

Feminist as the New-Age Revolutionist

Dr. S. Sudha

*Assistant Professor, Department of English and Foreign Language Studies
Alagappa University, Karaikudi, India*

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 13

Special Issue: 1

Month: December

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2320-2645

E-ISSN: 2582-3531

Received: 12.11.2024

Accepted: 17.12.2024

Published: 20.12.2024

Citation:

Sudha, S. "Feminist as the New-Age Revolutionist." *Shanlax International Journal of English*, vol. 13, no. S1, 2024, pp. 88-93.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v13iS1-Dec.8532>

Abstract

It is necessary for this paper to explain a few basic and limited set of theoretical principles in feminism and few basic assertions of the feminist movement. The feminist movement combated against gender bias and the associated myths that degraded and marginalized women. Literature and the general culture promulgated a poor and subordinate images of women and made them unequal to men. The feminist point out that cultural mind-set in men and women perpetuated the hegemony. Feminism draw its power and intelligence from linguistics, post-structuralism, and the latter Marxism. Feminism reveals that and the later Marxism. Feminism reveals that the hegemony against women is political and power structured: Feminist challenge the representation of women as "other" as a lack or as part of nature or God-ordained.

Keywords: Feminism, Feminist, Alfa- Female, Alfa – Male, Revolutionary, Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy, Egalitarian Society, Fascist Forces, Transformed Society.

Introduction

This paper studies Githa Haricharan's novel *In Times of Siege* on the basis of the critical assumption that the novel's discourse is feministic. The paper is a discourse analysis applying a limited set of theoretical principles in feminism and a few basic assertion of the feminist movement. Feminist criticism is the product of the women's Right movement. It combated against gender bias and the associated myths. The general polity throughout the ages was made to willingly accept the ideas which marginalize women. A dominant male dominant social order was established. Literature and the general culture promulgated a poor and subordinate images of women and made them in equal to men. Feminist criticism in the beginning exposed the mechanism of patriarchy. The feminist pointed out the cultural mindset in men and women and this perpetuated the gender inequalities. Feminism drew their power and intelligence from linguistics, post structuralism, and later maxims. Feminist negated the fallacy in the men centered ideology which stated that women are naturally so or god ordained it so or it is culturally so. Feminism makes every one perceive that the hegemony is political and a power structured. The hegemony uses the word nature to cover up the politics and to legitimize inequalities and injustices against women. Feminism challenges the representation of women as 'other', as a lack, as part of nature. Feminist deconstruct that prevailing ideas of women are human constructs, Socio-linguistic construct whose motive is politics and power by the logo-phallic centered world view

It is possible for any novel to pose a problem. The problem may be due to its plot, the aporia in its discourse, its message and values or may be a hermeneutical one. The problem posed by Githa Hariharan's novel in times of siege is who exactly is the hero. The question arises because both Dr.Shiv murthy as well as Meena occupy most of the narrative space. A deliberate conflict is created on the history lesson Shivhas written for the undergraduate students of an open university. Arya, one of the professor

at the same department where Shiv is his colleague. Arya is a stooge of a larger network of the right-wing fascists. Arya provides the fuel for the conflict. The conflict becomes an openly visible tussle played in the public domain involving the media and a host of others, civil societies, academics, students and violent mobs. At one point in time the right wing fascists use violence and destruction. The question is not about who wins or who is defected. The point is to infer who actually is heroic according to the novel's discourse. The novel itself raises the question, Who is a hero? A leader? What makes some of us speak out, draw others to listen? (82). The objective of this paper is to find out the identities of a hero which the narrative points to. The hypothetical assumption is that the novel intervenes in favour of a feminist and presents Meena a young women, research scholar, as the hero of a new-age.

When the novel begins with Meena is introduced as a young research scholar wither leg broken. Dr.Shiv Murthy waits at her hostel to take her to his house as her guardian. He sees her with a huge cast on her leg and a crutch for support. As the story progresses Meena takes control of her situations and becomes almost the keeper of Shiv's consciousness. She always maintains a positive mood and action in spite of her physical discomfort. The text indirectly points at the conditions ostentatiously of her crutches as "belong ostentatiously to a past... Its entrails hang out desolate twisted rags" (8). The discourse signifies the still extant dominant cultural order. The unequal height of the crutches stands for the social and economic inequities which the women as well as men experience. The orthodoxy still considers women as girls and refuses to perceive that girls "become a person with a name" (10). The text rightfully claims their independence, individuality and self-sufficiency. Meena represents the feminist material.

Her voice is bold, confident and decently authoritative whenever she addressed Shiv or Amar or others even in her little accident, she desired it to be for a greater cause or a common good. She says, "What a waste", ... If only it had been at rally or something. You know, if it had been the fault of the police, breaking a leg would have been of some use" (13). This shows her leadership mettle and the propensity for revolutionary and heroic acts. Shiv feels, "why has he never seen this Meena before?" p.13. Shiv shows his sense of missing a chance in life.

Meena shows acceptable leadership qualities which make professor Shiv oblige her requests. Her action's reveal that she is a free agent whose actions are her own. When Shiv thinks it right to inform Meena's parents of her broken leg, She thinks that he need not worry them. She tells, "I'll be alright here. You don't mind, do you?" She is not ready or harsh but suggests her opinion on the grounds of equality. She is a real feminist in these: "Since you don't have to meet your students, can't you bring your work home? I mean if you don't mind (14).

Meena stands tall among the rest of the major women characters. Mrs.Khan is secretary to Dr.Sharma, the Head of the department of history. She records the minutes at the faculty meetings. Dr.Arya makes shamelessly cruel and despising remarks about Indian muslims and Christians stating that they were as foreigners and as "greedy marauders". The rest of the faculty look at Mrs.Khan "write some sort of fascinated horror". Mrs. Khan's reactions show "her face impassive, bent. Over her pad". P.19. Arya is not making any academic statements but cruel divisive and communal ones. Through she is a progressive woman very much different from her grandmother and her mother "to working an office and making modest contribution to the family income" (20). Arya represents a crude culture that hates fellows human beings. Mrs.Khan is not feminist because she does not stare back when arya's language was oppressive bereft of human sensibility. She does not any sign or expression of resentment or opposition to the dominant majoritarian social order.

Amita sen is a colleague of Dr.Shiv Murthy. She is quite disgusted with Arya's idiocies. She observes that the department meeting as the usual ended as "faculty-meeting blues". Amita's existential problems are "boredom and loneliness". She, ofcourse, has participatory interest in favour Shiv when faces conflicts roused by Arya and his rightwing hooligans. She gives him her moral support but does not grow up to be a reformer not a hero.

Rekha is Shiv's wife and is with her daughter Tara at seattle, U.S in the duration of the story. She is intelligent and active, bold and independent in her choice of action. She loves to spend her bold energies in

subduing the challenging soil at her garden-land and her heroic accomplishment are to do with sustenance care and cultivation of a variety of garden plants. She is more of a materialist than human concerns and struggles against inequalities and the repressive socio-political order. Rekha does not perceive the urgency for a transformed society but, of course she is able to see through the masks of the fundamentalists, fascist and their political games but she chooses the safest path far from active involvement. The text puts it as “the safety of Rekha’s banal certainties” (58). Shiv was facing situations which threatened his academic honesty and his honour as a patriot in the hands of the ugly Hindustan groups and their hired hooligans. Rekha’s suggestions to him would be to “take stock of the situation, commit himself one way or the other and if he could not make a decision he should go to bed and will himself to sleep” (59). She is very mundane and materialistic her ideas a common prudence but nothing heroic or revolutionary.

Shiv begins to receive hate-mails and threat calls. Like Mena Rekha too is swift in her response. She tells Shiv scornfully that the mails “nonsense and rubbish” and she advise him to “throw out the hate mail and complain to the university security” (81). A little later Rekha discovers from the news online that Shiv’s troubles have become increasingly dangerous, she feels allured realizes her vulnerability. She begins to complain why Shiv did not tell her that “it was a big mess than” She thought (102). She finds his efforts were spent “all for a correspondence course and some poet no one represent heroic defense but a blame game. She does not visualize the joy involved in a speculation leading to inferences and discovery. She merely sees the historical past as irrelevant to the present and “would like safely banish to an irrelevant past” (104). Here is an un conscious urge for self-preservation and nothing more.

Meena is accommodated in Shiv’s small study room and meena could make even that little space available to her into a mini war-room or a mine conference hall for discussions or plans for action. “Amar and his friends sit around Meena’s bed, drawing up lists of progressive, historians, academics, journalists, M.P.s. The room is already beginning to look like a campaign office: headquarters” (88). And in another scene “she sits in her bed, phone in hand, a general on the battlefield directing operations” (117). These scenes signify the actions of a liberated feminist and a revolutionist. They are the signs of a transformed woman in action trying to bring in a transformation in the society. These show her organizing ability her work on a war-footing.

Little further in the story shiv’s room is attached and rawsacked by “an unruly paid mob. Rekha’s immediate reaction reveals her moral fear. “Her voice shook again and fell almost to a shamed whisper. Don’t forget you’re dealing with hoodlums. Who have putlog doom mosques and churches... engineered riots, What’s little violence to them? And they’re so powerful now. What can we do shiv? (155). Her unruly and to choose a subaltern position.

One finds a qualitative difference in Meena from the other women in the novel. She maintains a demeanor, transparent, endearing, trustworthy which does not hide her emotions. “Shiv finds something touching about this whatever she thinks or feels is there on Meena’s face, not just faithfully mirrored, but multiplied in intensity (24).

There is a district difference in the perception between Meena and Shiv by the wall-décor they prefer Shiv is aesthetically and academically inspired by fixing a simple framed photograph of the Hampi ruins. It details alive a historic past that signifies vales for the present. Meena has posters on either side of Shiv’s Hampi photograph. One is a feminist poster, image of matchstick women holding hands making a perfect circle. The other is a poster, a face of an indeterminate gender across which the poem of Reverend Martin Niemoller is printed in black. The poem carries the caption pointed in red which says, “speak up! Before its too late!” (27). These wall-haugings show Meena’s inclinations, stances, concern and the urgency of a reformed society and the need for revolutionary actions. Shiv to need for critically perceives that the historical past did engineer social revolutions and an created egalitarian society. Shiv’s inclinations satisfies itself with registering and disseminating these historical facts. He did not think of involving himself in political intervention or in a revolution.

Meena is a fervent feminist and as a leader is able to pass on the same spirit even in Kamala a humble, working class woman. Kamala finds Meena ferocious and independent and is able to shed “her look of virtuous suffering She has no worries about extra work or about juggling hours in all the houses she works in. Kamala is free to express human interest in the situation” (28). Meena as a leader is able to instill the feminist boldness in Kamala.

Shiv and Meena fill up their empty evening hours with game she chooses a strategy game. It is played with a toy tiger and a number of sheep on a board. The game starts with Shiv playing the tiger. He could move ahead one step a turn. Meena’s sheep could move in all directions, a step forward or backward or two steps diagonally. And when Meena’s turn comes to play the tiger, she changes the rules. Neither tiger nor sheep can move backward. The point of the narrative is that a leader need not be bound by any single closed system or single strategy. There is no singular or monolithic discourse but multiplicity or discourses. It takes only a critical leadership to alter the rules of the political game positively to usher in a reformed social order.

Shiv tries to analyze the reason for Arya’s unruly unacademic foxy behavior in the department. He tells Meena that he sees a divided psyche in Arya – the Arya at the department and Arya as an affectionate father to his blind son. Meena is quick to observe the critical flaw in Shiv’s attempt to humanize or rationalize even the irrational mindset of the anti-human fascist like Arya. Meena tells, “why should we rack our brains figuring out his life? Finding out what made him such a twisted piece? He is like all his ancestors tyrants capable of personal acts of kindness. Nazis who responded to music and poetry” (30).

Meena is clear headed in her perception, analysis and objective campaign that Arya conduct against Shiv is not new or a recent one. It has been going on for a long time in history. She knows the conflict that Arya and his secretive and divisive hate mongers try to keep alive is heading towards a terrorizing violence. She is capable of diagnosing the moral and conceptual flaw in Shiv when she says, “You don’t like confrontation, do you?” (30). She wants Shiv to grow up into an action hero when “she talks of causes and street theatre, gender and quoting arrest with the ease of a veteran” (31). Meena makes him feel passions that were alien to him so far.

Meena, though independent in making her own decisions, is not arrogant, proud or bossy. In the absence of Kamala, the maid, Meena finds it a pleasure to join Shiv in the cooking. Though she does not know cooking, she says, “I have never tried, but so what? you drive, I’ll navigate (32). In another scene, Meena agrees to a rum and yet “knows how to hold her liquor”. She maintains sobriety. It reveals that she not pretend self-righteousness or holier than thou attitude. For Meena it is a transgressive act against the established fake ideas on women Meena meets women victims in order to interview on their experiences and opinion they have as victims of anti-sikh riots after the assassination of Indira Gandhi in 1984. After an initial reluctance of most women, one woman comes forward. Shiv perceives that the woman was quite courageous but Meena sees it comprehensively and says, “it was not just courage but also anger, passion-the combinations of all three” (34). Meena wants to keep herself always alive and alert to the problems of the day and to the world outside. She tells her comrades, who embrace her as expression of honour and a sense belonging, “Tell me what’s been happening. I’m bored out of my mind” (39).

Meena chooses Asterix and finds Tintin as being “shamelessly imperialistic” (47). Her value-judgments are sharp and to enhance her critical perceptions she chooses Edward Said Orientalism. She is politically and morally wise when as a rebel, says, “Oh but don’t get batteries made by those murderous Union Carbide” (48). Shiv who witnesses all these learns from Meena on how to live with power and not to give up laughter: survival by play; play as survival mode” (47).

While Shiv is puzzled with the group that called itself it has Suraksha Munch, Meena peeps into the motive and psychology of the right-wing group’s propaganda claiming to protect history. She understands the game plan of the Munch seeking a closure to the values and meaning available in history to one single unitary meaning to maintain the status quo of the dominant class and community. And anyone who registers meanings and values would be attacked by the rightwing unruly mob. She tells Shiv “with a knowing sneer” that protection means “Attack” (55). It is a code word for “attack” in order to protect. The feminist in Meena

helps Shiv to prepare himself to the needed revolutionary way of seeing things. She asks him to chalk out a plan and not to apologize for the history lesson he wrote. "But Meena is a step or two ahead of Shiv." She tells that the word protection is much abused as a "cover up for all kinds of bullying tactics" (55).

Meena uses the art of a psychological warfare by assigning nick names for these negative forces to make them a belt of fun or objective of ridicule. She calls these right ring elements as "fundoos" – fascist obscurantist, terrorist, the made – in – India brand, the communalist for professional other – community haters." (57). To Shiv, till now, Basava is "a legacy" and himself a heir to the legacy. The legacy signified a mighty movement for equality and democracy and must be remembered Shiv feels it his commitment to explain this legacy to students, and even to the general public including the bunch of hate mongers. Though it is quite obvious that Basava a revolutionary and a hero of a very great populace who experienced the joys of equality, brotherhood and freedom form a dominant, oppressive social order. He was a leader full of "passion, charisma and much vision." He created volunteer-warriors who called themselves "Veera shaivas" who were all equals including their women folk. Basa is heroic and a revolutionary because wanted to usher in a new transformed age. Though Basava stands as a model Shiv fails to take any clue from Basava's life to be one humble instrument for revolution but he merely wants to defend his historical inferences as a professor. And it Meena who knew comparatively little about Basava has chosen to be a warrior-women to fight for socio-political transformation and to take on the fascist forces as a leader of young student group. Just like Basava's, Meena's dream was also egalitarian (60-61).

Shiv shows all signs of a hero in his resolute stand not to apologize but to defend his historical inferences that real documentary evidences support. He is heroic to present his case openly in a public forum and to be part of the rally which educates the masses of the rally which educates the masses of the inherent danger of the fascist propaganda and fake histories. The flaw in Shiv, though not a tragic flaw, is a deep fixed negative self-assessment that he cannot be a hero. He tells himself, that he is "an academic, not some rabble-rousing activist. He is a professor, after all, not a two-inch newspaper-column hero. The prompting inner-struggle tells him", "Shiv do you imagine an ordinary man cannot be a hero" (64). He thinks he was fifty two, an unlikely age for the birth of a hero (64). Shiv feels exasperated as each moment becoming more and more challenging and he asks himself, "Where is he to find sustenance for an encounter he is unprepared?" (73).

The TV interviews were merely moments grand show. They did not help him present his views fully. The TV, as usual presented a clipped version of Shiv's ideological stance. But Meena gathered ideas and opinions from her friends on how to fight the fascists before larger gatherings of real people or the mass and in public spaces. The battle against hegemony is always a collective action to Meena. She know very well that it is apolitical struggle against" the regimentation of thought and brutal repression of culture " p.101. The story describes Meena as an Alfa-female , "an alert healthy animal ready to bounce,... a girl matriarch" and "to rescue an aging historian". Her eyes " do not flinch at the prospect of violence, of violation, They wait with a youthful certainty" (111).

Meena is always alive and alert to the world outside her. She perceives that it was Arya who is the central spring to the ticking clock of violence and she tells Shiv, "you have to confront this Arya. Ignoring him is not going to make him go away" (119). She is almost prophetic because soon after this an attempt is made by aired mob to attack Shiv in his office. But Menon and Shiv spot the hooligans at a distance. Menon compels Shiv and make him drive safely away but the disappointed hooligans ransack Shiv's office room. A big rally and a public meeting are arranged but Meena and her friends. Meena insisted that the meeting is addressed by "more than one voice or one identity" (142) like Basava's transformed social formation that created Veera Shaivas, Meena's rally and meeting involved all kinds of people. There were eminent people academics, civil societies, social activities, feminists, students. And in refusal to orthodoxy she brought in heterodoxy. She opportuned an environment for a multiplexor world-view in opposition to a unit polar world view.

Shiv's dependence on his reading, scholarly training, his understanding of history as a social science dissipated into darkness. "He was naked, unprotected. He had forgotten who exactly he was" (159). The text infers, "If only he, Shiv could be Meena" (88). As one could be only himself or herself, Shiv remains himself

and not a Meena. And Meena feels the need for Shiv to see that he too is a hero-material. Shiv senses that. Meena, summoned all the forces at her command, concentrating it, willing him to vault over some invisible trail of a hurdle to land on his feet safe on the other side" (167). According to the text Shiv too is a hero but circumscribing the kind of hero he is. It states, "Shiv is now living, contesting historian. Kin to the heroes of our times, a new comer in that family peopled by reluctant, accidental members" (194). It means Shiv is new to the family of heroes and that he is an accidental hero and was a reluctant one in the beginning. A little further in the story one reads: "Meena too will go, go back to her life, leaving him on his raggedy bit of heroism (194).

Meena as a feminist shows a better maturity in her heroism. She was "single minded", "energetic" and had obsessive pursuit of independence" (198). In contrast with Shiv, Meena opportune others to become heroes beside her. It was "Meena who put this stick in his hand again, Coaxed limping legs in the direction he knew... must be taken (194). An alpha – male naturally does not allow any other male in the group to challenge or replace its dominance over the rest while the matriarchal after female has no such prejudice.

Shiv and Meena are mythic characters, the Deus Ex machine signifying the female and male cosmic force. The discourse of the novel, In times of siege of Githa Hariharan, reinforces the concept that it is the female force which is primordial, life giving, sustaining, enervating, boisterous, evolutionary, reformatory and revolutionary. Meena is the fictional actualization of the female force signified as the feminist revolutionary protagonist striving towards the realization of a transformed social order, an egalitarian society and ushering in a new age. The role of Meena does not negate Shiv but functions as a complementary and compensative power, partnering in a heroic action. The message and the value of the narrative is any new age has to be the one which form a socially transformed, heterodox society; and such an age can only be by a revolution led by the heroic actions of a feminist alpha – female.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's novel, In Times of Siege has two protagonists, Shiv and Meena. Both Meena and Shiv occupy much of the narrative spaces. They both act heroically. Both are heroic materials and show courageous actions. The paper is provoked by the desire to know who is the real hero according to the discourse of the text and the standard set by the text. The hypothesis is that the text intervenes in favour of the one who is a revolutionary. The word revolutionary, according to the text is one who strives towards the birth as equals and helps them become heroes beside her or him. The hypothesis assumptions finally identify a feminist as revolutionary by their standards stated above. In Times of Siege is not a story of the unequal but a narrative of like-minded equals trying to make each other grow into heroes to make the world a better place for everyone in pursuit of happiness.

Works Cited

1. Geetha, R., and S. Sobana. "The Repression and Self-Determination of the Female Characters in Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's Victory Song." *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, vol. 17, no. 4, 2021.
2. Hariharan, Githa. *In Times of Siege*. Pantheon Books, 2003.
3. Rashmi, G., and D. Anand Kumar. "Manifestations of Social Behaviour: A Study on Personality Traits in Githa Hariharan's In Times of Siege." *Indian Journal of Applied Research*, vol. 6, 2016, pp. 114-15.
4. Singh, Ashok, and Mukesh Sharma. "Feministic Approach in the Novel's of Githa Hariharan: A Critical Study." *Smart Moves Journal IJELLH*, vol. 9, no. 9, 2021, pp. 71-83.
5. Singh, Ashok, and Mukesh Sharma. "Feministic Sensibility in Githa Hariharan's Novel: The Thousand Faces of Night." *Research Journal of English Language and Literature*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2021, pp. 195-97.