

## CHAPTER III

### Evolution of the Artist

“All my work looks at power politics in some way or the other” (Githa Hariharan).

Hariharan is a challenging and dynamic cultural activist, revisionist writer and editor. Her writing revisits the past: history, myth, memory, text and figures. As a revisionist writer she produces challenging counter narratives and gives voices to marginalised characters of the hypo-texts and thereby adds new thematic perspectives to those texts. Through these narratives she revisits the cultural texts and questions the patriarchal logic and power politics in them. She re-imagines the history and texts, and thus, she is able to create new visions and meanings. Her revisionist narratives are skilful reworking on mythical and historical materials which uses ‘intertextuality’ and ‘transtextuality’ as technique to complement her interesting agenda. Githa Hariharan is writing back to the world wide popular legendary tale, the frame story of *Arabian Nights* or *One Thousand and One Nights*<sup>15</sup>. She is retelling many myths, tales and fables of Indian mythologies. For instance, in *The Thousand Faces of Nights* she revisits Sita, Ganga, Amba, Gandhari, Draupadi etc. Her idea of revisioning might have come from either her familiarity with American feminist theory of revisionism or

Helene Cixous's French feminist ideology of "écriture feminine", women's writing. Her revisionist writing seems to get its root in Adrienne Rich's idea of "Writing as revisioning" that is focused in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Revisioning". Then Hariharan might have interest to hear Cixous's pervasive clarion call for the female writers through her "The Laugh of the Medusa" where she has formulated some ethics and aesthetic of "écriture feminine". It is in this text Cixous shows the idea of revisioning by suggesting a new image of laughing Medusa instead of her ugly image of fatal monster as it is shown in the western phallogocentric myths. It advocates equality in the domain of writing; reclaim the empire of writing from where women were violently driven out. It demands re-exploration of the whole tradition of writing. Elaine Showalter's influence on Hariharan cannot be ignored because her effort to recreate female texts out of canonical male texts might be inspired by her (Showalter) feminist classic, *A Literature of Their Own* as it talks about producing a female literary subculture, 'female tradition'. Showalter's idea of 'rediscovery of self' and a female literary tradition which need to re-explore the history of writing tradition has definitely left an imprint on her (Hariharan) feminist revisionist writings. However, there is a possible influence of postcolonial revisionary writing practiced by a number of postcolonial Indian writers who are revisiting India's past to bridge the gulf between the past and present, and thus, recreate the link between the two, and thereby reclaim the rich socio-cultural heritage of India. Rao, Rushdie, Tharoor and Tripathi are some of the influential postcolonial revisionary writers in India who revisit ancient Indian texts, history, myths, images and figures. Influence of writers in regional languages cannot be ignored. Mahasweta Devi, a Bengali revisionist published some revisionary

works like *Kurukshetranantar*, *Panchakanya* and *Drupaudi*. Of course, now, Hariharan has been a source of big inspiration for the upcoming revisionist writers in India. Among such writers, Kavita Kane, Umesh Kotru and Ashutosh Zutshi are worth mentioning.

What makes Githa Hariharan a writer? How and why, she has taken up pen? When she started writing...? Whether it is her inborn talent or fortune or inspired by superior beings as it is often described in the prologue of epic narratives, or it is situational human experiences of revolutionary struggle that causes her to raise pen. These are natural questions come up usually when one deals with evolution of an artist and concerns with an artistry. It may be believed that a half of the human talent is earned, rather than gifted by the Almighty or inspired by the Moses. It is the struggle of life which gathers human experiences and those experiences turn into knowledge and wisdom that is expressed through the artistic writing. This common knowledge has to be synthesised with human intellect for an articulation of ideas. Without this intellectual exercise artistic creation is unthinkable. An artist must acquire complete sense of human life. It is the experiences, thoughts and ideas which are communicated through the art form. Hence, art is nothing but a medium of presenting something or sharing something with the larger society. That something may be comprehensible or incomprehensible ideas. In this sense art is a larger language or discourse in wider context to see life and the world, to question about and express wonder of these elements. This is why art can be termed as an extended form of language. Art is an intellectual discourse created by enlightened people with enriched experiences. On the other hand, it is logically claimed that an art is result of creative (imaginary) faculty of

human mind. As Aristotle comments that art is an instinctive process of human mind to know the unknown, to imitate and desire for rhetoric articulation or harmony. So, the cause of creating an art is a process of gathering experiences through learning to live a life and struggling for it, and imitating life through observation, and finally putting them into a compact articulation, a piece of art. Besides all these, a literary art is actually a language game or rhetoric act. As a school child she liked word game or pun. Some of these factors definitely have influenced Githa Hariharan at her becoming a literary artist. Hariharan as a child was born and brought up in different cities of India and abroad. For her education she was shifted/ sent to different cities/ other countries. Definitely she might have encountered with different challenges at different places. Her challenges have taught her much lesson of life. Thus, she accumulated diverse experiences of life and world. Her enriched experiences and struggle have largely contributed to her writing. And it is the time/ age of writing which decides the type of writer one is, the way one writes or what one writes about. Actually, writers are the products of the society, time and context. So, naturally contemporary episteme has shaped her intellect. Hariharan is a feminist revisionary writer who is revisiting, recasting and re-interpreting the past. Her revisionary writing is an insightful interrogation of the past, reinvestigation of gap between past and present/ future.

Githa Hariharan's circumscribed worlds shape her artistic life. Three things are mostly important at her evolving as an artist. First, it is her habit of voracious reading and natural interest in language game. Second, her recurrent shifting life since her childhood from one city to other, one country to other which demands for self explanation and develops nostalgia for revisit of her national ancestry, myth and

history, those places and people she comes across. Her western liberal feminist experience has also contributed to her development as a writer. Her multicultural experience adds much spice to her writing. Third, it is her activism which engages her to express her worldviews and perspective for looking at things. She is a strong social and human rights activist. Besides, her profession as an editor and columnist provides her with an advantage to link herself with intellectual world. Though she starts her writing very late in her life, she is quite a successful writer. She has published around a dozen of works. She has been able to win even the prestigious Commonwealth Literary Prize for the first best book.

Undoubtedly, Hariharan's love for lexemes and literature created enthusiasm of writing in her mind. Studies of genealogy of writing of many literary artists reveal that interest for writings starts with playing pun, love for words and languages and particular interest in reading literature. To them writing is a kind of natural game in the world of language. Hariharan's artistic genealogy is not exception to this. She said that she had genuine love for words, she played with words. To her words were melody. Books and words were her friends to play with during her desolation. Her real sense of love for words and her loneliness conditioned her to establish friendship with literature; it enhances her literary flavour and her artistic desire. Her writing is characterised by intelligent use of language and images. Indeed, her lucidity but subtle language makes her narratives interesting and impressive. She uses very shrewd and subtle language. Michael Ondaatje comments on her fiction, "Githa Hariharan's fiction is full of subtleties and humour and tenderness" (Qtd. in Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*, 2009).

In Hariharan's reply to research questionnaire that asks to tell about the background of her life which influences her artistic development is read as follows,

I have always been in love with words. I read a lot as a child – partly because we lived in different places and that can make for loneliness. My father was a journalist and that too reinforced my love for reading and writing. Reading, writing, travel, having to explain yourself and where you come from – all these contributed in some measure to the kind of writer I am. Later, getting politicized, understanding that power transactions are central to all relationships – whether in terms of gender, caste, class, race, and nations – was a powerful influence on my life as a reader and writer. I think the variety of languages in my life also contributed to my obsession with multiplicity as a central idea in my writing.

(e-Questionnaire 1, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015)

With a few exceptions, usually literary artists' life is twisted, whether it is individual or social, with hardship, struggle, conflict and challenges. Lots of such instances can be given. It is the hard struggle in search of knowledge and enlightenment from the east to the west made G.V. Desani one of the top classic writers and philosophers. Bharati Mukherjee had also the same struggle in the western context when she went to study and later got married with a Canadian husband. Her conflicting transnational experience is the main basis of her writing. Ben Okri, a Nigerian poet and fictionist, says that his acute suffering in England gave him the best thought of life. Mamoni Raisom Goswami, an Assamese writer, scholar and political activist, had tough challenges in her life who became a famous writer. Sometimes, societal demands cause the production of art and artist. Anti-colonial movement in Indian sub-continent produced many nationalist writers in the country. And as a result of new individual

struggles of modern India after independence many innovative literary artists have been born. Gandhi and Nehru, they were not only strong political/ social leaders of India but effective writers too. Women's social movement has brought an aura of gender specific writing and gender studies. For example, the second wave of feminist movement in 1960s is primarily concerned with relooking women's life, history and action. It is about "rediscovery" and "reclamation" of female life, texts, sex and self. She demands for bringing female sex into the text, a sexed text, "sexts" (Cixous 1650). It is the fact that women have been violently deprived of writing since long. Prejudice of androcentric texts is questioned and new form of gynotext is created. Helene Cixous, a French feminist theorist, argues for rethinking of life and world and she advocates for woman's writing. In her provocative essay "The Laugh of the Medusa" Cixous demands for rescuing female body from masculine text, and bringing female sex and self into texts. This movement is encouraging and bringing women more to text and writing. This is the great challenge women have before them today. Cixous gives a clarion call to her fellow beings,

I shall speak about women's writing: about what it will do. Women must write about her 'self': must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they are driven away as violently as from their bodies- for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Women must put her self into the text-as into the world and into history-by her own movement (Cixous 1942).

Thus, feminist movement has resulted emergence of many great writers in the world who write with new perspectives. Hariharan is too aware of this episteme. As a writer of present social milieu Githa Hariharan is definitely influenced by her time and

situation. India is a country surrounded by different social and political conflicts; struggle concerning not only with caste, class, race, gender, culture, liberty, but with vague idea of nationalism, nationalist tension, religious fundamentalism and extremism. India has always more challenges with the threat of secularism and unabated communalism. This conflicting and diversity ridden Indian society with unequal power structure has been the main force to ignite Hariharan's mind to assert something through her pen, and thus, she is brought to writing. Experience of western liberal education has changed her perspective towards Indian society where women have limited choice. Being a western educated intelligent woman with enriched experiences of life Hariharan determines to write and stand for multiple voices of India. She always advocates for the marginalised section of society; she gives voices to marginalised people. This is how her variety of experiences has attributed to her writings; may it be fiction or non-fiction. Her main challenge is to hold the national character of plurality and diversity, and to champion for the marginalised section of the society.

However, different writers, as she acknowledges in a questionnaire, have been important for her development of points of views in her life or may be considered as sources of artistic inspiration. Some major writers who have influenced on her life and writing, thought and action are A. K. Ramanujan, Nissim Ezekiel, Girish Karnad, Italo Calvino, George Borges, Mahasweta Devi, Paul Zacharia and J.M. Coetzee. They have overtly and covertly influenced at shaping her vision, writing technique and style. Thematic influence cannot be ignored. Moreover, she acknowledges that her inspiration of writing comes from various sources. Hariharan says, "My artistic inspiration is drawn from variety of things: sometimes it is from ideas, or an image that sparks a



mood, a situation or character. It could be an event in our times. In short, it's the barrage of impressions from the world about me" (e-Questionnaire, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015). The actual point of "inspiration" is when some of these impressions get linked. It's the linkages that make a design, a fictional world, out of what she sees, hears, thinks and feels.

Githa Hariharan's life is filled with vastness of multicultural experiences in different metropolis which has a significant influence on her works. It has shaped her character of plurality. Her life has given different sense of home. Consequently, she has developed different idea of home, a diverse concept of home. She is a person with diverse home addresses and experiences of various cities of the world. She often confuses with her home address. She does not have any specific home address since her childhood. It is because of frequent shift of living places. Having been in this transient situation, she is often perturbed by the questions: Where is your home? Where are you from? What is your home address? What is your home city? She sometimes wonders where she belongs to because she cannot locate herself to any specific place. Reality is that she does not have any single home address. Consequently she has developed an idea of composite home of many homes, composite city of many cities. Since her childhood she has been moving along with her parents from one city to another within the country and in abroad. Her father was a journalist. He was not only moving alone. He had been moving from one place to another with his family in search of job, information and knowledge. And situation of life was such that everywhere they had to be self explanatory. Wherever they went they had to explain about themselves, their whereabouts and purposes. She was born in Coimbatore. Then the family moved to

Bombay (Mumbai). As a child she grew up in Bombay and Manila, and moved from city to city in USA and India- New York, Chicago, Madras, Bangalore, Delhi etc. Her schooling started in Bombay and it continued to Manila. She often longs for those homes and cities and her longing has shaped her personality of revisiting past that is articulated in her arts. Glimpse of this recurrent shift of address by Hariharan and her frequent movement is observed in some of her works. For example, Devi, protagonist in *TFN*, born and brought up in Madras, then moves to Africa along with her parents. She and her mother return India after death of father, and again her mother sends her to America for higher education. She falls in love with Dan, an American young man. Then her mother compels her to come back to India. Thus, her backdrop of life has been the background of her fictional works. In fact, her wide range of national and transnational experiences has contributed much in her creation of artistic world.

Her wide range of cultural and geographical experiences helps her ethnographic account and portrayal of character in her fiction and non-fictional works. Her lack of any permanent address, repeated changing places and experiencing transient life of staying and meeting different people from different background and categories at different cities taught her a great lesson of acceptance of plurality and multiplicity. Then, by nature she has experienced transnational secularism. Some of her works show pluralistic force stands against the singularism and fundamentalism. She has grown up and has been working in multicultural situation at different places. Wherever she goes and stays she easily accommodates, accepts and adjusts with that place, its people, society and culture. What ultimate lesson she learnt, maybe it is accustomed to her, is that every city where she lives becomes her almost home. She says, "I have lived in my

all life in a city, but if someone asks me, quite simply, ‘Which city are you from?’ I wouldn’t be able to answer. Or I would have too many answers: Bombay (this Bombay or that), Manila, New York, Madras-Chennai, Bangalore-Bengaluru, Delhi. Or I could say: Any city, composite city of visible cities, remembered cities, imagined cities” (Hariharan, *Almost Home...* 2). In one of her essay, “Almost Home”, she has discussed about how poor immigrants, refugees, slums and other dwellers in the capital city Delhi struggle to justify their living as a part of the city producing official documents. They have different meaning of living home and defining home, landless home. Thus, her sense of plurality and multiplicity shapes her artistic bend of mind.

Hariharan is a polyglot but preferably writes in one language, English. Since her childhood she grows in multilingual society. Her knowledge of various languages helps her expansion of her body of knowledge and experience. It allows her reading different literature in the real context. As it is already said, she does not have a single address to tell. She has lived at different places and accepted those cities as her own home. As a child she experienced numerous situations in her life at different cities. It is her diverse and rich experiences which have contributed a lot to her living life and narrating it. This repeated shifting place has one more significant impact on her. She was brought up in a multilingual situation. Thus, diversity of linguistic experience has been advantage for her to gather more knowledge and information about life and thereby she is able to expand her vision and outlook of life. It is already said that they had always to explain their whereabouts, names and purposes. As a child when she moved to Bombay along with her parents she had to lose her mother tongue because in the new linguistic environment she had to speak Hindi, Marathi, Gujrathi, English and she learnt a little

bit of French. First in her school she had to explain about her name. Initially she did not have surname. Actually, in her community place name was used as initial name followed by father's name. So, her name was P.H. Githa. P stands for her village name Perinkolam, meaning Big Pond and H is for her father's name Hariharan. Githa is her name. In her school while teacher asked her to give her surname her mother wrote to the teacher simply her father's name as her surname. This is how she got new name in Bombay school. She remarks in her *Almost Home: Cities & Other Places*, "My name mapped me geographically and patrilineally" (Hariharan 3).

Young Hariharan's desolate life in Manila was translated into a good habit of speculative reading. Being a lone foreigner in the convent school in Manila she often found herself alienated. It was there she discovered that she is an Indian. She had to explain about Indian culture and tradition; about the Indian concept of transmigration of soul. Her living and narrating life at different places was part of her exploration of people, culture and society of those places. Her diverse transnational and cross-cultural experiences have trained her to see man, society and culture with critical eyes. She has developed a different vision of life. Thus, she possesses unique experiences of diversity and plurality which has been her perspective of life. Her knowledge of larger world shapes her thought and imagination which upholds plurality and heterogeneity of life. She has developed an idea of accepting and living at different places as home. Her self-explanatory state of life kindles her mind to explain about life she has lived, and about people she has met through her writings. Her *Almost Home: Cities and Other Cities* is a wonderful travel narrative and description of the cities and people she came across in

her journey of life. It is indeed a revisit of the past of those cities where she lived or she read in books. Chapter I of the book is about the seven cities which are relooked by her present perspective. This book has provided critical analysis of the concept of home. Hariharan says that the idea of home is not as easy as people take it. It depicts an ironical situation of concerning the idea of home in the capital city of Delhi. The last chapter is concerned with day-to-day struggle of Delhi refugees, slum dwellers, immigrants and poor children at rescuing shelters who have become indispensable part of the capital city. These people of Delhi are persistently trying to establish the city as their own home though they do not have legal rights to claim. They are incidental holders of Ration Cards and Voter Ids by which they are trying to identify themselves as permanent part of the city. On the other hand, there are people in this city who are living there for years, have become significant part, but cannot accept it as their own home. They have sense of alienation. The reasons for them may be cultural, social, geographical or psychological. By the way, it is to be deduced that idea of home is not fixed in case of some people; it is transient and flexible one. Hariharan has that flexible sense of home as she says that she possesses several home addresses of different cities.

Her habit of voracious reading definitely helps her in artistic speculation and interpretation. She used to read literature to music books to political discourses. It was her situation of loneliness at different places which made Hariharan read books after books just to get rid of it. Books were her friends in her solitude. Hariharan's student life was often haunted by loneliness and contemplation. As a student in Manila and U.S.A. she had reclusive life. Books provided her the best companions in her loneliness. So, in Manila and New York she spent her time by reading variety of books

to avoid loneliness. However, her deep sense of reading at solitude develops her reading qualities and level of reading. Her wide ranges of literary reading develops genuine literary bend of mind and artistic enthusiasm in her mind. It enhances her artistic sense of literary tradition which is utmost important for an artist. This artistic consciousness has to be combined with creative faculty of mind to create something new. This is the individual faculty what T. S. Eliot terms as “individual talent”. A significant point is to be made clear here. Writer’s life and writing always intermingle each other. It is very difficult even for the most impartial author to separate writer and text. Somewhere or other autobiographical elements or writer’s direct experience spontaneously becomes visible in the text. Devi’s reclusiveness in *Thousand Faces of Night* and Mala’s retrospective loneliness in *Fugitive Histories*, her revisiting her past, everything resembles Hariharan’s loneliness in Manila and New York and now, in Delhi, and her retrospection of those places at her second visit. Devi’s coming back to India and resuming the dated cultural game regulated by old order of things resembles to writer’s return to her own country and accepting the old system once again despite her desire to live in western metropolis. Like her protagonist Devi, Hariharan struggles against the traditional order of life.

Her western education and familiarity with individualism have much to do with her ideas and perspective of writing. American liberal feminism might have influenced her personality. Her familiarity with women of the western corporate world also taught her much lessons. Her academic subject itself makes her conscious about the human relationship and structure of power. MA in Political Communication adds her political ideas, nations, nature of power, role of government, and thus, western education and

experiences trained her as an intellectual which definitely has helped to explore human relation and power, resistance of silenced people in her writings. On the other hand, her western feminist experience has developed her critical outlook over Indian cultural mindset and societal affairs. This idea made her think for certain reformation and change in Indian society. This is how she becomes a feminist thinker, activist and writer in India. Indeed, she has been a strong voice for the oppressed. Her western liberal ideas are visible in many of her novels. As Khuswant Singh observes that Hariharan writes with anguish, pain and anger about what is happening to our country. *When Dreams Travel* and *The Thousand Faces of Night* are feminist texts; women centred novels as they are written in feminist perspective by changing the technique of characterisation, images of characters, atmosphere and purpose of the ancient text. Hariharan shows keen interest to raise voice for marginalised people of the society. She is well aware of the fact that women are more and more pushed back from the formal sectors in this multinational and multi-industrial society ruled by patriarchal capitalist economy. In a lecture on “The Struggle of Women Human Rights Defenders” she states that global economic policies push back women to informal sectors more and more (Hariharan, e-Questionnaire, 26<sup>th</sup> May, 2019). She deliberately questions the dated tradition and history of India and Arab. She demands that tradition and history must be questioned, squeezed and reinterpreted from subaltern perspective. Her revolutionary tone is always resonant in her narratives and characters. This is why she has adopted revisionary writing both in fiction and non-fiction writings. Her challenging, committed, and determined nature in her personal life reflects in her protagonists. Devi, Dunyazad, Mala, they are self defining, assertive and rebelling protagonists who are

like confident modern educated young women struggling for better survival with all dignities. All of them subvert the traditional norms of Indian society.

Acquaintance with Indian socio-cultural movement in Madras shapes her artistic self. The city was under strict patriarchy and dominated by upper caste Hindus. The time when she came back from New York and made a temporary stay at Madras the city was socially and politically at turmoil state. A movement of civil society was going on. Women's Organisations were very proactive. There were public meetings, rallies, protest, public talks, public book readings and intellectual discussion. In fact there was a strong challenge against the rigidities of the past and the conventional system. In all aspects of life, she observed, recurrent fight between old and new order of things. This socio-cultural struggle of the city had a deep impact on western educated young mind of Hariharan who had just come back from the US. It complimented her intellectual make up. Thus, these Madras experiences have much to do with her artistic evolution. These crucial experiences of Indian society and culture shaped her critical mind and created an urge to write and share her views on some issues and urge for certain changes of society. She got her pretty stakes of writing in the city. This is the beginning of her artistic vision. She clearly states about it in her *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places*,

My Madras had kacheris of inspiring music, music that moved me though I did not believe in the words that were sung. But my Madras had also reading groups and public meetings and women's organisations and rallies, all challenging complacent rigidities of the city I had grown to love. To reject or even criticize convention, parts of your heritage, it helps to be on intimate terms with it. You



have to have stakes, pretty high stakes, in the world you want to change, or dissect or write about. Madras showed me, almost painlessly, what my stakes were all about; as Indian, as modern Indian, as modern Indian woman, as modern Indian woman writer.... (Hariharan 7).

One of the most important aspects of her strong intellectual background is that she was born and brought up to an intellectual family. Her father was a professional journalist. He shifted his family from Madras to Bombay- settled in an area where highly intellectual classes of people lived and then to Manila, a foreign land. The family was directly involved with intellectual circle wherever the family went and settled. As a matter of fact, the family was concerned with many issues and ideas of the world. So, she was fortunate enough to have that kind of highly intellectual environment since her childhood. This background of her life has much to do with her artistic speculation of life, culture and society. Here we can refer Virginia Woolf who had similar background of artistic evolution. She was born and brought up to an intellectual family. It is the upbringing which influences greatly the life, character, personality and action of a person. Leslie Stephen, Woolf's father, was a writer and he was associated with many of the contemporary writers of England. In the family there was recurrent meeting and discussions of the writers belonging to Bloomsbury group. This kind of rich artistic and intellectual background had major influence in Woolf's thoughts and writings. Similarly, her father's intellectual circle and upbringing obviously have influenced Hariharan's intellectual bend of mind and artistic development. Thus, as a new generation Hariharan is fortunate to avail the two basic

conditions of woman writer in patriarchy which Woolf emphasises in her *A Room of One's Own*. The two conditions lie in her famous dictum “a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction” (Woolf 3).

Hariharan's nature of job is directly concerned with intellectual pursuit, writing and articulation. She has been professional editor of publishing houses as well as freelance editor with different institutions since long. Her line of works definitely might have created zeal of artistic creation in her mind. Once she also was a staff writer in WNET-Channel 13 in New York and travelled a lot. These sorts of literary activities have direct influence on her artistic evolution. Acquaintance with numerous ideas and information enables her to pour these ideas into her writing. Editing provides lots of experiences and familiarises her with technique and style of writing which might be the direct sources of her works. In this respect she can be compared with G. V. Desani, writer of wonderful novel *All About H. Hatter*, who was reader in British Library.

A great lesson Hariharan learnt in her life is plurality and multiplicity which she always advocates for and preserves herself. Pluralism has been a dominant theme in her writing. She tells it in the questionnaire, “My obsession with multiplicity is the main idea of my writing” (e-Questionnaire 1, 16<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015). As an activist and intellectual she argues for maintenance of pluralistic society of India. She fights for secularism and multiple nationalist ideas in India. In her lecture on “Narrating the Nation, Living the Nation” at Anita Baruah Memorial Lecture 2017 in Gauhati University, Hariharan says that India does not have one single narrative, rather she has multiple narratives since ages. She also argues that traditionally India was not defined as single Hindu society. Her political views and cultural opinions get reflected in her political novels *In Time of*

*Siege* and *The Ghost of Vasu Master*. Her multicultural experience of India and the US is reflected in her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. She is speaking through her character Devi about her American and Indian experiences. In the text she is contrasting the two nations. America is a country with absolute individual liberty where, Devi experiences, everything is possible. It is country of competition and solitude. It is always concerned with earning individual position and dignity. India is still loaded with old order of things: dogmas and rigidities. It is full of noises and interruption. Women's life in India is limited to ordinary aspirations of marriage, husband, child and home. Little choice they have in their life. Her western outlook makes her see critically about Indian women's life, how they are being marginalised, prescribed different socio-cultural roles and how they are tortured brutally if they failed to perform these assigned roles or failed to validate expected values. The novel shows artistic vision of changing society. Her bold characters Devi, her cousin Uma, Parbatamma and Mayamma desert husbands' home and lead their own life for their own choice and self. They struggle for their life and are free from the traditional confinement.

Her activism has much contribution to her artistic evolution. Her activism and writing progress simultaneously in her artistic journey. It has widened her outlook and perspective to the nation and to address the various issues in the country. She is not only writer and editor, but a strong human rights activist, cultural activist and practitioner. She is one of the active members of Indian Cultural Forum--active advocate of human rights, especially minority rights; women's rights, Dalit's rights, Tribal rights. She talks about various rights of people: basic rights, economic rights,

political rights, cultural rights, right to choose and right to speech/art/media. She also talks about people's new rights; right to participate in the policy making of the country and world. She is one of proactive members of Human Rights Defender Group. She is closely associated with women's organizations, activists, social workers and NGOs in Delhi. Her *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* is result of her exploration of life of the poorest of the poor of cities- slum dwellers, poor migrants, refugees, their struggle of life, who are indispensable part of city. She often walks along the lanes of Kusumpur Pahari, Kheer Road, Khan Market and visits Rescue Shelter and NGO offices, and discusses various problems of the down trodden people. Her writing gives an insight to the struggle and suffering of the poor. She talks about the various basic human rights and new human rights. In India still there exists discrimination at various levels. Still minority, tribal and women and children cannot avail basic rights to food, shelter, water and choice. Besides, she has observed that in new growing India, marginalised groups are excluded from the system and policies. Gulf between haves, and haves not, centre and margin, dominant and dominated is highly increased. To Gayatri Spivak this is a situation of new subaltern in this transnational capitalist society. In these multinational and transnational economic policies country's citizens are overtly and covertly alienated. They are not party to it as they cannot participate in the process of making policies by which they shall be regulated in this consumerist society. In this global economic process normally country's citizens are kept out of system. Thus, they are outside the whole system. It looks citizens as their targets, subjects to be used, mere receivers; kept ignorant of the system. Citizens do not have the sense of belonging to the whole system. This is a systemic violence against the common masses of the

nations. This is how new subaltern groups are created in the new world order. Githa Hariharan is aware about this new process of divisions and marginalisation. She says that every day there is new division between who eat what and who don't, who is from where; able people and disabled people, obedient and not obedient. Again it is more challenging for women because they are left out more and more in these new exclusive economic policies of the country. The system has pushed them to informal sector. They are being used in fashion industry, prostitution and domestic works. There is no security for women in the country. On daylight women are raped, tortured and butchered. These ideas are overtly and covertly reflected in her fictions.

Hariharan is the first lady to challenge for equal parenthood in Indian legal system and thus, she heralded a major change to it. It was Hariharan who fought against the Section 6 of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act (1956) and section 19 of the Guardian and Wards Act (1890), and demanded for reformation. It happened around 1994. She accidentally discovered that though she is an adult citizen of India, a working and taxpaying citizen, a wife and a mother, is not considered the "natural guardian" of her child. So, she and her husband with the help of Women's Rights Initiative programme of the Lawyers Collective filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court challenging the validity of these two legal provisions. She strongly argued that if there is any "logical" or "biological" reason that mother cannot play the role of guardian of a legitimate child. Finally, in 1999, February 17 the honourable Supreme Court declared a positive judgment saying that "it is an axiomatic truth that both the mother and father of a minor child are duty bound to take due care of the person and property of their child" (Hariharan 1, githahariharan.com, 25<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2015).

Hariharan's works are consequences of her close observation of Indian society, people and culture; reasons and institutions. As what Khuswant Singh remarks that Hariharan writes with anguish, pain and anger about what is happening to our country. Her focus is on marginalised people who are deprived of knowledge, power and facilities of the nation. Overtly and covertly, her wide ranged experiences of life and places reflected in her writing. She is interrogating the situation of the female existence, social and domestic predicaments, pain and pleasure, underground history in search of self, desire, freedom or private space, identity and representation in the patriarchal society. Moreover, she is revealing her audacious rebellious spirit to deconstruct the great mythical tradition of male chauvinism, ideological and cultural texts, and male bias literary tradition which were looked at as the sources of moral and cultural ethics. They were enjoyed as masculine aesthetics for ethics but they have been the complicit intellectual for women because they are the forces to control and restrict the female role in the whole sphere of present life. In her writing she basically revisits myths and history, tradition and heritage and she focused on what Showalter calls "rediscovery" (Showalter xv) of female life and experiences. In her two most famous novels, *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* she is retelling the ancient myths and fables, legend and stories of Arab and India which have been long accepted traditions without any question and doubt. But now they are being interrogated and apprehended, and are posited at a vulnerable position. Her writings provoke hundred of questions and arguments. She has created some very strong female protagonists as her mouthpiece to raise voice against the irrational mythical and historical tradition.

Hariharan is an innovative writer. First, she is fictionist and essayist later. Myth, fable, history, imagination and imaginary landscape have been the major theme and techniques of her early fictions. After joining Indian Cultural Forum and other institutions Hariharan inclines towards cultural politics, nationalism, reason and institution, fascism and human rights. To her activism and writing goes side by side. Her later works deem to be sediments of this activism and she becomes more of a realist and argumentative. Gradually, she is shifting from fiction to non-fiction writing. She says that writing essays is more significant in her part because it provides her better scope to argue and share her opinion with the readers directly in easier ways. It is better medium to develop argument and dialogue. It is more deliberate way to express her point of views and opinions. *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* is travelogue form of essay which reveals her multicultural experience, multiplicity of languages and multiple ideas, her involvement in activism. It not only talks about her cultural and ideological progress but her mental journey of life.

Moreover, her art makes a comment on the bias and authoritarian historiography. It shows how the patronizing power or authority plays role in exploring, accounting and analysing history of a community or a people. This agency of historiography might lead to suppress the fact and change the orientation of the interpretations. Her fiction highlights some of the significant features and problems of historiography and its challenges and objectives. It advocates the pluralistic history, multilayer narrative, timelessness of history and conflicting nature of history. Her novel *In time of Seize* is strong critique of the authoritarian agency of historiography. Certain agencies like government, community and historical association control the scholarship

of historiography. Rigidity of these agencies has been great hurdle for any further research and drawing different perspectives. *In Time of Siege (ITS)* deals with the several critical issues of history- power, nature and crisis of history. History is like a powerful chain where we are tied and pulled which is often challenged, struggled against to get liberty from it. Past is significant part of human life. It is a futile effort to detach from history or past because it is a deep-rooted psychological image and story of life which is always standing behind us like shadow to mingle with the present. History is not only external process but it has internal current in the stream of human psychology. This has been a recurrent theme in her fictions. *ITS* ironically shows that in the study of Indian history emotion/sentiment is more important than the fact or reason. History is protected by the fundamentalist organisation.

*The Ghost of Vasu Master*, Hariharan's philosophical novel, tells about her own outlook and attitude towards Indian conservative society. To cope up with the new world order and change a traditional society and its way of life has to be modified. Utmost rigidities must be withdrawn. It shows the futility of the age-old human tradition, outdated philosophy of life that is always pulled by the old members of the society as Vasu Master in the novel who is trying to impose those traditional philosophies and values on his subordinates and students who are no longer interested in them.

Hariharan's life and writing can be compared and contrasted with some of the contemporary Indian woman writers. Of post independent Indian woman novelists Anita Desai, Shashi Despande, Bharati Mukherjee, Manju Kapur, Nayantara Sahgal are worth mentioning. All of them are from urban middle-class society. They are well



educated and endowed with rich experience which has made them intellectually well equipped for participating at artistic innovation and speculation. Most of them are having western experiences. As a result, their works focus on the life of limited middle-class society of India. As female writers their main common focus is on projecting women's life, their plight, struggle for survival, self and choice. They try to create a new image of women in their writing. Obviously, their works are concerned with women marginalization. Majority of their novels are concerned with domestic sphere of female life and core focus is characters' individual psyche; their inner conflict and silent rebellion. Most of them have created strong female protagonists who struggle for own choice and personal dignity. But there exists individual difference among these novelists. Anita Desai and Bharati Mukherjee are two expatriate writers living in the US whereas others including Hariharan are writing about their living experiences of India. Still there is a vast difference between the two. So far, the presentation of female character is concerned, Desai creates marginalized female characters with perturbed psychology, weak, lacking self reliance and who usually fail to come out of conditioning (the predicament). Actually, her characters are static and victimised. Her novels are basically dealt with feminine sensibility and gender discrimination. Maya in *Cry, The Peacock*, Uma in *Fasting, Feasting* and Manisha in *Voices in the City*, these protagonists have sense of their situation but they do not have effective solution to it. Both Mukherjee and Desai see Indian social milieu with their western liberal perspective. Desai's protagonists are stereotype Indian women. But Mukherjee has wider range of setting. She has widened her backdrop of writing from India to Canada to America. Her characters move from Indian social milieu to the west. Indeed, her

works are result of her minute sense, observation and introspection of expatriate experiences of pain, sense of loss, mirage/myriad, fantasy, hope and pleasure, and obsession with multiplicity. Her novels also show melancholic nostalgia or homesickness. It is all about learning to live in the new environment with new challenge in foreign lands. Hence, Mukherjee, by no means, considers herself simply as an Indian writer, but western writer. Her characters are challenging and self reliant and realizing their choice. In her *The Tiger's Daughter* (1971) Mukherjee presents conflict of the east and the west. Her protagonist feels the burden of Indianness. As Indira Nityanandam observes, "Mukherjee's novels under consideration here explore the East-West encounter from Indian women's point of view" (Nityanadam 15). Similarly, female characters of Shashi Despande, Manju Kapur, Anita Nair and Githa Hariharan are not only challenging and self reliant and realizing their choice, strong assertive but also rebellious and confident avengers. The protagonists bravely face the traditional rigidities and successfully overcome the hurdles.

Like Hariharan, Despande and Kapur present more challenging and confident protagonists than Desai. Despande's Sarita in *Dark Hold No Terror*, Indu in *Roots and Shadows*, and Jaya in *That Long Silence*, all of them encounter with conflicting situation, passivity and silence, but ultimately they become successful in their struggle. They go beyond their predicaments. Each of them has own individual solution to her problem. Sarita, a doctor, frees herself deserting her sadistic husband; Indu gets her liberty after death of domineering Akka, and Jaya who observes silence for many years finally goes for her last resolution to reveal everything by writing a novel. Manju Kapur, a debut novelist from north India, has created many determined and challenging

and successful protagonists. For example, Virmati, (Ida's mother a freedom fighter, challenging woman who suffers ultimately for her secret love with a married professor) in *Difficult Daughters*, Astha in *A Married Woman* (here Astha is artist, a school teacher to play actress, activist, novel is about sexuality).

Nayantara Sahgal is another western educated Indian woman novelist, essayist and chronicler. Like Hariharan she is concerned with power and politics of India as she is well acquainted with elitist society of India. This aristocratic and bureaucratic experience has formed her fictional world. Political episteme of colonial and postcolonial India is reflected on her writing. As she confesses, her all novels have political backdrop. These are the reconstruction of official history of India in her fictional forms. In her works she revisits Gandhian movements of non-violence and *swadeshi*, and she gives her point of view. Hence, she is often called a political novelist. Her novels are often considered as restatement of political history of modern India. However, she is also concerned with women's marginalisation in patriarchy, their struggle for own dignity and identity. She has viewed Indian traditional society with her liberal outlook that she acquired in the US. She has produced some strong protagonists like Rashmi in *This Time of Morning*, Simrit in *The Day in Shadow*.... Rashmi overcomes her sad ridden marriage with Dalip after a long struggle. Simrit, main protagonist, struggles with her poverty and traditional Hindu society where women do not have any right and choice of life. *A Situation in New Delhi* is concerned with alienation and frustration of younger generation of India, their desire to go with new world order. Political anarchy, lacking leadership in the country and students' unrest after the death J. Nehru is highlighted in this novel. Unlike Hariharan, Sahgal

creates some fascinating male characters. *Rich Like Us*, *Plans for Departure*, *Mistaken Identity* and *Lesser Breeds*, her later fictions where she produces male protagonists. For example, Bhushan Singh in *Mistaken Identity* and Nurrullah in *Lesser Breeds* are such male protagonists. Women's life is presented through male narrators in her later fictions. *Lesser Breeds* tells the tale of Nurrullah, an English teacher, who arrives in the city of Akbarabad who showed indifferent attitude to non-violence movement of Gandhi.

Among these woman writers Hariharan seems to be unique in her style, theme, technique and characterization. Her protagonists are not only self defining but also rebellious and revisionary. They relive their past and reconstruct it to contrast with the present. To her past is unforgettable, indispensable part of everybody's life though it is inadequate basis of life. Her novels explore complex power relationship, man-woman relation, women-women bond and link of the past and present. Her fictions reject traditional heterogeneity and are marked with transcendence. She writes with subtle language, effective images and symbols. Nature has symbolic significance in her writing. Every page is fascinating with images from nature, poetic tune, impressive language and style and serious theme. As Michael Ondaatje observes, "Githa Hariharan's fiction is wonderful- full of subtleties and humour and tenderness" (Ondaatje, <http://www.mrmlonline.com>). She has used dream logic to re-imagine past and ancient text. Hariharan's writing career marked by remarkable evolutionary stages of artistic development. Her early fictions are concerned mythical techniques, womanhood, motherhood, patriarchy, women's emancipation, rediscovery of female-female bond; her writing career thematically moves from myth and history to political

issues like power structure, fundamentalism, communalism, secularism. Similarly, it goes from gender to class, caste and involves wider range from country to the world. It shows genre shift that it moves from fiction to non-fiction; change of technique, from dream and fantasy to realism; mythical character to real characters.

Hariharan's dexterity as revisionist artist can be seen in her changing the narrative pattern, motif, outlook, vision and politics of the source text seeking for re-exploration of the off-scene and marginalized background and characters, especially female characters. The hypertext is concerned with new vision and politics which have given a new pattern and direction to it for its extensive movement and examination. Her novel *When Dreams Travel* consists of two parts; the first chapter of part I is a parody of the original text telling the visible scene of the frame tale, while the rest of the novel is a metafiction as it explores the marginalized background and characters, tells untold stories and critiques the prejudiced text, *Arabian Nights*<sup>15</sup> that is about one thousand- and one-nights entertainment by Shahryar, an Arabian emperor, a pharaoh and his brother Shahzaman. On the other hand, it is about the one thousand- and one-nights' struggle of two poor sisters, Shahrzada and Dunyazad, wonderful story tellers, who risked their lives to save the lives of young virgins in the kingdom, and who were indeed real heroines without history. Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* has been a strong feminist critique of the traditional concept of women as a mere lustful traitor or cuckold, a child bearing machine, an object of male desire, propagated by *Arabian Nights*. This type of moral and ethical text has led the patriarchal society to disrespect and devalue women in the society. Myth making politics of the patriarchal society for constructing self-centred ideologies has been observed here as *One Thousand and One*

*Nights* talks only about the men's adventures and history, their hopes and frustration and thus, it hides half of the truth showing two strong figures of heroine as mere shadows or inactive figures behind the screen of the stage. To challenge this established ideological text Hariharan uses her innovative, visionary and imaginary power to give a new vibrant life, hopes and aspiration to the marginalized female characters and bring their talent and creativity to limelight. Thus, the misogynist view of the text is changed in *When Dreams Travel*. She retells the myths and legends of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in her *The Thousand Faces of Night*. She has revisioned those myths and legends through her main protagonist, a western educated young woman, who re-reads her grandmother's tales and stories with her matured mind and understands differently, and thus, she derives different meanings out of them.

### **End-note:**

#### About author

Githa Hariharan, an editor, a significant Indian writer in English and an activist, was born in Coimbatore in 1954. Then she grew up in Mumbai and Manila, Philippine, where she got her early education. She obtained her BA (Honours) degree in English and Psychology from University of Bombay in 1974 and MA degree in Communication from the Graduate School of Corporate and Political Communication, Fairfield University, Connecticut, in 1977. After that she worked as a staff writer in WNET Channel in New York. She left that job and returned her native land. Since 1979 she has been working as editor in publishing houses like Orient Longman and at el in

Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi. Then she started working as freelance editor to different institutions. Now, she is a Delhi based writer and activist. Moreover, she has been teaching and lecturing at various universities and institutions as a Visiting Professor and Writer-in-residence like Goa University, Jamia Milia Islamia University, Dartmouth College and George Washington University, the University of Canterbury at Kent and Nanyang Technological University. In 2017 Hariharan participated in the “12<sup>th</sup> Anita Baruah Sarmah Memorial Lecture” conducted by Dept. of English, Gauhati University and delivered a highly intellectual talk on “Narrating the Nation, Living the Nation”. Hariharan also closely involves herself with activism. She is a strong social and human rights activist. She has close link with numerous NGOs and associations in Delhi. She is one of the founder members of Indian Cultural Forum. She organizes different interviews and programmes under the banner of Indian Cultural Forum. Actually, she is a woman of scintillating personality. She is the author of many brilliant fictional works like *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Art of Dying* (1993), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1998), *In Times of Siege* (2003), *When Dreams Travel* (2008) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). Her most recent published novel is *I have Become the Tide* (2019). Hariharan has hand in children literature as well. She has got published a collection of short stories for children, *The Winning Team* (2004). She has written and published numerous highly contemplative and reflective essays. *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* (2014) and *India to Palestine: Essays in Solidarity* (2014) are her two non-fiction writing. She is the editor of *A Southern Harvest*, a collection of stories in English translation from four major South Indian Languages, Tamil, Telegu, Kanada and Malayam. She has co-edited a collection of stories for Indian children, *Sorry, Best*

*Friend!* (2012). Her works are widely read and researched in India and abroad. Consequently, her fictions have been translated into different languages of the world including Dutch, French, German, Greek, Italian, Spanish and Urdu. Some of her writings have been included in remarkable anthologies like Salman Rushdie's *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947-97*. Hariharan won the Commonwealth Literary Prize for first best book, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, in 1993.

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