

Progression Of Women In Githa Hariharan's The Thousand Faces Of Night

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is not aggressive in India. It doesn't expect woman to be a complete rebel and revolutionary instead it expects her to fight for liberty and equality. The past four decades have brought about dramatic changes in how women and men navigate their workplace responsibilities, care giving needs, and personal lives. In modern cultures, since the industrial revolution, there has been a significant rise in social isolation, in the fragmentation of traditional communities and kinship networks. Most of us are living alone, often in big cities, working long hours and experiencing a profound sense of alienation and insecurity without being consciously identified by the male and female bonding. Unlike our Stone Age ancestors, we no longer face the same dangers or lead the same harsh lives, whereas all the same bonding instincts are still in place, and friendship is still a vital part of our lives. Such friendships give women an outlet to share their problems, thoughts, feelings, and triumphs with those they feel a close bond with. Thereby, Githa Hariharan, the winner of the Commonwealth Writers Prize for Fiction (1993), her novels emphasis feminism native contemporary issues and problems in the society. In this paper an attempt is made to see Githa Hariharan, enduring the ways and tactics of female bonding in her novel "The Thousand Faces of Night".

FEMALE BONDING

Female Bonding, a strength giving aspect through which the formation of a close personal relationship between women. An important expansion of nurturing and care giving is the woman-woman dyad, also called female bonding, which describes patterns of friendship, attachment, and cooperation in women. It plays a significant role in identity formation as well as in sustaining women in the patriarchal set up. In a society where the male and the female worlds are strictly compartmentalized, women find their space in the 'inner courtyard', where the feminine environment is supreme.

A bond within feminine can be dependent on multiple factors such as age, sexual orientation, culture, race and marital status. In some studies, have shown that there is relatively strong female bonding evidence which is shared among single women. For example, the positive mother-daughter ties which develop have been described to provide immense emotional, financial and instrumental support; indicating that female bonding is present. The girls, being of the same gender as the mother, do not completely separate from their mothers. The mothers also tend to experience their daughters as more like. Thus, the formation of identity blends with attachment felt for their mothers. Hence, the mother-daughter and woman-woman bonding becomes a growth-fostering medium with empathy as an important nutrient.

This historical necessity gained further significance in feminist movement, which gave a call to create 'sisterhood' and saw mother-daughter bonding as an extension of woman-woman dyad. In the literary criticism, scholars and critics have explored the woman-woman dyad and mother-daughter bonding in fiction. Women often had the 'inner room' to themselves, which used to be their exclusive domain. The child narrator's mother, aunts, grandmother and other females of the household spend their spare time in their 'embroidery room'. A lot of 'feminine gossip' was exchanged here and women developed bonds of affection. The concept of female bonding cannot be fully applied to the Indian sociocultural matrix as seen by Western scholars. As VrindaNabar points out, there is a significant difference between the Western and Indian female bonding, though the basic nature of female bonding is similar around the world. The concept of female bonding, which Western

feminists emphasized, has operated in societies for a very long time, but its special nature is conditioned by the differences between the individualistic version of the West and our own perception of community-membership, may mean an intolerable loss of individual identity in the Western world's view, which the Indian may perceive as spiritually fulfilling.

The concept of female friendship, especially the mother-daughter relationship, is the central concern of recent feminist psychological studies. Devi, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, is given the cues of attaining the ideal womanhood by her grandmother through the mythological stories of Gandhari, Mansa, Amba and others. Hence, the formation of identity blends with attachment felt for their mothers. Thus, the mother-daughter and woman-woman bonding becomes a growth-fostering medium with empathy as an important nutrient.

The story of *The Thousand Faces of Night* shows how woman opposes patriarchal hegemony by developing female bonding. Female friendship between Devi and Mayamma is prominent and strength-giving. Devi is concerned for Mayamma when she is sick, but Mahesh's unconcerned remark is: "So leave her alone . . . if you fuss over her today, she'll do it more and more often". In Mayamma's suffering Devi feels one with her when she ruminates about her life in retrospect whereas Mahesh does not 'take it all too seriously'. Similarly, Devi's loneliness and her problem with Mahesh do not escape Mayamma's notice. Devi empathizes with Mayamma's life-stories. The two women, so apart in age and social standing, build a strong interactive bond between themselves. Mayamma shines as a mother figure that shows a deep understanding of Devi's emotional life. Also, when Devi's grandmother recounts to her the stories of Gandhari, Damayanti and other mythological women, her attitude, and the manipulation of events have secret messages. Women tend to be empathetically and sympathetically related towards other women.

In the patriarchal community, woman forms her own community to stand against the patriarchal forces. It is clear that woman exhibits empathic ties, a kind of cooperative devotion with the other woman and helps her through her crisis in life. This kind of helpful relationship and sympathy can be attributed to their fellow-feeling, undergoing similar experiences as members of the same community. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Parvatiamma shelters Mayamma, who is thankful to her for her charity, "I came to her with only a torn sari over my weeping flesh. She gave me this home. She gave us all a home". Similarly Devi's widowed grandmother 'collected in her old age more and more wounded refugees in her house, stray objects of charity'. Devi's cousin, Uma, molested by her father-

in-law and ill-treated by her husband, seeks shelter with her. The grandmother empathizes with the domestic problems of Gauri, the maidservant, as if they were her own. Distant relatives, having been “orphaned or deserted by philandering husbands, found in her house a warm refuge. They came and went and my grandmother never let them go empty-handed . . . with advice culled from the epics”. The grandmother in *Daughter’s Daughter* is very parallel to the grandmother in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Acquainted with the adversities of being a widow, she shield Hiruli with her brood of five, giving her two rooms to live in her house, free of cost. Hiruli calls herself grandmother’s ‘devoted Hanuman’ and tries to reimburse the gentleness by being her constant companion.

Being fully acquainted with the adversities that come in the path of their individuality, women often feel sorry for their race. Like Mayamma, the other female characters in the novel under discussion, too, show deep concern over their troubles and at the same time extends help to raise them above their suffering. Mayamma does not stop Devi when she elopes with Gopal. She remembers how she was always on the threshold of tears and ‘cried like a trembling little bird’ against her shoulder. She wishes her to go away from that state of suffering. It is Mayamma’s empathy for Devi that forbids her from telling Mahesh the truth. She pleaded deafness, ignorance and old-age when he enquires about the missing Devi. Her empathy for Devi radiates into her concern for womanhood in general.

In Githa Hariharan’s novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the mother-daughter relationship is explored from yet another dimension. Sita poses to be a strict disciplinarian and Devi craves motherly touch. The only memory impinged on her mind of her tender touch is of when she once fell sick and her mother caressed her while Devi had pretended to ‘feign deep asleep’. On close reading, we discover that Sita has covert love and sympathy for her daughter. She wants Devi to be perfect in every way. Sita considers Devi as her Veena. Together with her disappointment, Devi realized that all through her life, she was running away from her trials — America, the house of Jarcand Road, Mahesh and Gopal. She had been living as a weak willed woman and she had allowed others to treat her as a puppet and they pulled her string. Devi realizes that she has made very few choices in her life. Devi knew that this time was right to make choices in her life to write off the male scripts. She knew if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned “to drift between worlds . . . a floating island detached from the solidity of mainland”. She wants to come back to her mother from whom earlier she tried to escape through her flight of the imagination and

through her identification with the male world. Suitcase in hand, Devi opened the gate and looked wonderingly at the garden, wild and over-grown, but lush in spite of its sand-choked roots. Then she quickened her footsteps as she heard the faint sounds of a veena, hesitate and child like, inviting her into the house.

Although Devi returns to offer her love, Sita is also reborn through her daughter's adventures in life. She retrieves her lost self by returning to her music and to her veena. Sita has been the ideal wife, daughter-in-law and mother. When her ideal becomes ineffective and void, she is ready for self-examination. "She sat before the relic from her past, the broken veena, freshly dusted, and waited for Devi to come back to her". The inviting call of veena to Devi suggests a restoration of new positive relationship with mother, herself and the renewal of itself. Both Devi and Sita have liberated themselves from the pressures of feminine role-play to attain a free creative individuality. Now for both of them it is self, the genderless principal who is neither male nor female that is in quest of selfhood. Devi admires her strong and self-willed mother. Sita and Devi share one thing in common. Both are strong willed. But as a critic asserts, in one case, 'this becomes a strength to live by, in the other, it becomes a venom to poison the life force'. Devi empathizes with her mother for her strong resistance to patriarchy when she broke her veena to satisfy her in-laws. But her sacrifice was never the sacrifice of the weak. It had the force of a rebellion. However, in the bargain, what she lost was her own comfort, privacy and needs. study, too, exhibits deviously her affection to her mother in dictating the novel.

CONCLUSION

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, three types of suffering women characters recur with subtle changes. To the first type belongs the housemaid Mayamma –the traditional woman who believes that her place is with her husband and family. Whatever be her troubles, she does not speak. In this sense, she respects the traditional religious ethos and confirms to the Manu code that the woman should be under control of the father in the maidenhood the husband in the youth and sons during her old age. Though Mayamma as a mother or mother-in-law cannot take control over family because traditionally, it is supposed that a bride is not to have a voice of her own. In a traditional culture, those women can be happy who blindly accept the roles it assigns them.

The second type of woman suffers converse of the traditional type. Here, the woman is bolder, and rebellious. She cannot conform to the Sita's version of womanhood. Such kind of woman is Devi, the protagonist who rejects the traditional roles of woman and rebel against patriarchal society. She left her husband Mahesh and her lover musician, Gopal and decides to live an independent life with her widow mother Sita.

The third type of women narrated is the woman in between. Most of the ShashiDeshpande's heroines belong to this category. This woman is neither traditional nor modern in her ideas and practice. She faces troubles and suffers a lot in her life and also pay a price to get adjusts in the patriarchal society. But in the end of the novel, she realizes herself and survives independently. Devi's mother Sita belongs to this category of woman in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. These three women — Sita, Devi and Mayamma manage to survive by making their female choices and fought against the troubles in life. Not cease to fed up or sorrow, not committing suicide like Anita Desai's characters, they prove the strength of their womanhood by their very act of survival. Hence, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is not only about the confrontation of tradition and modernity, the conflict between the 'old' stories and 'new' ones that was well-spoken.

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