



Quest for Self-Identity in Githa Hariharan's Novel "The Thousand Faces Of Night"

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Abstract

Indian English Fiction enabled a more in-depth examination of the Woman's Question. Women were employed to represent revolt, heroic principles, and passionate desires. While post-independence Indian writers in English condemn the current literary scene and critical creeds as absolute and out of date, their thematic interests extended well beyond Indian borders. The work presents a huge "feminine mystique," with characters ranging from Arundhati Roy to Githa Hariharan. Writing on nearly anything under the sun, these female novelists are cognizant of their society, ideals, and ideologies, as well as the power, strengths, and vulnerabilities of women. The identity, which is frequently referred to as the "self," is the inner person to whom the notion of divided selves is more important than the exaltation of the outward personality. The question of identity is comprised of the humble and human relationships accounting to the feminine existence such as mother, sister, daughter, wife, and soul. It is more in her approach to discovering her identity, which is nothing more than a frenzied chain of fragmented selves. Githa Hariharan's novels have represented the cultural spaces and survival methods predominantly occupied by the middle class since the development of feminist thinking. The paper describes women's path towards independence

and forging an individual identity, beginning with fictitious conceptions of feminist individualism and continuing through the institutions of marriage and family.

Keywords: Feminism and Feminist Literary Criticism, Culture, Role of Gender, Position and Gender discrimination, Patriarchy, Self- Expression and Self-identity.

1. Introduction

Literature is a social institution that use the medium of language using methods such as symbolism, metre, and so on. Life is an expression of literature, and literature is a social reality. As a result, life becomes the object of literary imitation. Life is reflected through writing. Literature is a social expression. It indicates that the literature depicts certain features of society. It does not represent all aspects of one's existence. The author may mention her own life or the beginning of her life, but it would be inaccurate to argue that he expresses everything of her life at any particular time. Primarily the author writes about cultural variety, identity crises, survival methods, and rootlessness or instability. Githa Hariharan is the prominent post independent novelist and editor her first work *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers Prize (1993), the first to win this prize by Eurasia. She subsequently published many stories and novels: *The Art of Dying* (1993); *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994); *When Dreams Travel* (1999); *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). *A Southern Harvest* was edited and translated into four south Indian languages by her. Githa Hariharan holds a distinct place in contemporary Indian English literature. Throughout her career, she has contributed five significant novels. She also wrote some short stories. Her novels and novellas both contain significant feminist elements. The regional writer emphasises and documents a specific location's topography, customs, and language, with a more serious explanatory focus than for basic background material. The context is frequently utilised to explain the personality and actions of its residents. The related term 'regional sensibility' is a

new concept that refers to the melding of the 18th and 20th century definitions of sensitivity in the context of a region. It refers to social and personal transformation. Githa Hariharan's works address contemporary issues such as extremism and conservatism. Githa Hariharan believes that writers should reaffirm their devotion to the craft. They are interrogating voices. As a writer, she has made more room for herself in the vast pool of culture. She discusses Hindu fanaticism because her story is set in India. In her novel "In Times of Siege," she uses the metaphor "siege," which she believes is applicable to the rest of the world. "In Times of Siege" by Hariharan can be considered as a sociological, historical, and political fiction. It addresses current issues in fundamentalism, with a particular emphasis on Hindu fundamentalism. The novel takes place in India. Hariharan also mentioned the political effect on academics. Githa Hariharan pioneered woman-centered techniques of projecting and interpreting experience from a feminine perspective. In her humble manner, she favours education as a weapon for women. Githa Hariharan's writings depict many stages of female development. Her writings depict Indian women's long journey from subjugation to rebels against patriarchal tyranny and assertion of their identity. Geetha Hariharan's female characters span decades but play significant parts in the plot. Mayamma, Devi, Sita, and Meena are all present in the protagonists' lives, while others exist only in their recollections. According to Elaine Showalter, they are classified as 'feminine,' 'feminist,' and 'female'. Despite being termed Showalterian, each character shows signs of progress towards the next level. Women have cared for families, social interactions, and values for millennia, despite being hamstrung in all arenas by men in the garb of a breadwinner. Women's intellectual and economic accomplishments were rendered infertile, and they were reduced to biological existences. Women were deprived of their fundamental rights and unable to occupy honourable positions in society. Marriage is a social institution and a binding legal agreement, giving it significant authority in society. It significantly affects how women think. Githa's novels contain marriage-

related literary situations that show gradually how women's perspectives have altered over time as a result of altering temporal frames and cultural sensibilities. All of the grandparents of Vasu and Devi, as well as Mayamma, Mangala, and Lakshmi, can be categorised as having "feminine" attributes because they exhibit all the traits of an entire matured woman. They make excellent mothers and competent housewives. Mayamma, the family's retainer, is a typical example of a lady who accepts her fate, makes no demands, and lives her life as she should. She maintains the strict treatment of mothers, daughters, wives, daughters-in-law, and abandoned women that a patriarchal family demands. She lives a predetermined life and doesn't make choices. Mayamma's life has been plagued by abuse and violence ever since her marriage at the age of twelve. Her carefree childhood comes to an end with marriage, as she recalls:

"I took the iron skillet into my hands before my mother-in-law woke up. (TFN 116)

After ten years of marriage, Mayamma unfortunately never had children. She consumes stale rice because she does not believe that it is crucial to nourish infertile women. She has to atone if she wants to please the gods. She is instructed to cut her breast in half in order to appease the gods and have a son. After she spends the night whoring in the house, her husband labels her "a shameless hussy" and throws her outside in the rain. (TFN 111) When Mayamma gives birth to a boy child, her problems temporarily end.

However, when the child becomes eight years old, Mayamma's husband leaves her. When her son physically abuses her later, she discovers her husband's duplicate in him. When she refused to give him money, he strikes her with an iron skillet and tears her diamond earrings out of her lobes. But Mayamma never raises a voice, never protests the atrocities she sees in her patriarchal household, and never seeks to flee her torment. Mayamma slowly and

painfully acquires the skills necessary for survival. She exercises her own defence systems when she observes persistent disappointments beyond her control. She objects quietly.

She is neither loving or passionate towards her son when he is bedridden, and when he passes away, "She burns his horoscope with her son" (TFN 82). She begins to look for the significance of her survival after his passing. She has nowhere to go and, after finding her way into Devi's father-in-law's home, manages to make a comfortable living as a family retainer. Despite her difficult life, she ends up being the foundation of the entire family. This demonstrates the inherent fortitude in women who, despite their vulnerability, can return to normalcy.

The author depicts Devi, who had her education overseas, as a contemporary Indian woman. While studying abroad in the United States, Devi meets Dan, a black man, and they become close. His suggestions don't evoke the myth-filled society she was up in. She begins to think her grandmother's stories of a perfect marriage are true after Dan brings up her fear of taking chances. She desires to remain in her comfort zone as the ideal "feminine." Additionally, Sita is able to convince her daughter to return from America and marry Mahesh, a corporate officer. Unfortunately, the unromantic Mahesh—a "regional manager of a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpastes" (TFN 22), Githa Hariharan portrays the personality of Parvatiamma, Devi's mother-in-law.

Devi has the idea that she was a generous, loving, and 'feminine' woman whose kindness caused her to turn away from herself. In reality Parvatiamma sought out spiritual fulfilment. She chanted Bhajans for God the most of the time after the kids left for boarding school. Because of her confidence in Mayamma, she was able to leave her husband and children in her care. She dissociated herself from domestic life in her search for God. She can be categorised

as a feminist since she rejects society pressures by leaving the institutions of the family and home. In general, marriage, which was supposed to be a safety net for women, becomes increasingly repressive under the tyrannical authority of husbands who imprison them for housework. Through a pilgrimage, the grandmother escapes the constraints of the family.

Sita is another important character in "The Thousand Faces of Night." She was educated, smart, and born into a superior social and economic class. She got married when her cousins became moms. Her amazing aptitude at playing the 'veena' more than made up for her lack of attractiveness, and as a result, she was welcomed in the marriage market. Her marriage home was filled with her music. She was once playing the instrument when her father-in-law called, and she didn't answer. In a fit of wrath, he runs up to her and confronts her, asking whether she is a daughter-in-law. After the incident, she made sure she never gave the family a chance to complain, as a kind of protest. Even to Devi, she progressively started to act odd and overbearing. She began living a practical life devoid of any sensitivity as the bitterness of suppressing her youthful feelings lay latent in her psyche.

Devi never stops trying to make herself happy. When she realises that neither Mahesh nor Gopal can replace her void in life, she does not feel at peace and tranquil with them. When she discovers that they are solely focused on their work, she is disappointed in her hopes of forming a meaningful relationship. She feels degraded by the secondary status the patriarchy has given her. When she is unable to reconcile her second life with Gopal, she resolves to join her mother. The sound of the veena comforts her as she walks up to her mother's house and strengthens her relationship with her. Devi hopes that this female closeness with her mother will last forever despite breaking tradition. Devi, a misfit in the patriarchal world, aspires to build a new life of caring and sharing with her mother, a place she can call home.

2. Conclusion

Within these restrictions, each of the female characters tries to rip apart in her own unique way in order to carve out spaces for herself. The strong female link between Devi and her grandma is well-portrayed. According to the analysis of the women's characters, 'feminine' people tend to dwell in self-pity and feel like victims of life. While helping others, they do not assist themselves. The 'feminists' decide to change their way of thinking in order to shape their future in light of their lacklustre past. As they advance, "female" characters stop being reliant and begin to rely on themselves, and they approach each connection by considering what they can contribute rather than what they can receive. Her women are no longer slavish defenders of tradition, silent or uncomplaining victims, or ineffective armchair critics. They are aware of a bigger world and want to live in it according to their own rights. To do this, they insist on being classified as human beings and assert their right to education and equal standing. Githa Hariharan imagines that women's liberation will only come about with the awakening of the self, as great philosophers have correctly noted.

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