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PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN GITHA HARIHARAN NOVEL: "FUGITIVE HISTORIES"

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ABSTRACT

Githa Hariharan writes to awaken feminine consciousness. In India women were unaware about their miserable conditions in the society. Women should be aware of their rights to live in the society and should be educated to fight for their rights. Women were expected to be under the care and control of male dominated society. Gradually, women started to show awareness about their rights and courage to be independent. As women were expected to remain confined within constructed boundaries and if any women crosses those boundaries she will be treated badly. In this novel Githa Hariharan tries to awaken the women.

Keywords: Feminine Consciousness, Hindu- Muslim dilemma, idealist and identity.

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INTRODUCTION

Fugitive Histories is a commendable novel by Githa Hariharan, which has admirable narration regarding the points of view of the characters. She captures the thoughts of the characters and narrates them as incidents in real life – as the thoughts move from one theme to another, from people to individuals and from one places to another. Her narration is prompted by any insignificant thing – it may be a thought, some scene unfolding, a simple visual, a singular word, an accustomed situation or just a whiff of a known or unknown smell. She is able to realistically place her characters in time and space, and let their thoughts wind back and forth, through restrictions, both in reality and in imagination.

Fugitive Histories is an amalgamation of the thoughts of the three main protagonists. Two of them belong to the same family and share the mother–daughter relationship, and the third gets acquainted with the daughter which she is trying to find her calling in the professional sphere. Mala is the mother, who belongs to a south Indian Brahmin family. She marries a Muslim from Mumbai; her husband is an artist by profession. She declines any religious identity and desires true freedom throughout her life. Sara, their daughter, apparently has many identities to choose from, thereby getting confused. It is her journey as she tries to accept and adapt a single identity similar to her brother. The author has voiced the Hindu–Muslim dilemma that arises from mixed parentage. But this is a dilemma faced by all who have multiple identities, especially the children of immigrants.

Yasmeen is a Muslim girl who survived riots but lost her brother. She even lost her family home during the riots. Her opinions and memories have been realistically portrayed by the author. Her narrative is not negative, but conveys the survival of the human spirit.

The sketches made by the late husband of Mala allow the readers to glimpse her heart and soul, which showcases her life in bits and pieces, with the rest left to the imagination of the reader. The novel is not a singular story but just the feelings, imaginations, and memories of three women. Their lives are woven artistically with good expression, even flow and spellbound narration. The story conveys no conclusion, and one can draw one's own; it does leave the reader confused as to what the author really wanted to say. Written as a biography, it is the story of a family reflected through their thoughts pertaining to a current scenario and another that took place in the past. It is a light and thought-provoking read.

Fugitive Histories is set in 2002 after the turmoil of the Godhara riots. In this novel, Hariharan depicts the web of human relationships that links people as much as it divides. All the main six characters of the book namely Mala, her daughter Sara, Yasmin (one of the victims of the 2002 riots in Gujarat), Bala (Mala's grandmother), Asad (Mala's husband) and Samar (Mala's son) face dilemma of identity in various ways. The novel opens with Asad being dead. Mala is in search of her identity without Asad. Though she has acknowledged life without Asad, she is seeking to understand him and figure out as to what happened to him. Sara, after her father's (Asad) death, is unsure regarding her professional choice – should she stay at her job or go to Ahmedabad to make a documentary film on the victims of Gujarat riots. She is in search of her identity as a half-Hindu and half-Muslim in modern-day India. Yasmin is a teenager displaced by the riots, in which she lost her brother Akbar and her home as well. She only wants to restore her life to as it was previous to her misfortune. Bala (Mala's grandmother) is an old hysterical lady, an outcome of the patriarchal set-up. She had lived her life in submission, never stepping out of the house. Her life journey makes her an introvert and unsatisfied individual. Asad's life is conveyed through his sketches. An idealist, Asad is a gifted artist; however, his faith in the human spirit breaks during the Hindu-Muslim riots. Then there is Samar, the son of Asad, who adopts a religious identity early in life as he comprehends its importance in society, which stresses on belongingness to a specific religion or ideology.

The novel is categorized into three parts – missing persons, crossing borders and funeral rites. Set in three main cities – Delhi, Mumbai and Ahmedabad – each city belongs to one of the protagonists, Mala, Sara and Yasmin, respectively. The first part conveys an outline of all the major characters and their lives. The second part deals with Sara's and Yasmin's association, including with other victims of the riots. The third part is reconciliation by these three main characters – Sara, Mala and Yasmin – and their ultimate achievement of lost identity.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's finely portrays that women in today's world are always at risk. Githa Hariharan is a significant star among women writers. Her practical ideas are presented in a captivating way. Githa Hariharan's vision of life is truly liberal and her thematic likenesses are related to the new way of life. Githa Hariharan has concentrated on gender equivalence and freedom of women in a traditional social structure of Indian society. Her attitude is thus equally well, progressive and open-minded. Hariharan has tried to signify her characters free from fear by pointing her protest against the Hindu militant. Feminism arises when women obtain dissimilar treatment under the law because they are women. It arises when women are either burdened or advantaged based upon their sex. Githa Hariharan has precisely emphasized that violence against women remains relentless even in the twenty-first century. The need of the hour is to deliberate, discourse and, most importantly, acts in order to stop this gross violation of one-half of the population.

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