

CRISIS OF IDENTITY AND RETHINKING FEMINISM IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S 'THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT'

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Abstract

Githa Hariharan is a post-modernist woman novelist in Indian English literature. Her novel The Thousand Faces of Night is a novel about women's problems in India. She talks about three women each represents one generation. All the three women have problems while living in society. They are the victims of male dominating society. Therefore we have to think over the position of woman in India and try to change the scenario. The paper is an attempt to emphasize to think over the feministic issues. Devi Sita and Mayamma struggle for their existence and identity throughout their life and they are helpless. Their dungeon and engulfed life is presented in this novel. The reader gets an enigmatic experience while reading the novel.

Key Words

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Githa Hariharan's novels grapple with contemporary themes. One of these is the emotional and psychic consequences of the search for self-identity. The theme is revealed by the women characters. She has presented a picture of Indian woman that needs to be changed. Her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a picture of traditional woman. She observes the characters through her feministic view. Hariharan also thinks that till the Indian woman is facing the same problems that were faced by ancient women. The women are till the object of weakness. She is subordinate to men in the family and has to live as per the traditions of the society. Therefore the feminist writers are writing over the existence of woman. The feminist criticism emerged like mushrooms in its parent political movement in last few decades. There has been no predetermined and generally accepted analytical method to apply it. The women workers handled the theme of feminism that they compel us to think over the problems of women. The woman characters reveal the emotional and psychic consequences of the search for self identity. From the ages the role of woman is subordinate to men. These women veer away from their time-worn function of bolstering the male ego by sublimation. They also abandon the facelessness and negation of identity which resulted from the masochistic pride. They are the objects of society. the society has kept them among four walls and that is the reason they suffer from male dominating society. They know the roles of traditional woman. But the modern woman writers have revealed the new role of woman. Githa Hariharan is the post modernist woman novelist and her novel '*The Thousand Faces of Night*' is the author's best first novel. It has won the Commonwealth Writers' prize for the best first novel. The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* reveals the unfathomable experiences of the protagonist. The Indian woman struggles in her affiliation with society and man for the sake of preserving her identity. The novel is the subtle picture of the underworld of the Indian women's lives. The picture is relevant to the women around the world. The dreams of women are thwarted in Indian society as well as elsewhere. The novelist compares the present day women with the women of the epic period of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Pradeep Tripathi explains 'Faces' exemplifies the multiple existence of Indian woman which has potential to suffer and sustain life through her struggle and self realization. Devi strives to preserve life. She is "an uncompromising survival' (TFN p,9) the novel reveals the sensitive portrayal of Indian ethos.

The women are at the centre of the novel. Devi is modern and Mayamma is traditional. Whereas, Sita becomes a widow in her early youth and carries out the responsibility of parents. The novel deals with the issues of marriage in India. The Indians believe in arranged marriages. The marriage is social obligation in India. The Indian couples survive and exist in the framework of marriage in Indian society. They have to perform their duties in serving the

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family members. It is a duty of wife in family to serve her husband and his family. Hariharan shows that the situation is same for young educated woman of today. The novel is linked with the stories of three Indian women, Devi Sita and Mayamma. The stories explore the various hues of darkness engulfing their married lives.

Devi is the protagonist of the novel. She takes her education in America. After, doing her M.A., she returns to India. In America, she meets Dan, a black. They became friends. The bond between them is intimate. It was strong bond and they made promises to each other. The relationship does not finish into marriage as they were from different cultures and the love of mother that prevented Devi, Sita could not allow Devi to marry Dan. Her mother, Sita however, believed in arranged marriages. Devi admits:

“Dan was friend, an experiment for a young woman eager for experience. The possibility of imposing a permanence such as marriage- however flexible in transient America - somehow obscene” (p,6)

Dan promises Devi for marriage. .Devi refuses it because they were from different cultures. Their identity was different. Devi was Indian woman and she could not dare and believed in love marriage. The burden of Indian culture does not allow her to marry Dan. The differences always prevent her from doing so. She confesses:

“Dan was different. His charm lay in the vast distance they, had traveled towards each other, and in Devi’s awareness, that this distance was not, would not be, completely bridged”(p, 5)

Devi’s grandmother has painted a picture of Devi’s marriage that when she will be young, she will be like princess and prince like husband would marry her. Actually it remains a fantasy. She returns to India. Her mother finds a match who is not a prince but a manager in multinational company that made a detergent and toothpaste. The marriage was a mirage. Soon Devi realizes about her ill match. Mahesh’s father keeps Devi’s dreams of marriage alive. Mahesh goes to abroad and Devi turns to Gopal. Gopal was no better than Mahesh. Devi’s Dreams of marriage are shattered and she returns to Madras. She decides to live a life of her own.

Sita, Devi’s mother was also a talented woman. Her talent is neglected. She was very clever in playing Veena. This was the talent which agreed the groom’s family, to accept her. After marriage, she had to sacrifice the talent like Gandhari who blind-folded her forehead for her whole life. After marriage, the talent becomes a crime. Her father-in-law orders her to put away the veena, because it neglects her duty as a wife and a daughter-in-law. Her husband dies early after marriage and the responsibility comes on the shoulders of Sita. Later on Sita carries her household duties and manages to educate Devi. She handles the problems after she is widowed.

The third story of Mayamma is very troublesome. Mayamma is much frustrated in marriage. She is uneducated and does not bear children for several years after marriage. She was tortured by her in-laws. Finally, she breeds a child son but as he grows up he becomes

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wayward and spoilt. Devi thinks over the struggles of these women when she lives with Gopal. She reflects upon their situation:

“she thought of the three of them, Mayamma, Sita and herself. Three of the women who walked a tight-rope and struggled for some balance for some means of survival-they could fashion for themselves” (p135)

These women are representatives of three different generations. ShubhraTripathi describes them:

“All three belong to different generations and different in terms of education and social circumstances, Mayamma could not bear a child for several years. Sita had a girl child and Devi could not bear a one.” (p178)

All the three have serious problems. Mayamma was tortured by her husband and mother-in-law. Sita's life is more painful and Devi suffers due to her husband's indifferent attitude. Sita's case was different. She had married late at the age of twenty. She decided to be a goodwife and daughter-in-law but she too paid the price for womanhood.

The novel presents the frustrated life of these three women. The Indian customs rituals and superstitions are woven into rich literary fabric. Devi and other are exploited by the facet of Indian ethos. The stories narrated in the novel are about mythological women signify the existence of women in ancient times and present situation. The picture is same. Her grandmother's stories were not common stories and the stories explain the significant of Indian women life. Devi tells:

“my grandmother's stories were no ordinary stories She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childhood questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple. They had to be decoded” (p 27)

Since times immemorial the institutions of marriage has been valued and idealized and the secret of happiness is thought in it. It is not seen in Indian life. The woman has no honour without husband. The existence of woman lies in her husband. Devi's grandmother tells Devi

“A woman without husband has no home.” (38)

Sarah Grimke opines that “human rights are not based on sex, colour, capacity or combination. Hariharan has raised her voice against this unchanged condition of women. The author has emphasized over the problem of woman and it should be thought over and the status of women can be improved. She has not her own identity without a man.

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