

Journey towards Actualization to Realization of “Self” in the Selected Novels of Githa Hariharan: Reconnoitering through myth, reminiscence and resistance

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Introduction:

Gender plays a pivotal role in the historical evolution, as well as in their culture. But, before the culture was framed, in such a way the society laid a set of definition for the appropriate roles, values for men and women. It embodies attitudes and beliefs toward being a man or woman in social life, in the family, at work, in relationships, and in religion. The process of gender identity involves psychological, biological and social values. This topic “Journey towards actualization to realization of self in the select novels of Githa Hariharan: Reconnoitering through myth, reminiscence and resistance” focuses on the strategies which was framed right from the Vedic period till now, and the treatment of women in all the places. Many writers have concentrated on various themes, though they have written on different subjects, have given importance to women, not only the female writers have treated female as their subjects, male writers also have shown their choice on women. But Githa Hariharan is one of the major and influential feminist writers whose works dig deep into the complex multi-avatars that women play within various societal contexts: from family life to professional settings in the work context, religious nuances, and cultural implications. Her works present her women characters elaborately in a vast range of domestic roles-as wife, mother, grandmother, aunt, daughter, and maid. Probably one of the important unifying features among these well-developed characters is their ongoing quest for what they perceive as 'true love' and liberation from the often restrictive and stereotypical expectations imposed upon them by conservative societal norms.

Hariharan's characters always pendulate to ripple between the deep stages of self- realization and the profound insight of their self-identity, reflecting upon the struggle that these women have in their freedom against a society that has thrown into their lives severe and rigid norms and conventions. The unwieldy journey they set out on many times involves extreme mental distress and humiliation at the hands of some looming threat of death itself. Despite all the toiling and pursuit, these women most of the time find their situations hemmed within themselves; the pursuit of real, true selves leaves them dislocated and hopelessly disoriented in a world contrary to their quests.

A host of her voluminous and impressionistic written material reveals effectively the plight of such women she makes them face their reality and reconsider these hard circumstances. Her richly nuanced characterizations and intricate portrayals stir the female readership into profound reflection upon their own life and the empowering possibility of reorganization and transformation of their personal life circumstance. In sum, therefore, Hariharan makes an important contribution with respect to her characters in terms not only of the value of what they say but also as a means to provide a new impetus for a much broader and more meaningful dialogue between theory and practice about the roles and that critical aspect of self-determination of women in the complex landscape of modern societies.

The title "Journey towards Actualization to Realization of Self in the Selected Novels of Githa Hariharan: Reconnoitering through myth, reminiscence and resistance " deals with and discusses the complex, many-layered portrait of woman as she struggles her way through and responds against societal expectations, coupled with cultural constraints, that are depicted in various works of Hariharan. Being one of the major feminist writers, Hariharan has pledged her literary efforts toward pointing out the deep struggles women

face as they find themselves ensnared by the conservative and patriarchal expectations that are so common not only within the four walls of the family but also in the workplace, religious contexts, and greater cultural contexts. Her characters range from wives and mothers to grandmothers and daughters, all in a quest for true love and freedom from societal norms. The two oscillate between self-actualization and self-realization as they stand face to face with emotional suppression, humiliation, and even death associated with the pursuit of personal freedom. Hariharan's characters in the novels such as *The Thousand Faces of Night*, *When Dreams Travel*, *In Times of Siege*, and *Fugitive Histories* depict the way they evolve from passive acceptance to active self-definition. She as an excellent narrator drives characters from myth, histories and contemporary social realities, her narrative skills challenge patriarchal norms and question rigid identities. This kind of transformation exemplifies an unfathomable crusade from self – actualization to realization that is satisfying from one's own potential within the structures to understand and assert one's true identity beyond levied boundaries.

Gender and Society Expectations:

Traditional Indian society has been guided by a belief system and deep-seated attitudes that define what is appropriate for men and women. Predefined roles entrenched into the very fabric of society have defined both sets of cultural values and the prevailing norms within which individuals lead their lives and relationships. Hariharan focuses on closer examination of this complex, multi-dimensional dynamic of interaction between gender and societal expectations within which women have traditionally been ascribed to limiting roles that grossly restrict personal freedom and self-expression.

Her work mirrors the wealth of gender identity through psychological, biological, and social levels of such complexity. When it elaborated on how women negotiate their lives through such complex challenges in practically every possible realm—whether it be within the four walls of the family, in the workplace, in the intimate environment, or religion. Always women in India have to be a passive listener and their duty is to perform the work assigned by their elders. They should not ask any doubt, if they ask, it is a crime. All the novels and short stories of Hariharan have given the exact happening in the south Indian family. Each of her characters has stood as an epitome, has moved from stereotypical portrayal, self-sacrificing women to self-assured women, assertive and ambitious women. They have started, demanding the society for their demands and needs; still, they should need knowledge in knowing the law which supports them. Hariharan's, women question the system designed by their elders. Finally, they have started to create a new world for themselves of female companionship, who is longing for love and care. Sita, the mother of Devi, accepts her daughter's decision to return to her. There is a gradual change in silent revolution, in the attitude of the Indian Women.

Githa Hariharan's Feminist Approach:

The feminist perspective of Hariharan, highlights the confusion in emotions and the mental battles women have to face day in and day out in their lives. Her developed, detailed, and intricate characters well represent the fact that even when women are endowed with all the potential and capability, they are constrained within the rigid boundaries of society for their deliverance from such shackles. Her woman protagonists suffer from vastly high pressure from families and society at large but only to underline their intense longing for personal space and independence underlining independence and self-determination. In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, for example, this struggle can be directly narrated in the lives of both Devi and her mother, Sita. Even though both have much education and great talent, they are not able to free themselves from traditional expectations of their patriarchal environment. More so, Sita's is such a sad and incisively moving story; her personality seems laden with talent for music - she plays the veena with the most excellent skill and devotion, and yet she is struck dumb by the male-dominated environment that holds sway in her home. This silencing represents not only a personal tragedy for the individual concerned but more universally a comment on how possibilities and potentialities are systematically narrowed and destroyed for women.

Self-Actualization and Self-Realization of Hariharan's Characters:

Hariharan's novels often present the arduous road women travel through in their search for two major psychological phenomena: self-actualization and self-realization. Though separate from each other, each also interrelates to the other in many ways. Abraham Maslow's popular theory of self-actualization speaks of the process of realization of growth and fulfilment of the unique potential of a person, whereas self-realization goes far into one's inner self and focuses much more on the process of recognition of one's real nature and essence. On the pages of Hariharan's novels, her female characters implement with vivid colour both of these desires: the active search for personal growth is intertwined here with the beginning of a quest for a far deeper level of self-awareness and understanding. However, they are denied their full potentials because they get enmeshed in cultural, religious, or family obligations that bind them from doing many of life's options.

In the view of W.S. Kotteswari, Hariharan has encompassed the multi-layering of postmodern feminist differences. All the feminist stories are brought out that is focused to multitude of forces and contradictions which are also seen in the novels. When it is compared to other foreign women, Indian women are initiated to move towards "self - identity," "self - perception," "self - expression," "self - determination" and "self-actualization or self- realisation" but they have not gone beyond their tradition and their family bindings. In India, there is contemplation that a woman is not capable of having the western concepts like equality, individual rights, and personal choice challenges. They are also dismantled the Indian family structure, which is based on sharing and accommodation. Hariharan's works are resided with these "differences" of postmodern feminism.

The personal sacrifice in the case of Sita of *The Thousand Faces of Night* is the sacrifice of her musical passion and her personal desires of fulfilments as a wife and mother. Her self-actualization was cut short by society, and self-realization leads her too painfully realize her limitations within the traditional framework. This conflict comes alive with the several women characters Hariharan portrays. Each one of them strives to make her way out of the interplay that persists between her personal desires and the demands instigated by society. The struggle has to be carried out with very personal sacrifices that drain the show of humanity.

The Mythology and Tradition of a Culture:

Hariharan very comfortably uses myth, religion, and historical material to lend great depth and resonance to her stories, finally giving her characters a colourful and intricately laid out cultural background against which to fight out their personal battles and struggles. In fact, more often than not, she clothes the texture of her narrative with traditional tales and potent symbols, hence creating a more rich and far deeper conversation between her characters and their various histories and cultures. And most important in that craft is how such mythic elements are laced within modern reality, so that there ensues an underlining and highlighting of an ongoing, often complex tension, both between the forces of modernity and age-old traditions as they most germinal relate to situations and roles assigned to women in society.

This does underline a deep tension caught well by the protagonist in Hariharan's *when dreams travel*. She is a bold storyteller, surviving by narrating stories for one thousand and one nights, but she is still entrapped within the male-dominated world. The inner journey from self- actualization to realization reflects the broader themes of female suppression and search for identity within oppressive structures.

Many imaginary characters found in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is Kritiya, the imaginary character created by Baba, which Devi has read of her own from the books of Baba, usually in India a woman has to be treated properly; this has already followed in the age of kali. Each age has its Kritiya. Kritiya – ferocious woman has destroyed and haunted the house with her anger and spits fire where women are not treated well. Here Kritiya is compared with Kali the blood thirst goddess who has the world ablaze. Still women have been treated with silent terrific tortures inside the four walls. Sometimes these women hide and sacrifice everything for their cultural values. It is pointed out that if a woman brings the tortures to the light, they have said as a sin of womanhood. Is it so? If she has taken everything as penance then she will be considered even herself as a woman in the society. She has to be like "Ahilya" a stone, a curse given by her husband. If not, they are saying as a curse to the world and saying it as because of "Kaliyuga." This has not happened only in this age alone but also in all the ages it

happens, but our ancestors have pointed out only the stories of Gandhari, Sita, Ganga, Kannaki etc. Before, Devi has imitated and tried to be like that of these women, but as time passed, she could not tolerate the silent tortures given by her husband, and the society so she has left the house without any intimation, and where she goes with Gopal, she is not happy, again she comes back to her mother.

Interaction of Gender with Society and Identity:

Novels by Hariharan eloquently enunciate the multifaceted struggle and complexity that Indian women encounter, who may neither buy into nor feel equal to Western women in terms of notions of equality and choice without endangering or exposing the very fiber of the traditional family unit. All her characters come alive as the words resonate deeply, capturing that inner struggle between longing for self-expression and societal dictates holding fast the one that would be considered greater-good family unity and tradition above individualistic autonomy and freedom. The intense tension brought out by the narration of such women's characters as Jameela and Mangala in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is that, to get recognition and respect within the confines of their respective communities, they have to undergo a very arduous task. This task is observed or juggled around by everyone else, despite the incessant effort put in by them in claiming their worth and receiving due recognition. As a feminist writer, Hariharan has shaped her writing through which she is all set to cause a silent revolution or change in the attitude of modern Indian women. Since she has written in English, her involvement in different groups, her conscious attempt to question the gender bias prove that she is a woman of substance and is a socially committed writer and a true citizen with awareness of her rights.

Conclusion:

The novels of Githa Hariharan essentially epitomize the tortuous trajectory of women in their multidimensional pursuit of self-actualization and self-realization from a society that puts various brakes on their freedom and self-expression. She etches the furrows of profound inner turmoil which seriously dares women to seek some sort of autonomy and personal fulfilment in life, both hands full. But such women are always tied and shackled by the dominating burden of societal expectations accompanying their gender and cultural identities, complicating their struggle for liberation and self-discovery. Indeed, her characters embody the complex and largely confusing waltz toward self-discovery, which always finds a partner in duty to society. In fact, it awakens fears over some of the universal themes deeply embedded in the core of identity, freedom, and a lifelong pursuit of meaning in life. To that end, Hariharan is eminently successful in capturing such multi-dimensional struggles with much depth and nuance; through effective presentation, she brings out her specific contribution to feminist literature, while at the same time emphasizing individual narratives against their cultural background.

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