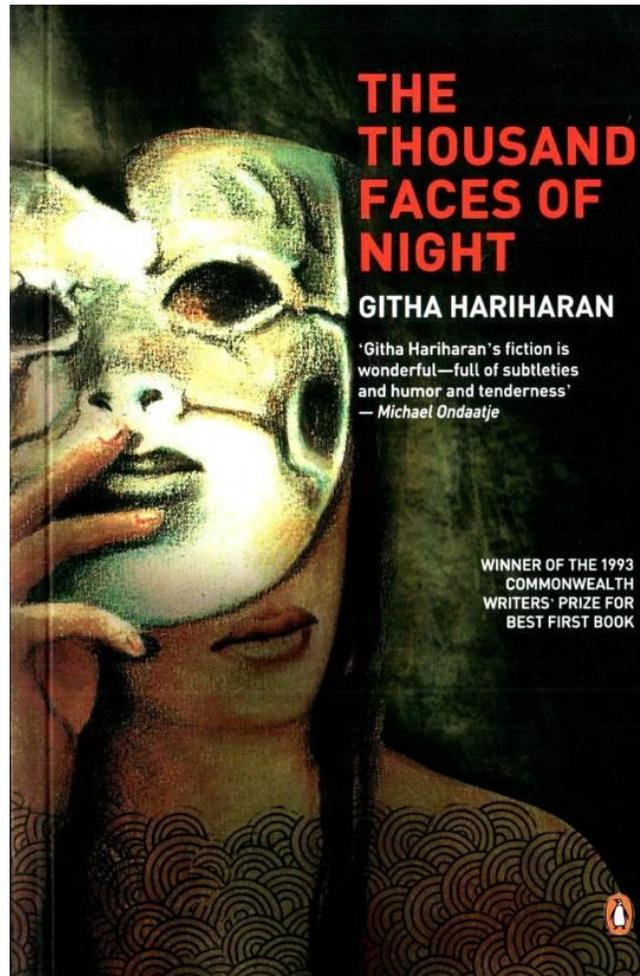


Subjugation of Women in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Abstract

Githa Hariharan, one of the notorious Indian novelists, projects the theme of marginalization of women in Indian societies through her writings. Her novels assert how women were oppressed, suppressed, repressed and silenced in the male-dominated society. The main focus of this paper is to analyze the subjugation of women in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* by implying the subaltern theory as emphasized by Antonio Gramsci and Gayatri Spivak. It intends to represent the voiceless women who were silenced and enforced to play the male-scripted

roles of perfect daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother in the patriarchal structure of society. It explores how women were treated as slaves and were enforced to serve their family. It scrutinizes how women were constructed and equipped to adjust, adapt and accept the new environment in which she endures certain sufferings. It depicts how women were subjugated as silent-sufferers who sacrifice all their talents, desires and preferences in order to render and fulfill their endeavor as perfect and ideal women. It gives a picture of women as sacrificial beings who sacrificed their identity in order to uplift their family to a higher position in the stereotypical society. It portrays how the women were made to believe and accept their roles as subordinates and were supposed to serve their superior beings through certain stereotypical and superstitious beliefs practiced in the patriarchal society during their period.

Githa Hariharan

Githa Hariharan is one of the prominent Indian women novelists. Since literature is the mirror of life, her writings reflect her own life experiences. She has won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for her best first book, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Some of her notable contributions to Indian English literature were the collection of short stories *The Art of Dying* in 1993, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* in 1994, *When Dreams Travel* in 1999, *In Times of Siege* in 2003 and *Fugitive Histories* in 2009. Her novels picture the real life of women who were subjugated as subordinate beings in the male-dominated society.

Women were suppressed by bearing in mind that they were inferior and secondary to men. They were enforced to play the subordinate roles as scripted by the dominant males in the patriarchal structure of society. Women were the real subalterns whose voices were unheard by the colonizers - their husbands - who colonized them. Men colonized women by making them to move to the margin and rule over them by occupying the central position through hegemony. Men were considered to be a superior being whereas women were inferior to men. Hence men were considered to be civilized and it was their work to civilize the uncivilized being - women. In order to represent themselves as superior, men subjugated women as inferior beings.

The Thousand Faces of Night

In the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi, the protagonist was pictured as a subaltern. Not only the protagonist of the novel was subjugated but also, each and every woman in and out of the novel was subjugated as subalterns in a way or another.

Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist was the first to manipulate the term 'subaltern' to represent the working-masses who were marginalized. The term 'subaltern' refers to the grade given to an officer who was in the subordinate position. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who was an influential and notorious Indian writer, employed the term 'subaltern' in her significant essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" to represent the subordinate people and women who were voiceless and silenced by the dominant society. Spivak claims that "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (32). Thus, women as subaltern were doubly marginalized and silenced. The voices of women were repressed by the male-dominated society. Spivak cites the history of Bhubaneswari Bhaduri who committed suicide because of her inability to confront the political assassination and to avoid capture by the British Colonial authorities; as she was one of the members who involved in the armed struggle for Indian

Independence. Though she made her death to speak, her voice was not heard in the dominant system of representation.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi, the protagonist of the novel was subjugated by marrying Mahesh according to her mother's choice. Devi was like a puppet whose strings were in the hands of her mother before her marriage and 'a wooden puppet' (83) in the hands of her husband after her marriage. Simone De Beauvoir admits that marriage is the destiny that society traditionally offers women (451). Mahesh and Devi were yoked together like two different bullocks in the cart of marriage where the wife is enforced to follow the way of her husband.

Marriage

Marriage is the bond in which the husband and wife should understand each other and run their life together in a successful path. It should be the union of souls and hearts rather than bodies. It would be the foundation of a long and blissful life. But in the case of Devi and Mahesh, there is no understanding between each other. Her desires were not taken into account by her husband and he not even turns his ears to hear Devi's words. "He does not believe in talking about ifs and buts, at least not with his wife" (49). Her voice was unheard and was subjugated by her husband, Mahesh who was dominant enough to suppress all her feelings, thoughts and preferences.

Mahesh admits that marriage is a gamble in which the wife should adapt herself to the consequences and should play the roles of traditional wife and mother at home. But for Devi, "a marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling" (49).

Though Devi was born and brought up in a traditional Hindu Brahmin family, she was educated and completed her Master's Degree in America. While she conveys her desire to learn Sanskrit to understand her father-in-law's Sanskrit lectures, her husband disregards her desire by asking, "what will you do with all this highbrow knowledge?" (52). Even though she was educated, she couldn't raise her voice in getting her desires fulfilled. He subjugated her by commenting, "This is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman than you are? What is it you want?" (74)

Devi was subjugated as a subaltern woman who should sacrifice all her desires as Gandhari did in Mahabharatha by tying a piece of cloth around her eyes to make herself blind and "embraced her destiny – a blind husband – with a self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood" (29). Devi's grandmother narrates those mythical tales to her during her childhood in order to bring her up as a typical Indian woman who should adjust, adapt, accept and endure all the sufferings and fates which she may come across in her life. After her marriage, Devi was depressed and thought of herself as "an aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the *thali* round my neck?" (74)

Devi's mother Sita performs the role as a slave by suppressing her own identity of being an expert in playing the veena in order to uplift her family to a respectable position in the society. She holds back her desire and talent of playing veena in order to prove her as an ideal wife and dutiful daughter-in-law in her in-laws' house. It was Sita's father-in-law who makes her to wipe

out her desire and talent of playing veena. While Sita was playing her veena after completing all her household duties, her father-in-law found that she had not plucked and kept the flowers ready for his morning prayers and he call upon her but she didn't notice his calling and she continued playing veena. He annoyed and shouted at her, "Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" (30) It was the last and after that, the music was not heard in the house of Sita's in-laws. She was repressed to be a typical Indian housewife who should bear all her destiny in her life as taught by the stereotypical society from where she was brought up.

Though Sita was subjugated as a subaltern women in her in-laws' house, she well-played the male-scripted roles as follows: As a 'perfect daughter' she didn't spoil her parents' respectable name and fame by getting back while her desires and talents were suppressed in her in-laws' house, instead she undergoes and tolerates all her sufferings, suppressions, oppressions and repressions in order to prove herself as a perfect woman who was well brought up by her parents. As a 'dutiful daughter-in-law' she serves as a slave bearing all the miseries in her life. As an 'ideal wife' she struggles oppress herself to raise her husband's position to a higher level and to achieve his identity as a respectable man in the society. As a 'responsible mother' she brought up her daughter by inheriting the traditional values and customs in her. Though Sita was repressed as a widow by losing her husband, she completed her responsibility to make her daughter get married to Mahesh who has been chosen by Sita as a suitable match for her daughter. Thus, Sita being a subaltern woman was subjugated in the hands of the male-dominated stereotypical society and was enforced to play the male-scripted roles in the patriarchal structure of society.

Mayamma, the maidservant of Devi's husband's house was a silent-sufferer who endures all her destinies. She was married at the age of twelve. "Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim" (135). She was ill-treated by her husband and her mother-in-law because of her childlessness. She tolerates all those torments and curses made by her husband and mother-in-law. She was subjugated by her mother-in-law who enforced Mayamma to do penance to clear out those misfortune that she brought to her in-laws' house being a childless woman. Mayamma was suppressed and silenced because as a subaltern she was not supposed to have a voice of her own. As her voice was unheard by her husband and mother-in-law and they muted her voice.

Devi's cousin, Uma endures all her agonies and leads a miserable life. She was battered by her husband and her drunken father-in-law abused her physically. She was depressed and lived her life in dejection as a silent-sufferer by tolerating all her destinies she met with.

Thus, every woman was subjugated as subalterns in the male-dominated stereotyped society. Women were enforced to move to the margin and the centre was occupied by men through hegemony in order to show their own identity and authority over women in the society. Women suppressed their own self-identity in order to make their husbands to achieve their identity whereas women's identity was connected with their husbands' identity. Women were represented as secondary beings by comparing with men. Thus, women were subjugated as the subordinate beings.

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