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NOVELS OF GITHA HARIHARAN: A PLANET OF MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

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ABSTRACT

This brief study discusses various dimensions of mother-daughter relationship in the novels of Githa Hariharan. She has presented a huge variety of this relationship, like illiterate, well educate, talented Brahmin family background, lower caste, rich and poor etc. This study explores through these fictional mother-daughter relationships the main reasons, loose points and gaps of break-up, and destruction of this harmonious relationship. The sole aim of this study is to provide learning from the mistakes of the fictional characters so that we cannot repeat the same mistakes in our actual life because life is not so long that we learn by doing own mistakes so we must need to learn from these fictional characters and live with harmonious relationships.

**Key-Words:** Dimensions, mother-daughter relationship, huge variety fictional mother-daughter relationship, fictional characters, actual life harmonious relationship.

Indian fiction in English has matured itself over the years. It has become more expressive and experimental, both thematically and stylistically, than ever, and has come to establish itself as an indigenous branch of world literature. With the passage of time novel in English became recognized as an effective vehicle of human relationships in Indian society. Novelists since the formative years of this genre have been exploring through it, human relationships in the complex Indian society. R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arundhti Roy, Kiran Desai, Jhumpa Lahiri, Geeta Mehta, and Githa Hariharan etc., have produced social novels which deal with the theory of human relationships in the traditional and transitional Indian society.

Githa Hariharan born in 1954, is one of those enigmatic writers, whose works have received wholehearted commendation by critics like Michael Ondaatje and J.M. Coetzee and as well as a tense and bemused condemnation by many critics in India and abroad. Githa Hariharan is not merely a novelist,

but a philosopher, a weaver of stories, a teacher, a scholar and a famous literary figure among the literary artists of Indian writing in English.

Githa Hariharan is a well-known literary genius among contemporary woman writers in Indian Writing in English. She unties the Gordian knot of complex, extra-marital relationships by her pen, through the concept of human relationships. One can easily understand Indian life, its cultural religious, mythical and social values after comprehending the concept of relationships, which is a strong binding factor for all the Indians belonging to different castes and faiths. Hariharan not only deals with the human relationships as per the town or city paradigm, but she views such relationships in the village and rustic arena too. Her works are mirror of Indian life. Githa Hariharan deals in her fiction with various themes but exploration of human relationships in their myriad dimensions is an important area of Githa Hariharan's interest. Githa Hariharan has presented myriad dimensions of personal relationships through rich and complex

characters with compassion. Her novels are full of man-woman, man-man and woman-woman relationships. Hariharan has presented these relationships with full care and sincerity. She has shown how man-made geographical, social, linguistic and cultural barriers come between harmonious relationships. Thus, her novels are complex web of personal relationships. Hariharan has depicted in her novels various ups and downs in man-woman relationships, especially husband-wife relationship. Githa Hariharan in her novels presented personal relationships with a number of angles. In personal relationships, it is man-woman relation which drew her attention most. Hariharan considered man-woman relation as the pivot for the existence of humanity. She has given secondary place to the relation between man and man, woman and woman and parent and child in her novels.

Woman-woman relationship is another broad division of personal relationship after man-woman and man-man relationships. Mother-daughter, grand-mother-grand-daughter, aunty-niece, sister-sister, cousin sister- cousin sister, mother-in-law to daughter-in-law, and sister-in-law to sister-in-law etc. come under this umbrella of man woman relationships in vast space of personal or interpersonal relationship.

In Githa Hariharan's novels one can find a number of woman-woman relationships in which she focus on mother-daughter, mother in law-daughter in law, sister-sister, cousin sister-cousin sister and grandmother-granddaughter relations with their multiple dimensions.

Mother-daughter relationship is the core of woman to woman relationship. Githa Hariharan depicted this relationship with her keen interest. She presents this relationship with various angles.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Sita and Devi relation is an example of this relationship. Sita is a very possessive mother because Devi is her only child. So she gives all motherly love and freedom to her daughter. Sita is a young maestro of Veena. She plays it daily in the morning in her law's home. But one day her father-in-law rebukes her to play Veena and from that day she never touched Veena. She opened the strips of Veena from its wooden frame. Without Veena her life turns into a living death and

in all her remaining life she remains a wife and daughter-in-law. But she does not want that her own daughter remain deprives from education she sends her daughter Devi to America for higher studies and turns her in a well educated girl. But in the role of a mother she matches the horoscope of her daughter that is effect of brahminism on her and made tragic mess to the life of Devi. Nilufer E. Bharucha judiciously comments on this relationship:

Devi's rebellious spirit, however, is not so easily tamed. In a clever move, Sita gives her along rope and lets her go to University in the US, but when the time is ripe Devi is drawn back to India and married off to Mahesh. Marriage once more traps Devi in man-made enclosures. (102)

Sita does not ask a single time to Devi that to whom she wants to marry or does Devi like Mahesh? Mohit K. Ray rightly comments on Devi: "Yet she decides to return from unconfined space of America to the restraining limits of the mother's space." (154) After the death of her husband Mahadevan, there was no pressure on her but the so called traditional brahminical culture forces her to match the horoscope but not the thoughts and ideas of the girl with the matching boy means of Devi and Mahesh. Her over possessiveness and Devi's submissiveness make Devi, a suffering woman. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments:

It is interesting to note that Sita, the mother, again significantly has no stories to offer to her child. Devi has no inheritor to her mother's stories but a legatee to her silence. Sita's dogged efforts to manipulate and organize the life of her husband and her daughter in perhaps a way to escape from the silence that she had willed/imposed upon herself. Her obsession with ordering life around her according to her liking/inclination is discernible even in her garden that is pruned and plotted to perfection. Sita should not sustain her 'own' stories; she silences her Veena and directs her abilities in deciding upon 'stories' of others to live out. (153)

This relation shows a traditional Brahmin mother, a firm believer of brahminical orthodoxy

and a submissive well educated daughter who eats her hard earned education by just following her uneducated mother.

In *When Dreams Travel* Raziya's relation with her two daughters Shahrzad and Duniyazad depicts the another example of mother daughter, she nourishes and trains her daughters not for the kitchen and stitching but in full wisdom. She trains both of them in wit and knowledge. Raziya loves her daughters very much. When her husband, the Wazir makes ready to both his daughter for going to the palace for Sultan Shahryar then Raziya watches her daughters to going the King's palace. She sacrifices her both daughters for the sake of city:

True to her name - Raziya, the woman who is agreeable- if she had reservations about her children being offered up for the sacrifice, no one heard about it. Except the wazir perhaps, and he was adept at reducing voices, especially those raised in protest, to a complicitous silence. (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 83)

Shahrzad and Duniyazad both love her mother very much when they are going to the palace of the king. Then Duniyazad saw her mother last time:

Duniyazad, on turning around a last time, saw her mother is face. The look on her face as if the muscles had lost their elasticity all at once, the bones disconnected and knocking about, meaningless, in shriveled up air less bag. A look Duniyazad knew instantly (though she have never yet looked the ultimate terror in the face), not just of grief, after and hopelessness; but a look which belonged on the face of death. (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 83)

This is the condition of Raziya when the daughters go to the palace of the Sultan. Her body turns to bloodless. She is the mother who watches her daughters who were going for death, she thinks this because before her daughters, from a long time of three years each night a virgin went to the palace but no one returned alive. The Sultan Shahryar kills them after sex:

What was happening to Raziya was so subdued and imperceptible that they hardly

knew she was dying till she actually collapsed. Broken heart people whispered, when she was wrapped in Shahrzad's in unused shroud on the five hundredth night. (Hariharan, WDT, 84)

Duniyazad feels that she is also watching her mother's face last time. In the palace she also remembers her mother Raziya.

She saw her mother's heart for a moment before it was shrouded from sight and buried forever. And what she saw was not broken spring, but a chamber where outrage swelled the air; stretched it to grotesque dimensions till the tightly packed, thin skinned balloon of the place exploded: the after-math of an enraged heart. (Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, 84)

Duniyazad also first time sees the emotions and heart of her mother and comes to know the deep love of her mother for her. She watches the love of her motherly heart which is full of love for Duniyazad.

Their relation presents the different face of mother-daughter relationship where a mother turns in living death or almost dead when she scarifies her daughters to the cruel Sultan Shahryar and the daughters who love her mother at the core of their heart.

Rekha and Tara relation in the novel, *In Times of Siege* depicted another dimension of mother-daughter relationship. Tara is the only daughter of the family. Rekha leaves her husband alone and goes to Seattle, America along with her daughter Tara when Tara gets a computer job in America. Rekha plays a role of a mother, as a responsible mother she never sends her daughter alone to America. She presents an Indian mother who always worries and so careful about her daughter and never ready to leave her alone, however she is in India or abroad. Tara also likes and loves her mother more than her father. Rekha is very happy when her daughter gets a job in America. She prompts and encourages her daughter for job and studies. Rekha's behaviour is very friendly towards her daughter. She says her husband Dr. Shiv Murthy about Tara in a very happy sense. "She's

fine, she loves the job, you should see the size of your daughter's new office. (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 57)

Rekha and Tara relation presents another dimension of mother-daughter relationship where a mother plays her responsibilities of a mother and establishes her daughter's career and a daughter who totally depend on her mother or loves and lives with her mother than her father.

The relation of Sumati and Meena shows another face of this mother-daughter relationship. Sumati sends her daughter to Delhi for studies. However she lives in a village but she aware of girl education. She knows the necessity to educate the girl child. Sumati cannot come to the University for in any emergency of her daughter so she requests to her old friend Prof. Shiv Murthy to be a local guardian of her daughter. So the relation of Sumati and Meena shows that when Meena's leg breaks in an accident then her local guardian help her and takes away Meena to his own house. The arrangement of local guardian made by Sumati helps a lot in the condition of broken leg of Meena. Meena is also very responsible daughter when in an accident her leg breaks Shiv Murthy says that he inform her parents about her accident but Meena requests to him for not informing her parents about this because she does not want to give any tension to her parents, especially to her mother. Meena says to Shiv: "Look, I know you plan to call my parents. She slips this is casually, though she is watching him carefully, I'll be all right here. You don't mind, do you?" (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 14) Shiv replies to her that it is her own house she can stay here comfortably. But he says her, "I think we should speak to your parents, you would be more comfortable with your mother here." (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 14) But in the last Shiv agrees upon the request of Meena. He stops worrying about informing Meena's parents. "After all the girl in her twenties, she must be allowed to make her own decisions. (Hariharan, *In Times of Siege*, 22)

The relation of Sumati and her daughter Meena adds a new dimension in mother- daughter relationship in which a mother knows the necessity of girl education and sends her daughter Meena in Delhi for higher studies and not only this she also

arranges a local guardian for her in Delhi and a daughter whose leg fractures in an accident. But she does not inform to her mother about this even she stops Shiv, her local guardian to inform her mother because she does not want to give any tension to her mother.

In the novel *Fugitive Histories*, Mala and her mother relation shows this relationship with different angle. Mala's mother is a traditional Brahmin woman and her daughter Mala is an educated girl. Mala decides to marry Asad a Muslim by birth and a secularist by thoughts. Her mother is against this marriage. She says very simple thing to Mala to change her decision and it also be funny as well: "And you said that the food in Nasreen's house was oily, have you forgotten? Wails her mother." (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 69) Her mother does not stop here and the quarrel increases day by day and her mother says: "You are killing us! You'll marry this man, this forgiener, and you'll be lost to, you'll kill us!" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 69)

Mala's mother presents an Indian stereotype traditional mother who always remains against the love marriage. Their relation presents a window in which one can peep and can see different view of this mother-daughter relationship, in which a traditional Indian mother who remains against the love marriage and an educated girl who decides to choose her own life partner.

In the same novel Mala-Sara relation shows another face of this mother daughter relationship. Mala is a Hindu Brahmin woman who marries to Asad, a Muslim by birth and a secular by the ideas. Sara is their hybrid daughter half-Hindu half-Muslim. Sara lives in Bombay, away from her mother and there is a sound understanding between them. Sara praises her mother for her decision of marriage with Asad, her father. She says: "Good thing Asad and you married when you did. This sentence touches the heart of Mala. Sara says that "How lucky I am" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 184) to daughter of the couple who made inter religion marriage. Mala questions her daughter Sara that in which sense she is lucky? Then Sara replies:

Yes I'm beginning to realize how lucky I am, how glad I am that I'm a hybrid. Sara drop her gaze, adds almost shyly, I wish I could

tell Asad that. (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 184)

Sara loves her mother and as well as also respects her from the core of her heart. So this relation shows a lovely mother and a hybrid daughter who is so grateful to her mother for the act of her marriage with her father Asad.

Yasmin and her Ammi's relation is an outstanding example of mother-daughter relationship which throws light on the another corner of this relationship. Yashmin's Ammi (mother) loves her daughter very much and she is very careful about her daughter. After disappearance of Akabar, her only son now Yashmin is both her daughter and son for her. Ammi is very courageous mother, she sends her daughter to school while the other women of her community stop their daughters' education after massacre of 2002. Ammi does tailoring and stitching work at home. She earns a little. But when Yashmin ready to go to school her mother gives her pocket money from her little earning. Yet her eyesight is very weak:

But has no trouble when she opens the red round box where she keeps buttons and small hooks. She squints at the shiny little things, the plastic and steel hooks as bright as the five and two rupees coins. She chooses two fat coins, one thin one, hands then over to Yashmin. (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories*, 199)

After giving this little money in the hands of Yashmin, Ammi instructs her as a careful mother:

You'll be careful? She asks if Yashmin has to guard something precious, say ten thousand rupees in her school bag. You'll come home directly? Don't talk to anyone once you've left Sultana at her class. (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 199)

On the other hand, Yashmin is very responsible towards her mother. She makes promises to herself to take care of family like a son. Yashmin promises that she will follow her mother and she will never betray to her mother.

She had made so many promises to, Ammi, Abba, to herself, to Akabar though he was no longer with them, that sometimes she

feels heavy with promises, fat and swollen with it like the crazy pregnant woman upstairs. If Yashmin runs, if she trips or falls, she will break a promise. The promises she made to herself are the worst of all, they are huge as airy balloons, but they are made of such fine glass that they can break without being touched. Keeping a promise to someone else sometimes meant breaking the promises you made to yourself. This is a strange and troubling thought. (Hariharan, F. *Histories*, 199)

This relation presents a picture of a scared and suffering mother and a daughter on whose shoulders now all the responsibilities of family. This relation is a mirror in which occurs a new dimension of mother-daughter relationship.

Thus, one can say that Githa Hariharan in her novels has depicted a number of interpersonal relationships. To say this will not be wrong that her fiction is microcosm of interpersonal relationships. She has presented in her novels various types of interpersonal relationships with their myriad dimensions. She has explored these relationships with their ups and downs and with their tears and smiles.

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