Chapter Four

Suffering Sex

From time immemorial women have been relegated to minority status and irrespective of the milieu and time they live in, they are tried to be suppressed and overpowered by men and rendered silent in this patriarchal social set-up and it is an undeniable truth that culture imprisons women and lead them to their subordination. Slavery has been abolished in several parts of the world, yet, women are treated as inferior by the very fact of their birth. Chatterji rightly points out, “women are born in bondage and are therefore, bonded from birth” (120). “Culture is a place where the social arrangements of gender can be contested. Cultural ideologies and institutions reinforce the dualistic separation of male and female” (Sardar and Loon 139). As Beauvoir rightly observes,

In the mouth of a man the epithet ‘female’ has the sound of an insult, yet he is not ashamed of his animal nature; on the contrary, he is proud of someone says of him: ‘He is a male!’ The term ‘female’ is derogatory not because it emphasizes woman’s animality, but because it imprisons her in her sex. (1)
The chapter “Suffering Sex” endeavours to enlist not the sufferings inflicted on women, but rather to showcase how Indian culture favours patriarchy and is detrimental to the growth of women through the careful analysis of the select fictional narratives of the eminent Indian women novelists Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai who belong to diverse cultural and geographical background. This chapter aims at a “woman centred inquiry, considering the possibility of the existence of a female culture within the general culture shared by men and women” (Kumar 78).

When education slowly crept into Indian women’s life, they started questioning this bigotry and began to claim for equality. This resulted in the emerging of feminism. Feminism, though a social issue required an awareness and awakening in the minds of women which can be achieved at large through literature, which frequently addresses the major social and cultural issues of the time. Miles very carefully establishes the close proximity between feminist writing and culture. He writes:

Feminism in literature is essentially concerned with the representation of women in society and their corresponding fluid position. Most of the attempts to define what it is to be woman, assume a universal connotation in that woman is considered more as a product of cultural norms and restraints rather than as a creation of nature. (1)
The secondary status of women which is questioned by the emerging feminist movement is the outcome of the age-old cultural practices prevalent in India which foster patriarchy. The history of the patriarchal set up of India dates back to Manu who advocated patriarchy. The theory of perpetual tutelage of women formulated by Manusmrithi, the earliest and most authoritative work representing the Hindu life and culture, was also known as “Manava Dharmasstra”. Manu has proclaimed that woman is always dependent in her life: “…Pita rakshate kaumare, bhartarakashati youwane, rakshati sthavire putra Na stri swatantryamarhati” (9/3). This tenet has been warmly welcomed by Indian men as it justified their cunning deeds in denying self-respect and dignity to the feminine. Man in the patriarchal set-up believed that woman “was created to be the toy of man, his rattle, and it must jingle in his ears whenever, dismissing reason, he chooses to be amused” (Wollstonecraft 66).

Colonization has brought a sea change in the life style of Indian women. It paved a way for them to taste the fruit of wisdom and knowledge. It equipped them to perceive their derogatory status in the society. As a result of education, the reading habit of women increased considerably during the 18th century. These women readers preferred the women writers especially novelists, because they found many of their issues being addressed by them stupendously. They could do justice to
what they rendered through their fictional narration. This factor contributed
tremendously for the development of women’s writing. Most of the
writings of women created awareness among educated women against the
existing patriarchy and women began to rebel against this gender bias
which paved way for the emerging of feminism in literature. As Sunanda
Mukesh rightly asserts, “Feminism, the talk about women’s strides, is not
new but it is painful that with the growth of nation the problems of women
are increasing and the situation is worsening” (189).

Irrespective of the age, society and culture, women strive for
individuality or identity and “dignity for their progress and development.
Indian woman’s identity is one that is usually connected to and defined by
societal and cultural norms of a patriarchal familial structure. Her identity
is defined within the parameters of her social relationship to men”
(Chandra 150). Women encounter such challenges that are not experienced
by their male counterparts.

It is during the surging of feminist ideas that the chosen writers
for study namely Arundhati Roy, Githa Hariharan and Kiran Desai have
entered the Indian literary arena. These writers “have attempted to project a
new sense of woman’s identity that transforms her status from the
victimized to the empowered …. The shift from poetics of suffering
towards poetics of individualistic empowerment is a noticeable trend in
recent Indian women’s writings in English” (Ravi 76). They felt that “…

women are like Dalits” and they use literature as a medium to “voice their emanciating demands, claim their rights, and assert their existence both are have-nots of society” (Mukesh 189).

Among the chosen authors, mention should be made of Roy who has been nurtured by a mother who is a feminist in its truest sense of the word. Her mother “Mary Roy was a social activist well known for her iconoclastic living and radical feminism” (Banerjee 89). Roy has the same ideology of Virginia Woolf who affirms that “there will always be in existence a nucleus of women who think, invent, imagine and create as freely as men do, and with as little fear of ridicule and condenscension” (Surendran 52).

Roy is not usually swayed by the traditional and cultural pulls of the Indian society which discriminate women just because they are considered inferior to men. The same spirit she exhibits in the delineation of her central women characters in her fictional narrative The God of Small Things. “Her anger at the crushing and destructing effects of patriarchal oppression runs through the novel” (Wilson Web). This epoch making book has invited plethora of criticism from the patriarchal Indian society, which could not still assimilate such a bold portrayal even in the era of science and technology, where, everyone talks about equality. The creativity of the young novelist finds witness in the splendid characterization of her women characters belonging to different
generations, who excel in displaying both their virtue and vice. Whatever is their quality they are universal in the aspect that they are all discriminated in one or other way by the male dominated Indian society.

Hariharan displays a similar feministic disposition. She is not simply contented with preaching of women’s rights. Instead, she puts them into practice in her life. She won the attention of the whole country by challenging in the Supreme Court, the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act which was discriminatory in nature. The victory she enjoyed was a giant leap made by a single woman towards the augmentation of women’s status in India. Her fictional narratives depict her deep insight into women and their issues. Each woman character of Hariharan gives her a chance to explore the different potentialities of both modern and traditional women, their strength and weakness.

Desai, the daughter of the renowned author Anita Desai, an expert in conceiving women’s sensibilities does not lack the creative and critical acumen that her mother displayed through her novels in assimilating the problems of her fellow beings. Though brought up in the United States where discrimination is not so acutely felt as in India, she is not oblivious to the problem of the women of her motherland. The fact remains that The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard, her maiden literary attempt lacks strong women portraits, but it too unveils the harrowing experiences of women which are presented rather in a sarcastic tone. However, her second literary
creation *Inheritance of Loss* displays the meticulous insight the young novelist has inherited about her homeland including that of the problems confronted by the womenfolk in the patriarchal social set-up and the intensity of their discrimination. Desai highlights in this novel the darker side of human life where everyone is challenged and afflicted with misfortune. Only the degree of it varies. As a sensible and pragmatic woman who knows the way of the world, she depicts that in a patriarchal Indian social condition it is women who are more vulnerable to disgrace and misfortunes and is thus more marginalized than men.

Family plays a vital role in Indian culture. It fabricates certain institutions to spread and cultivate its codes of behaviour which unfortunately is not propitious to women. Marriage is one such cultural institution. “Marriage: It is a sanctified bond that is attributed with religious sanction and piety, blessed with the charm of eternity” (Chatterji 121). However, in the works chosen for study, marriage has been depicted as a root cause for female subjugation and deterioration. They go by the words of Engels who points out in his *The Origin of the Family* “that the Latin word “Familia” means the total number of slaves belonging to one man. Marriage, he says, is not a “reconciliation of man and woman”, but the subjugation of the female in the interest of perpetuation of slavery and the private property” (qtd. in Swami 137). In the Indian context, the practice of female subjugation started only after the Vedic time.
Our Epics, Vedas and Puranas envisage marriage not as a mere social instrument, but also as a moral weapon to both stabilize and elevate the moral stature of an individual. But unfortunately, it is an irony of fate that in a post-modernistic world, such esteemed institutions are currently subject to doubt, cynicism and erosion. (Sarada 57)

Roy, Hariharan and Desai have the same credence about marriage. Like the women writers of the West as well as our Indian counterparts, these writers have very minutely scrutinized this cultural institution called marriage and have projected an array of female protagonists who endure hardship within the framework of marriage. They enumerate a number of women characters who suffer in numerous ways due to this traditional bond which often strangles the womenfolk. Roy and Hariharan present their agony by creating women characters belonging to different generations, under diverse educational and cultural backdrop through *The God of Small Things* and *The Thousand Faces of Night* respectively. They prove the idea propagated by Beauvoir that “tragedy of marriage is not that it fails to assure woman the promised happiness… but that it mutilates her; it dooms her to repetition and routine” (496).

Roy reviews marriage in its various aspects through her different characters in *The God of Small Things*. She shows a rare verve in delineating such a challenging and intrepid protagonist Rahel. She can be
easily understood by her readers as she is a modern woman with revolutionary ideas whereas, Mammachi, a representative of the first generation woman startles the reader with her different disposition. Mammachi is married to Pappachi, who is an entomologist and a typical patriarch who cannot tolerate his wife being appreciated and admired by others. Mammachi was a beautiful woman when she married Pappachi, who was eighteen years older than his wife. Mammachi in the photograph looks “beautiful, old, unusual, regal”. Unfortunately, marriage has rewarded her with so many wounds. Roy avers, on her “scalp, carefully hidden by scanty hair, Mammachi had raised, crescent-shaped ridges. Scars of old beatings from old marriage. Her brass vase scars” (GST 166). With this narration Roy promulgates that wife battering is very common in Indian society.

Pappachi in The God of Small Things is a gentleman in the morning. At night he is nearly a wild animal who will send his wife and daughter outside the house in Delhi and they spend the cold nights outside hiding behind the trees, so that no neighbour could see them. To him, wife is but a slave who can be driven out of the house at his will. He exhorts his hegemony by breaking the precious belongings of his wife and daughter and humiliating them in front of their neighbours. Such rude treatments serve as an ample proof to uncloak the male chauvinistic attitude of Pappachi. The callousness of Pappachi is well illustrated by Roy through a
photograph that he took while he was in Vienna. She writes: “His light brown eyes were polite, yet maleficent, as though he was making an effort to be civil to the photographer while plotting to murder his wife” (51). A similar thought is expressed by Roy in describing the photograph of Rahel’s great grandparents. There also one witnesses a lack of love in the marital relationship. Roy pens that in that particular photograph the great grandmother “with her eyes she looked in the direction that her husband looked. With her heart she looked away” (30). This shows the lack of love and understanding that prevailed between the couple. In spite of this beastly behaviour of her husband, Mammachi needs his presence and so when he expires she could not control her tears. Roy comments that it is not because Mammachi loves him but because she is used to his beating so much that when she misses it, she is sad and feels lonely and insecure. “Mammachi represents the feminine principle in the novel, straddling both tradition and individual talent…” (Banerjee 86).

Thus, the marriage of Mammachi, the first generation woman in The God of Small Things turns futile and fails to bring in the bliss as expected by this cultural institution called marriage. Ammu who bears witness to this fatal relationship very much wants to escape from this stifling house. Her father denies her college education as he considers college education an unnecessary expense for a girl and she chooses marriage as a way to escape. As a sort of escape, she goes to her distant aunt’s house in Calcutta,
where in one of the weddings, she meets Baba who is an assistant manager at a tea-estate. He proposes love to her on the fourth day of their meeting. Ammu is not really in love with him, but she just wants to flee from the grip of her father’s tyrannical clutches. Moreover, being a typical Indian girl, she feels that wedding is something that could not be avoided. It is unfortunate that she is jumping into fire to escape from a frying pan. Ammu’s marital life “like many Indian women’s signifies a heterogeneous relationship between a wife and a husband. Her’s story of loveless marriage. She has been depicted as if she has no ‘self’ or ‘no identity’ or ‘no autonomy’ but just a showpiece” (Chandra 154). Her husband turned out to be a drunkard and a liar. The irresponsibility of the husband is conveyed at its best by Roy when she describes how even on the day of Ammu’s delivery, he lies unconsciously on a bench in the hospital corridor. It is the feministic self of Roy that shows the resentment against the patriarchs of the society by depriving Ammu’s husband with any name. He is addressed always either as “her husband” (GST 40) or “their [twins’] father” (41).

In order to safeguard his job, Ammu’s husband condescends to the demand of his English Boss and to send Ammu, his beautiful wife to his master “to be looked after” (42). “Hollick’s demand for Ammu’s body presents an example of “otherness” in post colonial literature” (Budholia 60). Ammu, a woman with self- respect could not oblige to this strange
request of her husband. “When she was asked to go to his English Boss’ care, the defiance is the true identity of an Indian woman who can lead her amidst sorrows and sufferings but cannot just offer her body against her wish” (Chandra 155). However, she tries to maintain poise just to save her marriage and to save her children from disgrace. She could not prolong this for a long time as he starts to use violence against her which slowly includes her children. “She longs for coming out from the ambit of marital-familial-relationship and finally does so” (Chandra 154).

Roy does not stop with presenting the life of these few people like Mammachi and Ammu. She epitomizes that abusing wives is an age-old practice which has become very much the part of Indian culture. Many women suffer in the patriarchal society because of their good for nothing husbands. The untouchable women working in Mammachi’s factory, are sent to Chacko’s room to satisfy his ‘man’s needs’ by the mother. Here Roy tries to enlighten her readers that these poor women are compelled to do this as they are badly in need of money that Mammachi gives: “They took it because they needed it. They had young children and old parents. Or husbands who spent all their earnings in toddy bars” (169). This throws enough light on the pathetic plight of the women in general and it goes to prove that “If the elite women in a neo-colonial society are subjugated, the subaltern women are double subjugated. They are designated to mere sex objects” (Jamuna 191). They are, as Parry points out following Spivak,
subaltern female who are “positioned on the boundary between human and animal” (39). It strengthens the view that “Even the poorest Indian male is fortunate in having opportunities for releasing his impulse to domination and the fury of his frustrated ego, because he always has a wife whom he can treat as an inferior” (Swami 135).

If women ever show the audacity to come out of these suffocating relationships, they are mercilessly crucified by the society which being patriarchal favours only men. Indian society believes “dependency is feminine, submission is feminine, loyalty is feminine, helplessness is feminine – and all these are the result of the age-old disease, that of male dominance inside the family and in the society as whole” (Shankar 91). This thought has been well established by Roy who herself is the product of such a failed marriage. She illustrates in detail, the deplorable plight of divorced women through Ammu who calls comparison with that of the novelist’s mother Mary Roy. Ammu, a divorcée does as much work in the pickle factory as Chacko, the brother who also is in the same status, but he refers to it as “my factory, my pineapples, my pickles”. It seems that the patriarchal the Indian constitution also favours Chacko as Ammu has no right to the family property as she is a woman. This makes Ammu comment satirically, “Thanks to our wonderful male chauvinist society” (GST 57). Chacko too affirms the same attitude of the Indian society, for he frequently avers “What’s yours is mine and what’s mine is also mine”
(57). His words proclaim the cultural practice of “Lush green Kerala [which] denies a woman a place of her own. There is a strong patriarchal bias against women in the division of property. The women are also at a disadvantage as far as space and freedom are concerned” (Chakravarty 96).

Lack of acceptance and bigotry that a married woman experiences explain why majority of Indian women continue to endure hardship in their husbands’ houses, and never try to escape from the stifling atmosphere. In addition to this, the Indian patriarchal society believes that a family needs a father and mother is ascribed only a secondary status. As Sunanda Mukesh rightly opines that society is and always has been in the hands of men. Socialized to accept an inferior status and role, she may find that she cannot gain acceptance in her new culture. She has been subjected to different roles by home, school, and society. She has to face contradictory expectations. She is a victim to emerging clash between the old and new identities. She reacts violently against the old identification. She becomes moody, depressed, irritated, and even irrational by assertive and excessive aggressiveness. She is forced to feel ‘inferior’, ‘marginalised’. This new woman finds no ‘space’ or ‘a room of her own’ but feels ‘isolated’ ‘lonely’ or ‘out of place’. (190)
The society alleges that for a better brought up of the progeny, the presence of father is highly inevitable. Ammu, the bold woman who has streaks of feminism wants to disprove this traditional belief. She tries her best to replenish the place of a father which her children lack. Finally, she too comes in terms with this hegemonic ideology for she agrees at the height of her misfortune that, “May be they’re right, …. May be a boy does need a Baba” (GST 31). And so Ammu returns Estha, her son to the father. Here one finds Ammu’s identity being questioned and her high sense of isolation and feeling of inferiority being enviably communicated by the author. Roy, however, does not believe in this concept and goes to disprove this belief by illustrating as the narration proceeds how this decision ruins the life of this little boy who showed extra intelligence and practical wisdom in matters even at the age of seven.

The disgrace that deserted mothers face inside the family as well as in society is graphically presented by Roy. The police station episode in the novel corroborates the peak of disgrace a deserted wife is entitled to. When Ammu goes to the police station to report what has happened to her niece Sophie Mol, the Police Inspector mutes her by calling her a veshya. Further, his “sly and greedy eyes stared at her breast when he spoke. He humiliated her by tapping her breast with his batons” (8). As Chandra avers

The rude behaviour of the Inspector towards Ammu and the use of the word ‘Veshya’ show the low degree of treatment
of women in public life especially in Police Department. This forces the study of Indian women in its contemporary cultural context as to how they are exploited by the God of Big things. Ammu, a socially and economically insecure woman suffers in the hands of rigid upper class (Big things) for her passionate love and social transgression. (154)

Roy unfolds how the bitter fruit of failed marriage grieves even the next generation. Rahel’s life bears testimony to this. Being the children of a divorced mother, Rahel and Estha are neglected by everyone. “They are only ‘provided for’ like barn animals. Their mother Ammu is a divorcee. So her children are punished for their mother’s ‘fault’ – the divorce as well as the inter-caste ‘love’ marriage” (Pandit 169).

Chacko and Mammachi help Rahel to live after the death of Ammu, the victim of a patriarchal society. About this Roy comments that “They provided the care (food, clothes, fees) but withdrew the concern” (GST 15). This lack of concern made her a rebel even at the early age of eleven. Rahel “didn’t know how to be a girl” (17). She has no friends and even the teachers are scared and careful with her. She has no one to look after or arrange her marriage. So when Larry Mc Caslin, a doctoral scholar proposes to her she agrees. “She moved into marriage like a passenger drifts towards an unoccupied chair” (18). She could not love him. Her eyes while making love offend him. He does not know the depth of her despair
and the cause behind it. He does not know that “the emptiness of her eyes was only a version of the quietness of the other” (20). As a result, they divorce. Once again the tragedy repeats. But luckily there is no offspring to pass on this catastrophe.

Hariharan too echoes a similar cultural pattern in her *The Thousand Faces of Night*. This novel insinuates that woman has so many faces and each one she has to display to put on with her troublesome existence. She takes “a radical feminist position and the whole book is imbued with a sense of feminine…” (Paranjape 20). Hariharan’s maiden literary attempt speaks at length about the turmoil this sanctified institution marriage brings to women. As Webster in Act I scene ii of *The White Devil* has asserted, Hariharan too portrays that marriage is “like a summer bird-cage in a garden …”. There are three different generations of women whose lives undergo a sea change with their marriages which diminish their talents and crush their spirit as vehemently as possible. It also focuses on the fact that in the patriarchal society woman gets some respect only when she gives birth to a son. Failing to do so, she loses the very little dignity she has. The story of Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* vindicates this idea.

Adversity is a bitter fruit that marriage as an institution brings to women in the Indian patriarchal set up. It is “a traditional destiny forced upon her” (Mukesh 191). Tripti Garg’s observation on the women characters of *The Thousand Faces of Night* exposes the pitiable existence
of women in the male dominated Indian society. He says that Devi, Sita and Mayamma belong to three different generations and have entirely different educational status, “but the sufferings are almost the same…. In fact, it seems that all the major and minor characters are there only to tell that the female life is nothing but a tragic saga of sorrows because of the male dominance” (86).

The very prelude of the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* pronounces an old saying “A woman must learn to bear some pain”. Indian patriarchal tradition fosters such thought for ages and girl children are brought up with the constant preaching of this unwritten code of cultural practice that they accept it without much contemplation and pass it on to the forthcoming generation much to the relief of their male counterpart. Hariharan vindicates this exploitation of women by the society repeatedly in her maiden literary attempt. In this novel Mayamma, one of the central characters loses her long awaited baby during delivery. With the anguished mind she asks the doctor why she has lost the child in spite of doing so much penance. The doctor’s words clearly envisage a patriarch’s heartless and insensitive belief that she lost her son just as a punishment for her sins in her previous birth. The mother-in-law instead of consoling her grieving soul adds fuel to the fire of misery. This bitter experience teaches a lesson to Mayamma that in the Indian culture a woman should never ask why and so she warns Devi her mistress to be very careful while asking why to
future. The prelude itself proclaims the serious attitude of Hariharan in voicing against this social injustice vehemently through her maiden attempt. She raises her voice against several atrocities done to her sex in the name of tradition and culture and sharply criticises the belief that a wife becomes a woman only if she is able to give birth to a child, especially a son.

Hariharan presents very candidly the exact picture of the Indian society where the parents look “for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her … husband’s friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to ‘adjust’” (TFN 17). While man nourishes such hopes of choosing a wife, women are denied such a privilege. Being the mouthpiece of the author, Sita avers that women “can’t be too cautious when choosing a husband” (17). On the other hand, woman should be ready to sacrifice her desires if she wants to be a good wife or daughter-in-law or mother. Devi calls marriage a “gamble…. You measure the odds as best as you can and adapt yourself to the consequences” (49). It speaks volumes about the prevalent bigotry in the Indian social set up. Almost all the female characters in The Thousand Faces of Night forsake one thing or the other to harmonize them with the existing hegemonic patriarchal society. As Bharucha rightly avers, in Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night, “Sita, Devi, and Mayamma are separated by the
gulf of time and caste but are linked by the shared reductiveness of their
gender. All three of them live within the confines of the odhini, which tries
to tear apart in her own way to create spaces for herself” (101). Even Sita
who has been portrayed with the flair of feminism has to compromise with
her married life by renouncing her most beloved musical instrument, the
veena. Hariharan describes “Sita gave up her love. She tore the strings off
the wooden base, and let the blood dry on her chosen path on first difficult
days of abstinence” (103). The pain behind this sacrifice is communicated
by the writer by comparing it with the heroic renunciation of eyesight by
Gandhari, a proud and self-willed woman in The Mahabharata. When Sita
is married to Mahadevan, she takes with her the veena as a part of her
dowry. Sita’s pride like that of Gandhari is affected when she is
reprimanded for practising it, neglecting her duty. In order to quench her
anger, “she reached for the strings of her precious veena and pulled them
out of the wooden base” (30). Never does she touch the veena again and it
teaches the lesson, says Hariharan that human anger “could seep into every
pore of a womanly body and become the very bloodstream of her life”
(29). The attitude of Sita’s father-in-law echoes the words of Sunanda
Mukesh who candidly brought to the fore the fact that “In fact, there has
been no marked change in man’s attitude to women. A woman has no right
to aspire to become anybody other than a full-time housewife. A man does
not understand or rather ignores her concerns, interests, and ambitions” (191).

A woman’s life itself is indeed very hard to be lived. If she is an orphan, the hardship she has to endure is indescribable. Hariharan illustrates this sort of precarious experience through the life of Gauri, a beautiful servant girl. Being helpless she earns her livelihood as a servant. Hariharan portrays that like other women of her novel, Gowri’s wedding which is accomplished after so much hardship also ends in fiasco. Gowri recalls “Her husband was an animal…. They treated her like dirt” (TFN 32). These words of Gowri expose the humiliation a woman undergoes at her in-law’s house. When it exceeds the bounds, Gowri boldly walks out of her married life. The society treats such women very harshly. She is even denied of her previous menial job of a servant. The society expects her to bear in silence the atrocity committed by her husband and his family. However, if she tries to defy this social constraint, she is crushed by the monster called patriarchy. Further, this concept is hammered out through the story of a beautiful girl who married a serpent. She is praised very much for her patience which helps in the human birth of her husband. The story serves as proof to illustrate the fact that how the Indian society nourishes and acts as a fertilizer in sustaining the patriarchal hegemony. In presenting this idea, Hariharan resembles Roy in many respects.
Domestic violence, a very common practice in India is conveyed at its best by Harihara. As Luce Irigaray rightly says, “family has always been the privileged locus of women’s exploitation” (142). Such an ideology is conveyed through Uma, a cousin of Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her marriage is solemnized very grandly by her parents and relatives. Out of a blue, one day her father-in-law in his drunken state kisses her roughly on the lips “which had made her return to her house as it is the worst humiliation a woman can face in her husband’s house” (TFN 35). Her relatives and friends lament over the fate of Uma but as typical women in India they start to accept this age old atrocity as they agree with the highly conventional grandmother who seeks solace by saying “why weep over Uma? A high-born princess, or even a goddess, has been the victim of disaster” (36). She does not stop with this. Instead takes the feminist voice of the author who insists that a woman like Uma should not yield to such tragedies. On the other hand, she must display the courage of Amba who “finds the means to transform her hatred, the fate that overtakes her into a triumph” (36). It is these words of courage that Devi, the protagonist listened to in her childhood strengthens her to walk out of her unhappy marriage, by spoiling her husband’s self-respect and vanity. Her deed confirms what Bhargava asserted “Nor can a woman’s desires be curbed too long for there is a limit to suffering repression” (228). Through
the story of Amba, Hariharan also fosters the message that a woman can be independent and that “A woman fights her battle alone” (TFN 36).

Hariharan who has painted on her literary canvas so many causes for marginalizing human beings continues to register the inabilities forcefully implemented by the society on the traditional Indian women. They are mostly considered as an unwanted element, a recluse in a patriarchal Indian family. The life of the protagonist Vasu Master’s mother depicts the social constraints inflicted on women. A woman’s inability to give birth to a son is considered a crime by the patriarchal society. The parents are worried about the society and “they couldn’t bear the thought of people laughing at them on witnessing their failure” (GVM 31) in giving birth to a son. The girl child who is given birth to instead of the long awaited boy also has her due share of affliction for no cause of her own, which haunts the child’s mind till death and results in her deterioration. “In the case of Vasu Master’s mother it is the unfortunate environment - ‘the sixth daughter’ and also unsuitable treatment by parents, the husband and his kin that leads to the aggravated sense of inferiority” (Shinde 123). Lakshmi fails to compensate for her feeling of inferiority and meekly accepts to succumb to the pressures and environment. Hariharan is critical of the immediate constraints on woman’s individual development – “the constraints of domestic life and dominating patriarchy” (Shinde 123).
Another excruciating experience that a female infant undergoes in the tradition bound Indian society is narrated by Hariharan. When Lakshmi, mother of Vasu Master is born, the parents are heart broken at the birth of a girl child and even they forget the basic custom of naming a child. Finally, the name Lakshmi is supplied by the sweeper woman out of pity that too with the fond hope that she will bring prosperity to her in-laws. Lakshmi’s experience is vindictive of Shashi Deshpande’s dictum: “Everything in a girl’s life was shaped to that single purpose of pleasing a male” (163). Every Indian “girl is brought up to think that the least fulfilment out of life can be attained only through wifehood and motherhood” (Chatterji 6).

Lakshmi is brought up as an unwanted and obnoxious object in her family that entrenched in her mind the seed of inferiority complex which takes root as she grows up. Vasu Master recalls: “Her ambitions were on a lower scale – escaping her husband’s unpredictable explosions of temper, surviving her mother-in-law’s jealous rule of the household” (GVM 32) and keeping the house and its members neat and tidy. She is moulded by the society in such a way that she “had never exchanged more than six words” to her neighbours. They always hear her but whispering: “Lower your voice shut the door. Bathe and change your clothes before going out” (32). Such restrictions imposed by the family as well as society end up in the melting away of Lakshmi “as a shadow and passed away when she had
given her due to her husband”. Hariharan ironically conveys through Vasu Master that “she lived just about long enough to give my father his heir, and obviously even that was a shoddy job” (32). Her brought-up has declined her growth and she failed to compensate for her feeling of inferiority and meekly accepted to succumb to the pressures of environment. In portraying the life of Lakshmi, Hariharan condemns the socio-cultural constraints of Indian society which impede the growth of women and reduces them as mere disabled creatures.

Mangala, Vasu Master’s wife is yet another woman who is branded as a ghost, devoid of any identity. She is a submissive character whose presence is scarcely noticed by her husband. Vasu Master lives with her for fifteen years, she has given him two sons and in spite of that he confesses that she is to him “a cloudy memory than a person…. Pale and insubstantial, a figure perennially on the retreat” (41). She is to him a mere provider of physical comfort and without her any importance and identity. He remembers when he was laid on bed with fever, “she would hover around my bed with strips of cloth dipped in cold water when I lay groaning with a fever; on she would sit up, night after night mending the boy’s shorts and my vests…” (123). Still, she is not remembered by the unthankful husband. Vasu Master has very vague idea about “what she actually was. But he in her absence thinks about “what she might have been” (123). Mangala’s lack of the very essential quality of individuality
and her deep sense of loneliness is suggested by the author thus: “She said very little about either her belief or her fears” (138). As days went by, she becomes more passive. “She went about her daily tasks as wife and mother with a delicate, feministic modesty. It was only after she had died,” that they “could not fill her place, even the three of us put together” (138).

As a typical Indian husband, Vasu Master vehemently ignores her individuality and makes her remain “the awful unknown, never bothering to know her real woman-being, always dismissing her as an insignificant person” (Shinde 124). He recollects: “She was unnoticeable, inconspicuous; like my mother, memorable only as an absence. I knew my wife and my affection for her only when I lived with her ghost. This ghost had a frail, vapour body; made more insubstantial by my lapses of memory about what she actually was” (GVM 123). This precarious experience makes Virginia Woolf’s claim highly appreciable. She has aptly commented that women as a class “are comparable to the humblest domestic servants…” and as Virginia Woolf suggests “women may be likened the lowliest, and most familiar subject race of all” (qtd. in Saini 99). Through the portrayal of Vasu Master’s married life,

Githa Hariharan suggests that man always struggles to make woman part of himself, the extension of his will. The knowledge that she is other than himself is torture to him. He never tries to unravel the mystery that she is and to know the
reality of her and this consequently leads to the distance in the relationship. What is needed is the acceptance of woman’s otherness. (Shinde 124)

Marriage as an institution is perceived differently by men and women. Roy’s characters envisage “weddings were not something that could be avoided altogether” (GST 44). Man considers marriage as a necessity whereas, for a sensitive woman like Devi it is “the “sacrificial knife” that hangs a few inches about her neck, Devi thinks that the knife may tear her into pieces. “Instead the knife draws a drop at a time”. She feels that the “game it plays with me is ignominious. It pricks my chin; and when my hand flies up to soothe the sore spot, it stings my elbow. The heart I have prepared so well for its demands remains untouched, unsought for” (TFN 54). Devi’s words so poignant that they vividly present how the holy institution of marriage maims a woman and make her a non-entity.

The sanctity of conjugal felicity is questioned by the author. It mostly becomes a mechanical ritual for Devi. She says “Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name; snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden” (54). This insult trounces the spirit of Devi and like most other women she could not bear with this and she resents “my education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood” (54). When such inhuman subordination reaches its climax, she fumes out “why did you marry me”,
for which her husband Mahesh very casually remarks, “what ever people get married for” – illustrating the bitter fact prevalent in a patriarchal society like India where a woman gets married to a man to provide pleasure to her husband and to look after him like a maid. Mahesh’s remark “Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love” (54) speaks at length about the male chauvinistic attitude of an average Indian husband. Marriage brings the “walls close around Devi and she experiences the futility, pain, and reductiveness of womanhood. Her husband turns to her only in the darkness of night- her days are spent haunting the empty rooms of her married home” (Bharucha 103). She says that the “long afternoon stretches before me like an endless, pointless road. My hands ache with restlessness, my tongue is parched with lack of use” (TFN 74). This drives Devi to repeat these words often: “I am alone” (79). Unlike her mother, she fails to win in the battle for space that takes place almost in every patriarchal family. Her marriage sucks out her self-esteem and she begins to muse herself as “I am a wooden puppet in his hands, I stand by him, a silent wife, my wet sari clinging to me like a parasite” (84). She further laments that marriage has taken everything away from her that at times she seems a stranger to herself. She muses, “I seem to have lost along with many other things, my sense of humour, even my girlish ability to giggle. I am someone else now” (91). Such an indifferent and insensitive attitude of a husband drives Devi to find solace in music. She is like a butterfly that
goes from one flower to other in the hope of getting honey or happiness in life. This is a reason why Devi elopes with Gopal whose music promises her a fruitful life, but that too fails her. “She felt like an ignorant child imprisoned in a woman’s body, her rebellious, independent spirit…. But this bold adventures soon floundered; and struggled blindly to bring herself to a standstill” (128).

As J.K Dodiya and K.V. Surendran rightly have opined in the preface of Indian Women Writers: Critical Perspective, “Men have attained the status of colonizers and women the colonized”. Mayamma’s husband also is not an exception. He considers her only as his spot, an object to give him pleasure. He never bothers to understand the physical and mental tortures his wife endures from his mother for her inability to give birth to a son. Once she is “bent to draw kolam in front of the house” by humming a song, she heard a voice saying “So you’ve taken to singing in the streets, have you, you shameless hussy” and “the next moment I felt a swift, well-aimed kick of my husband, back after a night of whoring in the rain” (TFN 111). At last, when a son is born, he deserts her and takes away with him all their fortunes. His running away does not promise any solace for the poor woman as his place is soon replaced by his son, another male representative of the Indian patriarchal society. “At fourteen he threatened to beat his mother and sold her last pair of gold bangles” (81). He hits his mother with an iron frying pan when she refuses to give him her
diamond earring. Hariharan very strongly promulgates the fact that men whether husbands, fathers, sons or brothers are all male chauvinists. She comments, “It is useful to remember husband is a man. So is a father…. He holds his teeth apart in mock kindness and sucks like a hungry serpent coiled around your upright nipple. You can feel the tingling of the sweet venom, racing thick and wet through insatiable glands of your outraged heart. Do not believe them. Do not believe these strangers…” (92). It is the staunch belief that makes her comment through Mayamma on the decision taken by Devi to elope with Gopal. Her words “oh! Silly child, how far will you go with the overflowing bosom and the dreamy wet eyes” (117) depict that Mayamma’s own experience has equipped her to have this prophetic vision and it indeed comes true. It also proves that for ages women are considered slaves and “Woman was the first human being who tasted bondage. “Woman was a slave before slave existed”….“ (Mukesh 193).

Thus, Harihan’s *Thousand Faces of Night* brings to light the bitter fact that marriage as a social custom brings only misfortune for women. Hariharan writes: “Three of the women who walked a tight rope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (TFN 135). Three of them belong to different generations, but their common struggle for space suggests that patriarchy which was established centuries before continues even today and a woman can inhale
freedom and happiness only when she frees herself from the shackles of men.

Harihan in *When Dreams Travel* also describes marriage as a game. “The game is called The Martyr’s Walk and each player describes herself as she makes her way to the blade-holding hand that waits for her…. But it is always a man who waits for them. For he has something sharp in his hand, something that draws blood” (DT 53). Her sister Dunyazad also feels her freedom being snatched away after her marriage. She is denied even to wear what she wishes after her marriage. Her husband “Zaman with his innumerable jealousies ….insists she always dress in pale, maidenly colours” (57). Zaman proves to be a typical patriarch who rebukes his wife for expressing her opinion. He shuts her mouth saying, “Do you know the way to harem?... And if you do, why not stay there?” (194). He also torments her for not begetting a son. He justifies his deed by asking “What business does she have but to care for the one imbecile son she has given him” (195).

All the chosen authors for discussion assert that the wives reap loneliness as the fruit of wedding. Dunyazad too suffers from isolation. At her sister’s room she feels “terrified” “being here alone” “…. She feels a twinge of bitter isolation” (69). Shahrzad is also described as “lonely, having been alone, so alone, since she made the terrible mistake of dying” (72). It is suspected that her death is brought about by her husband.
Hariharan compares Shahryar with a serpent. She writes that his waiting in his bed chamber is like that of a “fat serpent coiled in its bed, waiting with its hood raised ready to strike” (257). How men like Shahryar treat women’s body as a mere terrain and their act is compared to the colonization of land by foreigners - a postcolonial thought. The author effectively describes that “they colonized her body, her skillfully planned design, to paint in their sticky colours and words, their own moral themes” (274).

Due to suppression, women show the tendency of escapism. It is what drives Devi to escape first from her husband and later from her lover. Similarly, Dunyazad and Dilshad, the servant, though in dream escape from the palace and their thirst for freedom is revealed thus: “Two women, having escaped a palace, roam free for seven days and nights” (116). Their motive is mainly “to gain for themselves a view, however obscure, of a different future” (117).

The insecurity a woman faces in a patriarchal society finds witness through the character of Dilshad in Githa Hariharan’s novel *When Dreams Travel*. Dilshad used to hear that “night is dangerous for the traveler, particularly for a woman” (162). To Dilshad even “afternoons are dangerous and treacherous” (162). The Sultan represents a male chauvinist in a patriarchal society. He tries to avenge all women just because his first wife cheated him. Every night he marries a new virgin. And midnight will
be the time for “the hopeless nightly clamour of virgins, families. A few minutes, and the bride will be stripped to the skin …. Foreplay for the more definitive act of conquest that the dawn will bring” (168). Thus, the innocent virgins are persecuted for no fault of theirs. The wazir [minister] who has two beautiful daughters spends sleepless night worrying about the fate of his daughters, who will be soon ravished by the sultan. The wazir sees a dream which very evocatively expounds the pathetic state of affairs in Shahabad, where women are mercilessly killed and humiliated. The pool that he dreams symbolically represents the patriarchal society which amputates women and around it one can see the annihilated parts of womanly bodies. The wazir sees that the pool is “a wardrobe of exclusively female discards. A whole population of dismembered bodily parts, picked in a vicious fluid, are floating around the wazir…. All of female Shahabad seems to be represented in hellish oasis” (171).

Hariharan’s story of a woman’s transformation into a goat illustrates the height of her imagination that enables her to bring forth the predicaments of women in a symbolical way. A goat is offered as food to man to slake his hunger and in the same way woman is offered to provide him pleasure and she is treated as mercilessly as cattle. Just like a goat, a woman is sacrificed at the feet of the man at his meal. The thought is conveyed at its best through a symbolic narration. The wazir in order to save his beloved daughter conceals her inside the ground, but when he digs
out her, she turns into a white goat that is presented to the Sultan. The wazir says handing over the goat, “It is time for your meal, my lord….You must be starving” (175). The girl Shahrzad also willingly surrenders to the wazir’s words, who “embraces the goat’s neck and hand with the knife flies down, plunges deep. The gloat bleats joyfully as her head falls to the ground” (175). The man turns out to be the god who gives back the life of Shahrzad, glad of her sacrifice. This story though strange very beautifully presents the patriarchal set-up where man is all powerful like god who decides for a woman whether to survive or not and woman is like a beast always at the mercy of the ‘brutal god’ [man]. Wazir represents the crude society which is always ready to sacrifice women to please these self imposing gods.

Desai also paints a similar patriarchal society on her literary canvas though she had only a few years of existence in her homeland. The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard being a fantasy world lacks a strong portraiture of female characters. One can hardly encounter three women characters each eccentric in their own way. Desai, though spent most of her life in the United States, is sensitive towards the traditional patriarchal practice of her homeland. She strappingly criticizes this cultural practice. Her view of the Indian women’s lives inside their families is also not different from her contemporaries. It is this patriarchal attitude of society that coerces women to pray for a boy child. In The Hullabaloo in the
Guava Orchard when Kulfy is awaiting child birth, the entire village longs for a boy baby. Desai writes “released happy and full of relief if the baby was a boy; released full of disappointment and resentment if it wasn’t” (HGO 7). The author brings to the fore that it is not the attitude of men alone. Even women gloat over the birth of a boy child. The sarcasm of Desai cannot be dispensed with when she informs her readers that the entire village celebrates the birth of Sampath, the protagonist for they felt that “though he might not be very plumb or very fair was triumphantly male” (12).

Desai shows no hesitation in registering her protest against the male chauvinistic society which demands more sacrifices from a woman. For them, she should be a perfect beauty proportioned in weight and height, fair skinned, even if she is not beautiful, money should excel in everything but should be a slave or a doll, dancing to her in-laws’ and husband’s tune, though stupid. These words are written with utmost derision that they strike the target without fail. The fact that women are denied the privilege of expressing their willingness regarding their marriage has been subtly suggested by Desai describing the plight of the girl to get the attention of even a monkey man. To allure him, she puts on a heavy make up and yet is unsuccessful.

The tone of this young author goes serious in narrating the unjust power that a husband imposes on wife on the basis of his physical strength.
In *The Inheritance of Loss*, she criticizes her husband’s act of beastly punishment of having violent sex with his wife Nimi just because she has stolen his powder puff. Desai strongly feels it is an act of abusing womanhood. Nimi tries to escape from it, but could not. Desai suggests that it is not the exceptional story of Nimi, but most women experience this sort of atrocity by illustrating that when Nimi tries to escape from Jemubhai, the aunts have locked their bedroom door as there are “All the stories of brides trying to escape” (IL 169). Instead of understanding another woman, they abuse her for bringing shame to the family and society.

The physical union of husband and wife is considered sacred and a way to accomplish oneness in the Indian society. However, men like Jemubhai, the judge use it to avenge their wife. Desai details at length the sexual relationship the judge has with his wife. She says that he “repeated the gutter act again and again. Even in tedium, on and on, a habit he could not stand in himself. This distaste and his persistence made him angrier than ever and any cruelty to her became irresistible” (170). He abuses her sexually to “teach her the same lessons of loneliness and shame he had learned himself” (170). He never speaks to her or looks at her after this. The most humiliating part is that at the end of his deed, he will spend “hours in the bathroom with soap, hot water and dettol. He follows his ablutions with a clinical measure of whiskey as if consuming a disinfectant” (170). Nimi is also denied of food just because she does not
know how to try it in English. He says, “You can’t say the word, you can’t eat it” (171). This is not the odd attitude of a man towards his wife. It is rather a generation old practice of manhandling wife and as rightly hinted in *The New York Review* that “Patel is like the man who routinely grew up watching his father beat his mother, only in this case the progenitor is the very system that made” (19) such a disgrace on women. Another fact is that the judge underwent a strong sense of self-loathing as result of his humiliating sojourn in the UK and to overcome this, he avenges his wife. “So an unsociable loner and inept Jemu rapes his wife from behind the veneer of anger and disgust” (Solanki 74).

The lack of love and care make Nimi feel very lonely. “She has fallen out of life altogether” (IL 172). The heartless husband punishes his wife by turning her out of his dwelling. She becomes dumb and even the servants neglect her and make her eat their leftover. Her husband finds her to be more irritable and treats her very cruelly. When he finds footprints on the toilet seat, “he could barely contain his outrage, took her head and pushed it into the toilet bowl” (173). The inhuman attitude of her husband drives her insane. She sleeps on days and spends sleepless nights. “She peered out at the world but could not focus on it, never went to the mirror, because she couldn’t see herself in it, and anyway she couldn’t bear to spend a moment in dressing and combing, activities that were only for the happy and the loved” (173). Such a pathetic state of his wife fails to arise
any sympathy in the judge. Instead, he shouts at her with more hatred, “… he took her fallen beauty as a further affront and felt concerned the skin disease would infect him as well. He instructed the servants to wipe everything with Dettol to kill germs” (173). He insults her deeply by spitting out these poisonous words: “Don’t show your face outside…. People might run from you screaming” (173). Such incidents lead to total abolition of love from the couple and replaced it with bitterness. “They belonged to this emotion more than to themselves, experienced rage with enough muscle in it for entire nations coupled in hate” (173).

Jemubhai also uses his physical strength to subdue her. His bad and inhuman treatment instigates aversion even in the readers. Such a beastly punishment drives Nimi as an unwanted and unwelcomed guest to her maternal home where she is compelled to end her life after giving birth to a child. However, the judge never shows any remorse over this unfortunate incident and he “chose to believe it was an accident” (397). Desai takes Nimi’s life as an instance to proclaim how women are tortured and tormented by their husbands and society, and how their married lives are turned into a hell on earth.

Roy, Hariharan and Desai have presented plausibly and convincingly that marriage, a cultural practice that most often humiliates and destroys the essence of women. They are also unanimous in highlighting other factors that subjugate women with the strong cultural
backup. They prove that husbands are not the only one who is instrumental in bringing disgrace and discrimination to the womenfolk. The patriarchal society of India takes various forms and degrees to bring about this, which ultimately ends in the erasing of women’s identities. The writers chosen well delineate this kind of experiences in their narratives. Roy suggests this thought from the beginning through the use of “no locusts stand I” which almost does the work of a refrain in this poetic novel. Chacko, Ammu’s brother says to the twins that “Ammu had no Locusts Stand I” (GST 57). Even before marriage, she has experienced this at her home. Chacko is given the highly expensive Western education just because he is lucky to be born as a male in this patriarchal society and Ammu is denied even higher education at homeland just because she is a girl child. Such atrocities which are prevalent in the Indian society have been faithfully recorded by Roy.

Roy shows that sons are equally well equipped in tormenting mothers just as life partners. Chacko is a good example. He proves himself to be no better than his father. Though he saves his mother from one patriarch, he is equally good in perturbing her. He demands his mother’s adoration, at the same time punishes her for it by praising Margaret whom she dislikes.

Hariharan too vindicates that man will not miss an opportunity to exploit women by adapting any tactics. The story of Eliamma is a case in
point. An invisible man cheats her by professing help in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Here the insatiable quest for freedom for a woman is beautifully represented by Eliamma who, fed up with restrictions comes forward to pledge her body to a man believing his words that he would return the body if she demands it back after a month. Eliamma too in her enthusiasm to travel far into the sea falls a prey before his sweet coated words. She enjoys a few weeks but soon she realises “why the stranger has been so generous; so quick to part with his riches: to be completely invisible was to be lonely in a way the living did not know” (GVM 130). As has been rightly remarked by Shinde, “Eliamma’s story points also to woman’s aspirations which are either totally ignored or deliberately suppressed by the dominating man” (128). The story of Eliamma also poses a serious and a hidden threat that the life of an ambitious woman would be punished beyond redemption.

Desai too provides lists of crime and atrocities committed against women. She writes about a “jealous husband cutting off wife’s nose or falsified record claiming death of widow who was still alive so her property might be divided among greedy descendants” (IL 57). Desai presents the bitter truth that gender discrimination is cultivated and practised by the parents themselves. They sow in the minds of the posterity seeds of discrimination by being partial to their children. Desai depicts that Jemubhai gets Western education, whereas the daughters [his sisters] are
denied even proper food. In anger the author writes, the “daughters were promptly deprived to make sure he got the best of everything, from love to food” (59).

The social vice of paying a huge dowry to a girl at the time of marriage, is commonly noticed in India. This system makes the parents shudder at the thought of begetting female children. Hariharan has explicated the negative impact of this cultural practice through the struggle put forth by Gowri to accrue money to be given as dowry. Desai too very sarcastically renders the pathetic plight of the parents of the girls who are ready to give any dowry for Jemubhai as “he would be the first boy of their community to go to an English university” (IL 89). The dowry depends on the worth of the girl. It is fixed after much “weighing and tallying: ugly face – a little more gold, a pale skin – a little less. A dark and ugly daughter of a rich man seemed their best bet” (89). Such a description unswervingly reminds one of the bargainings made over animals when they are sold.

Desai filches the unbroken attention to inhuman treatment meted out to widows and unmarried ones. They are contemptuously addressed as “unauthorized women”, who are given to soldiers “in an unauthorized part of town on whom they might spend their aggrandizement of manhood, returned them”, “smelling like rabbits from a rabbit hutch” (89)
Loneliness is an inseparable experience of Indian women, irrespective of the time, age and diverse communal backdrop. The chosen writers vociferously highlight loneliness as the constant companion of womanhood as they occupy only the periphery in the patriarchal society. This precarious situation has been sounded repeatedly by these writers. Desai also subtly suggests this solitude in the midst of her humorous narration. She talks at length on how the people at Sampath’s house paid so much attention to Sampath as he is a boy, but everyone neglects the daughter Pinky, the sister of Sampath. They assign least importance to her studies and come to the orchard to help the son. She is not given the choice to pursue her studies. Her father compels her to go for a typing class. When she resents, her father gives a long talk: “if you did not do so, your place in the hierarchy of things, indeed your very identity in the social sphere, would be totally obliterated” (HGO 80). She feels totally perplexed. Her mother too fails to give her any emotional support. So she laments “Ammaji’s tastes were a century behind the times and her father and Sampath were of no help either. She was all alone…” (81).

Loneliness is encountered by the protagonist Sai in *The Inheritance of Loss*. She has been presented by Desai as a symbol of womanhood. As Deshmukh says “The main character, Sai, (a stand-in or fragment of De-sai herself perhaps), embodies the very idea of rootlessness in the modern world” (76). She becomes an orphan at an early age. She seems to have
inherited loneliness and rootlessness from her parents who were deserted by everyone owing to their inter-caste marriage. After the death of her parents in an accident, she gets an invitation from her grandfather, and she goes there happily and with much expectation. But her life at Cho Oyu disappoints her beyond redemption. She could get neither care nor concern from the crude grandfather. He is cold and indifferent. The grandfather comes forward to accommodate Sai because “Sai could look after Mutt, he reasons. The cook was growing decrepit. It would be good to have an unpaid somebody in the house to help with things as the years went by” (IL 210). Living there, “She had a fearful feeling of having entered a space so big…. She became aware of the sound of microscopic jaws slow-milling the house to saw-dust…” (34). These words of Sai depict how intense is her sense of loneliness in that big house. “Unhappy with the boring present, she thinks, she’d have to propel herself into the future by whatever means possible or she’d be trapped forever in a place whose time had already passed” (Naik 2).

As a result, she turns to the cook just as a sunflower turning towards the sun for love, but she soon realises that he loves really his son and “she was just the alternative, the one to whom he gave his affection, if he could not have Biju, the real thing” (IL 187). Her attempt to find comfort from the brief love she nurtures for Gyan also ultimately ends in failure and “Sai becomes distraught at the violent change that sears the delicately spun web
of love in her life, initiating her into an unpleasantly real world” (Thekkayyam 171).

How the patriarchal Indian society favours women to be exploited and abused by men is portrayed by Roy par excellence through many incidents and most poignantly through the police officer who abuses Ammu publicly. Though Pinky’s deed of getting ready to board the bus with a hairpin, “a weapon against men who might misbehave on seeing such a pretty girl at close quarters” (HGO 29) evokes humour, it divulges the uncultured way of behaviour of men. When she does react against this hideous deed, many men criticise her. The male chauvinists ask, “But why are you making such a big fuss about a little thing like a wink? Some others said, “There are some ladies who should be made to walk to work” (29).

The exploitation intensifies if a woman tries to defy the system. Lola in The Inheritance of Loss is one such bold woman who goes to meet the Pradan to complain against his GNLF men who have encroached upon their land. The Pradan tries to send her away. When he finds that she is a strong-willed person, he very cleverly abuses her in order to weaken her confidence. He makes fun of her saying that he is the Raja and a raja can have any number of wives and he abuses her womanhood by asking, “dear aunty, would you like to be the fifth?” (IL144). The men assembled in the room laugh. He also comments badly about her physic. Even the women
join the men in ridiculing her. So as expected by them, Lola hurries out of the room unable to bear the insult. For the first time in her life, she realises the difficulty of a widow. She invokes her husband’s spirit to understand her pang of heart. “Look at what you’ve left me to. Do you know how I have suffered, do you have any idea??? Where are you?! … and look what I have to deal with, just look. I don’t even have my decency” (245). These words emerge from a wounded heart and as Haldar rightly remarks “The humiliation Lola had to face was more painful than death and insurgency was at the root of her humiliation. Lola’s social status and her assets do not save her from an insecurity that is usually attached to exited condition” (93). Such atrocities are committed against women just because they are considered as mere objects to be dispensed with and due to the bitter fact that most of the feminine gender meekly accept this and yield to patriarchy and its hegemony.

The cross-section of the Indian society which the chosen authors Roy, Hariharan and Desai have successfully weaved on their literary canvas displays a great variety of women, belonging to various generation, occupying different locale with diverse educational and economic background; but they are astonishingly unique in presenting suffering and alienation as the inseparable companion of womanhood. They feel the need for revival in the lives of their gender in achieving self-realization and acceptance. This being the need of the hour, they feel that it is their
obligation to set ideal women and present to their readers thereby aiding them to emulate and bring a healthy change in the society, and thus challenging the patriarchal cultural set-up. Each of the chosen writers provides a few women characters to demonstrate that a woman can shed her inhibition and emerge powerful from the age old suppression like the phoenix bird. It requires undaunted spirit and courage to defy an established and powerful patriarchal system which is very much a part of Indian culture. These writers do not preach alone but also try to practice this in their life and be models.

Roy, known for her revolutionary ideas, “raises her banner of revolt against a male-dominated, patriarchal society” (Diwedi 54) in her only fictional narrative *The God of Small Things*. Ammu does not give her children any surname which usually goes after the father. She feels that “choosing between her husband’s name and her father’s name didn’t give much of a choice” (GST 37). “By cocking a snook at this ancient practice of fixing a woman’s identity in relation to her father and husband, Ammu declares her independence and self-reliance” (Banerjee 88). She does not like even her beloved twins playing with her body. “She wanted her body back, it was her body” (GST 222). Here as Ranjana Harish feels, it “brings in a distinct feminist shade of the feminist assertion of female body as female estate” (qtd. in Chandra 159). In this wild mood, Ammu has a feministic approach to life. She “emerges as the feminist rebel who rejects
any kind of accommodationist stance, challenges the androcentric conventions of her society, and becomes a symbol of all that the men folk do not want her to be” (Banerjee 86). It is undoubtedly her mental strength that drives her to the police station to save Velutha, her lover from the allegation of abducting the children. Talking about this, Roy writes that Baby Kochamma believes that “however angry she was, would never publicly admit to her relationship with Velutha…. But Baby Kochamma hadn’t taken into account the Unsafe Edge in Ammu. The Unmixable Mix-the infinite tenderness of motherhood, the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (GST 321). Thus, “Ammu evidently becomes a liberated woman or a feminist. Through her Arundhati raises her strong protest against the age-old agonies and sufferings of the suppressed class of women” (Diwedi 55).

Rahel too reveals the attitude of a modern woman who shows the audacity to walk out of the marriage when she understands the futility of it just like the first world woman Margaret Kochamma who divorces Chacko. Through the portrayal of Rahel, Roy seems to assert that “every woman has to work out her own salvation as no outside agency can deliver her from the bondage of prevalent social customs and traditions…. The novelist has depicted Rahel as a model for liberated Indian woman, and not as a representative of the Indian women in general” (Ghotra 253-54).
Hariharan herself has feministic disposition. She feels the immediate urge to fight against the atrocities done to women. Commenting on it she has remarked:

I have considered myself part of the Indian Women’s movement for the last twenty years…. To begin with as a student in the mid-seventies, my political concerns more almost exclusively directed and shaped by feminism. Perhaps this was because I was then a student, in America, and this was the time of passionate debate of ERA (Equal Rights Amendment) and so forth. But once I returned to India in 1978, I saw that any real participation in movements for social change had to come to terms with the big class-gender issue. (Navarro and Tejero 207)

Harihan seeks the aid of Indian mythology to depict how a woman can turn into a dangerous destroyer and frighten men who have done her wrong. It is shown through Amba and it seems to be the writer’s message to her female readers to be courageous like Amba and not to be submissive like Mayamma. Paranjape points out,

One of the most moving of the several mythological stories which the book contains – all of which are a part of Devi’s cultural and psychological survival kit- the most striking, fascinating and disturbing is the story of her Kritya, who
haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. She burns with anger, she spits fire. She sets the world ablaze like Kali houting in hunger. Each age has its kritya. (20)

The myth of Kritya is a caveat that the writer wants to put across to the male chauvinists, not to indulge in ill treating women.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Devi becomes the voice of the author who advocates not to yield to the power of patriarchy. She shows a way to emerge out of the strangling atmosphere of men’s world to escape from humiliation and mental agony and find solace on the lap of the mother Sita which alone can provide a permanent succor. She is Hariharan’s model woman who resembles a feminist who tries to persuade legislators to break down the remnant of male supremacy which empowers the husband to commit rape on his wife with impunity and with immunity…. The feminists assert that the women must retain the freedom over her own body, must exercise the right to be free from sexual assault from anyone, husband included. (Chatterji 24)

She tries “to refuse him my [her] body when his hand reaches out” (TFN 74). Feministic thoughts creep into her mind. She motivates her mind and reassures herself by saying to her mind, “Take up your weapons …. Ride into the dark night, disguised as a beautiful woman and devour the demons,
thirty to hundred at a mouthful …. She wants to become a freak, to soar high” (94-95).

Parvathiamma, the mother-in-law of Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is another woman who is offered as a model who too renounces her husband as a result of endless humiliation and loneliness and walks out, seeking independent salvation. “Parvatiamma had been more ambitious. She had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life allotted to her, the life of a house holder” (64). Sita is the most powerful woman portrait of Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* who has an aura of magical power around her. Though Devi is the heroine of this fictional narrative, it is in Sita, the mother that one could evince heroic qualities. She is a strong-willed confident woman who will not succumb to problems even if it is the death of her husband. Soon after the death of her husband, Sita returns to Chennai. Her relatives gathered there to see a mourning, depressed wife. But Sita emerges out as a “graceful figure” (99) and greets her relatives with a smile. “They found themselves taken in charge; the object of their pity, their overflowing sympathy, stood dry-eyed, smiling and chatting as if this were a dinner party coming to a graceful, inevitable end” (99). She makes the best out of a bad bargain through her strong unyielding determination and thus becomes Hariharan’s ideal woman. Her potentiality wins for her the admiration of even her daughter who wonders
Why was Amma not called Devi? Smooth-skinned, small-made Amma. Perfect, somehow compact and self-sufficient like a shell found whole by the sea shore. Reticent unfathomable, like the wild song of the sea trapped in the shell, capable of exercising power over the ears that listens, and learns to love. Like the brass ‘devi’, she wears her tokens of beauty with pride. (83)

Sita feels defeated when her daughter elopes with a singer Gopal unable to withstand the neglect of Mahesh, her husband. For the first time, Sita feels her hopes being shattered and disillusioned: “Sita was in a fury. So this was what she reaped after years of sacrifice, years of iron-like self-control… the best of possible lives have been offered to her daughter”. But “she had torn her respectability, her very name to shreds” (108). This kind of disillusionment rules her only for a short time. Soon, she regains her self-control and begins to analyse the matter and understands that too much caring and planning have spoiled her daughter’s life just like “too much water, too much lushness” (109) that threaten her plants. This realization drives her to leave them on their own, both her garden and daughter and “sat before the relic from her past, the broken veena, freshly dusted and waited for Devi to come back to her” (109). Such an act of verve is very seldom accomplished by Indian women in the patriarchal social and cultural scenario.
Hariharan, being a feminist, does not seem to sympathize with women who willingly subjugate themselves to the whims and fancies of man. She seems to invoke the message that a woman should aspire to become independent and assertive like the grandmother of Vasu Master. She is a tenacious woman, who has a definite concept of her own, never yielding to the unjust dominance of her husband or her son. Vasu Master recalls his grandmother thus: “My grandmother was a thin, shrivelled old woman whose flesh hung over her sharp-edged bones. She was a formidable bully” (GVM 34). She has used food as medicine and eaten chilies as medicine and raw. “She looked a little like chilly herself – thin, long and sharp-nosed, with grasping hands, a stinging tongue and teeth that jutted out her mouth as if she would swoop down on you any minute and bite” (35). Defying her husband’s protest, she has donated her gold bangles to the freedom struggle. She also has the potential to flout the wrongs committed by men and to take challenges. Above all, it is her view about a husband that reveals her traits of a feministic self. She views that a husband is just a “hungry stomach and a few other things, never mind what. But all equally greedy, swallowing like a big red swollen mouth, then chewing and belching” (174). This unearths her undaunted spirit and supplies uniqueness to her character. She can be termed as a representative of modern women who try to carve out a separate space of their own. Vasu Master’s grandmother does that even in domestic sphere.
Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* also lists down some women characters who can be emulated by the Indian women. She buttresses the view of Bhargava who believes staunchly that it is the woman to whom men come for solace and peace by portraying strong willed and ambitious women like Rekha, Meena, Tara and so on. The pragmatism that a young girl like Meena exhibits, wins the appreciation and even the envy of an educated and highly experienced person like Shiv who “wishes he were half as sure of himself” (TS 35) as Meena. It is none other than she who urges Shiv to spring into action. “To her it is a foregone conclusion that he will pick up spear and a shield and rush headlong into battle” (57). This heroic thought of young Meena makes Shiv comment her as “an avenging angel” (99), a “girl-matriarch” (110) who instead of thinking about love and her beauty at this tender age of twenty four, “sits in a meeting to rescue an aging historian from the mob” (111). So strong a girl who “do not flinch at the prospect of violence, of violation” (110) is what Hariharan expects from the next generation women to fight against the cultural phenomenon called patriarchy.

One welcoming change that one notices in Hariharan’s text is that her women demand equality which is the emerging cultural change which education and globalization have brought in the Indian scenario. When Shiv’s friends assemble there to discuss about the speakers, Jyothi, the friend of Meena interferes asking why there are only lists of men speakers.
Why not include speakers “from women’s groups or just plain individual independent women? History has been a masculine exercise for far too long” (139). Hariharan also hints at the rising of feministic movement by talking about a woman’s organization called “Secular Women Against Patriarchy (SWAP)” (144).

The need to rise from subjugation creeps in inadvertently in all the fictional narratives of Hariharan. In her novel *When Dreams Travel* also one gets evidences of these feministic principles. She portrays powerful women who even in their restricted and subjugating environment try hard to assert their individuality and efficiency as a part of their existence. Shahrzad, the heroine of this novel bears testimony to this. In the first part of the novel, the protagonist is presented to the readers as a bold woman who readily agrees to become a martyr to save her country and its virgins from the tyranny of its sultan, “who is talking for her life, does not look frightened” (DT 6). Tales become her weapon, powerful enough to hold the Sultan in restrain and as Hariharan says, “It is she who holds the scene together. If she stops, if she collapses, if she loses Shahryar’s interest or attention, the roof could cave in, and with it, all hope of the city’s deliverance, or its Sultan’s redemption” (7). Shahrzad is a very shrewd woman who knows to judge man and act accordingly by being acquiescent to him.
The feminist in Hariharan surfaces out often in the novel. Shahrzad, who is nearing her delivery thinks like a feminist which very much varies from that of a traditional Indian woman. Instead of waiting anxiously for the baby, she is quite impatient to get rid of it, to “expel the ruthless parasite devouring everything inside her” (127). This strange feeling comes to her as a result of her struggle in life. She is also shattered by her realization “how alone she or any martyr is” (127). However, she is adamant that though “she has not yet triumphed, she has kept the murderous sword of the sultan at bay for nine long months and she will die the death of a fighter who has fought to her last breath” (128). The intensity of suffering and her anxiety to hold the attention of her husband drives her to think like a true feminist. “Her part is done. Her body is her own again, to risk or to save. She lets herself sag completely ….and she falls asleep instantly” (129).

Through Hariharan, the traditional Indian belief that behind every successful man there is a woman gets strengthened. Dunyazad is the woman who proves this by being a pillar of support to her step-son who as she “sees is fit to rule than her son” (198). Hariharan explicates, though Umar, the step-son is a king,

There is a woman who is watching him from a window, a quiet, ingenious woman who can rule, though her power will always be circumscribed by her invisibility. But she seems
content with her unofficial status; she does not claim the title of Sultana. She remains sayyida, the lady Dunyazad, briefly holding the reins for her predecessor’s child …. (198) This shows the power of Dunyazad who cleverly keeps everyone at bay. “She ruled discreetly” (198) and her step-son shows great respect towards her. When Dunyazad realizes that her step-son has equipped himself as a ruler, she retreats herself and this adds magnificence to her character. Dunyazad has also an undeniable trait of individuality and self-respect and when her identity is questioned by men, she raises her voice and thus becomes an ideal woman.

Desai’s first literary work *The Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* is noted, for its sarcastic portrayal of the Indian life. It lacks a powerful woman portrayal. Pinky is her contribution who displays some uniqueness of disposition. She is very bold, though spoilt a bit, she does not submit to male dominance. She shows the dare to punish men who ill-treat women in a thickly populated bus. “She speared a man who was not only taking up too much room in her opinion, but had made the mistake of winking at her, unaware of whom he was up against” (HGO 29).

It is an undeniable fact that one can behold quite ironically in the Indian society that women become the instrument of maintaining patriarchy. Roy, Hariharan and Desai portray unvaryingly how in the Indian society, it is seen as a traditional practice that one woman becomes a
source of misery to another. Such women “act as agents of this society and help in the undoing of another woman” (Kundu 174) and as Simone de Beauvoir describes such women internalize the patriarchal ideology. All the writers chosen for study bear witness to this and they strengthen the fact that a true enemy of a woman is not man but another woman. Roy’s text *The God of Small Things* provides ample evidence to support this fact.

Baby Kochamma in *The God of Small Things* who plays the major villain’s role if viewed carefully bears authentication to this fact. When young, she renounced the happiness of life as her love for an Irish Father Mulligan ended as a failure. She hates the twins because of their hybridity and Ammu just because she shows the courage to fight against fate, whereas Baby Kochamma subdues herself and accepts it gracefully. She loved Father Mulligan and when she found out that she could not marry him, she accepted the fate of living a life of a “Man-less Woman” (GST 45). But Ammu dares to love another man and so Baby Kochamma hates Ammu and contributes her share in destroying her life. As she could not enjoy her life, she could not even bear to see the twins enjoying happiness in each other’s company. “She grudged them the comfort they drew from each other. She expects from them some token of unhappiness” (46). It is she who brainwashes Chacko when he comes back home to punish Ammu and bring devastation on her and the twins. “It was her idea that Ammu be made to pack her bags and leave. That Estha be Returned” (322).
Mammachi in *The God of Small Things* also exhibits this negative approach to her fellow sex. She loves her son so much that she could not bare her son loving any other woman. Hence, when Chacko marries an English woman without seeking her concern, she gets very angry. Quite strangely, it is aimed not at her son but at the daughter-in-law. She despises her as “shop-keeper’s daughter” (167) and Roy informs her readers quite interestingly that Mammachi hates Margaret not just because she is a shop keeper’s daughter, she would have despised Margaret Kochamma “even if she had been heir to the throne of England. It wasn’t just her working class background Mammachi resented. She hated Margaret Kochamma for being Chacko’s wife. She hated her for leaving him. But would have hated her even more had she stayed” (168). Roy also proves the Indian belief that woman can be the creator and destroyer of life beyond doubt through this novel. Ammu and Velutha’s lives are destroyed beyond redemption by the army of women. Roy avers that they “did what they had to, the two old ladies Mammachi provided the passion. Baby Kochamma the plan. Kochu Maria was their midget lieutenant” (258). Mamamachi’s “tolerance of Men’s Needs as far as her son is concerned, becomes the fuel for her unmanageable fury at her daughter” (258). Mammachi and Baby kochamma “despite being women, they have internalized patriarchal notions” (Mani and Rao 175).
Hariharan’s characters also declare this highly deplorable condition of Indian society where a woman instead of helping another, indulge in aggravating her misfortune. This idea gets strengthened through the character of the mother-in-law of Mayamma. She waits for two years to see if Mayamma could get pregnant. When she could not, the mother-in-law “tore my new saris and gave me yesterday’s rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman” (TFN 112). When Mayamma is admiring her new sari, her mother-in-law “pulled up my sari roughly, just as her son did every night” (113). The mother-in-law also makes her to cut her breast with a blade and bathed the lingam with her blood. She added “No, no Maya. No rice for you today. It’s Friday. No rice today, no vegetables tomorrow, no tamarind the day after” (114). She torments Mayamma’s mind by constantly reminding her about the inability to become a mother: “Stop thinking of food daughter-in-law, think of your womb. Think of your empty, rotting womb and pray” (114). Mayamma surrenders meekly to this inhuman treatment just because she, like every Indian “girl is brought up to think that the least fulfilment out of life can be attained only through wifehood and motherhood” (Chatterji 6).

Desai also echoes after Roy and Hariharan and affirms that women basically enjoy inflicting trouble to her own gender. This is especially true in the case of mother-in-laws in the Indian society. While, how the mother-in-laws behave cruelly in the southern part of India, are presented by Roy
and Hariharan, Desai projects the mother-in-laws of North India and proves that it is a common problem throughout India and perhaps a universal problem. She presents the grandmother of the mathematics tutor Gyan who waits for an opportunity to persecute the daughter-in-law. So when she finds that her grandson has done a mistake, she blames the daughter in law, “glad of an excuse to do so” (IL 272).

A close analysis of the select fictional narratives of Roy, Hariharan and Desai thus makes it apparent that however one cries for gender equality and identity, the “Indian traditions do not support her at all during her struggle to redefine herself”. (Mukesh 197). It is no exaggeration to comment that:

the poor status of women, their oppression and exploitation, cannot be examined as an isolated problem in Indian society. Although the status of women constitutes a problem in the rigidly hierarchical and inequitable social structure which exist in India, the relative inferiority superiority of various roles is much more clearly defined. The inequality and subordination of women is an instrument or function of the social structure. (196)

Yet, she “has to work for her liberation without resigning herself to her destiny” (Mukesh 197).
Thus, in the chapter, an attempt is made to study of the condition of women in India as viewed by the three novelists Arundhati Roy, Githa Harihara and Kiran Desai. It is the cultural and social conditions that assign an inferior position to woman in the form of care and comfort, thereby making her completely dependent. It imprisons her within the walls of a family, which strangles and hinders her mobility, reduces her identity and self respect and brings in only suffering and loneliness as companions. What is surprising is that most women patiently endure the atrocities brought about by the patriarchal system just because they blindly believe that only endurance and patience bring dignity to them. This being the general condition of women in India, Arundhati Roy, Githa Harihara and Kiran Desai register them candidly, and at the same time attacking its unhealthy cultural patterns. They also highlight that it is time that women should realize their potentiality and capability and strive to break the bondage and spring out victorious. To provide inspiration and encouragement, they have created powerful women protagonists who challenge patriarchy and have enlightened them regarding the possible consequences their deed can bring forth and the degree of confidence and audacity they require to be successful, thus paving the seeds of great cultural change.