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Different Perspectives of Mother-in-Law and Daughter-in-Law Relationship in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Abstract:

The present research paper explores the interpersonal relationships and various dimensions of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship in Githa Hariharan's very first penned novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. She has presented a huge variety of this relationship, loving and cruel both examples of this relationship. When woman tortures to a woman in any form and sense then it doubles the sufferings of women. This study explores through this fictional mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship the main reasons, loose points and generation gaps of break-up, and destruction of this harmonious relationship. The sole aim of this study is to provide learning from the mistakes of the fictional characters so that we cannot repeat the same mistakes in our actual life because life is not so long that we learn by doing own mistakes so we must need to learn from these fictional characters and live with harmonious relationships.

Keywords: dimensions, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law, relationship, loving, cruel, torture, suffering, loose points, generation gap, destruction, mistake.

Relationship is defined as a state of connectedness between people. Although today the society is going with its crazy rhythm of everyday life, people tend to live in densely populated world, spending most of their time in the office and hardly knowing their neighbor's name, we still find ourselves in some kind of a relationship with friends, family, or colleagues.

The personal or interpersonal relationships are the core of human life and the foundation of human life. Without these relations we cannot imagine the human life. In our life we connect to each other in the form of relationships. Family relations such as husband-wife, mother-son, father-daughter, brother-sister, mother-daughter, sister-sister and many other relations and friendship come under personal relationships. The list of relationships that come under the category of personal or interpersonal relationships, their values and importance is a very vast subject of study. Personal relationships further divided in man-woman relationships, man-man relationships, and woman-woman relationships for sound understanding of personal relationships. The prime purpose of this part is to gain sound knowledge of personal relationships.

In interpersonal relationships, family relations are the first peoples' relationships to enter into the field of relationships. Parents and relatives influence our emotional development by

creating a model that we are sometimes bound to follow all our life, often subconsciously. People who have grown up in large happy families usually feel more emotionally secure than those, whose parents had gone through the divorce. Few women who are attractive and successful remain single for some mysterious reasons. They often turn out to be victims of their past. Deep inside they cannot overcome the fear of being abandoned, that comes from their childhood, when one or both of their parents left them or just did not pay enough attention. A well-established young man can be scared of a commitment in the relationship as his parents' family model failed to convince him that getting married makes one happy. There are some types in personal or interpersonal relationships as follows:

Nuclear Family Relationships: The relationship of Husband-wife, mother-son, mother-daughter, father-son, father-daughter, and brother-sister etc. come under this category.

Extended Family Relationships: This family is also well-known by the name of joint family in India. The relationship grandfather-granddaughter, grandfather-grandson, grandmother-grandson, grandmother-granddaughter, uncle-nephew, uncle-niece, aunt-nephew, aunt-niece, and cousin-brother and cousin-sister relationships cover under this category.

Law Family Relationships: Relationships such as father-in-law and son-in-law, mother-in-law and son-in-law, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, sister-in-law to brother-in-law, and sister-in-law to sister-in-law etc. come under this category.

Complex Family Relationships: This is a very big family. The relationships in joint family that is a generic term for any family structure involving more than two adults. The term can refer to any extended family or to polygamy of any type. It is often used to refer to the group marriage form of polygamy. The term extended or joint family defines a family that extends beyond the nuclear family, consisting of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins all living nearby or in the same household. An example is a married couple that lives with either the husband or the wife's parents. The family changes from nuclear household to extended household. Great-grandfather-great grandson, great-grandfather-great-granddaughter, great-grandmother-great grandson, great grandmother-great granddaughter, great granduncle great-grandnephew, great granduncle-great grandniece, great grandaunt-great grandnephew, great grandaunt-great-grandniece, great grand brother-great grand brother, great grand sister-great grand sister, great grand cousin brother-great grand cousin brother, grand brother-grand brother, and grand cousin brother-great cousin brother relationships etc. comes under this extended/complex or joint family.

Step Family Relationships: A step family or blended family is a family where one parent has children that are not related to the other parent. Either one or both parents may have children from a previous relationship. Children from a stepfamily may live with one biological parent and visit their other biological parent, or they may live with each biological parent for a period of time. A stepfather is the husband of one's mother and not one's natural father. A stepmother is one's father's wife and not one's natural mother. The relationships such as Step father-step-son, step-father-step daughter, step mother-step son, and step mother-stepdaughter etc. come under this section of step-family relationships etc.

Understanding and Importance of Relationships:

What is a true relationship? How does it start? Are we destined to become relative with certain people or can we actually plan whom to be relatives with? Everybody's relative is

nobody's. Unlike a companionship based on belonging to the same team or group, interpersonal relationship is a very close and selective type of people's relationships. It calls for trust, sincerity, and emotional bonds.

Sociologists believe that most of the people are looking for similarity of views, social status, and interests when choosing relations. No wonder that our relatives are often people of the same age, sex, and education. Another important factor is joint activity and solidarity. This is the reason why many of us befriend their colleagues and people who work in the same field.

Another underestimated common prerequisite for relationship is geographical proximity. If our relatives move out of town or overseas, it is a very common reason why relationship falls apart. Maintaining a long distance relationship is a challenge, and not many of us pass this test.

Most people would agree that a good relation is of someone who would always listen and understand. Understanding in this context implies a lot of meanings – compassion, sympathy, and emotional closeness. It's a process when someone deciphers your emotional state, shares your feelings, identifies himself/herself with you.

A relationship is like money, easier made than kept. To maintain relationship we have to make an effort. Relationship can be time consuming and might require some sacrifice from our part – staying up all night comforting someone after a hard breakup, canceling your hairdresser's appointment to babysit your friends' kids, or taking care of someone's pets. But relationship rewards us with a warm feeling of being there for someone, being important, being part of someone's life.

In the Indian Writing in English Githa Hariharan is one of the well known Contemporary writers in India and abroad. She has penned five novels, short-stories collections and she has also contributed a number of research articles in national and international scholarly research journals and magazines. In her literary works she has presented myriad dimensions of personal relationships through rich and complex characters with full compassion, especially, her novels are full of man-woman, man-man and woman-woman relationships. Hariharan has presented these relationships with full of care and sincerity. She has shown how man-made geographical, social, linguistic and cultural barriers come between harmonious relationships. Thus, her novels are complex web of personal relationships. Hariharan has depicted in her novels various ups and downs in man-woman relationships, prominently husband-wife relationship. Githa Hariharan in her very first prize winning novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* has presented personal relationships with special attention. In personal relationships, it is man-woman relation which drew her attention most. Hariharan considered man-woman relation as the pivot for the existence of humanity. Githa Hariharan in her novels presented personal relationships with a number of angles.

Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship is one of the chief relationships in woman-woman relationship in the sphere of personal or inter personal relationships.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Sita and her mother-in-law's relation is an example of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Sita's mother-in-law, while master in story telling but as a mother in law she is a timid woman. Sita is a maestro of Veena. But her father-in-law stops her for playing Veena in the presence of her mother-in-law but her mother-in-law not has a single word in her mouth to say something to her husband. Her mother-in-law's silence before her husband kills the talent of Sita of playing Veena. She is a passive lady only active in storytelling. Her mother-in-law never says good and bad to Sita. There is no quarrel between them both busy in their duties. So Sita and her mother-in-law relation present a picture of harmonious relationship between a timid mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law.

Devi and her mother-in-law relation in which, Parvatiamma remains unseen, is a fine example of harmonious relation of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship though her mother-in-law a coward, timid and submissive in actual life but in the last she chooses her own way and leaves her husband's house in the search of gods. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments about this relationship:

Parvatiamma is Devi's 'guardian angel' her mother unseen. Devi duplicates the pattern when she leaves Mahesh and the security which marriage signified in pursuit of a story of (her) own. (161-162)

In the last, Devi follows the way of her mother-in-law when her cup of sufferings fulls and finally she leaves her in-laws' home. So this relationships Devi and her unseen mother-in-law presents a fine example of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law.

Mayamma and her mother-in-law relation add a new dimension in mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Mayamma's mother-in-law is a very cruel and greedy lady. She is a monstrous woman and very cruel towards Mayamma in the house. Mayamma is married when she was only twelve years old. Before the marriage her mother-in-law examines her closely.

Mayamma's mother-in-law examined her closely before the match was made. She has taken the girl aside and cross questioned her about the jewelry. Were they hers or her sister's? She trigged at Mayamma's long, thick plait to make sure that it was all real. Unable to check Mayamma's insides herself, she has contented herself with the astrologer's promise that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons. (*The Thousand Faces of Night*, 80)

Mayamma's mother-in-law shows her real face of a cruel woman when there is no child from Mayamma after two years of her married life. The second year passes of Mayamma's marriage but there is no sign of child. Then her mother-in-law says in this situation:

Mayamma's mother in law watched her slim waist intently for the first year. The second year she broke into complaint. What kind of girl is this, she said, she eats as

much as anybody else, but is barren. Her horoscope is a lie; she will have to do penance to change its course. (80)

Mayamma suffers a lot in the hands of her mother-in-law. Now after the cruel instructions of her mother-in-law her daily routine changes. Suffering becomes the fellow friend of Mayamma now:

Mayamma welcomed per penance like an old friend. What else would keep the roving eye still? Her husband wake her up every night, his large, hairy things rough and heavy on her, pushing, pushing. (80)

Mayamma`s mother-in-law prepares her daily routine chart, according to this chart routine chart:

She woke up at four in the morning and walked along the blue-tipped shadows of the pond. She prayed, made vows, and dipped herself again and again in the pure coldness. She starved everyday; she gave up salt and tamarind. She tied little wicker baskets with crimson strips of cloth on the tree dedicated to Jaganmata. She meditated for hours before pan of clear water, representative of the golden complexioned Shasthi, giver of children. She feed the snakes her rice and curds she bathed the all conquering lingam with sandalwood, milk and her tears of ardour. To appease the evil conjunction of the planets, she offered *Tulsi* leaves at the family shrine, chanting mantras without stopping for a breath. She invoked every day the goddess` thousand names; five hundred times she prostrated herself at the feet of the every fertile mother. Every six months she renewed her vows, every six months she invited six Brahmins to a feast, and sent then away with the richest gifts she could lay her hand on. (80-81)

This is the penance for ten years, Mayamma exercises on the cruel commands of her mother-in-law who is a superstitious Brahmin woman. Mayamma is in her own words tells the story of cruelty of her monstrous mother-in-law.

I waited ten years for a son. Years come and went, so did astrologers. I was destined to have a son, they said. To be takes care of in my old age. I scared destiny away with my over eager pleas, my weekly facts my silent and humble apology to an impatient mother-in-law. She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman? (192)

Mayamma`s mother in law`s behavior towards her turns into rigid and rough every day. The degree of her abuses and tortures increases day by day. One day Mayamma hangs her new sari to dry. In the early morning the red and gold rays of the sun drew into its soft told and dazzled the muddy courtyard. Then her mother-in-law calls her in harsh voice:

Maya, called the voice of my mistress. What are you doing? Where is the rice told you to cook early today? And the spices? I ran into the smoky kitchen and gave her the bowl of the spices I`ll cook the rice in a minute, Amma, I said meekly. You have been admiring your fine new sari, have you continued the mocking voice. What has your beauty done for you, you barren witch? (113)

The mother-in-law does not stop of insulting her but further Mayamma says:

She pulled up my sari, as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly-ground spices into my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped tighter as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails. (113)

Mayamma's mother-in-law is so cruel and inhuman that she tortures Mayamma at the peak level and all this just of the child. "The next time it was my breast cut the right are open, here, take this blade. Take the silver spoon with the blood from your breast and bathe the lingam." (113)

This mother in law stops her to eat and directs her only to cure her barrenness. The tormenting mother in law says that as much as such starving may be her bareness come to an end.

No, no Maya's no rice for you today. It's Friday, no rice today, no vegetable tomorrow, no tamarind the day after. Stop thinking of food, daughter in law, think of your womb. Think of your empty rotting womb and pray. (114)

Mayamma suffers a lot in the hands of her mother-in-law. From the first day in the law's home she becomes a servant of the family. The first morning in her husband's house she describes in these words:

I took into my hands the iron skillet and blow the fire into the stove even before my mother in law woke up. I cooked for so many hungry mouths. Twenty, thirty? The house was full of brothers, nephews and nieces. I drew water from the well. I scooped handful of fresh, wet cow dung and patted the nauseous mess into identical round cakes, with the best of the dung I swept the floors clear. See; see the fine grains of filth line in my fingernails. (116)

It's a morning routine of Mayamma from the first day in this house. And in the night she says:

I sat my mother in law's feet every night massaging her fleshy ankles. Close to midnight, she would wake up and say, you can go upstairs now, Maya. You are young; you will want to go to him. (116)

Mayamma's sufferings become doubles in the hands of her husband. He is also a lustful person who has no soft corner for her. Mayamma also depicts his cruelty of night in these words.

He snorted like an angry bull. He pushed my sari aside ever before my head touched the pillow. I was a silly little girl, his grunting frightened me. If I turned away to sleep, he held my hair lightly with one hand and hit me with the other. (118)

Mayamma depicts her tragic married life as a daughter-in-law in a very suffering way. Mayamma tells that whenever she tries to escape from the cruel grip of her husband and remains to the upstairs and does not go to his room in night. She depicts the tragedy of this event also:

As she kept me downstairs later and later at night, I ran up the staircase to a defaming silence. He would sneak in towards dawn, satiated with his carnal night in the fields, and me to himself with rough tenderness. (116)

There is no one to whom she can talk and share her sufferings, so she talks to herself:

When I remember, I go to the dark room and lie down on the mat. I turn my face to the wall. Let them cook for themselves. Let them grind coconuts and spices. I don't eat any of it. (116)

The mother-in-law is the monster in the guise of a woman. Maya in her laws' house always lives like -- a slave who works day and night and what she gains of the all works and services of the house and house members only insult and suffering. After ten years of her married life Mayamma gives birth to a son on an auspicious day of Diwali. But eight years later, her husband, worn into middle age with dissipated excess. Disappeared, taking with him all the money in the house. There is no fault of Mayamma in his disappearing. But her mother in law makes her responsible for this:

The mother in law, shrieked in agony. She took away the wooden idol of the family god to her own room, it had been defiled, she said, by Mayamma years of unstinting prayer. She bathed it in five bovine, all conquering purifiers, milk, curds, ghee, fresh cow urine, and cow dung. She summoned astrologers from all the neighbouring towns. Mayamma's horoscope, they said, was without blemish Her lucky horoscope would lead him back. (81)

Once in the family diarrhoea begins. Everyone suffers from it except Mayamma and her mother-in-law. Mayamma washes the dirty latrine clothes of the family members on the command of her mother-in-law day and night. She describes this in these words:

Earlier, when the diarrhoea began, fifteen to seventeen spurts of slime and blood a day, my mother in law glared at the pieces of yellowing cloth I rinsed day and night. What we need, she said, is a purification ceremony. (120)

But her mother-in-law does not know any ritual to purify her own son and husband of Mayamma, the stench of the vomit that flew out of her sons' mouth. Her own son is a characterless person: "The stench of the vomit that flew out of my husband's mouth after three days of toddy and love-making in the fields." (120) Mayamma suffers a lot in the hands of her mother in law. She says, "Now my arch enemy, my mother in law, her days filled with her power weapons." (122)

But now it is her mother-in-law's turn. Mayamma is mother-in-law now starts suffer from diarrhoea. Mayamma depicts this situation in these words:

Then it was her turn. There must have been other in between, I forget. Her blood I cannot forget. Even as the blood gurgled in her throat-blood, phlegm, vomit, she accused me with the hatred in her eyes. I held the pail up to her propped up head. She brought up all the poison. Her throat began to rattle. She grasped my hand and stared at me, her eyes glazing with the whiteness of death. (120)

Her mother-in-law is such a creature even that diarrhoea is a natural disease but she accuses Mayamma that she is responsible of her diarrhoea disease. Even when she is on her death bed and near to the death she says to Mayamma the last blessing words before her death:

You ill-stared slut, you have brought all this upon my household. Her last words are the blessings of a mother-in-law. She died with her claws firm on my hands, her eyes wide open. I pulled the eye lids down, but they refused to budge. (120)

In her last words she accuses Mayamma as she is responsible and the sole reason of all wrong doing in her house.

So this relation of Mayamma and her mother in law presents a tragic picture of a daughter-in-law who suffers, insulted, helpless slave in the hands of her "arch enemy" (122) mother in law. This relation shows mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship with a totally different dimension.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Lakshmi and her grandmother's relation is the another example of this mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship which shows the another angle of this relationship.

Lakshmi's mother-in-law, is a self contained woman on the other hand Lakshmi is a submissive and timid daughter-in-law who lives under the commanding rule of her mother in law, Vasu presents the life sketch of Lakshmi in these words:

Whatever her name? I was told, she would have been a timid, worrying little thing, nagging and pestering like a high pitched mosquito. She did not know how to bite though. Her ambitions were on a lower scale as escaping her husband's unpredictable explosions of temper. Surviving her mother-in-law's jealous rule of the household, and above all, keeping the house and everyone in it, clean pure and unpolluted. (*The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, 32)

Her mother-in-law rules over her and Lakshmi becomes the slave daughter-in-law in the house. Lakshmi remains in her whole married life a slave who spends her whole life in the service of her masters - husband and mother-in-law. The house turns in a tyranny prison and Lakshmi is the lifelong prisoner of this jail who commences death sentence of lifelong imprisonment. The mother-in-law is the jailer of this jail. So the condition of Lakshmi becomes worse day after day and it is not a surprise for anyone. "It was not a surprising them that Lakshmi had melted away into the shadows of this loud, tyrannical household." (32)

So the relation of Lakshmi and her mother-in-law is not a relation of a mother and daughter but the relation of a master and slave. So their relation presents a shadow of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship.

The relation of Mala and her mother-in-law in the last novel of Githa Hariharan *Fugitive Histories* sets another example of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. Mala is a Hindu Brahmin girl who marries with a Muslim boy by birth and secular by view point. The mother-in-law likes her daughter-in-law although she is from Hindu Brahmin family and has

a love marriage with her son Asad. She cares of Mala. She invites her to go in functions of relatives. There is no difference, hatred between them. Both loves to each other and respect to each other. But Asad does not like their closeness, he afraid that his mother, to whom he calls “the lady can get hold of.” (Fugitive Histories, 79) But being a good daughter-in-law Mala replies to Asad that she “feels bad to say no all the time” (Fugitive Histories, 79) to her mother-in-law. So the relation of Mala and the lady means her mother-in-law is an example of harmonious relationship of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law in which a Muslim mother-in-law loves respects and likes her daughter-in-law though she is a Hindu Brahmin girl. Both have no feeling of jealousy, hatred and dislikes. Their relation shows a different shade of this mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relation.

Githa Hariharan in her novels presents the mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship. She depicts this relationship with a number of examples in her novel with its ups, and downs and shows the myriad dimensions of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationship.

To conclude this paper one can say that Githa Hariharan in her novels has depicted a number of interpersonal relationships. To say this will not be wrong that her fiction is microcosm of interpersonal relationships. She has presented in her novels various types of interpersonal relationships with their myriad dimensions. She has explored these relationships with their ups and downs and with their tears and smiles.

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