



A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE THEME OF FORGIVENESS IN ANITA NAIR'S *LESSONS IN FORGETTING*

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ABSTRACT

Anita Nair is one of the popular women writers of the modern India. Her novels make the readers comfortable easy way in understanding life. In general, she deals with the radical changes in attitude towards social roles and marital relationships in her novels. Her novel "Lessons in Forgetting" is a beautiful story of redemption, forgiveness and second chances. This paper is about the theme of forgiveness which is skillfully brought out by the novelist. Meera is a socialite, finds her way in chaos when her husband Giri leaves their two children, with her mother and grandmother. J.A.Krishnamurthy or J.A.K, a renowned cyclone studies expert, comes to India to find out the truth behind the fatal accident of his daughter Smriti. Through a series of coincidences Meera and J.A.K's paths intertwine as they uncover the secrets of their past. Both of them have their devastated past. They forgive the people who are responsible for their unhappy events in past and they start their fresh beginnings with promises.

Keywords: marital relationships, redemption, forgiveness, intertwine.

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INTRODUCTION

Anita Nair possesses inspiration from her real life experiences. In *Lessons in Forgetting*; she talks about how women suffer in sociological system which has forced in a many ways to repress, humiliate and abuse. She raises some questions in her novel, makes the readers to think about the ideological ground of sociological role in the traditional society. The novel describes how a woman struggles for attaining success in her life. Two main characters of the novel Meera and J.A.K undergo many hurdles in their lives separately. When they meet each other, they try to find solutions to their problems and find solace in one another's arms by forgiving the people who have made their lives miserable.

The Tale of Meera

The Lilac house plays a vital role in the life of Meera. Mr. Raghavan Menon, a native of Calicut, working in Calcutta and falls in love with Charu. She is a Bengali woman and he married her. Some years later, Charu died and Raghavan Menon sent his daughter Leela to Santiniketan for her studies. The brothers of Raghavan Menon did not like Raghavan Menon coming back to Calicut, and so sent him a cheque of his share in his family estate. At that time, a Bengali director spotted Leela and motivated her to work in Hindi cinema by changing her name as Lily. Lily married Sandor, a Hungarian painter and came to live in the Lilac house which Raghavan took for ninety nine years lease. Saro was born to Lily. Saro fell in love with her best friend's brother and married him. Saro's husband died in an accident.

Sandor died in due course when Saro was thirty nine. She came to Lilac house, seeking refuge for herself with her nineteen year old daughter Meera the protagonist of the novel. Meera did her post graduation in English.

Meera never dreamt big dreams. She had no desire for designer clothes, diamonds, or expensive holidays. In those hard years after her father's death, she learnt to worship at the altar of enough. That was all she ever hoped for. Enough to keep the roof over their heads and food in their bellies. Enough to retain dignity and not have to ask reluctant removed relatives for a temporary hand out. Enough to live as they did. (Lessons in Forgetting 46)

Giri, the son of a poor man in Palakad, was good at studies. His maths teacher Sivaramanlyer shepherded him away from home, first, to the Regional Engineering College, where his eyes widened at a world he never existed. He joined in IIM in Ahmedabad. He got placed in the campus recruitment and found a job in the corporate world. He was a good planner. He made plans about where he would be by the time he was thirty, forty, forty five...thereafter would be the playing fields of his life.

As a business affair, Giri enters the house Lilac with other members for a photo shoot. He is more attracted towards the house and plans to marry Meera and wishes to settle there.

"Giri exhaled with Meera, he would be able to move on. Finally, he would be free of the yellowing past and the stench of making do. Meera. His. Like the lilac house. L'air du temps." (Lessons in Forgetting 41)

Meera easily falls in the trap which is laid by Giri in the name of love. She starts analyzing Giri's attachment towards her.

"She thought of the young women who were part of his professional world. Tall young women who wore their suitability like their hair. Shining, groomed and never out of place. Why does he prefer me to them? She asked herself. They are smart, competent and have careers. Whereas all I have is a postgraduate degree in English

and stewardship of this house." (Lessons in Forgetting 41-42).

But Giri convinces her with his promising words. "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 a really smart woman to be a corporate wife."(Lessons in Forgetting 42)

After marriage, Meera changes herself as a corporate wife of Giri and also becomes a cook book writer. They have two children. Nayantara, the 19 years old daughter who studies in The Indian Institute of Technology (Madras) and Nikhil, who is thirteen years old. Meera becomes a socialite. Giri plans to start a new business. For that, he needs money. He wishes to sell the Lilac house but Meera not agree with his plan, moreover she cannot sell the house, because the house will revert back to the original owner after forty five years. Giri does not know about contract scheme of the house. Meera tries to convince him but he refuses to listen her words. She is unaware of his intention. When the babies are laid in her arms, the fulfillment she knows that drowns her in its completeness. But Giri is not like that. If he cannot have the benefit of this house, he does not want her anymore. One fine day in a party, he leaves Meera with their two children, her mother and grandmother. From his unfinished mail only Meera comes to understand that "she has been so blind. Giri had wanted more than enough."(Lessons in Forgetting 47)

After Giri leaves, Meera is desperate to write another book, but the publisher has lost faith in her. She has to draw on all her mental and emotional resources as she tries to provide for the family. She takes a job as a Research Assistant to J.A.Krishnamurthy who is called J.A.K, the guru of simulated cyclones. When Giri left her in the party, it was J.A.K who dropped Meera and her son at her house. But, at that time, Meera did not know that in future she will give solace to the mind of J.A.K whose mind is like a directless ship due to unexpected cyclones. Kala Chithitells J.A.K to accept the truth that "No one is ever responsible for what happens to someone else. You have to accept that. It is the truth. Whatever it is my life or Smriti's" (Lessons in Forgetting 233). Giri begins a new life and demands a divorce. When Meera's mother Saro

dies in an accident, Giri does not come for a help, but J.A.K helps her. The novelist skillfully brings the rebel against the traditional role of the woman and creates a curiosity in the minds of the readers to know about the roles of those characters with the life of the main character, Meera.

The Tale of JAK

Kitcha's father (Appa) never wishes for a wife, a child and the murkiness of grihasthaashrama. He decides to join an ashram. But because of the compulsion of his parents, Appa married Sarada and had Kitcha, his son. After, fourteen years of marriage, Appa walks out off his house. Sarada visited various temples in search of her husband. She took the Bachelor's degree in Education and she becomes a teacher. She married a Physics teacher and a year after their marriage, they went to Tanzania. After the death of J.A.K'S mother, he went to US for further studies and became Prof.J.A.Krishnamurthy (J.A.K).

JAK has marries to Nina. She belongs to Madras. They have two daughters, Smriti and Shruti. He is known for the reader of omens, the collector of warnings and the storm warning man. He is a very accurate in his predictions. He spends more time in studying cyclone. Most of the time, he stays out of his house. Like Meera, he fails to sense the change. His absence at home has created a distance among between them. As Nina is a short temper, their marriage comes to an end. Both get divorced and Smriti lives with J.A.K and Shruti lives with Nina.

Smriti, much interested in listening the tales of India. She comes to India for her Undergraduate studies. She meets one of her friends Shivu in the Shakti Forum. Rupa, She becomes the coordinator of the Forum, plans to conduct a play on the theme of female foeticide. Smriti actively participated in the play. With her friend Rishi Menon she goes to Minjikapuram. While she is walking near a sea beach, she gets injured by a bit of broken glass. She goes to the nearby hospital for treatment. There, she noticed many pregnant women and comes to know that every women came for scanning in order to find the sex of the fetus. If the report of fetus is girl child, they should do abortion either willingly or forcibly. Smriti felt that it is an illegal and wishes to stop it. She tries to collect

the proof against that for making a report. She meets Chinnathayi, whose daughter dies at the nursing home in abortion. Smriti was in need of some proof regarding the female infanticide problem from Chinnathayi. She also promises to help Smriti. But, the people who supporting the scanning method, they warn her friend to leave the village and also they threatened Chinnathayi. They send a message in the name of Chinnathayi and ask her to come to the sea beach. When Smriti comes there, those people destroy her and she becomes a motionless, pathetic frozen figure.

J.A.K receives the news about the fatal accident of his daughter. He comes to India for the investigation of her daughter's accident. His education taught him to ask questions, to go beyond the limit. J.A.K, being a father of Smriti, he tries to discover the matter of accident. When the investigation starts; he meets the different people who were friend of Smriti. Those people gave their different opinion about her accident. J.A.K feels that he is about to know the truth, unfortunately it happens all in vain. As Meera, he also comes to a situation to think about his future life. The shocking experienced of Meera over Giri's sudden disappearance from her life is nothing when compared to the blow that J.A.K receives over the tragedy of his daughter.

The mutual understanding between Meera and J.A.K leads to a fresh promising beginning

J.A.K takes Meera to his house at Bangalore. Both of them share their thoughts about their families. Meera talks about her daughter Nayantara who is at IIT, Chennai. J.A.K talks about his daughter Smriti who is also nineteen years old. The description of Smriti's room and Smriti is a very touching one. The novelist's artistic hand creates sympathy not only in the mind of Meera but also in the minds of the readers.

A few shelves hold books. The rest of the room is covered with dolls of every material, organic and manmade; precious and ordinary.

But it is the girl on the bed who causes Meera to grip her bag even more tightly. Her eyes crinkle. Is that girl? She hasn't seen anything like this creature. Not even in her disaster documentation. A wave of revulsion washes over her.

It lies poleaxed. Legs separate and hands flung wide apart. Swathed in a blouse and pyjamas of fine cotton, its hair razed to stubble. Thin as paper and almost as pale, the skin stretched across the bones, causing the cheeks to hollow inwards. The eyes wide open, cast of glass. The mouth askew. A face stricken in a permanent leer. Something about the hardness of the stare and the grim mouth gives it an evil cunning.

When Meera is stunned by the creature's appearance, J.A.K comes forward and tells her that creature is his daughter Smriti. Meera starts showing a motherly attitude towards Smriti. At home her grandmother Lily encourages her to make a new life.

"If there is a chance for you to make a new life, you must

...When your father died I should have told Saro this. But I didn't. I was selfish in my fear that I would be alone. So I clung to your mother and let her use me as a crutch". (Lessons in Forgetting 308)

Meera gives a reply

I don't know what you are thinking but there is nothing between the professor and me." Lily leans back. 'Not yet. But I can see he likes you and you him. It isn't about cutting your hair or acquiring a new wardrobe. That's good in the movies. A new look that turns you into a new woman. Get real, Meera. Get real before your life slips away from you. (Lessons in Forgetting 309)

Lily's words are uttered for the sake of Meera as per the story but the real motive of the novelist is to create awareness among the women about modernity.

J.A.K suffered so much when he listened to Chinnathayi's report about the fatal accident of his daughter.

"The booming treacherous sea waited, but anything 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-rose with the wave and came to slam against her head." (Lessons in Forgetting 357)

Meera on her part thinks: "This could have been my Nayantara, she thinks. If it had been my

child, how would I have endured it?" (Lessons in Forgetting 358)

Meera subsides into silence and she sees J.A.K's shoulders heave. Meera starts consoling him and at the same time shrugs away the sadness that threatens to swamp her.

"The gentle afternoon rain, washing away the past. He feels cleansed, alive, and as life stirs beneath the gentle but persistent pressure of rain on earth, within him a movement, an awakening, a tentative shaping of possibilities". He feels "she can read him. That much he is certain of one day perhaps, he will find the words." (Lessons in Forgetting 360)

Both understand with each other.

Conclusion

Through the narration of the lives of the two characters, namely Meera and J.A.K, the novelist brings out the theme of forgiveness by describing various events that happened in their lives.

Meera faces an embarrassing situation when her husband Giri leaves her with their two children, mother and grandmother in the middle of the party and also disappears from her life. But Meera forgives him and takes the steps on her own to lead a respectable life. She is steady and careful in her new life.

"She will be there with him, Meera decides. But to keep herself alive, she will need to drudge all the selfishness that lies deep within her. That alone will ensure that J.A.K does not swallow her up, as once Giri did." (Lessons in Forgetting 365)

She cannot give him the reassurance as he wants from her. Then she thinks how she savours the pomegranate fruit best when she eats it seed by seed rather than as a handful thrown into her mouth. She takes a cue from that.

"Of how resurrection is to be fashioned one day at a time." (Lessons in Forgetting 365)

So, Meera does not what she can. She rests her head against his arm. She will be with J.A.K but to a limit.

J.A.K is of the view that whatever happens in one's life, it is inevitable. It has been all decided by someone in his surroundings. But, he never takes revenge upon them; instead of he learned how to

forgive. He starts to forgive his father, his mother Sarada who marries another man, his wife Nina who has divorced him and the persons who are responsible for his daughter's fatal accident and makes up his mind to accept Meera's entry into his life as a promising one.

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