



## I HAVE BECOME THE TIDE: DISCREPANCY AMONG CASTE

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper the theme of the novel "I Have Become The Tide" by Githa Hariharan has been highlighted. The paper uncovers the theme of discrepancy among caste which is clearly visible in the novel. An attempt has been made to uncover the feelings of alienation, rejection and untouchability prevailing in the society. It also brings to light the turbulence of emotions caused by social inequality.

Keywords: inequality, casteism, untouchability, rejection, alienation etc.

### INTRODUCTION

The lines from an article "Singing About the Dark Times" published in Hindu Businessline rightly describes the theme of the novel as it reads, "Fortified by poetry, Githa Hariharan's novel I Have Become the Tide holds a mirror to a contemporary India riven by centuries-old prejudices... Hariharan etches many unbearable moments of humiliation and sabotage, and through the book are shades of the denouements that too many have met for daring to oppose the caste system or political and religious fascism. There is a necessary bleakness to this book that the poetry assuages, but insists we do not deny: "Only those who have sweated day after day/ know what it is to be soaked, O friend." I Have Become the Tide is required reading for the contemporary Indian context, a highly recommended novel sowed with verse, which provides an unflinching reminder of the eventualities of hatred. It is full of pain. But it is also buoyed, like a boat, on much depth and beauty." (Hindu Businessline)

It is a luminous and powerfully written novel where the experiences of three dalit students have been highlighted which will prove true for anyone who has faced discrimination based on caste in any sphere. This can be seen clearly in comments and reviews on Githa Hariharan's novel by "The Hindu" as it says, "A luminous novel... powerfully written. Hariharan pulls her readers from the tightly constructed world of the three friends and throws them down in front of today's newspaper... The experiences of the three students in I Have Become the Tide will ring true for anyone who has faced discrimination in an educational institution... In his hostel room one night, Ravi dreams of a putrid canal behind his house and a torrential rain that makes it flow like a river. Floating in the current is a nest with three eggs, the three friends who will go forward one day. These are the episodes that make Hariharan's novel luminous. The songs in it, written down by Kannadeva but not his alone, are spots of light and warmth in a dark story, and the reader will want to return to them long after the novel is read." (The Hindu)

*I Have Become the Tide* is a story where a senior academic Professor PS Krishna who is also a devotional poet discovers something surprisingly stunning about a Hindu saint poet Kannadeva. This novel centres around the caste system and untouchability. In the novel three dalit students, Asha, Ravi and Satya who are three parallel narratives of Chikka in the novel, dream of a future where they can live with equality and dignity like all other caste people. Telegraph India published an article according to which, "In the Acknowledgements section of the novel, *I Have Become the Tide*, Githa Hariharan explains why she, presumably a "privileged person in terms of caste or class", felt the need to write about "the terrible inequalities" that "ravage the lives" of so many of "our fellow citizens". To engage with life in India today, a writer needs to take a stand on these inequalities even if she cannot 'know' the "lived experience" of those "historically oppressed". The novel, therefore, is consciously political in the broadest sense." (Article in Telegraph India)

Prof. P.S. Krishna was getting hateful notices from many people who were annoyed with the Professor when he told that Saint Kannadeva is son of a Dalit. People were so much hurt by his lecture that they threatened him and insulted him by writing that he must die before thinking such cheap things about a pious saint. This is read by professor as: "In our tradition, we have examples of how wise men have lived before us. We are also blessed with their words of guidance handed down to us over thousands of years. These days it has become the fashion to question all this or claim to have made some discovery which turns our historic legacy into something ugly"(Hariharan, 17). Another hateful remark that comes to professor: "Professor of Literature P.S. Krishna has also fallen into this trap. In a lecture in Town Hall last week, he was supposed to describe the uplifting songs and sayings of saint Kannadeva. Instead the professor mocked the Saint's verses and songs, saying many of them sound like they were composed by someone else."(Hariharan, 17)

Githa Hariharan in an interview with Manik Sharma says, "I wanted to show how the terrible cancer in our country, caste discrimination, persists in both old and new ways. So my novel had to travel from the life and struggle of a cattle skinner about 900 years ago, to the lives of three Dalit students in India today".

This is a story which begins a few centuries ago, on the day when Chikka's father is buried. Latha Anantharaman aptly remarks about the novel in her article, "'Where is that land where water flows free?' This is the refrain of a song that Chikka's cattle-skinner father sings, longing for renewal in a swift river. His daily reality, however, is the pond in the untouchable colony: frothy, filthy, boiling with algae, and cooking poison. (The Hindu, 2019) Chikka leaves his colony carrying nothing with him except his drum. He moves with two men of the utopian society into a village Anandagrama which was free from the clutches of caste system. Chikka used to live there freely, a place where he was not identified with his caste. Chikka becomes a washerman and gets married. It is the child of the washerman, grandson of a cattle skinner who came to be known by the name of saint poet Kannadeva. This novel ponders over a deep and blazing theme, the social caste system that is responsible for physical, social, cultural and educational as well as economic separation of the dalit people from rest of the society. The work highlights the changes in circumstances throughout the centuries and we are still in search of a land, where water flows freely. Githa Hariharan's writing style and powerful presentation of thoughts in the novel is really captivating and remarkable. This can be seen in book review published in India Today, Leisure Review which is: "This searingly honest novel is woven around songs and water... there's much to be afraid of in this world that Hariharan shows us and in which we are all immersed...Words can become bullets, puncturing the lives of student activists, academics and authors as we know only too well, from reading the newspapers... But words, like water, can also be the source of great positive power. Words are what Hariharan has harnessed in this fictional tale about ancient truths and transient lives. By linking the familiar events of today to a poet-mystic of the past, she creates a swift-flowing current of ideas from then to now." (India Today, Leisure Review) Githa Hariharan attempts to raise voice against caste system in society in her novel as she boldly comments, "Three distinctive narratives intertwine past and present in compelling ways to raise an urgent voice against the cruelties of caste, and the destructive forces that crush dissent. But they also celebrate the joy of resistance, the redemptive beauty of words, and the courage to be found in friendship and love. *I Have Become the Tide* is deeply political, but it never loses sight of humour, tenderness—or the human spirit." In other words the novel unveils the sad reality that although situations have changed yet human is continuously involved in an endless fight with the caste system prevailing in the society. "In her latest novel, I

Have Become the Tide, Indian author Githa Hariharan reminds the world that caste exists, despite many of her compatriots' arguments to the contrary. Contrasting violence with poetry, she uncovers the subcontinent in a way that helps non-Indians understand it more." ( World Literature Today). Deccan Herald remarks about the novel, " Githa Hariharan's 'I Have Become the Tide' tells three stories in exploration of connection between the goal of respect and the countless massacres and killings that continue till date. It is a compassionate portrayal of this connection measured across different times. The emerging picture is counter intuitive : with all the affirmative action policies we have today, things are worse. (Book Review by Soni Wadhwa) The Indian Express review about the novel : "Githa Hariharan's new novel is an angry, intimate look at systemic social oppressions... The phrase "the more things change, the more they stay the same" is often used with an undertone of inevitability or resignation. I Have Become The Tide conveys the same message, but with a burning rage... While Hariharan's book is about a call to action, at a certain level, it is also encouraging. By moving beyond the constraints of a headline, she shows that these stories do not fizzle out when they drop out of the short attention span of the ever-churning news machine. While seemingly fragile, the voices of defiance and anger do not exist in isolation — they become part of a rising tide ." ( The Indian Express) .

### CONCLUSION

Thus it is a novel which is marvellous, containing joy and the political frustration which is narrated in a story telling way. It is a mirror not only to India but to the whole world. Githa Hariharan managed to move back, forth in time and space, created the story and highlighted the image that exposes the hostility that is prevailing in contemporary India and the world as a whole. Githa Hariharan very efficiently and in an elegant manner with her power of writing and skill of storytelling very efficiently managed to uncover the dark open secrets which needs immediate attention.

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