

Cultural Aspects in the Select Novels of Githa Hariharan

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Abstract

In the Indian context, writers are in a position to reveal the culture of their society. Only through the works of the novelist, the readers are able to understand the cultural, social background of their society. So this becomes common among the writers of Indian English Literature. The women writers also portrayed the background of their society. Several feminists have realized that the subject of woman's emancipation should not be reduced to the contradictions between man and woman. In order to liberate herself, the woman needs to empower herself to confront different institutional structures and cultural practices that subject herself to patriarchal domination and control. This research paper analyses how the Indian English fiction writer, Githa Hariharan uses the genre fiction as a medium to transmit the culture to learners exhibiting the Indian myths and shows how woman survive even in the odd situations of her life.

Keywords:

Indo-Anglian Literature is of most recent origin. An Indian writer is known by his writings which were about India and life of an Indian living outside. Famous authors have earned a position through their writing experience. Such an Indian author is the nation's pride. Indian authors have influenced an entire generation with the writing. Over the years, Indian writers have contributed to the world of English Literature. Indian authors in English deserve a special mention as they have portrayed India; its rich, cultural heritage and societal norms to readers in the west.

Since they hail from varied educational and cultural backgrounds, Indian authors present, a kaleidoscopic overview of the vibrant nation. Their writings have influenced readers from all walks

of life. The Indian writers did not need foreign writers to portray India. In the past few years many prominent writers have made their mark on cultural and social issues. Eminent writers like Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri etc. have given Indian English novel a whole new level.

Among the new writers Githa Hariharan is one of the prominent writers. She is one of the most prolific woman writers of India. She was born in Coimbatore in 1954. She is a social activist known for her care and concern for women. The works of Githa Hariharan include novels, short stories, articles and columns and also the essays of different topics that interest her. She published her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* in 1992 and was awarded commonwealth writers' prize in 1993. This novel was followed by *The Ghost of Vasu Master* (1994). Her third novel *When Dreams Travel* appeared in 1999 and it was quickly followed by *In Times of Siege* (2003). Besides novels, Githa Hariharan has also authored a collection of short stories *The Art of Dying* (1993) and a book of short stories *The Winning Team* (2004).

Githa Hariharan thus enjoys a crucial place in the history of Indian English fiction. On one hand she is an integral part of the larger part of the tradition, on the other hand, she is an important cord in the tradition of Indian women writers. Githa Hariharan thus enjoys a crucial place in the history of Indian English fiction. On one hand she is an integral part of the larger part of the tradition, on the other hand, she is an important cord in the tradition of Indian women writers.

The age of Githa Hariharan is undisputedly the most complex phase of the cultural history of India. The advent of the television and the consequent expansion of the news channels and entertainment channels is one most outstanding phenomenon that sped up the transitions. No transitional phase in the cultural history of India has been as forcefully accelerated as this. The spread of education is also a factor of great significance which took place during the last two decades. The education was not confined to make people literate but it had new functions to perform. The spread of technical education and management studies reshaped the mind of common Indians with handsome participation of women in reshaping the cultural history of India.

All the five novels that hit the literary horizon are written during this tumultuous era of Indian socio-cultural history. The crisis to which her characters are subjected is the crisis hovering over the society.

In the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, she wove together the lives of three women belonging to three generations in Madras in the south of India. The book shows how they are torn between tradition and modernity in trying to shape their lives in their own ways. Devi, the protagonist of the novel was brought up in a traditional Hindu family. Being in traditional background she overcomes her problems and she acted as modern woman. In this novel Githa Hariharan shows the cultural aspects of our country. She says about story telling in this novel. Devi's grandmother, Baba and Mayamma are some of the persons who tell stories in the novel. Githa Hariharan took stories from Ramayana and Mahabharata. She says about the stories of less important

character like Amba, Ganga, etc. Githa Hariharan through these women characters says the culture of our society. Her characters also stood as an example.

Githa Hariharan's another novel *In Times of Siege* has a real, personal background. In 1995, she tried to open an account at a bank for her son, who was eleven years old, but it was told that she could do that only with her husband's signature. The decision was based on the Hindu law, which at the time was still in force, that a mother has a right of guardianship over her children only when the father is dead. Together with her husband, she decided to take it to court and she won the case.

The fact that the Indian court changed the constitution in favour of women in 1999, saying that 'a mother is undoubtedly a child's natural guardian', now counts as a milestone in the history of women's liberation in India. The novel *In Times of Siege* is a mirror up to Indian society which is increasingly marked by fundamentalism, hate, mistrust and censorship. In this novel Githa Hariharan says about relation between a student and a teacher. The teacher is Shiv and student is Meena. This novel also reflects the culture aspects of the society. Here, Meena is the daughter of Shiv's childhood friend. Once Meena hurt her leg and she stayed with Shiv. In olden days a woman staying with a man alone is consider a mistake. But, Meena being a modern girl get rid of the old belief and stayed with Shiv. She helped Shiv when he was in a trouble. This novel is yet another example of cultural aspects.

The next novel is *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Like the previous this novel also says about the relationship between a teacher and a student. Here the student is Mani and the teacher is retired school master Vasu. Here Githa Hariharan says about the feelings of a retired person who is living alone. Vasu master even after retirement does not stay with his sons. She lived alone in the village. To keep himself occupied he took classes for the students in his home. One among the student is Mani. He is different from others. It is a challenge for Vasu master to teach Mani. Here also Githa Hariharan uses the technique of story - telling. Vasu master remembers his mother, grandmother and also his wife while he was telling stories. Githa Hariharan implies the method of story – telling to reveal the culture of her society.

The novel *When Dreams Travel* another novel of Githa Hariharan. This novel revolves around the life of two sisters and two brothers. Once again Githa Hariharan took the method of story – telling in this novel. The sisters Shahrzad and Dunyazad to save their lives and the kingdom married valiant brothers. To live their life, they started to tell the interesting stories which entertained the brothers. Her Githa Hariharan reveals how a king would behave in their period. Similarly, she also says how a woman would solve the problems.

A detailed study of the novels of Githa Hariharan acquaint us with the base realities of emerging social set up of India without any emotional or ideological veneer. Through all her novels Githa Hariharan reveals the cultural aspects of the society.

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