

## **Role of Intuitive Awareness in Exploring *The Thousand Faces of Night***

**Jitender Singh**

One starts making use of words to change something around; more precisely, to convey that one is not adaptive to the surrounding in one sense or the other. If there is an acceptance of whatever is in the surrounding, there is no need to convey the bliss in words. This can better be done either through sound or silence. When writing was invented centuries ago, it was kept in mind that word must be followed and preceded by space; and for that matter language appears to be a combination of sounds and silences existing at the same time in alternate positions. “For some people this arises as the sound of silence, or simply a quiet or empty mind” (Sumedho *Intuitive Awareness* 1). When one begins to observe language and for that matter words with such keen insight, they become a beautiful sight for realizing their intuitive aspect shrouded by their intellectual persona. It is on this space perhaps that violence enters a word and makes it manipulative. On the other hand, “From this place of spaciousness, social and personal conditioning can be investigated or reflected upon, thus freeing the heart from the delusion of identifying with the personality” (1). To substantiate these observations, it should be made clear that in writing, every space and every pause count for it is where the intuitive writer leaves the force of the argument. What is being spoken is reduced to a mere shadow of what has been buried in between the words. Language loves to hide the essence while delivering the existence. What exists in graphical form is a trace of presence which is present in its absent form. Thus it becomes very interesting to see how intuitive awareness is evoked in the process of interpretation.

It is where the need of going deeper into intuition is felt. Now that the understanding of language has changed, how literature should be interpreted is also in question. The answer begins with the assumption that literature is one form of writing. A poem or a story or any piece of literature is a structure of traces. Traces are invisible marks. Nobody is sure what these marks are. But surely they are there. “Criticism, which is basically an inquiry into a word, a

line, a text, or anything that moves the mind from the point of perception to the realms of inquiry with an ulterior motive to interpret it, begins with the suspicion, a suspicion based on a conviction” (Ravindran 76). The critic suspects the appearance of a sign because he has a conviction that it is not what it appears to be. The conviction is that it is something else. Then the inquiry begins. Criticism is the story of many such inquiries. Humans are never content with things as they are. They want to inquire into them, go beyond them to discover their secrets because they feel that something is missing or something is absent from what they perceive.

When a string of words is read, it does not simply evoke the meaning rather the sounds of those words enter within the intuitive energy of the reader and an understanding takes place in total silence inside the heart of the individual that is detected by the mind and is brought to the notice of the self. This entire process takes place under the energy called intuitive awareness. In this context, Ajahn Sumedho remarks:

The phrase ‘intuitive awareness’ is a translation of *satisampajañña*. The quality of *sati-sampajañña* is part of a continuum of three elements. The first element is *sati*, the raw, mindful cognizance of an object. The second element being *sati-sampajañña*, referring to the mindful, intuitive awareness of an object within its context; the final element is ‘*sati-paññâ*’ – usually translated as ‘mindfulness and wisdom’ – which refers to the appreciation of an object in respect to its essential nature as transitory, unsatisfactory, and not-self. (*The Sound of Silence* 3)

In doing so, the reader endeavours to clarify and expand the common renderings of ‘clear comprehension’ or even ‘self-awareness’. His chief concern is that normal reading does not give a sense of the true broadness of that clarity. Thus he experiments with an expression that conveys a deliberately expansive quality and that includes the element of mystery; for it is important for the English wording also to imply an attunement of the heart to experience that the thinking mind cannot fully understand. The word ‘intuitive’ is used because it perfectly conveys the mixture of a genuine apprehension of reality, yet also that the reason ‘why things are the way they are’ might not be at all apparent.

In contemplating right understanding, it must be emphasized to see it as an intuitive understanding and not a conceptual one. It would be very helpful to contemplate the difference between analytical thinking and intuitive awareness. There is a huge difference between the use of the mind to think, analyze, reason, criticize, and to have ideas, perceptions, views and opinions, and intuitive awareness which is non-critical. Intuitive awareness is an inclusive awareness. It's not that it doesn't allow criticism; rather, it sees the critical mind as an object. Some critics may find this approach frustrating because it is easier to be told what a word exactly means rather than trying to comprehend what does the sound of that particular word evoke in a human heart. It is obvious because intuitive awareness is frustrating to an analytical person whose faith is in thought, reason, and logic. Awareness is right now. It is not a matter of thinking about it, but being aware of thinking about it. Moreover, intuition also knows the limits of words, what they can convey. It is not just willfully making them do anything or mean anything that according to your ideas or ideals. The sanctity of the word can be damaged quite badly through tyrannically forcing it to do something, to mean something. Yet intuitive sound of a word includes its limitations, its disabilities, its sicknesses as well as its health and its pleasures.

With the intellect, with the reasoning mind, we want clarity; we want answers to questions, solutions to problems. There is desire to know 'what should I do first?' and searching that answer we approach literature and strongly wish that it should supply what is needed for us. But words do not supply answers yet they evoke a stimulation which can make you think and find answers for yourself. The understanding takes place not between you and words that you just read but inside your intuitive self. Words can only act as the medium to generate meaning or solution in your own intuitive mind. They don't carry the truth in themselves. They are mere fabrications, uncertain, doubtful – simply because they are also the part of the material world, thus not fixed, stable and eternal. So, that puts the onus back on to you to trust your intuitive sense rather than always be doubting, wanting the word to tell you, or wanting to follow instructions – which all are quite conditioned to do. Instead you open to the sense of uncertainty, insecurity, or confusion inherent in words and must build up your faith in your own intuition to interpret the world for you.

Consciousness is like a mirror; it reflects not only meaningful things, ideas or expressions but meaningless, ordinary and common reality as well. If a mirror is really analyzed, it reflects whatever – the space, the objects, and the neutrality, everything that is in front of it. Usually our attention is pinned at outstanding ones, the extreme of meaningful or meaningless. We do not look at the obvious but recognize the subtleties behind the extremes of meaningful idea or meaningless expressions. But an intuitive awareness of a text is like a subtlety behind everything that we awaken to, because we do not notice it usually if we are seeking the extremes. And that is what is being practised these days. Whenever a literary work is produced, we try to fit it in one or the other critical framework related to only one aspect of human experience. It appears to be a very limited approach to reduce a literary piece to the level of an object which can get fit into a single theoretical frame. Owing to this reason, modern literary theories are taken to be the sole interpretative methods to deliver the truth inherent in a text. What Ajahn Sumedho writes seems apt in this context:

These are ideals; positions that we might take. They are the ‘true but not right; right but not true’ predicament that we create with our dualistic mind; not that they’re wrong. In George Orwell’s novel *Animal Farm* there is a slogan: “Everyone is equal but some are more equal than others”. In the conditioned realm, this is how we think. We all think all human beings are equal, ideally. All human beings are equal, but with the practicalities of life, some are more equal than others. (*Intuitive Awareness* 33).

Thus, the real method to evaluate literature is to be mindful of everything that a text contains without tearing it off into important extremes. The sole criteria of it being literary should be above the extent to which it contributes in evoking intuitive awareness in the reader.

To substantiate these observations, an in-depth study of Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* is conducted to reveal a new understanding based on the principle of intuitive awareness. There are many instances where language ceases to influence the course of the narrative but through silence intuitive energy works.

The title of the novel appears to be a solid gateway to step inside the

underlying intuitive spirit of this novel. It deals with the latent dimensions related to woman and her true self. With this title, the novel launches a plea that woman should be careful before asking a question, the 'night' has thousand faces. It might be very difficult to figure out which face resembles yours or which one is meant for you to wear. In this multiplicity of identities, the claims to the validity of being a fixed entity are rendered unfixd, unstable and fluid in the presence of her mythical representatives. Moreover, the characterization of novel also very strongly raises the claim that the names of the characters hint towards the depth of Hariharan's vision. It seems the names given to all the main characters have been contrived to signify an intuitive course of events which is generally left unexplored in the wake of material consciousness. No other name can be apt for the mother than Sita who is a mythical representative of the daughter of Mother Earth. In her individual form Sita is considered born out of Mother Earth who becomes the spouse of Lord Ram. But in its universal form, Sita is thought to be the incarnation of goddess Laxmi, the mother of the universe itself. She is the source of Shakti, the power through which Narayan, the ultimate God, runs the course of events in the universe. Thus, Sita becomes the emblem of both 'mother' and 'daughter' and also the power that cannot be defined through these social roles. Moreover, the ultimate role of the goddess is to recreate herself in a new form so that the channel of power does not cease to deliver life and its sustenance in the world. Kamala Ganesh remarks:

The mother goddess can be interpreted as expressing ideas of power, autonomy and primacy in the widest sense of the term. She conveys not so much the idea of physical motherhood but a world-view in which the creative power of femininity is central; the goddess mediates between life and death, and contains in herself the possibility of regeneration. (74)

Therefore, Sita, the emblem of the supreme energy, gives birth to Devi who in the course of life transcends the limits of human perception by realizing her intuitive self. Thus, the protagonist of this novel is named Devi who represents every woman as being the source of self-realization. In her journey of self-discovery, she becomes the reservoir of faith, piety and goodness in the world. The general way of the world is to couple Shakti with Shiva, Devi with Mahesh

to maintain the cycle of life and death, of re-creation. Married to Mahesh, Devi analyses her potential to create life, maintain and sustain it. But after years of her devotion to this role of a consort, Devi needs to complete the cycle of her material existence by travelling back to Gopal, the ultimate masculine principle. It is in this union that her weakness gets transformed into strength, vulnerability into courage, and her material attributes into spiritual energy. And finally in order to begin a new cycle of life, Devi goes back to her source, the divine goddess – Mother Earth, Sita. Thus, this is the spiritual journey that the woman undertakes beyond her social roles by developing her consciousness of the divine origin she is the significant part of.

To express her intuitive understanding of women, Githa Hariharan has constructed a plot with parallel characters in material life. “Sita, Devi’s mother, in fact fits the ideal description of womanhood. Sita, as her name signifies is symbolic of an ideal wife, mother and daughter-in-law” (Kothari 44). Thus her identity is in a constant flux. She calls back Devi after the completion of her education. Her mother’s letters carry the message to Devi that she needs to be with her. Sita silently conveys what is the need of the time. Here the narrative remains muted and through the language of silence Sita’s message is conveyed to Devi. There is no mention of the content of her letters neither there is any description about them. Letters thus function as silent vehicles of communication of a significant order.

However Devi, conscious of her intuitive energy, is not able to relate to the marriage proposals which demand something else other than her original self. This resisting spirit of her origin and noble existence was kindled in Devi during her girlhood by her grandmother. She was fed on the mythical stories of the intuitive feminine principle behind life that protects the fragile layers of human existence through the devotion of Damayanti, anger of Gandhari, revenge and penance of Amba. Therefore even after years of separation from the grandmother and the motherland, Devi cannot forget the impressions of this childhood overture into the world of gods and goddesses. And this makes her a non-conformist to the ways of the world around her. “Above all, she felt a piercing ache to see her mother. But equally powerful was a nameless dread she only partly

acknowledged: the dread of the familiar love, stifling and all-pervasive; of a world beyond her classroom and laboratory, charged with a more pungent uncertainty” (Hariharan 7).

While exploring the intuitive aspect of the text it seems that Hariharan’s vision is not confined merely to present the hierarchically conscious social roles performed by women but she has also placed women on equal footings to show that they primarily exist for the sustenance of their creative feminine principle. The narrator informs, “My mother and I live alone in the house by the sea. Our rooms, with identical windows over-looking the beach, are next to each other” (Hariharan 12). Thus there exists no hierarchy either as ‘mother’ or ‘daughter’ but a common responsibility of their salvation and transcendence which has never been revealed to them by patriarchy. Sita waits for Devi with an eagerness to initiate her into a new phase of life. This eminent stage demands various things that need to be inculcated in her before Devi walks on the thorny ground of wifehood. To cater to the demands of this emanating phase, Sita constructs a safe haven for Devi and brings her closer to herself. “In this fortress that shuts out the rest of the world, I grope towards her, and she weaves a cocoon, a secure womb that sucks me in and holds me fast to its thick, sticky walls” (13). As Devi approaches Sita, the closeness between them opens gates for new vistas of womanhood where she is kept in bounds of her disciplined virtuosity so that the originality of self can be protected under the layers of social roles. “There was the initial awkwardness of seeing Amma – unchanged, every hair in place, cool and poised in a silk sari in spite of the sweltering heat. But she was also different; not changed, but less distant, more vulnerable, than the image of her I had carried about with me in America” (13). The need of language is not felt. They feel a deep connection between them by mounting on the boat of intuition. Love between them is not the sole ingredient of integration rather their mutual presence makes the flow of understanding a gradual process of assimilation. Devi silently learns the wisdom that Sita has preserved for her from years of solitude. “Amma and I did not touch each other and we certainly did not talk about love, for each other or anyone else. But in first few weeks after my return to Madras, we were intensely conscious of each other; we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our neck with its fine threads” (13). All these years of Sita which have been spent in loneliness

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help her to meditate over Devi's future and she carves out some useful strategies to launch Devi on the pedestal of womanhood. The future consequences and its eminent challenges occupy major portion of her consciousness. To make Devi conscious of her intuitive energy, Sita wishes her to focus on the coming events of her life. Any reference to her life in America is like visiting an old mansion that Devi does not need to inhabit any longer. Devi wistfully remembers:

I had begun to tell her about America. She smiled gently and said, 'All that is over now. The important thing is that you are back, you are now in Madras. Why go over an old story again?' I had not felt rebuffed then; I had, in fact, been a little flattered that we could speak adult to adult, and that I must have some secrets of my own. (13)

Hariharan reinterprets the archetypes of mother and daughter from the perspective of feminist sisterhood as: "It is the love of mother that restores in the protagonist a rekindled desire in life. It is the gift of music that the mother eventually learns to give to her daughter that symbolizes this new language" (Kothari 44). Hence, the intuitive call of Sita enveloped in her letters is so strong that it reaches directly to Devi across oceans and distant lands. Her words are not intellectually forced but emotionally charged with the need of companionship that their relation needs at the moment of its next flight to maturity. Each word seems enchanted enough to carry the enigma of Sita's dwelling presence in Devi's life: "But Amma's letters brought with them an unspoken message of loneliness, poignant in its quiet dignity. She has always been a strong, self-willed woman; in my moments of anger I have thought her selfish. But the image of her alone by the sea teased me like a magnet" (Hariharan 16). It seems as if Sita in her moments of solitude practises the art of linking her energy to that of Devi. Her unspoken words reverberate with the intensity of their emotional union. And Devi too, through her female inheritance, does not miss their vibration and notices the craving for strength that the part of Sita could supply to her. The real understanding that takes place in Devi's consciousness is an outcome of the unspoken words, the silent whispers which one soul receives from another. There is no show of being weak or

forceful except a silent invitation of union that one heart transmits to the other of its own kind. Devi asserts:

I heard the low, modulated voice, at once commanding and coaxing. I never dreamt of her as I did of my father, craving for a means to get closer to him. But she was always our anchor-rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self-evident fact of our existence. That she might need me, my hesitant, self-doubting presence, was intoxicating. (16)

Devi has lived a life of ignorance and innocence during her childhood. Her grandmother holds the strings of the horses of Devi's imagination and lets her fly through the ancient pictures of raging womanhood and its glory. The innocent mind receives these bouts of intoxicating womanhood as an expression of her adult self. The gap between the mythical and the real womanhood is merged the moment Devi finds an old photo of Sita: "Amma did not look like herself. Her eyes had a vague, dreamy look about them, softening the chin that already jutted out a little, like a portent of her later determination. What surprised me even more was that she held a veena in her hands, her fingers caressing the strings" (Hariharan 27). To make Devi understand what has happened to Sita's veena, her grandmother refers to the story of Gandhari. Here again the narrative remains muted. The connection between Sita's giving up her veena and Gandhari's anger is developed not through the use of words but through silence in the consciousness of the character and the reader. The link that Devi discovers between her mother's giving up of her veena and Gandhari's giving up of her eye-sight leads her to the realization that the emotion of anger is also a means of transcendence from material bounds: "Divine anger provides those twists and turns in mortal destinies that make heroism possible. The lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger: that it could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life" (Hariharan 29). This lesson brings Devi closer to her adulthood. From the story of Amba she learns the role of revenge and penance in the upliftment of a woman's life. And Devi thinks it to be her time to respond to her grandmother's years of over-rich, unadulterated nourishment with a story of her own. It becomes difficult for her to only hear the stories of the womanhood she would soon grow into without marking her own presence

on to that fantastic canvas. Devi reveals, “I lived a secret life of my own: I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons’ heads” (Hariharan 41).

Devi begins to explore the bliss of wifhood with Mahesh but soon realizes that this is not the end she is meant for. Baba’s stories try to inculcate an unflinching devotion to husband ignoring the secrets of womanhood: “The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting, by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens” (Hariharan 55). But the next stage of learning is marked by the revelation of the life-choices of Devi’s mother-in-law. Mayamma, the maid servant, relates the story of Parvatamma to Devi, how she in search of enlightenment left the house and marched towards her journey of self-discovery. Mayamma tells that Parvatamma had been an ambitious woman. In search of God, she stripped herself of the life of a householder. Devi says, “I kept her photograph in my room. Every morning I woke up to see that face, severe but glowing, look down on me like a guardian angel, a mother unseen” (64). Thus from her Devi derives the lesson of renunciation. Bhasha Shukla Sharma holds the view, “Her decision of not having children, by not trying continuously and ‘hysterically’ to conceive, symbolizes her search for self. Inspired by her mother-in-law who left her husband’s house to lead a religious life, she also leaves her husband’s house with Gopal” (569). She is sure that in order to search her spiritual roots, she also needs to leave behind the world of mundane engagements. In Rama Nair’s words, “Devi’s self-fulfillment does not lie in bearing and rearing of children, but in recognizing her own inherent potential to live with herself on more positive terms” (174).

Moreover, the name Gopal invokes the image of Lord Krishna – the god of love, the divine flute player and the reservoir of all the nine rasas. Devi, like an innocent child, lets herself flow into the stream of his musical voice which offers her an escape into her original self. “The irresistible music of Gopal is a symbolic call for confrontation of oneself” (Paul 99). The appeal of his music unmistakably reaches the core of her soul and touches the very fabric of its spiritual outfit. She floats in his enchanted company, “I am no one, she thought, as she was swept along in the rich current of Gopal’s voice, I have no husband or lover, only this blissful

anonymity in the darkness, filled with a raga that reaches higher and higher, beyond the earth-bound demands of passion” (Hariharan 128-129). In the aura of his musical voice, all the distinctions of being mother, daughter or wife get blurred and Devi is able to transcend the boundary of her socio-cultural self in the wake of her awakened intuitive self. Rama Nair remarks, “Unlike Mayamma, she [Devi] liberates herself from the pressures of feminine role-play, to attain a state of free creative individuality” (173). Moreover, this use of music as a means of transcendence makes Devi ponder over her female linkage, “She thought of the three of them, Mayamma, Sita and herself. Three of the women who walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (135). Her awareness to be a part of a deep glorious feminine lineage helps Devi realize her place in the growth of womanhood. In the journey of constituting her selfhood, she has lived through the lives of all those mythical women from history who blow up the tradition and fashion their own fate. “She could live again through Parvatiamma, even through Devi. They were not strangers to her, strange as their choices may have been” (136).

Thus, without being conscious of the power of words, these women characters focus their energy on the intuitive locus of their common selves and explore the innate strength of will power that nature has bestowed them with. Devi’s trials as a daughter, daughter-in-law, wife and a consort have prepared her for an unwavering faith in her own womanhood. “After a brief spell of passionate involvement, Devi is alert to her inner call” (Paul 99). Now she is ready to return to her mother presenting herself as a tribute to her female inheritance. Hariharan writes, “She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning” (139).

Thus, by invoking Ajahn Sumedho’s ideas on intuitive awareness it is found that a woman’s condition can get transformed if she focuses on her inner energies that are common to all the women of the world. As far as the narrative of this novel is concerned, it clearly reveals that the deep understanding takes place in the intuitive self of characters and the readers as well. It seems that the novel is an outcome of a deep meditation on the

silent aspects of woman's personality. The ultimate solution that the novel propounds is to make women more intuitive towards themselves. Otherwise, what Nancy Friday remarks stands true: "It can take generations to change the unconscious ways in which we think about ourselves" (xv).

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