



## IDENTITY CRISIS IN THE NOVELS OF GITHA HARIHARAN

N. Kumaraveni<sup>1</sup> and Dr. J. Swarna Joseph<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Reg. No. 10194 , Associate Professor of English , Rani Anna College for Women, Tirunelveli .

Ph.D. Scholar, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli , Tamilnadu.

<sup>2</sup>Principal, Govt. College of Arts and Science, Mettupalayam.



### ABSTRACT

*Githa Hariharan is one of the most influential Indian English women writers who have been producing a body of Indian literature that is committed to feminist and social issues. Her first novel, The Thousand Faces of Night (1992) won the Common wealth Writers Prize for Best First Book in 1993. She has four novels to her credit :The Ghost of Vasu Master (1994), When Dreams Travel (1993), In Times of Siege (2003) and Fugitive Histories (2009).*

**KEYWORDS:** *Githa Hariharan , Common wealth Writers Prize , ancient Indian history.*

### INTRODUCTION :

India is regarded as a traditionally male dominated society; where individual rights are subordinated to group. A woman's individual self has little recognition. In the ancient Indian history, women have been defied and glorified. In post-independence period, when women's education had already started, life had commenced changing, the new women started emerging. The spread of education inculcated a sense of individuality among women and aroused interest in their rights. Now when a swift change is going on all over the country, it has been necessary to redefine the role and determine the parameters to herself and to society in every walk of life.

The twentieth century is an age of doubts, turmoils and the cradle of complex and 'isms'. Our Epics, Vedas and Puranas envisage marriage not as a mere social instrument, but also as a moral weapon to both stabilise and elevate the moral stature of the individual. But it is an irony of fate, that in the post-modernistic world such esteemed institutions are currently subject to doubt.

Like the Western counterparts, the Indian women novelists are minutely examining the institution of marriage. Since marriage demands their total transformation on socio-cultural terms, the 20<sup>th</sup> century women is in a state of moral dilemma. The current Indian women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Bharathi Mukherjee and Githa Hariharan produce an interesting array of female protagonist who suffer within the framework of marriage.

The core issue of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is marriage. The protagonist struggle hard to enter and get out of marriage. Devi enters into arranged marriage with unrealistic ideas of love, life and marriage. Devi fails to understand that marriage is a life-long bond which needs love as an adhesive to strengthen life-long commitment to each other. She mentions, "A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling". (TFN p. 49). Therefore she enters marriage with doubts, regrets and a sense of unhappiness. She is not passive

acceptor of what life could offer. She has an inbuilt sense of revolt. Her grand mother's stories had a profound influence on her mind. The stories act as a tool of empowerment. She feels desolate. When her grandmother dies, her life becomes traumatic.

She is separated from parents, her father and her brother. Her attempts to date with Dan, her elopement with Gopal and her final union with her mother can be seen as an attempt of an alienated woman trying to seek security. Thus the emotional fulfilment which women seek outside marriage also fails since there men lack the substantial strength to provide the firmly grounded emotional solace they expect. Having failed to define her identity within the framework of male oriented social structures as a wife she finally returns back to her mother. It is the relationship with her mother that Devi hopes to find an identity for herself. In a Indian cultural set up daughters consider that the parents home is a temporary abode and that it is the husband's house which has to be considered as a permanent home. Once married the girls come to the temporary abode as honourable visitors. But permanently returning to their home after their marriage cause shame to the family's reputation and a source of despair to their mothers. In this light of this cultural background, we see Devi who has the quest for identity. The novelists show how women lose their identity in the family. She is instructed by social structure to bear with cruelty of any sort.

Mayamma is a victim of society. The novelists points to the fact that the woman has been taught down the ages to bear without raising any protest to the various atrocities meted out to her. She has been silenced for ages. Mayamma is ill-treated by her husband first and then by her spoilt son. She accepts her fate and bears the brunt of cruelty in the patriarchal social set up. She is battered, when she gets married at the age of twelve and tortured when she is not able to bear a child. Her mother-in-law feeds her with yesterday's rice as she is barren. This is the fate of married woman. It is an example for the humiliation and cruelty inflicted upon women by their own gender. Then she takes refuge in the house of Parvathamma. Her grandmother was an illiterate, widowed and an old woman in her early thirties. Sita, the mother of Devi had to shed her passion for music just to satisfy her duties as a daughter-in-law. Indian women had no individuality, no identity. They had no creative space. They search for their identity. They depend on their husbands, father-in-law and mother-in-law for their existence as no one is an island. Everybody has to depend on society.

The servant Gauri was demanded twenty sovereigns of gold but her marriage was broken because "they treated her like a dirt." (TFN 32). Uma, Devi's cousin also breaks herself from the bond of marriage as she feels dissatisfied.

In the novel *The Ghost of Vasu Master*, Vasu Master's mother, Lakshmi, his wife Mangala exemplify the traditional Indian women who are generally committed to familial duties. The characters help us to recognise the confined spaces of Indian woman in the socio-cultural hierarchy. They like to live under the male dominance order.

Meena in *In Times of Siege* has been portrayed as strong and independent woman with a view of changing the general perception of women as weak and docile. Anita, a lonely girl embodies the women of upper class smokes cigarettes and indulges in hurried sexual acts. She is an embodiment of how women are treated in the modern world. The degradation of Indian society with respect to women is presented and Githa Hariharan has captured the changing values of Indian society. How strange the trend of Indian tradition is that the girl when married is expected to fight for herself alone!

Her latest novel *Fugitive Histories* reveals the life of three women of different generations in three different cities. Sara in Mumbai, Mala in Delhi and Yasmin in Gujarat. The two generation of women Mala and her daughter Sara both faced the challenges in life. Mala, a South Indian Brahmin is married to Asad and is totally dependent on him. When the novel begins Mala's husband Asad is dead. After the death of her husband she feels alienated, and lonely. When she was twelve years old, she wants to live life on her own terms-to climb a tree or ride a bicycle like her cousins in the village. But she

since she is a girl, she is not allowed to do all. Thus she is denied complete freedom. Then she chooses Asad as her life partner, who does not fit into the framework of a son-in-law.

She defies all conventions and finally she elopes with him to Mumbai. Soon after their marriage, Mala starts facing problems as he belongs to a Hindu family. The culture of a Muslim household is entirely different from a staunch Tamil speaking Brahmin family. The secular identity is transformed into religious one. Mala gives birth to Samar. Mala gives birth to Samar. Her mother wants her to name him Ramakrishna but Mala and Asad want to choose a common name for him. So they name him 'Samar'. Mala's mother wants a naming ceremony and to invite all her relatives. That is also rejected by Asad. When a woman steps into a new house, she is deprived of her liking, individuality and even to name her son / daughter, individuality and even to name her son / daughter. Mala's mother comes, "First you come up with a strange name. We've never heard before then you don't want a naming ceremony. What do you think this boy is going to live in a world all by himself (FH 32). Now after Asad's death, she feels rejected by the society. She finds it hard to adjust to the new environment. There was no one to support her. Not only women suffer from identity crisis, but men also experience the loss of identity. Once when Asad visits Mala's house, he is given a different treatment. The cook serves him food on a white enamel plate. It is a plate used to serve pet dogs. Asad gets the same treatment just because of his marginalised identity. His Alienation starts when he does not find himself fit in that society, where people are figured on the basis of caste and religion. As an artist he is upset with the Gujarat Riot and the death of many people. And deeply disturbed by the communal problem chooses to find peace in death. Their children Sara and Samar also find it hard to manage their lives. They are the worst offenders. Sara faces a lot of problems as she does not belong to one religion. Co-existence of religious identities in a country like India is very difficult.

Sara, in search of identity goes and works to write a script for a documentary film over Gujarat Carnage 2002. Nina her friend and director redirect her to go to Ahmedabad for a week to see the actual plight of the Muslims there. She is frozen because one of her friends was murdered because her Muslim name was disclosed. Then she comes to a conclusion that a name can change the destiny of a person. She is not ashamed of her identity and boldly says she can be both – Hindu and Muslim. She stands firmly without any particular religion or caste. She says, "Yes I'm beginning to realize how lucky, I am. How glad I am that I'm a hybrid", (FH 184). Yasmin a Muslim girl has to shoulder the responsibilities of the family – to her Ammi, Appa, to herself and even to society at large. She is determined to get admission in the college. She has to face all these problems daily as an individual and not as a Muslim. Githa Hariharan portrays the effect of religious identities. *Fugitive Histories* points out through the character Mala that every individual is an isolated human being on mother earth. But the process of individuation, is achieved with the feeling of oneness and realizing the SELF.

Bala, Mala's grandmother is dissatisfied with her marriage life and she is termed as hysterical and crazy by her husband. So she lives in her permanent abode (her husband's house) and submits to her husband's whims and fancies. She lives in "prison conditions" (FH 15) laid down by her husband who is only "sometimes human" (FH 15).

In *Fugitive Histories*, Bala is the mother of Mala. The day she got married, she never stepped out of her permanent (husband's home) not even to visit her parents. She does not have an identity of her own. She is not given freedom to admire the crowded streets fully packed with people. Bala represents the fate of several Indian females who are not allowed to cross the threshold of their houses after marriage.

By introducing the characters of Bala, Mala, Sara and Yasmin, Githa Hariharan has taken the readers on a ride to see the different generations and their plight in society. They face different impediments, hindrances and tortures while they journey towards individuation

**WORKS CITED**

- Hariharan, Githa, *In Times of Siege*. New Delhi : Penguin, 2003.  
----, *Fugitive Histories*. New Delhi : Penguin, 2009.  
----, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. New Delhi : Penguin, 1992.  
----, *The Ghost of Vasu Master*. New Delhi : Penguin, 1991.  
----, *When Dreams Travel*. New Delhi : Penguin, 1999.

**N. Kumaraveni**

Reg. No. 10194 , Associate Professor of English , Rani Anna College for Women, Tirunelveli .  
Ph.D. Scholar, Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli , Tamilnadu.