

BLENDING FACT AND FICTION: A STUDY OF SELECTED WORKS OF GITHA HARIHARN

Samrat Khanna¹ & Jap Preet Kaur Bhangu²

¹*Research Scholar (Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh, Punjab, India) & Assistant Professor, Department of English, Punjabi University College, Ghudda (Bathinda), Punjab, India*

²*Professor, Department of Management and Humanities, Sant Longowal Institute of Engineering & Technology, Longowal, Punjab, India*

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ABSRTACT

In the post-modern age in which we are living, there is a need for self-awareness as well as self-introspection. The awareness must be reached at understanding the importance and existence of human being more than anything else. The issues of gender, class, creed and socio-cultural-religious divisions are condemned, challenged and questioned by the socio-culturally well aware writers like Githa Hariharan. The efforts for creating a space for expression of thought is considered to be the prime most need in the intolerant India of the present times. Githa Hariharan contributes well by way of her narratives full of hope for a new and progressive India.

KEYWORDS: *Post-Modern Age, Self Awareness, Introspection, Gender, Class, Creed, Socio-Cultural-Religious, Condemned, Challenged, Intolerant and Progressive*

INRODUCTION

Githa Hariharan is one of the most fearless feminist writers of the present times. She was born in Coimbatore in 1954. During her academic journey, she received her education in Bombay, Manila, and U.S.A. She worked as an editor in a publishing house and later worked as a freelancer as well. In the much awakened educated segment of modern India, She is known more as a social activist. She has led many motions advocating equal rights and justice for women in the stereotyped male-dominated society. In the year 1995, she received accolades for her success in challenging the discriminating 'Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act'. As a consequence of this case, every woman victim of domestic violence is not deprived of losing access to the child. Extending further the scope of judgment, mother's signature is needed on application forms for school or college admission, on passport applications and medical permission forms. It essentially has empowered the mother in decision making for her child. She can equally stand as the head of her family with her male counterpart.

Hariharan has penned fictions, nonfictions, and short stories apart from valuable essays and articles in leading newspapers, magazines and journals. Her other novels include *A Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) which won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the best first book in 1993. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). A collection of highly acclaimed short stories,

The Art of Dying, was published in 1993, and a book of stories for children, *The Winning Team*, in 2004. Her collection of essays, *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places*, was published in 2014. She has also edited a volume of stories in English translation from four major South Indian languages, *A Southern Harvest* (1993), co-edited a collection of stories for children, *Sorry, Best Friend!* (1997), and a collection of essays entitled *From India to Palestine: Essays in Solidarity* (2014).

PEN IS MIGHTIER THAN SWORD

Hariharan writes more like an engaged citizen aware of the dynamics of society, culture and politics. In all her narratives she advocates the voice of the marginalized, unheard segment subjugated by the hegemonical dominance of gender, caste, and creed. In the narratives like *The Thousand Faces of Night*, she advocates the need for gender equality. Hariharan generates hope in the narrative by webbing together a female space. The subjugated plight of females in the mythological accounts of the narratives gets avenged by rebellious Devi in the novel. Love, sex, and marriage are discussed are redefined, sketching a trajectory from tradition to modernity. The character of Sita in the narrative undergoes the transformation from the 'queen archetype' to the archetype of a 'sage', a 'mystic' and a 'mother'. She no more seems to be a sacrificial wife but remains a dedicated mother. She plays the Veena at the end to declare her transformation for attaining inner peace. Devi, on the other hand, is an embodiment of the 'Huntress' archetype since she represents the independent female spirit.

IS INDIA SHINING OR NOT?

In the novel *In Times of Siege* Hariharan shows the influence of the religious politics on education. A chapter written on the twelfth century poet Basava for the B.A. students five years back suddenly becomes a bone of contention. Hariharan has shown how the fundamentalist right winged groups like 'Itihaas Suraksha Manch' ironically dismantle the established historical facts. The narrative alarmingly speaks about deterrence of India's progress due to dogmatic communal forces. Manju Jaidka in an article published in *The Tribune* remarks:

"The distortions of history by political parties in power, the 'Hinduisation' of education, and the interference in academics by the 'knicker brigade'... An important concern of the novel is the re-writing of history. What, after all is history, and whose history can claim to be the real truth?... The learned academic may cry himself hoarse, insisting on the objectivity of his account, but the hired, illiterate mob bent on destruction, would have different ideas... When the mindless, irrational masses take over, how can the voice of the intellectual be heard or understood above the din?... The issues that *In Times of Siege* deals with, thus, are those which have been around for a while even as we stood by, watching helplessly. Blending fact with fiction, Hariharan gives us yet another perspective on the unresolved (and unresolvable?) problems of our times, tacitly asking us what we are doing about them. Are we doing anything about them? Or are we complacent accomplices to the malaise of our times?" (Jaidka in *The Sunday Tribune*, March 16, 2003)

Fugitive Histories like the narrative *In Times of Siege* is a consequence of political vendetta. The 'Babri Masjid Demolition' in 1992 and the 'Gujarat pogrom' in 2002 shamefully present the dictum 'history repeats itself'. The respect for one religion and the hatred for other co-exist and lead to communal riots at the behest of political leaders. In one of the article published in *The Hindu* on the narratives of Githa Hariharan, her literary and social persona is explained as:

“Githa declared that she was not a sociologist, a historian or an academic. It was primarily as a novelist that she was responding to serious political issues such as the demolition of Babri Masjid and the Gujarat carnage. In taking as her protagonist Professor Shiv Murthy (The protagonist of the novel *In Times of Siege*) of the imaginary Open University of Delhi, named Kasturba Gandhi Central University (which seems to be a combination of JNU and IGNOU), she was trying to play up the subtle use of thought, the assorted systems of coercion and restraint. The discussion after the reading centred around issues such as the novelistic decisions Githa made that liberal response to national / international crises and the inadequacy of the liberal discourse.”(Ramnarayan in *The Hindu* April 22, 2003)

Hariharan in her article “New Voices, New Challenges” has discussed the reasons for tumultuousness in India, she states:

“Either we fight to keep the Great Indian Experiment going, or we let it shrivel up and die. Our biggest strength is the Great Indian Experiment. A unique experiment in which a nation speaks in many tongues, voices and communities. We need our heterogeneity is at the heart of the secular foundation our republic is built on. If we allow this foundation to be marked as a disputed structure, if we let it be attacked by the various homogenizing religious and cultural nationalism, the foundation will break.”(Hariharan, 31-32)

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, there is a hope generated out of the narratives of Hariharan, a hope for equality of gender, a hope for cutting down of caste and creed barriers. The theoretical portrayal of ‘India Shining’ is not sufficient, when we are practically at loggerheads with each other. Hariharan through her narratives not only showcases her writing abilities but also performs her socio-cultural responsibility as an engaged citizen. The narratives penned by Hariharan bridge the gap between the tradition and the modernity. The struggles of all her characters end with the positive gains rather than lost hope. She stands as a prolific writer as well as a flag bearer of freedom of speech in the intolerant India of the present times.

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