WOMEN AT CROSS ROADS IN GITHA HARIHARAN’S NOVEL

THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT

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The present paper endeavors to depict the strive and struggle of three women Devi, Mayamma and Sita. They belong to three different generations who are striving for their survival, freedom and self respect. The Thousand Faces of Night depicts the reality for a considerable section of womanhood. The protagonists of this novel are trapped in whirlpool of alienation and isolation. Apparently this novel analyses the fractured marriage bond and deals with the turmoil and turbulence in the minds of the characters because of the transformation of social cultural terms. All the characters of this novel are in crunch of patriarchy. The novel revolves around women’s dilemma in contemporary India. Githa Harisharan portrays the position of women in the tradition and culture of male dominated society. She explores the awakening of woman consciousness which compels her to struggle for self actualization.

Githa Harisharan is an epoch making post colonial novelist of India who won the common wealth writers prize for her prestigious novel The Thousand Faces of Night in 1992. She tries to depict the struggle of Indian women who is trying to break the chains of heart aching traditions in order to preserve her own identity. Emancipatory transformation of women can be totally reflected from her novels. Her novels portray social upheavals and cultural turmoil. She has revolted against the patriarchal domination. In multicultural society, she has projected the social reality.

Githa Harisharan was born in Coimbatore and grew up in Bombay and Manila. She has obtained B.A. in Communication from Mumbai University, M.A. from Fairfield University U.S.A. Her works is an anthology of novels, short stories, essays, newspapers, articles, and columns. She presently works as Freelance editor. Githa Harisharan won common wealth writers award for her influential and debut novel The Thousand Faces of Night in 1992 which made him famous in the realms of literature. She published a story collection The Art of Dying in 1993, The Ghosts of Vasu Master in 1994, When Dreams Travel in 1990, In Times of Siege in 2003 and Fugitive Histories in 2009. Githa Harisharan’s fertile experiences comprises her depiction of Indian society and social institution. Her novels reflect the social and cultural dynamics of life.
Githa Hariharan’s first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* reveals the picture of central south Indian Brahmin family. Devi, the central character returns back to India after completing her post graduation from America. She feels totally soothing and delighted in her native place. At the very outset it was too abstrusive for her to make adjustments in new environment. This transformation of environment left her in conundrum. The new Image of women she dreamt in America was washed away by the flooded waters of India.

Dr Padmini and S.K Sudha have rightly observed that:

“In *Thousand Faces of Night* Githa Hariharan sensitively portrays the condition of Indian women caught between tradition and modernity. She diligently captures their split consciousness as a result of which we find through a set of representative characters, both their submissiveness and their struggle for individuality.”(Padmini and S.126)

Devi’s only intention of return was to support and love her widowed mother. She was having close cordial relations with her mother. Sita leads Devi to the altar of marriage. She truly believes in her wit. Devi like a mature good girl made herself ready for marriage. Devi’s education and broad mindedness challenge ample of blind beliefs, but she detaches her dreams to fulfill her mother’s dreams for the sake of family honor. She was married to Mahesh but her husband showed disinterest towards her. Mahesh takes married life for granted. Devi is suffocated in new atmosphere. She is unhappy and caught in pangs of isolation.

Devi says, “This then is, marriage, the end of ends; two or three brief encounters a month when bodies slutter together in lazy inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting all over again for life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood (*The Thousand Faces of Night* P 54)”.

Devi finds a good friend in Mayyamma, the housemaid, who suffers exploitation in patriarchal society. Devi paid heed to the life experiences of Mayyamma with heart and soul in order to construct her life beautifully than Mayyamma who was enduring excruciating pain. She believes that women must not live with unpleasant past experiences, but to battle with callous attitude of male dominated society

It has been pointed out by a critic that “we find the women depicted in the novel, struggle for their survival and to endure the trials of their womanhood. The means chosen by the women might be different but they all are means of survival they could fashion for themselves.”(Nawale 203)

*The Thousands of Night* is novel of three major characters – Sita, Devi and Mayyamma who walked on tight rope and struggled for some balance for some means of survival they could
fashion for themselves. They depict three different generations and more than thousand faces of women in India who still have no better existence than night.

Mayamma is a typical Indian female character who curses his own destiny but never goes for objections. She endures the ordeals of exploitation in patriarchal society. Sita, Devi’s mother, a middle aged woman portrays the life between two extreme generations of Mayamma and Devi. At the end of the day she feels suppressed and alienated. Devi is the central protagonist of the novel but she too fails and got caught in whirlpool of alienation and isolation. She feels that she has a transitory existence. Devi finally returns back to her mother as, she rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet with Sita to offer her love. “To stay and fight, to make sense of it all; she would have to start from the very beginning”(The Thousand Faces of Night P 139)

As Victor Hugo Says, ‘Our life dreams the Utopia. Our death achieves the ideal.’

The Thousand Faces of Night is a Novel example of women’s sufferings in the patriarchal cultural matrix of of Indian traditional society. Githa hariharan sensibly represents the condition of women who caught between tradition and modernity. Thus the novel portrays the struggle of Indian women in relation to society and man for the sake of preserving her own identity.

Works Cited:


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