



FOUCAULDIAN ANALYSIS OF GITHA HARIHARAN'S *I HAVE BECOME THE TIDE*

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Abstract

This article analyses Githa Hariharan's "I Have Become the Tide" from the Foucauldian perspective. It employs the concept of power-knowledge and discourse given by Foucault. It examines how truth is constructed and moulded by the powerful. Truth becomes a gamble at the hands of the mighty. It also sheds light on how the Dalits are treated as the "other", the way the insane were treated in the age of Reason or are regarded in this modern era.

Keywords- Foucault, power, knowledge, discourse, dalits, society

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Githa Hariharan has been a voice of the unknown, unseen and unheard. Through her writings she has challenged the political, social and cultural systems which like a mite have sucked the vitality from humanity. She deals with the concerns of the society and brings them to the centre of the stage which is generally hushed down upon.

In her novel "I Have Become The Tide" she touches on the themes of untouchability and fanaticism in the name of religion.

Her three parallel narratives of Chikka, three dalit students and Professor Krishna are interwoven with each other and they bring forth how little circumstances have changed in all these centuries and still we all are in the search of a land 'where water flows freely'.

In this paper, I want to analyze the novel "I have Become The Tide" from the Foucauldian lens. Foucault, the French philosopher, political activist, writer and the literary critic has propounded his ideas on knowledge - power, archaeology of knowledge, the concept of 'other' and how

discourse is shaped by the powerful. His ideas have touched each sphere of human existence and forces us to think the way we think and what we think.

"Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are "matrices of transformations."(Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 99)

Chikka, in "I Have Become The Tide", was a Dalit boy who lived in the outskirts of the village and his life was like that of a stinking pond, stagnant. It was only Nature who seemed to embrace him. When he fell flat on the soil he felt the soil to be his mother. He said that his skin colour was also like that of the mud. The bright sunlight made him feel that it had to share some happy news with him. He could be alone only by the pond and stayed there in tranquility for sometime. It was the sky, at which he looked endlessly instead of being a cattle-skinners' son. He found resemblance with himself in the mud under his feet. The mud could carry thousand of bodies

over it and likewise he too could shoulder innumerable miseries on his back.

The life of Chikka is a testimony how the Dalits are treated as the 'other'. The social system of caste has promoted the physical, psychological, social, educational, economic and cultural separation of the Dalits.

Foucault in his book "Madness and Civilization" traced the evolution of the concept of madness. "Renaissance men developed a delightful, yet horrible way of dealing with their mad denizens: they were put on a ship and entrusted to mariners because folly, water, and sea, as everyone then "knew," had an affinity for each. Thus, "Ships of Fools" crisscrossed the seas and canals of Europe with their comic and pathetic cargo of souls. Some of them found pleasure and even a cure in the changing surroundings, in the isolation of being cast off, while others withdrew further, became worse, or died alone and away from their families. The cities and villages which had thus rid themselves of their crazed and crazy, could now take pleasure in watching the exciting sideshow when a ship full of foreign lunatics would dock at their harbors".(Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, vi)

"Poor vagabonds, criminals, and "deranged minds" would take the part played by the leper, and we shall see what salvation was expected from this exclusion, for them and for those who excluded them as well. With an altogether new meaning and in a very different culture, the forms would remain-essentially that major form of a rigorous division which is social exclusion but spiritual reintegration".(Foucault, *Madness and Civilization*, 7)

In the Age of Reason in the 17th century the insane people were segregated to the margins of the society. They were also physically separated by confinement, with other anti- social people like the prostitutes or vagrants. In the modern era also the insane people are cruelly controlled by the creation of the medical institutions. There is no language to communicate with the insane.

The Dalits are given a similar treatment in our society. They are segregated from each sphere

of our culture in every way possible. The treatment meted out to them is worse than that given to the mad people. In the contemporary society, in the age of technology, we have not been able to overcome our prejudices regarding caste.

The three dalit students, Satya, Ravi and Asha were constantly harassed and equality for them was only an ideology. Asha joined a nursing college, Ravi joined for BSc Zoology and Satya got a seat in a medical college. Asha was humiliated by her teacher. Her answers were mocked at by her friends. She was asked to clean the toilet as a part of her assignment. Even in Priya's aunt's house, Asha was asked about her caste by the old man and was denied entry in the kitchen. Satya faced ill-treatment from his classmates and his teacher. He was repeatedly forced to believe that he could not pass as he belonged to lower caste. He was mentally tortured by Professor Sharma who threatened him. His scholarship was also not given to him on time by Murthy. None of his friends sat beside him.

The way mad people are separated from the main stream of the society, the lower caste people are also not allowed to be a part of the general society. They remain confined by the walls of caste. They struggle to break that wall but in vain. If they even become successful in breaking some portion of the wall of caste, the society reconstructs it within no time. However, Githa Hariharan finds optimism even in their struggle. Ravi kept trying to change the condition of the lot. He faced caste discrimination but he fought back. To protest against the injustices done to Dalits, he joined the 'Bhim Shakti' group under the guidance of the physics professor Senthil.

Michel Foucault, through his notion of power- knowledge, proposes that the foundation of knowledge is power. Power is achieved through knowledge. However power in turn shapes up knowledge to achieve its end. Knowledge is closely associated with power.

In the novel 'I Have Become The Tide' the people of Anandagrama lived in complete peace. It was like an utopia where people of all castes lived together in complete harmony with each other.

However the priests, the guardians of the Gods, moulded knowledge and claimed that Anandagrama became impure because there, weavers, sweepers, merchants, carpenters and Brahmins all lived together and even dared to pray and love. According to them "...ananda can be found only in the place that holds honour and prosperity in its brick and gopuram; in the place that houses milk-bathed idols and their priestly guardians".(Hariharan,211). Their sayings were listened to by others and were believed as they were people who held authority, who had power. The lower caste people were blamed because the rain failed ,fields became dry and the rivers were sluggish and the farmers were idle and the children were starving. Muthuraja , a member of the temple guards, was ready to take action to bring an end to the lower caste people of the Anandagrama. To achieve this end, the people in power constructed knowledge, or called the singing and chanting of the lower caste people as lies and trash.

Even, when Satya could not tolerate the humiliation anymore and chose to end his life , the cause of his death was stated to be his inability to endure the study pressure. This information also was fashioned according to them and this was far from the reality.

The society also forgets such incidents too quickly. Whatever information is distributed by the authority is accepted as it is without even questioning it. The power-knowledge nexus hides the truth.

When Professor P. S. Krishna revealed the low origin of the saint singer Kannadeva and about his mysterious death, the hindu religious fanatics murdered him. They called Professor Krishna as 'RakshasaKavi'. But ironically the devilish act was done by Srikumar. Professor Krishna was all alone with the truth. The religious fanatics were much more powerful and they shaped up knowledge as they wanted and the Professor had to part with his life.

Hatred is spread by the religious heads. Online mediums are used extensively to embolden the age old myths and evil social practices. Truth is

constructed and reconstructed keeping equilibrium with the social practices thus forming discourses.

"Indeed, it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together. And for this very reason, we must conceive discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable. To be more precise, we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies. It is this distribution that we must reconstruct, with the things said and those concealed, the enunciations required and those forbidden, that it comprises; with the variants and different effects-according to who is speaking, his position of power, the institutional context in which he happens to be situated-that it implies; and with the shifts and reutilizations of identical formulas for contrary objectives that it also includes".(Foucault,*The History Of Sexuality*, 100)

Thus Foucault's idea of power -knowledge, the way knowledge is created and discourse formed is prominent in Githa Hariharan's " I Have Become The Tide" .The novel urges us to introspect the contemporary scenario which can be termed as archaeology of knowledge according to Foucault.

"But there is a negative work to be carried out first: we must rid ourselves of a whole mass of notions, each of which, in its own way, diversifies the theme of continuity. They may not have a very rigorous conceptual structure, but they have a very precise function."(Foucault,*The Archaeology Of Knowledge*, 21)

The comparison evident in the narrative of Chikka centuries back and the present state of Asha, Satya and Ravi is a shocking revelation how we as a society are oblivious of the truth. The power-knowledge nexus and the discourse offsets the reality. There is a need of soul-searching. This paper while brooding over this novel 'I Have Become The Tide' through the Foucauldian lens attempts to spearhead discussions on the causes of emergence and transformation of the discourse ,explore the hidden truth and bring pragmatic

changes which sanctions the genesis of a just society.

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