

Incredulity towards Metanarrative Simulations : Residual, Emergent and Dominant Stereotypes in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Abstract

The paper attempts to deconstruct the text with the postmodern notion of "Incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard 43) and Baudrillardian concept of Simulacrum. The paper explains how the age old Myths which legitimizes the patriarchy and internalizes submissiveness in women. The paper also attempts to reveal three different kinds of characters who can be identified with mythical characters. The study, furthermore, focuses on how the metanarratives have influenced the three female characters. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams' concept of Residual, Emergent and Dominant culture is employed in a feministic way, which represents three different stereotypes of society.

Keywords: Metanarrative, Simulation, Residual, Emergent, Dominant and Myth.

The concept of Metanarration in postmodern context represents the Superstructures of society which gives power to the oppressor and which cannot be questioned. Postmodern presuppositions attempt to subvert the mythical Metanarratives by adhering to what Jean François Lyotard explains in his work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* as "Simplifying to the extreme, I define postmodern as incredulity toward metanarratives." (43). Therefore, Metanarratives, here implies, the myth which legitimises the authority, patriarchy and suppression. Incredulity functions as a subverting force which decentres the metanarratives. Here, metanarrative Simulations, represents the myths which are not real but a simulated hyper real. Githa-Hariharan employs these metanarrative simulations, in order to project her three characters as submissive, liberal and radical. The metanarratives can be defined as "Ideas, concepts, notions, or beliefs which can function to legitimate certain social actions and practices.

In the novel, various myths have been used as metanarratives which internalise cultural attitude with in the female characters. Each character can be identified with the mythical characters. Since the myth is not the real

one but simulated hyper reality, a kind of incredulity emerges as a sceptical presupposition. The novel has an intertextual connection with the characters and the metanarrative of the story which is hyper real myth. Therefore, the metanarrative myth serves as a superstructure which interpolates an ideology in the characters. The concept of metanarrative can be defined as,

The concept of metanarrative is also known as grand narrative, which mean ideas, concepts, notions and beliefs which can function to legitimate certain social actions and practices. For instance, the notion of evolution has served to legitimate large scale of programmes of social change. Similarly, the notion of Enlightenment served to provide reason. (Buchanan 210).

The word 'simulation' alludes to Jean Baudrillard, who postulated the theory of hyper real. Hence, Metanarrative Simulation denotes, suppressive Superstructures which are not real. By resisting to follow the metanarratives, the female character show their protest against patriarchal system which suppresses them. The Novel attempts to give a picture of how the characters sway between traditional

mode of life and modern way of life. The author has created a world of three women from three different generations and shows how they react to patriarchy. The three women, Mayamma, Sita and Devi symbolise three different attitudes of womanhood.

Devi, the younger one, can be classified under 'Dominant' Category, who actually has spent two long years in America. Her attitude towards the conventional system is radical. Devi struggles to cope up with Indian Marriage system. Even after returning to India, she keeps on thinking about Dan with whom did she study. Devi links the myths and folklores she learned from her grandmother with the present life situations and finds that they are patriarchal version of myths which suppresses women. Devi fantasies about her 'swayamwara' where he would be given chance to choose her own husband like 'Damayanti of Mahabharata'. When deconstructing the myth, it which reveals the patriarchal domination of patriarchy which says women must be silent and submissive.

As a 'Dominant', she breaks the traditional conventions by rejecting her own husband and chooses his lover, Gopal. When she finds Gopal is also not a good companion of her, she comes back to her mother. Thus, she exemplifies dominant women who breaks the mythical convention of marriage. Devi begins to decode the metanarratives of the bed time stories. When she gets the realisation she says, "The bed time story were coded with meanings" (Hariharan78). Devi even breaks the rule of myth in Amba's story where grandmother says "It is not possible for her to go home, for a woman without husband has no home" (Hariharan35). Devi, in real life, returns home leaving male companions.

Sita can be seen as a perfect example of 'Emergent' woman. She is suppressed by her Father-in-law to not to play Veena. She shows her resistance through her act of breaking the strings and not playing Veena again. She also proves herself to be an 'Emergent' by letting her daughter study in America. Sita finally plays the Veena once again at the end of the novel which symbolizes her emergent behaviour.

As far as Sita is concerned, psychologically she is trapped inside her home, but she tries to get herself out of the trap by playing Veena and indulging in liberative activities. Eventually, Sita turns to be a 'Emergent' and allows her daughter to live as she likes. The reconciliation with her daughter also reflects her Emergent attitude which tries to break the traditional mode of living. By ordering her daughter to dress as an Indian girl, she expresses her

'Residual' attitude. But later she turns to be an 'Emergent'. Emergent attitude can be defined in Raymond Williams's words as, "By Emergent, I mean the new set of meanings, values and new kinds of relationships are continually created. It is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between Dominant and Emergent" (123).

Mayamma shows "Residual" attitude throughout her life. She is married to a drunken husband who uses her for sexual pleasure. When mayamma is not getting pregnant her mother in law beats her and curses her. Finally, Mayamma is sent home where he begets his son who serves as another symbol of patriarchy who beats Mayamma and threatens to kill her. Throuout her life She exists as one who accepts the domination. The three women can also be catagorized with three phases of Eline Showalter. 'Residual' can be defined in the words of Raymond williams as,

What I mean by 'Residual' is very different. The Residual, by definition, has been formed in past but it is still active in process. A residual element is usually, at some distance from dominant culture. Moreover, at certain points that resudue is opposite to dominant. The idea of rural community is presominantly residual. But in some limited respect opposite to capitalism. (122).

Mayamma can be taken as an example of first phase where she endures all the sufferings and represents feminine stage. As in feminine phase Mayamma had inferiority complex which makes her submissive. Sita can be catagorized under feminist phase, in which she provides a slight resistance towards the domination. Devi can be categorized under female phase where she altogether throws the male dominance by leaving her husband's home. Thus the three women represent three cultural as well as feminist phases. Thus, how the Emergent and Dominant women shows their "Incredulity towards Metanarratives" (Lyotard 45) of Hyperreal myths.

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