

Psychological Review of the Book “The Thousand Faces of Night”

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Abstract: Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* portrays women as vulnerable individuals craving for love and understanding, while all the time being victims of their own gender. It basically articulates the problems of women, the basics of Indian Mythology and yokes together the various vicissitudes faced by the women of the puranas. It is the life struggle of Devi, who was returned from America after completing her degree and confined in the prison-housed of arranged marriage, the constricting environment of which make her feel trapped. The life of the Woman Devi was supported and exemplified by taking the stories of other women who were entrapped in such male power structures and their dealing and coping mechanisms in the existing circumstances.

Keywords: Gender Roles; Indian Culture; Power Structures; Marriage Hood.

INTRODUCTION

Devi’s story is complimented by the stories of four other women: her grand-mother, her mother, her mother-in-law and her servant. All these women, each in her own way, have been both a victim and a survivor. Their live has been scarred by suffering, sacrifice, injustice, and disappointment and yet they are undefeated, unbroken, and strong.

The journey of Devi begins when she returns from America as her widowed mother kept on writing her letters in which she spoke about her unspoken message of loneliness which brought Devi back to India. Devi used to have a friend, named, Dan in America who liked her lot and give her a marriage proposal but Devi refuses as she realizes that her mother needs her and she might not be able to welladjust in the culture of American society.

Though she has come from a brave new world, she realizes that it is difficult to change the old order with her radical ideas and her dream like to visit America ends as soon as she is in India. Devi married Mahesh, a regional manager in a multinational company who stays out of the town mostly and comes to home once in a month for a week or so. After his return back to the town, Devi felt the most alienated and lonely and tries to fit herself in the role of a wife and daughter-in-law just as her mother did years ago. She had everything but she finds something was lacking in

her life which was obviously the love and emotional understanding from Mahesh who just recognized her as a wife who has certain duties to perform in the business of arranged marriage.

Now the marriage has become torture for Devi and it hangs like a knife above her neck, where she completely lost her self-esteem and choice and just became a wife, a daughter-in-law with no other image. Her identity lost in the system of marriage and she was no better for doing anything other than the household duties and as a source of producing son.

Most of the time, Devi has nothing to do at home. She spends her time wandering in the house, talking to Baba, listening to stories of Mayamma, the servant maid, trying her hand at painting and being the perfect hostess. After Baba’s departure to New York, Devi was alone in the house with Mayamma and Baba’s orphaned books.

From the childhood, Devi has listened to her grandmother’s mythological stories of Gandhari, Parvari, Sita, and snake woman who followed the footsteps of her husband, and the stories of ferocious women like Kritya and Amba who take their revenge. These stories become so much part of her life that she begins to think that she was the very incarnation of all the avenging deities.

Finally, Devi decided to walk away out of Mahesh’s humiliating atmosphere when she falls for the Hindustani singer Gopal, who lives in her neighborhood. Devi eloped with Gopal as she doesn’t want to live a life like that of a Mayamma

in or Sita who took all their husband's violent actions and survives with them anyhow. She doesn't want to become a self-sacrificial woman.

Initially, Devi's relationship with Gopal is warm and affectionate, and to some extent he succeeded in giving Devi what Mahesh hadn't. But the moment he lifts his masks, Devi discerns that Gopal was no better than Mahesh.

Lastly, Devi thought that her walking out of Mahesh's life is her 'first real journey'. But after her disappointment with Gopal, she decided to run no further but to return to her mother to start a new lease of life.

PERTINENT ISSUES RELATED TO GENDER

Each chapter of the book carries unique theme with itself, as one chapter cater to certain concept while the other one had completely different thought around which the chapter is represented.

The central theme of the Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* revolves around Marriage. The author talked about the issues that the protagonist, Devi faced in dealing with the men and society, problems and inner tensions that a woman had to face in her life. It was the story of a girl, Devi who studied abroad in the modernized and westernized society, came back to India and got arranged married within the social structure of male dominating society where she cannot identify herself and felt miserable and indifferent.

The text portrays the lives of other female characters that faced similar kind of problems as Devi because of their gender and come out to be strong women at the end of their life. Basically, the author described how well those women faced challenges and develops their own unique identity during the course of their life.

The author elaborated on the idea of gender as the cause of women suffering and positioning in the society. Due to their gender, the life of woman changes after her marriage because now the husband and the male dominating society demands totally different role and responsibilities to be performed by them. Now their only duty remains is to look after their husbands, in-laws, household work, and producing son. Nowhere in the text, has

the word daughter been used for referring to the birth of the new child in the family.

Throughout the text, it was seen that the women has to do all the sacrifices in her life beginning from the very birth to adapting the culture of her husband's home. After marriage, there remain no self-identity of the woman except being as the vehicle of carrying household load and performing the role of pure and complete wife. Satisfying the needs of her husband both physical, social, and emotional become the only job of the women. Her wills are nowhere taken into consideration. Whether she likes to do certain task or not, she anyhow have to have to do without making any complains and demands.

All the characters presented in the story became the victim of their own gender and lose their sense of self and identity. In the Indian society, the womanhood refers to faithful wife, who left behind all her willingness and interests and devotes her life entirely to her husband. This is the life that the woman should have to live after her marriage according to the mythologies of the Indian culture.

The men has all the freedom to work according to their own choice and willingness, but the woman has the only role to perform that was been the wife. Such thoughts are represented by the author that is entirely related to the gender. In some way or other, the female characters of the text faced some challenges that are wholly due to their gender.

LEARNINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The texts directly showed differences in the roles that emerge completely because of the gender. How the women in the male power structure society were required to perform certain duties, roles, and responsibilities was presented in the text. The author took life examples of few women of different decades to show the consistent gender differences present in the Indian culture since ages.

After reading the text, and understanding the central issues that the author tried to put light on by taking the life examples of several women characters, the sense that I can make out of this text was that how in the Indian society the woman got trapped in the cages of four-walled husband's

house and how their role, responsibilities and choice of life has been predetermined by the male power structures of the society. They lose their identity, become the tool for completing household tasks, and producing son. But the protagonist, Devi doesn't follow the same path and took her own way in finding her self-image and identity and left behind all the societal obligations. She left her husband, Mahesh and eloped with Gopal and soon realizes that he was no better than Mahesh. Then she finally decided to return back to her mother, Sita and begin a life anew. This depicted her courage of living her life according to her own norms and values.

The author was trying to present that a woman should not always need to follow rules and regulations in their married life and must follow their own path when things don't go the way they wanted. Self-realization and self-esteem should be the major craves for an individual and when he/she realizes that they aren't able to attain their self-worth, it is better to leave that place instead of being a victim for a lifelong.

Through the text, I can relate to certain other life experiences where gender has its own consequences. Like protagonist's mother, mother-in-law, and servant maid, gender has been the cause of several issues that the woman has to face irrespective of their family background, education, class, and caste. Certain roles they are expected to perform in anyhow whether they are willing to do so or not. This burden makes the gender an issue especially for Indian women.

Furthermore, the text represented the life of a woman after marriage. The protagonist, Devi was an American return yet she had no choice of changing the old age beliefs and norms except adopting the long-lived values of her husband's mind and carrying forward this institution of marriage. The only choice she can make was to escape from all of that and begin a new life but cannot change the thinking and mind-set of her educated husband.

'Motherhood', carries certain myths with itself as depicted from the life stories of protagonist and other female characters. The actual worth of a woman comes when she bears the son of the family in her womb, and enters the stage of motherhood.

The in-laws and even the husband carry such a mentality that motherhood was the ultimate life stage of a woman and if you cannot become a mother, you're useless. Then you have no right to live and even properly eat. Nowhere in the text, has the word "Daughter" been used in context of admiring a new member of the family. This clearly implies that the son has been demanded from the woman.

It can be concluded that a woman has always remained the less needed part of the male power structure society. They are instructed to follow the old-age norms of their husband's family and look after all the daily needs of her family. They have no identity of their own, they are viewed just as the source of doing all the household chaos and cannot do anything from their own sense of will and choice. Although, they performed all the duties expected out of them yet they are least understood by their in-laws family members and continuously kept craving for love and emotional understanding and support.

The question arises in my mind that why women have to suffer all those challenges? Are men responsible for such causes or the power lies somewhere else? It was deniable to say that men do not suffer, they do suffer, they face challenges as well and somewhere become the victim of their own gender. Then why all the attention has been given to women? Why people never talk about disadvantages of being men and advantages of being women? It somehow becomes silent when we talk about disadvantages of being men. All these questions and queries emerged when I tried to critique on the text. And finally realized that the text continuously portrays the positioning of women in the Indian society and doesn't give a glimpse on the life of a man in the Indian culture from the time immemorial.

Furthermore, the sense can be made from the text that understanding the positioning of women in the Indian culture cannot be fully done until and unless we put a light on male placing in the Indian society. Thus, the author represented the text in a very beautiful manner, but somewhere it looked incomplete to me in a sense that gender has been equally a cause of certain problems both for man and woman.

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