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Reforming Beliefs

**THE CRUSADE OF A TIGRESS FOR A NEW IDENTITY****Ab. Majeed Dar****“One is not born a woman, but becomes one”****- Simone de Beauvoir (1949)****ABSTRACT**

*Tiger Hills* as the title of the novel reflects a typical place wherein only Tiger (Male) can rule. It is a geographical as well as a dreamscape of Adam where Eve is, but forbidden to Trespass. It is published by Phoenix, Orion Books Ltd 2010 with its first sentence as, “Muthavva knew her seventh child was special, had known from the very day of her birth, the day of the herons.” (p-1) It is an unusual story of a village girl raped by her friend, she eventually loses her childhood love, Machu and that grief shatters her life. Through her artistic sensibilities Mandanna depicts the inner sufferings of Devi, the protagonist. Keeping aside her marriage, Devi fights the trauma of rape and her lost love. She represents undaunted courage to establish herself in business, family and society. Devi voices her resentment to Devanna through the medium of her incessant hard labour and establishing herself as the ‘Coffee Queen’, fighting against all odds. Sarita Mandanna uplifts Devi from all adversities and makes her fight not to get lost in isolation and stagnation after the rape. In fact, she fights for her identity and emphasizes her presence with a bang. *Tiger Hills* explores the connections between fortitude and acceptance, the choices we make in the aftermath of coincidence and their far-reaching impact. Determined not to be victimized, Devi fights for her existence and happiness the best she can. She isn't always easy to like and makes some decisions that are far from right. As she forges a life for herself within the parameters decided for her, Devi hardens to such an extent that she becomes wedded to a version of happiness rooted in memory to ever become real.

**Keywords:** Rape, Identity, Sacrifice, rape-trauma, love-life broken family etc

### **Author Profile**

Sarita Mandanna, the author of *Tiger Hills* belongs to the stunning landscapes of Coorg, the setting of Tiger Hills. Her family history extends for centuries through these hills, famous for their coffee plantations described as the 'Scotland of India'. She has a P.G Diploma in Management from the Indian Institute of Management, an MBA from the Wharton Business School, and was most recently a private equity investor in New York City. Tiger Hills is her debut novel being translated into 15 languages around the world.

### **Crusade for a New Identity**

The urge and quest for 'Identity' has erupted with 'Gender Trouble' from years. Indian women novelists have created their own mode of expression for their concept of word 'Identity'. 'Identity crises' is an internal conflict and a search for identity. Identity can be termed as a synonym to singularity of personality. It cannot be denied that Indian Women novelists have vehemently articulated regarding this theme suiting to the Indian context, adhering to Indian system and drawing inspiration from the plight, resistance and compromise practiced by the contemporary Indian women writers across the globe. Of course, they are presenting it all in a comprehensive, compact and scholarly as well as dignified manner. Indian women Novelists have uncovered the face of women who seek fulfillment through self-expression. The utterance of the women protagonist would be vehemently declared rebellious or sometimes in a very subtle and tender way. The authors have portrayed the new women clinging to the basic values and molding herself (woman) as per the changing circumstances, moving ahead to seek her identity with new depth and acquires recognition. Very strangely and surprisingly the path the protagonist chooses is tough and they show undaunted courage and faith in themselves. They are ready to face and overcome every hurdle that comes their way.

Women writers across the globe have projected studies which seem to be very interesting premise for their concern to focus the positive elements of a woman in adverse situations. They talk of their wit and strength, and not of tear and weakness. Sarita Mandanna too is certainly inspired by feminist agenda and she incorporates feminist philosophy by weaving the story of a rape victim who fights all odds to get back her identity. Sarita Mandanna has portrayed the

protagonist, Devi who displays immense courage to break away from the conventional practices of traditional Coorg society. The concept of chastity that was the Victorian Society's chauvinism against women of the time does not become a reason of ending life for Devi, Sarita's protagonist. She loses her chastity, as such in the hands of her childhood associate, Devanna who rapes her under the influence of alcohol. The victim, Devi makes her desperate bid to gather the broken emotions and stands strong to show her annoyance to all, Devanna, Machu and to the Coorg society. She depicts her life believing in the principle 'living and loving is not a sin'. Mandanna has vehemently shown that the rape was not her fault and hence, she is being a living person who sails in the sea of passion and revives her relation with Machu, after marriage with Devanna. Sarita Mandanna does not remain a condemner but she gives opportunities to Devi, her protagonist to fight bravely the drama of human inhibitions, its prejudices and practices, above all, the sorrows and the suffering of the woman as a victim. Devi overpowers the obstacles and emerges victorious.

Critics claim about Hardy's novel that 'Destiny makes character', Sarita Mandanna builds Devi's character inch by inch after she is victimized, symbolizing her struggle as her fight for identity. Sarita deals with an average woman, a village girl, who stands ahead and above for her uncommon woman by their strength to face life despite what fate meets out to her by men like Devanna and Machu. Devi has dauntless courage and doesn't buckle down before the hypocritical society, instead attempts decisively to rein in the circumstances to live life anew. Mandanna has envisioned Devi as the new woman, even on the stark background of orthodoxy.

Sarita Mandanna has an unforgettable passionate story of a woman, Devi who is full of energy, strength and dauntless courage to live life. As a little girl she loved to be nature, play and be a part of all activities. She was a tom boy, his father remarked ... "*Muthavva cried out in horror ... why can't she behave like a girl instead of a ruffian ...*" (P.21) Devi lived in her own world keenly interested and extremely indulgent in everything happening around her especially nature, every minute and smallest activity sparked her. This inborn spark which is dominant in her shows the traits of a tigress which are latent in her. She was a typical and true Coorg in spirit "*Stubborn and pagan in their ways, sticking firmly to their primitive beliefs in their ancestors and spirits of the land ...*"(P.25) as father Gundert observed them. The robust Coorg's feminine traits were sizably

present in Devi. She fought the battle of life with great dignity and honour. Lived like a Queen, a tigress. Machu, is a symbolism of a Coorg man, he revealed traits of tiger which were apparent in him. He being a tiger himself immediately acknowledges streaks of a tigress in Devi and very naturally calls her a tigress... "Ayy! Devanna is your friend always such as tigress."(P.49) The tigress, Devi rightfully wished to marry Machu, the tiger and she declared it openly. "*The Tiger Killer... Machanna, Devanna's cousin I will marry him... I will marry only Machu.*"(P.50) she began to live life only with Machu's memories. Unfortunately all her dreams were buried and life was shattered after she was raped by Devanna, her childhood companion. This shook her belief and faith so much so that she couldn't forgive Devanna for all her life. She had spent her youth admiring and desiring Machu. He was the man in her life and she was mad about his strength, power and grit. "*Mine you are mine. I will wait for you forever ...*" (P.112)

Devi was very disappointed when Tayi did not agree to send a word to Machu, she said,

'Send for him and ... say what ... that you have been violated by another? He is a Coorg, he would never accept you ... his pride would never allow it.'(P.152)

Devi couldn't analyse things, this trauma and pain of losing her dignity her love left her a failure and loser. She questioned herself, was it her fault that Machu the reason of her hurried marriage to Devanna. Machu though Devi couldn't resist herself and, therefore, didn't for Machu to complete his vow. Devi not only loses her virginity after her rape but her whole being is crushed and it becomes very difficult for her to gather the ruins of her personality and begin afresh.

*Tiger Hills* is a captivating story of a village girl who faces the rape trauma. Mandanna depicts the roller-coaster life of this rape victim. The deviations and variations in the life of Devi gives fruitful opportunity to Sarita Mandanna to paint different shades of her persona and also exhibit the strength of her personality and character. Devi transforms according to the circumstances, fights like a tigress for her-selfhood. She succeeds in acknowledging herself in the society. The chaotic fact of Devi's life traces her incredulous odyssey from a small town girl to a business tycoon,

'A Coffee Queen' 'Gorfen Brainth Waite, one of the largest planters .... was astounded ....

Coffee king no more ... I believe the honour this year goes to a rather winsome local. Coffee Queen that it.”(P.231)

Devi takes rape as an evil event in her life and strides ahead with her feminine grit and determination reaches a pinnacle of success navigating all conventions of the society.

“Weeding, hoeing, compositing, manuring, hacking, pruning, standing, bending, reaching, plucking until the muscles in her back and her arms. Cramped in pain.”(P.228).

She worked and laboured in fields to fight for existence. Devi seemed to be among the few women who voiced their resentment through medium of action. She did not believe in wails or sobs’ but wanted to endorse her presence in the society and emerge triumphant. That is why when Tayi tells her,

“Do not make yourself so brittle that a single touch should make you shatter” (P.231) Devi very aptly & wittily replied, ‘In this life one is not strong people will trample you under foot. One has to fight for happiness. For one’s dues.” (P.231)

Devi wants to emerge strong; for once she was weak when she couldn’t fight Devanna and then her society psyche to understand the recurring feeling of insecurity. She expresses the struggle of an unknown village girl who fights for distinctiveness and economic independence.

After the days of repentance Devi realized that everybody has to forget the past and look ahead and flow with the stream of future. Devi faces the complexities of life showing a brave front, in the long run she over throws her marriage but doesn’t discard her sons. Even Machu’s son Appu becomes her son. She like a tigress grooms, nurtures and nourishes her cubs. She adopts and assimilates painstakingly to replenish her new being. Although she is emotionally dislocated she gathers herself to overcome the cultural and social dilemma. It takes a long time for her to compromise with her sense of displacement. Her steep run up of the Tiger Hills, is so merciless and tiring that there develops a disturbing silence between Devi and Devanna which is like a seething have beneath the earth’s surface. Devi had no dialogue with her husband which led to a big vacuum. Tukra in panic reveals Machu’ ... *“but shouldn’t Devi Akaka at least talk some times Devanna.”* (P252) The Depth and sensitivities of her though processes were different from a common traditional woman. She makes her own set of rules, patterns of life. She leads her life as

per her own choices and any cost she doesn't come down to her knees. When the spotlight is discharged in the deep recesses of her mind and her views means and concept about rape-trauma, love-life broken family etc. are about under scanner it becomes crystal clear that she is really a character of very high stature. Very few displaced, dislodged women of her age and social status would have the courage to search and dig out a new identity after the misfortune in her life. Her tone is a freedom, her act is of a valiant soldier and her line of thinking is revolutionary and thought provoking. Devi, doesn't tell Machu, about Devanna's act, for she dreaded disrespect and contradictory circumstances would have made Machu give her sympathy she just says. '*My son was not born of consent.*' (P.254) In fact finally when she reveals things to Machu, at that stage of life he feels lost and guilty ... "For you I would ... Devi I forsook my vow for you ..." (P.255) Machu feels helpless that Devi suffered all her life and none could do anything for her.

Devi overcomes wrath by battling to get social recognition. Doing exceptionally well in business, making money, thus achieving social identity. His pride of maiden-hood is crushed, she has extra-marital relationship with Machu to assert her belongingness to him and satisfy her pride. She is her own authority, becomes her own matter and discards masculine authority. Treading, hurdling through life, she recreates her identity. During her search for self she breaks traditions, customs but focuses only for self-identity and self-making. Devi's extraordinary strength makes her invincible. Her pursuit for freedom and evolution of her views, outlook and thought processes are stunning.

My avowed aim in this paper was to discharge the spotlight on the different tenets of Devi's character to prove and assert her as a victim with a glorified identity. Identity crisis and fear of losing her whole being revolutionized her ideas to view things in a broader and magnified spectrum.

#### REFERENCES

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**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**



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