

## Identity and Human Relationships: A Study of Anita Nair's Lessons in Forgetting and Preeti Shenoy's Wake Up, Life is Calling

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### Abstract

This study focuses on the interplay between identity and human relationships in Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* and Preeti Shenoy's *Wake Up, Life is Calling*. Both novelists explore how women navigate personal struggles, emotional challenges, societal expectations, and evolving relationships in contemporary Indian society. The two contemporary Indian women writers explore different aspects of human relationships. They focus on the lives of married women and portray their emotional and social struggles. They also show how these women face difficulties and try to overcome the challenges in their lives. In *Lessons in Forgetting*, the protagonist faces marital problems, emotional loneliness, and personal struggles. These experiences help her understand herself and begin a new phase in her life. Similarly, *Wake Up, Life is Calling* portrays a woman who faces emotional and personal challenges. Through these experiences, she gains a better understanding of herself and her relationships. A parallel reading of the two novels shows how relationships can both limit and support a person's identity. The study also explores the characters' psychological struggles, emotional pain, self-discovery, resilience, and ability to make their own choices. Overall, the study shows how identity, emotions, and human relationships are closely connected in contemporary Indian women's fiction.

**Keywords / திறவுச் சொற்கள்:** Identity; Human Relationships; Self-discovery; Resilience; Emotions; Contemporary Indian women's fiction

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Anita Nair hails from Shoranur in Kerala. She occupies an important place in contemporary Indian English literature and is known for her feminist and postmodern perspectives. She has written novels, short stories, poetry, and books for children. Her works often explore women's lives, identity, relationships, and social issues. Nair has also spoken about her creative process in interviews. She describes writing as a meaningful and creative engagement with life and human experiences. Anita Nair is a well-known Indian writer in English. She writes novels, short stories, poems, essays, and stories for children. She has also worked as a creative director in an advertising agency. She is known for her novels *The Better Man* and *Ladies Coupé*. Her writing deals with women, identity, society, relationships, and personal freedom. She is known for her energetic and interesting writing style. Anita Nair is considered a talented and successful Indian writer.

*Lessons of Forgetting* (2010) is a significant novel that explores the lives, aspirations, and struggles of women within a society largely shaped by patriarchal values. The narrative centres on Meera, the central character, who lives in her ancestral home, Lilac House, along with her

mother and grandmother. Their life in the house is initially peaceful and contented, strengthened by their close familial bond. However, the sudden death of Meera's father changes the course of their lives and places the family in a state of financial and emotional uncertainty.

Faced with difficult circumstances, the family is compelled to adopt a modest and restrained way of living. These experiences gradually shape Meera's outlook towards life. Rather than pursuing excessive material comforts or ambitions, she learns to remain satisfied with what is necessary for survival and dignity. Through Meera's experiences, the novel presents the challenges faced by women in a male-dominated social structure and highlights their resilience, adaptability, and quiet struggle for a meaningful life. The writer remarks:

Meera never dreamt big dreams. She had no desire for designer cloths, diamonds or expensive holidays. In those hard years after her father's death, she learnt to work ship 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. (41)

Preeti Shenoy's *Wake Up, Life Is Calling* continues Ankita's journey following the events of *Life Is What You Make It*. After overcoming two suicide attempts and undergoing treatment for a mental health disorder, Ankita relocates to Mumbai, unrolls in a creative-writing course, and begins the challenging process of rebuilding her life. Her interactions with her parents, friends, former boyfriend, and, most importantly, her evolving relationship with herself play a significant role in her journey towards recovery and self-discovery. Shenoy presents the novel as an exploration of human resilience, emphasizing the capacity of the mind to overcome adversity and the possibility of transforming one's life through positive thinking, self-awareness, and a renewed understanding of oneself. An analysis of these two novels demonstrates that identity is neither static nor predetermined. Rather, it is continually shaped and reshaped through interpersonal relationships, societal expectations, emotional experiences, and the ways individuals respond to personal struggles and crises.

In *Lessons in Forgetting*, Meera's identity is closely connected to her family and social roles. She is a wife, mother, daughter, granddaughter, and working woman. Her life seems stable because her family and social relationships give her a sense of security. However, her husband's sudden disappearance changes everything. She is forced to make decisions on her own and take responsibility for matters that were earlier shared with or managed by others. Meera's broken marriage marks an important turning point in her life. Although her husband's departure causes her pain and uncertainty, it also gives her a chance to understand herself as an individual rather than only as a wife. Through Meera's experience, Anita Nair shows how women may lose their individual identity when they are completely defined by family and social responsibilities. The novel also suggests that dependence within marriage can affect a woman's emotional, social, and financial independence. Meera's journey gradually helps her recognize her own abilities and develop a stronger sense of self.

Anita Nair further explores the question of female identity through characters such as Smriti. Although Smriti is unable to communicate normally after the accident, her situation helps JAK understand the difficulties experienced by young women in society. Her story reveals how women are often judged by social ideas about morality, sexuality, and respectability. The narrative does not focus only on the circumstances surrounding Smriti's condition; it also draws attention to the way society judges her choices and character. Through these experiences, Nair questions the social beliefs that restrict women's identities to marriage, sexuality, family duties, and public reputation. The novel shows that women have individual desires, experiences, and aspirations that cannot be understood only through traditional social roles. Meera, Kala Chithi, and Smriti each face different forms of social pressure, yet their experiences reveal their efforts to gain greater independence and develop their own sense of identity.

In *Wake Up, Life Is Calling*, Preeti Shenoy presents identity as something that changes through personal experiences and struggles. Ankita's past experiences with mental health have a strong influence on the way she sees herself. After facing difficult circumstances, she tries to begin her life again by returning to her studies, making new friends, and joining a creative-writing course. She wants to enjoy the freedom and experiences of a young adult. However, her earlier experiences continue to affect her thoughts and choices. Ankita's struggle is not only about dealing with her past difficulties. She also wants to move beyond the identity that others may associate with her condition. She wishes to be accepted for her personality, abilities, and dreams rather than being judged only by her past. Her experience shows the importance of seeing a person as a whole individual instead of defining them through one aspect of their life.

"Ankita's transformation reflects genuine psychological healing, illustrating that while trauma may never entirely disappear, it evolves, and resilience arises not from a single factor but from multiple independent predictors contributing to positive outcomes (Bonanno et.al, 511)". Writing plays an important role in Ankita's journey towards self-understanding. Through creative writing and keeping a journal, she is able to express her feelings and examine her thoughts. Writing gives her a way to understand her experiences and communicate what she finds difficult to express otherwise. In this way, creativity becomes an important part of her personal growth. Ankita gradually learns to accept her past while developing a new understanding of herself and her future. Anjali Hans remarks that:

A woman cannot surpass her male counterpart because to the intricate networks that make up society. She has been reduced to a supporting role for ages. It is difficult for women who have internalised these ideas since they were young to against them because they are not viewed favourably by society. (1762)

Both novels show that a person's identity is closely connected with their relationships. The way people treat and respond to an individual can influence how that person understands themselves. Relationships can offer love, support, and a sense of belonging. At the same time, they can create social expectations and restrict personal freedom. In Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting*, marriage plays an important role in shaping Meera's identity. Her marriage provides her with a sense of stability and social acceptance, but it also makes her dependent on her husband in several ways. When her marriage comes to an end, Meera is forced to face life independently. This difficult experience becomes an important stage in her personal growth. By rebuilding her life, she gradually develops a stronger understanding of herself.

The novel also highlights the importance of relationships among women. The women in Meera's family come from different generations and have their own experiences and challenges. However, their lives reflect similar struggles involving family responsibilities, sacrifice, and social expectations. Their experiences are passed from one generation to another. At the same time, younger women begin to question traditional ideas and seek greater independence. In this way, Nair presents female relationships as an important source of understanding, support, and change.

The bond between Meera and JAK is another significant aspect of *Lessons in Forgetting*. Both characters have experienced pain and disappointment in their personal lives. Their meeting gives them an opportunity to understand each other and develop a relationship based on empathy and companionship. Their connection is not presented only as a romantic relationship. Instead, it grows from their shared experiences of loss and loneliness. Through their relationship, Nair suggests that emotional closeness can provide comfort and understanding without taking away a person's individuality.

In *Wake Up, Life Is Calling*, relationships also play an important role in Ankita's journey. Her parents are a major source of love and emotional support. Although their relationship with Ankita is affected by her earlier struggles and hospitalization, they continue to stand by her.

Their care helps Ankita regain confidence and face the challenges of starting her life again. Through Ankita's experience, Shenoy shows how family support can give a person strength during difficult periods and contribute to the process of personal recovery. The novel also shows that relationships can sometimes make personal growth more difficult. When Ankita's former boyfriend comes back into her life, memories of her earlier experiences begin to affect her present situation. His return brings unresolved emotions from the past and makes it harder for Ankita to move forward. This experience shows how emotional connections and past memories can continue to influence a person even when they are trying to start a new chapter in life.

The two novels are different in their narrative style and tone. Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* presents a complex story through several characters and different generations. It connects the personal problems of the characters with larger issues related to gender, family, and society. In contrast, Preeti Shenoy's *Wake Up, Life Is Calling* mainly focuses on Ankita's personal experiences. Ankita feels, "I very badly want to sleep. To escape. I want a respite. Why don't you sleep forever? All of this will end then" (Shenoy,158). The novel follows her struggles and her efforts to rebuild her life in a simple and direct manner. Although the novels have different approaches, both writers present identity as something that develops over time. Meera gradually discovers her own abilities after facing changes in her personal life. She begins to understand herself beyond her role as a wife and mother. Similarly, Ankita learns to accept her past without allowing it to control her future. Both characters experience difficulties, but these experiences help them develop a stronger sense of self.

Anita Nair's *Lessons in Forgetting* and Preeti Shenoy's *Wake Up, Life Is Calling* explore important aspects of identity and human relationships in contemporary Indian English literature. Nair focuses on marriage, gender roles, family relationships, female bonding, memory, trauma, and personal independence through the character of Meera. Shenoy, through Ankita, explores friendship, family support, love, emotional struggles, self-expression, and resilience. Both novels show how difficult experiences and meaningful relationships can influence an individual's journey towards self-understanding and personal growth.

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