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INTRODUCTION

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Chapter I : Introduction

I : i : Indian Women Novelists in English : A Brief Survey :

The History of Indian women novelists in English begins with Toru Dutt who died at the early age of twenty, lesser than John Keats of the Romantic School of Poetry. The novels to her credit are Bianca and Le Journal de Mademoiselle Arvers which deal with autobiographical elements. Her novels beautifully project the agony and catharsis arising out of sisterly love and bereavement. Though the characters are Spanish and French, the delineation is entirely Indian, full of love and affection, sincerity and purity.

Cornelia Sorabji, another great figure in the realm of Indian English novel, is known for her famous works Love and Life Behind the Purdah (1901), Sun-Babies in the Child Life of India (1904) and Between the Twilight (1908). In her opinion, women are no longer objects of pleasure but a reservoir of all the healthy values of life. She presents realistic and miserable picture of the Indian women.

After the second world war, the history of Indian women novelists gets a new track, a new vision. The novelists like Kamala

Markandaya and Ruth Praver Jhabvala are the most outstanding personalities in the field of social and artistic novels. They provided new insight into the status and attitude of women in society. They developed their own style of expression and differ from each other in portraying the characters. The well-known woman novelist in Post Independence era is Kamala Markandaya whose first novel Nectar in a Sieve (1954) deals with a realistic picture of Indian villagers, their customs and cultures, rites and traditions. It is the first Indian novel in English where there is presentation of the realistic picture of rural India, famine, drought, excessive rain, superstitions, hunger and starvation. In this respect, Shivkumar comments on her novels:

Of all the contemporary Indian novelists writing in English, Kamala Markandaya is the most accomplished in respect of her authentic portrayal of the Indian scene. What distinguishes her most intensively from other Indian novelists is her acute awareness of a gradual shift in

values that has been taking place in this subcontinent during the past two decades or so.¹

Kamala Markandaya realistically presents the burning problem of a tannery which is the root cause of the tragedy of the peasant families. Nathan is victim of tannery, nature, landlordism etc. The novel presents an exploitation of tenant farmers by rich landlords. It is seen through the lamentation of Nathan:

Now the landlord can wring from us his money and care not for misery he evokes, for indeed it would be difficult for any man to see another starve and his wife and children as well, to enjoy the profits born of such travail.²

Markandaya's another novel is Some Inner Fury (1957) which shows the protagonist Mira's recollection of the past, her emotions, passions and ecstasies. Her another novel, A Silence of Desire (1961), unfolds the layers of spiritual reality and mystic vision of India. She treats the problem of Indian immigrants in her

The Nowhere Man (1973). There is a family of Indian origin living in Britain. The protagonist of this novel, Shrinivas loves the land he has chosen to stay in, tries to have smooth relation with the people of this land, yet he is regarded as outsider as a black man. Her another novel The Coffey Dams (1969) is a fine blending of art and truth, feeling and form which shows the story of the British engineer who constructs a river-dam in independent India. It paints the picture of the Indo-British encounter resulting in despairs and disappointments.

Another Indian woman novelist, Ruth Praver Jhabvala who is the contemporary of Kamala Markandaya, has left imprint as a woman novelist in English. Most of her writings deal with the various shades of Indianness though she is German by birth. Her novels show urban middle class Indian life tinged with domestic problems of joint Hindu family. Her first novel, To Whom She Will (1955) presents a very beautiful picture of Indian society, its rites, customs, marriage and love with element of illicit relationships. She focuses her attention on the upper-class north Indian people who are indolent, sensuous and violently emotional. She portrays

drab realities in day to day Indian life. Her another novel The Nature of Passion (1956) deals with a modern young girl Nimmi who wanted to discard the age-old customs and rites, myths and tradition. Her The Householder (1960) is a domestic comedy which presents acute perception of remote village life as the conflicts between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. Her other important novels are Esmond in India (1958) and A Backward Place.

Nayantara Sahgal, a significant post- independence Indian woman novelist tackled down the theme of the adjustment in husband's home. Her novel Storm in Chandigarh (1965) presents how marriages break over the issues of pre-marital and extra-marital relationships. She raises the voice of protest against the practice of following one standard of morality for men and another for women. The hero of the novel, Inder believes in two codes of morality, one for himself and another for his wife though he himself is not faithful to his wife Saroj. Sahgal rejects the view that a wife is her husband's property. Sahgal, being political novelist portrays truthfully the contemporary Indian political theme, contemporary political incidents and realities. Her first

novel A Time To Be Happy (1958) has references to Congress activities and events of 1942. Her This Time of Morning is a purely political novel. Even her novel Storm in Chandigarh (1965) is about consequence of the division of Punjab into two states of Punjab and Haryana. Nayantara Sahgal seems to be leaning towards feminism. In A Situation in New Delhi, she portrays that society fails to protect women even in the university campus in the capital city of the country. Saroj in Storm in Chandigarh is ill treated by her husband for having lost her virginity before her marriage which seems from the following conversation between Inder and his wife Saroj :

“Well why did you do it?”

“I was fond of him.” she said wearily.

“and I was curious. Is that a crime?”

“Good God, didn’t you have any inhibitions, any sense of modesty?

Couldn’t your curiosity wait

till you got married?”.³

Really, Inder himself too had lost his virginity long before his marriage.

Like Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee, Anita Desai is also an important woman novelist dealing with both the negative and positive attributes of women. She handles the problem of wife's adjustment in her husband's home as well as exploration of sensibility and her writing reveals inner realities of her female characters. In this respect she says :

My writing is an effort to discover underline and convey the significance of things. I must seize upon that incomplete and seemingly meaningless mass of reality around me and try and discover its significance by plunging below the surface and plumbing the depths, then illuminating depths till they become a more lucid, brilliant and explicable reflection of the visible world.⁴

In her novels, the solution of the problem lies not in constantly finding faults with husband's behaviour but in having a positive attitude. In her best novel Cry The Peacock (1963), Anita Desai portrays the wife who is unhappy with her husband. The protagonist of novel, Cry The Peacock has heaps of complaints against her husband though he is quite good and considerate to her. Her another novel Voices in The City (1965) is written in the same vein as Cry the Peacock. In Anita Desai's novels, the husband isn't cruel, harsh or unsympathetic. Each of the wife protagonist as Monisha, Maya and Sita feel that she is not getting emotional attachment where the result is that the protagonist of Cry The Peacock kills her husband and protagonist of Voices in The City (1965) kills herself. In her another novel Where Shall We Go This Summer?, there is no change in husband until the end of the novel yet Sita comes back to line with him happily. Thus Anita Desai always wants adjustment and in her opinion it is a fact that all husbands are not inconsiderable and iron-hearted.

Santha Rama Rao appeared on the Indian English literary landscape with her novel Remember the House (1956) where she

writes of things within the range of her experiences. Jai Nirbkar's best novels are Temporary Answers (1974), A Joint Venture and Come Rain. Another women novelist Nimita Ghokale contributed to Indian women novel in English with her first work Paro Dreams of Passion where she attempts to satirise on the aspirations of women protagonists.

Manju Kapur, a professor of English in Delhi University won Commonwealth Writers Prize for her work Difficult Daughters which is her autobiographical novel. It presents a woman who considers marriage as the end of her life's journey. It is the story of Virmati who is divided between the duty towards her family and her illicit love for a married professor.

Shashi Deshpande, one of the leading women novelists appeared on the Indian English literary scene and won the prestigious Sahitya Academy Award for her novel That Long Silence (1988). In her view, woman has to realize social responsibilities and think of others though she is highly educated. Her novel The Dark Holds No Terror (1980) deals with the character of Sarita who dares to marry a man outside her caste.

Later on she realizes that she has lost her brother, mother, her husband's manhood and has become individualistic. Her another novel The Binding Vine presents woman as a wooden creature subjected to male domination. In her novel That Long Silence (1988), Shashi Deshpande makes plea to free female from the conventional male control. She portrays the pathetic condition of women in male dominated society through her novels. Her other novels are Roots and Shadows, If I Die Today and A Matter of Time.

Shobha De is famous for portraying the sexual mania of the commercial world. She is frank in narration of incidents and exploring depths of female psychology. Her first novel is Socialite Evening (1988) and other novels are Starry Night (1990), Sisters (1992), Sultry Days, Second Thought, Speed Post. She exposes through her novels the moral and spiritual breakdown of modern society in which woman longs for pleasure and wants to fly freely in the sky of freedom.

Another woman novelist is Mahasweta Devi, who appeals women that they should not be submissive and passive and should

realize their inner strength. Bharti Mukherjee and Gita Mehta are engrossed with the theme of East-west encounter. Bharati Mukherjee takes up the problem of adjustment among Indians who have been living in the west. She clearly states her aim in her novels in a recent interview :

“We immigrants have fascinating tale to relate. Many of us have lived in newly independent emerging countries which are placed by civil and religious conflicts... When we uproot ourselves from those countries and came here, either by choice or out of necessity, we suddenly must absorb 200 years of American history and learn to adapt to American society...I attempt to illustrate this in my novels and short stories. My aim is to expose Americans to the energetic voices of new settlers in this country.”⁵

In her novel Wife, she portrays Amit Dasgupta and his wife Dimple who face the problem of adjustment in their own ways. In Gita Mehata's Karma Cola, an innocent Westerner comes to India in search of Guru, gets cheated by a hypocrite.

The prominent woman novelist in modern age is Arundhati Roy. She won the Booker Prize for literature, particularly for her novel, The God of Small Things which has become world-wide fame and has been translated in to more than forty languages in the world. She is entirely homegrown Indian writer in English. The God of Small Things is auto biographical in nature which deals with Roy's own childhood days in Kerala where she lived in caste prejudiced society. It portrays different castes and classes in the most educated state like Kerala. Arundhati Roy presents the life of Keralite society, their rites, customs and traditions with new style of writing consisting ungrammatical constructions, unconventional rhythm, uninvented capitalizations. The picture portrayed in the novel is so alive that the readers sometimes feel as if the history of South India has been redrawn before them. Prof. Giliran Beer, the

Chairman of the Booker panel of Judges remarked regarding Arundhati Roy's God of Small Things :

The story she tells is fundamental as well as local. It is about love and death, about lies and laws. Her narrative crackles with riddles and yet feels its tale quite clearly. We are all engrossed by this moving novel.⁶

Her another novel is The End of Imagination which is short but revolutionary and deals with the author's strong revolt against nuclearization in India and abroad. It seems that she is antiwar and a follower of M. K. Gandhi's principles of truth and non-violence.

I : ii : Githa Hariharan : Life and Works :

Life:

Githa Hariharan, the winner of the prestigious Commonwealth Writer's Prize was born in 1954 in Coimbatore. She grew up in Bombay and Manila. She completed her B.A. in English from Bombay University and M.A. in Communications from Fairfield University, Connecticut in the United State of

America. She worked in the Public Broadcasting System in New-York before returning to India. Now she lives in Delhi with her two sons and her husband. She has worked in Bombay, Chennai, New Delhi as an editor in a publishing house before becoming a full time writer. Her works display reinterpretation of myth, tradition, fantasy and fable. Githa Hariharan has immensely contributed to the Indian English literature as there are several novels and short stories are to her credit.

Her Works : Thousand Faces of Night.

Githa Hariharan published her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night in 1992. This novel won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for the best First book in 1993. It is translated into German, French and Spanish languages. It presents a contemporary woman's journey through experiences and relationships where there is an honest examination of identity of contemporary Indian women worried by the notions of tradition, religion and caste. She has proved that a woman has to meet her fate alone through the stories of Devi, Sita and Mayamma. She brings alive the underworld of Indian women's lives, their dreams and desires. As a

woman, Shahrzad uses her words and her body not only to save her own life but to gain little more. Githa Hariharan admits in her interview with Urvashi Butalia regarding the world of women :

Since I wrote The Thousand Faces Of Night , I have been fascinated by the ways of writing about women's dreams and desires. As a woman, Shahrzad uses her words and body not only to save her own life but to gain a little more.⁷

When Devi returned to Madras to live with her widowed mother Sita, she found that her student years had not prepared her a future in India. Devi was sucked back into maternal love which could arrange a suitable marriage for her. She discovered through the eyes of Mayamma, the old family retainer in the house that key to marriage is the ability to endure. The novel brings alive the underworld of Indian women's lives through the stories of Devi, Sita and Mayamma. She has interwoven myths and metaphors. In short, the novel is the story of a young woman looking for ways in which a contemporary Indian can survive it.

When Dreams Travel :

Gitaha Hariharan's another novel When Dreams Travel (1999) is beautifully written and bears with multi-voiced narrative with mystic qualities. The novel is constructed on the archetypal Shahrzad myth in contemporary language. The novel is about the perennial desire, about an old game that is never played out-the search for love and power. There is a woman who has love but no power, a man who has power but no love, and others who don't have much of either. The story telling woman uses her words and her sexuality to save her life and the man is powerful and terrified. When curtain opens, there are four figures : two men and two women. There is the Sultan who wants a virgin every night and Sultan's brother who doesn't like darkness. There are their ambitious brides, the sisters Shahrzad and Dunyazad who aspire to be heroines. The novel is a lively blend of past and present in use of evocative language with the narration of the mutability of tales.

In Times of Siege :

In Times of Siege is Githa Hariharan's the best novel published in 2003. It is about a History teacher Prof. Shivmurthy at

Delhi University whose writings on Basava (the reformer poet) were denounced by watch-dog groups. Shivmurthy, a middle aged History professor at New Delhi University, is the hero of the novel who followed Basava's ideals. Basava was a Kannada saint poet, a social reformer in the twelfth century. He was social reformer as well as good administrator who opposed caste system. Prof Shivmurthy's writings were denounced by Itihas Suraksha Manch on the grounds that his writings were inappropriate, against Hinduism and Hindu Saints. Hindu Fundamentalists also threatened his career on the ground that famous rebel poet Basava was not a god. The university authorities put forth him three choices : apologize, retract the offending statements or resign. But he could not comply with any of these demands. He discovered an inner strength and began to fight back. He had to battle the past, his demons to choose the path for future. He is a middle class person who respects others though they suppose themselves different.

The novel reflects the social realities of India with self destructive and divisive tendencies in our society today. According to her, today's India is completely seized by fanaticism, hatred and

mistrust. Our spaces as citizens, as writers, as teachers, as students are shrinking all the time. There is caste, gender, language, life choices by which our space among us is widening. Thus the novel presents the story of an ordinary men and women struggling to make sense of hatred, ignorance, love and loyalty to individuals.

Githa Hariharan picks up her protagonist prof. Shivmurthy from the academic world who knows that the prejudices are spoken in different languages but carries same message. Novelist focuses on history to present different interpretations of the past. History is a tool to understand ourselves and our times, so the novelist used Basava to get the system in.

Githa Hariharan admits in an interview with Utpal Bcrpujari in her selection of past :

I wanted to focus on history because I think history is not just something that we study in school. It is a tool of analysis for us to know our past.⁸

In the protagonist prof. Shivmurthy's life, there came three women, his wife Rekha, his colleague Amita and his house guest

Meena. Githa Hariharan has used an easy flow, a lucid structure. It starts with acute visuals and sharp characterization.

I : iii : Influences on Githa Hariharan's writings :

Even as a child, Githa Hariharan liked to do something with the written words. She was always a voracious reader. As an adolescent, she wrote poetry by which she acquired some discipline, training in using pattern of imagery. It became the base of her further novels and collections of short stories. She was also lucky enough to have truly extraordinary teachers while studying for B. A. in Bombay. Her teachers were kind, inspired her, lend her books outside the syllabus and challenged her to do creative writings. She still remembers her one brilliant teacher Nita Pillai. Later on she began writing short fiction while she was working in publishing. She also admits that it is difficult for women writers to write because of the children and the household duties but in her own case when she got pregnant and went on maternity leave, started writing seriously on The Thousand Focus of Night which received the Commonwealth Writer's Prize.

Githa Hariharan's favorite authors are Amitav Ghosh, Mahashweta Devi, Arundhati Roy and others. When she was growing up, she discovered other worlds than Indian and English. The big discovery for her was passion novelists and poets of Japan. She was influenced by Anita Desai's All About H. Hatterr and Raja Rao's Kanthapura, later Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children. She was also influenced by the reputed literary figures like A. K. Ramanujan and Girish Karnad. She was also inspired by Coetzee's spare style of writing. She wrote her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night and since then she has been fascinated by the ways of writing about women's dreams and desires. Githa Hariharan admits in an interview by Arnab Chakladar, that she is concerned with women's issues and feminism. In this respect she says :

I want to make it quite clear that in my life, my choices have been dictated by what I perceive as the feminist choice.⁹

In her view, she wrote this book because she was interested in the point in The Thousand Faces of Night when the tale ends. In case of, In Times of Siege, she admits that she wrote this book

because she felt a great compulsion to write about the way in which our lives are not only altering in obvious ways but also in subtle ways. Since last several years, she is along with lot of writers, artists and film makers and she feels strongly that they are travelling regressive direction. When she was midway through her novel, to her shock, she found that eminent historians like Sarkar and Panicker had their volume on the freedom struggle recalled. So in her novel, she focused on history because she knew that history is a tool of analysis for us to know our past. She wrote The Winning Team a children's book because she wanted to write for children.

Githa Hariharan who won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for her first book Thousand Faces of Night has another claim to fame too. She along with her husband, Mohan Rao happened to be the Petitioners in the case that prompted the Supreme Court to declare the mother to be the natural guardian of the child. The ruling made life a lot easier for single mothers and this is the source of satisfaction for Hariharan. She says that her agenda would

include women's rights, communalism, and global situation of today. She says in an interview with Sreyashi Dastidar :

The agenda for rest of my life would include women's rights communalism and the peculiarly lopsided global situation of today, above everything else. But I cannot see myself playing any one role, either of a writer or of an activist.¹⁰

She says that she would rather be a socially and politically aware citizen.

Githa Hariharan's concern with Genre

Githa Hariharan has a serious concern with the genre of fiction. Though she is a feminist, she is basically a humanist alongwith several other things. She admits this in an interview :

I want to make it quite clear that in my life my choices have been dedicated by what I perceive as the feminist choice.¹¹

Githa Hariharan advises Indian women the key to marriage is the ability to endure.

She makes an appeal to Indian women to protest against injustices through her novel When Dreams Travel.

She regrets for self-destructive and divisive tendencies in our society today where India is seized by fanaticism, hatred and distrust. She feels sorry for casteism in the academic world where Prof. Shivmurthy is denounced by Itihas Suraksha Manch for taking Basva's (A Kannada Poet and social reformer) ideals. She regrets the ideas about history, nations and patriots are shrinking day by day and prejudices are spoken in different languages but carries same message. Githa Hariharan's concern with children is of love and humanistic which is revealed through her collection of stories Sorry Best Friend. She looks at India, our children with affection and clear steady eyes. It is her remarkable attempt to get children to recognition and live with fundamental principles of life.

With the context of Githa Hariharan's novels, Rama Kundu brings to our notice Githa Hariharan's employment of the novelistic technique of metafiction through his article Githa Hariharan,

Intertext ; metafiction and Her Story. In Githa Hariharan's When Dream Travel, he found her use of metafiction where a double fiction appeared to be a story about storyteller. In this novelistic technique, the role of narrator and addressee go on interchanging and the speaker becomes listener again and again. The stories they tell are absurd, broken and incomplete so that the listener becomes dissatisfied and he is thirsty for knowledge. Rama Kundu brings to our notice Githa Hariharan's unique employment of the novelistic technique of metafiction.

Anjali Roy points out Githa Hariharan's novelistic technique of Oriental narratives of story telling and teaching in her article Visnu Sarma Against Shakespeare : The Ghosts of (non) Dominating Knowledge In 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master'. She points out that Githa Hariharan is against the educational models of West, medicine and narrative. Dr. Jayprakash Shinde points out Githa Hariharan's successful presentation of feminine ghosts which appeared in Vasu Masters life in his article The Feminine Ghosts in Githa Hariharan's 'The Ghosts of Vasu Master'. He brings to our notice Githa Hariharan's use of man-woman relationship where

man always struggles to make part of himself. It gets clear that in Vasu Master's life. women like his wife Mangala, Jameela, Eliamma are his feminine ghosts.

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