sita and Savitri but these figures being an inseparable part of our awareness formulate it required for women to do so.

The female protagonists of Mistress and Lessons in Forgetting are also supposed to abide the whims of their male counterparts like their mythical predecessors. Morality will be approved to them only if they conform—that perhaps explains Radha’s frantic desire to lead a pleasant life and Meera’s pretence that everything is normal in her broken marriage.

Even in the present day literature woman is presented a submissive tolerant person. The traditional values of feminine style and order are not disdained completely. She is now a more dignified Sita who shows her strength of character by absorbing all male atrocities or an intellectual Draupadi protesting and revolting against all humiliation. The gender split in modern Indian literature moves between new icons of these two bold and prehistoric figures who dominate over it since ages. There is silent suffering coupled with paramount loyalty to man in the Sita type and woman as an individual demanding social justice in the Draupadi types. The latter has got greater appreciation. As Deshpande also says in Writing from the Margin and Other Essays that:
Myths are still important to us. We do not want to demolish them, we need them to live by; they have shaped our ideas for a great many years, they embody our dreams. To destroy them would be to leave a large rent in the fabric of our culture…In India, specially, myths have an extraordinary vitality, continuing to give people some truth about themselves and about the human condition. (99)

It is not a refutation of myths but an alteration of them to suit the needs of a modern woman that is desirable. In Nair’s works the perspectives, figures and circumstances are mythological but the responses and reactions of her protagonists are parallel to those of contemporary women. The characters are portrayed as reactionary. She restructures the ideal male created mythological models to search and create. It is possible to draw akin between the archetypes of women and the protagonists of both Anita Nair. The image of woman in literature emerges out of the existing world. In India, which has been regarded by sociologists as a traditionally male dominated society, both men and women writers have seen woman in relationship with man, primarily as mother, wife, mistress and sex object. A woman's individual self has been given very little recognition, and her emotional turmoil generally results out of the frustration resulting from this. The image of the ideal woman the so called ‘angel in the house’ exists in Western patriarchy as well. Besides, this sense of duty in the woman makes her practice a morality that makes her feel responsible for the welfare of the family.

In the case of Radha, she revolt against the doctrine ridden society to find solutions for their emotional turmoil. In spite of being in a shocked state, Meera decides to fulfill her responsibility towards her three grown-up daughters. Forgetting her distress, she proves to be a strong support to her children. Men and women in her novels fight shoulder to shoulder against a common antagonist, the establishment. The women break through the tradition of home, hearth and veil to fight the establishment with whatever weapons they can use or with
sulking impassiveness. Though their voice echoes in the extreme horizon the rebellion remains inside the four walls of the household. Nair depicts through her bold and reformist woman characters the declining values and transformative adjustment between tradition (stereotype) and modernity (archetype), between desire and decision, with natural psychological stress that results. Her woman characters are not mute; they are ever questioning and cannot be daunted by any pretext.

In Indian society patriarchy always expels what it cannot dominate or control, but the richness of chaos is no less important because of the life of its miraculously regular process. When a woman is not considered liberation of man and reclaims limitless freedom. She meets man who cannot resist the desire to love her inorder to become her civilizing hero; the vital and terrifying chaos expelled by patriarchal culture returns from unknown lands, from islands where the only people who put to shore are those who have lost their course.

In both the novels *Mistress* and *Lessons in Forgetting*, Anita Nair tries to portray the sufferings of woman characters and also how their lives have been used by their spouses without thinking about their partners. According to men or society a woman has to be a good wife should in addition nurture her good qualities, while disposing of her vices. As for her appearance, she is expected to keep her good looks for her husband, possibly also to impress his friends. It is expected that she will be loyal and obedient to her husband, always at his disposal. Furthermore, even now as a married woman she has to ensure that her reputation, as well as that of her husband and family, remains intact. To meet this requirement she has to manage the household so that it is a true home for the husband and act properly in society, keeping in mind that any possible small lapse on her side can affect his prestige.

In return for playing well the role of the wives, the women are promised to be looked after. Hardly ever are there any higher attitude mentioned that women are supposed to meet in the relationship to their husbands, be it emotional or intellectual. Being a wife is being an
object owned by her man more than anything else. She's supposed to do as he likes and be prepared that he does the same. On the contrary to the social setup there are female characters in the novels that instead of being satisfied with their destiny of those that differ, long to become a part of the nameless collectivity. Such women who chose to conform to the expectations placed on them as women, rather than individuals, is central to this chapter. The focus is on what the areas of the greatest conformity are, what the motivation not to stand out is and whether there is a pattern as to what kind of women decide to merge into the collective.

The three women characters in the novel *Mistress* of three different generations namely, Saadhiya, Koman’s mother, Angela, Chris mother and Radha, the protagonist like in the same way in the novel *Lessons in Forgetting* three different generations of women characters namely, Meera, the protagonist, Jak’s mother Sarada and Kala. These women characters always depict the toughness they had in their married life. Anita Nair has very effectively employed the myth in these two novels. Radha’s life is constantly compared with Kathakali and Meera’s life is compared with Hera, the Greek goddess. Her use of myths in *Mistress* is extraordinary. So obviously the readers expect her to use of Indian myths for her Indian characters. But she uses Greek myth in *Lessons in Forgetting* and besides Nair justifies her choice of Hera in this novel.

In these two novels, the metaphors attempt to explain the repression of married women, their domination, helplessness and nuances of patriarchy and their death in life. Marriage is set as ultimate goals for girls. A woman has to mould and transform themselves to suit the interests of their male counterparts and in this process suppresses their self identity. Anita Nair beautifully portrayed this concept in her novels. Her female characters are bold enough and confident to fulfill their desires by going against the society. Her characters Radha and Meera indulge in extramarital affairs that are strictly against the Indian society.
She breaks the chains of the society in portraying her women characters which can lead to its fragmentation. She never hesitates to tell the truth however bitter it is and simultaneously she forces us to think on the importance of removing betrayal to save family life.

Through the characters, Radha in \textit{Mistress} and Meera in \textit{Lessons in Forgetting}, a powerful statement can be conveyed on the totally unfair system prevailing in our society of the subjugation of women. In general, the people can realize that it is the fear on the part of woman that has allowed the suppression to continue. Women must not surrender and assume the roles shed upon them in a patriarchal society. Women in all countries through one way or other supplied to own oppression and so they have to fight against their own battle and work out for solutions. It is possible for women to live in the world where men also live. But a strong assertion has to be made that from the time she accomplished her identity that she should never sacrifice her individuality. Only through this treatment the woman can continue her voyage of discovery successfully.

The clear narrative pressure between tradition and modernity on one hand and the inner, fragmented life of the mind and its flowing movements through new territories on the other constitutes one of the most interesting elements of two fictions and a reason for emotional crisis in lives of heroines of both the novels. Nair finds solace in returning to traditional solutions. The author does not resort to desperate methods of escape but look for solutions within themselves.