



The Influence of Indian Myths on Women's Character in the Novel The Thousand Faces of Night

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This article explores the mythological perspective of Indian mythology, with a focus on its impact on Indian women. Geeta Hariharan's famous novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* beautifully displays the status of women in India by comparing the myths and realities associated with the image of Indian women. On the second page of the text A.K. You can refer to the words of Kannada translator Ramanujan in which he has very cleverly expressed gender.

Suppose you cut a long bamboo into two parts; Make the bottom part for the woman and the head part for the man; Rub them together until they burn; Now tell me, does the generated fire belong to a man or a woman? (Ramanujan)

In our society, women are often expected to conform to a certain personality based on the mythological women portrayed in our culture. This definition of what it means to be a woman is narrow, limiting their individuality. It is interesting to see how Geeta Hariharan uses mythological elements to argue about the position of women in society. As a female writer, she can shed light on the discrimination and injustice that women have faced throughout history. It is unfortunate that even in works related to

mythological books, women are often portrayed as personified or objectified for violence. Their position in myths and legends was not secure, and they were often subjected to intense suffering and violence. However, these experiences also served divine purposes, as they were meant to provide examples for all of humanity.

This research paper aims to gain a deeper understanding of the acts performed through these myths in shaping the lives of women. To achieve this, we will be examining a novel that offers a unique perspective on the involvement of these myths in the lives of women. The term ‘myth’ carries a lot of meaning and controversy, as it is rooted in the beliefs, narratives, and traditions of past cultures. Moreover, myths are an intellectual formation of ancient people and are deeply ingrained in cultural narratives. They aim to provide a sense of guidance and understanding of the world and often convey a message or lesson. The existence of myths has been a topic of debate and discussion, with some questioning their validity and others viewing them as a valuable source of knowledge.

Myths were created to provide a framework for ethics, morals, responsibility, obligation, and restraint. Myths and conventional stories consist of the actual ancient actions. Myths are usually presented as exaggerated or fabricated stories of legends. Myth is considered to be a story combining symbols that can have various implications with morality. These are created in the form of accounts where the person has to prove his ideas as they retain spiritual or divine essence. That is why no one can speak wrong about the importance of myth, culture and codes of life, preach about religion. A large difference of emphasis can be seen between the myths depicted in literature and true myths, as there is a difference between historical and practical facts, but literary myths also function as mythology. No less capable of asserting the situation. The perception of women in our society is often limited by the narrow personality box created by mythological depictions of women. Despite the diverse range of women in reality, society still expects them to conform to the depiction of mythological women. There are some variations in the definitions of ‘myth’ among scholars, but a widely-cited definition is offered by definition provided by Lauri Honko, a folklorist from Finland, ‘Myth is a tale of the gods, a religious narrative of the world’s formation, key moments, and the gods’ exemplary actions that led to the creation of the world, nature, and civilization as well as all of its components and the establishment of their order, which continues to this day. A myth articulates and

validates the religious standards and ideals of society; it offers a behavior pattern that can be emulated; it attests to the effectiveness of ritual with its utilitarian purposes; and it establishes the sacredness of cult.

The extraordinary power is related to God or the supernatural elements have the person or any which is not normal can be considered as mythical identity. It is simply retelling a story of the past and thus turns into an act of restoration of a lost tradition. The word 'myth' comes from the Greek word 'mythos' which has a variety of meanings ranging from 'word' to 'saying' to 'story' to 'imagination'. The validity of mythos is usually accepted without any argument unlike 'logos', which refers to words whose truth can be proven and demonstrated. Although myths describe incredible events without any evidence, some people assume that they are mere stories with no factual basis. (Source: Britannica). Myths have been a part of every society, making them a fundamental element of human culture. However, due to the vast array of myths, it's difficult to generalize their nature. In literary or narrative genres, scholars have approached myths in different ways. Examples include fables, fairy tales, folktales, ballads, epics, and legends. Fable comes from the Latin word 'fabula', which has the same meaning as the Greek word 'mythos', like myths, fables are fictitious or untrue stories that often present an animal or human being or a natural object as a human character. Fairy tales are stories about supernatural beings, particularly fairies. They present unusual events and characters, similar to myths. On the other hand, there is much debate among scholars regarding the definition of folktales and their connection to myths. Some argue that folktales are stories that show common play on social situations and common fears and desires, while myths have a deeper purpose beyond mere storytelling.

In *Myth: Its Meaning and Function in Ancient and Other Cultures* (1970), Geoffrey S. Kirk, a British classicist, shares this view and uses the term 'myth' to denote stories with an underlying purpose and the term 'folktale' simple stories. The terms saga and epic originally referred to a specific type of narrative that takes place within a particular time and location. Although epics were initially found in many different cultures around the world, famous examples include Homer's *Iliad and Odyssey* from ancient Greece, as well as the Indian *Mahabharata*. Epics are often intertwined with myths, as they commonly depict mythical events and characters. Therefore, myths are a crucial source of the subject matter that epics draw upon., and the novelist Githa Hariharan tried her best to show the impact of those epics and myths through her novel. The perspective study of Geeta Hariharan brings out her concern on women's issues. But this does not mean

that she only fictionalizes women's problems or the female psyche; On the contrary, in a society dominated by men, women's reaction also mirrors their existence. The opening lines of the novel,

It was November, with two weeks to go for her journey back to India. To a Madras far from this wintry postcard landscape, sheathed in the muted greys and whites that muffled the discordant notes of decision so effectively. (*The Thousand Faces of Night* 1)

Where we are introduced to Devi, the protagonist who is torn between her aspirations to fly high and her respect for Indian mythological stories she learned from her grandmother. Though she wants to create a bright future for herself and does not want to come back from abroad, she feels compelled to obey her elders. As a result, she decides to return home. In this work, Hariharan has portrayed female characters from three generations of the same family. Devi the protagonist, Devi's grandmother (Pati), and Devi's mother (Sita) but apart from these, there are some minor characters like Devi's mother-in-law (Parvatamma), Devi's maidservant (Mayamma), Pati's maidservant (Gauri), and some more whose way of life is very similar to the struggles of the women of mythological stories. These women have different mindsets which are shaped by their environment, education and economic independence. According to Pati the awareness of mythological stories and their use in daily life has become more important for a woman to lead a peaceful life.

Devi's grandmother Pati, is a dowager in the age of thirties who lives in a Brahmin community village, but now she is not sad that her son left him alone in the village. The woman in question seems content with her lack of knowledge about modern development. She pays little attention to women's rights but is defensive of her own traditional beliefs and myths. She doesn't place much importance on her way of presence is always seen wearing a nine-yard sari, without any additional clothing, "She never wore a blouse-modern nonsense, she called it- and challenged my disapproving mother in a sudden, unexpected moment of aggression: what I have of hide? (26). Pati's deep affection for her granddaughter Devi makes her eagerly await her arrival during the summer holidays. She is a kind and pure-hearted woman and is always ready to help the orphans and distressed women of her village and tries not to hurt anyone. Despite being illiterate, Pati's knowledge of stories from Indian epics is impressive and he does not forget to share it with others.

Devi says she connects every incident of life with the stories of *Puranas* and myths. The bedtime stories my grandmother told weren't your typical ones. She picked each one for a specific reason, a tale to answer each of my innocent inquiries. She knew the answer to everything. Her responses, meanwhile, required some deciphering. A parallel needed to be drawn, an example needed to be found, and a lesson needed to be taught. (*The Thousand*

Faces of Night 27)

Despite facing many experiences in life, the aged woman strives to pass on traditional values and heritage to her future generations through her granddaughter Devi. Despite being widowed at a young age, Pati does not suffer from depression and never regrets missing out on things in life. As she approaches the end of her life, she feels contented to have lived a fulfilling life. She is ready to accept whatever fate has in store for her as a woman in traditional Indian society and allows events to unfold naturally while embracing all that life has given her. On her deathbed, she wholeheartedly blesses Devi, hoping that her motherly love will protect her even after she passes away. Whenever Devi has a question, Pati responds with stories that reveal the condition of women in ancient Indian epics. These stories leave a great impact on Devi's mind, helping her understand what is expected of a woman in Indian society. The impact of Devi's grandmother's stories never went out of Devi's mind, she remembered his stories even after going abroad, and even after a long time of 2 years she could not leave the religious thoughts related to those mythical stories. Devi was so obsessed with her Indian stories that she used to gift pictures of Indian Gods even to her foreign friends whereas the photo of his *Bhagwan Krishna* was just an excuse to make fun of the Devi when,

She had brought the host an Indian gift, a wall hanging of cotton cloth, hand-printed with vegetable dye. The host held it up for them all to see, and they looked at the blue, baby-faced man on the cloth, bare-chested and crowned with a peacock feather, dancing as he played the flute. For the first time, the image struck Devi as almost grotesque: a grown man, practically naked, wearing a perpetual baby mask. Tat's Krishna, the dark god who loved milk, butter, and women, said Devi. They could not bear to have a black god, so they made him blue, huh? Said the intent young woman Devi had earlier admired.

She smiled, but her voice was edged with contempt (05).

Instead of this type of discrimination, Devi was living her life openly in a foreign country. She had a friend named Dan who also proposed to Devi for marriage, but she never forgot that,

. . . neat little letters from her mother on the bridegroom's prospects or his parents' reputation for liberalism, making them promising inlaws for a risky oddity, an America-returned bride" (05), and finally "when the pane was finally ready to take off, there was no one to turn to and say goodbye. As she ran up to the waiting plane, she felt her American years slop away from her shoulders and trip her up in dank, stagnant puddles around her. (11)

She has no initiative, no urge to do anything, and waits passively for others to arrange her life. The one redeeming feature in Devi's character is her interrogative spirit which eventually prods her out of the life of lethargic material comforts and puts her on the quest for identity. When Devi comes back to Madras from America to live with her widowed mother, she faces some initial challenges in adapting to the day-to-day realities. Although she has come from a new and exciting world, she soon realizes that it is not easy to change the old order with her radical ideas. Her dream-like visit to America ends abruptly once she returns to India. She and her mother are inseparable, like a single entity. Sita is the rock she anchors to, never wrong, and never questioned. She is a self-evident fact of their existence. Even though Devi lived in America for a few years, she still felt vulnerable to her surroundings. Devi was raised by her grandmother, who had a habit of comparing the women in her life to mythological characters. For instance, Sita was compared to Gandhari, Gauri (maidservant) was associated with the snake story, and Uma (Devi's cousin) was compared to Amba. Some other characters were unknown to the grandmother, but after Devi's marriage, she began to see mythological characters in them as well.

Devi's mother Sita, is one of the most important characters who was responsible for Devi's married life. Sita is first seen as a cool, self-confident, and middle-aged woman who welcomes her daughter back from the U.S. She fits closely with Baba's description of the ideal womanhood. She was the one reason why Devi was ready to come back. Sita, as her name implies is an ideal wife, mother, and daughter-in-law. She plays every move with dexterity — Like a veteran chess player," (14) and answers every question —... with expert counterattacks. She has seen so much in her life that now she does not find much importance in anything. Her only concern was that Devi should prove her decision to go abroad to study and come back to India single and without an affair. The outlook of Sita is positive, acknowledging her limitation of being

a female and, at the same time, playing a convincing role as a daughter-in-law, wife, and responsible mother to her daughter. Devi is different from that her mother and grandmother, of her American graduation. Arriving from the US, Devi compares her relationship with her mother to her classmate Julie in New Jersey. Julie chats with her mother about boyfriends, expressing their love, kissing, and hugging each other. But Devi is not comfortable in the company of her own mother. Sita keeps distance and has no patience to listen to her daughter and her experiences in the foreign land. After the death of Devi's father, things become certain changed, they both become more conscious of each other, Devi mentions:

we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads. Drawn together, my dead father's memory receding for the moment, we became a one-celled unit. We became, not a family, but mother and daughter”
 “. . . I had begun to tell her about America. She smiled gently and said, ‘All that is over now, the important thing is that you are back, you are now in Madras. (13)

Sita, Devi's mother, is mentally a strong woman. Though she is not attractive physically, her skill of playing *Veena* earns her a good position in the family of her husband. She is a woman of conviction and discipline. When the question of her choice to decide whether to entertain the family with her skill of playing *Veena* or to be a homemaker, she readily confines herself to the latter choice to please her husband's family. She is appreciated by her mother-in-law and her act is compared to the sacrifice of Gandhari who blindfolded her eyes when she found her husband blind, in the Indian epic, the Mahabharat. This scarification of her passion was not easy for her, she loved *Veena* from her childhood Devi mentioned:

I remember the time I found an old photo of Amma's. it was a studio photograph of her alone, the kind that is still sent, but now in reallife colours, to prospective bridegrooms by the girl's family. But what surprised me even more was that she held a *Veena* in her hands, her fingers caressing the strings”, Devi asked her Pati about the photograph then she said, “Do you know about Gandhari, my little one? Listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman.

(28)

Grandmother believed that a real woman should aspire to become like Gandhari. Pati narrated how Gandhari was dressed in “bridal finery” and her “heart was beating like a drum as she was led through the

marble palace to the prince's chamber" (28). She was thrilled about her married life. But as she looked into her new husband's eyes, her eager gaze lost its shyness. Devi asked why they had kept her husband's blindness a secret. Pati then invoked the example of a mythical woman's sacrifice and replied, "Because, my child, a woman must face her destiny alone. All husbands are noble, Devi, even the blind and deaf ones" after that she glorified the sacrifices of Gandhari and adds,

In her pride, her anger, Gandhari said nothing. But she tore off a piece of her thick red skirt and tied it tightly over her own eyes. She groped towards her unseeing husband, her lips straight and thin with fury. Gandhari was not just another wilful, proud woman, said my grandmother, summing up. 'She embraced her destiny – blind husband- with a self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood'. (29) Pati says that Sita is also like Gandhari, she took her *Veena* as a dowry after marriage because she could not spend a day without playing it. Even though she took complete training to become a good daughter-in-law, she always made time to play the *Veena* after fulfilling all her household responsibilities. One day while playing the *Veena*, her father-in-law called her for something important, but she was so engrossed in her music that she didn't notice. When he called her again, he became angry and shouted at her Put that *Veena* away. Are you a wife, or a daughter-in-law? "Sita hung her head over the *Veena* for a minute that seemed to stretch for ages, enveloping us in an unbearable silence. Then she reached for the strings of her precious *Veena* and pulled them out of the wooden base. They came apart with the discordant twang of protest', 'she looked up at my husband, her eyes dry and narrowed, and said in a clear, stinging whisper, "Yes. I am a wife, a daughter-in-law". We never saw her touch the *Veena* again. She became a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbours praised and our household never heard that heart-rending music again. (30)

Sita was disheartened by her father-in-law's rebuttal, and she hung her head over the *Veena* for a while before removing the strings from the wooden base. In her book, "Working with Feminist Criticism," Mary Eagleton discusses the unique position of women, which is similar to Sita's situation. Eagleton explains that the unease women feel, including the inability to speak or being silenced, is partly a product of patriarchal power.

One of the locations where patriarchal power is most prominent is in language and the public platforms where language is used most prestigious. Areas of linguistic status in our culture, such as the pulpit, the bench, the board, and the dispatch box, are usually associated with men. (16).

Gandhari becomes a symbol of pride, self-denial, and even anger. Her blindfolding is an act of protest. Similarly, Sita's decision to discard the *Veena* is an act of both vengeance and denial. Devi sees the parallel between the lives of Gandhari and that of her mother, Sita played a vital role in her husband's rise to success at the office. Sita is aware that her marriage lacks passionate love. Nevertheless, she is willing to do anything to preserve her marriage. She skillfully and discreetly rejects her husband's advances. She possesses the skill of adaptability and patiently waits for the right opportunity to execute her plan for starting a family. Sita is highly efficient and her well-planned operations are steps towards achieving the desired social image. Her husband, on the other hand, is quiet and often lost in dreams and folklore. He allows himself to be shaped by Sita into any form she desires because he finds it easier to yield than to assert himself. It is, no doubt, a loss of her autonomy but she has dedicated her life to directing her husband Mahadevan and daughter Devi's lives, but in doing so, she has lost control of her own life. She has invested so much of herself into their lives that abandoning them would mean losing a part of her own self. Unfortunately, Mahadevan dies suddenly while on a posting in Africa. Sita burns his unfinished papers and dreams even before his body is burnt and returns to Madras. Sita had a strong desire to become a good wife and a perfect daughter-in-law. Being a practical woman, Sita fails to evaluate feminist concepts of equality, liberation, and the status of women in male-dominated Indian society.

However, in pursuit of these goals, she neglected her music and failed to nurture the artist within her. Unfortunately, her desire remained unfulfilled and she now feels a sense of discomfort and uselessness. Despite making many sacrifices, she never complains and bears any hardships with silence. Sita is a natural at embodying womanhood. During childbirth, she remained calm and composed, impressing the doctor with her ease and grace. As soon as the baby was placed in her arms, Sita didn't allow any nurse to touch her. She had a new *Veena* to play on and she was determined not to give it up easily this time (104). The mother is a strict and possessive parent who is committed to her responsibility of raising her child with discipline. She faces domestic challenges with swiftness and decisiveness and closely monitors every need of her daughter. She enjoys being the decision-maker of the family and is not distracted by her other

responsibilities. Despite comments from others, she is determined to send her daughter to the US for higher studies,

Amma proved to them that she had not made a mistake in sending a young, unmarried girl to America. Your daughter will be lost to you, Sita' - they had shaken their heads and followed up their prediction with illustrative stories of boys and girls who never came back, married Americans, and forgot their aging parents in India.

After her husband passed away in a foreign country, Sita was left without any support. However, this tragedy has given her the strength to face life with courage. When she arrived at the airport, she chose to detach herself from the mourning relatives. She did not want to be the object of pity, and she conducted herself with grace and dignity in front of them. Sita has a great sense of finding things within the limits of her magical powers.

The entire attention of the people who came to the death ceremony of Devi's father was on Devi so, her mother says: . . . Everyone is asking to see you, they are wondering why you have become so unsociable. They had better see that you have nothing to hide (14). After Devi is recalled from America, Sita wisely allows her daughter to indulge in a few tantrums before she arranges for her to be despatched this time to a permanent destination, wifehood before her marriage, she cherishes her life settling down in the seashore home in Madras after her daughter's marriage. Sita has no sense of remorse when she receives the telegram message from Devi's husband Mahesh that Devi has gone off from the house. Sita's only request has been, not to scandalize the matter and she patiently waits with her *Veena* for Devi's home return.

Devi is the daughter of Sita, and while she has a practical perspective on life, she is also deeply influenced by the mythical tales her grandmother used to tell her. Myth-making can be viewed as a process of networking among women of different ages and generations, an attempt at renewing the whole community of women through the re-presentation of myths. Devi's grandmother narrates a story that is appropriate to the occasion. Instead of giving a direct reply to Devi's queries about the conditions of women around them, the parallels and mythological. She often compares the lives of those around her to the characters in these stories. One day, when she was just six years old, she heard the story of Damyanti's *swayamvara* from her Pati, and it deeply impacted her. Like when *swayamvara* was organized

... the sun shone more brightly than usual', a long procession of kings, princes, and gods entered its lofty portals and each was received by a nymph-like maiden who led him to a throne bearing the scepter and turban of his state', 'all the kings were dressed in robes and jewels of such brilliance, the eye did not know where to look. And the gods- oh, they were dazzling!', 'Damyanti entered the hall with an escort, trumpets blaring, and a secret glow of promise surrounded her face and hands and the garland of sweet-smelling jasmines and roses she held, The heralds of the princess issued their challenge in verse, witty and brief; and kings' heralds would reply, in defense of their masters' achievements and virtue. But Damyanti listened with only one ear. Her heart, loyal and steadfast, never wavered from the path leading to Nala, the king of the Nishadas, and her feet adorned with gold rings and henna were sure of their destination. (*Thousand Faces of Night* 20)

Devi started to dream about having her own *Swayamvara* when it came time to make important decisions, like choosing a partner for marriage. She wants to choose her own partner but she knows her mom very well her mother was also influenced by myths so Sita wants to organize a sort type of *Swayamvara*. Devi returned to India and a month later, she began preparing for her *Swayamvara* with great care, despite her responsibilities as a wife. She strongly believes in arranged marriages and finds a proposal from so many bridegrooms suitable for her daughter, Sita and Devi are two different characters with different attitudes towards life. Sita is a self-confident woman who believes in her abilities and the power of her own magic. On the other hand, Devi struggles to define her identity. She is uncertain about her role as a wife in an arranged marriage or as a rebellious lover. Devi's grandmother once told her a mythical story about Damyanti's *swayamvara*, and Devi wished for something similar, she wanted to form a *swayamvara* for Gauri, fair and a beautiful girl but soon she also got married and just as Devi was disappointed with her marriage, Gauri too was in the same situation. "Gauri came to see Pati some years later, to ask if she could have her old job back. Her husband was an animal, she said. They treated her like dirt, she said,(32). On the life situation of Gauri again Pati tells a story to Devi about 'the beautiful girl who married a snake'. When a mother gives birth to a snake instead of a child after a long prayer and sacrifices for a child's with so she accepts that snake as her child and nourishes him. After that When he grew up, he got married to a very beautiful girl and everyone in the neighborhood started asking, how can you live by marrying a snake? 'But

the young bride lifted her veil and said, “ A girl is given only once in marriage. So stop this mockery of lamenting and wailing. Let me go to my waiting husband” (33). The moral behind this mythical story is for Devi to tell the power of marriage, How that girl agreed to live with a snake, and how Gauri had an affair with her brother-in-law only because he was physically strong. Like so many stories Pati transfers to Devi which is why Devi is never able to decide for her own betterment, in her every decision she has to face the contradiction between her own modern thought and the mythical influence.

However, she has no interest in getting married and finds the idea of being wedded a nightmare. Even though Devi wants to express her mind to her mother, she lacks the courage to do so.

The sacrificial knife, marriage, hung a few inches above my neck for years, and I see now that I had learned to love, to covet my tormentor. I am still a novice in the more subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear, rip across my neck and let the blood gush, the passion of the sacrifice whole, all-encompassing (54).

Devi tried to convince herself to get married and met with five or six potential grooms in a span of three months. However, she often unconsciously mentioned Dan, which made her feel nostalgic and caused several suitors to reject her, she mentioned

. . . slowly I found myself telling him about Dan. Dan has receded into the past quite gracefully; he has slipped through my fingers and left no scare. I found I could talk about him easily and with the affection born of nostalgia for a safely closed chapter (22).

Sita was unhappy with this situation, but Devi was still caught up in her *Swayamvar* fantasy and unable to move on from her past, which made it difficult for her to hide it from others. So she finally meets and accepts Mahesh who appears to her as a polite stranger or a reasonable stranger, again she compares Mahesh with the mythical prince ‘he is no prince but a regional manager’. Sita finding a life partner for Devi in Mahesh is perfected well, after a rigorous investigation of horoscopes, and with the guiding mottoes, good housekeeping, good taste, and hard work suggested to Devi. When he declares his purpose of marriage that his wife is to look after his family and children, Devi is at a loss as she is not able to fit herself into the life of an Indian housewife. Devi is married to Mahesh, a Regional Manager in a multinational company.

She tries to fit herself in the role of a wife and daughter-in-law just as her mother did years ago. Devi likes his honesty, “

at least, I thought, he admits to wanting a woman at home who will be a wife and a mother. Some of the others I had met had amazed me with their pretense that they were not shopping for a wife. They had chatted and charmed and grilled me about America. (23)

She has some expectations from her husband, Mahesh to support and understand her on emotional grounds but her expectations are never realized. She is impressed by his frankness when he talks about his expectations of marriage. Devi's husband, Mahesh, goes on long tours for weeks together on business. More than his absence, it is his coldness that leaves Devi utterly dejected. Mahesh has everything a young lady can dream of an executive job, a palatial house in Bangalore, and enormous riches. She is provided with everything but she finds that something is lacking in her life. His cold and indifferent attitude irks her. Devi feels cheated and slighted. Due to long tours of her husband and total absence of physical attraction, Devi finds herself spending sleepless nights, aching for a

‘...blissful numbness (78). She finally decides ... I must learn to Love, (78) and walks out on Mahesh devoid of the much-needed emotional sustenance that, earlier, she used to draw from her mother, she feels that marriage is torture and it hangs like a knife above her neck:

I am still a novice in the more subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear, rip across my neck, and let the blood gush, the passion of the sacrifice whole all-encompassing. Instead, the knife draws a drop at a time. The games it plays with me are ignominious ... The heart I have prepared so well for its demands remains untouched, unsought for. (54)

Devi hates being compelled to follow her husband's self-contained footprints, with clumsy feet that stumble at sharp edges and curves. (84) Ignoring her pleas, he entertains his friends by turning the house into a place for parties and playing cards. Devi, being a romantic individual, is married to a very matter-of-fact type of young man, Mahesh, which is amply demonstrated by this statement when his wife asks, ‘Why

did you marry me? (54), his reply was, Whatever people get married for ... Thank God, we Indians are not obsessed with love' (54-55). She is defenseless against Mahesh's supreme confidence and superciliousness. Mahesh seems to be insensitive to the possibility of Devi possessing an individuality and a personality that needs to express itself in a role away from that of a wife. When Devi wants to apply for the post of research assistant, he discourages her.

'What can you do? Mahesh asked, like a ruthless interviewer stripping away the inessential

'... You need at least one more degree for that, he said. And what will you do when the baby comes?' (64-65). He is inconsiderate towards her feelings and emotions, and this makes Devi think that her individual freedom is curtailed. Disappointment and anger mount in her. Her urge for a strong sense of revenge is manifested in many forms. She grows wild in her fantasies and seeks an escape in her weird imaginings: 'I will grow a garden of weeds, those single-minded, wild, common. Mahesh fits into the description of Simone De

Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* when she says that a man;

"A man views the bed as the proper terrain for asserting his aggressive superiority. He is eager to take and not to receive, not to exchange but to rob. He seeks to possess the woman to an extent over and above what she gives him; he demands that consent be a defeat and that the words she murmurs be avowals he tears from her demands that she confess her pleasure and recognize her subjection.

(725)

Devi is representative of the present-day intellectual woman. She fails and confronts loneliness and alienation. Unable to understand imponderable man-woman relationships, she feels that she has an ephemeral existence. She listens to the fables and mythological stories that her grandmother narrates. These stories are placed after situations that call for mythical clarification so that she can derive the desired meaning. Devi has a mundane attitude towards her lover or husband and fails to connect with them mentally or emotionally. The lack of commitment that characterizes Devi's intimate relationships with men is probably her reaction to her mother's smothering control of every relationship in the family. Devi refuses to take control of anything or anyone in her life. At a crucial moment of introspection, Devi reflects on her life as a wife and she gives her whole efforts and tries to suppress all the questions from which she suffers.

Devi thinks that this situation has arisen because her education has not prepared her to play the role of a wife. According to Damodar Rao, 'The areas of outward confrontation ... are very few ... Her mental stages rather than actual events occupy the center stage, and the conflicts, having been internalized, result in psychological aggression and violence'

(Rao, 168). But very soon she realizes that there were no heroines in his life, only wives and mothers. It hit her that if Dan is too un-Indian, Mahesh is too Indian. Devi is unable to identify herself with the life Indian housewife. As a homemaker of the house, she feels it is a burden to run the domestic requirements of her husband and the family with a housemaid at her disposal she regrets that her education is wasted as a wife of an Indian absence of her mother-in-law in her husband's house provides her sense of relief. Her life in fact is ripe for disillusionment when she walks into an arranged marriage, at once alien and familiar.

Though Devi enjoys Baba's company, she is unwilling to take up Indian values in her life. As an in-law in the family of Mahesh and Baba, Devi is in a far better level of comfort in comparison to her own mother, grandmother, and the millions of Indian housewives. After Baba departs for New York to visit his daughter, Devi is alone in the house with Mayamma and Baba's orphaned books. Very soon, he dies in New York and Devi is engulfed by an awesome loneliness and a wave of uselessness. She feels more alone after Baba's death than when her father died in Africa while she was in the U.S. Her mindset is not in a position to find happiness in her family but aspiring for a life that is in her imagination. With no aim at a visible distance from her family life, she suffers an identity crisis. When she finds she is unable to regulate her abundance of time, she takes herself to consume alcohol and attempts to find solace in the company of Gopal, a musician in her neighborhood. She too takes an extreme step no Indian housewife would ever dare, accompanying Gopal to a private concert in Delhi without the knowledge of her husband Mahesh. When Devi's barrenness reduces her place in the family she is attracted to Gopal, a Hindusthani classical singer and an occasional visitor to her neighborhood. Gopal's music tempts and seduces her when she is becoming desperate due to her husband's neglect. Devi's penance takes multiple forms of response from self-pity to revenge and from self-inflicted suffering to a strong sense of injustice. She feels suffocated in the atmosphere and plans definite means of escape. She has her own inhibitions about open action. The realization of her helplessness to take drastic action makes her prone to taking quick revenge. —I write elaborate scenarios in my mind for the last act – humiliating Mahesh, saying all the things we have left unsaid. I do something

bloody, final, a mark of protest worthy of the heroines I grew up with (95). After finding life with Mahesh miserable, Devi shows her resolve to leave Mahesh. When her expectations about Gopal become awry, she shows even greater determination to leave Gopal. Gopal's self-centeredness forces Devi to make what seems a final choice, to return to her mother to start life anew. The world that she wants to experience is like the rain-blessed garden '... lush in spite of its sand-choked roots' (139) – a life in all its multi-faceted myriad colored possibilities. She has to experience the happiness that can come from oneself '... for whatever is dependent on others is misery' (68).

The act of walking out on Mahesh provides substance to her life. Condemning her husband to a lonely life without a wife or child and trampling on the marital vows, Devi elopes with Gopal. Devi thinks that her walking out of Mahesh's life is her 'first real journey'. But, after her disappointment with Gopal, she decides to run no further but to return to her mother to start a new lease of life. While Gopal is in a deep sleep, she covers the mirror with the peacock's neck-coloured saree to cover the images that reflect the surroundings. This symbolizes her wish not to carry forward her past memories into the future as she plans to start a new life afresh with her mother. Avis Joseph remarks that; Devi has felt like a 'bold heroine' when she has walked out on Mahesh. But her passing relationship with Gopal has given her only a superficial feeling of freedom. Once she becomes aware of this and her place in his life, she realizes that she has made a wrong step. She attempts to correct herself by leaving him too. But, 'now she is not on the run, but she feels like a fugitive escaping from captivity to a stage of self-recognition (126). By stepping out of marriage Devi dismisses the voice of reason represented by both Mahesh and Sita. An identity achieved through relationships can never provide fulfilment. Her attempts to date with Dan, to establish a home to elope with Gopal and finally her union with her mother reflect Devi's frantic attempts to seek a haven of shelter and psychological security.

When she hears the faint sounds of *Veena*, she feels as if her mother welcomes her into her house. Now Devi knows that the battle has begun once again and that she should be true to herself. This prompts Indira Nityanandam to praise her when she says, '... it is Devi who is the modern feminist'(126). When both Mahesh and Gopal fail to perceive her emotions, she doesn't try for another relationship to find solace. She exercises her choice to stage a comeback to her mother. Any relationship fails to be a satisfying one when there is no compatibility between the two partners. Devi's relationship with Mahesh lacks warmth, caring and understanding. The US-educated girl is not able to fit herself into a typical Indian domestic life.

The values that hold Indian families together mean little to Devi and she looks out for happiness away from her domestic life. Devi becomes a practical failure to cope with the little demands of her husband as any husband in Indian society would expect from his wife. She has all along thrived on illusions of womanhood. unsuited to the life that she leads in India. Devi fails to adjust herself thoroughly to a traditional life as she has been influenced by the modernistic ideas of the West. Within the social structure of the male-oriented society.

The ferocious and awe-inspiring image of *Kritya* is also evoked in Devi's psyche. She says: 'I read about a *Kritya*, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted ... Each age has its *Kritya* ... each household shelters a *Kritya*

(69-70). Thus the old and the outworn order has to be destroyed giving place to a new one.

Devi does not entertain the traditional notion of a woman's role. For her self-fulfilment does not lie in the bearing and rearing of children, but in recognizing her own inherent potential to live with herself on more positive terms.

Mahesh initiates to consult a doctor when Devi fails to conceive. Devi considers, listening to the gynecologist and taking advice for her personal sexual life, a bothering matter. She wonders why Mahesh is so much concerned about having a child of his own. In the male-dominated society of India, women prove themselves superior to men as potential creators, and mothers of children. Motherhood is the energizing symbol of creativity and mother worship is common in the Indian context beyond the barriers of religion, language, and political ideology. Being an Indian woman, Devi does not realize that her husband would expect her to be a mother as early as possible after their marriage. In Hindu mythology, Devi, which simply means the 'Goddess', the spouse of *Siva*, unites both personalities –the ferocious and the sublime. Whether beneficial or cruel, she alone has an independent personality of her own. As *Shakti*, she is regarded as the motivating energy of the universe without which even *Siva* is powerless to act (Dimmit, 150) Devi's failure to become a mother becomes a crucial factor in her development as an individual. Palmer observes ... the identification of femininity with an experimentally fluid form of writing which subverts the readers' expectations of linear, rational discourse, merging identities and ego-boundaries in a manner similar to that which occurs in the their-oedipal mother-infant bond, is a feature of several novels written in the 70s and the,80. (97)

Mahesh's self-complacency receives a blow when the after fatherhood eludes him. To him, Devi does not seem to crave motherhood. When he awaits news of her pregnancy, her repeated nonchalant response is, no news. She remains '... all bones and flat stomach.' (86) The fact that he is fine and she is the one to consult a gynecologist does not help his ego. A woman without a child becomes utterly powerless and can be used to tilt the scales of power. It is the way that helps Devi restore her self-esteem. A woman is always looked down upon in Indian society if she does not bear children for a long time. Motherhood is considered a heavenly gift and gives a purpose and identity to her life and to her family, and thus is a redemptive factor on the part of a woman in India. Devi's mother writes about the importance of motherhood:

All through the ages, my dear Devi ... women have sought the deep content that comes with motherhood. When I held you helpless in my protecting arms, when you first smiled at my face bent over yours when you lisped that precious word Amma, what vistas of joy opened up before me! Mahesh writes that you are tired, and depressed. Would you like to take a holiday in Madras? Or er could go somewhere cool and fresh, just you and I, and talk about everything, your plans for the future, as wife and perhaps, mother?

(86).

Devi believes that the children at least would keep her engaged, wilderness at bay: 'Perhaps I will raise a brood of joyous, wild children, who will run pell-mell in this quiet garden ... They will indulge my fantasies of childhood ...'(53). Devi, however, is least perturbed by her inability to conceive. Once the novelty of the marriage wanes, she becomes restless. Mahesh's insensitive attitude makes her realize the trap she is in. When he tries to establish his unquestionable authority over her, she repels. She even derives satisfaction in not being able to carry children for Mahesh. She considers it a powerful weapon to be hurled against him. Childlessness, she feels, is the price she has to pay as penance for her marriage with Mahesh. Devi finds a route for rebellion when Mahesh says,

'I want you to have my baby'(74). The rejection of his sperm is the unconscious but important step to the assertion of herself. He may possess her body but cannot direct and control the functions of it. Her failure to become a mother becomes a crucial factor in her development as an individual. Self-realization dawns on her and Mahesh, the chauvinist is mainly responsible for this. She liberates herself from the pressures of

feminine role-play to attain a state of free and creative individuality. Again Baba, Devi's father-in-law, resembles Manu in his attitude toward women. His stories of saints and their wives uphold the traditional Hindu concept of *Dharma*, such types of stories never give transparency to Devi to think clearly about what she actually wants and for that how she behaves. He invests so much confidence in a woman and thereby assigns a great deal of responsibility to them. He says in a hypnotic voice:

The housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word, and body, she who does not transgress her lord attains heaven even as her lord does. (70-71)

Indira Nityanandam also expresses a similar opinion when she remarks that,

'Though she lacks the will to choose and her early decisions are faltering, we note a development in her character. Initially, she is easily influenced by societal role expectations. She quits the U.S. and leaves behind Dan because of a sense of filial piety, marries Mahesh as a good daughter should, and attempts to be a full-time wife and housemaker as an Indian Pativrata should. Gradually she shows her resolve in walking out with Mahesh and even greater determination in walking out on Gopal' (191).

The Thousand Faces of Night demonstrates the ways in which the unconscious mind of Devi works. The term 'night' refers to the unpredictable ways in which the mind of Devi works. Devi identifies herself with Durga, the goddess who is the destroyer of evil.

She says I lived a secret life of my own; I became a woman warrior, a heroine. It was Devi. I rode a tiger and cut off evil, magical demon's heads (41). Such type of thought comes due to the high impact of mythical images on Devi's mind. Another story of *Mahabahrata* left its impression on her psyche. Another figure in the *Mahabahrata* could be regarded as the incarnation of penance in Ambe. When Bhishma went to *Kashi* he heard of a

Swayamvara at the king's place. He went to the place to get a girl for his stepbrother, Bichatavirya. He abducted all three beautiful princesses, Amba Ambika and Ambalika from the *Swayamvara*. Nobody could stop them including the King of Salwa who was about to be garlanded by the elder princess Ambe. Devi questions her grandmother why they did not stop him. her grandmother answers, 'Once he (Bhishama) had

laid his manly hands on her shoulders, Devi, she was no longer a girl. A woman fights her battles alone, (36night). Amba pleaded with Bhishma to let her go but the king of Salwa rejected her saying that it was Bhishma who had rightful claim over her as he had won them all in the *Swayamvara*. Amba returned to Bhishma and asked him to marry but he rejected her because he had taken the vow of celibacy. She took offense and with the desire to take revenge on Bhishma went to the forest to perform penance. Siva, pleased with penance, touched her garland and promised her that whoever wore it and fought Bhishma in a battle would be able to kill him. She threw the garland around a pillar in King Drupada's court and went to the forest to meet her death. She was born again as Drupada's daughter

Shikhandi. She was brought up as a son and later at the Battle of *Kurukshetra* she wore Amba's garland and went to the battle to see Bhishma's death. Devi parallels Amba's story with Uma's story who is Devi's cousin and a common girl. Uma gets married to an affluent family. On one occasion, Uma's father-in-law in a drunken condition kisses her lips. She comes away from that house to stay with her grandmother till the old woman's death. Uma is unlike Amba since she does not have her fighting spirit. So the mythical stories become so much a part of her life that Devi thinks of herself as the very incarnation of all the avenging deities. If at all she is wrong she would be the mythical Devi, 'like avenger'.

The primacy given to motherhood in terms of power or vulnerability is a major theme in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Another character is Mayamma, who also survives this, the housemaid in the house of Mahesh, who experiences all kinds of ill-treatment from her mother-in-law for no fault of hers. The punishment meted out to her for not being able to conceive a child for ten years, is too much to bear, she mentioned;

I waited ten years for a son. Years came and went, and so did astrologers. I was destined to have a son, they said. To be taken care of in my old age. I scared destiny away with my over-eager pleas, my weekly fasts, and my silent and humble apology to an impatient mother-in-law. She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday's rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman? (112)

The birth and growth of her son worsen her condition and the hope of salvage is dampened by the lavishness of her son who hits her with an iron frying pan for refusing to part with her diamond ring. The great solace, she attains in middle age, is in the accommodation of Mahesh's family. She develops no

grudges against her mother-in-law who has ill-treated her severely and serves her wholeheartedly at her deathbed. Her experiences in life make her realize that nothing stays forever in one's life and life is to believe that it takes its own course. Her decision to walk out on Mahesh and elope with Gopal can be viewed as her unwillingness to live like Mayamma or Sita, who are the victims of domestic violence in one form or the other. She does not want to end up as a self-sacrificial wife. Mayamma, however, knows well that Devi's relationship with Gopal also will end up in a disaster, but does not discourage her from the plunge. She knows that it is mainly her sense of 'that perfect hyacinth. But as I hung on to it with all my strength, it dragged me down into muddy, violet swamp'(112). She realizes that she is the one who allowed others to pull her strings and learns the fact that in this male-dominated society, it is difficult to survive and find reliability for her emotions because for a man, a woman has always been primarily an object of sex and pleasure. Devi dismisses all the illusions and 'Maya' of his music from her life. She becomes alert to the inner call of self-realization. She is quite caught up in an illusion of womanhood and he serves as the deliverer. He refers to her as his inspiration and supports her through whispers and leers. She hopes to find her own emotional voice through music, which in itself is —...a non-conformist mode of spiritual expression. (Viswanath, Interview).

Mayamma's mother-in-law, 'Unable to check Mayamma's insides ... had contented herself with the astrologer's promise that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons'. (80) One day, the wish seemed to have been fulfilled. However, '... blood came, too soon ... the new village doctor ... shoved his greasy hand into my swelling, palpitating womb. I could feel the pull, the excruciating pain of the thrust, his hand, my blood, my dying son.' (122). Still she has never complained because she felt that success in life for a woman depends on her ability to endure and go on. 'I have learned how to wait when to bend my back when to wipe the rebellious eyes dry'. The lesson she has learnt from her own life experience is that women suffer because they are women and that the need of the hour for them is to learn the strategies of survival. Despite her own difficult and painful life, in spite of knowing no happiness with her husband and son, Mayamma can be a bedrock to Mahesh's family. Mahesh however, is able to neither see nor appreciate the enormity of her suffering. In a very off-hand manner, he brushes it off. —Those days are gone and there's no point listening to all her stories about them'(82). Mayamma never questioned the atrocities, never raised a voice or a finger, and tried to run away from the living hell. According to Devi,

Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, first hand, she had had no choices really. She had coveted birth, endured life nursed death. And she had won some small victory- if you could call it by such a grand name through that ragged belief she carried within her. She snarls and sulks, thought Devi with wonder, but she has no bitterness.

(135-36)

Mayamma is the archetypal female who accepted her fate, cursed it but never questioned it, and lived her life exactly as she had expected to. Illtreated by her husband and her spoilt son, she finds refuge in the house of a rich relative Parvathamma. Frail and old, she now replays in her mind the myths that she could not play out in her real life. Though physically unable to change the course of destiny, she has found the power to transfer the male-constructed benevolent gods into forces that she can identify with, in her mind if not in reality. Mayamma finally realized her identity not as the mother of her own wastrel son but by becoming the mother figure, a nurturer and a symbol of reliability in Mahesh's household. Baba trusts her, Parvati entrusts all the keys to her, Devi cries to her and Mahesh counts on her to maintain the house for him. Mayamma learns the strategies of survival and as she puts herself, 'I have learned how to wait, when to bend my back when to wipe the rebellious eyes dry'(126). Many women, like Mayamma, believe that survival is the highest ideal in the struggle-ridden life of a woman. Through Mayamma, Githa Hariharan appears to indicate '...the innate strength of the woman who is able to bounce back to normalcy in spite of all her tragedies' (Nityanandam, 184). Devi finds a good friend in Mayamma and is attentive in listening to her experiences so that she can draw useful essences from them to make her life better.

Parvathamma, the mother of Mahesh, is ambitious in her search for God after having begotten a son and raising a family of her own. She fails to identify her duty as a mother, and locks herself into a puja room, ignoring the requirements of the school-going young boy. On a fine day, she detaches herself from the family, unaware of its infliction of emptiness in the minds of male members of the family, the husband and the son. Parvati, his wife, leaves the house in search of independent salvation. He is baffled by his wife's quest beyond human relations. She has rejected the role of a householder, and in a way, by her non-conformist act, Parvati has turned Baba's theories upside down. She ran away to seek salvation elsewhere. Devi sees that the power of choice of her mother-in-law is very different from that of her mother, Sita.

Parvati's spiritual choice is, in a sense, negation of motherhood. She asserts herself by shuffling aside her familial role. Her son, Mahesh, sees nothing but rejection and treachery in her peculiar quest. A mother seeking space for herself outside the home is so unimaginable and treacherous a deed for him that his mother becomes a taboo topic for him. Surprisingly negation of motherhood is followed by negation of wifehood as Devi also rejects the role assigned to her and shirks from her responsibilities. In her return to her mother, Hariharan seems to suggest that Devi and Sita create a space between them to stand face-to-face in order to empower each other. She gains the strength to assert herself and survive on her own with her mother, leaving aside the anchors from outside (61). Sindhu Sarah Thomas is full of appreciation for Devi when she says,

Devi refuses to let tradition and gender roles determine her definition of self. She grows as she progresses from position of vulnerability to relative strength. She achieves psychological and individual wholeness when she is able to fight any kind of oppression-cultural or traditional or societal. (46)

Sita, Devi, Mayamma, and Parvatamma— either barren or widowed – are united and form a network with other women through their own stories of suffering. Thus Githa

Hariharan has a myth-making representational power in terms of sisterhood. Hariharan creates a sisterhood among women who share the same existential crises, and she creates a new bodily image different from the bleeding female bodies defiled isolated, or exploited for reproduction. Instead, she shows desiring female bodies met in blood and sweat' through intoxicatingly erotic rituals. (Ohira, 76)

Stories of Sita, Devi, Mayamma and Parvatamma reveal the friendship between women of different castes, generations and educational backgrounds. Mayamma, a victim of violence at the hands of her mother-in-law, husband, and son is supported by

Parvatamma. Mayamma supports Devi who is also childless like her. In this context,

Ohira's comment is very appropriate when he says,

Hariharan's depiction of a bleeding community of women allows for the endless multiplication of differences among women, but it is strategically powerful as an image of a communion in which women can share their painful or joyful experiences and understand their bodies, a communion that allows women to rebel against a repressive system and to build on their new empowerment. (Ohira, 73)

However, it is important to recognize that myths are not a comprehensive representation of reality and should not be used to restrict or limit the individuality of women or any other group. Instead, they should be seen as a cultural artifact that provides insight into the beliefs and values of past societies. After studying Devi's character, it can be concluded that she is not rebellious by nature, nor did she intentionally cheat on her husband. She simply did not want to put in more effort to maintain a relationship that she had been running alone. Devi had been trying to adjust since her childhood, and even when her grandmother nurtured her like an ancient doll who always lived in a mythical world, she still managed to move to America for further studies. When she thought about her bright future, her mother pressured her to marry an Indian boy, even though it was not her own choice. This was mainly because they had to maintain their social status. Not only did Devi, and Parvatamma also challenge the norms of patriarchal society, but she also left all things behind for the sake of her own identity. In the end, when Devi opens the gate to enter her mother's house in Madras, she is awed at the wilderness of the garden which usually is neatly kept. She also hears '... the faint sounds of a *Veena*, hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house'(139). Her mother knows that Devi will come back to her and so by retrieving the long-forsaken *Veena* she identifies with her daughter.

The novel revolves around a number of stories, fables, and myths. The use of myth in these stories helps the author to present the relevance of the literary heritage across the times and even in the post-modern era. She makes inter-textual links, says P. Geetha:

Gandhari's blindfold is her protest against an injustice imposed on her by getting her married to Dhritrashtra. Devi draws a poetic equivalent of Gandhari's blind foldedness with that of her own parents. 'In their blinkered world, they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of another'(29)

When the terms of marriage are broken, Ganga drowns her children and walks out of marriage. All these women- Amba, Gandhari, and Ganga- represent female determination. Devi sees the parallel between the lives of mythical figures of female virtue and that of her mother and finds her mother's self-effacement is meaningless. She also confesses, the lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger: that it could seep into every pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life. (29)

There is a peculiar love-hate relationship that Devi shares with her grandmother's stories. Though she does not fully agree with the stories, her life becomes traumatic the moment the mythical nourishment is deprived. Devi realizes that she has become a psychological destitute. Devi does not listen to her grandmother's tales silently. She is eager to know the why of everything and thus displays the right mood for an initiation. This exhibits an intellectual quest on the part of Devi who hopes for a redeeming answer. Mayamma, on the contrary, firmly believes that women are not supposed to ask questions. She even advises Devi to be careful when she asks her next question. This is so because Mayamma asked a question only once in her life and the answer she got silenced her for her lifetime. However, Devi gains wisdom by questioning her grandmother. She does not merely learn the stories, but more importantly, she learns that stories are meant to be revised and retold. In the novel, the stories of alluring, self-sacrificing, and avenging goddesses of the Hindu pantheon serve as a backdrop to the triple narrative. Fed by her grandmother's stories of palaces, heroic women, self-sacrificing heroines, and women turning into men, Devi realizes that she can relate neither to the aggressive model nor to the benevolent model of femininity. The novelist mentions that according to a mythical goddess, a woman should be,

'Like *Sati*, you must burn yourself to death, like *Sati* you must vindicate your husband's honour and manhood. Like *Parvati* you must stand neck-deep in cold, turbulent waters, the hungry, predatory fish devouring your feet. Like *Haimvati* you must turn that black skin on your sinful body into a golden sheen of light and beauty.

Like *Gauri*, you must reap the bountiful harvest that will be yours if you embrace the lingam on the sacrificial altar' (94)

The concept of whenever she gets a chance to show equality she never loses that chance as she mentions in the conversation of Mahesh with her mother; 'when Baba turned twenty-one, his mother called him aside and said, "My son, you are now the head of this household. Your father is no longer here to explain, so I must be both mother and father" (*The Thousand Faces of Night* 61). Githa Hariharan refuses to let tradition and gender roles determine their definitions of self. They grow as they progress from positions of vulnerability to relative strength. They achieve psychological and individual wholeness when they can fight any kind of oppression. Hariharan makes her woman revolt against the family ideology, which is considered the bedrock of Indian society. They rebel against the socially accepted norms of womanhood. Hariharan brings out the universal suffering of women in the subcontinent. Indian women learn life models

from the epics such as *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. Hariharan counters these images of women by creating new models of women from the epics. The protagonists in the works pass through a difficult process of identity crisis. They refuse to be passive.

Hariharan's characters, especially women's characters communicate effectively. They are not dumb, mute, and deaf. She resuscitates passive women characters from the epics and makes them relevant to the contemporary world. Hariharan acknowledges as a writer in the article, "New Voices, New Challenges," "All of us know that though we lead rather solitary lives when it actually comes to the writing, the raw material is from the world around us-and understanding this world, to ask the questions writers must, is perhaps the biggest challenge we face even before we put pen to paper" (5). Hariharan has also dealt with the web of human relationships in her works. Of all the human relationships, she depicts complexity within man-woman relationships. The relationship between Sita, the mother, and Devi, the daughter illustrates this point. Hariharan brings out a renewed, redefined concept of the mother-daughter relationship from a different perspective. Githa Hariharan re-conceptualizes the definition of motherhood. After Salman Rushdie's reformation in theme and technique in literature, Hariharan too belongs to the postmodern era. Women seeking liberation, the changing face of women, and the men's reaction to women's sense of self – are central to Hariharan's works.

The influence of mythical stories in novels is not limited to *The Thousand of Faces Night*, rather, the influence of myth is seen in almost all the novels of Hariharan. The novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* has many tales, which are taken from the *Mahabharata* and from folklore. The protagonists in the works pass through a difficult process of identity crisis. They refuse to be passive. In the story Revati, the female identity becomes a problem. A woman who has been positioned in the rigid family system faces problems when she becomes a widow. The absence of a woman's husband makes her fragile in Indian society. A woman's helplessness forces her to follow her husband into the funeral pyre. Whereas Hariharan's protagonist, Revati remains alone and lives independently. The other recent trend significant in Hariharan's writing is intertextuality. Intertextuality in Indian literature deals with the reference of the scriptures, epics, myths, and legends to the

Mahabharata, the *Ramayana*, and the characters in them. Hariharan in her first novel *The Thousand Faces Night* and in *When Dreams Travel* uses this by referring to the contemporary Devi, Sita, and Mayamma to

Sita, Parvati, Damayanti, Nala, etc, and compares and contrasts legendary characters with the contemporary characters. Hariharan has used her works as a representative of Indianness to the world. Susheila Nasta says that Githa Hariharan's first novel, *The Thousand Faces Night*, exhibits the influence of myth in Indian society. This novel excels in combining storytelling with contemporary narrative.

Hariharan makes women narrate stories to the protagonist, Devi, yet the stories are not presented in the same manner but are written down through the voices of generations of women. Hariharan declares to Susheila Nasta: "... so I thought *The Thousand Faces of Night* would be perfect because you also have the suggestion of masks, and the various masks that you are allowed to wear, that you could wear and that you have access to by day" (Nasta 23). Hariharan has defined some definitions of myths in her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, which are not specific but have been described according to the characters. Pati became the mouthpiece of almost all the mythological stories and she described every story as a way to make women's lives easier, but Hariharan has tried to show the exploitation of women happening in the name of all those mythological stories.

Therefore, while praising this writing skill of Hariharan, the Economic Times has written:

Githa Hariharan displays a control of the medium, a sophistication that would be the envy of any contemporary writer. Her diction is pointed and the textures communicated exquisite. From a technical point of view, his writing is excellent. She cannot write about an experience but will bring it to life intensely and vividly. There is not a single flat sentence in the book.

