

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE WOMAN PROTAGONISTS IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S: *THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT* AND SARA ABOOBACKER'S *BREAKING TIES*

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Abstract: This paper attempts to offer a comparative study of the main characters in Gittha Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Sara Aboobacker's *Breaking Ties*. Both the novelists portray how the protagonists are victimized in the name of Marriage, how their individual attitude toward life determines their reaction to their condition. Though the suffering is universal, the way the two protagonists handle it is different. Both the authors exemplify the multiple existences of Indian Woman, and this paper is a comparative study of their characters examining whether they have the potential to sustain through and reclaim their selves from their miserable life.

Keywords: Society, upbringing, Self Love, sustainability, confront.

LINK BETWEEN THE AUTHORS

Sara Aboobacker born in Kerala is a well known Kannada fiction writer. Her stories narrate Muslim lives in the area of bordering Karnataka and Kerala, focusing on the inequities and injustices meted out to women by the male society.

Gita Hariharan born in Tamil Nadu, writes in English and fights for the cause woman. She filed a case against the 'Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act' in 1995 in the Supreme Court and won the case, and as a result the mother can also now be the legal guardian for her children.

The following are a few common contributing factors for their marital disharmony: (a) Education, (b) Upbringing, (c) Society, (d) Religion and (e) Self-Love.

Nadira is the protagonist of *Breaking Ties* and Devi is the protagonist of *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Nadira is an illiterate girl from a poor uneducated family, with a sottish father who is a dictator. Nadira has a younger sister. The whole family including her mother is slave to her father.

According to Nadira's mother, a woman should be passive and tolerant. She brought up her daughters also to be so. There is no question of any lenience as they are susceptible. She would often say to her girls, "Men are capable of all kinds of madness. Thank God, your abba does not have any of that" (*Breaking Ties*, 6). She is happy that her husband is not planning for a second marriage.

Nadira is from Coastal Karnataka predominantly an Islamic society. They are strict followers of the principles of Islam. They believe a wife should be submissive

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and we find Nadira is one such! She could have refused her marriage at the age of 14, but giving in to the brutal compulsion of her father she gets married. Even though her husband is uncompromising, 'Inshah Allah' she is blessed with a son and thence a good family.

When her egoistical, manipulative and violent father (*By the banks of Chandragiri*) brings her home and gets 'talaq' from her husband, and when her son is also taken back by her mother-in-law, she tolerates everything as she does not want to earn a bad repute. Later her morbid father asks her to rejoin her husband. The custom in coastal Karnataka then demanded a, 'one night marriage', i.e. "A husband who divorces his wife, after telling 'talaq' 3 times cannot remarry her until she marries and divorces another man." - Qur'an, Sura 2 (Al-Baqara) ayat 231). She yields to that so as not to tarnish the image of her family and as she also believes it is against the rules of Islam.

But the novelist opines, 'Nowhere does the Qur'an decree that the wife has to go through a one day- marriage to remarry her first husband. These are the ploys employed by selfish men for their convenience' (*Breaking Ties*, 76)

Even if it be a fact, she becomes the victim of the cruel male dominating so called religious dogma. She marries another man to have 'talaq' so that the next day she could rejoin her husband. But as she is not yet ready for a sexual relationship with him, she ends her life by jumping into the river Chandragiri.

The original version of the book is in Kannada, and the title of the book is, 'Chandragiri Deeradalli' means 'At the river bank of Chandragiri'. The river Chandragiri also reflects the mood of the nature, 'Deep down Chanragiri had started to rumble' like the distraught Nadira. The river's daughter who grew up in the lap of the river was incapable of making her own decisions and thus the weak minded uneducated girl Nadira puts an end to her life

The story questions the authenticity of religion, relationship between men and women, and unquestions the authority of men and religion (*The Concept of Feminism*) When Nadira's sister enquires her about rejoining her husband, Nadira replies, "But how? How is this possible, Jamila? Can Muslim women ever go against the laws? Haven't you heard moiliyar say that those who defy the edicts of religion will burn alive in hell?" (*Breaking Ties*, 73)

Nadira, does not have any identity in the society as she is an illiterate, a coward, and not even has self love even though she is longing to live with her ex-husband and her own son.

As far as Devi is concerned, even though she was brought up in a south Indian Brahminical society, and grew up listening to the legendary stories of Puranas told by her grandma, she has understood how difficult a woman finds to survive in reality these days. Devi has the potential to suffer and sustain through life. Like Nadira, she also submits to her parent's compulsion and gets married. But later when she

discerns that Mahesh is not her soul mate, she comes out of her bondage. She is bold enough to face her life and take control of it. As her granny told, "A woman fights her battle alone" (*TFN*, 36).

She is also well aware of the Brahminical morality and the religious practice in the Hindu culture, which still has its sway in the melting pot of Globalisation. Devi does not regret her decision, whereas Nadira takes no decision at all, but constantly complains against her ill fate. "If the law was within the bounds of reason, one could follow it. But how could women comply with entirely unjust laws?" (*The Breaking Ties*, 73).

Even though Devi knows eloping with another man is against her religious codes (*Isthri Dharma*, 4) she is not afraid of breaking them and courageously follows the dictates of her heart. And after knowing that Gopal is no better than Mahesh, she never thinks of ending her life. Instead, she returns home to her mother without any expectation. She is welcomed warmly, because her mother is also a victim of the patriarchal society. Finally Devi realizes that,

"My grandmother fed me fantasies, my father, a secretive love. My mother sought me out with hope, and when disappointed, pushed me forward in the direction she chose... I have made very few choices... But I was too well prepared and not prepared at all. America, Jacaranda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from my trials..." (*TFN*, 137).

Devi desperately searches for her 'self' identity in the Hindu society which is highly traditional, with the 'the thousand faces of its continuing night' and her final decision is to take the centre stage to strive for her self identity. ('Gita Hariharan writing back to the 1001 Nights, by Dr. Rama Kundu).

She boards the train to Madras alone. "She had felt bold and carefree when she left Mahesh's house, a little like a heroine." (*TFN*, 138). So, when Devi makes a free choice exercising her will, she feels free, she feels herself like a heroine. 'Devi knew the time was right; if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned to drift between worlds, a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland.' (*TFN*, 138).

Nadira suffers because, she is afraid of the Islamic injunctions and the society she lives in. She is unmoved by all the humiliation heaped on her by the men in her life. She cannot pick up enough courage to fight against the injustice of it. Her cowardly adherence to the religious beliefs proves to be her undoing.

When we consider the character of Devi, we find her deeply concerned about her dissatisfaction in her married life. She does not want to lose her individuality and so she does not care about her society does not mind breaking the so called religious beliefs. Whenever she listens to the Puranic stories from her grandma, Devi raises a question 'why?'. She does not lose this assertiveness even in her later life.

The following words are a testimony to her defiance: "If I was going to play out a travesty of the myths that had filled my childhood, I would tear aside all pretence, I thought, I would be as matter-of-fact as Mahesh." (*TFN*, 23).

So, even though it seems like a failure, Devi succeeds in the search for her identity and she does not lose her 'self'.

In fact, though both the novelists perceive their protagonists differently, in both the novels, the 'ties' of the protagonists are shown only as 'Breaking Ties'.

CONCLUSION

As far as Indian tradition is concerned, it is still not an easy task for a woman to choose her own life. Between the two characters compared, it is obvious that Devi is an intellectual woman who has self love and that she has understood that woman has to be practical, or otherwise she will lose her 'total self' and her ability to endure the hardships of life and come out unscathed which need not be a success in the material sense. Thus we see Devi confronting the difficulties courageously and makes possible her life in the male chauvinist society, because for man, woman has always been primarily an object of sex and pleasure.

But, Nadira is not able to sustain through her sufferings since she is a slave to her emotion and society and she does not have the strength to confront loneliness and alienation which will develop her 'self'. She hates herself and her life and so brings her life to an end by committing suicide.

However, the problems faced by the two protagonists in the two different novels are similar in a way (facing the society in all aspects), the way they tackle their personal and social problems, the way they perceive the life around them is different.

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