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### The Impact Of Political Power And Hegemony In Gita Hariharan's 'In Times Of Siege'

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**Abstract:**

Gita Harihara is a well-known writer in English. She adopted her unique style of writing to record her own experiences of hurt and humiliations. Being a social activist, she mainly focused on exhibiting the realistic status of Indian women. She described the sufferings, bitter experiences and depression of women in all of her novels in order to point out the challenges to the present status of women both in Indian society and also outside India. Socio-cultural realities, social system and tradition of Indian society are reflected through her characters. Community, Religious tension, racial difference and Patriarchy of male dominated society are the key factors for the social harassment in our society.

**Key words:** Social harassment, Religious tension, Humiliation, Racial difference, Social system

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### INTRODUCTION

The novel 'In Times of Siege' picturizes the life style of Professor Shivamurthy, who was working at an open University. The novel depicts the impact of political power and hegemony towards leading the society. Political power is used as a powerful force to control and silence the voices of the people who demand their rights against the fake ideology that was framed intentionally by the dominant community. Here, this novel explores how such ideology acts as impediment for the progress of the society and also the overall development in science and education. The main objective of political ideology is to maintain strongly its grip on society. The novel puts forth that the political ideology of power "has penetrated the landscape into the heart of its tenure....colonize the buildings as if they might be hospitable to bird's nest, cob web, beehives". Besides, the novel speaks out that 'Delhi's imperial avenues, its filth ridden hovels and concrete monstrosities reduced to the powerless fleeting images of a dream" (p.2).

The basic physical pattern that political ideology brings out holds its office, name, authority, a ruling position and a safeguard at gate. It is to threaten and mute the voices of the people in general and minorities in particular, even though the pattern of ruling system is not acceptable in form. Those who criticize or resent are being monitored. The powerless people are considered very weak and they are trapped symbolically and literally in all the levels. The political set up advances seclusion and demarked social unit. For example, the lethargic people, who enjoy their life through power, treat their servants as slave and want them to serve any time of day and night for the sake of their master. Meena is a budding youth both progressive and anxious for power which democratic political frame offers. She desired that her broken leg should have been 'at a rally or something.....the fault of police (p.13). She thought that she could have gained some political attention and gained favor in the public view. She is the best example who aims at acquiring power.

It is her first attempt, suggestion or decision when she perceives that she planned to call her parents. She states that, "I'd rather you did not that you did not worry them, I'll be all right here. You don't mind, do you?(p.14). Her pleasing ward convinced Shiva and made him continue his service to his ward. Power uses the common intelligence to control and rule over others. Meena says "since you don't have to meet your students, can't you bring your work home? I mean- if you don't mind (p.14). She finds Kamala slow and clumsy and does not want her service. The description of the faculty meeting also indicates the order. The head sits with his secretary next to him like hand maiden' facing them are his colleagues Lal, Arya, Menom, Amita sen and Shiva. The drink served is "a creative fusion of tea and coffee". It is served in chipped white cups and saucers. The ceremonial exercise of power also includes "Items for Discussion". The text is a parody of the context in which the head is faltering. It reads, 'The head, Dr. Sharma, is a timid man whose head is just a little too big for his slight finely sculpted... He is now practicing for his role in his own corner of paradise, presiding, unbearably grave and pompous". The above mentioned words define the structure of power everywhere. It clearly points out that invisible political power dominates and rules over men even in the university. It controls all those who are seeking truth for the benefit of the human society. Power places stooges as eyes and ears of the power above. In this case, Arya is the power minion, He followed the orders instructed by the political boss. Power begins with aggressive fault finding. "Dr.Arya brought to my notice that some faculty members may be over stepping using their bounds. Or should I say over using their editorial pencils". Arya's role as a minion of the power is vividly exhibited by "the weekly meetings in Arya's house on campus...the guests have been seen leaving the house in khaki gear". He reveals more aggressive face. He intentionally politicizes history and Professor's historical studies. Power aims at initiating problem towards an expected reaction and bringing up a premeditated solution. Power tries to politicize the new knowledge when advancement of learning brings out a new finding that shakes hegemony. Power holds fallacies and myths to divide people. The problem initiated by Arya is on the expected lines. Whatever Arya says is not a history but he intentionally tries to create discrimination among the people and he tries to showcase identity politics.

There is a scene in which Shiva and Meena pass their leisure time playing a game with wooden animals, twelve white sheep and one yellow tiger. They "spend an evening making up different versions of a strategy game". Power too is a strategy game. The dominant do not follow the rules but very often changes the rules to maintain his power position. When Shiva is the tiger, he is only allowed to move ahead one step at a time. Meena's sheep move in all directions a step backward or forward, two steps the diagonally. And when Meena plays the tiger they have altered the rules; neither tiger nor sheep can move backward. This is exactly what happens in the propaganda and violence let loose by the air politics of

power in which Arya and his ilk turn oppressive against real history and historians. This is exactly what one finds when governments attempt to change the constitution and to reinterpret laws. The powers treat the fair as fool and fool as fair. The hegemony has the same strategy similar to the right-wing politicians. It forces the people to bear inequalities and oppression as a part of their life. It is to live in transgression against the oppressive power structure. It is to utilize every knowledge, data and findings in the public domain and spread the awareness of the reality and truth. There are some anti human forces which twist the narrative of the intellectuals and try to criminalize them. Freedom in the context is never the achievable end but an ever shifting goal post. Freedom is to be always in the action mode against fake news, fake data, fake narratives and fake knowledge. It is to keep the flame of dissent, sub version and transgression alive and burning at will. The text reads: “freedom movement did not end in 1947. In fact, the burdens of the new world - the travels of free India - sat on his shoulders.”(P.34)

Power is ambitious in its intent. In a democracy all ideologies are a key tool for power. Some play the game foul and have no scruples or any centre of consciousness to govern and their only objective is to be in power forever at any cost. They try to establish a grand architecture, feel hugest the better to make the subjects feel insignificant and humbled. But history is full of such grandeur, the palaces, temples and fortification all in ruins but the oppressive class, community or society is unaware of the futility of such a power strategy. It continues to do the same even now. Shiva feels that the ruins of Hampi “dwarfed” him and “they must have amazed and diminished its citizens hundreds of years ago. ...Evidence of might - might laid waste... a testimonial to imperial grandeur... a testimonial to the human capacity for destruction” (P.40). The state apparatus of power tries to keep itself separated from the outside world. They are mostly enclosures of power.

Referring to Rekha's gardening endeavor the text metaphorically speaks of the establishment of power. The daily wagers “cut and slashed, chopped and dug. ...The weedy army was a distant memory. The stretch of soil in enclosed by barbed wire had the cowed look of an obedient subject. All the conqueror had to do was keep it domesticated - plant afresh on the blank tablet things of her choosing, things she could name, things that depended on her for their survival” (P.58). Power often Calls itself the victorious, the conqueror, exhibit the authority of the might through city - building memorials and architectural Marvels.

The narrative speaks of Vijayanagar kingdom and of the Kingly state of Kalyana. “The terror and bloodshed in the two settings overlap; human suffering does not change all that much with time and circumstances”(P.59). The dominant community at the top rung of the hierarchy fear equality among people and develop an uncertainty of their future. They sour up the relationship between the king and his finance minister Basava. The text refers to the upholders of inequality as “the pillars of society” (P.61) The text reveals the power games that the dean plays within the system of larger oppressive powers above him. His office “is a cool soothing cave”. Thick, dark curtains is “Chameleon – like. He has a flamboyant show of a cultured man by the arrangement of furniture. The dean and the head decide “where the defendant’s dock is to be” (P.66). Power works with bullying tactics using courteous and eloquent language. The power also pretends to listen to the oppresses or the dissenter. The text puts it as “a habitual simulation” of listening.

Power plays a unique game. It has a network of secret societies. They play proxy to the political power and at times vice versa. “The Manch makes the demands for an apology from Shiva, from the department and the university. It wants the history texts to be rewritten. The rewritten lesson should be

submitted to the Manch before it is sent for printing. Power makes decision for others. It decides what should be the truth or reality. Power works by censorship. The meetings conducted by power often “never go beyond monologues to discussion” (P.7). Power often justifies its oppressive actions and try to silence the dissent by speaking for “order and harmony” or unity and nationalism. The tone of hatred and arrogance reveals power’s sly game.

It constructs the culture as the base. Power counts on emotive or provocative language to yield unconscious public reactions and there by condition their minds to division, hatred and disorder. The news item under the headline, call to revive Hindu courage is a case in point. The news reads: “we want to make the Hindu strong and courageous again. A meek person can not survive. I am not only talking about muscle power. We must return to our old militant sprit” (P.90). The Manch’s news item goes on this aggressive vein of hatred for others and wants to spread it by teaching in schools and colleges. If dissent and transgression continues, power tries to censor news and reports. It may flood the media with fake news or eulogize golden Hindu past. It calls for national unity and “legitimize one language, one religion, one nation” and one common civil code. Power’s designs are like “a spider’s web. Its sticky spittle has moved on to new threads” (P.94). It tries to “convince people they are under attack, and then offer them protection”. This is its preferred strategy. Centres of power in the controls of a dominant community are always facist in nature. “The link between facism and the ugly faces of Hindutva is the regimentation of thought and the brutal repression of culture” (P.101).

Meena is quick enough to perceive the ways of the fundamentalists as power centers. She names them as “the fundoo”. Amar tells that the fundoo “has three regiments. The troops in front are the thugs. Lumpen types, rushing ahead with their prejudices like shields before them, waving hatred like angry lattis. ... Then behind these you have the idea wallas...The historians, the ideologues. A few politicians and pamphleteers. ... up the distant rear is the pantheon of gods in power. These think they should run the government because they have a direct link to the mythical gods” (P.101). In a democratic climate and the expanding public of its human right, there is a flood of youth who express brave faces of transgressive opposition to oppressive power centres. Women like Meena, “years to look a starker terror in the face. They do not flinch at the prospect of violence, of violation. They wait with a youthful certainty” (P.111)

The game of power uses hired protesters “All it takes is the price of a meal. Hungry touts are unlikely to ask what they are protesting against” (P.129). The mob attack on Shiva’s office room reveals the ugly and cowardice face of power exhibited by the dominant community. Power is behind causing exodus of subjects as fugitives and exile in their own country. It is behind every lawless political act. The text in a poetic way compares power to a “beast, with many heads, many masks, and many voices” (P.134). The beast in the government has control over the media, “has even these glitzy private channel in its pocket” (P.146). Power’s trick is to force or entice people to confirm to the current theology which is the power’s discourse. All other discourses are beclouded by the noise and confusion which is kept going by the minions” of power.

Shiva, the protagonist holds his ground in his pursuit of knowledge and true to his professional calling and to teach and instruct students of history. He fights against an oppressive regime, and is aware of the tact sanction from the powers that be for any lunatic fringe that does its dirty work”(P.169)

He braves out against the centers of power that promotes doctoring of history or when they attempt to rewrite history. The discourse of the novel declares “the predatory intentions” of the dominant

social groups. At no point time Dr.Shivamurthy is cowed down by threats and violence, nor is he willing to make compromises in exchange of material advancements. One infers from the novel the fact that powers come and go but the structure remains and that the structure needs reordering, reframing whenever human rights are violated and oppression shows its ugly head.

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