

MOTHER DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP IN THE NOVEL *THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT*

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The novel has dealt with real as well as legendary female characters. Though all of them belong to different time but what is common among them is the legacy of women suffering. They might be unlike from one another in their social position but emotionally they are at the same situation. Every next generation is more advanced than the previous generation, but with the latent curse to be victim of social norms which work against women, children and old people. According to Mrs. Jacob, “*The Thousand Faces of Night* can be aptly defined as the several faces of thought presented by Githa Hariharan about the central theme- the struggle and predicaments of women in Indian society. The central theme is categorized as the quest for identity, penance, female bonding, marriage, chaos and dilemma by the rebellious protagonist Devi (81). The paper endeavors to discuss the novel in the light of mother-daughter relationship of Sita and Devi.

The novel tells that Devi is a modern girl who has returned to India from USA after completing her education. The novel further tells that in her childhood Devi was fed with mythological stories by her old grandmother. In every summer vacation she with her parents visited her village house where her grandmother lived alone. She was a wizened old woman, illiterate, and widowed in her early thirties, a very kind and helping. Here Devi was exposed to many beliefs and rituals. This was the first place where she started seeing the role, importance and influence of rituals. These rituals started from the moment they entered into the house and continued till they left the place. The influence of village experience does not end with returning to the home and not when was abroad rather it was more prominent during her stay there. In America she was getting marriage proposals but these proposals were not up to her expectation as “she could not find in them a trace of the bridal figure, head bent, forehead radiant, that had been lovingly etched into her mind years ago. The regal virtuous bride: the image was embedded so deeply that she did not need to open a creaking old cupboard to rediscover the beloved toys of her girlhood” (06)¹. She felt that “these proposals were not potent enough to recognize the myth-laden world that had soaked up her past”. The influence of her childhood mythological stories and aspiration to be

¹ All the unreffered citations are from Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

like the women of the stories, it suggests that though Devi lives in America but she has not forgotten her culture and traditions. She is proud to be an Indian and its beliefs. She is not influenced by the western culture. She is “unmixable mix”.

After her arrival, Sita arranges her marriage with Mahesh which Devi too gives consent for. At her new home Devi finds a fresh story teller in the form of Baba, her father-in-law. She discovers a pattern between the both story tellers. While Baba’s story “defines the limits. His stories are for a woman who has already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear. They make one point in concise terms: that the saints lived according to the laws of time tested tradition” (51), grandmother’s stories were “a prelude to [her] womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities”. Whereas grandmother’s tales are full of many possibilities for a woman, Baba’s are based on the limitation of woman. his stories make a undercurrent demand that in order to gain saints like respected position a woman must live life according to the age longed terms and conditions. His stories are never flabby and they always work as a touchstone for a woman, a wife. Here Baba can be described as a conservative and a mouth piece of society who does not want a woman to think and do apart from whatever he been watching from ancient time.

Devi is an educated woman but is in the great influence of Baba and grandmother and does not use her reason that why a woman uses all the rituals so that she can go to heaven. Even she feels excited about it and tells Mahesh that Baba has told her how to reach heaven. As an educated woman she must have asked Baba why all the duties and responsibilities are required to perform by women only? What about men? Should not he talk about men’s duties? These are very genuine question what Devi could have asked. But as she herself admits “my education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood” (54). Instead of making use of her education and talent she sits at home and gets bore. She realizes that “the long afternoon stretches before [her] like an endless, pointless road. [Her] ache with restlessness, [her] tongue is parched with lack of use. The old man is garrulous enough if [she] seek him out, droning half-stories about a part that oppresses me like a life [she] want to forget” (79). Thus, though she is an educated woman yet is not very practical.

One day Devi talks to Mahesh and shows her interest to do a job. Indeed she pines for some space. Nilufer E. Bharucha explains: “Traditionally, time has been seen as a Man and space as a Woman [the concept given by Blake]. While most feminists urge that women should claim more fully this man-ordained space, they also agree that this should not be the ultimate goal. The aim should not be simply to claim more space for women under the existing social structures but to deconstruct and transform the existing reality to reflect better Julia Kristeva’s

contention that women “are one half the sky” (93-94). But at this he remains silent and makes her guilty as if she has done something wrong.

Sita, unlike her daughter, is very dependent and talented. She was an excellent veena player and proud of her mentor. And after getting married to Mahadevan, she made proud her husband’s house also. Everything was going well but one while seeing pooja room in a mess her father-in-law got furious as he found that she had not fulfilled her household duties properly. He said, “put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (30) His statement and complaint made her to think to stop practicing her passion. She pulled strings out of the wooden base. It was her way of protest. In order to prove that she was a dutiful wife, she stopped playing the musical instrument. Grandmother says, “we never saw her touch the veena again. She became a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbors praised, and our household never heard that heart rending music again” (30). Devi found a pattern and similarity between Gandhari and her mother’s stories. She tells that “[she] said nothing, and was not precocious enough to ask how Gandhari’s story and Amma’s came together. Or perhaps I know. I must have known over then, that Gandhari’s pride, the fury that was to become her life-force, the central motive of years of blind suffering, was no piece of fiction. Gandhari’s anger, wrapped tightly round her head in a lifelong blindfold, burnt in a heart close, very close to mine” (29). *Ramayana* defines norms, the *Mahabharata* privileges rebellion, defiance and non-conformism” (Jain 126). Gandhari rebelled, but silently. Likewise Sita too made her fury of her life force, the central motive of years as “[human anger] could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life,” such is the example Sita is. Her anger was more dangerous than divine anger. She abandoned the playing veena and never touched it again and became an obedient daughter-in-law the neighbors praised. Here we can see that a loyal wife and daughter-in-law is only one who sacrifices her passion and puts forward her domestic duties. Both cannot go simultaneously.

The novel informs that she has always been different and her talent has “set her apart from the other girls; so had her unfeminine determination”. She is described living alone in a big and old house, with no attendant only a gardener. She cooks food and drives her car for herself. There is a garden scene in the novel which presents hallmark of her personality. She wants everything to be perfect, disciplined and meticulously done or whatever way she wishes things to be. Devi is told that “good housekeeping, good taste, hard work. These were Sita’s guiding mother as she had taken charge as a young bride, slowly, subtly, so imperceptibly, that nobody suspected what strength lay behind those smooth, child-like features, and the soft whispering voice” (101). She has molded the garden like her personality, everything to be at right place and in right position. It is not only the garden but plants too have the resemblance with her. There is a long, solitary laburnum, planted by her and dominates, as she dominates her family, one side of the lawn and eclipses everything around it.

The novel further tells that her favorite plant is bonsai gulmohur, “the tree sprouted only buds, no flowers. Like a childless woman, it wore its ageless expressionless detachment: its leaves never fell,” (98). The scene suggests that she does not allow any kind of rebellion against her be it of plant or of people and makes every effort to overcome it. She handles everything with the same whip. Devi is too tamed by her. Sita finds similarity between Devi and clinging creeper “both are young and tender and eager to be led in the right direction. The garden and her daughter are what she wanted them to be.

Sita poured all her effort throughout her life in order to become a compliant and self disciplined wife. It was all started after her marriage though preparation had begun before it but she applied all her knowledge after marriage. in order to become a perfect housekeeper , a blameless wife, she sacrificed her passion for playing veena for which “she practiced for at least five or six hours every day, and at night she slept with hands stretched out on either side, the calluses on the fingers gently massaged with warm olive oil” (101). With this sacrifice she recalls that she had to “put her well learnt lesson to good use those first years” and after all this “Sita needed all the strength she could master to face the big trial awaiting her. After that, it was one straight path to a single goal, wifhood. The *veena* was a singularly jealous lover” (103). All these were for the tactics to be a wonderful wife in her husband’s home so that she can fulfill the parameters of a devoted daughter-in-law.

Sita’s strength of mind for perfection was in each and field of life and people had become so strong that it was evident everywhere. She wanted to see her belongings perfect: her garden, daughter, husband and her family. And not only it but even this was the time when her *pedas* were perfect. Among her proposed things to be perfected by her Devi was a frustration for her and it was intolerable for women like her to see her daughter not to be perfect. And “Sita could never quite suppress a feeling of disappointment as she saw Devi grow into an awkward, thin, acne-ridden, stammering adolescent” (105). Her whim for perfection was perhaps at its zenith when she went to labor pain “without a twitch on her dark face; she remained impassive, a model patient, during a childbirth the doctor claimed was the easiest she had ever seen.” Perhaps it suggests her mechanical nature or excess of single-mind ness of a woman who is extremely focused to her single aim that is wifhood. Her daughter was more an instrument for her an object which she can experiment with. The minute baby was laid in her arms, free of umbilical cord; she refused to let any of the nurses touch her. She had found a new veena to play on and this time she was going to give it up so easily” (104). But later what we are informed that “her reign did not always run a smooth course; there were little challenges in plenty. Both Devi and Mahadeven had grown into the sly, shifty-eyed accompanies of a mutiny that threatened to erupt through books, daydreams, gods and goddesses, secret corners, the innocent (and therefore more dangerous) sensuality of a stranger like Annapurna” (105). Devi tells about her mother as:

My mother was not moved by the noble life of the gods. She frowned at my dreamy, inspired eyes while sought something beyond the mundane, literal world she arranged in neat, dust-free pigeon-holes around me. She said to my father, ‘This has gone far enough. Your picture-books, her feeble-minded fairy stories of gods and goddesses. I want no more of these fantasies. The girl is almost a woman, she must stop dreaming now. (45)

She further tells that:

Sita hated all illusion, however tantalizing a form it assumed. She knew what illusion was: she had seized it firmly by its roots and peeled it out till the enticing stems of seven-noted scale came apart, broken and disharmonious in a cluster of pathetic twang... now the goddess she worshipped was no veena-toting Saraswati, all femininity and ambiguity: her god rode the most practical, the most tangible (and hence most ferocious) of charges. (105)

Above mention extracts from the novel indicate towards her great effort to make her household and family members perfect but they should not dreamers at all. Perhaps she was scared of seeing dreams and because one gets disappointed in case if that could not fulfilled. Probably this is the reasons why she restricted Devi from getting imaginative because there is wide difference between dreams and reality. one cannot always expect things to happen in real life what he or she sees in dreams and this adds bitterness in life and ultimately towards a fragmented personality. It seems that Sita did not want her daughter to suffer and to see what she had seen in her life. She was aware what could be the consequence of dreaming and its result if it is not fulfilled. And the time when she realized her failure “she quelled these phantoms [Devi, Mahadeven and Annapurna] of rebellion with master strokes: she banished all gods and goddesses to their rightful place”. After Devi’s marriage “she felt the ache of something finished, the unexpected sense of loss that accompanies a mission fulfilled” (106). But hearing the news of Devi’s elopement, “Sita was at this point of time engulfed by valiant passion because she was deceived. Her life was full of sacrifices and self-control. She tried from different angles to give the best possible that she could offer, to her daughter, with great planning. But in return, Devi gave her the impure name of a woman that had been uprooted.” (Devi 202)

The mother-daughter relationship of Sita and Devi is very unusual. Unlike other mother daughter bond they lack emotional connection. Devi shares her experience when she happened to see her friends hugging their mothers and found it rather natural because she never had this type of relationship with her mother. They have been having very casual union with each other. Sita is very practical, scrupulous, and rational woman whereas her

daughter is a dreamer and credulous girl. They can be described as one who has understood the pattern of life so she takes every decision very carefully to avoid any type of failure while the other is a novice in the field of life and wish to explore unbeaten paths. Thus, their association is very unique and interesting too.

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