



“ASSERTION OF SELF” IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S *FUGITIVE HISTORIES*: A SYNOPTIC VIEW

K.V.S. MAHESWARA RAO

Lecturer in English, A.M.A.L. College, Anakapalle,
Visakhapatnam District, Andhra Pradesh



K.V.S. MAHESWARA RAO

ABSTRACT

The title of the exposition “Assertion of Self” in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* proceeds with articulation to be assertion which call for point by point basic elucidation as far as its significance and application. The word 'Assertion' hints "The action of asserting something". Despite of the fact that it is related with some other comparable words like "confident or belief". It alludes to an inquiry exceptionally hard to attempt in perspective of its dubious follow or area. One ordinarily looks to scan for somebody or something that we miss for assorted reasons. It also includes the time when it misses, where it misses, the way how it misses and the reason why it misses. In this atmosphere of change, it is important to note how women's lives have been transformed. Today, women are part of almost all the spheres of activity and there is an overall sense of empowerment among them. The reality of the situation is however complex and dichotomous as women on the one hand are empowered through education and financial independence but on the other hand they have to constantly battle with the deep-rooted traditional beliefs and practices that are detrimental to their ability to attain their true potential as individuals. Githa Hariharan through her novel *Fugitive Histories* portrays the communal riots in the year 2002 in India and the harassment against women has been apparently brought out through the novel. The voice against traditional and cultural barriers for the woman upliftment has been highlighted in the novel. It is the patriarchal logic of domination which is challenged, opposed and protested with integrated will and ideology. Through the novel *Fugitive Histories*, Githa Hariharan explains the changed scenario of woman's position and her identity in a new perspective through the protagonist Sara.

Keywords: Assertion, Elucidation, Dubious, Marginalized, Empowerment, Traditional, Upliftment and Perspective.

©KY PUBLICATIONS

Githa Hariharan (1954) is an Indian novelist based in New Delhi. She started her writing career as a writer with stories contributed to magazines. She has written five novels and a few books of stories. Her novels include *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1991), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege*

(2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). Githa Hariharan uses her novels as a vehicle of protest against male dominance over women. She denounces the subservience of Indian women and advocates their emancipation from the bondage of domination. She depicts the tragedy of women, who

in their inner mind react to this kind of subjection and persecution.

Githa Hariharan's skill goes beyond delving into the political and social problems of her country. She produces rich and complex characters with compassion. In her novel, *Fugitive Histories*, the protagonist, Sara who is an educated individual woman, tries to face conditions around her in an exceedingly bold and dynamic manner. Her vision is progressive driven female character, trying to look for an area, womanhood a distinct segment filled with thought and expression. Sara has never been a Hindu nor a Muslim. Her mother named Mala Vadyanathan, a Tamil Brahmin girl, her father named Asad Zaidi, brother Samar. While Sara's friend Rajat Shaw is an Christian and Hindu, since his father could be a Christian and mother a Hindu. She is a Hybrid within the name of faith as represent the hyphenated existence of Hindu-Muslim. She has revolted against the orthodox system of caste and religion in an exceedingly traditional commune of India. Sara lives in Mumbai and works in an NGO, named Sangam. She also writes scripts for documentaries. She writes a script for City Skyline, a movie produced by her friend, Nina. Nina requests Sara to prepare another script for her next documentary, associated with Gujarat riots. Nina tells Sara the objectives of the documentary and requests her to go to the affected people of Gujarat for a more vigorous understanding to jot down the script.

Sara's father, Asad is a man of ideals. Being a dutiful daughter of Asad, she inspired by his ideals (Humanity, who gives least importance to religion), she becomes a welfare worker in the society. She was very near her father in her idealistic manner and his death comes as an excellent blow to her. She knew well that Hindu-Muslim riots were chiefly accountable for Asad's untimely death. Sara seems interested to visit Gujarat and write the script, because she is keen to understand what makes people hate one another at the name of faith. She also wants to conduct a look on the causes of killings, supported religious prejudices and to find out herself.

In India, where women have redesigned role, which does not allow any space for individualism, identity and assertion. Githa Hariharan talks of

women who question the age old traditions and want to seek individual identity and growth. They try to reassess the known in a new context and find a meaning in life. Sara along with Nina goes to Ahmedabad to grasp about the people, littered with the Gujarat carnage. Sara and Nina visit a number of the dislocated families in their relocated colony. They can't record their statements; simply they'll note them down after getting back in their room, in order that they should hear them very carefully and remember the maximum amount as possible. Sara gets anxious after meeting Yasmin, a seventeen year old girl. They find themselves comfortable in each other's company. Sara wants Yasmin to unfold her dark grief. Sara learns through her interaction with the Muslim ladies that their children have left the varsity. Sara takes Yasmin to her old sweet home, where Yasmin breaks down and tells Sara about the incident which happened as a nightmare in her life. She unfolds with tears how she escaped being molested by middle aged man, her mother came in between. The same person attacked Yasmin with sharp weapon on her thigh. She could feel the pain of being a female over a Muslim. This clearly shows the status of Sara. Her fear shows her troubled state of mind.

The psychic travails of the estranged self-indicate a measured and specified movement from self-desertion to self-assertion. When her (Githa Hariharan) women characters are carefully scrutinized, they reveal the thought they remain disintegrated and fragmented in the beginning. It is the inner urge that springs from their self-identification that strikes a balance between the constructive and destructive aspects of self-alienation.

Sara knows how difficult it is to be normal under such grave situations. Sara talks to Yasmin for a few time and meets another Muslim families. She listens to them patiently knowing well that she cannot do anything for his or her comfort. She feels terrified of asking any wrong question. Next day, Sara meets Yasmin again within the school during Yasmin's lunch break. As Yasmin speaks, Sara sees her releasing her tension. She feels happy as Yasmin interacts together with her and provides vent to her feelings. Yasmin talks to Sara

about everything. She discusses her emotions and her condition with Sara. Sara sees Yasmin working hard to pass her twelfth examination. She wants to induce admission in an exceedingly college, in order that she will be able to get employment later and share her parents burden.

Sara realizes that the riots have done a permanent damage on the minds of the victims, impossible to rectify. Sara interviews plenty of girls and helps them releasing their stress and tensions. When the affected share their misery, Sara's mind shifts to a replacement world where she visualizes different scenes. Sara's eyes are bent over Nasreen. Staring at her, paying attention to what she's saying. Sara can almost see a pair of invisible arms pulling Nasreen into a pit. And suddenly, as Sara imagines this pit, they're all past preludes. All of them, not just Nasreen, are being pulled into Hell or pushed into it.

A woman called Zainab narrates the prejudices and disparity the Muslim children must face. She tells Sara about her son Nasir's incident, "My son left the school...we wanted him to check within the English medium school so he might be an engineer...but the principal was doing partition works" (FH 180). In her interaction with Nina another lady Reshma expresses the necessity of a faculty for his or her children. So they'll engage in studies removed from religious dogmatism, conflict, intolerance. The narration of experiences expressed by the Muslim ladies to Sara and Nina are so tearful, that the cassette players they need brought don't seem to be enough for the saga of unpacked emotions called stories.

Sara was a fun loving and carefree girl. When Sara was a tiny low girl, she won't feel happy. At school, she always felt that she is somewhat different from other girls. She isn't like them. In her school, she admired a woman named Tripti who was a confident smart girl. Once when Tripti enquired about her caste, Sara couldn't provide a definite answer. They remained friends but a skinny clear glass window slide into place between them. Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjugation of Women* (1869) are the other mileposts of modern woman's path for unrestrained attempts for self-realization and self-definition and

self-assertion and other more explicitly say, "an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society at the place of work and within the family, and conscious action to change the situation" (Bhasin and Khan 3).

Next morning, Sara decides to pay a visit to the grave of Asad. She buys some flowers and goes to the graveyard. She sees such a big amount of graves but isn't sure about Asad's grave. She sees a grave with a white goat thereon, nibbling the grass. She sees a poor woman there and offers her money and flowers. The old poor woman blesses her and promises to seem after the grave till she comes again. Sara knows she is going to never visit again as Asad isn't there within the graveyard. Sara knows that Asad is roaming freely somewhere. Sara leaves Delhi and returns to Mumbai. She posts an honest luck card to Yasmin for her examination. Sara gets regular calls from her office. They ask her to form a choice between 'Sangam' and her proposed film. Sara recalls everything. She will be able to understand everything but finds herself unable to pen down all the emotions to form a movie script. Sara's own identity doesn't let her write the script. She has never been a Hindu or a Muslim but finds that remaining neutral in times of communal hatred isn't really an option.

After spending a week in Ahmedabad Sara boards the train to Delhi. An aged couple within the train offers breakfast to her and she or he willingly eats the delicious breakfast. After having a decent conversation when the person asked about her caste and origin, Sara again couldn't find a precise answer. She couldn't say she is simply Sara or a proud hybrid, as she knows that some things are a matter of religion. Sara answers she is half Hindu and half-Muslim as her parents come from different parts of the country. She finds the couple embarrassed on her behalf. They suddenly step back and show no more interest in her. This incident reminds her again of Tripti- her school friend. She another time introspects. After introspection Sara gets a precise answer. She involves know that like Maua (Asad's grandfather) she chooses to be an Indian. She chooses to be her parents' daughter. She is secular. Whether or not she is given the name of a muslim, she knows she could be a person first.

Sara feels that she will be able to be both-Hindu and Muslim, who celebrates all the festivals with equal passion. She sees a decent range of choices before her. Here, readers see Sara entering the stage of identity achievement by choosing and committing to her role of a lady only. She overcomes anxiety, tension and fear. She also gives strength to Yasmin. Now Sara knows well that she will be able to only be a lady standing firmly with none particularly name, religion, race or caste. She seems like a young lady with a 'body' only. When Sara reaches Delhi, she finds her mother looking forward to her with an extended list of questions. When she reaches home, she sees her mother very keen to grasp her experiences. She doesn't want to inform anything to Mala. She knows how difficult it's to work out other peoples' pain or miseries.

Sara has not chosen the past. She feels happy with her father's ideals, but once she realizes the reason of her father's death, she willingly commits to some relevant goals and roles. Her goal of living peacefully in society without having a particular religion and her role of a true and real woman. On being asked about her identity, "Sara laments with a deep sigh I have Muslim relative and Hindu relatives. I'm neither. Sometimes I think I'm Indian. But most of the time I'm just Sara" (FH 167). It shows her self assertion. Indian woman who masters the skill of enduring the oppression be it physical or emotional, lives with the assertion of being herself. She also learns to help others in the similar state and become conscious of their respective problems.

Githa Hariharan portrayed the sacrificing nature of traditional woman through the character of Sara in *Fugitive Histories*. She successfully portrayed multifaceted role of individual self in the present scenario. She also juxtaposed the role of a woman in the present society. Her novels moved on to arrive at varying levels of intellectual self assertion which enabled the characters to either attain freedom or reconciliation through self intelligence. She had also succeeded in tracing the battle of woman in her relationship with man and society. Githa Hariharan, of all, provides a pattern for the projection of feminist concerns in the contemporary Indian women writings. Women writers portray the hissing discontent that they have

allowed their victimization and paved way ultimately to reach their goal of self-assertion.

References

- Bhasin, Kamala and Nighat Said Khan. *Some Questions on Feminism and Its Relevance in South Asia*. 1986. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2000.
- Das, K. and Deepchand, P. *Studies in Women Writers in English*. Delhi: Commonwealth, 2012.
- Dharurkar, V. L. *Mass Communication Theory*. Aurangabad: Chaitaniya Publications, 2008.
- Hariharan, Githa. *Fugitive Histories*. New Delhi: Penguin Books Ltd., 2009. Print. P.180,167.
- Sundaram, Aparna. "A Culture of Violence: A Study of Kishwar Desai's *Witness the Night* and Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*." In Balkrishnan, Anita. (eds.) *Transforming Spirit of Indian Women Writers*. New Delhi: Authors Press, 2012.