

# Self-realization of women in novels of Githa Hariharan

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**Abstract:** *The Indian English Literature focuses on its own culture heritage, modernization of values and systems, Indian consciousness and sensibility. In the decade of sixties Indian novel in English acquired a private tone and exploration of inner life received focus at the hands of a number of Indian women novelists led by Anita Desai. In fact, the heroines of Anita Desai's novels are hypersensitive and introverts, caught up in the vortex of domestic turmoil, enjoying brief moments of escape through protest. The legacy of Anita Desai was passed on to a number of Indian women novelists who emerged in the decades of the eighties and nineties viz. Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Sunetra Gupta, Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri, Kiran Desai, Anita Nair and others. Of them, Githa Hariharan holds her special charm and is comparable to Shashi Deshpande in terms of her varied achievement. This paper will study different aspect of self realization in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of the Night*, *The ghost of Vasu Master* and *When Dreams Travell*.*

**Key Words:** *gender inequality, self-realization, individuality, consciousness, tradition, patriarchal.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION:

In words of Shakespeare woman is described: 'Frailty, thy name is woman!' (**Hamlet 1.ii.146**). According to Nietzsche, "woman is the diversion of the hero" (**Beauvoir 244**). But according to D.H Lawrence woman is neither a diversion nor a prey; 'she is not an object confronting a subject, but a pole necessary for the existence of pole of the opposite sign' (**Beauvoir 245**).

We live in a society and interact with and express ourselves to our fellow men and women through language which gives way to creating literature. It means that society is the subject of the literature, i.e. literature is the mirror of the society. It expresses social sympathies and influences our society too. Novels have also changed the direction of our thought.

Thus literature is created by the society. It is the reflection of our society. But the role of a writer in creating literature cannot be underestimated. The quality and nature of literary work depends on the writer's attitude of mind. They not only receive from the society but return it back to the society. They show the real face of society and various aspects of life is also revealed. A writer also intervenes through his/her work to reform the society we live in. There are two types of writers: conservative minded writer will emphasise the traditional ways of life. He will respect and have faith on age old ideas and ways of life. While a progressive writer will not believe on age old practice rather he will show that these traditional ideas are only curtailment of natural freedom of man and woman. *Githa Hariharan* is among such ever-memorable progressive writer who has firmly expressed the complex relationship of culture and its art. She is a progressive writer who not only rejects her ties from the society but through her works simultaneously reveal the suppressed feelings and sufferings of women in patriarchy and at the same time attempt to celebrate feminine selfhood and freedom.

In fact, *Githa Hariharan* shot into fame with her very first novel which won for her Commonwealth prize for the best debut fiction by a Eurasian author. The Novel is named *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992). She grew up in Bombay but moved to the U.S.A. for a job in a television company. But she came back to India and worked as a freelance journalist as well as an editor for a newspaper. She has published several novels viz. *The Thousand faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghost of Vasu master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999) etc. She has also published a book of stories *The Art of Dying* (1993).

Her works reveals the reality of the overwhelming majority of middle class Indian women who is struggling to adjust in the traditional society but her inner conscience wants freedom from this phallogocentric world. *Githa Hariharan's* women are aware of the shortcomings of their traditional culture and society they rebel against male – chauvinist society but find themselves in a situation where they only have the option to adjust. The sea-saw of individual desire and social expectation never reaches a balance but may indicate the initiation of future change. *Hariharan* investigates the inner conscience of these women who wants to achieve self-realization. Through her women protagonist *Githa Hariharan* candidly presents the unnoticed aspect of women thoughts which was invisible to this outside world. IN this regard Dr. S. PrasannaSree writes:

Through this medium of expressing themselves in writing, women have investigated and Published those aspects of their lives as sexual beings that have not previously been acknowledged by society. Despite late

21st century, women are still very far from attaining the required level of Socio-cultural, educational and economic advantages usually enjoyed by men. (39)

*Hariharan* in her fiction describes the predicament and conflict of Indian women struck between tradition on one side and their individuality on the other. Her fiction examines women's struggle to fulfil herself as an individual human being in this male dominated society. She reveals that the common sense notions in myths that supports patriarchal order and construct an identity of ideal womanhood is only man-made constructs. Her protagonist wants to achieve self realisation and freedom from her traditional role of daughter, wife and mother in this patriarchal society. Her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* tells the story of three women belonging to three different generations namely, Devi, Sita and Mayamma. The central character is, of course, Devi who faces problems because of her modern education and upbringing and has to return to her widowed mother leaving behind her American friend Dan. In Indian she falls prey to the pressure of age old traditions and orders. She is forced to marry Mahesh but the marriage deprives her of her identity and urges. Communication gap between Mahesh and Devi chokes her voice and sensibility. Later she decides to abscond with Gopal only to take revenge from Mahesh. Rama Kundu remarks: It is less for love than to show her rage of rejection of a demeaning marriage that had crushed dignity, individual aspiration and mocked her emotional imaginative refinement. (120)

There also she is not able to recognize her identity and individuality. She tries to establish a contact with her real self and for this She passes through relations. She takes a step to attain equilibrium of power of self realization in this male chauvinist society.

Her own mother Sita and the maid Mayamma are also fellow sufferers. Sita is burdened with the role of an ideal womanhood. In her quest to be an ideal woman she suppresses her desire and dream of becoming a veena player. Although she is burdened by the patriarchal society still she is a woman of clear views and is firm in her decision. The character of Mayamma exposes the helplessness of traditionally suppressed and illiterate woman. She is the target of the traditional society and suffers for quite a long period of time. Rama Nair while discussing the Prelude of the present novel writes:

Realism and fantasy interplay in the narrative to focus on the emerging self. It is a self that endures suffering, but it is a suffering that leads to self-understanding and an inward strength to break loose from past thoughts and experiences that are negative. (174)

In fact, the novel presents the real life characters the issue of gender exploitation faced by them. *Hariharan* in 'The Thousand Faces of Night' presents the travails of women who crave for love and sympathy but are, paradoxically enough, victims of their own gender.

The next novel *The Ghost of Vasu Master* uses the strategy of story-telling. Here the protagonist is a retired teacher, a widower, who lives on his memories of the past. He tells various stories to a young boy and recreates the past. He recalls the tales of his grandmother, dead wife Mangala, Jameela and Eliamma-the real ghost from Mangala's story.

Vasu Master's mother had no name for one year because her parents did not want to spend money on a naming ceremony for one more daughter. This shows the secondary position of women in Indian society. She was only the shadow of her husband suppressed by her duties and inferiority complex till her death. Next Women character is of Mangala the wife of Vasu who was also a gloomy figure for Vasu. He continues thinking of Mangala as the awful unknown and always dismissing her as an insignificant person:

She was unnoticeable, inconspicuous; like my mother, memorable only as an absence. I knew my wife and my affection for her only when I lived with her ghost. The ghost had a frail, vapoury body; made more insubstantial by my lapses of memory about what she actually was (GVM 123).

Mangala was educated, but she believed in ghosts. Vasu Master thought that Mangala was as flimsy and evasive as her companions of darkness. He remembers Mangala looking longingly at "some remote point in the distance where she melted into sky" (GVM 124). Then she suddenly seemed different, more receptive, opened to the possibility of change. The last canvas Jameela had embroidered for Mangala showed "a hazy seascape in which all was ambiguous movement, suggestive of mysterious possibility" (GVM 131).

In this novel the three women character of *Hariharan* tries to achieve self realization and woman's aspirations at different level. Vasu Master's grandmother was a rebellious woman. She was illiterate but didn't blindly believe her husband. Once, she told Vasu, "What is a husband, Vasu? Just a hungry stomach and a few other things, never mind what. But all really greedy, swallowing like a big red swollen mouth, then chewing and belching" (GVM 174). She had independent thinking of her own and even supported nationalist cause against her husband. She maintained her separate identity. But the character of Lakshmi and Mangala were not rebellious. Vasu Master says about his mother, "She would have been timid, worrying, little thing, nagging, pestering like a high-pitched mosquito. She did not learn how to bite though" (GVM 32). But Mangala had a submerged sense of self consciousness which appeared in her stories, her embroidery and her enjoyments with Jameela. *Hariharan's* women have limitless possibilities which are mysterious to man dominated society.

The third novel *When Dreams Travel* is a work of sheer creative imagination which allows the writer to cross boundaries and realities. Here myths, legends and realities merge. The novelist has written herein about women's

dreams and desires. The novel is a story of two sisters Shahrzad and Dunyazad and their husbands. Here many kinds of stories are interwoven in the narrative. In fact, the novel is a saga of two defiant sisters who are linked to two brothers, two Sultans, two cuckolds namely Shahryar and Shahzaman. The story is like a witty fable with strong sexual undertones. The relationship between the two sisters is quite significant. These sisters emerged as a superior human being accomplished with knowledge, awareness, power, wisdom and diplomacy. They not only saved their lives but also the whole city.

The novel raises questions of feminine consciousness as well as female sexuality. The novel's craft and presentation must be specially recognised. In this novel Feminism is a major thrust of *Githa Hariharan's* unique work. Rahul Chaturvedi has observed: "When Dreams Travel is atale of marvel with feminist agenda to revive the lost status of women."(Chaturvedi157).

## 2. CONCLUSION:

In fact, *Githa Hariharan* is post-colonial woman grappling with the problem of individual identity and national identity at the same time. The detailed study of her work reveals the changing social, emotional and ideological set up in our country. Her Fiction acquaints with an understanding of women's issues and predicaments. *Githa Hariharan* with her intellectual standards, and sharp observation of life and has imparted a psychological depth to her female characters. She has projected a deep view of female psyche, inner aspiration and their peculiar responses to patriarchal society.

*Githa Hariharan* makes us realize subordinate and inferior position of women in family and society. The need of the hour is to confer on woman the rightful, equal, independent status that would act as an impetus to her development as an individual and a social being.

At last, the women characters of *Hariharan* are conscious of individuality and struggle for liberated feminist identity, along patterns of resistance, survival, imaginative choices and solidarity, leading to unexpected life stories.

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