CHAPTER — 4

Conclusion
Female subordination is a fact of history, but in order to understand the material reality of the everyday struggle of woman, it is necessary to contextualize the analysis. The Post-colonial woman writer Githa Hariharan is familiar with the woman’s oppression in dominant culture. She exposes the old value system through her fictional writing. However, she does not recommend a shift away from the community or transgression, but suggests, by foregrounding women’s experiences, a return to the inner source of strength by assimilation into the female community and compromise with the culture so that the woman-centered model is given its due place with the male-centered perspective within the dominant culture. Recent psychologists carrying out their research at the Stone Center, USA, have recognized woman’s inner strength and the value of woman’s basic psychological structure. Some of the findings of Carol Gilligan, Jean Baker Miller and others are suitable for the Indian situation and can be well applied to Indian women. This study has sought to see how woman’s intrinsic virtue has been devalued by a patriarchal society and how the novelists try to raise their protagonists’ consciousness by highlighting the centrality of the feminine experience. The introductory chapter of the present research focuses on this issue and feministic approach of Githa Hariharan who portrayed woman in her writing and raised woman’s sufferings and also her survival tactics.

More and more women started seeing women as women and now ‘gynocriticism’ gained more acceptability. Elaine Showalter coined the term ‘gynocriticism’ for “scholarship concerned with woman as the producer of textual meaning; with the history, themes, genres and structures of literature by women” (Showalter 29). She further contends that the criticism by “gyncritics is more self-contained and experimental”
Feminist literary criticism primarily responds to the way woman is represented in literature. Gynocriticism can be seen in the works of Elaine Showalter, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Juliet Mitchell and many others. It concerns itself with developing a specifically female framework for dealing with works written by women. Therefore, gynocritics seek to read the male-created texts and female-created texts to produce a literary category called ‘woman-centered criticism’ and highlighting the female experience, rather than adopt male models and theories. The theories propounded by women psychologists such as Carol Gilligan and Jean Baker Miller saw woman’s intrinsic strength and showed the corroding effect on both the psyche of woman and the psyche of society when strong humanitarian values like care, nurturing, sympathy and empathy are devalued by the patriarchal culture. These woman-centered psychologists probe how care, nurturing, empathy and other values, central to the female experience, go unrecognized in favour of the so-called male virtues of power, success and careerism. The empirical research of these psychologists brings to light the practicing of these patriarchal values leads to woman’s devaluation and the devaluation, in its turn, leads to the woman’s enslavement and society’s degeneration.

Self-assertion is a quality. But when self-assertion is practiced at the cost of negative of a care and other positive feminine values, it creates ultimate discontent. The reading of these novels reveals that the girls, often sensing their mothers’ suffering due to the absence of reciprocal care and nurturing, opt to not like their mothers. Devi, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, negates care, asserts her independence, refuses to identify with her mother and suffers when the basic demands of her self clash with the dominant social values. The ultimate result is dissatisfaction after marriage with Mahesh due to the
absence of healthy communication. This leads her to elope with musician Gopal. But, with him also she feels a lack and left him too. She returns back to her widow mother Sita to live her independent life.

Care and nurturing are the natural values to the female psyche. If allow to blossom, they may lead woman to self-actualization but unluckily, these are imposed from without as female attributes that must be adhered to; any deviation is seen as threatening. Conditioned by society, woman follows these norms and inflicts suffering on her. Feminists regret that the values of care, tolerance, nurturing and empathy, which are the foundation of strength and empowerment, should ultimately become a source of suffering. When woman cares for others out of a fearful need to please others, as do the various women characters Sita, Mayamma and Devi in *Thousand Faces of Night* and Shahrzad and Dunyazad in *When Dreams Travel*.

Female friendship is significant for woman’s healthy self-image. Those who are successful in forging female friendship develop as steady characters; those who are unable to bond with others in a healthy reaching out, like Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, suffer isolation. A good example of female bonding is displayed in Mrinal Pande’s novel, wherein in a strictly patriarchal society, woman has only other woman to fall back on. The problem arises when elderly women play the power-game of patriarchy.

Woman reaching out to man with a selfless goal is often disillusioned in their relationship, particularly in marriage. There is a difference in the male model of independence and the female model of independence. Woman wants to live in a relationship and yet remains whole, which is not acceptable to the patriarchy. On the other hand, the male model of completely independent person is one of the abstract
relations and autonomy. Since this does not conform the female model, the result is either woman’s invisibility or silence. In The Thousand Faces of Night, Mayamma, Uma and Devi’s grandmother do not raise their voice against their sufferings and exploitation and leave themselves on their fate. Mayamma thinks that it is not right to speak against her husband and mother-in-law.

This sexist bias of society hinders the freedom required to validate one’s self in case of woman. The community grants enough freedom to men to develop their sense of self, but women have to juggle multiple responsibilities to prove themselves. The study focuses on how various women characters — Sita, Devi and many others are compelled, in the name of upholding the values and ideals of the traditional community, to repress their urge to act according to their own will. Through the fictional world, Githa Hariharan espouses the cause of woman’s exploitation and shows how the physical and psychological suffering of susceptible women characters against the background of a rigid and traditional society. The study reveals the importance of subverting and overhauling the present steely social system to make way for a humane social order.

Different novelists use different fictional techniques to recreate the world of their female protagonists. Shashi Deshpande presents Saru’s conflict through first person narrations. In Daughter’s Daughter of Mrinal Pande, memory and child’s perspective are used. Githa Hariharan turns to myths of the past to understand the present. She takes instances of Ramayana and Mahabharata and relates them with the female characters of her first novel The Thousand Faces of Night. In When Dreams Travel, Hariharan uses system of story-telling as a survival tactic. This novel is also the rewriting of Arabian novel One Thousand and One Nights through a gynocritical point of view. Shashi
Deshpande makes a suggestive use of her epigraph taken from *The Dhammapada*. It reads:

You are your own refuge;

There is no other refuge.

This refuge is hard to achieve. (Dhammapada 171)

These lines show the significance of drawing sustenance from within and Devi reaches that stage of drawing strength from her inner self after much conflict. As feminist scholars assert time and again, writing is in itself an act of resistance as well as empowerment. By gaining courage from her grandmother’s stories, Devi strengthened herself to revolt against patriarchal society. The sense of female community is strengthened when Devi understands the implication of myths for a modern woman’s life. The novel *When Dreams Travel*, also employs what Adrienne Rich terms ‘revisionist mythmaking’. The most important thrust of the feminist agenda has been that of making woman ‘visible’ and their voices ‘audible’ in male dominant society. This study of Githa Hariharan’s novels has tried to see how fiction retrieve woman’s history and expresses woman’s exploitation and locates woman’s voices within the patriarchal discourse.

Life is a web of relationships. This analysis of Githa Hariharan’s novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* makes one conclude that to forge healthy relationships, the morality of care should be universal and not restricted to women, otherwise they will rebel and negate it, which, in turn, would evoke an unsympathetic world. This problem can be tackled only in conjunction with men. They should help to build a society on mutual care, compassion and cooperation. According to Jean Baker Miller, there should be redistribution of responsibilities where
we do not offer femaleness and maleness all the meaning we presently give them. There is no reason that serving others has to be a threat to maleness. This, like many other notions, is culturally imposed. (Miller 70)

Men and women should together join hands to make a way of life that includes serving others without subservient and envision a society based on the foundation of these virtues inculcated by both males and females to make the world a heavenly habitat. Undoubtedly, the so-called ‘feminine’ virtues of woman are feature of an advanced form of living. These virtues are exploited, but ironically, the woman who practices them is kept in a very inferior status. If woman continue to be considered the inferior sex, weak and are exploited and, in turn, they endeavour to increase their worth by emulating men by replacing feminine qualities with masculine ones. For the good and progress of humankind, woman should be allowed to develop her authentic self. Men and women can build up a supportive value system and reciprocate care and nurturing. All should realize the universality of the need of compassion and care. Reformation of relationships is the need of the hour. Women should be able to draw strength from their relationships and craft a way of life that includes serving others without being subservient. Our stereotypical traditional notions should be refined, redefined and revised to create a world with a better quality of living based on equality.

Githa Hariharan through her novel *When Dreams Travel* projects an old myth, but with a feministic adaptation. Both this rewriting and canonized version proves that Shahrzad’s myth lives on, as one of the narratives admiring woman’s intelligence and solidarity. Myths are symbolical narratives containing role models and inculcating a set of values on its audience. These are one example of what Homi Bhabha called the
pedagogic strategies to narrate collective identity. In this way, myths are the key references that interfere with unconscious life, a sort of elemental archetypes with a strong emotional appeal. Shahrzad is an example of positive reformulation of feminine identities, reversing the traditional victim status of woman to a position of empowerment. Secondly, the bond between two sisters Shahrzad and Dunyazad and the sisterhood of other storytellers in the novel is the example of female bonding and promoting woman’s self-respect. Last, but not least, the women characters created by Githa Hariharan are serious candidates to think new forms of liberated feminist identity, survival, solidarity, imaginative choices, leading to unexpected life stories. Thus, in the final analysis, Hariharan by merging myth and parody, past and present, seems to a signal to us that all reality comes to us filtered through language and that language is liked to power.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel about love and death, about woman and man, myth and story, passion and loneliness. It is a patchwork novel which pieces together the lives of Devi, Sita and Mayamma, to uncover the hidden pattern of woman’s oppression across time and span. In this novel, ‘fact’ and ‘fantasy’ are often mixed, the continuity and cohesiveness of female experience is emphasized through the opportunities and reworking of myth and folklore. We observe the dilemma of Indian woman and the sick social structure. The religious sayings, anecdotes, words of wisdom uttered by old people, expressed through various rituals, religious rites and customs, emphasize the acceptance of woman’s traditional role.

Githa Hariharan critically examines and questions the age-old norms. The tools she adopts are quite sharp and probe very deep. She is a new voice which cannot remain stifled or silent any more. It is a prophetic voice announcing the emergence of a new
identity. Her pen, which is mightier than sword, attempts to establish a new order. She has adopted satire as a mode of expression to give voice to her anger. It pierces quite deep, destroying age old wisdom, dismantling old myths and heralding a new dawn. Compared to other modes adopted by writers, satire has proves to be a more effective and powerful style of expression.

Though the narrative mode employed and the characters portrayed are different in two novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel*, in the use of the device or ‘stories within a story’. *When Dreams Travel* is a retelling, a subversive intertext of *The Thousand and One Nights* while *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a linear realistic story of an Indian girl, Devi, which opens out to embrace a magic realistic tale of storytellers and storytelling. In the first novel, on the surface of the story of Devi- a young educated girl battling with a failed marriage and a failed relationship, striving to find her identity from the maze of identities and roles imposed on her is a variegated amalgam of ‘stories’, old and new, mythical and scriptural, however remaining constant.

In both the novels taken for study *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan focuses on the life and dreams of woman. So, she turns to myths that contain chaste, self-effacing woman as well as the more ambiguous figure of woman who offers resistance of the ideal model. Myths help to locate certain “irrational” parts of our existence. She always seems to contain subversive elements which leak into the straight forward moral stories in unexpected and revealing ways. In *When Dreams Travel*, she used the Shahrzad’s stories to hold the bloodthirsty Sultan’s interest. The story is like the stage of the novel. And the onstage we get to see some of many faces of ‘female chastity’ and ‘male power’.
In nut shell, the portrayal of woman in literature helps women writers as it provides them with their role models drawn from the sufferings of the women characters, harassed under the chauvinistic male domination. Their thematic concerns and ideological preoccupations paved way to establish the synchronic and diachronic developments and continuity in the construction of the subjectivity of woman. Githa Hariharan portrays woman who battles for her self-identity in male dominated society. Her woman protagonists are the representatives of the present day intellectual women. At the end, they feel that they have an ephemeral existence. Her characters are not only interested to read, but are thought provoking. Through her women characters, Githa Hariharan shows how woman is treated in male dominated society and she struggles for her self identity. Her protagonists are brave and have love for risk.


