

Unveiling Multiplicity: Postmodern Readings of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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ABSTRACT

The postmodern era saw a significant rise in the prominence and influence of women novelists in Indian English fiction. The second phase of women authors, belonging to the period of post-independence achieved a specific maturity in outlining socio-psychological issues of women showing a steady advancement from modernism to postmodernism. The novel of this period exhibited the entire of the Indian ethos that was resonating with the components of multiculturalism and cosmopolitanism. The emergence of Indian women fiction writers in English altogether grabbed the eye of the world during the postmodern period. These writers use their words against male macho common in the artistic world uncovering the facts of interior and exterior world. The modernists in the majority of their works have endeavoured to show a fragmented perspective of human life in gloomy way, while the postmodernists as opposed to regretting the fragmentation of life have endeavoured to commend it in their works. Githa Hariharan is a novelist who has taken an interest in gender related issues in Indian culture in an engaged manner and reaped benefits out of her industrious ordeal. By combining Indian mythology and modern elements of Indian culture, Githa Hariharan has succeeded in producing a postmodern novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. This content presents us with three ladies whose different but similar stories cut crosswise over ages and cross boundaries of rank and class for a situation of great female bonding. This Paper will give a glimpse on the Postmodernistic perspectives in the chosen novel.

Keywords: gender inequality, identity crisis, myth, mythological characters, women characters in Indian English fiction

Indian writing in English has commended unstinted admiration in both home and abroad and is now in its full swing. It has carved out a new track, a new vision – a vision that is replete with unanswering faith and hope, myths and traditions, customs and rites etc. If we lunge deep into the works of the Indian stalwarts of English fiction, it is revealed that their works are not an imitation of English literary pattern but highly original and intensely Indian in both theme and spirit. Post – Independent India has been making quick strides in the field of science and technology. There has been an admirable economic growth in India in recent times. So, the novel proved to be an effective medium for the reflection of the spirit of the age, encompassing the bitter and sweet realities of the period.

The sudden spirit of creative writing in the eighties reflects the sense of awareness of the plurality of the nation. It transcends the east – west conflict and portrays the new Postcolonial India with its evolving outlook, which is essentially a blend of tradition and modernism. It reveals the cosmopolitan outlook of the new generation who strives to strike a balance between the inherited traditional values and imbibed foreign culture.

Women novelists have played a crucial and momentous role in enhancing the quality and quantity of the Indian English Fiction. They have further added the woman's perspective and feministic dimensions to the novels. In fact, the works by women writers constitute a major segment of the contemporary Indian Writing in English. Today women are seen establishing their identity in almost all walks of life and they have heralded a new consciousness in the realm of literature too.

Githa Hariharan has a place with the new age of Indian writers who have earned increased reception and readership for Indian English Literature. As a writer, she is completely occupied with human condition which to her is the most essential aspect of writing, particularly literature.

The utilization of fantasy and myth in her books is both a piece of her narrative style just as of her enthusiasm for narrating. For Hariharan, narrating transforms into a helpful tool for the recreation of the past with the aim of making it progressively significant for the present. This becomes as one of her major concerns as a writer. Her utilization of folklore and myth is anything but a cognizant choice as she lets us know. The core of the novel comes out first, then comes the mythology which lends itself as a methodology to make 'a small space spacious.'

Postmodernism has discharged art from the prohibitive assumption and elitist hierarchies. It has supported a few marginalised perspectives. It has provoked such branches as subaltern studies, multiculturalism, diaspora and others. Leslie Fiedler, Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Ihab Hassan, Susan Sontag, Linda Hutcheon and others have contributed abundantly to the propagation of postmodernism.

The major characteristics of postmodernism are celebration of the fracture, questioning of identities like race, sex, ethnicity, feeling of estrangement, distrust about establishments of power, authority, interest for absurdity in the

utilization of parody, pastiche and irony, magic realism, obscuring of genres, playing with conventional form, science fiction, western, erotic literature, popular art presented through dismissal of elitism, resistance to dismissal of metanarratives, mini-narratives favoured, practices, the past visited however with irony, selfreflexivity, narcissism, globalization of economics, industrialism, utilization of college music, video, TV, web and different types of electronic media, dystopian views and pop fictions through hybridity of styles.

In 1992, she released her debut novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. In 1993, it was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for the best debut novel. The book re-defines the lives of women who are always trying to carve out a place for themselves. Through legendary Indian tales such as Gandhari, Amba, Ambalica, Damayanti, and others, it is also a rewriting of tradition and a defiance of man-made rules.

Githa Hariharan creates characters that have a postmodern sensibility and style of thinking. Devi, for example, from *The Thousand Faces of Night*, exemplifies postmodern sensibility. The character rejects Mayamma and Baba's conventional beliefs, as well as traditional women such as Gandhari, Savitri, and Amba, but it deconstructs and redefines metanarratives. When she discovers that her husband Mahesh lacks love and is solely concerned with his business, she divorces him and chooses to spend her time with Gopal, a musician. When she learns Gopal is just interested in music, she leaves him and returns to her mother's home. She rejects conventional philosophies and ideologies. As a result, she fights hard to overcome her marginalisation and establish her own identity and respect.

Githa Hariharan's work demonstrates that she is a postmodern Indian writer through her use of various novelistic methods and postmodern viewpoints. She utilises postmodern methods in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* to disrupt conventional metanarratives of femininity, patriarchy, and so on. Intertextual allusions from epics such as *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata*, *The Puranas*, and others have been used. Gandhari, Dhrtarashtra, NalaDamayanti, Amba, Bhishma's tale, legend of Jaydeva and Padmavati, Purandaradasa, and lines from Geet Govinda are among the legendary characters she has used. She's also used the postmodern method of magical realism in her work. Myths, legends, fairy tales, fantasy, fables, fragmented non-linear and multiple narratives, pastiche, metafiction, temporal distortion, irony, and so on have all been utilised by her. The writer is able to give voice to the marginalised voices of women via the aforementioned postmodern fiction methods. Every one of her books is unique and yet a common strand can be found among them such as the postmodern element.

In one way, the novel is focused on a lonely woman Devi in three phases. In the first phase, the novel deals about the life of Devi before marriage. The second phase of the novel is a clear portrayal of Devi's existence with her better half. The third phase of the novel highlights the protagonist's returning to her mother's home. Each part of this novel is an illustration of each phase of an Indian woman. The main character is Devi, a young woman who comes back from America to make an unsatisfactory marriage. Sita is her mother, a moderately aged woman who attempts to connect the difficult gap between convention and modernity. At that point Mayamma, an old family maid in Devi's husband's home, indicates Devi that marriage can possibly succeed if the woman consents to suffer torment without hesitation.

In an Indian conventional family, myths and legends have a remarkable spot as they verbally and orally transmit them from one generation to other generation. The collection of these myths and legends in India are called 'Puranas'. Githa Hariharan, originating from a conventional Brahmin Hindu family might have been familiar with these fantasies and she splendidly mixes the legend and reality in the modern life. Indian woman more often does not make a fuss over her own bliss and solace as much as she delivers herself to the errand of making others happy and furthermore maintaining the custom and traditions. Sita and Mayamma are the agents of Indian conventional women. The modern woman does not discover any sense in being passive. It does not interest her creative ability to be a suffering and conciliatory person. A woman with modern standpoint may try to achieve personal autonomy and satisfaction yet in such an endeavour, she may float anchorless for need of perfect option in contrast to customary qualities for which Devi is the best example.

The tale is woven with the considerations of women, their issues, their place in the Indian culture, legends, stories, tales, superstitions, religion, marriage, family, love, connections, and so on and so forth. The epic highlights and investigates the uniqueness between the real and the mythical status of women in the Indian culture. This enables the writer to bring out the torment and, enduring in the lives of these women as they take part in the lonely and troublesome fight for self-assertion. Githa Hariharan utilizes a method that keeps running as a coupling string through the entirety of her works "that of reinterpreting myth and legend in the service of themes and issues dearest to her heart. She makes her concerted use of myth and folk tale to enlarge the space of the lives of "real" people, especially women." (Meenakshi, Bharat. 2003. P.112)

Devi is the focal character in whom the development of the heroine is exhibited. She experiences an enigmatic mental impact of legendary or mythological characters of her grandma. The legendary characters are deeply rooted in the recollections of Devi. She accepts herself in those legendary characters. She starts her adventure of life from the day she chooses to return home from America to the day she returns to her mother towards the end of the novel. In the center, the writer constructs the story with numerous occurrences from Devi's life, accounts of Pati her grandma, Mayamma her in law's house keeper, and Baba her father-in-law. The narratives are related to real life. Pati's stories are legends or myth; Baba's portrayal is the woman's ideal job. They are intentioned to be included in the story to make it more meaningful. The major focus of the story is Devi's existence with all the legendary mythical stories, every one of these accounts is indistinguishable piece of the novel as it discusses what will occur in Devi's life and picture reality of a woman's destiny in a man-controlled society. The accounts fluctuate with ladies like Gandhari, Parvati, Sita and a

woman wedded to a snake that are respectful to their spouses, and with ladies like Kritya, Amba who make progress toward their retribution. They give two particular perspectives to ladies, one to be passive and submissive, the other defiant and rebellious. At the end of the day, it is the survival of the woman which is significantly shown through the female characters of the novel.

There are social and cultural connections to Myth, they are:

“A system of hereditary stories which were believed to be true by a particular cultural group and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by people conduct their lives.” (M.H. Abrams. 2007. P. 178)

Myths and legends have representative articulations which help to set up significant estimations of a culture. Actually, myths remain loaded with values that clarify much about human nature. Myth guarantees moral direction and solace that improves life. This is the motivation to revive and restore the legends and myths of a society. Myths fill in as a superior way to comprehend the life-style of predecessors. Traditional legends and myths are talked about as texts to associate them to the contemporary circumstances or setting. Legend or a myth can have a superior interpretation when the setting of a legend, the way of life it originated from, the person who told it, when and for what purpose is known. Despite the fact that legends or myths which have a place with different societies can't be completely comprehended, it doesn't imply that it stays irrelevant. They are the explanations of the universe and how to live in it. Legends or myths have rich emblematic, figurative and, narrative appeal. In the postmodern world individuals trust that legends or myths exist in a new, consolidated, and restored forms. In the Indian setting, here individuals are still related with religious customs, belief systems, culture and conventions. Along these lines, Legends or myths are the best emblematic assets to impart.

These stories have characteristics that make them distinctly different from legends and folk tales. They are mostly symbolic tales and distant past which may be connected to belief systems of contemporary world and may also serve to direct social action and values. In his book *The Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives*, William Bascom says, "Myth is often sacred in itself, and it is always an object of belief. The legend deals with human beings, preferably heroes and their supernatural experiences and is regarded as a true description." (Bascom 1965, P. 15)

In conclusion, one can say that in so far as revisiting techniques in postmodern and postcolonial writing attract our thoughtfulness regarding the capability of exposing the authorities of high classes, they do have esteem and keep on drawing the attention of the critiques. These re-works stimulate the creative energy of the postmodern authors and power the readers to look at and power certain paradigm changes.

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