

## THEMATIC CONCERNS IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S THE ART OF DYING AND OTHER STORIES

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### Abstract

Short Stories have always been an area of interest for most of the readers. They not only entertain but also educate. They are the mirror of the society. They are always ready to serve a message. They are a great tool for Women Short Story Writers as women Writers pour light on the condition of present society with the help of such stories. Githa Hariharan needs no introduction as she is well known for her novels and Short stories. This Paper is an immaculate effort to go deep and analyze the thematic concern in the her collection of short stories *The Art of Dying And Other Stories*. This will try to depict the importance of Death factor and role of women in present world.

**Keywords:** Death, Disease, pain, nostalgia

The publication of stories from Indian Christian Life by Kamala Sathianandan (1898) marked the beginning of short story in English by Indian writers but this tradition can be traced back to the *Panchtantra*, *The Jataka Tales*, *Kathasaritsagara* and *The Daskumarcharita*. The ancient story tellers were concerned with moral values which can be helpful in living a good life.

Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao are the most important writers in the field of Indian writing in English. Today, we have so many writers who try to come up with the hidden meaning and significance. Short story has got a purpose and it not only entertains the readers but also educates. As A.K. Ramanujan has observed, "No text is original, yet no telling is a mere retelling and the story has no closure, although it may be enclosed in a text...the stories are there, 'always already'." (A.K. Ramanujan, 2004:53)

These are the words of A.K. Ramanujan . Stories are there but they are different to different environment, country, time, space and surroundings. Today, the stories are written with a different perspective. Women Short Story Writers have always poured light on the condition of Women in modern world.

This paper is an effort to go deep to throw light on the thematic concerns of Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* .In this collection,she talks about those aspects of Women which are erased , muted ,ignored and mystified .The stories are a good source to know about the concepts of 'decency and 'honour and that too , with playful irony.One can easily find a connection between larger and smaller events and this is done in the form of so many voices In this collection ,with the help of twenty short stories ,the writer has taken up so many different characters and twenty different topics .Death, Aging , Conflict ,Women and their condition, Loss and Change can be seen as important themes of this collection.

She perfectly portrays death and its place in life .Krishna Daiya has mentioned the same thing in his book *Post-independence Women Short Story Writers in Indian English: Death is the central preoccupation in this anthology* .The title itself reflects the theme of the stories. Death is not shown merely as an event but as a shadow looming large over life. Life is as if a journey and death, its only destination. The writer is unique in showing not only death but also its place in life. Death is portrayed as a phenomenon, sometimes dreaded and welcome, but inevitable.(47)

"*The Reprieve*" is all about a man who misses his wife after her death so very much .Title Story is the story of a mother ,dying each day after her only son's death."The Rainmaker " is the story of a dead mother ,present in the ideas of her daughter. It shows gothic element."The Closed Room" depicts the sad end of a writer. Most of the stories deal with death, helplessness, and a social responsibility.

This Anthology talks about Indian mothers ,joint families, child widow, bollywood dream, will, Indian Children, widow grandmother's, summer vacations at grandmother's houses and all those Indian themes. The characters feel lonely and dislocated because of their loved ones death. The sense of loss is introduced by the inevitability of death. The double' D' factor is visible in most of the stories, that is to say, death and disease. As Amitabh Mukherjee has said:

Many of the stories do deal with death. "In *The Remains of The Feast* " , death has visited some time back, and now a widow has to live out under sharp, social restrictions- her hair must be shorn, she can wear only very plain clothes(These laws for widows have not changed for nearly a millennium ;see the 17<sup>th</sup> century text

Tryambakayajwan's The Perfect Wife, Stridarnapaddhati).  
([www.cse.iitk.ac.in/users/amit/books/hariharan-1993-art-of-dying.html](http://www.cse.iitk.ac.in/users/amit/books/hariharan-1993-art-of-dying.html):17/feb/2009)

The old great-grandmother has to die but she dies of cancer and the narrator says :”The goitre lump , the familiar swelling I had seen on her neck all my life, that I had stroked and reading my pinched as a child, was now a cancer that spread like a fire down the old body, licking clean everything in its way.”(9)

On one hand, we have stories like “*The Warden*” where a woman in the story mourns her husband's death and Other consoles her, ”The tears flow from my face to hers .She is a brown, Mary old woman just like me ,and we lick the tears of each other's faces(40) but on the other hand, Maharaj Rao thinks again and again about his wife Mangala and misses her a lot in the story “*The Reprieve*”. In “*Voices in The Twilight*” , the son realizes his duty ,towards his widowed mother when he says,” I am the sole male of the surviving family .I am the staff for my widowed mother to lean on.”(129)

“*The Will*” is a true depiction of Indian society where Sushila is all alone after her husband Raghu' s death but when she gets his letter as a part of will for her , she changes beset and starts staying with her children one by one .If we talk about the thematic concerns in her stories, than we can say it is full of variations. “*Revati*” is a real depiction of pathetic condition of a child widow who is supposed to wait for the children and male members to eat first and that is a big and burning question on our society.

Hariharan has written a totally different story “*Gajar Halwa*”, which depicts the true and total devotion of Indian Servants .She has written similarly beautiful story “*The Field Trip* “ which is a wonderful description of children's best source of enjoyment: summer holidays.

Thus, to sum up ,we can say Hariharan's *The Art of Dying and Other Stories* is a perfect collection of stories which talk about D factor; death and disease and Women and their different roles and responsibilities in the families and society. She says the same thing in her essay “*Discrete Thoughts* “: “ I have considered myself part of the Indian Women's movement form the last 20 years. The extent of my day to day involvement has of course been dictated by my juggler's life of earning a living ,raising children , reading and writing. “(215)The same juggling can be found in her stories.

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