

Feminism in the Novels of Githa Hariharan

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Abstract

The Research paper entitled “Feminism in the novels of Githa Hariharan” deals with varied Social realities emerging issues of deep significance about women. In the works of Githa Hariharan she raises questions regarding Women’s concern and the enduring patriarchal power structures that bar them from realizing their actual strength. Githa Hariharan is the final female post-colonial writer who has been selected for discussion. Her name can also be placed among the women writers who create the main part of Indian literature dealing with feminist and social issues. In her novels there is a set of circumstances which are both physical and psychological. The mind or the deepest thought of Indian woman in general is influenced by violent powers that control unfairly her acceptance and admittance of defeat resulting in the varieties of reactions that include protest, revenge and violence.¹

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The study shows feminism as a struggle for equality of women, an effort to make women like men. Feminism is seen as the struggle against all forms of patriarchal and sexist aggression, such as oppositional definition presents. Feminism as the necessary resistance to the patriarchal power, logically then it is a theory of imagination.

Feminism is more concerned for woman and wants to establish a new identity for woman to understand the female predicament. Normally, woman's image is observed from two angles, what she is (Biologically) and what she has to be [socially constructed]. A woman cannot escape the fact that she is woman. Society has constructed rigid model role for her and has labeled woman variously. Feminism in the Indian context is a by-product of the Western liberalism in general and feminist thought in particular. The indigenous contributing factors have been the legacy of equality of sexes inherited from the freedom struggle, constitutional rights of women, spread of education and the consequent new awareness among women. In literary terms it precipitates in a search for identity and a quest for the definition of the self. In critical practice, it boils down to scrutinize empathetically the plight of women characters at the receiving end of human interaction.

Feminist English Literature is a spectrum of many colours and shade- soft, prominent, loud and harsh. The voices emanating there, vary from the traditional to the modern. When clearly articulated, well argued and precisely defined feminist sentiments rather than mere faint echoes thereof can be traced even in early works like Jan Austen's 'Pride and Prejudice', one feels unwilling of dubbing feminism as merely a late twentieth century phenomenon.

Githa Hariharan's subjective view as a writer is her notable contribution to the literary world, especially about "women's issues". In a very plain and distinct manner, she puts herself as the one who prefers by what she considers as the feminist choice. Her work also develops because of not only her belief in feminism, but also in other political beliefs. She has a desire of dealing her fiction, non-fiction and, moreover, her life, with consciousness of the past. She has firmly convinced that political attitudes must come across her writings, in order to encounter the challenges of her times. A thing worthy to be noticed about Githa Hariharan is that, she also engages herself in her editing work by the time she writes a novel because she feels it necessary for a writer to send one's own writing out to the readers, to be able to read and reread and even to cut if needed.

In her first published novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the story started with third person narration and the story continues with Devi, the protagonist of the novel narrating the story of her life. The main story of Devi's life is narrated by Devi herself, and a number of other stories are included into this framework. Two characters also narrated stories to Devi. One among them is Devi's grandmother, whose presence is not found in the whole story sequence. She was made alive only in the memories of Devi with the myths and other stories narrated by her. Her myths, fables and fantasies overthrow analytical, rational, and male discourse. If history is taken as male, then myth is female and is occurred earlier than history. Her stories instilled in the mind of Devi the sense of acknowledging her individuality, and of fighting for her right to achieve it. The other character was Devi's father-in-law, who also narrated her stories but unlike her grandmother, his stories were about women who had already reached the goal of womanhood. His stories were challenging touchstone for a woman, a wife.

In the second novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, once again, we find first person narration as the writer's mode of presentation. Here, the protagonist of the novel, Vasu Master, narrated varieties of stories inclusive of animal fable, ghost story, personal autobiographical musings and contemplations and even ayurvedic (medical) lectures to Mani, an abnormal boy. His main motif of these narrations was only a trial to heal Mani.

The individual mode of presentation in Githa Hariharan's third novel, *When Dreams Travel*, is a multi-voiced narration with a clear and vivid mixture of past and present. Its skilful reworking of the historical tradition and also its restricted use of language that awakened the mind, – place the novel under the literary genre of modern myth.

The novelist has the skill of putting together story, poetry and magic as a connected whole into unornate sentences that only make the reading of her books delightful.

We find a third person narration in her fourth novel, *In Times of Siege*. We also come across dialogues delivered by the characters at times.

Githa Hariharan's novels are presented in the following manner:

For her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, attempt has been made by the writer to represent a recently created awareness of woman's identity by changing the appearance of the close connection of mother and daughter. We also find a change of position from those who suffer to those having a distinct authority to act. And again, the novel treats with the subject of discussion of what a woman signifies in our country, India. The novel calls into question the extraordinary and integral pattern of Indian culture inside the range of the system of rules that should be followed by the women community.

Her second novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, is a formal piece of writing on practical wisdom. The novel concentrates on the present day system of education that has an inferior worth which has raised up the limitations of the prescribed texts. In the third novel, *When Dreams Travel*, the novelist emphasizes upon the undesirable old traditions of treating women in harsh manners. Again, stress is also given to the interruption of the long-established custom of oppression, suppression, deprivation of the rights and enslavement of women that existed since a very long time. Unlike her other previous novels, Githa Hariharan made use of history inclusive of politics, in her fourth novel, *In Times of Siege*, the novelist begins the story of the novel with an angry argument from the side of the public, about a history text book and made progress to a historian who thinks carefully about various meaningful explanations of the past. More-over, the book deals with the extremely interesting truths of everyday reality that frighteningly reproduce the realities of India with senselessly cruel events of ruin in the society.

She opines that we should have an opportunity to examine and argue thoroughly on history, with all its hostility and accomplishments. History is an analytical device for recognizing the bygone days. Githa Hariharan's main aim is particularly to give expression of powerfully persuasive truths of authentic happenings of everyday in our society and not to entertain others.

She is also keenly concerned with the link of political control and how they are connected with the conditions of the modern times. For this very novel, she uses simple prose and writes with thorough concern of all the characters. The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night (1992)* examines alternatively in detail the particular conditions of Indian women treated with self-denial in their different appearance – their marginalization and unceasing inferior position. The novel also treats with what it means to be a woman in India. We also find an analysis and explanation of a set of circumstances which are both physical and psychological. The mind or the deepest thought of Indian woman in general is influenced by violent powers that control unfairly her acceptance and admittance of defeat resulting in the varieties of reactions that include protest, revenge and violence. Mythical stories from the Indian epic, *The Mahabharata*, is also referred to, in order to show the condition of the women of the present age.

When Dreams Travel (1999) is the third novel of Githa Hariharan. At the very beginning, the novel is the modern parallel of *The Arabian Nights*. Tyrannical nature of the King that symbolizes the unwanted old tradition oppressing women is the next point. It is then followed by a brief discussion of the literary theory, "Willing Suspension of Disbelief" or "Suspension of Disbelief". Next is the role taken by the

Wazir, the father of Shahrzad. Then attention is being drawn towards the role of Shahrzad in enlightening the Sultan through her stories. After this, Duniyazad who is the sister of Shahrzad, indulges herself in travelling. Lastly, focus is being made on the intervention of an 'aged-long tradition of oppression, suppression, deprivation of the rights and enslavement of women'.

Alike her other two earlier novels, the novelist resumes her concern in legend and myth. The novel attracts attention to *The Arabian Nights* and the novelist chose Shahrzad and Duniyazad, her younger sister as the leading characters of a skilfully constructed novel of pleasing dreams. Duniyazad's power of remembrance filled with stories, happens to be a point of detachment for an innate reinterpretation of the myth of an ideal model.

In *In Times of Siege*(2003). Focus is being made on the trend of thinking of Professor Shiv Murthy and his ideology. Next is about the interpretation of the "Doctrine of Basavanna." As the supporter of the above doctrine, Professor Shiv Murthy, his ward Meena and her friends formed a sector. Stress is then being given to the Hindu Fundamentalists who opposed the aesthetic ideology of Basava. This is followed by the acts of the fundamentalists who hurled a threat even on the life of the professor. Lastly, there is the hidden idea of defeat of the fundamentalists.

In this novel, the novelist very carefully handles with the up-to-date and intense matters of perplexity that the general public have to deal with. One such thing is fundamentalism which is very acute and it is the adherence to strictly orthodox religious or other things. The fundamentalist or the Tundoos' attempted to overpower the expressed opinions of those who have excellent mental abilities and who are competent enough to obtain paltry acclaim. In the novel, Githa Hariharan attempts to give an impression of Shiv, who has a complete power of endurance and makes the readers aware of a particular reasonable judgement.

Professor Shiv Murthy, of an Open University in Delhi was charged by a Hindu Fundamentalist Group called **Itihas Suraksha Manch**, for a lesson of Medieval History he wrote some five years back. The Manch strongly denounced and accused Shiv for misrepresenting history and making the historical figures appear ridiculous. In the novel, we find a mutual action among the active ones and the opposite appearances of endurance from the other side. In spite of the fundamentalists' demand of apology and withdrawal of the lesson from the course, the professor resolved to oppose and he was not ready to accept their unreasonable claim. He selects non-violence in contrast with violent response and his passive opposition takes the appearance of Satyagraha.

The novelist takes up the role of a post-modernistic writer, and writes with a

concealed social purpose whereby, she vigorously describes social and personal unsolved matters. She makes an effort to search the causes for opposition and the basis of its unsettled matter. In the novel, the novelist gives special emphasis to those persons in general, who are not completely westernized but are influenced by the civilized culture to a certain range and are forced to move away from the correct path very easily by the fundamentalists. The principal subject of disagreement in this novel is 'resistance', but she did not open her mouth, except make us think.

Githa Harilarian is also fully conscious of the literary trend of the post-colonial literature. And her works are also affected by the 'otherness' and opposition' that is prevalent in the present society especially in India, and her writings are concerned with local experiences too. She makes the readers think seriously and deeply about the happenings of the present age. Finally, it would be more appropriate to say that our minds i.e. the minds of the readers are thoroughly decolonized by going through her works.

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