

Feminist Fervour in Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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ABSTRACT

Literature has always acted as a mirror and a reflection of our society. The condition of women in our society has always been a matter of concern. Gita Hariharan in her *'The Thousand faces of Night,'* sharply carves the predicament of women. Not only does she sketch how the society has coerced women to be puppets in the hands of their male guardians, but also churns out the way elder generation of women has accepted it as their fate and how women themselves have romanticized their fate which they conveniently impose on the Gen Z and Gen X girls who are young and vivacious in their thoughts, words, and deeds. The paper aims to explore the contrast Gita Hariharan has portrayed among three generation of women in her novel.

Keywords- Feminism, Marriage, Self-Respect, Women

The word 'Feminism' originates from the Latin word femina, meaning "women." First coined by Charles Fourier, it is a range of socio-political movements and ideologies that aim to define and establish the political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sense.

Githa Hariharan considered her art of writing a mission and has not handled any trivial theme in her novels for novel's sake. She has documented almost all the sufferings of women and analyzed the real problems of Indian women from different angles. Her works like *'When Dreams Travel'* (1999), *'Gajar Halwa'*(1993), *'I have Become the Tide'*, *'The Thousand Faces of Night'* (1992) and many more stand as evidences to this statement. The winner of the common wealth writers prize, *'The Thousand Faces of Night'* as inscribed in India Today, is a novel "with exceptional fictional skills, the subtle and everyday way in which women are bludgeoned to play male scripted subordinate roles."

Elaine Showalter identifies the progress of women as 'feminine,' 'feminist' and 'female,' corresponding to imitative, protest and self-discovery respectively. Hariharan's major female characters i.e. Sita, Devi and Mayamma draws an exquisite parallel with Showalter's concept.

Marriage, as Simon de Beauvoir puts it "diminishes man, which is often true; but almost it annihilates women." Proving this fact absolutely correct, almost all female characters in the novel are seen to suffer in almost all aspects in their marriage, may it be their self-respect, self-identity, self-interests or simply they have lost their own self under the ink of becoming good wives, daughters-in-law, and mothers.

To Sita "Marriage had meant...would have to learn to eat dry chapatis..." to be a woman "...who did not complain, who knew how to make sacrifices without fanfare..." [TTFON,103]Devi, though a new age girl, returned from America, was fed well by her mother Sita about marriage and the standards to be followed to prove herself a good wife and daughter-in-law. Devi dreamt "of a god-like hero...who guided me gently when he saw my own desperate desire to fly with him." [TTFON,46] But she after all had to marry Mahesh, and as expected she "...spend hours every afternoon, opening dusty rooms and cockroach-ridden cupboard." [TTFON,59] "To cooked all afternoon as if my life depended on it. Chop, boil, stir...I felt my resentment, myaches, and pains...leaving me quit..." [TTFON,72]

Domestic Violence, dominance of husbands or simply the cruelty a patriarchal family display is well portrayed by Hariharan. Mayamma, the caretaker at Devi's in-laws house, "was married when she was twelve." [TTFON,79] Her innocent childhood was nipped in the bud Gauri, who is the caretaker at Devi's mother house, got married to a husband who was nothing less than an animal, and as per the societal name, it was only Gauri's fate, and her responsibility to transform him, and bear with him, as he was her husband After all. Women to fulfill the expectations of the society, lose their self-interest and aspirations or to be true, they are bound to become obedient wives and caring mothers at the cost to their own hearts. Sita loved, playing Veena, and it was her life. But one glooming day, being scolded by her father-in-law, and she being a 'Saintly' wife, she broke the veena and shattered her passion. "After that, it was one straight path to a single goal,

wifehood. The veena was a singularly jealous lover.” [TTFON,103] Even Devi, as she steps into her married life she is treated as a private property by Mahesh. He disapproves her wish to do a job, playing cards and even to learn Sanskrit.

Being childless, for a woman, was nothing less than being equated to “barren Land” that is good for nothing. “Let’s have a baby Mahesh said. There is no reason to wait.” He Says “I want you to have a baby.” [TTFON,74] Devi is obligated by Mahesh to have a child irrespective of her will. And later when she is unable to conceive, she is made to think of herself as powerless and good for nothing. Even Mayamma is childless, she failed to produce a male heir to sustain the patriarchal system and hence is ill-treated.

The status of women is even shown to be deteriorated to mere objects to satisfy the lustful desires of men. Mayamma’s husband sexually abuses her, Umma’s “drunken father-in-law kissed her roughly on the lips,” [TTFON,35] and as Mahesh lived out for most of the times, few days when he and Devi met, it was all about love making consented or otherwise.

Other than these major characters we even see Mrs. Lalita, Annapurna & Tara being the victims of this so-called tolerant society and be puppet in the hands of their patriarchal guardians. We see grandmother, being a women bond by traditions, as she considers even wearing a blouse with saree as a “modern nonsense”.

Sita is a woman with aspirations and self-love initially. She wants her daughter to flourish, sends her to America for study, but again, she is bound by the whites and fancies of this so called ‘Sacrosanct’ society, so much so that her passion of playing veena gets subdued in the hands of her in-laws and educating her daughter Devi, turns, mere getting her qualified to get her married to a good man.

Devi is prepared by her grandmother through her stories, about Swayamvara, being an obedient wife, making sacrifices for family and all it takes to be a good wife and daughter-in-law, leaving her own self in a corner.

But in the end, we see Devi rises as a phoenix, she “left the silk saree behind...She had felt bold and carefree when she left Mahesh’s house...for the first time, no longer on the run.” [TTFON,138]

Though critics have pointed out that Hariharan has used disjointed narrative, has overemphasized on mythology, has shown only the condition of upper- and middle-class women neglecting marginalized women and has even romanticized Patriarchy.

Others like from the Deccan Herald praises her for “remarkable clarity and subtlety with which it articulates a young woman’s search for selfhood...fresh and poetic...entirely free from clinches.”

CONCLUSION

Wrapping the portrayal of women by Hariharan we may conclude that the contrast Hariharan shows among the three generation of woman i.e. Devi, Sita, and grandmother, representing the first, second and third generation respectively, has well depicted the plight of women and their subjugation which is coming over from generations, and has today become a dark truth of our evolving society to say.

Citation

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BIOGRAPHY

I am Shiny George pursuing Masters in English. It gives me immense pleasure to indulge in various literary activities specifically in the domains of oration and writing. Adhering to my passion towards literature and its concerned domains I hold the honor of being the winner of various literary events at state and national level for which I have been recognized by the state government of Punjab, India and been awarded with Roll of Honor. I am one among those who aspire and work to explore the unexplored and critical domains of society through the incredible lense of literature.