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INFLUENCE OF POLITICS AND HISTORY IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S *IN TIMES OF SIEGE*

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ABSTRACT

Feminism is one of the important things that should handle carefully. Once upon a time there was gender discrimination in the society. That is women are not given importance and their ideas and views not asked or accepted by the society. So it was the writers' duty to get rid of these problems. At first some male writers decided to write about the problems of women. Later there arose a group of female writers to deal about their problems. By writing they developed their position in the society one among the writers was Githa Hariharan. Hariharan deals with the theme of history and how it is influenced. Similarly she has dealt about politics and it affects the academic career of the student. So Hariharan in this novel *In Times of Siege* deals with the influence of politics and history in the novel.

Key Words: History, Politics, gender, feminism, society.

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Fiction by women writers contributes a major part in the contemporary Indian Writing in English. The novel provides the basis for discussion. Many of the Indian women novelists focus on women's issues. Most of the women writers wrote about the sufferings of women faced by them in the male dominated society. Some of the women writers who wrote about identical analysis of women were Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, ManjuKapur, Anitha Nair, etc. These Indian women novelists get awareness because of their high educational and intellectual standards. These writers have created a way for the younger generation of Indian women novelists. Among all those writers one notable person was Githa Hariharan.

Githa Hariharan was born in Coimbatore and she was brought up in Manila. But now she lives in New Delhi. Githa Hariharan's literary career began by winning the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* in 1993. She had written three other novels and short stories. She had published several essays about cultural and political issues. The novel *In Times of Siege* is one of her best novel which was written in 2003.

Hariharan's personal background: The novel *In Times of Siege* is her fourth novel. There is a real, personal background in writing this novel. In 1995, she tried to open an account in the Reserve Bank of India for her son who was eleven years old. But she was unable to do this, because she can do this only by getting a signature

from her husband. This was based on Hindu law, that a woman has the guardianship right only after the death of her husband. So, Hariharan along with her husband filed a case and take it to court. Finally, she won the case and it was in favour of women. The Indian court changed the law in 1999 that a mother 'is undoubtedly a child's natural guardian'. This paves the way for Hariharan to write this novel.

Meena's entry in Shiv's life: Shivmurthy was a middle aged history professor working in Kasturba Gandhi University. Shiv's wife Rekha has gone to U.S.A. to see her daughter Tara. So Shiv has to manage his life alone. During that time Shiv received a phone call from a girl. It was about Meena who had broken her legs. Meena was the daughter of Shiv's childhood friend Sumathi. Shiv had promised her that he would be a guardian for Meena during her stay in Delhi. Meena was a sociology student in Kamala Nehru University. Shiv, on hearing about Meena's accident, takes her to his home till she become alright. Since his wife Rekha was not there, he makes all arrangements for Meena in his study room. Meena's stay Shiv's room brought a new look to his room as well as to his life. Shiv takes care of her and helps her to do her daily habits. Meena's friends Amar, Jyothi and Manjar visit her often.

Basava – the founder of Veerashaivism: Bhasavana or Basava was the founder of Veerashaivism. He was a famous Karnard poet of 12th century. Basava was a finance minister in the royal court and he was a poet of having no comparison. He was against caste system and he wanted to demolish it and other social ills. His followers were known as Veer Shiva. His opposition against social ills resulted in violence. He was against the systems related to religion. Once, marriage between a low caste boy and a Brahmin girl was about to take place. So the people attacked the college and there was violence. Basava could not control the public and he was fed up. So he made up his mind to go to Sangam, a meeting point of two rivers, and he never returned back. This was the incident related to Basava.

Shiv's relationship with Basava: Shiv, being a History Professor has written an essay on Basava. Few years ago, a play was written on Basava by H.S.Shivaprakash. He was attacked by protectors of history. In this novel, Shivaprakash was characterized as Shiv Murthy. As Shivaprakash, Shiv was also attacked by the same people. So, Shiv's essay on Basava was the turning point in his life. The whole novel is based on this.

Influence of history in *In Times of Siege*: According to Hariharan,

History with all its ugliness and achievement, is something that we
Should have access to explore and debate.

Hariharan views history as,

.....history is not just something that we study in school. it is a tool
of analysis for us to know our past and to understand ourselves.

Hariharan has portrayed the problems that prevailed in the previous years. Hariharan has said about Basava, a 12th century poet. She links Basava to her protagonist Shiv Murthy. The novel goes around Shiv. Shiv's essay on Basava brought a change in his life. Shiv was inspired by his dead father, who was a freedom fighter. He was also influenced by Basava. Shiv's essay on Basava brought controversial ideas against the Hindu religion. They were against Shiv. So, pressure falls on Shiv. He was attacked by the Head of the Department to make changes in the essay. Because of that he was attacked and he was saved by his friend. This brought a change in Shiv's life. Hariharan brings this historical incident into focus and influenced the people. Thus this reminds us of some historical incidents. These historical incidents brought a link in present life. Not only that this also enters into the field of academic life. On one point this brings awareness to the students about the historical events. At the same time, because of the violence created by this incident affects the academic career of the students. They were not able to concentrate on education. They are forced to take part in this violence whether they are interested or not. History is treated as a tool to read about the past events. Thus history plays an important part in *In Times of Siege*.

Influence of politics in *In Times of Siege*:

Hariharan in her novel *In Times of Siege* deals with rethinking of historical incidents through political or cultural issues. The protagonist Shiv has written an essay on Basava for the students of his University. A Hindu group called Itihas – Suraksha Manch keeps strong conditions against Shiv.

The munch lays three demands before Shiv. Firstly apology for hurting their sentiments, separate apologies from Shiv, department and by extension the university. Secondly the lesson to get retracted. Thirdly, the rewritten lesson should be submitted to the Munch. (ITS 69)

The condition is that Shiv should change the essay and he should write a new essay. Not only that, he should also apologize in front of the public. Shiv's Head of the Department asks Shiv to do that. This brought a great pressure for Shiv. He discusses this incident with his colleagues and Meena, his friend's daughter. Meena says Shiv that he need not ask apologize to the Manch. She extends her full support to Shiv by involving her friends in this problem. Shiv's colleague Menon said that his lesson has been sent to Review Committee. So he said that Shiv's resignation will become true. But Meena was against this. She arranged for a Press Conference with the help of her friends. This incident brought an impact on the students of the university. So politics enter into the field of academy.

Since political incidents arrive into the field of education, the students are also forced to involve into that incident. They have to issue pamphlets, leaflets, etc. attacking the Hindu organization. Two parties arose one supporting Shiv and the other which is against Shiv. But, because of the support of Meena and others Shiv boldly faced all the problems. Thus, politics after entering into the field of education destroys the academic field.

Middle – class man as a hero: A normal middle class man can become a hero due to the situations prevailing in the society. Hariharan's In Times of Siege is a best example for this. Shivmurthy is the protagonist in this novel. He is a middle – aged history professor working in a university. He belongs to the middle class society. But, because of his single essay on Basava he reached the top level and was made as a hero. Shiv had written an essay on Basava, a Karnard poet. Basava was against social ills. So Shiv was forced to remove his essay from the syllabus. He was given pressure on political level, religious level and academic level. He was threatened that his wife and daughter would be punished. At the same time, his head of the department also asked him to give up his essay. But Shiv was not willing to do so. This gave him courage to face boldly and stand in his point strongly. Thus a single incident brought fame and popularity and made him a hero.

Influence of woman: In some way or other Shiv was influenced by women. First, he was influenced by his wife Rekha. She assists him in all his work. So he finds it difficult for him in the absence of his wife. Next an important woman mentioned in this novel was Meena. Hariharan symbolizes Meena as herself. Since Hariharan was bold enough to violate the law of guardianship, Meena was also a bold girl. When Shiv was threatened, Meena was the person who supported him. Meena asked Shiv not to ask sorry and she helped him with the help of her friends. They issued pamphlets supporting Shiv. Because of Meena's boldness, Shiv developed courage in his mind and he made up his mind to solve the problem. Like Rekha, Meena was also bold enough to face the problem.

Like Rekha, Meena names things with ferocious certainty. Communalist fundamentalist, these women warriors seem to know exactly which cities they want to raze to the ground, which they want to raise in their place. (ITS 60)

Shiv was deeply attached with Meena in the absence of his Rekha who had gone to U.S.A. to see her daughter Tara. So in each and every stage Shiv was greatly influenced by women.

Remembrance of history through politics: Hariharan reminds us of some of the important incidents in history. For example, incidents about Basava, about Babri Masjid. By telling the story of a history professor Shiv Murthy, Hariharan deals with the subject of contemporary historiography and discusses the issues regarding this. She argues about the re- writings of history and its propagandistic usage. Hariharan uses two events for retelling history. One is about Basava and Shiv's essay on Basava and the second is about Shiv's father. Shiv's father is a freedom fighter for Indian independence. These incidents are remembered because of the issues created by the essay on Basava by Shiv Murthy. Shiv Murthy's essay on Basava brought him a great trouble. His essay was not accepted by Hindu community and some of the political parties. Shiv was threatened and luckily he was escaped from attack. Shiv with the help of his colleague and Meena faces the problem boldly and he

developed a confidence in him even after Meena left after her recovery from her injury. Through this incident Hariharan made the audience to remember the history.

Thus Hariharan through her novel *In Times of Siege* reveals the importance of history and the need to know about the past events. She says this by relating the past incident and the present life situation. Hariharan's narrative technique is seen in all her novels. It is so simple and it is understood by all people. This was also seen in her novel *In Times of Siege*. In this novel she says some of the historical incidents and so this novel can also be called as a historical novel.

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