

Quest for Realization in Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Abstract

India has contributed significantly to the overall world literature. This contribution of India has been chiefly through the Indian Writing in English and translations of regional literature into English, Novelists being forefront in this respect. Many Indian English novelists have turned to the past as much to trace the deepening mood of nationalism as to cherish the memories of the by-gone days. Indian women novelists have given a new dimension to the Indian literature. In the mid-nineteenth century, more women started to write in the English language,. With the passage of time, English literature has witnessed several changes in the writing patterns.

Indian women writing in English is being recognized as a major contemporary current in English language and Literature. Traditionally, the work of Indian women writers has been undervalued due to patriarchal assumptions about the superior worth of the male experience. In those days women used to write about woman's perception and experiences within the enclosed domestic arena.

Key words:

Self realization, Myth, Tradition, Struggle, Loneliness, Sufferings, Identity

The Thousand Faces of Night is the portrayal of different facets of women, kinds of their suffering and depicts the status of women in Indian society. The lives of the three women in *The Thousand Faces of Night*-Devi, Sita and Mayamma exposes the different dimensions of women, who belong to different generations. When compared to first and second generation woman the third generation woman acquired any change in her relationship with man and society? Does the women of the hoary past came back to claim the protagonist Devi through and story, music and memory? How myth and reality are portrayed in the novel?

The emergence of a new generation of Indian women in the nineteen-nineties who tend to interrogate the traditional images of women in terms of the feminine and female identities and patriarchal value-orientations had led to a radical change in attitude towards sex, social roles and marital relationships. Most of the contemporary Indian English novels envision the new Indian women as a subservient house wife to woman as independent and as asserting a distinct social identity as well as from marriage as a personal choice. Many Indian women novelists have explored female subjectivity in order to establish an identity that is not circumscribed by a patriarchal society.

Most of these women novelists of the nineteen-eighties and nineteen-nineties are candid and outspoken about female body, female consciousness and sexual freedom. But, at the same time, they reflect a highly sensitive perception of social society as well as keen sense of history, myth and tradition. Female quest for identity has been a pet theme for many women novelists. Among these post modern Indian women novelists whose fictional worlds juxtapose tensions of the Indian women with contemporary social and historical realities are Manju Kapur and Shashi Deshpande who reflect the middle class milieu, Shoba De and Namita Gokhale whose major concern is the upper class and the world of Arundathi Roy and Anita Nair who delineate the typical regional ambience of Kerala with its wide variety of people of all class, Kiran Desai who portrays violence and insurgency and Gita Hariharan who perceives plight of contemporary women in the context of myth and history.

Self realization is an expression used in psychology, spirituality and eastern religions. It is defined as the fulfillment by oneself of the possibilities of one's character or personality. In the world of literature, the characters are drawn from reality. Gita Hariharan explores the inner world of the women who are striving towards self realization. The common sense notions support patriarchal order and construct an identity of ideal womanhood in the light of dominant male culture. She throws the light on these notions and reveals these to be man-made constructs.

The focus of this novel (TFN) is an inner lives of women, the inner spaces and exceptional fictional skill are portrayal of woman characters, explores in her first award winning novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* the marriages, old traditional values, story and myth, passion and loneliness in the lives of Indian woman. The novel presents stories of three women Sita, Devi and Mayamma who engage in a lonely but difficult battle against restrictive rules of patriarchy. Except Devi, the protagonist of the novel all the characters are the epitome of endurance, tolerance, patience and submissive. They never react to any situation and admit their role passively.

Devi the protagonist returns to Madras with an America degree after returning the proposal of marriage from Dan, a black American friend because of her ambivalent attitude to American culture. Devi's grandmother is a feminist in her own way asserting her individuality as sheltering women who are victims of male chauvinistic society. Devi tries to take flight from stress situation and swims against the current she has the ability to realize that life is worth to be lived. She knows the importance of: "lush inspite of its sand-choked roots"(139).

Devi's obsession with Gopal much made her elope with him. She requested the pin pricks of embarrassment during her stay in Gopal's house. She felt that she had no husband or love. During one of Gopal's concert Devi understand that her identity was questioned by the appraisal of a staring eye. She decides to leave Gopal's house in search of her identity effectively. She reached her mother's house and decided to start up a new life; she had listened to the sound of veena which seemed to invite her. The inviting call of veena to Devi suggests a renewal of new positive relationship with her mother, herself and the renewal of life itself. Devi is at a juncture where she has to decide whether she wants to remain frustrated throughout her life or she wants to be bold and face the world with conviction. The novel thus projects three, main characters Devi, Sita and Mayamma who walked to tight rope and struggle for some balance Indira Nitayanandan opines that "They prove the strength of their womanhood in their struggle for survival. So all the three major characters of the novel with their will and determination, are able to move from subjugation and servitude to protest and assertion of self".

For an Indian woman, her role is circumscribed within the emotive immersion of herself which results in the negation of self and often leads to exploitation and conflict. In the gallery of women characters portrayed. Devi represents another harsh social reality of contemporary society-married woman plight that is happy with her husband and decides to live with her lover Mayamma presents miserable life of a woman who was married early. Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a sensitive saga of woman struggling to survive in a world of shattered dreams. Devi the protagonist and her desperate search for identity in the traditional

Hindu society. She has gained enough strength to assert her and to survive on her own. Devi is not only person in the novel who makes adjustments and sacrifices in her married life. Her mother Sita also suffered a sacrificial married life. Along with her disenchantment, realization dawns on Devi that all through her life, she was running away from her trails—America, the house on road, Mahesh and Gopal. She could not offer to help to her father's helplessness nor could she understand her mother Sita's loneliness behind her grim perseverance. She gets a revelation of herself in an epiphany. All along she had been living as a puppet and they pulled her strings. She realizes that she has made very few choices in her life.

Gita Hariharan highlights her experience by interspersing it with those of other woman and thus position of women entrapped in such male power structures is explored. The development of her character can be seen in the steps she takes in life but soon realizes the hollowness of her decisions. Then the self-examination takes her to roots. 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 experience that are negative. (174)

The novel is yet another version of female 'novel of marriage' in which the woman does not live happily even after getting married. This common place story of marital discord and the women's quest for identity outside marriage is turned in to remarkable rendering of the collective struggle of women of self-liberation through the author's narrative technique of framing texts within text and saying 'seek the river, miles away, where the dim forest gives way to a clear transparent flood of light' (TFON 126). Her choice is to be fixed in her woman's role but through Devi she too can see a different life. *The Thousand Faces of Night* represents a variety of female characters with varied wishes and frustrations, desires and agony, searching for self Identity or self liberation Hariharan's female characters revolt against considering Marriage and Mother hood as ultimate goals of an "ideal woman" Here they stand with the third wave of feminism strongly advocating individual liberation. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is about the journey of Indian women through tradition to modernity in search of self identity. It also discusses the ways out. The vision Hariharan has for womankind is of empowerment. Devi finally realizes her mistake that she was looking at herself from the opposite end.

The characters in Gita Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* are victims of loneliness and emptiness—a search for self discovery, their places in society. She has succeeded in giving the readers the glimpses of the interior life of the woman characters, where as Devi, a modern girl who tries to escape from the stark reality failed in the end and struggled for identity. She returned to her source realizing her responsibility as a wife (to Mahesh) and daughter (to Sita). The novel deals with what it means to be a women in modern India and it raises question of female space. Gita Hariharan's depiction of women characters in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is very impressive. Each character has its own stance. But they all coherently conveyed the message that endurance is the fame virtue of a woman to lead a marriage life.

The protagonist finally disowns her state of being 'other' 'finally return to her mother or her roots to rediscover her true identity.

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