CHAPTER IV

RESUSCITATION OF PAST & PRESENT

Human being themselves are centers of narrative gravity since they are programmed to extrude narratives as naturally as spiders spin webs or beavers build dams. A narrative is a constructive format as provided in Wikipedia that describes a sequence of non-fictional or fictional events. It is known clearly through Oxford English Dictionary that the word is derived from the Latin verb narrate, ‘to tell’, and is related to the adjective gnarus, ‘knowing’ or ‘skilled’.

The word ‘story’ may be used as a synonym of ‘narrative’. It can also be used to refer to the sequence of events described in a narrative. A narrative can also be told by a character within a larger narrative. An important part of narration is the narrative mode, the set of methods used to communicate the narrative through a process narration.

Along with exposition, argumentation and description, narration, broadly defined, is one of four rhetorical modes of discourse. More narrowly defined, it is the fiction-writing mode whereby the narrator communicates directly to the reader. Stories are an important aspect of culture. Many works of art and most works of literature tell stories; indeed, most of the humanities involve stories. Owen Flanagan of Duke University, a leading consciousness researcher, writes that "Evidence strongly suggests that humans in all cultures come to cast their own identity in some sort of narrative form. We are inveterate storytellers". (Owen Flanagan, 198)
Narrative is a telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee (although there may be more than one of each). Narratives are to be distinguished from descriptions of qualities, states, or situations, and also from dramatic enactments of events (a dramatic work may also include narrative speeches). A narrative will consist of a set of events (the story) recounted in a process of narration (or discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the plot).

The category of narratives includes both, the shortest accounts of events and the longest historical or biographical works, diaries, travelogues, etc., as well as novels, ballads, epics, short stories, and other fictional forms. In the study of fiction, it is usual to divide novels and shorter stories into first person narrative and third person narrative. As an adjective, ‘narrative’ means ‘characterized by or relating to storytelling’. Thus, narrative technique is the method of telling stories.

A narrator has plethora of options to narrate events. They can base their narrative on temporality and causality or they can narrate through focalization. Focalization changes the course of narrative as the reader receives images of character through the impression of the narrator. Focalization employs three dimensional strategies: the voice of one who narrates, one who sees and his understanding of events.

A fiction-writing mode is a manner of writing with its own set of conventions regarding how, when, and where it should be used. Fiction is a form of narrative, one of the four rhetorical modes of discourse. Fiction-writing also has distinct forms of expression, or modes, each with its own purposes and conventions. Currently, there is no consensus within the writing community regarding the number and composition of fiction-writing modes and their uses. Some writing modes suggested include action, dialogue, thoughts, summary, scene, description, background, exposition and transition.
As a fiction-writing mode, narration is how the narrator communicates directly to the reader. This contrasts with the use of the term "narration" as a rhetorical mode of discourse, where it has a broader meaning which encompasses all written fiction. Description is the fiction-writing mode for transmitting a mental image of the particulars of a story. Together with dialogue, narration, and exposition, and summarization, description is one of the most widely recognized of the fiction-writing mode. Description is more than the amassing of details; it is bringing a scene to life by carefully choosing and arranging words and phrases to produce the desired effect.

Broadly defined, exposition is one of four rhetorical modes of discourse. Within the context of fiction-writing modes, exposition is used to convey information. Exposition may be used to add drama to a story, but too much exposition at one time may slow the pace of the story. Summarization, or narrative summary, condenses events to convey, rather than to show, what happens within a story. The "tell" in the axiom "Show, don't tell" is often in the form of summarization. Summarization may be used to:

- connect parts of a story
- report details of less important events
- skip events that are irrelevant to the plot
- convey an emotional state over an extended period of time
- vary the rhythm and texture of the writing

The main advantage of summary is that it takes up less space than other fiction-writing modes. Effective use of summarization requires a balance between showing and telling, action and summary, with rhythm, pace and tone playing a role.
In the emerging narrative techniques a discernible reader can easily notice the double consciousness of the narrator. Since 1990 the narrators in Indian English Fiction speak in the language tinged with a deep anguish for the motherland. There is deep rooted awareness of the belonging to the periphery. In recent years, Indian English fiction has grabbed the attention to a kind of fiction offering something distinct from English fiction itself. Indian English fiction has been besieged to bring out clear conception from the time of its inception. It was quite paradoxical for the Indian writers who chose language of their colonizers to express their innate sensibilities, cultural experiences and thoughts. But Indian novelists adopted, nurtured and made English language their own. As Prof. K.R.S. Iyengar observes: “English has become ours: it is not less ours for being primarily the Englishman’s or the American’s; and Indo-Anglican literature too is our literature, the literature, which, with all its limitations, still taught us to be a new nation and a new people.”(Iyengar 1959)

Literally speaking, Narrative is a story and it can be conveyed through many aspects like pictures, songs, poetry, speech, fiction and non-fiction as well. The person who is to deliver the duty of narration is the narrator and his perspective serves as a prism through which ideas are transmitted to the readers. There are three points of view to present a narrative: first person point of view when the narrator is one of the characters: he participates in the action and also comments on the events, third person point of view when the narrator narrates the story in an objective manner and omniscient point of view where the narrator is God like and can also make his presence felt with authorial intrusions.

Indian writers in English like Anita Nair began to take a mature view of Indian reality and handled new themes with greater clarity and confidence by experimenting new methods to express her novel ideas. Past and Present is a modest attempt, that has been made to trace the development and value of novels, taking into consideration the substantial contribution
made by the characters to the clear narration of events in the novels. This chapter also highlights the shaping influences that contributed in the making of Anita Nair as one of the famous writers of the modern era. Feminism, free-sex, alienation, identity crisis or an individual’s struggle for freedom is some of the thematic concerns of this writer. In her novels, the appearance of the new, fully awakened woman, ready to fight against the patriarchal norms in order to live a meaningful life is a recent phenomenon. The female characters created by this novelist do not accept the low secondary status in a male-dominated Indian society that is conservative. The central theme, therefore, is the emergence of ‘new woman’ in the fast changing social environment. This chapter tries to explore the writings of Anita Nair in the light of the innovative narrative strategies that she has experimented in her novels. Different narrative techniques are subtly interwoven into the texture and structure of her novels.

The big issue with time travelling is interfering with the course of events. If one goes back to the past and make a different decision than the one already made, it is not creating a distortion thus making impossible the present, meaning that one basically cancel it and cancel anybody. This kind of question always lingers in one’s mind and is debated between the mind and the heart. This forms the base for the primary non-interference directive. It seems logical and imposed by the events: and one cannot get involved and one cannot modify something in the past show that one doesn’t cancel a future sequence, basically cancelling you etc. But what if going back through time and modifying the past is precisely in the core of the event and an option which is assumed to be used? Meaning the flow of event also includes the assumption of going back and modifying the moment from the past that one consider it has to be revised and added. Yes, subconsciously one goes back in time and makes another decision. Will things evolve differently or will they be the same, including this subsequent change? This question always prevails.
Or the second option is that no matter what change one makes to the past, it does not radically change the present? The present can get over the modification of the past and its even reinforced by this change… one can radically change the present even if they have the possibility to go back then in the past, having all the new knowledge of the events. Not because the present is a fatality, but because its flow is the sum of all possibilities, including the virtual ones. Here the famous statement made by Freud, that the present world is the best possible one because it is the only one possible…In psycho analysis one can produce important modifications to the present by analyzing the critical moments (complexes) such as variation of Oedipus complex - in fact, the specific way of reacting to the complex’ requests. If this is a neurotic way – and one don’t see how it could be different as one do not believe in Freud’s optimism when they talk about solving this complex – in that case it influenced the present in a neurotic way, meaning it as responsible for the actual neurosis. By eliminating that distorted ‘solution’, fix the present and avoid other neurotic consequences.

Still, one does not have to count too much on the modifications done to the past. As a matter of fact, the identity always creates desires, it is a machine desire, and this cannot be stopped forever. And the way one modifies these desires so that they became usable, even if this can be calles as healthy – thing which is actually very difficult or delicate – it means nothing essential in real life. This aspect can only be connected to the above conclusion regarding the fictional modification of the past when it can be analysed that the present can get over the modifications of the past and its even reinforced by this change.

A consequence for psychoanalysis would be that one doesn’t have to hurry to submit the passion to a severe analysis unless his/her current neurosis is extremely noxious. If one can obtain positive result by using not–so in-depth analysis, by analyzing and interpreting dreams, then it is desirable to stick to it.
Any piece of writing is always in some sense became literature and the work is labeled to be prose, fiction, play, verse or others. It is an art and it is highly creative. When did literature come into this work is a big question that nobody could answer. The structure of the novels has a clean idea of introducing the elements that are essential for the flow throughout. One refuge for every man is the memories of the distant past. He must go back past his adulthood and his teenage years – to a time when he was capable of clarity of feeling.

The novel *Ladies Coupe* talks about six ladies travelling in coupe from Bangalore to Kanyakumari in train. The narration of novel is very much close to reality. On reading the novel, the reader visualizes the reality and has a great feel as if it was his/her own experience. This is because the novel or its plot has a space and gaps in such a way that a reader identifies herself/himself with the author and finds him/her to be the main character of the whole plot in *Ladies Coupe, Mistress* and *Lessons in Forgetting,* Anita Nair has handled the narrative technique in a different way. The present has very much in connection with the past at times it may linger in the mind.

The women are particularly caught in the process of redefining and rediscovering their own roles, position and relationship within their given social world. In the extended families that Nair presents, two or three generations live together. The old tradition bound world co-exists with the modern, creating unforeseen gaps and disruptions within the family fold. Women’s understanding becomes questionable as the old patterns of behaviour no longer seem to be acceptable. These struggles become intense quests for self-definition, because it would not be possible to relate to others with any degree of conviction unless one is guided by a clarity about one’s own image and role.
Women take a lot of responsibilities. Even a household woman knows a lot. However, women hide their talents willingly and proceed in the society. Women are mentally strong though physically weak. Women, generally in the Indian concept, are growing like a plant with thorns. Here thorns refer to a male dominated society. Male domination was widespread in the past as well as in the present. Women writers are widely acclaimed to be more genuine in expressing their feelings and experiences, thus enabling them to enrich the literary and aesthetic quality of their work. The woman’s stand point as expressed by women writers demonstrates the realistic perspective and it is not necessarily a feminist statement.

The novel Ladies Coupe: a novel in parts narrates the tale of six women who meet, purely by chance, on a short train journey. It traces the lives of six women as they travel in ladies compartment. The stories they narrate help Akila to take a decision on her to enable her to establish her true identity. As the train moves ahead, Akila, a 45 year old spinster questions the other women whether women need to steer the course of their lives. The other five women lay bare their hearts and elucidate their struggles to help Akila to find an answer to her queries.

Her second novel, Ladies Coupe is in some ways even better than her first, though it is impossible to draw a parallel between the two novels (i.e. BetterMan & Ladies Coupe) since they are largely different. When the novel begins, one could find desperation as Akila is irritated by the way woman and the handicapped have to stand together, while men stands separately at the ticket counter. Even at home she was never been allowed to live her own life. She has sacrificed her youth in taking care of her family consisting of her mother, sister and two younger brothers after her father’s untimely death. She was rather considered to be a man in carrying the responsibilities of her family. She has provided security and settlement for everyone around her remaining herself single, unmarried and exploited.
“I don’t know sometimes and think she isn’t even practicing Hindu. She won’t light the lamp in the puja room or go to the temple or observe any of the rituals we Brahmins do. When she has her periods, she continues to water the plants and if I object, she bites my head” (LC 174) In *Ladies Coupe* Anita Nair deals with the concept of patriarchy and signifies a relationship of inequality. Almost throughout the novel, the narration jumps from the present to the past of each lady narrating their story and the consequences they have faced till the time of the travel in that *Ladies Coupe*.

The story is an attempt to show how, in life, suppression and oppression do not always come in recognizable forms, but often under the guise of love, protection and the assurance of security. Though patriarchy is a common concept in every woman’s life, Anita Nair depicts carefully the diversity within each woman, as she did not want to put the lives of women to one ideal.

*Ladies Coupe* is the story of six women who meet in a train journey, just by chance. Akilandeswari, the protagonist listens to the story of five other women in the compartment and gives her too, seeking in them a solution to the question that has troubled her all her life: Can a woman stay single and be happy or does a woman need a man to feel complete? The story switches over from past to present and present to past and hence, even other than the five women in the compartment, we are shown of certain women who are humiliated and debased. Sunita Sinha says,

Nair’s India suffers from a patriarchal system which has tried in many ways to repress, humiliate and debase women. The question she poses in the novel not only shakes the ideological ground of man’s patriarchal role in our traditional society but also imply the existence of an alternative reality” (149)
Akila in her spinsterial age takes various roles of a daughter, sister, aunt and the provider of the family. As her father dies suddenly she takes the burden of the entire family on her young shoulders. As Indra Devi says, “Anita Nair probably hints at the family’s easy acceptance of her as the head of the family on a place traditionally reserved for the patriarch in both the colonial and post-colonial periods” (220)

When Akila sees a man in the railway station surrounded by a whole family of uncles, aunts, cousins and grandparents, she finds a parallel link between him and her. “Akila looked at the man who carried on his shoulders the burden of other people’s dreams. That she knew all about. That she could understand” (LC 9). As Narsi her brother became the first graduate and found a teaching job and Narayan the other brother joined the tank factory as a machinist, “Akila felt the iron bands around her chest begin to loosen: Dare I breathe again? Dare I dream again? Now that the boys are men, can I start feeling like a woman again?” (LC 77)

Though she was the breadwinner of the family, she was not considered as the head of the family and her needs and desires were least bothered. Since Narsi was a man he did not ask for anybody’s permission to get married but “decided” to get married for “Narsi decided he wanted to get married” (LC 77). When he told the family that he was going to marry the principal’s daughter, “No one could fault with his choice and there was nothing anyone could say except perhaps – Don’t you think you should wait for your elder sister to get married before you think of a wife and a family? But who was to mouth this rebuke?” (LC 77) And both Narayan and Narsi had their weddings in the same hall, on the same day and time.

Akila waited for Amma or her brother’s to say something about her marriage but they never asked, “What about you? You’ve been the head of the family ever since Appa died. Don’t you want a husband, children, a home of your own?” (LC 77). Though, Akila had done her duties, all that as a head of a family to her brothers and sister, she was not recognized as
the real head, this is just because she was a woman. Amma expected her to get permission from her brothers, the men of the family to go on an office tour as she says, “perhaps you should ask your brothers for permission first” (LC 150). When Akila argued that she was their elder sister and why she should ask their permission, Amma simply says, “you might be older but you are a woman and they are the men of the family” (LC 150). Akila’s encounter with her school friend awakened her spirit to think of a life to live her own. But even then there sprouted the patriarchal domination. When Akila boldly told Padma about her decision to live alone, she without reluctance says, “Do you think the brothers will consent to this? Do you think they’ll let you live alone?” (LC 204). When Akila says for her defiance, “For heaven’s sake, I don’t need anyone’s consent” (LC 204), Padma mocked at her telling, “They are the men of the family” (LC 204). Everyone including Padma, Narsi and Narayan were strongly rooted in the patriarchal structure and hence were unable to bear the thought of a woman living alone. But Akila’s defiance was stronger than theirs that she boarded the train to Kanyakumari.

As one reads the story of Margaret Shanthi, it is obvious how women are dominated by man-power. Men like Ebenezer Paulraj are like the colonizers who are unable to see and praise the worth of the women, who are like the colonized. She married Ebenezer Paulraj at her own choice and at the immediate willingness of her family. She was a Chemistry teacher not an ordinary teacher but the one who had been a gold medalist. Initially Margaret did not understand the deep rooted male egoism in Ebenezer Paulraj, as her extreme love for him had made her blind. Though at times she felt the pain of it she convinced herself saying, “He was Ebe. My Ebe. He was right. He was always right?” (LC 109). As Indra Devi says, “She silences her aspirations in order to what Ebenezer wants her to be” (LC 220). Ebe is simply a male chauvinist when he takes the power to ask Margaret to abort the baby off, the first baby off, when she conveyed him the good news with all happiness. Not only in that, but he
continued to thrust upon his supremacy over her in deciding her higher studies, career and even simple things like choice of food and her hair dressing for he says, “What’s the point of working for a doctorate? Do your B.Ed. so you can become a teacher and then we will always be together. Long hair doesn’t suit you. Cut it off. You’ll look nicer with your hair in a blunt bob” (LC 105). She was so patient and gulped in all insults thrown by him on her but later woke up to the fact and planned her own strategy to prove her strength. As Ebe was becoming more and more egoistic, domineering and hypocritic, Margaret was unconsciously compelled to teach him a lesson. She was taken to the height of anger as Ebe started throwing insults on her in front of his favorite Coterie. When he said to the Coterie “when I think of Chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs” (LC 130), the anger in her bubbled for she thought how he had turned the evening party into another moment of triumph for himself. She thought, “all that was good and noble about my life that he had destroyed, the baby that died even before it had a soul,… there was nothing left for me to dream of and the words rose to the surface again: I HATE HIM. I HATE HIM. What am I going to do?” (LC 131)

She chose flattery as the weapon to bring down Ebe’s self-esteem. She flattered and flattered and fed him with fatty food since dawn till night, till fat found its home on him, and turned him into a fat man, a quiet man and an essay man who sought her for food and sex and every way she knew. As Dr.T.Varalakshmi says, “By making him fat she erodes his self-esteem and feels he is an easy man to live with now, in and out of health institute.

Margaret gains self-esteem by eroding Ebe’s self-esteem. She succeeds in achieving her emotional fulfillment keeping the family ties impact, though some justifications contain a modicum of sense (LC 69). The character of Margaret shows that the woman could vanquish the domineering man.
The youngest of the six is Sheela, fourteen years old who talks of her maternal grandmother, in whom one could see the manifestations of feminity. Anita Nair has not only brought out the need to assert the individuality of the female selfhood but also finely brought out the issue of female child abuse through the character portrayal of Sheela. As Judes Jalaja and Shanmuga Sundari observe, ‘Sheela’s retrospection also touches on sexual abuse of girl children by older men’ (LC 122). Sheela felt ashamed and hurt at the unwanted touching of Hasina’s father Nazar as, ‘One Sunday afternoon when Sheela went to their house, rushing in from the heat with a line of sweat beading her upper lip, Nazar had reached forward and wiped it with his forefinger. The touch of his finger tingled on her skin for a long time’ (LC 66). So Sheela was unable to open her mouth against the physical abuse attempted on her, but developed confidence to protect herself from it in future for it is said, “Thereafter Sheela mopped her face with a hanky each time she entered Hasina’s home” (LC 66). Even Sheela’s friend Hasina and her mother were able to understand the man’s attempt to touch her unnecessarily but they were helpless. When once Naazar knotted the bows in her sleeves, she saw the hurt in Hasina and her mother’s eyes” (LC 66). Thereafter Sheela took the right decision that “She would never go to Hasina’s house again” (LC 66) as a means of her self-protection. Thus, Sheela was strong in her defiance against a man’s abuse on her physique.

Within Sheela’s story Anita Nair has brought in an incident, where a girl named Celine became a victim to a man’s instinct. Celine became pregnant because of her friend’s father and her family moved to a place where no one would know about her abortion. But it is said, “the friend’s father went to a far away town where he would find plenty of young girls to ruin everyone said” (LC 65). Through this incident, Nair has brought out the unjust treatment of women by men.
As Suresh Kumar and Leema Rose say,” Patriarchy shows its ugly face from cradle to grave”. Even parents are more concerned about the boys than the girls. And Anita Nair has chosen the character of Prabha Devi to emphasise this issue. When Prabha Devi is born his father sighs, as it would be a hindrance for his business progress as he says. “Has this baby, apart from ruining my business plans, added your brains as well? If you ask me, a daughter is a bloody nuisance”(169). Even Prabha Devi’s mother is pleased when a daughter is born as her thoughts are confined that a daughter is someone who will take her recipes to the other house and treasure her jewellery and someone who will say that she did this and that in her mother’s house.

Even while playing games as a child, a girl is destined to choose to play cooking or baby-sitting games as it is said, “A kitchen was set up for her to play house and mother games. Sometimes Prabha Devi’s mother joined in her daughter’s games, pretending to be an adult-child while her daughter tried hard to be a child adult’(LC 170). Basically, a woman is never liked to come out with opinions. Prabha Devi’s mother finds great pleasure in the company of her daughter than in her four sons put together. But she conceals it within her for “she had discovered that a woman with an opinion was treated like a bad smell, to be shunned,”(LC 170). She swallows this thought as she has done all her life.

Though Prabha Devi’s childhood had been this way, in future she grooms herself as a woman who can measure up her life with difference. She doesn’t want to define herself within a more mechanical and monotonous life of a homely wife and a mother. She is not satisfied with this life and craves for something more. Moreover she feels guilty for her viles upon her husband’s friend Pramod and tries to come out of it. Prabha Devi’s weakness does not escape Anita Nair, yet she displays a very real respect for her as she has done with every other woman. And Prabha Devi achieves the self-actualization by learning swimming on her
own out of great desire. As T.Varalakshmi says, “She triumphs over her innate timidity and
gains “peak performance” of supreme content bringing tremendous happiness to her husband
as well” (69).

Marikolanthu is the most pathetic woman among the six. She is the realistic picture of
the humble and miserable peasantry women on whom male oppression is forced on heavily
and left unquestioned. Even as a girl she is denied to be sent to the town school as her mother
says, “Its not just the money but how can I send a young girl by herself…there is too much
risk” (LC 215). To ensure her mother’s fear, her childhood innocence is destroyed when
Murugesan attempts physical brutality on her. When she is found, pregnant her mother and
Sujata, regret it as they feel it is too late to insist Murugesan to marry her. Her mother is least
bothered about her feeling but worries that no one will marry her. Even when the matter is
taken to the Chettiar’s son Sridhar, he with little reluctance says, “The girl must have led him
on and now that she is pregnant she’s making up a story about rape”(LC 245). For her mother
and Sujatha, a woman’s life and protection lies in her husband, as Sujatha says, “But if she
has a job, that will replace a husband’s protection” (LC 246). But Marikolanthu is able to
raise the question within her about the so called ‘Husband’s protection’. She is sure that
neither her mother nor Sujatha Akka had their husbands look out for them, but for them, “a
fulfilled woman was one who was married”(LC 246).

For Marikolanthu nothing is more cruel than a man’s raping of a woman and so she
finds little fault in the missy’s love for each other and experiences a kind of content and
happiness to give her love for Sujatha, more than her husband did. Marikolanthu never wants
to tie up her life with a husband. Till she is thirty – one she lives alone and wrestles with life,
making a living of her own. She neither wants to rely upon her brothers nor wants a penny
from Sujatha or her husband but decides to make her living of her own, working as a servant
maid in a house. She defines her as an independent woman. Her strong aversion for the physical brutality attempted on her, evokes a strong aversion for her son Muthu. But at the end she feels ashamed for having rejected him and even using him. As Indra Devi observes, ‘In the end she decided to “measure happiness” as Muthu’s mother’

Anita Nair has used the character of Karpagam to bring awareness to the society of women’s demands and their need for self-expression. Karpagam is portrayed as a strong woman striving for self-definition in a patriarchal social organization. She is a widow but unlike other widows she wears the kumkum and colourful clothes. She is a courageous woman who breaks the shackles of patriarchy when she says, “I don’t care what my family or anyone thinks, I am who I am. And I have as much right as anyone else to live as I choose. Tell me didn’t we as young girls wear colourful clothes and jewellery and a bottu? It has nothing to do with whether she is married or not and whether her husband is alive or dead. Who made these anyway? Some man who couldn’t bear the thought that in spite of his death, his wife continued to be attractive to other men” (LC 202). Her defiance is outstanding when she says, “I live alone. I have for many years now, we are strong, Akhi. Whatever you think you want to. Live alone. Build a life for yourself where your needs come first” (LC 202). More than any other woman, Karpagam and her words instill a strong desire to live had come first” (LC 202.). More than any other woman, Karpagam and her words instill a strong desire to live a life of her choice as Akila feels, “Karpagam are you real or are you some goddess who had come to lead me out of this…” (LC 202). Thus, Anita Nair portrays the character of Karpagam as one who courageously breaks the larger framework of patriarchy that denies personal freedom to women.
Anita Nair uses certain characters like Akila’s mother to express how women are strong conservatives of the patriarchal structure that has framed strict social, political and economic limitations on women. Akila’s mother is a conservative and orthodox mother, a devoted wife with her own theory that a wife is always inferior to her husband. She is the sort of woman who never takes decision on her own but left all decisions to her husband for she believes, “He knows best”(LC 14). According to her,

A good wife learnt to put her husband’s interests before anyone else’s, even her father’s. A good wife listened to her husband and did as he said. It is best to accept that the wife is inferior to the husband. That way, there can be no strife, no disharmony. It is so much easier and simpler to accept one’s station in life and live accordingly. (LC 14)

When Akila wants her mother to take music lesson as Karpagam’s mother teaches dance, she disapproves of it telling, “I don’t approve of what Karpagam’s mother is doing”(LC 13). She reminds Akila what her father has told her when they were first married, “I want my wife to take care of my children and me. I don’t want her so caught up with her job that she has no time for the house or for taking care of my needs”(LC 14)

Even after the death of Akila’s father, her mother let her eldest daughter Akila shoulder the responsibilities of the entire family, taking advantage over her sense of duty to keep them safe, secure and comfortable. Anita Nair brings in Sarasa mami’s family that faces a similar situation. As Subramani Iyer, Sarasa mami’s husband dies, Sarasa mami goes to every doorstep demanding to be taken as a servant-maid. But every neighbourhood just gives her a handful of rice as if she is a beggar and this makes her sell her daughter Jaya for the sake of their living. Anita Nair chooses this family as a complete contrast of Akila’s family to interpret how the moral dilemmas of women are trapped in social and emotional circumstances, struggling against oppression and destiny.
Listening to the lives of various women in the coupe Akila gets down at Kanyakumari as an empowered woman to rediscover her “self”. The more she wants to get rid of her life she had lived for others, she desires more of her life, that is more of Hari and executes her decision to get reunited, connected him over phone. Finally, she succeeds in her defiance against patriarchy. She subverts the repressive forces of patriarchal ideas that have chained her not letting to discover her “self”. Throughout the novel, Akila travels both in the train and in her mind. The train experience provides a guts to face the life where in the time travel enlarges her vision to take the new venture of her life on her own.

Anita Nair has ‘quest’ as the central motif in the novel titled *Mistress*. It is a novel of art and adultery where the characters are out on a quest of consciousness. Each character tries to weave their past experience into a yarn and find meaning in their present existence.

A travel writer Christopher Stewart arrives at a riverside resort in Kerala to meet Koman, Radha’s uncle and a famous kathakali dancer. With this journey taken by him he enters a world of masks and repressed emotions. From their first meeting, both Radha and her uncle are drawn to the enigmatic young man, Chris, with his cello and his incessant questions about the past. The triangle quickly excludes Shyam, Radha’s husband, who can only watch helplessly as she embraces Chris with a passion that Shyam has never been able to draw from her. Koman plays the role of observer participant; his life story, as it unfolds, captures as the nuances and contradictions of the relationship being made and un-made in front of his eyes. Anita Nair in an interview with Aruna Chandraraju traces the source of this novel to an experience she had in 2000-01.
The psychological make up of Radha, Shyam and Uncle Koman is made explicit through the method of plunging deeply into their motives and desires. There is cringing of this peripheral character to come to the centre. Anita Nair has applied the methodology of confession for these three characters. This is highly post modernist technique where the reader is caught in the eclecticism employed by the author.

She observed a Kathakali dancer being taken around to various agencies like some kind of a performing animal. She was touched by the thought of humiliation he must have experienced after giving eight to ten years to learning this complex art, the question “What are the compromises that an artist makes in order to survive?” becomes the recurring theme in the novel *Mistress*. The novelist does not satisfy herself with a question of this kind being addressed to an artist alone but extends it to the life experiences of all the characters in the novel. Each character is taunted by inability to identify the compromises to be made to lead a peaceful life. To begin with, I consider that the narrative technique adopted by the novelist in the novels clearly sets her apart. It deviates from the common narrative technique adopted by other writers. The novel is divided into three books with each having three chapters. Kathakali lexicon is used to title the chapters there by linking the two aspects namely art and life. The art form becomes a metaphor of life.

The world of masks and repressed emotions symbolize the struggle of each character of the novel. The novel begins with the Prologue which sets the mood of the novel.

“Look at me. Look at my face. The naked face, devoid of colour and make-up, glitter and adornment. What have we here? The fore head, the eyebrows, the nostrils, the mouth, the chin, and thirty-two facial muscles. These are our tools and with these we shall fashion the language without words. The navarasa: love, contempt, sorrow, fury, courage, fear, disgust, wonder, peace”.

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“In dance, as in life we do not need more than nine ways to express ourselves. You may call these the nine faces of the heart” (MS 1).

The action of the novel alternates between Radha, Shyam and uncle as the centres of consciousness. The Kathakali artist Koman is on an aesthetic quest and in the processes of narration brings forth the pangs of identity crisis that he has lived with. Here we do not have the omniscient narrator, but the reader is given the progress in plot by the characters within the framework. The narrative is neither pedantic nor sentimental but presentations are made by different characters based on the general observations.

The reader is repeatedly drawn to the past, brought to present or moves to the future within a single character’s presentation. Each book ends with the story of Koman’s past as revealed by him to Chris. The sub-section of each chapter takes the reader away from the present to the distant past namely the experiences of Koman in the early years before and after he became an artist. The narration moves in time and space and the reader is required to continually adjust himself to the different time frames. With time, man–woman relationship in Indian English novels has acquired varied dimensions. Social norms and conventions are sidelined and it is now the age of the go-getters. Traditionally, the image of woman has been what men have thought it should be. A ‘good’ woman is one who is meek, docile, passive, kind and self-sacrificing and a ‘bad’ woman is one who is bold, adventurous, active, articulate and questioning. Radha experiences the problem of fitting herself in either of the broad band. There is conflict in the inner configuration of the self-conflict between reason and instinct, the will and reality. The first chapter of the novel entitled Sringaaran means ‘love for the unknown’. Form the first meeting Radha is drawn to the enigmatic young man Chris. The man she sees for the first time in her life is able to draw her towards him but the man she has known for. Her father, eager to safeguard the status of the family, requires her to
marry Shyam. When Shyam was brought forth as husband, she hesitated, but conceded only because she longed to flee from her own conscience. To her, relationship with her husband was all a part of a ritual and routine of marriage. She understands the relationship as “I can’t say that I am unhappy with Shyam. If there are no highs, there are no lows, either. Some would call this content, even”(MS 302)

She identifies her position in the life of Shyam, as only as much cherished possession. She says:

… I think that for Shyam, I am a possession. A much cherished possession. That is my role in his life. He doesn’t want an equal; what he wants is a Mistress. Someone to indulge and someone to indulge him with feminine wiles. …I think of the butterfly caught and pinned to a board when it was still alive, its wings spread so as to display the markings, obvious that somewhere within, a little heart beat, yearning to fly. I made that butterfly now. (MS 275)

Only a day after Chris’ arrival Radha finds her mind filled with the picture and words of Chris. He had moved into two places at once- cottage No.12 and her soul. She is disturbed and is unable to understand her own feelings. She reminds herself the promise she had made to herself when she marries Shyam. “…I swore never to flout the rules of custom again. How have I become so disdainful of honour, so contemptuous of convention?”(MS 60) the question in her mind tells the reader that she is aware of the expectations of the society from ‘a married woman’, ‘a wife’. The confrontation of the opposites leads her into a state of helplessness. Her desire overrules her responsibility towards her husband and respect for the norms of the society. She plays Mistress to Chris, satisfying his sexual desire and in turn her own. Radha, Koman and Chris are tormented by their past and seek temporary solace in one another’s company Koman prefers to bury his past, as he was advised by his father. Koman
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says, it is wise to bury the past. It was his way of coming to terms with life. To suppress remorse and regret. Forget, forget… We must do that if we want to cling to our dreams and hopes.

Radha and Chris have one thing in common, ‘an uncertain paternity’. Radha was told by her mother that she wasn’t sure who Radha’s biological father was and Chris believed that Koman was his father from the relationship his mother had with Koman when she had come to the school to learn the dance form. Koman plays a role in solving this uncertainty. The truth of Radha’s biological father and Chris nor being his son is revealed as the narration progresses. In the story presented by Koman the doubt in the mind of Radha and Chris is cleared but with the relationship Radha has with Chris she invites the position of her mother on herself. In this manner the solution in one’s life leads to a new problem. Although Chris came to the resort as a travel writer, he had taken up this long journey only to find the answer to a question that disturbed him for a long time. The journey signifies the quest motif. He is eager to know the truth of his parentage. His mother had come to the art school to learn to survive. She puts forth the question, Would I have changed the tenor of all that I respected and loved, to make it accessible and popular?

This reflects the sense of betrayal Koman feels when he sees the pure tradition of Kathakali, being corrupted to give it popular appeal. True ease in writing comes from art and not by chance. True ease in art comes by constant practice and not by short cuts. Life is metaphorically compared to art. Life is a complex art form and one is going to be blessed only when one tries to realize self. When one tries to realize self in a half-awake, half-asleep state one is led nowhere. It becomes more of a one-dimensional picture of self. Koman was led into revealing his past as answers to queries raised by Chris. At a certain point Koman,
who didn’t like talking about himself, finds that he was doing exactly the opposite. He attributes the act of talking about himself as a means of ‘finding himself’.

He narrates the Kathakali version of Ravana Udbhavam and claims that Ravana was not hesitant to sever his tenth head in his attempt to know himself. This was stopped by the creator who appeared to grant him every boon. Koman says that unlike Ravana he did not have ten heads. “I do not have ten heads to this hungry creature called the inner me. But what I am doing is, laying bare my life. Perhaps, then I will discover who really I am” (MS 282).

Consciousness is like a log drifting along the tide and at some point of time the characters, each drifting, try to take initiative. In the process many come into the picture who may or may not cause an impact on the life of the individual. But often the result of this kind of movement is— one is left at the threshold of ignorance - ignorance of meaning of life in relation with others. Chris, a tourist from the materialistic world is easily received by Radha. Radha in a state of drifting, believes that she has something to hold on to. She establishes a brief relationship with Chris but she is ultimately left alone with nobody to turn to. She understands neither the meaning of her action nor its result. Understanding life is as difficult as understanding the complexities of art. In life one masterly activity leads to another. Life is as exhaustive as art. This is the realization each character has in life. The common theme in most of the novels by Indian writers is the role of the family and the role played by the institution of marriage. Both bind the society to make it an entity. The novel has in it a message that the strong pillars of our society are shaken. Koman does not have a married life to be proud of, Radha is not true to her husband and Chris does not treat the relationship with any kind of sanctity.
The novel works on two levels, the turmoil that one may possible witness in – art and life. The various traditional art forms are losing their integrity, so are the values of family life seen disintegrating. The pertinent question that runs through the novel is ‘Has art lost its meaning as life happening in the life of the characters. But what is remarkable about the structure of narration is that instead of feeling confused as one reads the novel one is confronted with the challenge of self-realisation as is the predominant experience of the characters. One may infer that the novelist has deliberately used this kind of narrative technique (i.e.) the purpose of presenting self through the multi-dimensional narrative technique. The different streams of consciousness coagulate to project the writer to us. The labyrinth of existence is choreographed through the metaphor of Kathakali.

Uncle Koman in *Mistress* hailed to be the main character talking over the past that had a separate plot, which in no way relieves the knot until the end (i.e.) present. He felt that the old man’s palm caressed his hair. ‘you must think your family and mine were enemies in our past birth. First I hurt your mother. Now my niece breaks your heart. What can I say, Chris? What can I say to make you feel better? Perhaps it is best that I don’t make you feel better. If you are angry, you will hurt less’. Chris looked up in surprise.( MS 423)

At the same time Chris is lingering in the mind of Radha, she could not forget Chris. She was angry towards his past. She knew a great pang of hunger. She thought of Chris’s unshaven chin nuzzling the line of her throat. She thought of his smile. How the curve of his lips tugged at her. She thought of his slow, lazy voice and the inflection he chose to bequeath her name with. Moreover, she thought of how she had already cast him as a memory, something to look back upon with a curious and also a bitter sweet sense of loss. This happened to her, once in the past and again.
The novel is a story of a simple, self-righteous middle class woman. It deals with the marriage on rocks. It is narrated on two levels, the present and the past. Her ambitions, simplicity of nature, eagerness to meet life in all its facts have been portrayed beautifully. She has the desire to be ‘somebody’ to have a purpose in life, to understand the meaning of life. The connecting link between her love for life and her inability to find happiness in life is lost in the areas of darkness. The novel is divided in four parts. The novelist has deftly manipulated the identity crisis with its origin through this narrative.

Past always reminds the present, if at all it has some meaning to remind on it. There is a specific need for the study of autobiographies of women because they reveal the urges, fears and the aspirations of a class of human beings who are mainly interpreted by men. The influences of various factors, like religion, society have deprived women towards opportunities.

Even though women are comparatively free in the twentieth century, they too have been reluctant in revealing their private lives and thoughts. In a patriarchal and male dominated society, sex was an important aspect to create a bondage between relationships but it alone cannot withhold Akila after her thirties was starving for physical intimacy. She allowed her body to be touched by the co-passengers in the bus. She very much wanted a relationship both physically and mentally to console the self that years.

In the life of Margaret, Ebenezer shared love with male-domination; he wanted to prove his manliness. Working in a same school made him show more arrogance. Ebenezer tormented her inner self rather physically. Along with an English teacher of his school, he confronted in front of Margaret with dance and music in his house by giving parties, where Margaret stood aloof as spectator and chef for parties.
Sheela’s love over Ammumma is natural. When her whole family rights what to do with Ammumma’s body, it was Sheela who cleaned her, powered her with sweet smell all over her body, decorated her with jewels and felt satisfied that then her Ammumma’s soul would feel happy. In Marikolanthu’s life, no relation understood her. Janaki, the second daughter in law of Chettiar’s family, perceived her and procured her till she started running the family. She had tenderness towards Marikolunthu. In the afternoon hours, she used Marikolunthu to soothen her feelings through body touch that arouses and kinless eroticness in Janaki. Marikolunthu, out of long relationship she had with Janaki, accepts this treatment and finds pleasure.

In thinking about how her life would have been if she would have taken the other path, immediately, she thinks about the other family. In comparison, Nair shows a parallel situation. It is Akila’s neighbour Mr. Iyer’s family. When the man of the house dies, the widow Sarasa Mami is forced to put her eldest daughter on the street as a prostitute. Both the families are Brahmmins and have lost the man of the family. The difference is that the neighbour family makes their survival in an undignified way. Akila’s family’s situation could have been similar but as Akila’s mother says; “I had you” (LC 85) Akila again feels her identity being lost in the role, she’s expected to play. “Young as she is, she hopes that one day she will have a home and family her own” (LC 85). But Akila’s great contribution to the dignified survival of her family is certainly not appreciated by its members and they never repay her in any way. She remains instrumental in arranging the marriage of her two brothers- one elder and the other younger the same day, but no one ever thinks if she also wants a husband, children, or a house of her own. “In their minds Akila had ceased to be a woman and had already metamorphosed into a spinster.” (LC 77) So, at the age of thirty four, Akila is expected to marry off her youngest sibling Padma by amassing a sizeable dowry.
She is reminded often of a Tamil film whose heroine is just like Akila—a work horse and a woman who gives up her life and hope of her marriage: “….When Akila thought of the film, she felt darkness lick at her. Would her life end like the life of the woman in the film?” (LC 77). No man for any reason in her life. A long journey of her life has just been bare. Bare enough to bring thenull and dull time to experience.

It began more as a lazy and misty blur of self-confusing thoughts but soon Akila’s resilient self began to take form and shape. At long last her “entombed desires” surfaced and decided to carve out a life of her own. She listed out her own problems with clarity and arrived at the conclusion that she was in need of an education which could give her a sense of firm footing. She discerned her own needs and began to take care of herself. “On her thirty-fifth birthday, she decided to get herself an education. She enrolled in the Open University for a Bachelor of Arts degree. Akila chose history as her main subject.” (LC 85)

Her decision to get enrolled in the Open University is a step towards asserting her own being. Akila’s yearnings for tenderness, tough and erotic fulfillment are never vocalized. They exist only in her dreams and her unexpressed sub-consciousness. The quest for the recognition of her womanhood is expressed through her dream. Akila’s longings are beautifully revealed through the dream where she experienced the touch of male fingers. The personal warmth through this touch in this dreamy sensation in a strange way soothed her though it is insubstantial. She is now emboldened to seek out emotional nutrients in order to cater to her sensation-starved body. The passion in her catches fire when she meets Hari. She then experiences the flow of life, as she yields herself to the finger-tingling of Hari. Thus, the encounter with Hari marks the first phase of her transition to fulfilment and freedom. Contrary to the social norm she goes to Mahabalipuram and spends some time with him.
Satisfying the call of her innermost being even at the cost of lying to her mother speaks volumes about the pulsating urge of her being and reminds us of the fact that she is not an object but a woman who has a free will.

She enjoys sensual pleasure unknown to her so far for a small period of time and realizes a fullness, a flowering of her personality: “Akila felt a warm rush over her… she had never known anything like this before. An unfurling. Beads of sweat. A rasping edge to her muted breadth. A quite flowering.” (LC 139)

Anita Nair exposes relationship in connection with physical embracement. Even when a woman gets completeness in her relationship with the opposite sex, she is not ready to expose her inner ideas or dilemmas to anybody. She always poses a kind of fear. She is somehow not allowed by the society to think and live on her own. Moreover women are common in one way—they want to live with the fine-tuned memories of the past and at the maximum keep mum in the present with a fear over the future.

Anita Nair’s characters exhibit the feelings of powerlessness, anxiety and bewilderment as qualities of negative freedom. Anita Nair’s artistic transmutation of the social reality is convincing enough as she relates her characters to social phenomena; nonetheless, psychological problems have to be understood in terms of the social phenomena too.

Art is a tough *Mistress*. Exacting. Unforgiving. But, beautiful and tantalizing: all the same. These truths prove double-edged, yet true as steel, those who have read it will mull over issues inherent between its cores. Set in Kerala, spanning 90 years, Nair’s third novel explores the depths of relationships while, in a parallel strand, it unravels the skins that weave together a life in art.
As the turbulent eddies of life surround the protagonists, we are plunged into a multi-pronged narrative where the navarasas dictate the mood of each segment, where the main characters offer first-person slants on the evolving plot, where myths are vigorously retold with local colour, where the artist and his art tussle for an equitable balance. It is a formula that seems bound for literary magic. To anybody, Nair’s narrative powers and mastery of minutiae remain her forte. This novel proves she is conscious of the trivialization of art, a Mistress who accepts no compromises.

This is one of those novels that bring a specialized subject alive for the novice. The story is imbued with rich descriptions of Kathakali positions, facial gestures and mythical stories. The reader discovers and experiences the dance without having to look up from the page. Mistress not only brings a traditional art form into the spotlight but questions its place in present day India… Mistress is a well-written novel that gifts the reader with knowledge of a magical art form from the uncompromising artist to the champions of contemporaneous India.

Anita Nair’s characters, in a return to society, can progress to awareness, at least partially, of the positive freedom as the ideal state of consciousness within the circle of tradition and duty. In the affirmation of this ideal, Anita Nair reflects in her work the concept of true freedom as enunciated in the Indian philosophy – in the Gita and its teachings. Freedom, according to the Gita, is ripeness and awareness through a total realization of the self.
It talks about all the things one normally consider as taboo but actually, they already exist in society. Though wrapped under layers of tradition…that is when one gets to see the hypocrisy of society. Most of the incidents in the novel are one that anybody would have come across but there it is more of in-your-face stuff and one cannot escape the details. This makes more sensitive to the subject.

It is very well written in this aspect. The ending one can be sure that it will bring about a different reaction from every reader. There are bound to be differences of opinion here. “As far as I am concerned, Radha got what she deserved,” says Nair. She has taken charge of her life and gets what she has been missing out. It shows one that in life it is never too late for taking charge of things. So may be here is the positive aspect after all.

Moments of intense passion and love are seen through the eyes of Kathakali artists: seeing Radha and Chris together, Koman remembers the burning love scene involving Duryodhana and Bhanumathi in Uttara Swayamvaram, one of the most beautiful episodes in Kathakali repertoire.

Kathakali is a complete art wherein one will find everything that is there in life. Like a true Kathkali spectacle performed by master veshakaars that lasts all night, Nair evokes in her readers wonder, delight and grief. She has written about man-woman relationships and complex Kathakali aesthetics with equal felicity. When you put down the novel, you feel as if you are walking back home in the pale early morning light at the end of a nightlong Kathakali performance. What fills your soul, then, is shaantam – the last of the nine bhavas.
In her fourth novel *Lessons in Forgetting* the narrative takes the shape of retrieving what had happened in the past. In Meera’s life past had been smooth, lovable and merely appreciable. Lilac house had been the symbol of pride and had become one with the lives of Meera and her family from the past. Giri had cast an eye on the property and had been hoping that this house of the past would fetch him enormous wealth and with this hope had shaped Meera to fit for the life of the corporate, so that one day when he claims it she would not refuse him the property. This led her to lead a corporate wife life. But when tables turn and Giri comes to face the fact that the property is not theirs, he forsakes her leaving her in a state of misery. Jak, who once had a pleasant stay in India with his mother, been to foreign as a cyclone analyst.

The novel very authentically states that, though at the outset that the patriarchal set up is responsible for women condition in the Indian society, is half truth, for this responsibility also lies with the victims who refuses to raise a voice and achieve the goal. The novel, in a way is like a ‘Multiple patchwork quilt of different elements- facts that fictionalize and fiction that actualized. It is a patchwork, a collective memories presented by myths and rituals, with a wide range of characters, situations, similar view—points, contrasting out looks, all emotions, debated on life and art. The novel being a woman’s version of her sense of world, it tries to accommodate/place others view points, and are oriented towards overall design of a woman’s narration as a multiple patchwork quilt “is basically a woman’s art”. A woman’s narration is not claimed to be complete because she admits that man has his own understanding of the situation. Though her narrative is partial yet it is authentic. The novel moves from the nervous climax to the very reality of realities, it is an exploration of selfhood as a mere form of expression.
In every sense, the novel is of immense relevance’s to us in the present — day socio-cultural contact. The novel *Lessons in Forgetting*, depicts the life of Meera at the level of the silent and the unconscious. A sensitive and realistic dramatization of the married life of Meera and her husband Giri, portrays an inquisitive critical appraisal to which the institution of marriage has been subjected in recent years. It centres round the inner perception of the protagonist, a woman who is subtly drawn from inside, a woman who “finds her normal routine so disrupted that for the first time she can look at her life and attempt to decide who she really is.

The question, “who am I?” haunts her so obsessively that she fails to find herself in the beginning of the novel. This haunting leads her many a time into the past to try a self-judgement on what went wrong between Giri and her. She is an utter stranger, a person so alien that even the faintest understanding of the motives of her actions seemed impossible. Meera before meeting Jak, drowsed into the image of Hera and Zeus the Mythological characters on comparing the family life she had with Giri.

Memories plunge in, often linked by the ambivalent association of ideas. Each incident, a mini-story, a fiction in itself, imparts an unexplored vision to the narrative. The dejections and disappointments of unrequited selfhood, the illusions and pining of love and the yearnings for companionship make up the stream of Meera’s consciousness. Recalling the ions of her split self entangled in her memory, she creates a world-of harmony, a world of fantasy, understanding, authentic selfhood and a composite self.

A close study of the novel reveals that Anita Nair is deeply concerned as usual with the traumas suffered by women in a middle-class family in India. No doubt, the novel begins in a manner which is deceptively similar to her earlier novels that follows almost the same pattern, but there is something intrinsically different in its theme and presentation.
“Memories and pictures of the past, dreams, hopes and plans or the future—these are as real to us as the present (Literary Review) the narrative move in the novel, is it’s ‘intimacy and integrity, that, holds the past and the present together, in an intense and complex play of all familial relationships.

Nair’s all three novels are basically a family story of intimate spaces, of emotional pains and of such intrusions that are absolutely unexpected. The family is a timeless and universal institution—everything begins here, everything that happens outside the family mirrors what happens within it. In getting to study, the complex relationship within the family, the novelist, Anita Nair weaves her narration around repetitive acts of transgression, beyond any body’s capacity, while bringing into contestation of self, of other man, woman, bone, body, physical, emotional, sexual, ethics, individual and social binaries. As the narrator, Meera, is a women, these complex component faced by a woman, are question in the process of self-realization of her own position, as she locates the self in the labyrinth of her already experienced the experience and socially contestable norms. The experiential becomes the touchstone above and beyond other things where the existential is not a compelling motif but facilitates reflection on life in that others secrets are discovered complicating one’s own opinions about them and also continually revising oneself, one’s perspective. A process of building, rebuilding and deconstruction continues in the novel, in a narrative narration, that is rolled up in a spiral form with the coils layered one upon another, as well as relating to each other.

Among, all other things, the novel ‘Lessons in Forgetting ‘ is about writing. The novel opens with a heavy shock Meera observed. She was sitting and writing and wondering as to what to write next. In the next chapter, one can see the male protagonist Jak, sitting to write his own story. The act of writing in this novel is not the autobiographical reflections; let
it not be confused, even the novelists strongly resist such, confusion. This is very much revealed throughout the novel.

Responsible is not just for her children but her mother, grandmother and their rambling old family home in Bangalore, Meera takes up a part time job with Professor J.A. Krishnamurthy, or Jak, a renowned cyclone studies expert. What she doesn't know is that Jak is seeking the truth behind the vicious attack on his nineteen-year-old daughter, Smriti that left her comatose. However, a wall of silence and fear surrounds the incident. Driven by the need to know the truth, he explores the events that lead to the incident.

In the process, he gains an insight into his daughter's world. Through a series of coincidences, Meera and Jak find their lives turning and twisting together, with the unpredictability and sheer inevitability of a cyclone. And as the days pass, fresh beginnings appear where there seemed to be only endings. Lessons in Forgetting talks about a clear topography and a non-linear narrative.

Throughout the novel Meera lingers into the past calling herself in the name of Hera. She personified Giri to be Zeus, a mythological character in Greek history. When Giri asked her to get ready for the party, he insisted,

“It’s not a cocktail party. It’s a Sunday brunch. I am sure there will be other kids there. Probably a few from his class even. Besides, it’s time he got out and saw how real people live.” “Zeus spoke as he worked his way through the Sunday newspapers. Zeus, whose bidding even the heavenly bodies obeyed, would tolerate no interference. He made the laws. She, Meera Hera, listened.” (LF 5)

At the party when she cannot find Giri,
“Where is her Zeus by the way? She hasn’t seen Giri since they got here. Meera thinks again of Hera. How strange that the trajectories of their lives had followed almost the same path. Like Hera, she too had gathered a bedraggled cuckoo into her bosom. It had eaten and drunk its fill, nestled in her warmth and love, and now it wants her home. What is she to do? Be Hera who wised up to what Zeus in the disguise of that cuckoo wanted of her? Or allow herself to be manipulated like a guileless crow mother with a cuckoo child in its nest? Her head throbs suddenly”.

( LF 6)

The narration of the situation and sequences happens in such a way that often the characters take time to travel to past and mourn over the present. Anita Nair is very much talented in handling this time schedule throughout the novel. Almost all the major characters have redemptions’ past to renew their present. It is a woman who communicates a lot without much concern on words, may be her ideas are correct rather than her words. Meera in a shock over Giri’s leaving in the midst of the party, provokes various ideas on the chat that had happened in the past with Giri. Leaving for no reason makes her succumb to death because she had been a singing Skylark for Giri than as a housewife.

The book she wrote for corporate wives brought her fame. Giri had been the total reason for that. On his sudden dismissal from her life, “it seems to Meera, wife of Giri, queen of her world, mother of two, author of cookbooks, mentor of corporate wives and friend to the rich and celebrated, that she who has everything can afford to be forgiving”. (LF 6).
When she realized that Giri had left two hours before, gloomy past passes over her, “My Giri is not Zeus. He does not frolic with nymphets or even goddesses. He is prone to fits of rage; he is ambitious. But he is eminently trustworthy. Meera hears again that censorious voice in her head: That’s exactly what Hera must have thought each time Zeus disappeared from her horizon!” (LF 15)

In the epilogue of the novel, Anita Nair clarifies her narrating of Greek mythology through Zeus and Hera. The male-protoganist of the novel, who had come from US to retrieve the past of his daughter Smirti. On his stay at Bengaluru and there after his travel in the South Tamilnadu, he is in search of the truth, that might have happened in Smirti’s life. On accompanying Meera and Nikhil in his car, he drowsed into his youth by seeing Nikhil in the back seat. “In the rear-view mirror he glimpses the boy: bewilderment and hope jostling in a child’s face, waiting for things to right themselves. In the presence of the thirteen-year-old with his nose pressed to the glass, he knows a stilling of time. I was that boy, he thinks” (LF 13).

Regaining his remembrance of the past, he is investigating about an attack on his teenage daughter that has left her in a vegetative state. Seeing her, in such a condition, make him very much mourn for her.

Anita Nair’s characters, in a return to society, can progress to awareness, at least partially, of the positive freedom as the ideal state of consciousness within the circle of tradition and duty. In the affirmation of this ideal, Anita Nair reflects in her work the concept of true freedom as enunciated in the Indian philosophy - in the Gita and its teachings.
Freedom, according to the Gita, is ripeness and awareness through a total realization of the self.

In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Meera and Jak are the two major characters who seemed to lose their individuality for the sake of their family. Both these are educated and they have a corporate status in the society. On taking Meera’s life, right from her marriage she is unaware of her individuality. Giri from the beginning dominated Meera in the name of love. The actual essence of getting into marriage is money than love. This act has never taken seriously by Meera as she always considered her to be Hera. The Lilac House played vital role in misleading Giri. The first time he entered the house along with Meera was ever remembered by Meera again and again after losing Giri. When Giri ran away from Meera’s life she had sixteen year old girl, nine year old boy, her mother and her grandmother to look after. This disappearance shattered her for a day or two it was her son Nikhil who supported her in that shock. Life became a question for Meera as no corners gave any clue. Meera who was once a cuckoo girl for Giri became no man of any art. Chaotic condition prevailed until she came across an email sent by Giri from his mail account. The self got a heavy damage to analyze who she had been in the life of Giri. The mail revealed Giri’s mentality yet another shock was that Giri never loved Meera when preferred to Lilac House. She could easily recollect the damages she often faced in the hands of Giri with the nick name cuckoo girl. Meera loved Giri unconditionally. She wanted to be a dedicated wife as Hera. She gave her heart and soul in serving Giri with love. She was a squirrel to Giri. In running a family, every move was his choice including sex. She adored Giri in such a way that never it occurred to her that he might think wrong.
In the life of Jak, it is a mere fate that makes things move around. His early days had been hard as his father left his mother to move as a sanyasi. He is voiceless all the time. Even his Kala Chithi’s life also had a great damage. When he thought of living with his mother and Chithi in a comfortable way, his mother chose another life and went away. Jak left out of country to pursue his life as well as his research. When his daughter Smriti wanted to do her graduation at Madurai, he felt good and sent her. After coming to India for the tragedy of Smriti, he could realize that his individuality is tormented from his childhood. As a father Jak couldn’t cope up with the reality and the redemption to be made.

In fact, Nair crafts life not as a cage of inevitable burden but as an act of resurrection and metamorphosis. One has to sever the ties of the past and acquire a new sensitivity towards life. Life, like cyclone, triggers despair and uncertainty and all human beings have one thing in common, nothing but troubled souls. The bulwark strength of human beings lies not in accepting the devastation of life but in renewing themselves from the shackles of burden and bars. The novelist teaches a lesson to expect joy as the birthright and a power of denial towards despair. The murky canopy of life may gift dismay and demolish, all of a sudden, the hopes which are carried. Again the same life teaches to refashion the decree of redemption and renewal with forgiveness. Life is not an encumbrance of affliction and anxiety but it educates to look at the twists and turns of life with courage and strength.

Nair’s “Lessons in Forgetting” offers an intimate perspective into the lives of two individuals, who are trapped in sullen situations. Both the characters are captured in familial ties, cultural expectations, marital betrayals and sexual discovery. The plot moves on with men and women abandoning their marital relationships. Narrated in the backdrop of the Greek mythology of Hera and Zeus adds colour to the novel.
Meera has always lived in a fantastic world, a one created by her. All her dreams crumble leaving her deeply upset. She thinks that waiting for Giri is a waste than getting adapted to the new vision. She starts disliking everything still she has to take up her household responsibilities. She is also fascinated by popular culture images of romantic love. Anita Nair presents this confusion of social conventions and cultural influence as ultimately oppressive for women. Anita Nair invests her characters with a kind of self-excluding attitude, a desire to remain culturally and socially isolated from the American society.

The main aim of the novel is the delineation of individual’s quest in all its varied and complex forms. A sense of identity is a constant sustaining creative force in a writer. For the modern man, the search for identity has been one of his chief preoccupations. Identity and its quest refer to the spiritual odyssey of the modern man. When an individual finds himself in the fullness of his capacities, he is satisfied with himself. All his needs, roles in the society, his sublimations, and his personal and cultural achievements – together can give the impression of an individual with established identity. If all the above factors are negated, identity crisis will result.

It is her quest working in two directions simultaneously. In one direction, she tries to assert herself as an individual and in other her female identity. In the course of the novel they are to meet later. For Meera, her quest for self is very important. The novelist has presented the existential dilemma of the self of Meera in society and in her mind. They are alienation, fragmentation and meaninglessness of life. It leads to perpetual quest for identity. Owing to an unbridgeable gulf between herself and Giri after eighteen years of their long married life, Meera remains clouded with terrors sparked off by various reasons. As a wife, her body has become more precious than her own being. The knowledge that Giri has not married her for
her own sake but for her money, the woman in her breaks down completely. She has been needed by Giri only for her status & money.

When Meera puts the proposal of not giving up the house for sale because she is tired, Giri flatly rejects her. He tries to prove her the necessity of her work. The basic ground for her to be a woman with status in society is denied to her. Her dream to find happiness through a man has become shattered. She wants to be a woman attracting her male partner for all the time. Her dream to find happiness through a man has become shattered. She wants to overcome this sense. She is unable to accept everything calling it ‘Fate’ like a traditional woman. She becomes confused. She gets nervous. There is no answer and no solution to her question. She is caught in a dichotomy and has become tired of taking the burden of this dual experience. When the realization comes to her of the things happening in a logical manner, she has become strong enough, she has understood that she carries her own hell within her she has to come out for the sake of her children.

Thus, Anita Nair is a writer par excellence when she deals with ‘human issues which are of interest to all humanity’. She effectively portrays the lot of Indian women and the convoluted state of things resulting in their self-abnegation in her writing known for courageous and sensitive handling of significant and intractable themes affecting the lives of women. Her works, therefore, constitute an outstanding contribution to Indian literature in English.

Despite their disillusionment with marriage and all that it entails, they are able to preserve their identity, realizing their own personal and private limitations. Within the binding relationship they are able to, at last, affirm their own individuality. It could be said that “they are not satisfied with the rhetoric of equality between man and woman but want to
see that the right to an individual life and the right to development of their own individual capabilities are realized in their own lives.”

Therefore, Anita Nair repeatedly calls for understanding and balance in matrimony, however not at the cost of one’s self-respect and individuality. Her novels based on submission and suffering of women does not necessarily end with their rejection of family values and marriage. Her bold and balanced heroes often face the challenges of life confidently. Mostly they return to their husbands with the realization that self-assertion and conformity to one’s given role are not necessarily contradictory, but can even be complementary.

Thus, the end shows them as women aware of the importance of family and marriage, at the same time, accepting their need to discover their ‘self’. Her belief that caste based arranged marriage is not always the key to happiness is highlighted in most of her novels. Repeatedly calls for understanding and balance in matrimony, however not at the cost of one’s self-respect and individuality. Her novels based on submission and suffering of women, do not necessarily end with their rejection of family values and marriage. Her bold and balanced heroines often face the challenges of life confidently.

Though to present only a realistic picture of society is not the real business of art and literature, however rich and profound author’s knowledge about society may be, it has no permanent significance in the realm of literature unless it is woven into the fabric of art. Anita Nair has showed the naked truth of society, no doubt, but she has never forgotten the rules of art, e.g, images and symbols, overtones and ironies and other associated aspects of the great art.
Anita Nair’s novels represent the new Indian woman’s voice. A new woman is in search of self-identity, seeking liberation in all walks of life, replacing the traditional image of Indian woman. The need for women to seek their identity is the message in her novels. However, Anita Nair also exposes the women’s misunderstanding regarding their freedom and mocks at their way of asserting their individuality by posing to be men without concentrating on female empowerment as a whole.

Above all, her protagonists are more intelligent and capable women than men, who desire to have their own individuality. Anita Nair is fascinated towards the complexities of human relationships. She has confessed in an interview with the researcher, “We know a lot about the physical and the organic world and the Universe in general, but we still know very little about human relationships. It is the most mystifying thing as I am concerned. I will continue to wonder about it, puzzle over it and write about it, and still it is tremendously intriguing, fascinating.”

The time is a valuable thing that goes hand in hand with life. It plays a very cruel role that even after a minute it can’t be seen. Anita Nair throughout her writings has made use of this time aspect which is inevitable. It is one kind of a nature that human mind experience whenever there is a vacuum created. Let it be of sorrow, happiness, vengeance or any other feeling, the mind immediately start its analysis of narrating the events that had in the past in touch with the present. It may not called as a stream-of-consciousness rather it is also a demonstrating event on what to do next in the same situation with different ideas.

Woman is provided with the instinct of always relating any occurrence with the past. She is one such monster who never forgets the past. Whether it switches to a happy mode or sorrow, she is sure to remember a very minute feeling, body language, vocabulary which meant a lot at the time of its usage.
The question on the aspect is that how time can be resuscitation in life. It is of course a question but in today’s world, anything is possible and everything is digestible for the effect of the humanity to move on. The resuscitation must also happen in the time sequence in human life, particularly woman who must take decision not to retrieve the past unnecessarily. Like Meera who gave a detailed thought on what went wrong with her life with Giri, Akila whose remembrance of her past close to age of forty – five, Radha and Koman who take escape by lingering in the past. Of all these characters, nobody was able to find the fruitfulness for future. So, why to go back and retrieve which has nothing to provide in the present than why not attempt to take only the experience it has given and steadfast to bring a grooming life for the future?