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Mythological Study in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Abstract:

India is the most beautiful country of the world for its unique cultures and traditions. It is famous for its historical heritage. In India woman is identified as an ideal mother, daughter and daughter-in-law. While she is known as the symbol of creativity, she has to fight for equal rights with man and for literacy, which can provide her economic liberty. Indian women novelists, who are well educated and intellectual, have pointed their observation of life and imparted a psychological depth to their writings. So these writers have produced a new canvas for the younger generation of Indian women novelists. These women writers have proposed an insider's view of female psyche, inner aspiration and their peculiar responses to men and things.

In the novel 'The Thousand Faces of Night' the female characters of Githa Hariharan's novel reflect the experiences of hardships through her character or protagonist Devi and her mother Sita and grandmother Mayamma. But happiness is never decided by her fighting for liberty but by mutual understanding.

Keywords: Exploitation, Consciousness, Orthodox, Myths, Symbolism.

Generally Indian Female Writers present the pathetic conditions of woman and obstacles that create problems in their way of success. A great American women novelist Toni Morrison views:

Only women can present the real and natural story of women. Only woman can fight for the sake of women. She may be practically true but her statement cannot be overlooked because it has been observed that women writers are more authentic and vocal in rising the conditions of women in male dominated society. (Dwivedi 10)

Today writers focus on the literacy of women which provide them self-confidence and economic independence. But intelligence or literacy never decides the happiness in life but their mindset. Githa Hariharan describes this concept of happiness through her female characters in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her women characters are in search of meaning and values in their life. Hariharan uses the myths in her novels from traditional tales, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. In an interview with Susheila Nasta, Githa Hariharan tells:

Well, the entire book is the Devi myth, the Devi figure, a goddess and

you have all these various aspects, which fit in perfectly with that I was writing to do, and all the names I've used are in fact names of Devi. So you have Devi Sita, Lakshmi and the sort of face of the goddess, but also you have Kali, you also have Durga, and also you have all these different aspects of the goddess, and of course Devi has Thousand names, so I thought names, so I thought *The Thousand Faces of Night* would be perfect, because you also have the suggestion of masks, and the various masks that you are allowed to wear, that you could wear and that you have access to by day. (Dwivedi 189)

Githa Hariharan's female characters are neglected and not getting a proper place either in family, society, and home or in the heart of their husbands. They represent the modern women who are conscious of themselves and their position. The vision of a changing and challenging attitude towards reality, the passage of time is a new faith that reproduces through the women of her novels. In the age of globalization women are suffering more in a country like India as the process of victimization of women still continues in the traditional society. Her major influence lies in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* published in 1992. Every work of fiction by Githa Hariharan truly manifests the seeds of feminism, deeply rooted in her philosophical base. A cross cultural section of Indian society is showed in her novels of women. She is the voice of women and that she has portrayed their picture through her writing.

In her novel *Thousand Faces of Night* Githa Hariharan explores Indian mythology and presents it from the women's points of view. The artist's clarification of the traditional accounts promotes the image of women and attempts to inspire their position in the society. The myths and legends of India are reinterpreted with a young woman's search for self and her community. They make an attempt to explore the worldwide themes like freedom, independence, soul seeking, acknowledging and desire of the women. The endurance power of women in different generations and various social classes exist through the women character of Githa Hariharan. The theme of the novel proves that survival is the highest model in the struggle-ridden life of women and every woman has to learn for herself. Charumathi Ramaswamy writes in an article about mythological allusions in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*:

The *Thousand Faces of Night* is the portrayal of different facets of women suffering different kinds of suffering and depicts the status of women in Indian society. It articulates the problems of women with the help of Indian Mythology. It yokes together the various vicissitudes faced by women of the Puranas. Hariharan's novel is a dexterous conglomeration of numerous stories besides the story of the protagonist Devi. And the technique is —Passing-onl narration from one character to the other. The narration passes from Grandmother's stories, the Baba's stories and to Mayamma. (Ramaswamy, <http://literati-charumathi.blogspot.in/2012/05/mythological-allusions-in.html>, accessed on 18th Dec. 2013)

The Thousand Faces of Night is a story of an Indian woman whose marriage does not provide any bliss and identity. Myths are utilized as a backbone in dramatizing the suffering and misfortunes in the lives of the three women, who struggles for self-assertion. All the stories that Devi, the protagonist of the novel is fed by her mentors who helped her in emotional and intellectual development. Githa Hariharan has drawn the Indian mythological stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to view them from the female point of view. These myths are recreated, and retold by her from a woman's point of view. This mythical performance makes the novel a definite feminist writing in which the focus is on the inner life of woman and the bright echoes of their internal spaces. Githa Hariharan's narrative ambitions basic structure from the on-going competition of Devi. The novel shows, how women are imposed to enact subordinate roles through the lives of Devi, Sita, and Mayamma, who present a picture of the multifarious Indian women. Hariharan's story is a metaphor of complex myths that open the life of passive women. It depicts the predicament of women who have a thousand faces as an everlasting imprisoned in a closed frame of mythology scripted by the society. Divyarajan Bahuguna rightly says:

While this novel successfully represents traditional Indian values and integrates it with modern thinking, it is basically a feminist writing in which myths are reviewed and retold from a women's point of view. (Bahuguna 77-78)

The ancient mythical figures expound the novels of Githa Hariharan in general. The imprisonment of women in different generations and social classes are the significant themes of her novels. The story rounds around these three main characters Devi, Sita, and Mayamma. Devi, the protagonist and an American returned modern girl comes to India with an American degree to face a challenging life. The second generation is the mother of Devi Sita, an ideal woman, daughter-in-law, wife, and mother who play the role of a bridge between convention and innovation. The third is Mayamma, representator of old generation and the family maid servant who learnt the art of survival. Devi is not convinced by Mayamma's adjuring, that a marriage can be succeeded only if the woman agrees to tolerate boundlessly without a objection. But Devi is ghostly through myth and recollection of the women of the ancient times showing her the way either to stay or suffer or to break free and transfer on. Sita organizes marriage for her daughter Devi. Her duty makes her daughter to marry a practical minded sales manager, Mahesh. Devi's husband is not able to match her demonstrative requirements. Subsequently the emotional emptiness of her childless married life is provisionally relieved by the sympathy her father-in-law, Baba. Baba's wife, Parvati left him to follow a peaceful life. He tries his best to guide Devi in the role of an ideal wife by confirming the ethnic resolutions rooted in his stories taken from Hindu scriptures.

Devi tries to break her connectivity with the society and never wants to please to the outlooks of the world because of her marital frustration which was imposed on her on the names of norms and principals of society. She wants to be independent and takes the examples from the

protesters of the mythology to launch her individuality. She chooses some models of women from mythology who revolted and rebelled against the social pattern of the prejudiced society. Hariharan displays in her novel the history of injustice in the community with process of networking among women of different ages and generations and castes in the novel and is framed by numerous myths and real life historical stories. So the three female characters, Devi, Sita, and Mayamma each of them find a medium to come to terms with life. Githa Hariharan explores the Indian mythology as a relieve for these queries of women. The myths and legends of India are skillfully inter-woven with woman's search for self, independence, self-identity and representation. The novels of Githa Hariharan attempt to answer that Indian culture can indicate the rightful direction to the woman which is loaded with so many social issues. Devi's imaginative vision is uncurbed by the guidance of her grandmother who narrates to her tales of mythical women connecting them with the sorrowful stories of real women around them. The mythological stories which she receives from her grandmother as a kind of groundwork to her future life. These mythological stories are references to gods, goddesses, superhuman, warriors, brave leaders, and honourable princesses and men and women intended to lead heroic lives. For each problem, the grandmother indirectly tells a mythological story.

These stories give solutions to the problems but these are not simple or ordinary bedtime stories. Intentionally, Githa Hariharan highlights the stories of the forgotten and invisible women of the past from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata like Amba, Ambalika, Devi, Gandhari, Ganga, and Damayanthi. The qualities of great rage are hidden in all these women. Amba transformed her misfortune into an act of triumph by retaliating the offender Bhishma, who changed life. Ganga married king Santhanu after laying conditions and walked out of the marriage when terms of the marriage were not in her favour. Hariharan juxtaposes Devi's memories of the stories with recollections of family histories to exemplify Pati's reference to myth and legend to explain. Ramayana and the Mahabharata in which princesses grew up secure in the knowledge of what awaited them: love, a prince who is never short of noble, and a happy ending. The stories are told for particular occasion to a particular character as Gauri's domestic problems are connected with a story of the beautiful girl who married a snake. Devi learns of Gandhari's story, is obvious through her grandmother's words:

I listened to my grandmother's interpretation of Gandhari's choice, but the lessons I learnt was different. The lesson brought me five steps closer to adulthood. I saw, for the first time, that my parents too were afflicted by a kind of blindness. In their blindered world they would always be one, one leading other, one hand always in the grasp of another. (Hariharan 29)

Amba has transformed her life, hatred of Bheeshma, who is wronged and denied her feminine fulfilment and glorious triumph and Gandhari is married to a blind king expressed her protest by taking an oath not to see the world thereafter, by binding her eyes with a band. Devi's

grandmother narrates the story said that she embraced her destiny that is a blind husband with self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood. Devi has learnt the lesson of life through her grandmother's story of Gandhari and acclaimed that the lesson brought her five steps close to adulthood. She sees that her parents too were afflicted by a kind of blindness in their fixed world but they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of other. This story of Gandhari, who sacrifices her sight to express her protest against her marriage with a blind man, connects to Sita, Devi's mother, who had put aside Veena to perform traditional duties of a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She broke Veena to idealize her role in a traditional Hindu home and her breaking of the Veena can be taken as a revolt and a protest against male dominance. But later she is able to left free from the past and takes control of her life. Then she not only resumes her love for Veena but also shown courage and individuality. These stories make Devi feels that she ought to do something as a mark of protest worthy of the heroines she grew up with. Devi rejoices in imagining as Durga or Kali are ready to avenge the assault in her inner core. Sita, Devi's mother, the second generation woman, is a self-confident middle-aged woman who is modern and liberal. After marriage Sita's single goal of life is wifedom, due to that she has to sacrifice her love for Veena. She has arranged her daughter's marriage with a practical minded sales manager, Mahesh. It is very shocking to her when she comes to know that her daughter has eloped with Gopal. Sita is very practical and modern woman and knows very well one day her daughter Devi will turn to her. Mayamma, the old caretaker at Mahesh's house, is another victim of male dominated society, who lived all her life to satisfy others. Married at the immature age provides her no happiness in marriage. When two years of marriage has brought forth no child she has to face the wrath of her mother-in-law and husband. She faces number of tortures till she finally gave birth to a male child. Mayamma's son a wastrel from birth being a replica of his father and never hesitates to beat his mother. Mayamma loses his son as he has caught fever and died. Having lost everything Mayamma leaves home for good and comes to Mahesh's house to attend the family needs. Through the life of Mayamma, Githa Hariharan presents the inner strength of women who are able to bounce back to normalcy despite of great ordeals in life. In spite of her difficult and painful life Mayamma is able to be a bed-rock to Mahesh's family and always gives immense strength and support to the family. The patriarchal social system has laid down the ways of expressing womanhood. According to them woman only idealized when she acts like a good daughter, wife and mother. If she tries to find her individual identity she is claimed as an illegal or misguided. Whereas grandmother's stories are a preliminary to her womanhood and an innovation into its hidden possibilities for a woman, a wife is pictured in her novel.

Githa Hariharan's woman is trapped between tradition and modernity and has become the victims of unsophisticated gender favoritism of the society. Githa Hariharan's Devi, in spite of the continuous narration of the mythical stories told by her grandmother from childhood inspire her in same way as the stories of her father-in-law. She has viewed myth-dictated society with hostility and rebelliousness of a woman warrior. As her own mother-in-law has revolted by

leaving the family in search of God, Devi's elopement with Gopal is also a revolt against her husband Mahesh who just wants her to keep waiting, as a submissive wife for his arrival. She hopes to finish his monotonous life in the company of Gopal. And she is very sure that her mother can understand her transformation and her desire to re-start her life from the very beginning. Hariharan tries to show that women are no more entities of someone else, but they have their own mission of seeking their salvation. Devi's ultimate sanction of her autonomy is celebration of the entire community of women. Corruption and parody have been used in feminist re-writing of the old texts. But in Githa Hariharan's novel, the old stories undergo refined and gradual transformation through narration as they pass generation to generation. This novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, survival is shown as pre-condition to any futuristic struggle. Devi, the protagonist of the novel resists the hegemony of the patriarchal, but never imperils her survival by adopting feminist position in finding a path to success. Devi searches herself by discovering freedom, independence and desire. For an Indian woman, her role is confined within the emotive devotion of herself, which results in the negation of self and often leads to exploitation and conflict. She is always exploited in society. And in this paper we evaluate the same condition of women characters portrayed in the novels *The Thousand Faces of Night*. And in this novel all the female characters are exploited in one way or other. To keep a woman inveterate and oppressed, old conservative values and ideas are supported and is forced to face every challenge to keep these ideologies. Thus this research study explores solutions to the questions how second sex can find her innovative footprint within culture.

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