



Research Article

## Psychological Depression: A Scrutiny of the Select Short Stories in Githa Hariharan's The Art of Dying and Other Short Stories

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### Abstract

Indo-Anglican Literature is one of the new voices in which India speaks to the world and Githa Hariharan is one of the distinguished writers who communicates to the world in her native tongue. Indian short story is deep rooted in our Indian tradition. It became popular because of its brevity in length and unity in impression. Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore, India, in a Tamil Brahmin family from South India. Her distinguished writings cover genres like novels and short stories. Some of her famous writings are The Thousand Faces of Night (1992), The Ghost of Vasu Master (1994) and When Dreams Travel (1999). A collection of highly acclaimed short stories, The Art of Dying and Other Short Stories was published in 1993. The Art of Dying and Other Short Stories is a collection of twenty short stories composed of somber tales of depression. Here, the writer has delved into the meaning of death, the consciousness of loss and the memories that accentuate this feeling.

The short stories selected for analysis are 'Love Poem' and 'Revati'. In 'Love Poem', the psychological depression faced by a lecturer and a poet critic named Dr. Sharma and his student are analyzed. In the next short story titled 'Revati', the psychological depression faced by the protagonist named Revati and her unnamed second husband are described.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Indian Writing in English, women play a significant role through their writings. They do not remain as the invisible writers any more but their works are internationally acclaimed and is extensively used in classrooms. During the twentieth century, the women writers began to portray their ideas from a feminist point of view. The result is that their focus began to shift from the patriarchal society to the place of women in this society. Hence, they took up the challenge of laying bare the bitter and biting realities of the domestic and social life through the life of their protagonists.

Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore, India to a Tamil Brahmin family from South India. She has contributed a great number of novels to Indian English Literature. Some of the famous novels are *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghost of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). A collection of highly acclaimed short stories *The Art of Dying and Other Short Stories* was published in 1993 and a book of stories for children, *The Winning Team* was published in 2004. She has edited a volume of stories in English translation from four major South Indian languages, *A Southern Harvest* (1993) and co-edited a collection of stories for children *Sorry, Best Friend!* (1997).

*The Art of Dying and Other Short Stories* (1993) is a collection of twenty short stories composed of somber tales of depression and eccentricity. Here, the writer delves into the meaning of death, the consciousness of loss and the memories that accentuate this feeling.

The story titled 'The Warden' was nominated for the Pushcart Prize in 1995. In this novel, the predominant theme is the hegemonic male dominance in the Indian society that does not allow women to enjoy creative freedom. 'Love Poem' and 'Revati' are the selected stories for analysis. 'Love Poem' revolves around the relationship between a lecturer named Dr. Sharma and his student named Neeta. 'Revati' is the titular heroine and the sufferings that she had experienced in her life alone is the theme of this short story.

In the story titled 'Love Poem' the psychological depression experienced by Dr. Sharma, a lecturer and a poet critic and his student name Neeta is described. Dr. Sharma is described as the holy of holies in the strictly segregated ladies college. He was a man who read poetry as if it flowed through his blood. His trauma is understood when he pleads with his students for an answer in vain. He questions them about how the images presented in the poem are moving them and the name of the image that comes to their imagination repeatedly while he was reading the poem. But the girls stared blankly and the only expression that they were able to express was a giggle if they were able to understand the innate meaning of his words. As his expectation of receiving the correct answer through words remained unfulfilled, he experiences psychological depression to the core.

Dr. Sharma came to college only once in a week. While dealing with poetry, he explained the girls about their necessity in shedding conformity and also shedding away their fear of being

an oddity. Despite explaining concepts to the core, the girls gazed at him blankly and this instigated psychological depression within him. The details of his personal life is then portrayed. It expresses the psychological depression that is encountered by him patiently. His personal life is explained as, "He is separated from his wife. He left her when she was hugely pregnant. He actually has two wives. One to cook and clean, the other for – for fun. You don't know what you are talking about. He's actually a homo. That's why he nuns let him come here" (123).

For Dr. Sharma, the phrases, "a passion for lofty things, a poetic love for life" (123) are favourite. Even when he pronounced those words, he appeared to be glistened with sweat and his voice trembled. This depicts his psychological depression. One day he read a poem by Neruda and bowed to the class. Even before the audience could react, he rushed out of the class room clasping his collection of Neruda to his chest. This action symbolically suggests the dissatisfaction that he had towards the response of his students.

Finally, he noticed the loyalty of Neeta. This promotes him to experience psychological trauma which continues till the end. After the Neruda class, he would single her out in the midst of the lecture. While he was explaining an insight, he nodded in her direction and while describing poetic humour, he would smile in her direction. In a way, his psychological depression forced him to seem to say the words, "For you alone, a kindred soul" (124).

The impact of his psychological depression forced him to lend her books and lecture her after the class hours with both of them alone in the room. As a result, Neeta understands the psychological depression of her professor. As time passes by, his trauma increases and finally it becomes uncontrollable. Therefore the subsequent result turns to be disastrous and he disturbs Neeta mentally.

Hence in one occasion Neeta was forced to run towards the door to hide her own nakedness. Neeta's situation can also be found in the writings of J.M. Waghmare which states that, "women have been standing at the crossroads of history for centuries with tears in their eyes and milk in their breasts as their's a male-centered world" (5). The next day, Dr. Sharma spoke about what he called a "perfect love poem" (126). The result is that she felt the trauma of solitude and expected interruption to the extent that she starts reciting poems to herself even though she is unable to understand them.

The next short story titled 'Revati' analyses the psychological depression faced by the protagonist named Revati. She faces psychological disturbances even at the age of ten, the year after she got married. She is a victim of child marriage that was prevalent in pre- independent India. Binod Mishra in her *Critical Responses to Feminism* states that, "Money can buy both the best as well as the worst husbands. According to all existentialist feminist perceptive women have the same nature as men and they too are free and creative beings like all the others" (193). Revati was married off without her consent and this forces her to react in an illogical manner towards the end of the story.

Revati ironically says that she is happy which suggests that she is suffering. Even when her husband was alive, she did not enjoy a satisfactory married life. She was taken care of occasionally and was often treated as an invalid and as an undesirable child equal to an orphan. All these circumstances make her to feel and suffer silently. Her behavioral change is clearly exposed when she behaves strangely with her second husband. She exploits him and forces him to obey her to the core.

Revati exploits her second husband that he is described as an abnormal person who was a little weak in the head. The eccentric behaviour of her second husband and Revati can be visualized when the narrator describes the happenings as:

Revati spoke and moved slowly, like a soft, swollen balloon filled with stale air.

Otherwise she was just the same: she still ate too much, sighed greedily when she saw our new saris, and bathed for hours on end. The idiot seemed devoted to her. He is a strong and a perfectly harmless, a sweet, docile big baby. He followed her about like a dog follows its mistress. (95)

As days passed by, Revati starts behaving in an insane manner. She was not clear of how she saw things. Psychologically, she had the fear of being alone that the others thought that she was fearing for an imaginary ghost or demon. When she faces health issues like gas problem, her irritating behaviour knew no bounds. She behaves illogically while eating and her action is described as:

I had never seen anyone eat like Revati. Usually we women waited till all the children had eaten, then the men, before we sat down to eat what was left over. But Revati never noticed any of these family niceties. She would sit with the children, and stuff the food, great big balls of it all mixed up into her mouth. At the end of the meal, she always asked for a glass of warm milk and a banana. (94).

Revati starts enjoying a satisfactory life but her family members felt irritation and they send him away. This depicts the nature of patriarchy. Premalatha Dhinakaral states that, "Patriarchy is an exploitative structure reinforced by governments, religions and social practices. The oppressive nature of patriarchy has its manifestation as sexism" (179). After this incident, her behaviour changes as she was unable to accept their decision. After the departure of her husband, one night she screamed aloud. Her family members assembled near her to find her shivering as if she was having fits and she utters the words, "there, he's there. He's laughing at me" (97). No one questioned her about what she had seen but they tried hard to bring her wandering mind to her previous illness.

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