When Dreams Travel
Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* is a re-writing of *The Arabian Nights' Entertainments* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. Unlike the old compilation of tales, Hariharan has written this novel from a feminist angle. This novel forces the readers to think about the depiction of male-dominated society in the famous translation of the medieval Arab anthologies. Through this novel, Hariharan not only answers back to a male-dominated literary tradition but also deconstructs and erodes the sexist impact of the original tales. *When Dreams Travel* is written in a self-assertive tone, and establishes story-telling as a women's tradition passed on among them, from generation to generation. In the novel, women invent the tales and male characters can listen and repeat them. Marina Warner, in *Signs and Wonders* has done a detailed and comprehensive study on story telling as a feminine tradition. She has referred to legendary “sibyls” in classic mythology, followed by widespread writings expressing fear and hatred of “women’s voices” in the medieval period. Story-telling, in the shape of short story writing, has indeed been friendly territory for women.

This novel can be mirrored as a strong manifesto of The Second Wave Feminism. Githa Hariharan by recasting *The Thousand and One Nights* brings into light one of the central ethical concerns of the novel, namely, to bring the marginalized to the centre in different ways by erstwhile colonial and enduring patriarchal power structures. *The Thousand and One Nights* is an example of a text that travelled from East to West and was incorporated into the annals of World Literature and imprinted its artistic and philosophical patterns on several genres of European/Western literatures starting from fairytales to fantasy.

*When Dreams Travel* is presented in two parts. Part one - entitled “Travellers”- is a rewriting of the original frame story of *The Thousand and One Nights*, the plot of which is outlined in an opening section entitled “In the Embrace of Darkness.” First two
sections recast the myth of Shaharyar and Shaharzad. Part two—titled “Virgins, Martyrs and Others”—has a brief introduction that is sub-headed as “A Dream, A Mirror,” which is followed by seven pairs of short-stories alternately narrated by Dunyazad (Shahrazad’s sister), and Dilshad (Dunyazad’s lover).

Hariharan has intentionally changed the scheme of the narrative to unravel the power struggle in which women are entrapped. This is one of the main structural differences between the original collection and Hariharan’s novel. In the second part of the novel, there are completely new tales told by Dunyazad (Sharzad’s sister) and Dilshad (slave girl) with feminist and moral agendas, which are totally different from the tales of the original Arab collection. According to the original story there are two brothers, the sultans of different cities, who discover that their wives are adulterous. “It is important to note that the lovers of the sultan’s wives are always lower in social rank, actually, slaves or “one of the meanest officers of the household” (Mack 2). As revenge for adultery, wives, lovers and attending slaves are killed to make up for this wrong. Eventually, one of the brothers, Shahriar, convinced that no woman is chaste, decides to marry a virgin every night and executes her in the morning, so as to prevent any disloyalty. In the city (where this carnage takes place), the sultan’s Visier had two daughters: Scheherazade, and the youngest, Dinarzade. Scheherazade was witty, courageous, and intelligent, had an extraordinary memory and had read in abundance philosophy, physic, history and the liberal arts. Besides, she was a flawless beauty and no one suspected her solid virtue. She asked her father to propose her to the sultan because she had a “design to stop the course of that barbarity (...) upon the families of this city” (Mack 10). As part of Scheherazade’s plan, her younger sister Dinarzade is to play a role:

As soon as I come to the sultan, I will pray him to allow you to lie in the bride-chamber that I may enjoy your company this one night more. If I
obtain that favor, as I hope to do, remember to awake me tomorrow, an hour before day, and to address me in these or some such words: my sister, if you be not asleep, I pray you, that till day break (…) you would tell me one of the fine stories of which you have read so many (Arabian Night’s Entertainment).

According to the canonized text, every night, at dawn, Scheherazade starts narrating a tale, full of adventure, suspense and magic. The sultan is so fascinated by the tale that he postpones Scheherazade’s execution till he has heard the end of her story. Of course, narrating to save her life, Scheherazade makes one tale lead to the next, weaving a continuous thread that makes her survive for one thousand and one nights, after which the sultan renounces his barbarous vow and deems Scheherazade the savior of many other damsels who would be sacrificed to his unjust resentment.

The first section called “In the embrace of Darkness”, highlights “a decided predilection for the night, during which a great deal of the novel’s action takes place” (Kagal, vol. 8). This presentation is more of a “tableau vivant”. The scene depicts two women and two men. Sultan Shahryar is in bed and listening to the tale his wife (Shahrzad) is telling. Next to the bed, on the floor, sits Dunyazad, younger sister of Shahrzad, waiting for the right moment to say her short (but vital) lines, which allows the story-teller to go on with her tales; a bit further, sits Zaman, the Sultan’s younger brother. In this static scene, Shahrzad is the only character who can move freely. Shahryar has the right to choose between life and death anytime. Dunyazad is the assistant, the right hand of the heroine. Zaman is the one who is provoking Shahryar’s hatred against women. In this original scene, unlike Shahrzad, the two brothers as well as Dunyazad are shown as silent listeners.

The opening story of the first section reveals the cruel intentions of the princes to suppress female identity. Sultan Shaharyar of Shahbad and his younger brother
Shahzaman, (ruler of Samarkand) are shown to be happy and contented with their kingdoms. One day, Zaman gets an invitation from his elder brother Shaharyar to visit Shahbad. Rejoiced at this prospect, he makes elaborate preparations and starts his journey along with his men. While taking rest at night in the camp, he suddenly remembers that he forgot to collect a special gift from his palace, and he silently moves to fetch it. To his utter dismay and surprise he finds his wife in the embrace of a dark slave. This shocks his senses and blurs his vision. He murders his wife along with the slave, comes back to his camp and orders his army to start the journey again. He reaches Shahbad and receives a grand welcome. His brother arranges a hunting expedition for him but being depressed he refuses to go. After the departure of Shaharyar, he witnesses another horrible sight. He sees his sister-in-law, the queen of Shahbad, lying naked and engaged in lecherous activities inside the palace-garden with black slaves. He finds comfort in the fact that he is not the only one who is cuckolded. His elder brother’s misfortune is greater than his. These thoughts revived him of his grim mental state. When Shaharyar comes back, he lets the cat out of the bag. Shaharyar becomes restless and perplexed and secretly spies on his queen. After discovering the truth, he murders her and decides to renounce the world till he meets another person suffering from such disgrace. Shahzaman agrees to travel with him far and wide. Finally, they reach a sea shore and see a giant Jinni with a chest. The Jinni opens the chest and picks up a box. The box reveals a beautiful girl. Jinni, her master lays his head on her knees and falls asleep. Then, the girl lures both the terror-stricken brothers and invites them for sexual pleasure. The brothers come down and meekly enjoy with her. Once satisfied, she takes Shaharyar’s and Shahzaman’s royal rings and adds them to her collection of ninety eight rings’ string. The brothers come to know how the Jinni carried this girl away on her bridal night when she was still a virgin, and as a revenge, since then she has been unfaithful to her master a hundred times, always in his presence and without ever being
caught. The brothers find comfort to discover a shame larger than theirs own. They come back to Shahbad and then Shaharyar announces a new law for the Harem i.e. finding a fresh virgin every day, marrying her for one night and slaying her in the morning, if she is unable to continue with entertaining stories.

The plan flowers into action, the brides enter the palace for a night and next morning they are meant for the executioner’s hungry axe. Sultan Shaharyar satiates his sexual desire in this way. Three years pass and there is a severe shortage of virgins. At this point, the Wazir of Shahbad sends her daughter- Shaharyar- to save the city with her cleverness and eloquence along with her younger daughter Dunyazad. Her main purpose is to save the girls of the city from the hands of the cruel king. She starts narrating a story on the first day and continues it for thousand and one nights by connecting it with other stories in series by her wit and intelligence. At last the king becomes so happy with the magical power of storytelling of Sharzad that he decides to make her his queen. Afterwards Shahzaman also marries Dunyazad and both the brothers rule their kingdoms.

But in her story, Hariharan challenges the traditional belief of patriarchy as discussed by first wave feminists as well which wants women to endure all kinds of sufferings and atrocities inflicted upon them. “She raises a valid question: how could a woman live happily with such a man as Shahryar” (Nair, vol. 27). The historical tale of Arabian Nights is a total mixture of adventure and fantasy, but Hariharan shows the physical suffering and brutality buried in its depth. The reason for this trauma and suffering is deep rooted in women’s psyche since ages. Patriarchy demands women to be subservient to them. The code of conduct expected from women is codified in Manusmriti as well. According to Manu, “A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of
any good qualities- it is because a wife obeys her husband that she is exalted in heaven” (115). Dictums of patriarchy on one hand uses and on the other hand abuses the women-folk.

‘Patriarchy’ literally means the ‘rule of the father’. It has been adopted by the majority of feminist theorists to refer to the way, in which societies are structured through male-domination over, and oppression of, women. Patriarchy, therefore, refers to the ways in which material and symbolic resources (including income, wealth and power) are unequally distributed between men and women, through such social institutions as the family, sexuality, the state, the economy, culture and language (Edgar and Sedgwick 269-70).

In the story, one clearly sees the misuse of power by both the brothers, and only this power defines their male identity. Hodson rightly asserts that male identity focuses on individual competence and knowledge. Patriarchy intensely believes in their competency to rule women-folk. Without the display of this power, they do not find meaning in their life. Shaharyar is portrayed as a person who gets pleasure by making women suffer and his brother helps him in this cruel act. Shahzaman means “shah of time, ruler of the age”, Shahryar means “friend of the city, master of the city” (9). But one sees this pair of rulers, seizers of power, dispensers of justice, not living up to their roles. Hariharan’s Zaman is portrayed as a deeply insecure and suspicious man, who feels scary in the night/dark. Zaman’s fear of not living up to his role, as a ruler, is deep-rooted in his lack of confidence on his virility. He hates this “Dark Continent” which he cannot master and is suspicious of the womankind.

The connection between sexuality and power is continuously echoed in the *The Thousand and One Nights*. As Hariharan’s narrator points out, in all the versions of the
tales the lover of the adulterous Queen is always someone lower in social rank than the
husband which equates “desire” with “power”. If a woman declares her feminine needs,
she has to have a “weaker man”. To justify this one sees the queen with “one of the
meanest officers of the household” (Mack 2). Such a desire of a woman brings threat to
the rulers as they can erode their claim to power. It can be concluded that the act of
leaving their kingdoms by Shaharyar and Shahzaman (in search of more examples of
disloyalty) is not to promote justice but to satisfy their wounded selves. It is not
necessary that a woman can only betray her husband by being sexually involved with
someone else; at times even her behavior can bring shame to her menfolk. Here, both the
brothers- the insecure and exploitive Zaman as well as the tyrannical Shahryar- can never
be considered as heroic characters. How can a king who demands the sacrifice of a virgin
every night be respected or admired by his people?

In her recasting of this old tale, Hariharan suggests the serious dangers of mutiny
Shahryar had to face by making his chamber in the dungeons of the palace, which is the
only place where he felt safe from the anger of fathers and brothers intent on avenging
their daughters and sisters. This novel shows the age-old ethical debate between
sexuality and power which is also discussed by Cixous in her gender theory where man
is always in the centre and woman is always marginalized. The link between male
sexuality and violence is continuously repeated in the novel. The two men, the brothers
Shahryar and Shahzaman, are both shown as holding a sword each: the former a “mere
ornament...a grand showy thing of gem-encrusted gold” while the latter holds another
“plaything in his hand, an ancient, blood-dripping sword” (5). This scene, which is
described in the text as “self-absorbed,” is presented as a primal scene- an archetype of
sorts rendered “shamelessly immortal” (7) not only in art but it is implied in life as well.
Masculinity and violence, both are interrelated in this male dominated world. The very
first part underscores the act of violence that the brothers plan. One notices that “It is she [Shahrzad] 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 becomes the saviour of female identity as she narrates every night a new story to the whimsical king. Her act satisfies his wounded ego and thus she is able to save the lives of so many other females. She is no longer the archetypal victim fighting for her survival but a bold woman well aware of the danger hidden in the situation. Gradually she changes her position from that of a victim to that of the puppeteer, the master-narrator who carefully plays and controls this scene. Against the passive listeners, namely King Shahrazar and Shahzaman, she is the one who is “gifted with Movement… talking for her life (7). Shahrzad does not feel frightened by the violence that surrounds her; rather she revels in the danger and becomes a model of the feminist heroine. Readers see that “She throws back her neck, holds her goblet high and drinks deeply, eyes shut. What she does not swallow she holds for a moment or two, rolling the liquid in her mouth as if she is tasting it for the last time. Then she wets her lips with her tongue and begins again” (6).

Shahrzad surfaces as a glorious fighter, who not only saves her own life but also of many other women by her flawless performance night after night. Again, in Hodson terms, she attains her identity. Her identity revolves around issues relating to others. She has been well re-named, Shahrzad, “born of the city”, “clever, ambitious and quick-tongued” (16), who makes the king realize that all women need not to be killed. She stands in opposition to Shaharyar and shows her great concern for the city and its welfare. Shahrzad witnesses the harsh and cruel ways of patriarchy to suppress and use women but eventually she overcomes all the obstacles. Rama Kundu says about Githa Hariharan’s writing competency:
With remarkable skill she evokes the grim “faces” of the thousand (plus one) nights; at the same time she uses it deconstructively to bring out the terror, the terrible oppression and injustice, the inherent chauvinism of the comfortable patriarchal assumptions often blunt-insensitive-irrational that she reads between the lines of the world famous legend. (Kundu 180)

In the second section of the first part of the narrative entitled “On the Way to Paradise” which begins the day after the thousand and one nights are over, one sees, the regal couples sitting comfortably in a shaded grove of the royal garden. In this section Tong raises “questions about power” (160). Shaharzad has told her tales, entertained the king for thousand and one nights and now has to settle down to her routine.

Shaharyar, overwhelmed and fully entertained by the tales, now asks his beloved wife who has escaped his sword by her sharp wits, “Shahrzad... where did all those stories come from?” (19). Shahrzad’s responds in a brief, most unromantic and unpleasant way, “From my dreams; only those whose necks are naked and at risk can understand them” (20). Shahrzad refrains from giving the Sultan a straight-forward answer because as she says bluntly, “only those at risk should be entitled to understand the dreams that make up for the absence of a sword” (20).

Freud, in his Interpretations of Dreams, discussed that dream is the conscious expression of an unconscious fantasy or wish which is not accessible to the individual in waking life. According to Freud, every dream represents a wish fulfillment. Dreams are representative of the imaginary fulfillment of a wish or impulse in early childhood, before such wishes have been repressed. The dream images represent the unconscious wishes or thought disguised through symbolization and other distorting mechanisms. He showed a direct link between dreams and unconscious with the help of his “Theory of Mind”. The unconscious, Freud saw as containing material which had been repressed for
some reason: because it was too traumatic or painful to reach consciousness. This material might consist of memories, fantasies, wishes, dreams, etc.

In Josselson terms, Shahrzad emerges as an example of moratorium woman who daydreams a lot and has an excessive need to be right. She shows her keen desire of victory through her dreams. “To dream”, in this novel, is a form of wisdom passed on between women. Although not allowed to travel physically, women always took to travel through imagination and what has been told and repeated as idle entertainment is, in fact, a manual for survival, secretly kept away from men. Shahrzad’s story itself shows that dreams and imagination can make women survive.

Shahrzad and her tales are tales of survivors, like myth, they travel across cultures and time, to reach today’s women still, “the powerless [who] must have a dream or two, dreams that break walls, dreams that go through walls as if they are powerless). In this way, Hariharan reclaims, explicitly, a tradition of women’s wisdom in storytelling” (24-25), linking the corruption of the original text (possibly feminist) to its Western colonization, as “women, dreams and stories are transported from India to Persia to Arabia to France to England” (25). Now one can clearly see that the time to tell stories is over. No woman is at risk any longer, Shahryar will now rule the city, and Shahrzad can disappear into the Harem.

Harihan enquires as to what happened to Shahrzad after her moment of grandeur. She asks how Shahrzad, such an extreme lover of risk and power games, ever feel contented spending the domestic life of a mother and a wife. How can she lock herself in the close doors of the Harem? This question is crucial to understand the feminist viewpoint in re-writing this tale by Harihan. Dunyazad knows from the very beginning the degree of her sister’s obsession with danger, and her pleasure in manipulating Shahryar each and every night either to win or die in the end. What will
happen then, when the excitement to play with death is over? What can live up to that experience? For Hariharan gender plays a major role in social identity. How a woman sees herself is very important. In society her role as a feminist or simply a traditional woman affects her identity.

Hariharan resurrects the past in a completely different way from that of the legend. Hariharan, in her novel, focuses on the experiences and aspirations of this ignored character called Dunyazad. Hariharan chose to build her plot around the ignored younger sister of Shahrzad, Dunyazad. Throughout the legend, Dunyazad is silent except occasionally rousing the interest of the Sultan by questioning her sister. One sees her always as an attendant, an accomplice of her sister. The story begins when Dunyazad is informed of Shahrzad’s death. This sad event is the beginning of new journeys, and new nights, with Dunyazad’s departure from her home city to discover the mystery behind the sudden death of her sister, echoing the previous journey in the canonized version, when the younger sultan receives an invitation to visit his brother. And this time, it is two sisters and not two brothers, who are searching for each other.

Hariharan re-invents the lives and views of women omitted in the original story. She focuses on the neglected character of Dunyazad, who travels secretly to Shahabad, in search of an answer to a suspicion she dares not formulate, though the reader can guess it. She fears that the murderous Sultan may have something to do with this sudden death of her sister. The quest for Dunyazad is to know the reason of Shahrzad’s death, and to give punishment to the person responsible for this. This new dimension indicates that women are operators of their unavoidable fate and cannot be pressurized.

Dunyazad reaches the palace. Sabiha (old nurse-maid of Shahrzad) welcomes her and makes arrangements for her comfortable stay. Dunyazad inquires about her sister’s sudden death. But Sabiha does not give a satisfactory answer even after much
persuasion. Dunyazad anticipates a mystery lurking behind the death of her sister. One night before the proposed meeting with Shaharyar, she “dreams” of travelling through tunnels and palaces as if in search of something. She dreams that she is visiting her sister’s tomb. On this magnificent grave, covered with a “sheet of living gems from one end of the room to the other, a sheet that lilts with a subtle, rhythmic movement, like a carpet of flowing water” (48) she finds, among these exquisite tokens of grief, the tablet with Shahrzad’s epitaph. It reads “Here lies Shahrzad, Beloved consort of sultan Shahryar, Daughter of the chief Wazir to the sultan of Shahabad, mother of Prince Umar and the departed prince Jaffār” (49).

The deliberate omission of her name on the tomb of Shahrzad in the dream makes Dunyazad restless as she cannot claim her identity as Shahrzad’s sister and she starts screaming in desperation as her hands cannot find her name on the tomb. The elimination of her name directly relates to the history of effacement and invisibility for women, from generation to generation. Next morning, Dilshad (the slave girl) comes to take Dunyazad for her meeting with the Sultan. They meet at the same place where they had met in the past but this time without Shahrzad. Sultan is now grown into a man with wrinkled skin and sunken cheeks. Sultan only speaks about his precious love for his queen and making of a precious tomb.

Hariharan restores certain silent women characters from the legend, reinvents them, gives them voice and a new identity and also creates new characters in her novel, which is a major deviation from the source text. Hariharan also brings to limelight characters like Dilshad, Raziya, the mother of Shahrzad and Dunyazad, and Sabiha (the nurse-maid of the palace) that were always behind the scene in the source text. Dunyazad’s encounter with them in the old palace after a gap of so many years brings out their feelings and personalities. The childhood reminiscences of Dunyazad
beautifully portray the character of Raziya, the Wazir’s wife and the proud mother of two beautiful daughters. In the legend, her role is limited to being a suppressed wife and a voiceless mother. But Hariharan, (through the dream of Dunyazad), makes readers see Raziya as a thoughtful, sensitive human being capable of independent wishes and desires, though unable to voice them. As a mother, she too has a right to take decisions about the lives of her daughters and is enraged at heart at being denied the right. Her silent death is her protest against the injustice meted out to her daughters. Thus, the silenced and absent mother hidden behind the colorful stories of the legend is conferred visibility and audibility here.

Through the character of Satyasama (who is absent in the original text and is purely an invention of Hariham), She directly attacks the male-dominated society which cannot accept that a woman can ever bypass her male counterparts in talent or even in presenting her viewpoint. Satyasama was a rare slave brought to the king’s court. She had a sleek fur all over her body and was a wandering poet in her own country. Her realistic poetic pieces offended the king and she was ordered to put to death. But the executioner out of sympathy did not kill her. Her neck was ringed and voice was changed forever. She was put into a merchant’s boat to be far away from her country. She became a favourite of Shahryar’s court with her strange poetic entertainments and also fell in love with one of the eunuchs guarding the Harem. This was a grim offence and she was imprisoned in a dark, windowless room. The magnanimous sky was the source of inspiration for her but without it she headed towards her untimely death. Dilshad was her nurse then in whose arms the poetess died giving her a parting kiss and Dilshad seems to carry this mark on her face as if keeping alive the poetess who spoke out strange truths.

Lesbian feminists opine that personal is political. They do not feel a need to be straight. The rebellion of Dunyazad against Shaharyar is linked with her choice of
Dilshad as her new lesbian lover and companion instead of Shahryar. The moment Dunyazad settles her political and affective alliances, she seems to be in peace with the death/disappearance of her sister Shahrzad as if she had achieved what dreams and visions had been urging her to do. This "inner peace" means the real source of anxiety was not to discover what may have happened to Shahrzad but to make sure that Shahryar, who locked his wife in the harem out of jealousy for her political wit and her growing popularity with people, does not win in the end.

Dunyazad emerges as a clear example of Poppen's foreclosure woman, who is high on self-esteem and is not anxious about her safety. With the help of the slave girl Dilshad, Dunyazad meets Prince Umar, son of her sister Shahryar, who seems to her the reflection of her father and mother. She cannot find anything of the Sultan in the young boy. The young prince is motivated by an ardent passion for his kingdom and its well-being. Dunyazad becomes a pillar of support to Prince Umar. She helps him in deposing of Shahryar. Unlike Shahrzad, Prince Umar is no liberator of the city. He only wants to compensate for his father's foolishness for another kind of order. One can compare him with Aurangzeb. Like Aurangzeb who did not wait for his father's death, killed two of his brothers, incarcerated his father and seized the throne for a long and ruthless reign, Prince Umar too imprisons his father and takes hold of the palace and the city following a violent dynastic succession. In this fictional case, the chosen prison is the Mausoleum, Sultan Shahryar is building for her queen. Umar is tired of his father's waste of money with obsessive planning and construction of monumental buildings. Dunyazad conspires with her nephew to overthrow Shahryar.

Two alternatives are given for Shahrzad's disappearance and readers keep guessing it till the end. The second alternative portrays Shahrzad growing old, and decaying in the empty life of the harem. This possibility takes the reader to the very last
tale of the novel, and it will be discussed later on. The other (the first) possibility is introduced by the discovery of a beautiful "ivory mirror" among Shahrzad's things. It is Dilshad, the slave appointed to take care of Dunyazad, who deliberately shows Dunyazad this object, hinting at the existence of a story connected to it. When Dunyazad enquires about the mirror, Dilshad tells that the mirror was given to Shahrzad by a merchant traveller (a young man). She also gives hint about the possible love story between the two. Dunyazad dreams of Shahrzad with this young man, happily smiling and looking younger in a carefree mood. This scene explains the sudden disappearance of Shahrzad from the palace. The Sultan might have deserted her and publically announced her death. No one ever finds her body and this further supports the belief of Dunyazad about her sudden disappearance.

Next day, Dunyazad dreams of her sister who is no more imprisoned in the palace, happy with her young companion of a lower rank. Deliberate mention of his low rank is very important here, as it is a woman's version. Shahrzad leaves the palace before she can be caught and punished. Here Shahrzad's departure from the palace is not linked with infidelity but her courage to leave the palace, (a symbol of masculine, patriarchal power) escaping the control of her husband. Shahrzad liberates herself from the secluded life of the harem, where she is neither allowed the simple pleasures of a normal life, nor does she have any share in public power to compensate for her exclusion from the life of the city. Dunyazad cannot decide between the possibility of a hasty, invented death to hide the escape of a wife, or the credibility of the official story claiming that Shahrzad after a short illness died quickly. The ambiguity of the narrative concerning Shahrzad's disappearance makes sense, as myths never die.

In the novel, marriage becomes a sort of tool to assert patriarchal power over females for the kings. It becomes very clear to the readers that both the brothers regard
marriage as a sort of entertainment. For them marriage is just a game. This game is called “The Martyr’s Walk”. This game reflects the martyrdom of women at the hands of a man with some sharp object. 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” (53). This was Shahrzad’s and Dunyazad’s favourite game as little girls. They play this game out of the desire to be heroines; they pretend they have to confront their killer, preparing to die. The difference between Dunyazad and Shahrzad, when they play the martyr’s game, is Shahrzad’s desire for life, which makes her walk differently than the usual sufferers. For Shahrzad, no matter how, on what grounds, the aim of the game is not public recognition for martyrdom. It is rather to find a way to escape her executioner.

When marriage brings only oppression and repression, women think of escapism. Shahrzad and Dunyazad, both go through the stage of identity conflict, because of extraordinary development of their characters as discussed by Habermas. Dunyazad struggles to make commitments and wins in the end. Dunyazad is not happy with her married life. She cannot even choose the colour of her dress. Her husband, Zaman, wants her to dress only in pale, maidenly colours. He rebukes his wife for expressing her viewpoint. All the time she is supposed to sit in the harem. This type of behavior indicates that males want their wives to be self-sacrificing and faithful. Sheeba S. Nair rightly says that “Hariharan does not hesitate to unveil the bitter truth that marriage imprisons women and brings in ignominy and isolation- a highly untraditional thought. She asserts this through her female protagonist Dunyazad who suffers from loneliness” (57). In the palace, in her sister’s room “she feels a twinge of bitter isolation” (69). Shaharzad is also shown as lonely, having been alone, so alone, since she made the terrible mistake of dying” (72).
Dunyazad’s dream of Shahrzad’s tomb, the reference to “The Martyr’s walk”, and the construction of a magnificent tomb strengthen the possibility of Shahrzad’s death. If that is the case, it is surprising that the body is never found or seen by anyone and there are no clear hints concerning the reasons of queen’s death. It is also surprising that widower Shahryar never mentions memories of Shahrzad or of their moments together but only talks of his own grief and the magnificent tomb he is building as a monument to their “rare love”. It is supposed that Shaharyar is responsible for her death. Here Shaharyar is compared with a “fat serpent coiled in its bed, waiting with its hood raised ready to strike” (257). Men like Shaharyar use woman’s body as a colonizer. Hariharan describes, “They colonized her body, her skillfully planned design, to paint in their sticky colours and words, their own moral themes” (274).

Before the opening of the second part of the novel one clearly sees that Dunyazad has brought the story of *The Thousand and One nights* to its logical conclusion by making sultan Shahryar realize the agony of an imprisoned person; the claustrophobic feeling inside a small, dark room by making him prisoner in a tomb. She breaks the norms of heterosexual relationship, and establishes physical relations with the slave girl Dilshad. She attains fulfillment in the company of another woman. Dunyazad rejects company of men and prefers to be a lesbian. This remedy suggested by Dunyazad may not be approved by other women, but her attempt almost provides an answer to the queens’ desires as the king only suppresses her and busy with other women. Dunyazad and Dilshad are two women seared by their experiences of patriarchy which has treated them as pawns in their patriarchal power-games. Since they have already dealt with patriarchy too well, now they cannot look for a solution within its confined spaces. They created a new order of their own—a circle of love where male hegemony, along with its oppression, cannot enter.
Chodrow, in her theory of identity moves beyond generalizations about sexism, patriarchy or male supremacy. She does not identify with such identity theories which ignore women, rather provides valuable insights to a theory of female identity pertinent to the analysis of writing by women. Githa Hariharan’s version of the Arabic tales is more women centred. The beginning of the second part of the novel reveals a major shift from memory making to storytelling. In the original Arabic tales, Scheherazade tells her stories to save her life as well as other women’s lives by entertaining her husband, the Sultan. In Harihnan’s version of the tales (Part-II) there are four figures: two women, Dunyazad and Dilshad surrounded by two goading jinns- Shahrzad and Satyasama. Dunyazad and Dilshad, (the active story-tellers), who are lesbians, tell each-other stories alternatively in an answer to the others’ stories, for seven days and nights. They give their own version of The Thousand and One Nights through “woman’s language” or “écriture féminine”. In this version, they settle for a period of seven days and nights in an interlude of love-making, storytelling and liberating the ghosts of their pasts in an attempt to search for the real Shahrzad. Although one finds no linear narration in these non-realistic tales that seem like a series of illogical dreams, even then, Hariharan has magically interwoven the source text and the novel. Devi K. Ragini says that “Hariharan makes a fresh dimension in an original way inside the range of the previous treatise that revives modern courses of life where women have risen as the operators of their unavoidable fate and not as those crumpled under pressure” (154). The stories highlight a beautiful merger of history, fantasy, legends, and religion. With the help of these stories Dunyazad and Dilshad reveal their respective personalities and views. In this way, Hariharan directly questions the colonial and post-colonial literature in which women are assumed to be stereotypes in society.

The first tale “Rowing a Floating Island” is told by Danyazad about her brave sister- the queen of Shahbad- Shahrzad, who in spite of her mental and physical agony
not only satisfies the king but also saves the lives of various virgins. She is shown to be pregnant and experiencing labour pains but boldly she is trying to prepare herself for the act of storytelling in the night. Meanwhile she feels discomfiture due to her labour pains.

Shahrzad is scared and impatient due to her present condition. What if she does not complete the labour before nightfall? Dunyazad suggests that they will kill the Sultan if the newborn is a male, but Shahrzad does not agree with her suggestions. Here, one sees the pain and anxiety of the woman who wants to give birth to her baby during the hours of the day so that she can be ready in the night to tell the tales to the Sultan. Here, one wonders and acknowledges the real power of Shahrzad who despite her physical complications acts as a new bride continuously for the Sultan for one thousand and one nights. Thus, she satisfies the Sultan not only mentally by telling him interesting stories but also satisfies his physical urge. With her skill she saves herself from death, “Even if it means eternal rest or paradise or even martyrdom” (128).

The second tale “Nine Jewels for a Rani” told by Dilshad symbolically reveals the fate of females in a male-dominated world. This tale is about a monster, the one-eyed monkey woman- Satyasama. She loves to sing songs and when she comes to the Eternal City, the Eternals welcomed her. Eternal City is divided in two, because of nothing else but the “innocent, baby-blue sky” (264). The sky divided the city into Eastwallas and Westwallas. The Easties love sunrise and the Westies love sunset. The inhabitants of Eternal City were happy because there is enough sky for everybody, and enough sunrises and sunsets. The problem is that both Easties and Westies believed that birdsongs could influence the moods of sunrise and sunset. As long as One-Eye sings simple, silly songs, she is left alone for “all the world loves a simple fool” (142). But then, two things happened: One-Eye fell in love with the Rani and heat waves stroked Eternal City. “Rani” is the nick name One-Eye gives to her lover but because of its connotations of
power, the poor monster is tortured by Eternals who wanted to know “Who is she? What are her aliases? Is she anti-city? Anti-sky?” (265). Because of this encounter with her Rani, which brought to One-Eye refined emotions, she started to have visions with her only eye, and she condensed what she sees in her songs, which became more elaborate and incomprehensible. The Rani wanted love songs that would light up a mind so One-Eye created beautiful poems about the sky, and the light of day, and night, the things she liked the most. The second thing that happened is that there were changes in the climate of Eternal City and continuous heat wave made the Eternals suffer from sunstrokes. These melted their brains and, when they cooled down they believed they no longer could share the sky. One-Eye sang of peace and of the undeniable necessity of having both sunrise and sunset, since the natural circle of day and night could not be broken, the singing monster is summoned for interrogation and she is forbidden to sing because she mixed night and day (East and West) in her songs. These oppositions were fundamental, and not to be questioned. One-eye refuses to shut up and, consequently, was imprisoned for one year. After this period, she is promised freedom if she remains silent and opens her mouth only to eat.

This shows the fate of females in a male dominated set-up where they can only speak if it favors the men folk. But, in the first night of freedom, she gives her greatest performance ever and, at dawn, she was caught and “chopped, limb by limb, till all that was left of her was a misshapen trunk but continuously groaning” (266). Here lies a paradox. On one hand there is Shahrzad who is bound to speak for living and on the other hand, there is Satyasama who dies as she could not keep quite as wanted by patriarchy.

The tale “A Lover, a Tomb” is narrated by Dunyazad revealing the defeat of Shaharyar (symbolic of mankind) and victory of Dunyazad (symbolic of women-folk). The story is about Sultan Shahryar who is trapped by Umar in the same tomb (a structure
the Sultan was making for his queen Shahrzad) and for the first time he realizes how it feels to be trapped. Umar, the son of Shaharyar makes a plan with the help of Dunyazad and Dilshad to teach a lesson to the King. Shaharyar was making this monument to celebrate his enduring love for his wife. This shows the desire of the Sultan to attain popularity. This tomb, he was making, just to exhibit his love to the world. This indicates a clear reversal of fortune. Dunyazad broods over the punishment fit for him keeping in mind the type of crime he has committed. Earlier, he used to kill one woman each night, now his own life is endangered. Simple death for such a tyrant will be denial of true justice. He is dethroned by his son Umar and betrayed by Dilshad which is also not surprising rather banal in those times. The betrayal of Dilshad (slave-girl) has been intentionally shown to clarify that if a woman wants to take revenge, it is not difficult for her, despite any position or class. He must make amends for his criminal acts. Though he is carrying the burden of so many sins yet there is no sign of either repentance or fear on his face, rather one sees him grieving for his favourite city, his name and fame. This tyrant does not seem to understand the cycle of life where death is inevitable. He, in the end, is left only with the curse of the virgins and martyrs. Nothing is left except the choking smell of rotten bodies.

Although after one thousand and one nights, Shaharyar had conferred the title of “Sultana” on Shahrzad, but he could not tolerate her increasing popularity as a savior of virgins. Consequently, Shahrzad disappeared which symbolically refers to her untimely planned death by her tyrant husband. Shaharyar had done this all to supersede her but in the end one sees him imprisoned by Umar in the same tomb waiting for his death. In his last days, one sees him petrified. He visualizes Shahrzad waiting for him at the other end as she wanted to fight this battle of existence and power once again. This symbolically shows the victory of Shahrzad over Shaharyar. Shaharyar could not find comfort in living as well as in death.
The tale “The Well- Constructed Lie” is about female identity and is narrated by Dilshad about the Bhai Minar constructed by two brothers, namely Azhar and Mazhar. Bhai Minar symbolizes male supremacy over the females. It is “Smooth, rounded, glinting, the marble phallus that thrust its way into the sky” (164). Dilshad wants to visualize this wonderful creation and starts her adventurous journey. When she finally reaches her destination after facing so many hurdles, she stands aghast at the sight of the huge structure. While resting under a tree near the minar, she hears a story about this minar narrated by two friends- a monkey and a donkey. She comes to know that both the brothers were brave and wise. They conquered one enemy after the other and earned respectable positions. As thanksgiving to God, they constructed one short stout column of the minar with an inscription ‘God is very good’. With the passage of time, they marry beautiful ladies and enjoy all the blessings of life and another column is raised with one more inscription ‘Love is very good’. When they are blessed with obedient and sincere children, one more story of the minar is constructed with the praising words ‘Life is very good’. The monument reaches almost near the sky which shows their numerous victories as well as their desire to earn name and fame. One day, the brothers go on the top of the minar to see this fantastic creation and feel happy that as long as this minar is standing, everyone will remember their names and deeds. This shows the desire of a man to find everything permanent in this temporary world. Then, suddenly monkey and donkey both start fighting over Azhar and Mazhar so as to find out who is the best which actually shows the desire of both the brothers to be supreme. They both go to the pebble lying on the earth and ask its viewpoint as it was lying over there for a long period of time.

Now, “pebble” here stands for the female point of view in this male world. With the help of the pebble, Dilshad presents her point of view that when both the brothers go on the top of the minar to see their achievements, Azhar falls down due to the attack of
vertigo and Mazhar in search of a suitable epitaph for his brother goes mad soon. This shows the reality of this transient of world. Although death is inevitable, even then, man desires to conquer all. When Donkey and Monkey listen to this new version of their story told by Dilshad, they go mad as they could not accept anything against their fanatical devotion to the story or one can say that they are not ready to accept a version given by a female. This shows the tendency of patriarchal set-up to rule according to their own will. They both want to kick the pebble, but Dilshad quickly swallows it and runs away showing that she too is free to give her own version and to twist the story according to her own desire. This act of swallowing of the pebble by Dilshad symbolizes that women like men are also free to give way to their thoughts and feelings.

The tale “Three scenes and a Father” is narrated by Dunyazad about her father— the Wazir of Shahryar’s court. He undergoes three different adventures in this episode each of which serve as allegories exposing the rotten, decadent and abusive state of patriarchy under the cruel reign of king Shahryar and the condition of women-folk. This story shows his unending thirst for virgins and the state of moral dilemma which the Wazir faces as the father of two daughters and one for whom it is told, “virginity holds the city’s real treasury in its tight grip” (168).

In the first scene, Dunyazad tells the readers about the pathetic condition of the Wazir at the time of cruel killing of virgins every day. Dunyazad makes the readers see the pathetic and fearful condition of her father who is undergoing a trauma daily of losing his daughters by fulfilling his duty as a Wazir. The Wazir finds himself in the middle of an arid, endless desert and after getting extremely exhausted, finds “a gleaming, opal-hued pool” (169) in the distance. When he wants to go further, he is stopped by a clear voice, which he recognizes as either his father’s or teacher’s, rings out with command: “No, you have not finished...Did you think that was all? A whiff of
morality, a pinch of justice and the task is done? Is salvation to be bought so cheaply” (170)? This sound seems to be an upright and just aspect of patriarchy which instructs him, “The journey, dear Wazir, begins here. Be patient; you will have your fill of the pool” (170). But when the Wazir reaches the pool it turns out to be a hellish oasis filled with dismembered limbs and body parts of the virgins executed night after night by the king. The last dismembered limb that slides up to him he recognizes to be “the capable hand of his first-born” (171).

This episode touches the social issue in larger context. It tries to show the status of women in our society. One realizes how they are treated. Nowadays, one sees the killing of a girl child. Parents do not want to give birth to a female child. Even today, society does not treat a woman equal to a man. The society is like a torturing cell where women are treated as subjects of sex and discarded once the sexual purpose is fulfilled.

In the second scene, one finds the Wazir hurriedly going home when he is caught by Sultan’s messenger a Eunuch who is enquiring about a virgin in the house. In between they hear a call for prayer and the messenger goes away for the time being. Meanwhile the Wazir buries his daughter Shahrzad in the hole he digs in his garden to save her life. After the prayer the Eunuch appears again and asks the Wazir “Do you house a virgin” (171)? He gets a negative response and leaves the house. The Wazir hurriedly digs up the ground just to discover a plump goat in place of his daughter which hints at the fate of all women in a bigot male-dominated society, where women are butchered for the sake of menfolk. They do not hold any identity and are just subservient to men. Turning of a girl into a goat signifies the pathetic condition of women during the reign of Shaharyar in society. It simply shows the slaughter of women by men for their pleasure and satisfaction.

In the third scene, one finds Wazir back in the desert in order to feed his hungry God carrying the goat on his arm. He visualizes “The lord, a gigantic man with wild and
red eyes,” which reminds him of Lord Shiva, who says, “Remember only something you love will fill my stomach with your devotion” (175). This reminds the readers of a well-known Saiva Siddhanthic myth, of a Tamil race in which Lord Shiva to test the faith of his devotee appears in the guise of a mad Shaivait heretic demanding that the devotee should kill the most favoured thing in this world to please him. The devotee under a vow kills his only son. When the devotee serves the food, the heretic asks that his son should also join them. When the heart broken devotee calls out for his son, the son appears.

In retelling this myth by substituting Wazir and Shahrzad in place of the devotee and his son, Hariharan, on one hand exposes the nature of patriarchal set up which considers God as authoritarian figures and on the other hand she challenges the canonical texts which are viewed under patriarchy as storehouse of ethical and moral insights. This tale also shows that women are compared with some kind of animal that can be butchered by men, i.e. hungry Gods. Shahrzad is being compared to a goat to be offered to Shahryar, the God.

Dilshad’s next tale namely “Rupavati’s Breasts” retells the famous legend of Lord Buddha’s previous birth when he was born as a woman called Rupavati, in multiple and protean versions. Through this tale one records the desire of Dilshad to give her new version of this old “Buddha’s tale”. The male-dominated society is not ready to accept any version given by females, which ironically hints at the silent and suppressed state of women- folk. But Dilshad asserts her will and gives her version through the mouth of Satyasama and shows her individual identity. This story provides a retelling of a Sanskrit tale concerned with the attainment of Buddhahood as a process of birth and rebirth. In this tale the Buddha first appears in the body of a woman, Rupavati, who, in an act of generosity, cuts off her breasts to feed a starving mother about to eat her newborn child. “Her breasts are eventually restored, only to be lost again when she is reborn as a man,
Rupavata, and then as successive male Bodhisattvas, in the end attaining Buddhahood. Traditional readings interpreted the excision of Rupavati’s breasts as signaling the birth of the male body as the ideal body, equated with virtue” (Armour and Ville 2).

In Dilshad's story, it is the tale that undergoes a series of reincarnations in the hands of three storytellers: an old woman whom Satyasama meets in her travels, the old woman's husband, and Satyasama herself. The old woman and her husband each recount narratives that seem to follow, with certain variations, the first and the second segments of the Sanskrit myth, but as independent stories. In the first one Rupavati’s both breasts are removed to feed a hungry mother and her child. In the second story told by the man a single breast of Rupavata was removed for the same purpose. The couple argues whose story is correct, with the old man eventually silencing his wife by rejecting the possibility that the Buddha could be born as a woman. Seeing no reason "why she shouldn't have a turn at this game of moulding Rupavati's breasts" (185), Satyasama provides a subversive retelling, where a brahmin named Chanderprabha visits the house of a married couple (Rupavata and Rupavati) begging for food. He tells them that his wife is going to eat their only child out of hunger. To satisfy their hunger he demands that Rupavati should pluck out her breasts one for his wife and another for his son. Rupavata was standing confused when suddenly Rupavati twists Chanderprabha’s ears off (which later regrow) and plants them in the earth, thus causing ears of corn to magically appear, row after row, to feed the hungry mother and child.

Hariharan beautifully explains that how the woman’s version is dismissed as “lies” by her egoistic husband who tells his own version of it. This only indicates that how the patriarchal set up ignores and puts aside a woman who tries to bypass her male counterparts in talent or even speaking the truth. Women are always treated as second to men who cannot gain any respectable position as well as name and fame in the society.
When the old woman narrates her story is snarled at by her old husband, “Facts, he
snarled at the old woman. You’ve all your facts wrong. How dare you pollute this house
with such unrealistic lies? Listen and correct yourself before it’s too late” (181). This
shows that males are not at all ready to accept the voice of females. They want them to
be either silent or only their meek followers. To show the supremacy of the male-
dominated society the old man subverts it to Rupavata, a beautiful male but when
Satyasama attempts to take similar liberties and produces her version of the story, is
thrown out of their house by the angry couple. The wife remains quiet at this moment,
shown as completely subservient to her husband’s. This points the way to the possibility
that previous female versions of any story could have been omitted, truncated and
corrupted by misogynous interference to produce the final canonized version suitable to
a ruling patriarchal structure. Afterwards, with the passage of time this gets enshrined by
successive generations of readers as the authentic version. Thus, in the final analysis,
Hariharan by merging myth and parody, past and present, seems to signal to us that all
reality comes to us filtered through language and that language is linked to power.

The tale “Adventures of a Sultan” is the continuation of a story told in the
previous section where readers have already seen the complex characters of both the
brothers. But here, Hariharan powerfully records the will of a strong woman (Dunyazad)
who skillfully takes action against her own tyrant husband and not only proves her
identity but also sustains it. The old story tells how these brothers on finding their wives
to be adulterous, go in search of a more sorrowful man just to satisfy their male ego and
to settle their disturbed state of mind. Finally, on reaching the sea-shore they find a more
unchaste woman and a more cursed husband. This unchaste woman—the Ginni girl (wife
of the Ginni) forcefully makes love with them and snatches their royal rings.

In the new version told by Dunyazad, Zaman (her husband) has been portrayed as
terribly afraid of the dark. Darkness haunts him as he had visualized a dark slave in the
dark night making love to his first wife. He has no confidence on his virility. One day he
listens to a story of an unchaste woman by a story-teller in his court and becomes
restless. The past haunts reminding him how he has lost his ring to a filthy woman.
Similarly, the betrayal of his first wife continuously tortures him. Losing a ring to a filthy
woman makes him restless and he orders his spies to remove all the rings from all the
fingers of the people of his kingdom. This results in revolt and bloodshed. Here, one sees
the mad and eccentric behavior of a king who is now having a chaste wife-Dunyazad but
still thinks that women are disloyal and should not be trusted. He cannot tolerate the wise
and confident words of Dunyazad when the latter asks him to stop this bloodshed and
terror. She is just a like a toy to him. This again shows the dominating nature of this
tyrant. But Hariharan gives it another dimension when Dunyazad conspires with a
discontented General of the Army against Zaman and dethrones him. She makes his son
(from his first wife) the king- who is austere, kind natured and gives due respect to
Dunyazad. This reveals how Dunyazad was forced to kill her own husband, Shahzaman,
for the welfare of the people.

... Dunyazad has acted swiftly, in league; it is said, with a powerful and
discontented general in the royal retinue. A boy on the throne, a ruler in
the harem, a silent inhibited army; and the city, limping back to life,
remains surprisingly calm. Though an occasional whisper links Dunyazad
to the Sultan’s disappearance, not one voice is raised; nor is there any sign
of the agitation that usually accompanies a sudden transfer of power.
Though no one says it in so many words, the city seems to have turned,
briefly, into the queen’s ally. (198-199)

Dunyazad emerges as a powerful matriarch. Her role can be clearly understood
through the above lines. She has, unlike her sister Shahrzad, learned to tackle violence
with violence. The image of an aggressive woman in possession of herself and tackling patriarchy with her own instruments is a fresh and welcome change from the powerless dreams of lesser mortals. Dunyazad not only gives an end to the reign of a tyrant but also restores the kingdom to normalcy by showing the power of female fraternity.

The story “The Woman under the Deadly Skin” is narrated by Dilshad about a character named poison-skin who has the power to change the destiny of men-folk. Poison Skin is recruited by a palace-minister to be used as a spy. From the story one comes to know that she was a young and innocent goathered named Nanni, whom this man captures and uses as a spy. She was made to drink poison every day, until her skin had such a concentrated dose that it kills her lovers. This tale resembles the situation of Shahrzad, escaping from the palace to join a lower class lover. In this tale two versions of the destiny of Poison Skin (just as it happened with Shaharzad) are there. Once, when she was supposed to kill enemies of the king- she opted the life of a recluse (the harem) in chastity, to avoid the killing of the prince she was ordered to seduce. Second version stated by a young shepherd, states that Poison Skin was poisoning soldiers as long as she was making love to warriors in the enemy camp. One day, after getting tired of this love-making and killing, in a restless mood, she ran away from the palace to escape and met a young goathered who was bitten by a snake and was about to die. She felt compelled to love him assessing she could not do more damage and the result is that he did not die. So, she discovered that being sexual with high-ranking partners was deadly and not with passionate and rustic lovers. Despite being poisonous she saves the life of this young boy.

Similarly, Shahrzad’s escape from the palace is a liberating alternative to the secluded life she has in the harem, where she neither can enjoy the simple pleasures of a normal life nor has any share in public power. One can conclude from this tale that in the Arabian Nights, Shahryar, the Sultan was a killer of innocent virgins, however, here in
the version of Hariharan transfer of power is seen- from a man to a woman. Poison Skin does have the ability to kill anyone but she only saves people unlike Shahryar who misuses his power. Here, one sees a woman using her sexuality as a power to help others. Poison Skin not only saves the life of a young man but also helps herself from not being a murderer for the rest of her life. This signifies the real strength of women and their victory in a patriarchal set-up.

The tale namely “The Palace Thief” is narrated by Dunyazad who tells the story of prince Umar, the only surviving son of sultan Shahryar and queen Shahrzad who in league with Dunyazad and Dilshad dethrones his father. This act of Umar symbolizes the power and authority of women, who are otherwise considered meek and submissive. Umar imprisons his father when he realizes that the “palace” only rules and abuses the city. This story shows us the growth of his character as well as his mental state. In the beginning one sees the childhood days of Umar when he is in the careful hands of nurse Sabiha since his mother is busy in satisfying the lust of his father as well as in saving the lives of several other females. One day, Sabiha narrates him the same old story of a king (Shahryar) who after discovering the secretive love affairs of his queen, decides to marry a virgin each day and executing her the next morning. She tells Umar that how the daughter of the Wazir of that kingdom out of love and compassion for the humanity offers herself and entertains the king for the whole one thousand nights. In the end, she wins the Sultan’s favour. After listening to this stupid fancy tale, Umar never finds his palace to be the same again. He swims down to the memory lane, and acknowledges the presence of a visitor every night without having any recognizable features. He finds this image neither visible nor stable. Here, Sultan Shahryar has been compared with a thief, a spirit, or a creature that can change shapes at will- a person who has not only stolen the happiness of the palace but of the city also by ignoring justice and attention to its people.
All the time he is busy with the queen in his own secret ritual. One can clearly hear a lot of graved voices- some wailing in hunger or despair, some others demanding the justice, but sultan is ignorant of all this as he is to perform his lecherous activities just to satisfy his manly power and prove his dominance (ironically which he thinks more important than ruling a city in just manner).

This spirit of the palace which is compared with Shaharyar is an ever changing, malevolent figure. This spirit haunts everyone inside the palace. This spirit makes its presence felt through nightmares and visions. The image of the spirit is not clear but every time it is personified as a palace man. The same spirit we find in Dilshad’s tale namely “The Slavegirl’s Palace” also. In the first section it has already been told that soon Umar realizes the grave condition of the people of the city and their sordid life. He imprisons his father (in the tomb he was making for his mother) with the help of Dunyazad and takes the power in his hands by stealing away the authority from the palace minded, spoilt, and irresponsible Sultan.

The narrator of this next tale “Four Lovers in the Wilderness” is Dilshad who is on her adventurous journey in the endless wilderness which indicates the desire of women to take risks and chances in life. The forest symbolizes the confusion experienced by women in this male-dominated world. Dilshad wants to fathom the forbidden sea of reality. During her journey, she not only hears shrieks and trumpeting, but also sees a hidden mystery behind each bush. She feels petrified. She gives up soon. After passing one fearful night she sees her savior- a well-built axe-man having a large axe in his grip which reminds the reader of king Shahryar having a sword in his hand. This man deceives her into marrying him with the promise that he will help her find her way. This incident shows the reader the desire of man to overrule a woman and show their patriarchal power. In this encounter of Dilshad with the Axe-man one recognizes
the relation between power and sexuality as, “His eyes on her like an eagle, his hands on her arms like a reliable witness” (228). Like king Shahryar who deflowers a virgin every night having sword in his hand, this man with an axe is enjoying with Dilshad every day. Soon Dilshad realizes the real intention of this Axe-man and decides to teach him a lesson. She discovers through self-introspection that she is a powerful woman, and, not a mere puppet in the hands of men. One day when he was sleeping, She takes his axe, clears the wood and runs away. Soon she meets a Deer-man (half deer and half man) in the forest who arouses feelings in Dilshad’s heart. In the Arabian Nights main reason for having sex is to fulfil a man’s desire, in When Dreams Travel, in the second encounter of Dilshad with this deer-man, it is the desire of the woman that matters e.g. “As her eyes moved down to the firm, flat belly above his piece of deer skin, she felt an ache between her legs” (230). In this encounter one not only sees a woman’s desire to have sex but also the fulfillment of the desire. Here, Dilshad seduces the man. The centre of power has been shifted from Man to a woman where woman asserts her power. In this tale narrated by Dilshad one sees two contrasting lines, “The king seizes a virgin girl, the courtesan seduces a virgin boy” (231).

After seducing him for many days Dilshad finds that the manly powers of this dear man is decreasing day by day. One day, when she finds the Axe man trying to follow and catch her, she leaves the Deer man to his fate as she is tired of this game of seduction. When she asks herself, “Is there no way out of this old story?” (231). She immediately sees the way out of the forest. It is her search for adventure and unmapped territory that have led her here but in the end she magically overcomes all the troubles when she realizes her female powers. This shows that females do have remarkable decision making powers especially when their life is in danger.

The tale “The Slavegirl’s Palace” is narrated by Dilshad about her journey to the palace after Umar usurps it. She goes there to fetch the reward announced by Umar to
her as she had skillfully played her role in dethroning a powerful king. This tale once again portrays the ghost of Sultan in various forms- Slave- Girl buyer, Eunuch, Pimp, and will of Sultan- all try to claim the immortality of Shahryar. Here, the encounter is between a slave- woman and a palace. When after the fall of Shahryar, Dilshad enters the palace to have her due reward from Umar, all the memories of the past start haunting her. Palace man (Shahryar) welcomes her claiming the palace to be the real world and making her see all the hidden secrets of the world (palace). She tries to sleep in the harem but constant wailing of the women makes it impossible (the cry of the innocent virgins). She feels as if hundreds of Dilshads are standing in the palace terrified and frightened. This scene shows the mental agony of all those women who were once a part of this harem.

In the second scene, Dilshad envisions a group of women from the different parts of the world, gathered there just to impress the Sultan which, in turn, indicates the never ending sexual hunger of Shahryar. At this point, Dilshad feels as if the palace man is assessing her worth and cost which shows the real stature of women in the reign of Shahryar. They are treaded just like a feast to enjoy.

The last scene portrays Dilshad standing like a strongly willed woman who wants to construct a palace of her own choices and dreams. She remembers the Sultana (Shaharzad), and Satyasama and their role in her life and how they taught her to live life on her own terms. She realizes how she has dethroned a powerful king which shows her real power and calculating nature which must be possessed by all the females if they want to survive in this male- centered world. Finally, before leaving the palace she once again visits the old bedchamber of the Sultan and feels his presence there. She feels as if the Sultan still does have a strong desire to live even after weighing the burden of so many souls. Dilshad feels a strong urge to defile the dungeon in some fundamental way.
She wants to do which neither the Sultana nor her sister did- a hard blow in the heart of the palace to tear it apart, to wash away its claims of immortality and she begins her journey for this new venture with the old story books to add her own twists.

The tale “The Chameleon on the Wall” again shows the struggle of a woman in this male-dominated world, who, after realizing her real power turns her destiny and portrays that a man and a woman are equal. This is narrated by Dilshad about a girl namely Lonely Voice, who is locked in a silhouette by her angry, suspicious and jealous brother. Dilshad hears her voice one day while searching a shelter to spend her night. She goes to the place and sees Lonely Voice who wants her help in getting herself free from his tyrant brother. She insists Dilshad to help her, makes a plan, and when she sees her brother at his usual place to spy on her she starts narrating a story to a lizard on the wall.

The story is about a woman who makes love with four men in her life. While narrating the story she pretends that there is no other person in the room. When Dilshad (hidden) hears the clucking of the lizard, she approves by imitating her voice. All the men gives her one or the other gift before leaving and but last man, who is a hermit, blessed her with chastity as he thinks it to be a biggest reward to a woman. When the story ends, Lonely Voice enquires about the best gift given to the woman. At this, her brother shouts in favour of the hermit, “She became what a man desires” (250). At this point half the screen behind which he was hiding collapses indicating the selfish nature and ruthlessness of a male-dominated society where the chastity of a woman decides her place and freedom in the society and this chastity needs to be verified by the men only.

Lonely Voice feels happy and starts narrating another story about a chaste man who has turned himself into a rock in the middle of a river. This rock is found to be an obstacle by a king in the progress of his military campaign as his men were not able to approach further. The king sends his men to find an equally chaste woman to make this
rock-man happy. When she touches the rock it easily swims like driftwood. Now, Lonely Voice asks Dilshad a question as to who is more powerful out of the two. Dilshad answers in favour of the woman and man also supports her telling that a chaste woman is the most powerful woman. At this point the building collapses with a great thud as Lonely Voice was a chaste woman. Then she makes herself free and punishes her brother with death indicating that no man can decide the fate of a woman.

“The Dreams of Good Women” is a tale narrated by Dunyazad about her own feelings, emotions and her journey from a submissive figure to a free and self-assertive woman who renews her identity and wins in the end. This tale shows the depth of her character. She is alone in a room, making plans to enter the bedchamber of the Sultan in the palace. She sees a mirror on the wall. She goes nearby and discovers her secret image in the mirror. The image portrays her everlasting dreams of becoming a martyr. She finds herself flying high up in the air like a hovering bird, keeping an eye on the palace. She, at any cost, wants to enter the palace before the arrival of Shahrzad. But, suddenly she sees her sister in the mirror, ready to go to the bedchamber of Sultan. She pleads with her father (Wazir) that she is equally a good choice to become the next bride for the king Shahryar and how her father considered Shahrzad to be a better bet. When the Wazir tries to make her understand that she is quite young and tender, she answers furiously in one line, “I love my sister but I do not want to be her shadow”.(256), which shows her desire to become a martyr and take the place of Shahrzad. She realizes that Shahrzad is the heroine of this game. She is going to accomplish everything leaving nothing in turn for her to do. As per the advice of her father she joins her sister in her game plan against the Sultan, and gives her full support throughout the one thousand nights. When on the first day, she watches her sister’s walk in the bedchamber of the Sultan, deep inside her heart, she feels some ache. She recalls the ‘martyr-game’ which they used to play in their childhood and notices that her sister has borrowed her manner and style perfectly.
She sees herself with Shahryar without having a control of her father the Wazir or the guidance of her sister Shahrzad. One sees both of them going to the bedchamber—the same situation is created by Hariharan where Dilshad plays the role of Dunyazad, Dunyazad plays the role of Shahrzad to the same but now aged sultan Shahryar. We are told, “All candles, lamps and lanterns have been put out. Dilshad crouches on the floor in darkness. Dunyazad is waiting eyes closed. Force of habit—"(260), showing that Dilshad is in the same room witnessing the love making between sultan and dunyazad in the same manner as Dunyazad was used to witness in the original tales.

This scene brings to the picture the hidden desires and strong feelings of Dunyazad to take the place of her sister Shahryar. As we are informed earlier that she hates being the younger sister as Shahrzad goes everywhere first, she does everything before her and nothing is left for her to perform then. After the act of lovemaking when Dilshad in the same manner of Dunyazad asks her to tell a story to pass the night, Dunyazad feels like a heroine coming for the first time on-stage. She imagines the restless crowd panting behind the screen including her father, Zaman, Umar, Mother Raziya, Nursemaid Sabiha, the poet Satyasama and her old lover and rival, Shahrzad. She starts narrating a story about two sisters (ironically about Shahrzad and Dunyazad) portraying the elder one enjoying every reward and the younger one, the irredeemable one— is doomed. Suddenly she stops in between and asks the Sultan to finish it. “You began the whole thing, now you complete it” (262). Now the Sultan finds himself helpless and feels as if he is the woman not the man forced to tell a story and apprehends that despite of listening to so many stories, he is unable to recall or narrate any one. This again shows the power of a woman as a storyteller to invent and create stories when their lives are at stake. In the end, Dishad finishes the story tactfully.

In the next tale namely “The Morning After” Shahrzad is being presented as an example of a positive reformulation of feminine/ feminist identities, which reverses the
traditional victim status of women and empowers them. Initially one sees her left to the
care of the slave girls in the remote corner of the palace. She is alone, abandoned, and
widowed waiting for her death in the harem. This queen Shahrzad is supposed or
broadcasted to be dead years ago by her polygamous husband. King Shahryar might have
considered her as good as dead. But in the last, she emerges as the embodiment of
feminine efforts done consciously for survival in a male dominated society which
criticizes women at every step. Now, Shahrzad is totally changed - an old woman. All the
time she looks back and forth with a feeling of happiness mixed with a little worry and
tension for the ignorant slave girls. She feels proud in realizing that her stories have
saved their mothers and grandmothers from the lusty hands of a tyrant. She seems
worried about their coming life as her past and present experiences merge into one
another, “A circle with no beginning or end” (256). No doubt, she has saved her life by
winning a personal battle with her quick tongue and also saved many other women. But
what about their degradation? There is no end to this abuse and degeneration of women.
Being queen she has enjoyed some rights but what about the fate of others? So, this
brave but perplexed queen warns her present generation to remain conscious, equipped,
and alert every time for any type of challenge, “When the drums roll, and the sword
blunted with age, the rusty, wake up to be freshly sharpened” (276). She feels that she
can go on teaching her tales to younger girls, but she cannot fight for them. They will
have to struggle for themselves when their turn comes.

In the end, Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad— ultimately discover their
identities as free women who can take their own decisions and will no more be oppressed
by the patriarchal domination. Shahrzad, the woman of wit, knows from the very
beginning that she will have to endure for herself and the coming generations of women.
Just Like a trickster hero, she keeps death at bay and ultimately succeeds in making
Shahryar mend his prejudice towards women. Despite perpetual fear and tension, Shahrzad exhibits no sentiments or complaints at her plight. After the thousand and one nights are over, she actively participates in the task of the ruling over the country. On the other hand, Dunyazad, the silent and ignored presence in the original version has been transformed by Hariharan as a powerful woman. Of the trio- Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad- Dunyazad is the one whose personality towers above all in Hariharan’s *When Dreams Travel*. Her swift action and courage compensate for the doubts that she faces as she meets the people from her past. She shows the courage together with Dilshad, and breaks free of her gendered destiny and sets out on a lesbian journey where there is no exploitation, suppression or torture but only love and companionship. Dilshad too, gets a new identity at the end of the novel when she becomes a free woman. Dilshad disrupts the old order and establishes the new rule of a considerate and prudent Umar by using her wittiness, bravery, and presence of mind. Dilshad represents sidelined femininity taking on the forces of patriarchy. Given freedom and knowledge, she attempts to write a new story of a liberated woman. Through all these tales, Hariharan challenges the concept of canon under which all the texts are produced and studied. By giving voice to unheard females Hariharan like Cixous deconstructs the binary opposition of the feminine and masculine.

All these three women present the three different directions via which modern woman can recover her true identity: by duping patriarchy as a survival tactic; by overpowering patriarchy, through force, as a avenging tactic; and by writing ‘her-stories’ as an revolutionary tactic, instead of playing a silent role in history. As Joana Filipa da Silva sums up:

Modern myths, like Shahrzad’s, are part of popular culture, of our collective cultural heritage, and can work as a powerful mechanism to understand the
real or interpret experience. This is not to say that myths are, always, openly pedagogic. They are complex narratives, ambiguous and multi-layered, allowing diverse interpretations. Still, they transmit an objective model of behavior and promote certain values or attitudes. Shahrzad is an example of a positive reformulation of feminine/feminist identities, reversing the traditional victim status of women to a position of empowerment, even in the most adverse circumstances. The women characters created by Harinaran are serious candidates to think new forms of liberated feminist identity, long patterns of resistance, survival, imaginative choices and solidarity, leading to unexpected life stories. (121)