

Tradition to Modernity in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*

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ABSTRACT

Literature plays an important role in creating awareness, by mirroring the realities of life. Novels by Indian English writers begin with the exploration of the fictional contours within which the writers operate the protagonist's attitudes, motivations and pursuits. They use novel as the effective vehicle to communicate a creative experience, evoking and touching the profound thoughts in and about human life. Githa Hariharan, one of the contemporary women writers of India, depicts the transforming image of woman through her conservative women characters in her novels from the present and post-modern eras. Her novel *Fugitive Histories* is a journey back in time, juxtaposing the multifaceted Indian women and their lives of three generations. The traditional role is carried out by Bala, the protagonist Mala's grandmother. Bala is a pity victim with no will of her own. Her only option is to suffer in quiet. *Fugitive Histories* is noted for the presentation of Mala for her revolt against social conventions and parental authority. It is a novel for times as chaotic as the present and all happens in the name of religion. Githa Hariharan's novels reflect the present Indian society. This paper is focused to observe the characterization of 'modern' women struggling to get rid of the trouble of self-consciousness and the tremendous change of tradition, transition and modernity to prove that marriage does not remain a holy tie between husband and wife; it has become a contract to live together, till it suits each other.

Key Words: *Oppression, Multifaceted, Conventional Woman, Tradition, Cultural, Modernity, New Woman.*

The image of women in Indian culture, civilization and tradition is as varied as the geological, chronological and other power that shapes them. Women who consist of half of the world's inhabitants are ridiculously not allowed to be treated as equal as with men in all field of human movement. Literature plays an important role in creating awareness, by mirroring the realities of life, providing women, with a voice to combat the forces of oppression within gender relations in the society. Feminism in Indian English literature, accustomed to the feminist readings based on "gender" to the social dimension of texts, it appears to invite feminist readings based on "gender." It's a term used to characterize women's status inside local patriarchies, as well as the psychological harm they suffer as second-class citizens in a repressive social system. Women's writing, of course, is not separate from other types of social criticism. The examination of social concerns and political difficulties focuses first and mainly on the status of women, exposing how these challenges are experienced by a specific set of people in that culture. Women's texts have a specific role to play in a postcolonial situation.

Novels by Indian English writers begin with the exploration of the fictional contours within which the writers operate the protagonist's attitudes, motivations and pursuits. They use novel as the effective vehicle to communicate a creative experience, evoking and touching the profound thoughts in and about human life. Githa Hariharan, one of the contemporary Indian women authors, represents real life of Indian womanhood for a significant sector. She is one of the contemporary women writers of India, depicts the transforming image of woman in the present and the post contemporary era through her conservative women characters. In her novels, Githa Hariharan observes the characterization of 'modern' women struggling to overcome their self-consciousness, as well as the tremendous change of tradition, transition, and modernity, to demonstrate that marriage is no longer a holy tie between husband and wife, but rather a contract to live together until it suits each other.

The women in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* are paying attention to the dual role of their characters; they are tattered between traditional customs and modern values; they struggle between their quest for independence and liberation and their care for nurture; between her multifaceted role as a

daughter, a wife and a mother and her self-respect as a human being. In spite of Githa Hariharan's women are instance of social and economic demands and discrepancies; they elevate themselves to cross the boundaries and barriers of bigotry.

Fugitive Histories reflects the present status of the Indian society. Her concern is to bring out the idiotic followings and inequality of conjugal and societal life through this novel. This novel is about people picking up threads from the point where man-made upheavals have left them. Githa Hariharan has exposed the current status of Indian women by portraying her characters realistically both sensitively as well as actually in her novels. Her novels expose a fresh examination of the role and rank of women in the contemporary Indian society. *Fugitive Histories* is a travel back in time, to revisit the multifaceted Indian women and their lives through three generations.

Githa Hariharan's observations on women's treatment and lives have a tendency to raise question on the less important place they have been given by society. The muted problems may draw into attention for eradication. H.M. Parshley, in his preface to Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* talks of women's unjust position in society. He writes as:

... since patriarchal times women have in general been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of the human race... (Parshley 9)

Women are ready to accept their archetypal female role in the past. Githa Hariharan's traditional role is carried out by Bala, the protagonist Mala's grandmother. Mala's grandfather is a bully, he had firm ideas of his life, he made rules and Bala had to follow them. As a traditional Indian woman Bala is also the follower of her husband, she is considered as an object that belonged to him, as it is true to the words of Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex*, "Women have gained only what men have been willing to grant; they have taken nothing, they have only received." (119) Githa Hariharan has pictured the joint family system in this novel as it is stated by Mala as:

...her sister Sheela and their cousins, they were no longer separate persons in that house. They were the children, a single cluster of squirming appendages. The day Mala still remembers: they were all in the 'big room' even Bala... (FH 15, 16)

Bala is a poor victim with no will of her own. Her only option is to suffer in quiet. She is revealed to be a dim-witted, meek woman who has no ill will against her husband. who never loves her but he is, 'the undisputed warden' (FH 15) Bala is generally gentle, dependent, submissive and passive within the family she is usually her husband's yes person. In the Indian context wife is sub-ordinate to man. The condition of woman is not good. This has been observed as:

The early works of Anand and Narayan are dominated by the male point of view. Both have observed, shown and given prominence to the boys in Indian families in their novels. The girls are shown as subordinate creatures. They are rarely shown in depth and come before us mainly as pictures of pity and suffering. (Shirwadkar 47)

This highlights the pattern of the Indian social structure that believes in subjugating and sublimating women in conformation to the norms of the society. In the tradition-bound patriarchal Indian community, a woman has to accept and practice the principles that the community lays down. Mala recalls the memory of her grandmother Bala's duties as a typical housewife as:

...Bala woke up in a clear, bright place. And when she went to the backyard to brush her teeth,... She drank her coffee, ... She dipped her dirty sari in a bucket of soapy water, beat it on the bathroom floor and wrung it dry, exactly as a good housewife should. She bathed struggling to wash every strand of her thick long hair. Then she took her combs, the wide toothed one for untangling knots,... (FH 21)

Githa Hariharan clearly exhibits the male chauvinism through Mala's grandfather. Often Bala was locked in the storeroom as a punishment given by her husband for climbing the roof of the house to dry her hair, the secret place for Bala to gaze at the world outside of her house. She said that, "she could still feel his shove ... She could still hear him roar through the locked door that the storeroom was the best place for her to learn how to be a respectable woman." (FH 22) Though she experienced the ill treatment of her husband she is very devoted to him and she never thought of breaking the traditions for her life in which marriage is forced to her as the natural fortune. It is, "very difficult for a woman to leave her husband however badly he might treat her." (Williams 6) The grandmother knows the feeling of a woman's self identity.

Fugitive Histories is noted for the presentation of Mala for her revolt against social conventions and parental authority. Mala marries a Muslim Asad. Her marriage to Asad is a sign of her turning away

from the traditional ways. Githa Hariharan illustrates that contemporary women have started to revolt against the old accustomed way of life. through her protagonist Mala. Mala's marriage with Asad is considered to be a disgraceful treatment to her parents. Her father asks, "How can you want to marry him?" (FH 69) He advised her that it would be a problem throughout her life time. Bala is the only member of the family who has not reacted to Mala's marriage with a Muslim Asad. Bala is very practical, once Mala and Asad came to see the bedridden grandmother, she was very happy to see her revolutionary grand daughter. She blessed them and says, "...Don't come here again, this house is a ruin. ... 'I have to go, Mala. I don't have time to look out for you'" (FH 77) she is to die but she is very proud of Mala for breaking the traditional customs.

Her father shows the letter to Mala received from her grandfather which reflects his disapproval for allowing their daughter back to Bombay. He felt that this will ground a way to trap a love marriage. Mala's parents' disapproves of the marriage not because of his religion. They were of the opinion that there will be a lot of habitual and traditional changes. This can be understood by the words of her father, 'Think of the difference!' and he also says, "It'll always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It won't go away just because you're married." (FH 69) Her mother wails her by distinguishing the difference in food, prayer and customs. The entire family's reasonable objections are taken by Mala and Asad to test their ability to bear the terrible burden of living what happens when a Hindu and a Muslim fall in love.

Githa Hariharan raises the disparity between the families. The young couple had a bitter experience during their first visit to Mala's family. Mala's mother scolds her and the cook has been instructed to serve Asad's food on a white enamel plate which is used to serve food for the woman in the household at the time of their menstrual period and it is like a basin to feed the pet. This kind of discrimination is one of the old practices of India to differentiate the caste system. But in India today the transformations that took place tackle the old way of life with tradition and culture which is followed in India with repressive authority. The dawn of a new custom and system became mandatory to modern women.

Githa Hariharan's novels reflect the present Indian society. In twenty first century, marriage does not remain a holy tie between husband and wife; it has become a contract to live together, till it suits each other. Even in arranged marriage now young generation does not accept the proposal of their marriage blindly. It has been observed that inter-caste marriage is greeted nowadays and love marriage changes the traditional concept of arranged marriage. In some families, parents have started to give priority to their sons and daughters choice about their life partner before engagement. This type of transformation and the factors like migration, mobility, money, economic pressure, extra-marital relationship, loneliness of family members cause fragmentation in the family. Therefore, survival is of supreme importance for every woman.

Githa Hariharan plays a vital role in the history of Indian English fiction. It is very clear that the age of the writer is undoubtedly most multifaceted period in the India history of civilization. Sudden progress and slight changes that classify the identity of woman in particular and of the individual in general. *Fugitive Histories* teaches womanhood to survive beyond the death of their sons, husbands, brothers and fathers.

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