



A Search for Feminine Desires in Patriarchal Social Structure in Khushwant Singh's *Nirmala* and Gita Hariharan's *The Feast*

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Abstract

On the contrary, Hariharan's *The Feast* is a provocative and symbolic reading in which women secretly get together to dine and exchange stories, providing them with a voice and an identity in a society wherein they are frequently ostracized by men. This study analyzes how female characters in the story embrace, fight, or navigate hierarchical discrimination using feminist literary theory and narrative evaluation. It further demonstrates how the body, memory, food, and stillness are signs of both rebellion and repression. In order to fully understand the theatrical and philosophical structures that create gendered identities, the essay draws on significant feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak. Conversely, the essay argues that *The Feast* is an expression of the collective statement of female, but *Nirmala* is the symbol of domestication and passivity of desire. Nevertheless, as a survival strategy by the means of psychology, both stories underline the importance of female solidarity, narrative agency and symbolic manifestation of desire. This essay advances the concepts of gender, voice and resistance in South Asian fiction by showing how fiction reveals the concealed desires of women out of the ruins of patriarchy.

Keywords: Feminine Desire, Patriarchal Constraints, Repression, Rebellion. Female Solidarity, Womanhood

1. Introduction:

Feminine Desire and Patriarchal Norms It is the desire of women, specifically, which has been invisible, risky or unethical in the patriarchal cultures. As men's desire is consistently normalized and idealized, women's desire is feared, censored, or repressed (Beauvoir 33). According to religious convictions, cultural values, and socio-political situations, patriarchy is an omnipresent ideological power that not only constructs gender roles but also regulates the manifestation of desires, feelings, and agency (Butler 45). Women are socialized to internalize subordination's, virtue as silence, and eschew personal ambition in the guise of family and

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social harmony (Spivak 102). Female desire, if indulged at all, is reduced to motherhood space or straight marriage romanticism. Anything short of the norm—emotional closeness outside marriage, sexual autonomy, or intellectual ambition—is deviant. Women are thus regulated and policed, to a great extent willing subjects of their own subordination by internalizing patriarchal ideologies themselves. These meditations of control and desire are thematic preoccupations of a lot of South Asian literary fiction, fertile ground to look at how gendered desire is censored, negotiated, or repressed. Two of them—Khushwant Singh's *Nirmala* and Githa Hariharan's *The Feast*—are companion but separate readings of how feminine desire functions in patriarchal society. Whereas Singh's *Nirmala* offers stark, realistic description of suppressed feeling within a patriarchal household (Singh 78), Hariharan's *The Feast* employs allegory and myth to propose a collective feminine consciousness which cannot be repressed (Hariharan 142). Both narratives map the ambiguity of women's desire—love, attachment, confirmation, or self-consciousness—and the ways through which norms discipline, deflect, or distort such desires. In *Nirmala*, Singh composes a world of the grey loneliness in which the title heroine is wedded to an older man in a marriage of convenience to maintain honour for family (Singh 21). Her sensual and affective desires are never confirmed and go beyond reach. She is bound by obligation, fear, and silence—her own being gradually coming apart to be a submissive stepmother and wife. Singh's control over the story is a consequence of *Nirmala*'s psychosomatic numbing. Her own needs do not spill out in defiance but get washed away to become an otherworldly guilt. Her suffering is internalized, normalized, and worst of all justified by the hegemonic moral order (Singh 104). Somewhere else, however, Githa Hariharan's *The Feast* creates a women's space of storytelling in which the women remember their desire and also reclaim and articulate it collectively (Hariharan 56). In a nameless village heavy with myth and remembrance, the novel is a narrative about a group of women who come together every year to behold a hidden feast—a place not appropriated by men. Food is here used as a vehicle of communication, pleasure, and transgression. Breaking bread—narrative, recipe, joke—is an act of recovery of body and soul self. The narrative jumps back and forth between past and present, myth and memory, retaining the argument that desire is not a personal but a historical and communal as well (Hariharan 98). Hariharan presents a vision of resistance in communality and symbolic practice in which women fill each other's hunger, symbolic and real. What brings both these tales together is the tracing of the systems surrounding and silencing female desire. They present themselves in *Nirmala* as social norms, family demands, and deficiency of emotional solicitation (Singh 115). The hypocritical standards of feminine behavior are the unwritten codes of feminine behavior that are supposed to be inconspicuous, and they form the background of *The Feast* (Hariharan 162). But the women of Hariharan create their own spaces, which include psychological, physical and symbolic ones, where desire is no longer meant to be hidden but a space of resistance and rehabilitation unlike the heroine of Singh who is kept as a prisoner of her part. This essay aims at discussing how *Nirmala* and *The Feast* describe feminine drives as repressed and inviolate. Examples of feminist literary theory in strict sense are Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, and Gayatri Spivak. It will be analyzed based on the replication, reflection or subversion of the ideological role of patriarchy in the texts (Beauvoir 41; Butler 54; Spivak 89). The analysis will also address the role of the narrative mode, namely the realist in Singh and the allegorical in Hariharan, in conditionalizing the creation of desire and its consequences. Whereas realism grapples with the material and physical limits of patriarchal reality, allegory offers the potential for speaking about utopian or other fictional spaces (Butler 112). The essay will furthermore explore the deployment of silence, voice, and space to trace the contours of feminine desire. Silence is imposed and internalized on *Nirmala*; it is a strategy of governance and mark of submission (Singh 132). In *The Feast*, voice is multiple, circular, and counter-culture—it dismantles linear time and weaves a tapestry of woman's life (Hariharan 173). Likewise, home space in *Nirmala* is a space of imprisonment, and feast in the novel of Hariharan is heterotopia—a space where normal norms are suspended and other ways of being prevail (Hariharan 189). Finally, then, the essay contends that both novels are dedicated to a richer understanding of how woman's desire is constructed, suppressed, and reclaimed within patriarchal culture. While *Nirmala* discloses the psychic cost of frustrated desire and the grotesque cost of conformity (Singh 140), *The Feast* constructs a world in which desire is a space of community, of memory, and of empowerment (Hariharan 202). Both of them offer a

nuanced working through of gender, power, and narrative's capability to reclaim what has been silenced. Women's interior lives are lost or misrepresented in a world that silences them (Spivak 121). Such books as Singh's and Hariharan's are needed in such a world. The narratives do not simply bear witness to women's lived lives but also open up space from which other possibilities can be envisioned. Either through implicit determination or unconscious resistance, the female protagonists of these novels live in a universe in which their own desire is constantly in conflict with what they ought to desire. The novels remind us that women's desire is neither a unified act nor a political act—on which it destroyed the very cornerstone of patriarchal subjugation. In the discussion below, it is in this analysis that this paper will explain how *The Feast* and *Nirmala* employs narrative structure, symbol, and character development to explain the pursuit of feminine desire in a patriarchal society. In contrast between Hariharan's mythic lyricism and Singh's tragic realism, this study attempts to plot the affective and symbolic topographies on which women hunt, repress, or outstrip desire in a world that would have them close their eyes to their own

2. Khushwant Singh's *Nirmala*:

Portrait of Silent Sacrifice Khushwant Singh's short story *Nirmala* brings to life a poignant tale of repressed passion, concealed pain, and heart-wrenching emotional cost of patriarchal values. Not just a story of a falling marriage, but also a venomous critique of the socio-cultural systems that bring women down to the level of honor pieces in decency, propriety, and domestic obligation. The fact that *Nirmala* is a forcefully married young woman who is wed to an older man is the symbol of institutionalized domination, nonrecognition of emotion, and internalized conformity, as well as the isolation of women.

2.1. The Domestic Prison

In *Nirmala*, the home is a place of both tangible and symbolic incarceration rather than affection and compassion (Singh 45). The home, otherwise romanticized as a place of women's spaces, is a place of imprisonment and surveillance. *Nirmala*'s marriage is not one of mutual consent or love but one of social convenience (Singh 52). Her father, as willing as he is to seal her destiny after a broke out engagement due to dowry, marries her off to Totaram, a man twice as old as her and with children nearly the same age as hers (Singh 61). By doing so, he adheres to the patriarchal belief that a woman's worth is based on marriage whether or not under conditions. This union drives the home to the point of suppressing passion and imposing duty (Singh 68). *Nirmala*'s perception of the home extends only as far as a parched routine of labor, silence, and emotional distance (Singh 74). Singh's writing evokes the sensory void of her life: conversation is restricted, sentiment is repressed, and the very atmosphere is thick with unreleased pain (Singh 80). Not only is the house constricted in terms of space; it is effectively sterile. *Nirmala*'s universe is limited: she has to be mother to children barely younger than she is, wife to a man who will never be able to participate in her youth, and unspoken guardian of tradition (Singh 95). Singh avoids sensationalism and opted instead for low-key, remorseless disintegration of *Nirmala*'s solitude (Singh 101). No melodramatic showdowns and outside revolts; the power of the fiction is in the everyday, in the way *Nirmala*'s dreams are battered by the force of social convention (Singh 110). She is restricted in her independence, physically as much as symbolically—she cannot go out of the house, nor does she possess the sense to venture beyond the boundaries of what is recognized as respectful womanly behavior (Singh 117).

2.2. Emotional Vacuum and Non recognition

Nirmala's emotional loneliness is the saddest aspect of her situation. She is trapped in a relational vacuum, deprived of friendship with her spouse and cut off from her peers due to her childhood marriage. Her stepson Mansaram, who is a contemporary of hers and with whom she is more emotionally and psychologically attached than she could ever have been to her husband, is the only person with whom she has a strong emotional tie. But this connection is also, colored with the scorn, suspicion, and guilt of the people. This discordant union that was

never to be is what brings out the tragic irony of the situation Nirmala is in, and it was repressed with emotion. She is having difficulties with adapting between her assigned job and her real age. Her womanhood does not receive any youthful or loving form but rather is controlled by her husband, contaminated by socially influencing opinion and eventually a conflict and a punishment after all. The story captures what has become internalized and becomes prohibited to be internalistically known by Julia Kristeva in her writings, the French psychotherapist, an internalist feminist. The proximity of desire even the suggestion of it on the side of Nirmala is unacceptable in the moral economy of the world which she inhabits. The manner in which the statements of love by Nirmala are interpreted as disobedient is an emotive expression of the misconception in her mind. Her silence makes one suspicious; her wish to Mansaram is misunderstood as romantic desire. Singh goes to an extent to show how a patriarchal anxiety manifests itself in blackmail, withdrawal and innuendo as opposed to blatant violence. Jealous and non-confident, Totaram starts to isolate Nirmala among the individuals who may be capable of comforting her. Nirmala also retreats and seals her dreams in a tomb of guilt and self-loathing. The fact that the society has indoctrinated women that they should not have the luxury to experience, much less to articulate desire is the inhuman reason behind her silence on her desires. She cannot say her confusion, disenchantment or isolation. Rather, she takes things in her head as a failure. There is not much to offer but censure and judgment, around the world which brought her plight to being.

2.3. Internalized Patriarchy

Particularly, perhaps, the worst aspect of Nirmala being miserable is her own collaboration with the repressive mechanism. She stoically accepts her death with dignified nobility which is noble and shameful without making any complaint or opposition. This submission is based on a complete confidence in the righteousness of her torment instead of ignorance. She finds out that sacrifice is strength and endurance is virtue. Singh reverses such assimilation of patriarchal culture in a secret way. Nirmala is not a pitiable victim as he perceives her, but a product of a society that conditions womanhood to be painful and silent and that she has a right to feel. This self-discipline is perhaps the biggest accomplishment of patriarchy since it enables women to continue with the same oppressive system. Nirmala is not a fighter although the price Totaram paid in his jealousy, Mansaram fell ill, and died was horrific. She does not object, accuse, or revolt. As opposed to that, she blames herself on what she could not accomplish. Singh cleverly and maliciously erodes this ethical line of reasoning, which portrays that women should always suffer a cost to preserve family honor whatever the price of happiness. The inner world of Nirmala described so beautifully is very interesting. Rather than making her look as a weak or foolish person, he makes the readers realize how strong an individual should be in order to endure such psychic eradication. Her silence is a disciplined agony and not even passivity. Her loyalty is not stupidity; it is the only means of survival in a world where there is no escape. In a sense, Nirmala is a warning sign of how destructive patriarchal compliance can be to the mind. The book clearly shows that the need to suppress the desire of a woman is not a social or even a moral issue, but very human. The deprivation of women of emotional and physical intimacy, their conditioning, and silencing of voices make women vulnerable to fragmentation of their person-hood. Nirmala, the character in work *Nirmala*, is psychologically dead, a ghost of the old Nirmala, but Khushwant Singh, who is notorious in his irreverence and satire, admits that there is a happy moment when he takes a self-reflection. The story does not revolve around the issues of women or simply simplify their lives. Instead, it portrays a heartbreakingly authentic situation of a woman who is conditioned to sacrifice the self-bliss because of an ethical and emotional crisis. The melodramatic, thrilling action of Nirmala is not the tragedy, but being deprived of hope, without mourning, without sorrow, without outcry, the ordinariness of loneliness, the loss of sexual desire, and the loss of it so softly, so gradually. Through presenting the inner world of Nirmala, Singh allows us to observe the silent murder of patriarchy the one that does not shout, but only chokes, does not strike, but only hides the face, does not hit, but only enslaves. By so doing, he allows us to see the cost of the system in human lives where empathy, relationships, and love are replaced by honor, cruelty, and servitude.

3. Githa Hariharan's: The Feast: Allegory, Memory, and Resistance

Githa Hariharan has created in *The Feast* a subversive and lyrical story in which she recreates feminine desire in the mode of a communal memory and ritual. When going beyond the *Nirmala* of Khushwart Singh, which as far as realism can be taken, it is a realistic narration of the emotional suffering in the family, *The Feast* reaches beyond the myth and fact to enact the desire as a communal act of liberation, rather than a personal desire.. Situated in a hidden village where women gather yearly in secret, the novel employs food symbolism, oral culture, and allegorical richness to envision a society in which patriarchal oppression is temporarily suspended. Hariharan's novel is thus a strong feminist intervention since it offers an alternative narrative of counter-silence and repression in the form of powerful acts of sharing food, remembering, and speech.

3.1. The Symbolism of the Feast

Food here transcends its literal definition to become sustenance, identity, and defiance. The banquet is a feast—it's a ritual feast, rich with depth and nostalgia. Each dish that is put on the table and eaten has in it a moment of history, a repressed feeling, or a forbidden rumor. They're not passive consumption but material text upon which women remember, narrate, and recover their fragmented selves. Hariharan loads food with an affective burden such that it's a rhetoric of desire and empowerment. Contrary to the discipline, instrumental food prepared by patriarchal families' domesticated women—food prepared to serve others—food here's a work of love of self and solidarity. The banquet deposes privatized, service regimes of the kitchen and is a public, ritualized space of feminine self-fashioning. Feeding and being fed are not gendered acts of service anymore but symbolic acts of recuperation. Each brings a dish with history—something she has, remembers, or been left with. They feed and eat more shards of resistance carried through time than food. The food represents that ;it overturns the belief that desire can be controlled, starved, and repressed. The women of *The Feast* are nourished—not body alone, but psyche, and soul. They hunger with hunger for power, not weakness, or lust. To eat as a gift is an act of solidarity, love, and acknowledgment—the same denied to women in cultures of domination. Hariharan's food is sensual, libertarian art which recuperates what the culture of domination wishes to forget: memory, pleasure, freedom.

3.2. Reclaiming the Voice

Most radically distinct from *Nirmala*'s voice in Singh is the voice of Hariharan's women. While Singh's *Nirmala* continues to be silenced, misread, and affectively repressed, Hariharan's women are voiced, accorded the intensity of passionate feeling, playfulness, and lyricism. The storytelling economy of *The Feast* prefers oral conventions of storytelling in favor of cyclical, fragmented, and non-linear storytelling as opposed to linear narrative. This is a stylistic choice that sanctions feminist epistemologies that are revelatory of multiplicity, relationally, and body-knowledge. The women do not construct broad, large-scale narratives; instead, they weave close, tight stories—of lost love, forbidden desire, traumatized histories, and ephemeral pleasures. They are self- histories that are echoed in a collective sense and they are sewing up a quilt of mutual struggle and rebellious knowledge. Voice in *The Feast* is not a way of communication; it is political action. To speak out is to resist forced silencing to which women such as *Nirmala* are subjects. It offers the women a space through which to re-signify their experience, to mourn and celebrate, and to re-constitute a sense of self that has been sought to be erased by patriarchal structures. When they testify and narrate their experiences, they stake their claim to life as anything other than the men's tale ghosts but as human in themselves.

3.3. Gendered Spaces and Subversion

The dining room is part of the event and food. Transitional space, are not public space neither private space, but this is a space; in which convention is temporarily overthrown. Women characters discussed in this paper are living on the margin. Invisible to men, but present, it is heterotopias—a space of otherness, of other ordering—is the means by which Michel Foucault was able to dismantle it. They are not women: daughters, wives, mothers but tellers, makers, dreamers, rebels. The fact that Hariharan is producing this play undercover is significant. The

fact is that there needs to be a cover-up indicates patriarchal vision permeates all, and also resistance power in the action. The fact that there is even a feast at all is significant about the culture's preoccupation with women's rituals, gatherings, and voices. The room is replete with what Judith Butler would call "gender insubordination"—the queer performativity of femininity. The women are not being given tradition but creating new traditions, new rituals, and new meaning. The room is inter-generational. There are older women, young girls, and middle-aged mothers who are present, and the unbroken continuum of feminine experience is created. This gathering in groups between generations erases the fantasy of new feminist resistance. The feast deconstructs an unmarked history of women who ever held power—quiet or loud—to testify to their lives. It is a ritual of remembrance, past and present collapsing into each other, future resistance stitched. The subversive power of the Feast of the Lord Mayor is that it is plural. It is sensual and political, aesthetic and useful. It does not have to be fought against, but it will change. It brings together women who are able to imagine other worlds—not schematic worlds, but material practices of everyday life such as cooking, sharing food, and gossip. It is care feminism of the ordinary, mundane kind. It is revolutionary, not anger feminism. While home in Nirmala's universe is an oppressive institution of domination, Hariharan's dinner table retrieves the domestic skills—entertaining, cleaning, and cooking—as art and counter-practice.

Where patriarchy appropriates such space as an act of domination over women, Hariharan's women re-signify such space as space of meaning and space of empowerment. The kitchen is a space of experimentation in memory; the dining room is a space of healing. Githa Hariharan's *The Feast* is thus a grand but trenchant condemnation of patriarchal silencing. She constructs an allegorical and symbolic universe in which women's desire is to be satiated rather than feared, memory not disavowed but relived, and women not clinging on but living in shared power. The novel is a feminist redrawing of self through ritual, relation, and utopian imagination. The women of *The Feast* are not aloof from tradition but they are the part of it and they occupy space for desire, memory, voice which they get from their own. Their possessive acts have been depicted symbolically and are not violent.

4. Desire, Voice, and Solidarity:

Female Subversion and Resistance and Comparative Perspective. A comparison between Khushwant Singh and Githa Hariharan has shown that literature holds some potential to explore the theme of feminine desire and though both stories are quite critical of patriarchy, Hariharan employs numerous literary techniques such as allegory, symbolism, and magical realism to represent feminine desire as a powerful, communal, and rebellious form. They offer important clues on how literature can reveal and circumvent the process of oppression that involve female subjectivity. The comparison between the two texts of Khushwant and Hariharan presents the concerns concerning the motif of desire and the ends in both novels boils down to the transactions and domestic disaster and violence which are instilled upon women in the social situations of patriarchy. The second grand area of dissimilarity between the two stories is their endeavour of feminine bonding. Networks do not exist in *Nirmala* she stays at home and that is a spatial place for her. The protagonist *Nirmala* is a lonely girl not only in her feelings but also in society. She has not friends, comrades or confidantes. Her suffering is a solitary, interior, something not visible. Those women surrounding her, in case they exist, are sexless beings that confirm patriarchy. There is no sisterhood here, no speech of recognition. This isolation ensures that her tragedy is even more hidden and her misery even more pronounced as women in these two novels depict their own readiness to speak, talk and share their activities despite having different opinions and views. *Nirmala* and *The Feast* even in their divergence share a thematic concern in the sense that their negotiating with shrinking social systems by the female gender. Both authors reveal the ugliness of the patriarchal norms emotional, psychological, symbolic, and yet they perceive differently.

4.1. Women Identity and Gender Performativity:

This claim by Simone de Beauvoir (1949) on how the feminine body is imposed upon by a socially constructed identity can be heard in *Nirmala* and *The Feast*. Her life is predetermined by the cultural norm, the need to make ends meet and family honor. She is engaged to a man much older than she wants to make sure that her social status is guaranteed by her father. Her womanhood is determined relative to self-sacrifice, emotional control and moral rectitude. *Nirmala* does not get herself elected into it, she is shaped into it. The alienation of defining womanhood outwardly and acting it inwardly is evoked by her story. Her wants, desire and freedom are systematically destroyed in favor of idealistic and self-denying femininity. The performance of gender as one of the theories proposed by Judith Butler in her work of *Gender Trouble* (1990) adds another layer to the analysis. Butler sees gender as not something, but a repetitive set of gestures, acts and performances dictated by societal rules. Gender is an action and not a state. It is made by the acts of socially approved behaviors that create the impression of a specific fixed identity. The fact that Totaram was jealous of the affair of *Nirmala* and his son also testifies to the looseness of gendered norms. *Nirmala* is corrected when her performance fails to keep pace with how she is expected to behave even in innocuous manner. Her husband as well as her internalized values and her sense of decency police her gender role. Butler would note that this policing upholds the perceived natural gender identity. These performances in *The Feast* are being interrupted by women, however. Their merry-making is a way to relax in their everyday functions as good wives, subservient daughters-in-law or humble mothers. They stop performing to the male gazer under the ritual arena of the banquet hall and they perform to each other. They laugh very noisily, gossip without any sense of self-consciousness, eat everything with great pleasure and even feel what their official personalities do not permit themselves to feel. This inversion of performativity is what helps to see the liberating effect of the story of Hariharan. By building a transient heterotopia where gender performance is redefined, the women can now build a space where they can fantasize themselves. They create a gender trouble that upsets hegemonic feminine scripts in the term of Butler. They have no way to get out of their social roles but to discontinue them in order to render themselves and their definability, illegible.

4.2. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: Can the Subaltern Speak?

The ground-breaking essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* (1988) by Gayatri Spivak raises some foundational questions that are of voicing, agency and representation of the subaltern woman. Spivak writes that, the subaltern is not only silenced by colonial and patriarchal power discourse, but also by those who aim to speak in her name, after and by intellectuals. The subaltern woman's voice is rejected, misread, or usurped. This reading is true especially in the context of *Nirmala*. As an economically disadvantaged young woman in a strict patriarchal culture, *Nirmala* is in a canonical subaltern position. Her desire is unutterable, her pain unimaginable. She has no discursive means of speaking her interiority, and nobody is willing to hear. Even in tragedy, she does not have the privilege of narrating it. Here is a narrative about her, not by her. Singh, to his credit, brings this condition into focus empathetically, but the reality is that *Nirmala* is confined in a system that forbids her both speech and agency. Hariharan's *The Feast* is a hypothetical solution to Spivak's question. Can the subaltern speak? Yes, she can—through ritual, through narrative, through shared acts of memory and imagination. Hariharan's women remain marginalized, remain monitored, and remain governed by the laws of gender. They do, in fact, have a symbolic space in which to speak—not of law, politics, or history, but the poetic, allegorical, communal discourse of the feast. This is not to disprove Spivak's thesis but to supplement it. Spivak is interested in how they dominated are represented within the dominant discourse, while Hariharan demonstrates how women establish parallel systems of meaning and expression. The subaltern can only speak outside the dominant order, but she can speak among her own kind and establish a counter-archive of visions and voices.

5. Cultural Context and Historical Specificity

If one is to appreciate the thematic depth of Khushwant Singh's *Nirmala* and Githa Hariharan's *The Feast*, one has to take into account the cultural and historical contexts within which these

books are set. Both texts are the product of specific socio-political environments in Indian history, and they voice multiple entanglements with patriarchy, tradition, and feminine agency. Though Singh has realistic text, which is an outcome of social setting of post-colonial India, Hariharan has a postmodern one, the creation of a literary and cultural setting that relied on feminist discourses and symbolic rewriting as well as on playfulness of narration. A more complicated interpretation of how feminine desire is formulated, suppressed or re-evaluated can be achieved through the understanding of the historical context of these novels.

6. Conclusion

Nirmala dualism of Khushwant Singh and *The Feast* of Githa Hariharan is a spicy commentary about the desire of the female form in the ideology of patriarchy. Both the texts are interlaced with myth, ritual and memory of the community to form an imaginary world where desire is not merely a contingency but is transported to the festive excellence. The novel abandons linear narrative to oral, circular narrative that reflects how the information and resistance production is passed on between generations of women. Not only material convergence, but also symbolic, is banquet, of the story itself, of the historical and emotional sustenance, of the fast of silence broken, the memory of the dead or ruined. Where Nirmala's tale falls to resignation, women at *The Feast* sing in a refrain that resists the margins. Most of all, both plays are against the reductionist myth that desire is, or need be, romantic or sexual. Women's desires here are desires of every sort—desires for dignity, for recognition, for voice, for community, for autonomy. They are political desires as well as desires of intimacy. Nirmala wants a world where she could be emotionally honest without reprisal; the only truth women at *The Feast* wanted was love—a truth greater than wives, mothers—of being remembered as dreamers, as agents, and as storytellers. Literature serves as a site of resistance here. Singh's work does not necessarily have to be self-consciously feminist, but it participates in a larger feminist discourse by testifying to the emotional toll of patriarchal orders. Hariharan performs a feminist poetics of imagining desire as shared heritage and resistance as ritual practice. Either way, writing is remade into something that has been made formless under domination—it is voice to longing, face to remembrance, and shape to suffering. Both authors re-perform the erasures of culture and history, opening space for listening and speaking women's truths. The power of *The Feast* is its visioning of non-traditional epistemologies. Where patriarchal fiat and privilege institutions have written knowledge in the past, Hariharan uncovers oral narrative, household ritual, and shared living as legitimate and valid practices of meaning-making. This new geography of knowledge is also a new geography of power. Nirmala's ancient power is exterior—mediated through husband, family, and society. Nirmala and *The Feast* together map the life of the Indian woman in patriarchal India—not as story from oppression to freedom, but as topology of struggle and accommodation, of imagination and resilience. Witnessing women's suffering and female strength, both the plays highlight the unspoken dignity of survival and the resistant power of celebration.

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