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Cultural Resistance In The Selected Novels Of Githa Hariharan And Manju Kapur

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Introduction

Cultural themes in the contemporary writings of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur are significant. Both are postcolonial writers and are very much aware of women's rights. They are well-read and educated. They raise questions through their novels. Their novels are women-centric and certainly question male dominance, as well as the pressure put on women not to go beyond patriarchal traditions. Every novel asks questions about gender, women, identity, society, and inheritance.

Githa Hariharan belongs to a South Indian Brahmin family. Her questions arise against the whole male-dominated society, not against any individual person or any specific family. She awakens the whole male-dominated society through her novels, such as *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992). Githa Hariharan grew up in a multicultural family and is interested in mythology, folk tales, tradition and modernity, power dynamics, cultural orthodoxy, political criticism, history and memory, and women's identity.

Manju Kapur belongs to a Hindu Punjabi family. She is inspired by real-life incidents. Her central themes are family issues. Her novels deal with modernity, freedom, Hindu customs, traditions, conventions, the exploration of women's identity, sexual orientation, education, social expectations, and choice, and they deal with feminist themes.

Kapur examines the complexities of women's identity, sexuality, education, social expectations, and the right to make independent choices. Her fiction consistently engages with feminist concerns. As Kapur states, "Tradition that refuses to entertain doubt or remains impervious to new thoughts and ideas becomes a prison rather than a sustaining life force." This statement reflects her critical perspective on rigid social traditions.

Key words: Resistance, Patriarchy, Feminism, Identity, Mother-daughter Relationship, mythology.

Literature Review

Leena V. Phate , examines in her study on the themes of cultural identity and identity crisis in the selected novels of Githa Hariharan, argues that Hariharan portrays women's identity and their struggle for selfhood. She presents strong female characters who attempt to establish their own identities while confronting violence against women and the constraints of social traditions. Through her novels *The Thousand Faces of Night*, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, and *Fugitive Histories*, Hariharan portrays women resisting orthodox cultural beliefs and practices. This study helps in understanding cultural resistance in Githa Hariharan's literary works.

Sharma Agrawal, describes Githa Hariharan as a postcolonial writer whose works focus on social issues and feminism. In her novel *Fugitive Histories*, she portrays the suffering of Muslim women and the social injustice that followed the 2002 Gujarat riots. The study argues that Hariharan raises her voice against political oppression and brings the social and cultural experiences of marginalized communities to the forefront through her fiction.

Githa Hariharan challenges in “In Search of our other Selves: Literature as Resistance” the fixed

notions of culture and history in her novels. Cultural resistance in Hariharan's fiction is not

limited to opposing traditions; rather, it critiques orthodox interpretations of history and tradition,

challenges their assumptions, and presents a new perspective. She demonstrates that history is

often used to promote political interests by reinforcing conservative ideologies.

S. Narmadha, and Dr. T.K .Vedharaja, examines in “Analytical Study of Manju Kapur’s Works” how Manju Kapur portrays the condition of women in a patriarchal society. It highlights their struggles, gender discrimination, identity, rebellion, and desire for freedom. The study emphasizes that the female characters in her novels are not silent sufferers of oppression; rather, they openly challenge traditions and the male-dominated social order. The book helps readers understand Manju Kapur's literary vision and evaluates her contribution to contemporary Indian English literature.

Dr. Dattatraya Mukund Rao More, examines “Against the Backdrop of Tradition: A Study of Manju Kapur's Heroines”, argue that Manju Kapur portrays women who resist patriarchal structures and social traditions while striving to live independent lives. The study analyses *Difficult Daughters*, *A Married Woman*, *Home*, and *Custody* to demonstrate how Kapur's female protagonists remain capable of making their own decisions despite the social and cultural restrictions imposed upon them. The study provides a valuable understanding of cultural resistance in Manju Kapur's fiction by highlighting the role of women in challenging orthodox traditions and asserting their agency.

The research gap identified the previous studies on Githa Hariharan have primarily focused on women's identity, identity crisis, and postcolonial discourse, while studies on Manju Kapur have mainly examined patriarchy, women's identity, and the conflict between tradition and modernity. However, comparatively little attention has been paid to a comparative study of cultural resistance in the selected novels of both writers. Therefore, this attempts to fill this gap.

The aim of this research is to undertake a comparative study of the selected novels of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. It seeks to examine how both writers challenge social traditions, cultural norms, and established beliefs, and how their female characters construct their identities while resisting patriarchal and cultural constraints.

The significance of this study lies in its comparative analysis of cultural resistance in the works of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. It helps explain how both writers portray women's resistance to social and cultural orthodoxies and represent women's empowerment through their fiction.

Cultural in the Family Patriarchy, Identity Crisis in the Postcolonial feminist Themes

Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur are interconnected through tradition, modernity versus custom, women's identity, social expectations, education, culture, orthodoxies, and power dynamics. Without these issues, their novels are incomplete. Githa Hariharan's debut novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, critiques marriage and family orthodoxies. On the one hand, the traditional characters Sita, Devi's mother, and Mayamma navigate restrictive societal norms. On the other hand, Devi, the novel's protagonist, breaks these restrictive societal norms. However, toward the end of the novel, they are not happy. Hariharan explores the shackles of marriage. Ultimately, according to the novel, cultural orthodoxies do not leave any woman happy. At present, whether women follow the ideal path or not, cultural orthodoxies are never satisfied. They keep searching for and objectifying women. They teach women how to behave and what their roles should be in society (Second Sex, p. 48). Githa Hariharan explores the different strata of the condition of motherhood from different points of view, considering marriage, sexuality, and cultural control in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. "Thousand Faces of Night explore many facets of womanhood. Strangely enough, all women characters are unhappy with motherhood if attended is forceful and unwanted. Devi and others, including Parvatiamma or Mayamma, who after attending it, reject it." (Sharma). In *Thousand Faces of Night*, women are not merely confined to the role of motherhood; rather, they are compelled to conform to the expectations imposed upon them by society, family, and their husbands. As a result, motherhood and other prescribed gender roles become sources of suffering and dissatisfaction rather than fulfillment. Characters such as Devi, Parvati Amma, and Mayamma illustrate how women suppress their own desires and aspirations in order to meet patriarchal and social expectations, ultimately experiencing emotional conflict and a loss of personal identity.

Similarly, Manju Kapur's debut novel, *Difficult Daughters*, won the 1999 Commonwealth Prize and explores typical Hindu society. The protagonist resists the social norms of that time without her parents' support. The novel appreciates the conflict between modernity and tradition, marriage and cultural orthodoxies. In Hindu culture, women have to marry; otherwise, they are not given respect. Kasturi says, "Hai re beti! What is need to do job? A woman's shaan is in her home. Now you have studied and worked enough. Shaadi! Here Kasturi eyes's glistened with emotion, After you get married, Viru can follow" (Kapur, 19-20). This statement reflects the patriarchal belief that, regardless of how educated or professionally accomplished a woman may be, society and traditional norms continue to regard marriage as the primary source of her dignity, respect, and social acceptance.

Common Cultural Themes

Both postcolonial novelists think according to their post-independence Indian context and women's development. Both are feminists as well as social activists. One of them represents real-life experiences, while the other involves Indian mythology, folk tales, and tradition.

Mother-Daughter Relationship in the Contemporary Cultural World

The mother-daughter relationship plays a very important role in the novels of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur. They portray this relationship from different perspectives. One presents it through myths, fables, and traditions, while the other shows the real-life complexities and the emotional distance in mother-daughter relationships.

Githa Hariharan explores all walks of life, including old culture, modern culture, and women who belong to different phases of their culture. Some of her characters are faithful, while others are unfaithful. Most of her characters are aware of politics, religion, spirituality, virtue, piety, chastity, and modernity. In *The Thousand*

Faces of Night, Devi, the protagonist, breaks society's norms. On the other hand, her mother and Mayamma navigate strict societal norms. They contradict each other. Hariharan gives a glimpse of myths and fables, which attract the reader's attention. Mythological figures explore the plight of women of that era, where we are aware of the parental love for their children. However, girls are not given the same love and care as in earlier times. The novel shows progress in education but fails in child care. Tradition teaches women, not men. Girls should have limits in how they sit, speak, and walk, where they will be married, and how much they should be educated. Women's characters are greatly affected by stereotypical culture, which binds them within certain limits. Although Devi lives freely, constant societal norms interfere with her freedom of mind. Somewhere, she becomes trapped within these circles. As Simone de Beauvoir famously states in *The Second Sex* (1949), "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." This statement reflects the socially constructed nature of gender and reinforces Hariharan's portrayal of women's identities as products of patriarchal culture. Similarly, Manju Kapur explores three generations of family life in her novels and shows the culturally orthodox relationships of women, especially in *Difficult Daughters*. We find the continuous relationships between Kasturi and Virmati, and Virmati and Ida. In an interview with Jai Arjun Singh, Kapur observes: "Literature by women, about families, always has these layers of considerations with years of studying texts, it becomes almost second nature to look beneath the surface at social and economic forces, gender relationships, and how they are played out in an arena that, in my writing happened to be the home. But then all sorts of things happening inside the home." (Singh)

This statement suggests that the home is not merely a place of residence but a significant site where power relations are constantly negotiated and challenged. It is within the domestic sphere that patriarchy, economic dependence, gender inequality, and social norms become most visible. Consequently, in Kapur's novels, the home serves as the primary space where women's struggles against oppression and their resistance to patriarchal structures are vividly portrayed.

Silence, Voice, and Resistance in the Cultural Orthodoxes

Githa Hariharan draws her characters from the perspective of myth, fables, stories, and fantasies, which help us understand and project the consequences of their deeds. She points out mythical figures and blends their lives with logic, and her characters learn important lessons from the Indian epics, *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. They break their silence, raise their voices, and resist patriarchy in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Devi observes the silence of her mother, Mayamma, but she assumes herself to be a Devi, adorns herself with the goddess's weapons, and wants to live life on her own terms. Devi assumes her own mother to be Gandhari from the *Mahabharata*, who navigates the strict societal norms, and Uma as Amba from the *Mahabharata*. Finally, she assumes herself to be Ganga and leaves her husband, Mahesh. Ganga, who abandoned King Shantanu.

Manju Kapur's characters unknowingly navigate the strict societal norms in *Difficult Daughters*. Kasturi becomes more traditional and the voice of patriarchy to her own daughter. , "Kasturi knowingly becomes the voice of patriarchy. She holds those values as ideal which patriarchy has taught her to be so and when her daughter rebels against such values she takes it to be a rebellion against her own self." (Rishi, 2). Kapoor portrays all her characters with remarkable simplicity and authenticity, making them realistic and relatable. Like most mothers, Kasturi desires what she believes is best for her daughter, particularly by securing a suitable husband and arranging her marriage at an early age. However, her perception of what is "best" is deeply shaped by traditional patriarchal values. Consequently, she imposes these beliefs on her daughter, disregarding Virmati's own aspirations, desires, and individuality.

Kapur portrays her novel's characters as very simple and genuine, like every mother who thinks good wishes for her daughter. Kapur admits, "Conflict between mother and daughter is inevitable, and I suppose I was a difficult daughter. The conflict carries on through generations because mothers want their daughters to be

safe. We want them to make the right choices—right in the sense that they are socially acceptable. My mother wanted me to be happily married. I want my daughter to have a good job" (Bala and Chandra 107).

Conclusion

This research includes the idea of Githa Hariharan and Manju Kapur portray the cultural realities of Indian society through themes of patriarchy, motherhood, identity, and resistance. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan uses mythology and female characters from different social backgrounds to depict women's struggles against patriarchal norms. In *Difficult Daughters*, Manju Kapur presents the traditional Hindu family, where mothers are deeply concerned about their daughters' marriages and social respectability. Both novels explore mother-daughter relationships across generations and highlight women's silence, aspirations, and resistance within orthodox society. Together, these novels reveal how women negotiate cultural expectations while seeking identity and selfhood.

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