

# The Subaltern Voice and Gendered Experiences in Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*: A Feminist Perspective

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## Abstract

Post-modern writer Anita Nair is a well-known novelist, playwright, and essayist. Inspired by the idea of "subaltern" put out by Spivak and Gramsci, Nair concentrates on the heroine, Meera, who personifies the hardships of women caught in subservient positions within a society run under male dominance. Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* has female protagonists navigating patriarchal systems that marginalise and subjugate them. The story shows how patriarchal societies limit women to domestic responsibilities by means of male control and manipulation, therefore stifling their activities and ambitions. The paper looks at how Meera loses her sense of self and becomes emotionally and financially reliant on her husband, Giri, even though she is educated and competent of independence. Nair's book questions these power relations by highlighting the psychological and emotional abuse women experience as well as by honouring their possibilities for self-realization and empowerment.

**Keywords:** Subaltern, Patriarchal System, Marginalisation, Emotional Violence, Oppression.

Examining how female characters are portrayed in this work, with an eye on their attitudes, beliefs, and social demands, It emphasises how these heroes negotiate their responsibilities in a patriarchal culture, therefore clarifying their subaltern status at last. Within this framework, the word "subaltern" describes those subjugated by power dynamics; Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*'s female characters reflect this marginalised demographic. From the Latin words "sub" (meaning "below") and "alter," which means "other," or "different," the phrase "subaltern" results. Historically, it spoke of those in inferior roles, like soldiers of lesser ranks or peasants. It acquired significance in military settings in the 18th and 19th centuries. Often in a complicated relationship with authority, the subaltern continuously negotiates its place rather than being either totally subservient or totally rebellious.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's query, "Can the subaltern speak?" questions in post-colonial theory the capacity of the oppressed to express their voices within dominant power systems. According to Spivak, the subaltern stays invisible, therefore supporting their marginalisation. Likewise, Antonio Gramsci's concept of subalternity characterises people without authority and autonomy,

especially under hegemonic institutions run under the elite controls. Women in a patriarchal culture are often seen as subalterns, their voices muffled and their responsibilities confined to domesticity. Based on gender and bodily shape, this system marginalises women and results in their subjection in many different kinds of violence and control.

The lessons in forgetting by Anita Nair provide a clear picture of how women are made subaltern in a society controlled by males. With their lives moulded by the behaviours and expectations of the males around them, the book shows women as subservient and excluded individuals. Meera, the heroine, perfectly captures the challenges faced by women who are limited to conventional roles and start depending on their spouses.

Meera's narrative takes place within a middle-class metropolitan household. She decides to fit society expectations by adopting the position of a devoted wife and mother even if she is well-educated and capable of attaining freedom. She gives her individuality up for the sake of her family and becomes emotionally and financially reliant on her husband, Giri with time. This contribution best shows how patriarchal systems keep control over women's autonomy.

Meera's life is shaped by her marriage to Giri, who dominates their relationship. Meera values her housekeeping job over her credentials and achievements; she frequently feels inadequate at social events. She suppresses her needs and her goals and follows Giri's demands. Meera has an emotional crisis, however, when Giri suddenly leaves her. Meera is forced to face her repressed wants and identities by this desertion. Nair investigates the idea of self-discovery via Meera's psychological and emotional trip. Meera first becomes overwhelmed with her family obligations and often ignores her own wants and wishes. But she starts to rethink her life and gets the bravery to take charge once Giri leaves. Meera's character undergoes a major turning point as she comes to value her own well-being and welcome freedom.

The teachings in forgetting exposed the life of a normal page. Meera boasts an obedient, loving son, a well-educated daughter in a rich nation, and a successful husband. She gets ready, flirts a little, and strikes brilliant but ridiculous talks, moving through all the motions like a social butterfly.

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 handout. Enough to live as they did. (LF 46)

Her whole environment is shockingly chaotic as the narrative opens. Her spouse left the celebration. Jack, a stranger, rides with him back home. His life started to shift that instant on. Her life becomes an engagement with a stranger, a storm specialist from the United States, driven by automobile. Her spouse was no longer in her life and she had lost all communication with him, hence she was working for him to help her family. She has to change from a sociable butterfly to an industrious bee gathering nectar for her brood.

Male characters in the book such as Giri reflect the institutionalisation of patriarchal power. Giri's control over Meera's life and his disrespect of her autonomy highlight the natural injustices in such arrangements. Meera is expected by him to stay limited to the home, never given the chance to pursue a job or grow personally apart from her responsibilities as a wife and mother. Giri's rendition of the Lilac House captures this patriarchal perspective. He takes a choice without consulting Meera: he wants to sell it to help with his business enterprise. Combining his emotional desertion with this act of treachery, emphasises the degree to which women in this society are seen as subordinates whose needs and preferences come second to those of the males who rule them.

The book also tackles the subject of gender violence, a ubiquitous problem related to subalternity. Under the males in their life, women in Lessons in Forgetting suffer emotional, psychological, and

physical violence. A kind of psychological abuse, Giri's betrayal and manipulation of Meera's life restricts women's autonomy and possibilities by means of the patriarchal system.

Though it is not always physical, the violence women in the book experience is manifested as emotional repression, control, and manipulation. Meera's story reflects the many women who live in civilisations where emotional and psychological abuse renders them subalternly diminished. Notwithstanding their difficulties, the ladies in *Lessons in Forgetting* show fortitude and courage. Meera's path from a docile housewife to an autonomous woman is evidence of the possibility for change. By means of her hardships, Nair stresses the need of self-realization and autonomy. Meera's choice to look different and to accept a position as Jak's research assistant marks her reclaiming of autonomy.

Meera's path emphasises how women, in the most repressive surroundings as well, have agency that may be expressed. Nair questions the idea that women have to be reliant and docile. By working and reinventing herself, Meera shows via her metamorphosis that women can overcome hardship and starts to recover her freedom, therefore releasing the patriarchal influence that had kept her constrained.

Focussing on the subalternity, *Lessons in Forgetting* presents the complicated reality of women's life in a patriarchal culture. Meera's path from servitude to freedom is a shining example of the hardships experienced by women who are oppressed and excluded in a society run by males. By means of her narrative, Nair emphasises the value of self-discovery, empowerment, and the necessity of women recovering their identities. Applying subaltern theory, the book invites readers to recognise the hardships and goals of women who oppose society expectations and advocate their independence.

Finally, Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* deftly examines women's responsibilities in society and their struggle against patriarchal tyranny. Nair's story emphasises the repressive aspect of patriarchy and the resiliency of women like Meera, who, despite first reliance, progressively discovers the fortitude to help her family and re-establish her identity. By means of Meera's path, Nair challenges the conventional subordination of women in a patriarchal society by illustrating the fight for autonomy and the transforming potential of self-realization.

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