



## The part of myths in Githa Hariharan's novel: *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Dr. N Palani

Assistant Professor of English, Jairam Arts and Science College, Salem, Tamil Nadu, India

### Abstract

India is a country with rich cultural, heritage, and cultural values. The woman in India is respected as mother and goddess but at the same time she has been oppressed and denied recognition of her invisible work. The conventional roles of women as portrayed by many writers of the past and the expectations of the society have been changed and women have started representing themselves as human beings with equal educational opportunities, emotions, responsibilities so on and so forth on par with men. Githa Hariharan mainly focuses on the ceaseless quest for self-realization and liberation from the rigid social structure in which the Indian woman is a constant and endless sufferer.

**Keywords:** self-realization, liberation, myths, expectations, conventional roles

### Introduction

The novels of Indian women writers generally represent the Indian women's miseries, hindrances, social tensions, and their silence as resource of message. They focus largely on the psychological searching of inner mind and soul of women. These artists being women enter deep into the inner mind of the miserable conditions of women by advantage of their feminine sensibility and insight and bring to nimble their issues. These themes are the outcome of Indian women's psychosomatic and sensitive injustices of the society. The women artists articulate the feelings and suppressed emotions of women from their own viewpoint, attitude, agonies, and their reactions. The women writers like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande, Anita Desai, and Githa Hariharan have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women as the main themes of their accounts and try to create consciousness. Githa Hariharan mainly emphasizes on the ceaseless quest for self-realization and liberation from the rigid social structure which the Indian woman is a constant and endless sufferer.

The women of Githa Hariharan become conscious of the people surrounded by them in various levels either in their family or in the society. The women of all her five novels are persistently anxious with the primeval and uplifting questions of their identity with many parameters. Though they become conscious they cannot escape from the world which traps them. They sacrifice, tolerate, and survive with the same society around them. Their steps may be revolutionary but their results are not in the satisfactory level. The conventional women convince themselves with the result and they are in the quest of everlasting and subsisting vision of life. They are trying to discover the more abiding faith, quite elevating and fulfilling the human values. Githa Hariharan's creation of alternative women characters, and the design of a plot around their unconventional choices, embodies a form of writing closer to fleshly difference theories and their search for women's solutions and urgencies. Most of the protagonists are feeling ill at affluence and experience themselves misplaced

and misshapen by the captivity of their surrounding and subsequently, after the consciousness, through away the bondage and they are bored and desperate after redemption and release.

Githa Hariharan's novels are littered with the blood and toil of her women personages who are in search of meaning and value in their life. Her protagonists like Devi, Sita, Shahrzad, Dunyazad, Meena, Mala, and Sara are under the grip of revulsion. They wage a fight beside it by generally discover that condition is universal. The women of Githa Hariharan aim at their liberation from the shackles of their slavery. They heroically revolt against the inhumanity. The women in her novels are serious to think new methods of liberated identity, along patterns of resistance, survival, creative choices, harmony, and leading to unexpected life stories. The novels stand closer to the principles defended by exploring the liberating potential of imagination to create consciousness of women. It is curious to note that Githa Hariharan always follows the way of story-telling as they are implied in the traditional fantastic tales of ghosts and fairies from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata.

Githa Hariharan's women are soul-less, life-less, unloved, alienated, and carrying no place either in family, society, home or hearts of their practical husbands. They represent the modern women who are conscious of themselves and the position they are given. The vision of a changing and challenging attitude towards moving reality through the passage of time is a new faith that reproduces through the women of her novels. In the age of globalization women are suffering more in a country like India as the process of victimization of women still continues in the traditional society. Her major influence lies in the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* published in 1992. Every work of fiction by Githa Hariharan truly manifests the seeds of feminism, deeply rooted in her philosophical base. A cross cultural section of Indian society is showed in her novels of women. She is has a voice of women and through her writings, she has portrayed

the protagonists in the society. *The Thousand Faces of Night* focuses on Devi, the protagonist who undergoes identity crisis.

Myths and traditional stories are consisting of events that are apparently ancient, often ghostly and romantic. Myths are often stories that are presently understood as being exaggerated or fabricated from the legends. The myths are generally about the gods and goddesses, the heroes and heroines, or animals and plants. Most myths are set in a timeless past before recorded time or foundation of the serious antiquity. A myth can be a story involving symbols that are capable of multiple connotations with moral values. The myths are always sacred narrative because they hold religious or spiritual significance for those who communicate to streamline the lives of the peoples. Myths also contribute and express a culture's systems of thought and values of humanity. Myths are descriptions and explanations of the world past and future as they understand it. Myths appearing in literature may be different from true myths, but still they recollect the fragments of a practical assembly and they can be easily drawn back to a legendary substance. Githa Hariharan enters the web of life in order to disentangle the particulars and difficulties of reality through her women. The myths offer the artist a theme which sounds a basic subject and thus makes it possible for her to return to the world-wide audience. Her feminism is based on understanding of myths and enticements and she has given an optimistic treatment to the myth and reality in Indian social and personal life. Myths empower her to arrive at a perfect union between her conscious and that of the reader. While using myth as raw material Githa Hariharan is capable of transporting her fictional world into the status of a living myth. In artistic creation, the mythic process is functional; in other words, it is the life-force of art. The creation of myths through fiction is demanded by the nutritional policy and also by the demands of time. The writer, detaching herself from her personality and resorting to a superfluous element, becomes one with humanity at large and with history where the limitations of past, present, and future melt into a single entity, thus Githa Hariharan creates a new language and a new dialectics of myths.

Githa Hariharan has tried to foster liberal values by changing the traditional myths. A happy married life is based on love, mutual respect and appreciation for each other, trust and sense of duty towards each other. The protagonist of *The Thousand Faces of Night* Devi finds her married life is unhappy in line for her husband's unemotional and apathetic relationship. Despite her grandmother's mythological stories about ideal women, she tries to find fulfilment in her neighbour Gopal, a musician. She soon realizes that his association is also a mere fascination and leaves him behind to be free from everything and to reach her ancestral home. Devi's father-in-law has an array of not so ancient allusive stories that women should forget their desire for ornaments. Therefore the burden of keeping the flame of *Dharma* alive rests on Devi and not so much on her husband. There are also other virtuous wives whose stories are recollected so as to set an example for Devi. All the allusive stories which Devi's father-in-law narrates, strike home just one point that a wife should be good, virtuous, dutiful, selflessly devoted, etc. These stories sum up all permeating and truly significant segment of Indian beliefs,

religious traditions, and social customs. Thus the significance of the myths mentioned by Githa Hariharan has to be interpreted.

Devi's grandmother is not unaware of the thousand faces of the night engulfing matrimony, yet she is optimistic and hopeful for Devi. Her myths and stories are a window to look at a mysterious, unknown world outside. She wants Devi to be aware of feminine frailties, frustrations as well as fortitude, so that she could endure these dismal hues and somehow survive, therefore her mythical stories are linked to situations in Devi's life and women around her. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a unique example of such narration. The myth and reality in Githa Hariharan's novel form her unique tradition of the complex issues of women. Her able thinking echoes a new voice and new awakening coming in the world of women. It seems that she has carefully studied feminism and feminist movements in contemporary India and has treated these complex issues in a careful style. She is anticipating the arrival of 'New Women' in the new millennium.

The problem faced by new women has been described by Githa Hariharan by pin-pointing different facets of myth and reality. The women in her fiction are progressive, change-oriented and still they are sophisticated and elite. The traditional Indian social structure is based on patriarchy which is dominated by the same human is given a secondary treatment. This bias is truly reflected in her works which record feminist elements in a systematic way. The understanding of myth and reality brings one to the opinion that she is drawing a clear line between the myths and lures.

Githa Hariharan in her novel *Thousand Faces of Night* explores Indian mythology and construes it from the women's perception to catch a remedy for feministic relations. The method of amendment of myth is also an act of annihilation, revealing, and igniting the stories that have vulnerable to women. The artist's elucidation of the traditional accounts elevates the image of women and attempts to re-instigate their position in the society that was downsized. The myths and legends of India are reinterpreted with a young woman's search for self and the self-whole of her community. They make an attempt to explore the worldwide themes like freedom, independence, soul seeking, acknowledging and desire of the women. The endurance of women in different generations and various social classes exist through the women of Githa Hariharan. The theme of the novel demonstrates that survival is the highest model in the struggle-ridden life of women and every woman has to learn for herself.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is a common story of women whose marriages do not offer any bliss and the women's quest for identity and soul seeking. The theme of re-visiting of myths is used as an anchor in dramatizing the suffering and misfortunes in the lives of the three women, who struggles for self-assertion. All the stories that Devi, the protagonist is fed by her mentors helped her in emotional and intellectual development. Githa Hariharan has drawn the stories from the Indian mythology the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to view them from the female standpoint. These myths are rewritten, and retold from a woman's point of view. This performance makes the novel a definite feminist writing in which the focus is on the inner lives of women and the bright echoes of their

internal spaces. Githa Hariharan's narrative ambitions its basic structure from the on-going competition of Devi. The novel shows, how women are forced to play subordinate roles through the lives of Devi, Sita, and Mayamma, who present a picture of the multifaceted Indian women. It is clear that the myths of Indian womanhood to support their own patriarchal ideals. Hariharan's story is a metaphor of complex myth that unfolds the passive women's life. It depicts the women who have a thousand faces as an everlasting imprisoned in a closed frame of mythology scripted by the society.

The ancient mythical figures elaborate the novels of Githa Hariharan in general. The imprisonment of women in different generations and various social classes are the significant themes of her novels. The story orbits around these three main characters Devi, Sita, and Mayamma. Devi, an American returned modern girl comes to India with an American degree to face a challenging life. The second generation is her mother Sita, an ideal daughter-in-law, wife, mother and an ideal woman who tries to bridge the harbour between convention and innovation. The third is Mayamma, the family maid servant who learnt the art of survival as an old generation. Devi is not convinced by Mayamma's entreaty, that a marriage can be succeeded only if the woman agrees to tolerate boundlessly without a mumble. But continually Devi is ghostly through myth and recollection of the women of the ancient times showing her the way either to stay or suffer or to break free and transfer on. Devi's mother, Sita organizes marriage for her daughter. Her conscientiousness makes her daughter to marry a practical minded sales manager, Mahesh. Devi's relationship with Mahesh could not gratify her demonstrative requirements. Subsequently the boredom and emotional emptiness of her childless married life is provisionally relieved by the sympathy she attacks with her father-in-law, Baba. Baba's wife, Parvati left him to follow an abstemious life. He endeavours to guide Devi in the role of a good wife by confirming the ethnic resolutions rooted in his stories taken from Hindu scriptures.

Devi tries to break her bond with the society and never wants to please to the outlooks of the world. She wants to free herself and takes the examples from the protesters of the mythology to launch her individuality. She also takes models of women who revolted and rebelled against the social pattern of the prejudiced society. Hariharan displays in her novel the history of injustice in the community with process of networking among women of different ages and generations and castes in the novel and is framed by numerous myths and real life stories. So the three women, Devi, Sita, and Mayamma each of them find a way to come to terms with life. Githa Hariharan explores the Indian mythology as a remedy for these queries of women. The myths and legends of India are skilfully inter-woven with woman's search for self, exploring themes as freedom, independence, self-identity, representation, and symbolism. The novels of Githa Hariharan attempt to answer that Indian culture can indicate the rightful direction to the woman and also is the woman, loaded with so many issues. Devi's imaginative vision is unbridled by the guidance of her grandmother who narrates to her tales of mythical women connecting them with the sorrowful stories of real women around them. The mythological stories which she received every seasonal from the grandmother is a kind of

groundwork to her future life. They prepared the child towards her marriage where courage, endurance, resolution and diligence are inevitable. Those mythological stories are references to gods, goddesses, superhuman, warriors, brave leaders, beautiful, and honourable princesses and men and women intended to lead heroic lives. For each problem, the grandmother indirectly narrates a mythological story. The fables give solutions to the problems but they are not simple or ordinary bedtime stories. Githa Hariharan purposefully highlights the stories of the forgotten and invisible women of the past from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata like Amba, Ambalika, Devi, Gandhari, Ganga, and Damayanthi. Parenthetically great rage is hidden in all these women. Amba transformed her misfortune into an act of her triumph by avenging the offender Bhishma, who changed her life. Ganga married king Santhanu after laying conditions and walked out of the marriage when terms of the marriage were not honoured. Damayanthi's swayamvara with, its grandeur showcased the independence of woman, as the princess could choose the man she loved even against the celestial intervention. Hariharan juxtaposes Devi's memories of the stories with recollections of family histories to illustrate Pati's reference to myth and legend to explain. The epics of the Ramayana, the Mahabharata in which princesses grew up secure in the knowledge of what awaited them: love, a prince who is never short of noble, and a happy ending. The stories are told for particular occasion to a particular character as Gauri's domestic problems are yoked with a story of the beautiful girl who married a snake.

Amba has transformed her life, her hatred of Bheeshma, who is wronged her and denied her feminine fulfilment and glorious triumph. Gandhari who is married to a blind king expressed her protest by taking an oath not to see the world thereafter, by binding her eyes with a band. Devi's grandmother who narrated the story said that she embraced her destiny that is a blind husband with self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood. Devi has learnt the life through her grandmother's story of Gandhari and acclaimed that the lesson brought her five steps close to adulthood. She saw that her parents too were afflicted by a kind of blindness in their fixed world but they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of other. This story of Gandhari, who sacrificed her sight to express her protest against her marriage with a blind man, connects to Sita, Devi's mother, who had put aside Veena to perform traditional duties of a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. She broke her Veena to idealize her role in a traditional Hindu home and her breaking of the Veena can be seen as a revolt and a protest against male dominance. But later she was able to left free from the past and take control of her life. Then she not only resumed her love for Veena but also shown courage and individuality. These stories make Devi feel that she ought to do something as a mark of protest worthy of the heroines she grew up with. Devi rejoices in imagining as Durga or Kali and ready to avenge the assault in her inner core. Sita, Devi's mother the second generation woman, is a self-confident middle-aged woman. She is a modern woman who is at liberty. Sita's single goal is wifedom, after she has sacrificed playing the Veena. She has arranged her daughter's marriage with a practical minded sales manager, Mahesh. She is shocked when

her daughter has eloped with Gopal. Sita is very practical and modern woman and knows very well one day Devi will turn to her. Later she has prepared herself to accept and receive Sita with the welcoming notes of her Veena. Mayamma, the old caretaker at Mahesh's house, is another victim of patriarchy, who lived all her life trying to satisfy others. Married at the age of twelve to a useless gambler, she has no happiness in marriage. When two years of marriage has brought forth no child she is incurred the wrath of her mother-in-law and husband. She does every penance to change her course of life till she finally gave birth to a male child. Mayamma's son a wastrel from birth being a replica of his father even never hesitates to beat the mother. Mayamma loses him as he has caught fever and died. Having lost everything Mayamma has left home for good and comes to Mahesh's house to attend the family needs. Through the life of Mayamma, Githa Hariharan shows the innate strength of women who are able to bounce back to normalcy despite of great ordeals in life. In spite of her difficult and painful life she is able to be a bed-rock to Mahesh's family and always gives immense strength and support to the family. The patriarchal social system has laid down the ways of expressing womanhood. A woman should live as daughter, wife and mother. Whereas grandmother's stories are a prelude to her womanhood and an initiation into its hidden possibilities for a woman, a wife is pictured in her novel.

### Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's women are trapped between tradition and modernity and have become the victims of unsophisticated gender discrimination of the society. Githa Hariharan's Devi, in spite of the continuous exposure to the mythical stories told by her grandmother from childhood, the stories she hears from the father-in-law and the stories of Sita, Uma, Gauri, and Mayamma do not help her to be a submissive wife. She has viewed myth-dictated society with hostility and defiance of a woman warrior. As her mother-in-law has revolted by leaving the family in search of God, Devi's elopement with Gopal is also a revolt against her husband who just wants her to keep waiting, as a submissive wife for his arrival. To break the monotony, the loneliness and the meaninglessness of life finally, in a fit to give vent to her lone life to put an end to the yawning emptiness she elopes Gopal. She hopes to find relief in the company of Gopal but in abortive. She is very sure that her mother can understand her transformation and her desire to re-start her life from the very beginning. It is an attempt to establish that women are no more entities of someone else, but have their own mission of seeking their salvation. Devi's ultimate endorsement of her autonomy is celebration of the entire community of women. Subversion and parody have been used in feminist re-writing of the old texts. But in Githa Hariharan's work, the old stories undergo refined and gradual transformations through narration as they pass generation to generation. This novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* nurtures serious feminist discourse where hoopla is shunned in favour of an honest and realistic portrayal of lifecycle. Survival is shown as pre-condition to any futuristic struggle. Devi, the protagonist resists the hegemony of the patriarchal, but never endangers her survival by adopting feminist position in finding a path to success. Devi searches for self by

discovering freedom, independence and desire. This study explores solutions to the questions whether a woman can find her footpath within her culture.

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