

SUMMING UP

Literature has always held up a faithful mirror to the society under observation. The social activities of men and women have been monitored closely by the creative artists as developing acts in the plot construction. The creative writers, closer scrutiny of life comprising the multitudinous aspects of society reveal the complex and diverse interactions of men and women with one another. They get the greatest creative motivation from their observation to the inevitable evolution of the minds of the people.

The role of women in Indian society in the end of twentieth century and in the beginning of twenty first century has taken giant transition in all fields of life. The march of women breaking the shackles of the past has been remarkable that women gain much confidence to try their hands in all professions. The restrictions upon them for so long period begin to give way and the women begin to enjoy free movement in all walks of life. Literature is no exception. Indian English fiction by women writers challenges the prominent old patriarchal domination. The image of women in fiction has undergone a sea change from traditional self-sacrificing women to characters demanding for their right and space in the society. The women in the works of most prominent women writers express their anguish over the existing condition of the women in the society and demand for their own space and identity in community they live in. The women writers disclose the condition of women against the man's perspective so long it had been. As her contemporary Indian women writers do, Githa Hariharan questions the patriarchal domination in her works. The novelist reflects the

mind of womenfolk of this age, contrary to the culture where identity and individualism has been unheard of by female genders. The characters in Hariharan novels are moving from status of victims, submissive, and tolerant women to the position of financially independent and assertive. The works of the novelist become collective consciousness that impact their presence in society and in turn make it aware of their concerns and demands.

Githa Hariharan has intertwined the post modernist and feminist perspectives by stressing on the different strategies women adopt to assert themselves. She has encapsulated the effects of the strong winds of change that have brought about far reaching upheavals in women's lives in India. Hariharan has urged that the manu disruptions of civil society have created opportunities as well as hazards which have simultaneously enabled and constrained Indian women. Even at the lower levels of privilege, Indian woman begins to overcome their conscious sense of submission or being mindless object of pity.

Hariharan demonstrates the pressures of tradition upon the characters in the form of the dominance of gender ideology, while those characters achieve the liberation of the spirit. Her works go on to prove that the postmodern feminist theory which analyses the workings of patriarchy in all its manifestations. It will break the conceptual hold of those long traditions of masculine dominance. In order to achieve the goals the novelist exerts her writing skill to deconstruct the past and reconstruct a more meaningful present to augur a healthier future. Her works unravel the male hegemony which consists of conscious assumptions and unconscious presumptions about women.

Githa Hariharan as a modern Indian English writer experiments with ancient belief for interpreting human relationships in modern life. She attempts to remake old stories in gynocentric perspectives. It is a revisionist myth-making as one of the ‘strategies of emancipation’ for the cause of subjugated women. She co-relates the past occurrences in traditional works with the present life. Her novel represents a variety of female characters, mythological as well as real undergoing agony in consequence of their desires and ambitions. These characters are fighting the idea of “an ideal woman” which is demanded of them as wives, mothers and daughters-in-law. The narrative is of sufferings, humiliation, and alienation of her women characters Hariharan assesses critically the patriarchal power structure of the Hindu society through these contemporary women. She also shows the reader the position of Indian women in the traditions and culture of this male-dominated society. She deconstructs the ideas of gender, equality and identity through the narrative. In the traditional structure of the novel, the author articulates the images of women, “good” and “bad” with the help of Indian myths, *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and other Sanskrit stories. Githa narrates the stories of – Devi, Sita, Parvatamma and Mayamma though linking them to Mythological characters. The myths have been reinvented and retold for these women characters to connect to Amba, Ganga, Gandhari and others in their plight, in spite of the time gap of centuries between them. The central characters expose the various dimensions of oppression through ‘Story within a story’ technique.

Hariharan shows how each female character suffers from her own traumatic humiliation, guilt and alienation from her own body and processes which originate in

menarche. Through these representations, she not only exposes how women are suppressed but also creates a narrative that challenges the ideology of womanhood, which is tacitly assumed to be celebrated only because it means future motherhood, and thus means nothing for barren women.

Hariharan's depiction of a bleeding community of women allows for the endless multiplication of differences among women, but it is strategically powerful as an image of a communion in which women can share their painful or joyful experiences and understand their bodies, a communion that allows women to rebel against a repressive system and to build on their new empowerment.

Hariharan articulates the awareness of woman's destiny in her works. The lives of women are fated to lead as they aspire to do so. In spite of their suffering in the dictations of the male members of the family, the women would be able to take the call. The narrative of the writer is ironical, ambiguous at the same time open ended to have multiple perspectives. It seems to focus on some underlying truth that is not referred to in her works. There are always some empty spaces to allow the reader have the fair chance to infer from. They actually project how women can be misrepresented without a complete understanding on the women's perspectives. Hariharan often gives us a realistic account of women's mind and their attitude towards the latest developments of incidents.

The works of Hariharan are woven around the different generations of women of the present and immediate past. The novels bring for the idea how despite the background and the education that an Indian woman attains, her fate is to fall back

into the century old customs if she is not aware enough to be cautious of her own rights. The Indian society constantly demands at from the women that they oblige to the expectations of the routines of society in practice.

The Chapter two, “Traditional Women Versus Women in Modern Age” presents the condition of women from ancient and traditional India and its radical transmutations taking place especially at the last few decades. There had been no question of demanding rights and equality with the fellow human being that women enjoyed momentous position in ancient Indian society. Declination in the position of women had emerged in medieval period during the foreign invasions. *Mughal* invasion had greatly influenced the role of women in the society initiating social evils against women like polygamy, use of *purdah*, sati, and child marriage. Women were constrained to the demands household tasks. The prejudiced approach of men towards female members in the society considered a girl child in the family a burden and it is an inevitable responsibility on the part of the head of family and the male members of the family to safeguard women against any kind of sexual abuse. Hence the movements of female members from the residence of the family were brought down to the minimum level. On unavoidable circumstances, they would be accompanied by either male member or elderly persons in the family.

Being constrained within the walls of residence, the responsibilities of the women were much to keep their minds engaged. The major obligation of women in the medieval period had been preparing variety of food to please the men in the family and their visitors and serving them when they retire in addition to delivering babies and nurturing them. Women, who introduced agriculture to the better human

existence in the earliest period of human life, are integral part of human civilization. But their remarkable services and their active participation in the development of society have never been given its due. The social reformers in the later period initiated the significance of role of women for the complete improvement of the social order and human society. Education to women rendered awareness among the women about the discrimination between men and women and denial of gender equality. The economical demands in middle class families necessitated women to enter into their career life in order to supplement the family income. The images of women have undergone some unprecedented transformation in the twentieth century.

Change of trend in social condition of women has been brought in by education. Education to women strengthens and explores all possible development in the society. It gives confidence to women bringing back their role for the upliftment of the society. While entering into the social activities of life, they come forward to try their hand in literature. As world literature did, Indian writing in English welcomes women writers to present the world of women in women's perspective. Indian women novelists give a new dimension to the Indian literary world. They incorporate the recurring female experiences in their writings which affected the cultural patterns of Indian literature. The frank description of the world of women has stunned the literati. Women's literature depicts the psychological suffering of the frustrated housewives. The educated women become the readers of these novels and readily come forward to take up their new role equal to men in the modern society. Women in modern age begin to break away the traditional boundaries.

Githa Hariharan, the modern English writer experiments the traditional belief of the people interpreting them in gynocentric perspectives. She attempts to co-relate the past occurrences in traditional works with the present life presenting women characters in the modern age. Sita, one of the protagonists of the novel *The Thousand Faces of Nights*, is an emerging women in modern age obliges to the family demands as the daughter-in-law in the family. When there is an opportunity to take the commands, she cleverly manipulates the situation to her own wish taking major decision in the family. Another important character in the novel, Devi, is presented as representative of modern women. After her studies in the USA she marries Mahesh, and settles down in one of the cities in India. When she finds her married life meaningless with her husband who is much duty conscious, she decides to take destiny in her own hands and moves away from the house.

Meena ia an exemplary character in *In Times of Siege*. The final year student in the college comes to the rescue of her guardian, Shiv when his career is in turmoil. The staunch support of Meena strengthens Shiv refusing to apologize in public for no fault of him. She is vibrant and assertive to stimulate Shiv to fight for his right at the age of fifty five.

While rewriting the legendry story *The Arabian Nights*, Githa Hariharan recreates the traditional characters from the silenced and absented women to valiant women. Shahrzad's love for danger makes of her a perfect figuration for liberated patterns of feminine identity because she represents, together with her self-assertive wit and saviour behaviour. It is like locking a good jinni in a household bottle. Githa

Hariharan shows the kind, helping and sympathetic nature of woman and how she uses her extraordinary power for the survival of others.

Women in modern age empower their right eradicating the social evils prevailed in the traditional Indian society. The characters of Hariharan exemplify the women in the modern age through their education not only finding their own independence of thought but also extending their support to men folk in trouble.

In the Chapter “Feminism and the Works of Githa Hariharan” the emergence of feminism is traced to assert its need in the age of transition. The principle aim of feminism is to get back equality of women with men and their honour in the society. After analyzing the meaning of the term and its role in the literary background, the contributions of the social reformers and the literary creative artists are discussed. In order to bring back the natural existence of human society maintaining equality among people without any gender bias, a great social movement has to be sustained. Promoting awareness among the women has been top priority of the Indian women writers penning down their heart out to overcome all the hurdles on their way. The outcome has been very slow but a steady transformation in the last few decades encountering the challenges in the domestic and social life. The kind of damages both physical and psychological harm imposed upon the equal members of the society is also discussed in the chapter.

The suppression of women in Indian society has been strongly condemned and Githa Hariharan voiced against repressions upon women in the name of traditional taboos. Having sensed the need of the hour, she takes the responsibility of the women

writers articulating for the women rights through her novels as vehicle of protest against male dominance over woman. The novels of Hariharan advocate for the emancipation of womenfolk from the bondage of male containment. The protagonist of debut novel deems the *mangalya*, a hurdle to hold back her freedom. Anxious Sita becomes aware of her condition and moves away from the traps of the commands of her husband and frees herself to enjoy the sense of fresh air relieving her from domestic obligation. Mayamma, another character in the same novel emerges with courage to face the hardship in life. She discovers her own space in the benevolence of Parvatiamma developing an ethical bond with the family. The pressures of adversities upon her leave her strengthened to face life more emboldened.

At the same Mangala in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is the representative of traditional Indian women. She is Vasu Master's wife. It is a tragedy on the part of Mangala that though she gave Vasu Master two sons, Vishnu and Venu, he reminds her more as a cloudy memory than as a person. The focus of his memory always lays somewhere else and she always remains in the background. His memory: "I always saw her in my mind against a seashore in the background, the monotonous slosh and thud of waves against rock and sand drowning out all possibility of words" (GVM 41).

Lakshmi, Vasu Master's mother, fought a losing battle on all fronts. Her husband and sometime her mother-in-law enrage her. She had melted away literally into the shadows of loud, tyrannical household. She lived just about long enough to give her husband his heir; obviously it was a shoddy job. She accepted everything as a submissive.

To study these characters, it is necessary to recognize the confined space of Indian Woman in the socio-cultural hierarchy. A close look at the story, we find that these characters confined to a framework, which was based on the ideals of class, race and gender. These characters try to identify themselves as valuable, social individual. They are the part and parcel of patriotic traditional Indian society. To live life under the dominance of male order is general feature of woman stereotype. The picture which emerges out of the original inhabitant's culture is an unpretty affaire and it is maintained in the present novel. They always think in the terms of what is socially valuable. I find this formulation of stereotype is helpful, in that, it enables us to examine and identify Mangala and Lakshmi as stereotype of Traditional Indian.

In the collection of short stories Hariharan presents the conventional tenor of woman's life taking up domestic chores. The women involved in such activities are found to be in an anxiety to get relieved from a constant cycle of household responsibilities. They wish to get away from familial commitments. Sarala in one of the short stories does not tolerate to be tied up with routine acts of caring for her husband. She finds right moment to break away from the shackles and fulfill her personal aspirations. Age is no limit to curb the desires to overcome the sufferings of repression. In an another story, after being denied of any tasty food for being Brahmin widow for more than 70 years of her life, the elderly lady is introduced to prohibited edible items by her great granddaughter. Her desires become unlimited and she discloses her trivial desires frankly at her death bed not worrying about the taboos which she had been strictly following for maximum of her life time. The character is an exemplary that subjugation of women in the name of tradition taboos may be

possible only when the person concerned is obliging. The moment they revolt all restrictions become meaningless; they become totally free of constraints.

The major women characters in the novel *Fugitive Histories* are Yasmin, Sara, Mala and Bala from different backgrounds presented at different angles. Yasmin, the riot-ravaged teen who lost her brother, her home in 2002 is too young to grasp the events taking place around her; Sara is the aspiring social worker ill at ease with what she understands of life, of misery; Mala is a recent widow who has now to come to terms with doing away with being defined as ‘Asad’s wife’ – for which she must know who he was, and what happened to him; Bala is an old hysterical lady who has lived her life in submission to the male dominance of her village home, who never went out – and hence went within. Sara is Mala’s daughter. Bala is Mala’s grandmother. Yasmin is almost Sara’s muse. These women characters respond to situation enforced upon them in their own way of encountering the unprecedented situation in the modern age.

Attachment within female gender is one of the important themes in the works of Githa Hariharan which enables formation of female identity. It is a great consolation on the part of women to have close association with the fellow women living at the backdrop of patriarchal set up. The feminist movement finds that companionship among the women is an important aspect and a historical necessity to take forward the ideology with all the subjugated women. The women form their own community exhibiting their empathy for their fellow women. Hariharan in her novels depicts the characters suffering from isolation when they are left alone; find their

happiness in the company of their closely associated women. It may either be between mother to daughter, between sisters or companions.

At the time of hearing loud voice of slogans like, ‘India for Hindus’, ‘Sons of Soil are Hindus’, it is important to analyse its effect upon the listener whether they are from minority community or not. The Chapter “Secularism” closely examines the declaration, ‘India as a secular state’ and how far the real meaning of the declaration taken into account. At the time and after the Independence of India, secularism is a major principle of the national polity. Till 1980s there has been no second thought over the statement of declaration. The emergence of communalism encourages deviation in existing ideology claiming that secularism is a false face to pamper the minority at the expense of majority. The novelist takes two major incidents to weave her stories in two of her novels. The communal forces projected secularism as a myth to the mask of fundamentalism accusing Christians being more loyal to Vatican and Muslims to Pakistan than to India. It is ideally required to stem the tide of communal fascism in absence of which religious dogmas and clergy would happen to guide the administration.

Secularism has been strength of the nation allowing pluralism and finding unity in diversity. It has strengthened democratic spirit and unity. The instances of threat to freedom of speech and freedom of religion leave not only the people of minority but also the majority under loss of harmony. The growing influence of communalism and their reaction to unintended action encourage the writes to respond through her novels. Two of her novels, *In Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories* come under this category. The controversial module on Basava is unintentional. But the

battle over topic is instigated by his colleague. The novel is directed towards the proponents of academic freedom.

The communal harmony in India is also disturbed at razing of disputed Babri Masjid in Ayodhya. The acts of tit for tat strain the harmony across the nation within short period of time. Gujarat riots 2002 was instigated act of retaliation to Godhra Train Bogey Burning incident. *Fugitive Histories* is set at the aftermath of the incident leaving thousands homeless, loss of property and migration from their place of birth. The novel as means of reaching wider audience states a message to protect human rights and criticizes communal fascist forces. It also stresses for more generous and pluralistic vision of the world.

The Chapter “Mythological Elements” scrutinizes the myths in Indian literature, especially in the works of later part of twentieth century writers. The meanings and definitions of myth are discussed before analyzing how myth is retold in the works of Githa Hariharan. Basically myth is telling stories. In the course of period it created code of belief, rituals and also principles of morality. Philosophers, anthropologists, historians, writers, literary critics, sociologists, philologists and essayists’ definitions of myth are collected for better understanding its concept. Myth is a milestone in human civilization holding communities together. It provides insights into the mysteries of life and death. Myths germinate in collective conscious of the mankind and associate the individual mind with universal phenomenon. The inner reality of man’s hidden world would be interpreted in understanding myths. The social concerns of the past and the present are blended in myth. Myth is a rich resource for the collective consciousness of mankind. Myths behold customs beliefs,

and attitudes of people. The principles of mythical patterns sustain the unity of the community.

The functional and creative frameworks for creative writers can be obtained from myths. Great writers have intelligently woven their matter on the mythic parallels. Modern writers experiment power of myth to explain the facts of life co-relating the past with the present. There has been deep relationship between myth and literature as they occupy similar verbal space. The creative writers employ myth in their works as per its functional requirements of their creative works. Modern issues are approached juxtaposing the mythic patterns by the modern writers. Novel is closely related genre of literature which finds it to express its thematic concerns. While the novel deals with man as social being myth focuses on man and his universe. Myth also provides ethical implications for the communities as novel does.

Indian fiction in English has greater influence of Hindu mythology. A great number of stories from Indian mythology have been a good source of inspiration to the Indian English novelists. *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are the greatest Indian epics, the store houses which are the living force in the life of Indian. Eminent Indian novelists both from the pre-independence period and free India the novelists skillfully demonstrate the influence of myths in their fiction. Githa Hariharan is no exception but rewrites mythology from a female point of view. In her novels tradition gets reinvented and manmade laws are subverted.

The aim of retelling myth is to challenge gender stereotypes. The existing social conventions are thrashed to present the social reality. They do not reject

tradition but reclaim a new lineage. The old stories are transmuted. Devi in Githa Hariharan's novel pays tribute to her three mentors, her grandmother, mother Sita and her elderly house keeper Mayamma. She is introduced to mythical heroines at her young age by her grandmother. Learning the determination on the part of mythological figures Damayanthi, Gandhari, Amba and Ganga, she becomes stronger to take decision on her own when the situation demanded. *When Dreams Travel* is Githa Hariharan's version of The *Thousand and One Nights*. Rewriting Shahrzad's story from a feminist angle, the novelist indirectly reflects on a shared cultural heritage. Myths in the novel are collective heritage serving as a powerful mechanism to understand the real experience. They act as an objective model of behaviour to promote certain values and attitudes. The novels of Hariharan reinterpret mythology subverting the canonic versions and new symbols. The novelist has represented the glory of India through her fiction.

The Chapter "Social and Moral Issues" surveys purpose of literature and examines role of literature in maintaining social justice and morality in society. A writer has a duty to remind the member of society whenever he deviates from social justice. Culture of the society may be measured by the social and moral standards which safeguards the harmonious inhabitance of members. The same members of the society are expected to uphold individual and social ethics. Along with social reformers and moral thinkers a writer would hold a yardstick to sustain balance among the people of all sections of society. Indian writers evaluate the social and moral disparities against the man-made discriminatory and oppressive laws.

The concept of divorce or separation married couple is unfamiliar to Indian tradition as marriage is sacrosanct bond. On a rare occasion of infertility it may be the right of the husband to call for it and it would never be the right of the wife. The woman is solely at the mercy of her husband after her marriage. She has no right to leave the house without the knowledge of her husband. At the change of condition of women, the stigma associated with separation is diluted. Couples with serious issues of compatibility have to accommodate with the injustices in order to avoid humiliation. But in the globalized era, the traditional notion would not be taken strictly into consideration especially by the educated women. The protagonist of Hariharan opines that there are many other things in life other than living with incompatible husband.

Diversity, tolerance, co-operation and non-violence are salient features to be associated with India as a fast developing nation. The principles deeply inbuilt in the culture and heritage of the nation speak of the traditional values of the nation. Harmonious existence of multi-religious and multi-cultured people has been distinctive feature of the nation. There is a strong ethic behind the core system of the nation. Fascist ideology with its anti-human implications disturbs the communal synchronization. Hariharan dedicates two novels for the issues to be discussed. Under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhiji India became independent thanks to his great movement Satyagraha. India was declared a secular country accommodating all religious beliefs. Fascist ideology is openly preached with all its anti-human implications. The novel *In Times of Siege* raises the question of safety of the people and the moral values observed by the majority community. It also reveals the writer's

honest commitment to the sanctity of human rights to live peacefully. The importance of being more generous and pluralistic vision of the world is stressed.

The assertive statement to be concluded as finding in a sentence can be recorded that social-cultural impact upon any writer is inevitable and Githa Hariharan has been presenting the immediate reflections upon the events while she is in the course of creating her literary works of art unmindful of implications it would leave either upon her life.

Scope for Further Study

Githa Hariharan is the writer who is deeply rooted into the Indian culture and tradition. India has a rich tradition of fables and parables. Hariharan has taken a plenty of references from the great Indian epics into her writing. They are the collection of many stories of minor characters stitched around the major characters in the epics. Children in Indian society are brought up being enriched them with stories of moral values. Hariharan also combines some of her works using fantasy to present the underlying principles of all human action. The study on the works of Hariharan with an intention of interpretation of the fables in the novels like *The Ghost of Vasu Master* would unearth the interesting aspects of her fables in her novels. Being a member the Palestine solidarity committee in India, the novelist has edited, *Almost Home*, a collection of essays which combine her political perspective with the multiple voices of her fiction. Like the novel, the essay can hold all kinds of forms – poetry, politics, anecdote, imagined vignettes. In an essay on “cities of victory”, Washington and medieval Vijayanagar, I trace surprising connections – the obsessions with grand

monuments, with defense and security, the grandeur that comes at the expense of the slaves and the workers who hold the cities on their shoulders. The novelist's another remarkable effort *A Southern Harvest* is a collection of 16 brilliant and evocative stories from contemporary sort fiction in Kannada, Malayalam, Tamil and Telugu. The stories, by writers both new and established, have been translated into English especially for this volume. The language sections are introduced by eminent literary figures in that language. *A Southern Harvest* is an unforgettable voyage of discovery, taking the reader through the pain and poverty, humour and compassion in the lives of ordinary people.