The Thousand Faces of Night
The opening of *The Thousand Faces of Night* focuses on the identity crisis of a girl child. The title of the novel is inspired by the dilemma faced by its protagonist, Devi, who "encounters the horrors of the thousand faces of night, dreaming of "bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight" (74). Women, especially mothers and grandmothers, show concern in encouraging their daughters to follow the stereotypes. The myth of Parvati, Sita and Savitri are built up and repeated to promote the traditional image of women, which leads to selfless state of a woman. The historical stories of Ganga, Amba, Gandhari and Damyanti, who are symbols of self-sacrifice, are embossed on the psyche of the women. The very virtues praised in their characters become instrumental in the suffering of common women.

Even today these stories become dictums for women and lay down a chalked path to be adhered to. Being raised as daughters in patriarchal society women start seeing themselves as inferior. The feminine traits empathy, care, nurturance, tolerance, sensitivity to the needs of the others, self-sacrifice are considered inferior to the masculine traits like autonomy, individuation, success, power, careerism and are devalued. This is the chief consequence of patriarchal culture where women accept their identity as subordinates to the dominant group. As a result the woman's mothering "produces psychological self-definition and capacities appropriate to mothering in women and curtails and inhibits these capacities and this self-definition in men" (Chodrow 208). Within the family, the child perceives and takes cues from the way males are treated. Usually, mothers idealize masculinity and present the fathers to the children as important persons on whom they focus their most attention. This attitude has two fringed repercussions: (a) girls become wary and learn that they have to take care of the needs of the others whereas boys come to know very early that their needs would be taken care of, and (b) in the process of acquisition of a "gendered masculine self" a boy
comes “to deny identification with relation to his mother and reject what he takes to a feminine world” (Chodrow 176). As a result, a boy represses those qualities that are supposed to be feminine qualities in the social world. Thus, the women’s mothering produces daughters with the capacities for nurturance and sons with individuated and autonomous sense of self. The qualities of care, nurturance, empathy which are actually the strength of one’s moral character are used against women and are devalued. These qualities help in attaining happiness and are crucial in the human development. These very virtues are traditionally held symbolic of ideal womanhood, but as Gilligan points out, herein lies a paradox for the very traits that tradition have defined the “goodness of women, their care for and sensitivity to the needs of others, are those that mark them as deficient in moral development.” (Gilligan 18). Men due to their patriarchal conditioning fail to value the female qualities and celebrate “the female in a universalistic and essentialist manner.” (Stacy 575). If a woman fails to display these virtues she is branded unfeminine or masculine. If she follows the “predefined pattern of femininity like sweetness, modesty, subservience, humility, she often becomes a mute sufferer” (Moi 209-10).

*The Thousand Faces of Night* has a protagonist girl- Devi- who is at the threshold of womanhood. The novel is a saga of her identity crisis and her efforts to come out of it. Like Indira Goray in Santha Ram Rau’s *Remember the House*, Devi is a product of western education trying to find her roots. Usually, these novels deal with the growth and maturity of the female protagonists who go from their adolescent fancies and beliefs into accepting the realities of life. In Hariharan’s case, Devi goes through this phase as a female who challenges with the patriarchal set-up, consequently to break with conventionality.

Devi, belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family who goes to America to complete her education and her quest begins when she finds herself caught in-between her new
experience in an American University and a possibility to go back to her native land. Once she has returned to her ancestor’s house, she begins by questioning the inherent expectations of the given role. Her quest for self-discovery begins, and freedom of the self from these pre-established roles emerges as her primary concern. Devi finds herself caught between tradition and modernity. She had spent her time in Madras and Bangalore according to the norms of a Brahmin family where the outside world rarely intervenes. In Devi one sees a troubling and contradictory affinity with oppressive aspects of tradition, while opting for a liberal and modern lifestyle, which forces her to make pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relations with Dan and Gopal respectively. Devi’s graduate student days give her an opportunity to “shed her inhibitions and her burden of Indianness” (4), but unable to shed either her Indianness or her Brahmnic tradition, Devi feels uncomfortable among Dan’s friends and their expression of black identity, and resolves to reject his marriage proposal in order to return to India as: “these proposals were not potent enough to reconjure the myth-laden world that had soaked up her past. Instead they led her gently, with grasping, watery fingers, to walk along the shores of an Indian rebirth” (6).

Right before leaving the US, Devi “felt a piercing ache to see her mother. But equally powerful was a nameless dread she only partly acknowledged: the dread of the familiar love, stifling and all-pervasive; of a world beyond her classroom and laboratory, charged with a more pungent uncertainty” (7). In this manner, Hariharan touches upon the theme of confrontation of East and West, the emphasis is on the conflict itself, rather than on the evil effects of an alien culture. The protagonist stands at the crossroads of transition, from tradition to modernity, trying to evaluate both and accept the best out of both worlds.

When Devi was a child, she had heard many mythical stories celebrating womanhood by her grandmother. Devi’s grandmother never gave her a direct reply of
any question or query related to the conditions of the women around them, rather narrated a story appropriate to the situation. This kind of magical bonding between Devi and her grandmother is symbolic of many possibilities that are open to all women through the important mentor figures, role models and inspired women among them. Devi reminisces: “My grandmother’s lap was soft and she murmured gently like a little brow and yellow bird, but the bony thighs I felt through her soft sari were as warm and solid as the afternoon- baked earth below me. Her pallav covered my face, enclosing it like a silken refuge” (18).

It is this physical, psychological and emotional intimacy that provides the tempo and tenor for Devi’s initiation into the world of women. She is her first teacher; she imparts secret knowledge to her through a purposeful re-telling of the tales of the forgotten women of the past- Damyanti, Gandhari, Amba and Ganga and relates these stories with those of ordinary women- Sita (Devi’s mother), Uma (A servant in Devi’s house), Gauri (Devi’s cousin) or Devi- into familiar patterns of heroism and suffering. As Devi herself puts it: “In my grandmother’s mind the link between her stories and our own lives was a very vital one” (30).

Devi, fed on these histories of her mythical ancestors, grows into a dreamer inhabiting occasionally an extra-physical realm. In her dreams and visions, she enjoys an intimacy with her mythical heroines, a contact with deities and entities of the other world:

These visions restore a magico- ecstatic life- dimension which recaptures the ancestral matristic vision of the world. The creative ecstasy that is transmitted through the great matrilineage over generations from grandmother to granddaughter constitutes an important female rite of passage in which the initiate acquires the knowledge of women’s creative
and artistic power that can set feminine forces of transformation to work in
life, and the world. (Vijayasree 179)

All these stories of the grandmother ended with an advice, which suggested that a
woman should fight alone for her identity in this male dominated world: “a woman
meets her fate alone” (28); “a woman fights her battles alone” (36).

Women are supposed to form their identity within given socio-cultural
environment. Indian culture demands women to be subservient to men. Chodrwow
portrays female personality as relational and fluidly defined right from infancy to
womanhood. She argues about female identity on the basis of sociological and historical
grounds and not on biological one. In her opinion this criteria of judging a woman’s
identity becomes the root cause of her suppression. Devi, who was brought up on a
romantic diet of stories about the sacredness of wedlock, finds her own married life
vastly disappointing. Her grandmother used to assure her that all men as husbands were
decent. Marriage meant that a woman offered herself completely to her lord and master,
as her grandmother tells her: “When you marry, Devi, your heart moves up to your
shoulder and slips down your arm and the palm of your hand. The hand that holds you
tightly as you walk around the fire receives it like a gift. You cannot do anything about
it: when you marry, it goes to him and you never get it back” (37).

Devi had many hopes from her would be husband who should be a god- like
figure who would guide her gently. Her husband Mahesh, however, is “no prince, but a
regional manager in a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste” (22).
He views marriage with restraint and detachment, “as a necessity, a milestone like any
other” (49) and he does not pay heed to the needs of his wife. All that spewing out of
feelings is self- indulgent, he says. It is un-Indian. She soon realizes that while serving as
a housewife, all her dreams of an ideal husband has been shattered after marriage. All
those myths that her grandmother told were false and do not fit into her actual life. She feels as if her life is becoming increasingly lonely and purposeless in the huge mansion, and wants to spend more time with her husband but her lord and master is a busy man with a lot of business trips to make. Mahesh was brought up in a family atmosphere where a wife is supposed to be confined to the house without interfering in the life and activities of males. According to Pradeep Trikha: “Devi has some expectations from her husband, Mahesh to support and understand her on emotional grounds but her expectations are never realized” (9). On the other hand, Mahesh expects his wife to become his companion as soon as he marries her. Devi has realized soon that her husband is taking her for granted.

For Devi, marriage only meant that she has to learn to love her tyrant husband, while the heart she had prepared so well for his demands would remain “untouched, unsought for” (54). When she asks Mahesh why he married her, he finds the question absurd and answers evasively: “whatever people get married for” (54). Devi was surprised by the stories told by her father-in-law (Baba) that were supporting male supremacy. When Devi, expresses her desire to learn Sanskrit in order to understand Baba’s quotations better, Mahesh responds:

“Why,” Mahesh asked.

“So I can understand Baba’s quotations better,” I said.

“Don’t be foolish,” he said. “The English translations are good enough and what will you do with all this highbrow knowledge?” (52).

Career-marriage conflict is also a very crucial factor in the formation of identity. Devi gets best education but is not allowed to pursue a career or lead a life of her own choice. Virginia Woolf in *A Room of Ones’s Own* has rightly demanded financial
independence and space for a woman, so that she can grow physically and mentally. Rather than understanding her desire, Mahesh brushes it aside. The reason is that he has never interacted with Baba, and considers Sanskrit “highbrow knowledge” and wonders what use such knowledge is to her. Mahesh is “far too civilized” to thrash her “rebellious body” when she refuses him her body then he calls her a “teasing bitch”. Devi sketches a painful and accurate picture of her marriage:

This then is marriage, the end of ends, two or three brief encounters a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood. (54)

It is highly ironical that throughout women’s lives, the self is defined through social relationships; issues of merger and fusion of the self with others are significant. Chodrow rightly opines that female social roles are more rigid and less varied than men. The traditional patriarchal family system gives strength to the position of man in the society and demean that of woman. Devi’s marital life lacks colour and excitement that she had expected as she spends her time wandering about in the house, talking to Baba and hearing Mayamma’s stories about her past. Her desire to take up a job or acquire another degree is met with such a discouraging tone and attitude that she is forced to put them aside. Mahesh is reluctant to see Devi as having an independent personality. For him a woman is no other than a homemaker, a wife or a mother. Adali Uma explains:

Most educated women comply with the traditions of society, some because they are unwilling to face social ostracism, others because they
are too imbued with traditional concepts. Even when the daughter, wife or mother works due to economic necessity, her freedom ends when she leaves her work place and enters home. Due to threats of conventional decorum they face frustration, anger, dejection, and disappointment. Most women, in spite of all their grievances, give into the system, for they are not able to break away from their acculturation; they often end up unhappy, putting on a facade of happiness. (7)

However, Hariharan shows a new generation of women who do not pretend to be submissive and are brave enough to make individual decisions.

Mahesh, eager to see his wife taking responsibility of his home, disapproves of Devi’s spending so much time with Baba and Mayamma. He notices one day that she has been reading in one of Baba’s books about “a kritya, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted” (69). He asks with irritation, “Did your mother need books to tell her how to be a wife? I have never met a woman more efficient than your mother” (70), and blames Devi’s education for her discontent. He constantly compares her disparagingly with her mother, grandmother and his colleagues’ wives who appear more happy and competent. “This is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn’t she a happier woman than you are? What is it you want?” (74). On another occasion, he purposefully praises his junior colleague Ashok’s wife Tara to tease his own wife and to make her aware of her responsibilities. Mahesh admires Tara’s boundless energy, her bubbling, infectious enthusiasm. “She keeps herself busy but has enough time for her children,” he says. “I have never seen such well-behaved children before. Lucky Ashok!” (56).

Inevitably, their marriage weakens, and both feel deeply disappointed with each other. He finds her lazy and neurotic, her upbringing faulty. She refuses to
uncomplainingly waste her hard-earned education polishing the floor for the stranger who tied the thali round her neck (58). Devi wants to escape from her present condition and imagines, “I will grow a garden of weeds, those single minded, wild, common-blooded weeds that plunge their tenacious roots deep, deep “into the helpless soil” (58). Devi understands what Jasbir Jain also observes that, “The sacrifices and the silences which marriage demands require almost a superhuman ability to ignore the self” (16-17).

Devi achieves the stage of “identity foreclosure”. She displays high level of self-esteem and low level of anxiety. She considers her self-prestige more important than the pressures of society. The crux of the problem appears when both opine differently on the question of the issue. Devi herself feels no great desire to have children, but Mahesh, a firm believer in the traditional values like all other common men-folk thinks that motherhood will teach Devi to be a better person. In spite of long drawn out attempts, Devi cannot get pregnant. As she is unable to conceive, she feels her whole being defined in terms of her “unfertile womb”, “I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh’s eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb” (93). Through this “stubborn, unrelenting womb”, Hariharan attempts a feminist statement of confrontation.

The novel presents a gloomy picture of marital brutalization, imprisonment and suffocation in general as well. When Baba was twenty-one years old, his mother asked him to look at a set of photographs and choose as his wife one from three prospective brides. Baba did not even want to look to their photographs, and instead he told his mother:

If you think they are healthy and well-trained, why should I doubt your word? But I don’t like the names Hema and Mohana. They are too frivolous. They sound like back-chatting, tantrum-throwing, modern girls.
You can go and see Parvati. There’s an old, reliable name! Go, see if you like her. (62)

Hariharan shows extreme sarcasm of Devi’s father-in-law (who was young at that time) when he was asked to choose a bride for himself. He carelessly states that the name Parvati is more suitable for him. So, he selects her out of the three girls. Moreover, the author mocks at Baba by presenting Parvati (his wife) as a woman who leaves her family to become a devotee.

The novel shows the relegation and alienation of well-educated and rich woman like Devi which is best illustrated through the harsh experience Devi has at the hospital, a modern corrective institution par excellence. She frequently visits the hospital for treatment in order to conceive. “Her husband, has found a doctor who will set right the rebelling organ and the straying tubes inside her, so that she can “be mended, an efficient receptacle for motherhood”(89).

Devi’s inner organs dislocate due to excessive medical treatment. Her urge for a strong sense of revenge is manifested in different forms and she plans definite means of escape. She derives satisfaction in the fact that Mahesh is perturbed by the fact that she is not able to carry children for Mahesh. She considers it a powerful weapon to be hurled against him. Sudhir Kakar analyses the socio-psychological implications of the situation:

Whether her family is poor or wealthy, whatever her caste, class or region, whether she is a fresh young bride or exhausted by many pregnancies and infancies already, an Indian woman knows that motherhood confers upon her a purpose and identity that nothing else in her culture can. Each infant born and nurtured by her safely into childhood, especially if the child is a son, is both a certification and redemption. (56)
However, Devi does not define her identity through motherhood; she denies it and tries to find a self, detached from any socio-cultural restrictions. She feels utterly helpless and this traumatic experience makes her prone to take quick revenge:

In my waking hours I am still conqueror. My petty fears, and that accursed desire to please which I learnt too well in girlhood, blur the bold strokes, black and white, of revenge. I write elaborate scenarios in my mind for the last act- humiliating Mahesh, saying all the things we have left unsaid. I do something bloody, final, a mark of protest worthy of the heroines I grew up with (95).

Devi’s inability to become a mother is a decisive factor in her development as an individual. She releases herself from the burdens of the role of mother to achieve a state of free, creative individual. She asks herself about her identity, about being a woman for the first time. Until then, she has been defined by other people, asking numerous questions and accepting her role:

Am I a neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the thali round my neck? A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body when his hand reaches out; and dream instead, in a spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight? (74)

At this point, the sexual politics of motherhood becomes a major theme as Devi’s self-fulfillment does not lie in the bearing and rearing of children, but in identifying her own innate potential to live with herself on more positive terms. It is a self that endures suffering, but through this suffering the self attains self-understanding and an inward strength to break loose from past thoughts and experiences that are
negative. The figure of the woman moving from a family to another epitomizes the tradition of a patriarchal set-up even as she is herself drained of proper identity. She lives imprisoned in the role of wife, and escape from it is only possible for her through adultery; she says:

I will gather together the fragments which pass for my life, however laughably empty and insignificant, and embark on my first real journey. I would do better than sneak out, a common little adulteress...so that I can learn to be a woman at last. I will sour high on the crest of Gopal's ragas, and what if I fall with a thud, alone, the morning after? I will walk on, seeking a goddess who is not yet made. (95)

Her loneliness as a wife pushes her to take recourse to extra marital affairs. Rama Kundu rightly says that, “It is less for love than to show her rage of rejection of a demeaning marriage that had crushed dignity, individual aspiration and mocked her emotional imaginative refinement” (120). Childlessness, she feels was the price she had to pay as a penance for her marriage with Mahesh. In such a situation of loneliness and deprivation, she finds comfort in the arms of Gopal, her neighbour (who is a classical singer) and thinks of running away with him hoping to find salvation through the bhog route than the tapas marg adopted by her mother-in-law (Parvatiamma). Here the question that perturbs a woman, more than that of equality is of ‘survival’. By ‘survival’ she does not mean a continuity of mere physical existence, but a survival with dignity in the battle with the society and the circumstances. And when denied this human need, “an instinctive human reaction is to flee when the vital interests of the individual are threatened” (Fromm 30).

Mead social concept of identity portrays Devi- who is now no more dependent upon others and does not worry about the expectations of society from her. She gives
more importance to her own feelings and views herself as a feminist and not as a stereotype woman. But soon she realizes that life with Gopal does not afford her the space she craves for as Gopal was wedded to his music and concerts as Mahesh was to his job. He was an artist "scaling dizzy heights with arrogances" (89). Hariharan shows a new image of woman: a frustrated one caught between the Sita-Savitri figure and a more modern, individualized one. However, marriage is projected in the novel as a barrier for women's self-development, being either widowhood or divorce the only escape from oppression.

The Law of Threshold: Women Writers in Indian English is a methodological resource for feminist literary criticism in India by Malashri Lai. The "threshold" is a bar, making a critical transition from inside to outside, i.e., the domestic and the public worlds. For women, unlike for men, a step over the bar is an act of transgression, once committed they are never to re-enter the boundaries of home. In the home, the woman plays a determining role, but Devi refuses to be bowed down by her husband's wishes. As Lal points out, from the woman's perspective within the home, the world beyond the threshold is an unknown arena full of male activities. Devi's husband protects her with his authority from the outer world, forbidding her to exercise her intellect or achieve economic gain. Devi is in a critical zone, in a space between two types of influences: from the interior (custom, heritage, beliefs from upbringing, and messages of conformity coded by generations of patriarchal hegemony) and from the world out there (freedom, risk). The strains of the threshold zone are located in the problems of gendering. The interior space has sensitized her to her female identity and the expectations aroused.

Feeling utterly humiliated and revolted at having to submit to an insensitive gynecologist's check-up at the insistence of Mahesh, Devi finally decides to elope with Gopal. "By stepping out of marriage Devi dismisses the voice of reason represented by
both Mahesh and Sita. An identity achieved through relationships can never provide fulfillment” (Paul 118). Her interest in life is renewed with the arrival of Gopal. Mahesh’s unconcerned attitude brings her closer to Gopal. She accompanies Gopal’s troop to many concerts. In the beginning she enjoyed it all but as time passes; she no longer enjoys the concerts and music and becomes restless once again. This fascination lasts until she understands her true place in life. Pramila Paul again notices that that Devi soon:

Realizes that her position as mistress is not very different from that of a wife. Neither of them offers enough space for her. Her secondary status is stressed through the image of her being a mere reflection on the mirror-studded buttons of Gopal’s kurta...Temptation has no value once yielded to. Gopal is a mere prop to be dispensed with. (119)

She decides to leave Gopal and to find the freedom of self-expression like her mother found with widowhood and symbolized by the sound of the veena. Since a little girl she has been engaged with fundamental questions about the nature of womanhood, and she has made her exploration from which one can conclude that there are not biological determinants, but sociological constraints superimposed to limit women. Once in a world beyond the home, she is not accepted by the others, but Devi succeeds in building a self. Lal points out that this situation often leads to suicide or mental breakdown, and in fact, this is the ending for most female characters in for example Anita Desai’s novels, but Hariharan offers a new perspective, that of success in independence. Indira Nityanandam observes:

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

Devi recognizes her independence and by resolving the conflict between individual and restrictive domestic social norms achieves it. Until now she had been seeing her reflection mirrored by the others, not the self; she has been at the place provided by the other, by the male-centered community. Devi recognizes her other self in the mirror the night before she leaves Gopal. Before that, Devi did not own any identity; she was making her identity through the meanings provided by the other people. Devi finds her true self once she gets separated from the definition provided by patriarchy which has tried to frame her position in societal set-up, but once Devi throws her sari over the mirror, a gesture which symbolizes that she wants to shed her old identity and wants to create a new one:

She stood in front of the ornate, teak bordered, full length mirror that she and Gopal shared, (...) she looked into the mirror, but it was as if she was still looking at Gopal’s sleeping face. It threw back at her myriad reflections of herself. Devi undraped the sari and folded it carefully, lovingly, till it was one long, multi layered curtain. She covered the mirror with the silk so that the room suddenly became darker, and everything, the bed, the table, the sleeping body of Gopal, were themselves again, no longer reflections. (138)

Devi attains the stage of “identity achievement” in Josselson’s terms as she trusts her own capabilities and instincts and through the exercise of her abilities wants to
achieve her goal in life. So, Githa Hariharan proposes that instead of succumbing to the pressures of patriarchy, divorce is a better option. She intends to put an end to oppression and repression to become a liberated woman, detached from moral conventions that are man-made.

Thematically, *The Thousand Faces of Night* not only focuses on the loss of identity faced by Devi but also of her mother, Sita; the old housekeeper at her husband’s house, Mayamma, and her mother-in-law, Parvatiamma. Hariharan depicts the female characters’ married life in terms of entrapment, progressive mental deterioration, and increasing physical disability.

Devi’s mother Sita in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is also a victim of patriarchy. Married at the age of twenty, she goes to her in-laws’ house having a “resolve to be the perfect wife and daughter-in-law” (36). A woman’s “identity is defined in context of relationship and judged by a standard of responsibility and care” (Gilligan 160). In order to maintain harmony and fulfill her endeavor to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law she has to pay the price. “One thing that she loved playing was veena and she equated her self-worth so completely in terms of her music.” (136). Once when her father-in-law could not find something he needed while he sat in front of the Gods for his morning prayer and also found that the floor had not been swept and flowers had not been picked, he roared at her, “put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (30). This was a call for self-sacrifice. It is a virtue expected of women but it complicates their life for “the ethic of self-sacrifice is directly in conflict with the concept of rights of women” (Gilligan 132).

Sita in frustrating fury burnt all her photos posed with her “Veena” and broke its strings and “built a wall of reticence around herself” (136). Here, Devi’s grandmother tells her that it was an act of penance on the part of Sita that reminds Devi Gandhari who
covers her eyes with a piece of cloth. She cut herself off from “her own mother, father, the gurus of her childhood” along with the “Veena” and she wrote them “the occasional duty dictated letter” but never visited them (103). This was done to avoid “obsolete memories” (104). In this way “having deliberately given up her subjectivity symbolized by the music of her veena, she valorizes the acceptance of a strongly institutionalized role” (Mongia 126). After this she became “a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbors praised” (30). But withholding her efforts to do something in her own self-interest took a heavy toll on her emotional health. She became reticent and detached from her own identity. It is also a form of rebellion. By her silence she punishes the people around her. One notices and finds her silence synonymous with the quietness of the strings of “Veena”. Her silently seething rebellion move her to make her way meticulously from an average woman to a rich lady though it is through her husband, whom she inspired to move upward. In the end Sita turns victorious. She acquired what she was deprived of. Towards the end of the novel her house is shown to be ringing with the faint sounds of veena, which are indicative of the old Sita emerging like a phoenix, embracing her true self. Erikson’s psychological theory says that earlier Sita was suffering from “identity deficit” as she did not show any commitment to her goals. This deficit is brought by situational changes, but later on in the novel one sees her in stage of “identity conflict” when she struggles to make commitments. Finally, she achieves “identity achievement” by committing to the given roles.

Another victim of patriarchy is Mayamma, who is the old caretaker of Mahesh’s house. She was married to a large family at the early age of twelve; the village astrologer made the forecast that she was very lucky and would be welcomed in any house. She got married to a gambler who never understood the meaning of the vows he had made before the ceremonial fire. She knew no happiness in her marital life. When she could not
conceive a child, her cruel mother-in-law forced her to do penance which not only involved refraining from food and eating left-overs but also heart rending tasks like bathing the lingam with the blood from her breasts to change her destiny. “mayamma welcomed her penance like an old friend” (80), as she knows that, “Barrenness” as Subhash Chandra avers “… (is) regarded the greatest curse for a woman. Infertility was (is) considered inauspicious and the barren woman had (has) to bear the censorship of her immediate family and face social contempt and ostracization from auspicious functions in the society at large” (13).

After ten years of pleading with the goddess she gave birth to a male child. Eight years later her husband disappeared taking with him all the money in the house. Though she never saw him again, she saw his replica in her short-lived son - a wastrel from the birth. “The day he died Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life’s handiwork; now all these had been snatched from her” (82).

She burnt her horoscope with all the signs of luck on it along with her son’s dead body as a sign of her protest against the severe penance of ‘silent enduring’ she had performed throughout her life. She puts an end to all the suffering she has endured, “she has coveted birth, endured life, and nursed death” (136). Mayamma belonged to the generation of women who quietly bore till death their liabilities and never rebelled even if they wanted to, because it was considered outrageous for women to shirk away from her familial bindings even if she was feeling crushed underneath it. Rama Kundu says:

Mayamma epitomizes many a poor wives of Asia and Africa---used as producing machine, betrayed and exploited by husband, children, in-laws, used up, drained dry, robbed and cheated by everybody around, and then thrown away to rot by herself. Even her responses are shrewdly controlled by
an orthodox society through its imposed age-old superstitious and sexist values. The onus for all calamities falls on her. She is the target. (120)

Mayamma resembles to that female section which demanded justice with the emergence of the “First Wave of Feminism”. Being a woman she goes through this crisis. She is told to find happiness and fulfillment in traditional feminine roles which smother one’s identity. Her tale of woe is not much different from the tales of women in general. Her suffering “exemplify the inflexible constraints that identify a woman with the undesirable attributes of ‘dependence, passivity, and masochism’ (Nair 77-78). She suffers from the atrocities of a tyrant husband who hurts her. Conditioned strongly in her feminine role she attributes her suffering to her fate and bears the physical and emotional violence at the hands of her mother-in-law in unison with her son. She does not exhibit courage like M.R.Anand’s Gauri to leave her husband and escape the affliction. Mayamma’s husband deserts her and frees her from his cruelty, but his going away adds to her suffering because having run away from his responsibility, he burdens her with the responsibility to look after his mother, son and support herself. Unable to forget her long bout of suffering after her son’s death she seeks shelter at the altar of Parvatiamma. But Mayamma had no bitterness in her, she could live several such lives again, but she was aware that new generation is not as patient and may not survive circumstances faced by her, she says “Devi, that child so easily moved to tears, what he knows of penance?” (113). Mayamma is the archetypal woman, who accepted her fate, cursed it but never questioned it and lived life exactly as she was expected to. Being a woman Mayamma goes through this crisis. She is told to find happiness and fulfillment in traditional feminine roles which smother one’s identity.

So, one can say that Hariharan has shown a change in the conscious of the female characters as far as the question of marriage is concerned, as it is related to the
transformation of India. The first generation women accepted their role, without questioning it. Then, the second generation shows a degree of rebellion but still had children. The third generation - the narrator of the novel reject marriage after having given it an opportunity with no success, deciding, then, to remain motherless.

The cases of Gauri (Devi's grandmother's servant) and Uma (Devi's cousin) are also relevant: "Gauri had worked in the Brahmin houses as long as she could remember; she had been working to build a little pile of dowry-gold, chain by chain, bangle by bangle" (31). Finally she gets enough gold for a man who asks for twenty sovereigns, and accomplishes her goal to get married. She left her husband's house because she was mistreated; on the other hand, Uma was also mistreated by her "drunken husband and sexually abused by her father-in-law (135).

It is commonly thought that marriage leads to stability, attachment and mutual care in a family. Levi-Strauss in The Elementary Structure of Kinship talks about the theory of kinship structures as a system of the exchange of women. Women as a group are fitted within an already set framework where patriarchy rules without considering the effects of such placement. Levi-Strauss further argued that culture is based on a system of exchange, the underlying law of which is reciprocity. This for him was the key to understand kinship systems, as a means of organizing the exchange of women in marriage. This definition implies that women are treated as property. The masculine norm presented and cultivated in tradition considers the existence of women as dependent on the male-governed and male-defined social structures, treating them as a piece of property to be passed on from one man to another. This image denies women's personhood. The image of subordination or to control and confine women is popularized by patriarchy so that women can be marginalized through cultural institutions and religious rituals.
The institution of marriage is commonly treated by female writers as an area which limits and confines the lives of women. Adhikari states in her article “Enclosure and Freedom: Arundhati Roy’s The God of Small Things” that Durga, Sita and Savitri are the creations of male imagination and are either empowered by the male gods Vishnu, Brahma, Mahesh (like Durga) or are the symbols of sacrifice and service expected to live and die for their lords (Sita and Savitri). “The images of women controlled by the institution of marriage are those of suffocation, dwarfing and mental illness. Women writers are constructing successful, self-aware, emancipated protagonists who also manage to continue with the respect worthy ideology of womanhood” (Adhikari 40).

An Indian woman’s self-perception, as also the society’s expectations from her, have for long been largely determined by the complex of ideas and values and beliefs codified in the Manusamriti. In mythological terms the central feminine model still is the virtuous, enduring, self-denying, long suffering wife, Sita. The values personified in such ideal figures appear very strong in the psyche of women even if they discard these role models. The traditional Indian values assigned to women are: first, acceptance of male authority whether of father, husband or son; second, acceptance of dharma; third sexual purity before as well as after marriage; and finally, muteness. But, as suggested by “Third Wave Feminists”, now Indian women have been moving towards new directions under the impact of new ideas: autonomy, personal goals, sexual emancipation, and speech.

Love remains just a dream in the three generations of women. Familial code remains in conflict with the emotional impulses of the individual. Marriage, which seals the bond of love, turns out to be a social duty, which has to be lived through the family code. However, the succeeding generation not governed by any rigid ethics finds a
loveless marriage a burden fit to be shed off. The trend continues in the third generation when marriage breaks off even before it develops into a family. The sacred façade of marriage either lacks harmony or comes crumbling down in an imbalanced familial set-up in all cases that the novel depicts. Hariharan attacks the double standard that one sex is to be sheltered, and judged and kept away from power, while the other- regardless of its behavior- runs the world.

Lichtenstein rightly says that society depends upon the stable identities of individuals. All these women suffer dilemma of identity as they do not fit in the identity themes given by their culture. Sex and gender roles exterminate the female identity. By comparing and contrasting the lives of three generations of women, the author presents a picture of the multi-faceted Indian women. One finds women who accept their archetypal female role as a wife and mother and live a frustrated life without questioning it; women who are victims of both mental and physical abuse and suffer in silence; and a more modern version of women who seek their own individuality and rebel against social conventions.

The novel also focuses upon female bonding. The major character Devi shows a vital and close bonding with Mayamma who understands Devi’s problems with Mahesh and Devi empathizes with Mayamma’s life-stories. Through her silent endorsement of the radical actions of Devi, she recreates another genealogy of women. Mayamma intentionally narrates to Devi the story of real guile and rebellion of her aunt Lakshmiamma who “casts away her shame, the very source of her womanhood” (125) to assert her right on her erring son, who had left his widowed and destitute mother alone to wither away like a discarded rug. She actually sees in her mind the aggressive forces of Kali in her old age. She supports Devi when she elopes with Gopal and seems to suggest that survival is the highest ideal in the struggle ridden life of a woman. Female bonding
between Devi and Mayamma is elevating and strength giving. Mayamma believed that her life was completely governed by gender and she narrated the story of her own life filled with distress, pain, discomfort and sorrow. One is truly aware of the fact that she had to suffer miseries which turned out to be a great boon to the society and her family. She was treated very cruelly by her husband and in addition to it by her worthless son too, and eventually she could find shelter in the house of a well-to-do relative Parvatiamma, who was the mother of Mahesh, Devi’s husband. Physically weak and old Mayamma, presently perceived in her mind’s eyes the violent strength and physical action of goddess Kali. As she was not able to change the direction of her fate, she silently and willingly agreed to play her part in society when she finally accepted that women have to experience physical and mental pain because they are women. In spite of the fact that Mayamma could do very little for her, she encouraged and even supported those female folks who had the similar fate with hers. She supported Parvatiamma when the latter tells Mayamma her strong desire of leaving the household responsibilities to become a devotee. Moreover, she not only accepted Devi’s decision of walking out of Mahesh’s life, but also she even blessed and wished her. By telling Devi the miseries and experiences suffered throughout her life, she helps her to unshackle from prejudices and shallow patriarchal norms. She makes Devi realize that submission and surrender is futile in the name of conformation. She thus stopped to obey the old traditional values that prevented a woman to achieve her rights of making choices resulted from the ill-treatment of her family. Without making much hue and cry, she tolerated everything with a firm belief that the success of a woman’s life relies on her capacity to tolerate everything with patience in this society dominated by male. Having a mindset of this kind of life she moreover gave comfort to Devi. Mayamma seeks pleasure and satisfaction when Parvati and Devi release themselves from patriarchal social system that tried to seize their mind and soul.
The technique of myth-making is deliberately used by the writer to show Devi’s progress as an individual in the novel. Her interpretation of the different stories she hears from different people show the growth of her personality. It is “Hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do to provide a rationale for social customs and observances” (Abrams 170). In the Indian traditional family system these myths have a unique importance as they are verbally and orally transmitted from one generation to another generation in order to “establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives” (Abrams 170). Kedar Ali rightly says that:

The 1980’s were the era of the so-called myth-busting. Indian feminists had begun to step out of shadow and rewrote mythology, which was written by men. This was and is necessary because male discourse... makes them (women) invisible. Men written myths have the function to infantilize women. As a result women have to write themselves into discourses. A central aspect here is the re-visionist remaking of mythology from a female point-of-view. If history and politics are male discourses, mythology becomes a female discourse. (13)

Indian mythology is connected with the stories about goddesses and even the legendary heroes mentioned in the epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The myth collections are called Puranas. Githa Hariharan, being brought up in a traditional Hindu Family might have been acquainted with all these myths and she perfectly blended the myth and reality in the modern Indian life.

Grandma’s stories of “predestined husband and idyllic marriages” which Devi’s mother, Sita also “fed and stoked” before Devi’s meeting with, the prospective grooms, are pointers to the emblems of womanhood handed over by tradition (16). These stories.
and their morals are narrated to prepare her for her role as an ideal wife, imbibing the qualities of self-sacrifice, empathy, tolerance and nurturance. Devi’s father-in-law too tells her mythological stories which are “for a woman who had already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear” and have a “centre point, an exacting touchstone for a woman, a wife.”(51). His advice to Devi through various stories and statements of ideal womanhood are strewn all over the text.

Her father-in-law’s statements about how an ideal woman ought to be epitomize the conventional gender attitude shared by most males. Through his mythological tales of Syama Shastri, Thyagaraja, Narayana Tiratha, Jayadeva, he documents the patriarchal structure and the dynamics of family and life under paternal authority which preach women to be unvoiced, undemanding, self-sacrificing centering their lives around their husbands. Devi understands the sexist politics and patriarchal designs underneath his narratives. The feminist critics have shown that literature reflects a patriarchal, or a male-dominated perspective of society. Patriarchy is a system where men are family heads, descent is reckoned through the father, men alone are priests, and all laws and norms dictate by male elders are held to be just and right. Mulk Raj Anand, while addressing a seminar of women teachers of English Literature in Jodhpur University said, “In my opinion, one cardinal cause of suffering of women in all ages, except the first Aryan phase, has been the dominant patriarchy, sanctioned in the Smritis” (5).

All the stories told by Devi’s grandmother deal with mythical figures like Gandhari, Damyanti, Amba, Ganga and the devoted wife of Snake husband. The stories relating to daily life and mundane situations told by Devi’s uneducated grandmother, have left the most deeply etched and disturbing images in Devi’s mind. As already been mentioned that through myths, girls are taught their roles in society, but Devi interprets all these myths from a different angle. At first sight, her grandmother’s stories show
customs of a culture, which reflect rules and tradition placed on Indian women. However, they also show a number of subversive possibilities, because they are double-edged, ambiguous and often to interpretation, as Harihara herself claims in an interview with Sushila Nasta. These stories can be used at the simplest level as guidelines for behavior but if we go further, they subvert the conventional male created myths about women.

"Devi" means goddess, the spouse of Shiva, who unites both the personalities: the ferocious and the sublime. It is only Devi- whether benevolent or cruel- who among the goddesses has an independent personality of her own, thus giving a symbolic significance to her name, a woman who looks for her identity, breaking the social barriers, which limit her personality. Devi's grandmother has offered her new possible interpretations of the legends. For Devi, there is a vast difference in her grandmother's tales as compared to those of Baba's tales. Devi feels that Baba's tales were less spectacular, they ramble less" (51).

Devi, who was indoctrinated by Baba's Brahminical ideals, wonders about Parvati (her mother-in-law), who "had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life all other to her, the life of a householder. Had she misread Baba's stories? Or had she turned them upside down and taken the contradictions, the philosophical paradoxes, to their logical conclusions?" (64).

Baba's tales were anti women whereas her grandmother's were totally different. Parvatiamma's story captures Devi's thoughts as also the mythical tale of Amba. She is fascinated with this ultimate fantasy: "a woman avenger who could earn manhood through her penance" (39-40). It is this defiance of gender stereotyping and subversion of Baba's tales that lays a hold on Devi's imagination.
All the myths and women that have passed through her life come together in her dreams saying:

Like Sati you must burn yourself to death, like Sati you must vindicate your husband’s honor and manhood. Like Parvati you must stand neck-deep in cold, turbulent waters, the hungry, predatory fish devouring your feet. Like Hemavati you must reap the bountiful harvest that will be yours when you embrace the lingam on the sacrificial alter” (94). These are the voices she has grown up with. Devi is filled with fury as she has swallowed her hard earned education and followed her husband of the numberless mythical women who haunt Devi’s narrative; the most enduring image is that of a warrior-goddess who rides and cuts off demonic male heads. (70)

Devi reinterprets the stories told to her by her grandmother and father-in-law and she culls a new meaning for herself through these stories. Out of Gandhari’s tale, which appears in Mahabharta; the grandmother interpreted anger of Gandhari as self-sacrifice, but the lesson Devi learnt was different. “The lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger, that it could seep into...The lesson brought me five steps closer to adulthood” (29). Another myth that can be doubly interpreted is the story of Ganga, a woman who drowned her seven children because they were the reincarnation of gods and she tried to get them back to heaven. Again, one can interpret that motherhood brings boredom and desperation.

Once a woman transgresses the roles expected from her, she becomes a man. She does not identify herself with her mother (Sita)- who always stand for self-sacrifice but with Durvasa in Kalidasa’s Shakuntala, a man, who has the traditional right to be angry when betrayed, humiliated, and passed over. There is no doubt that the story that most
deeply influenced Devi was the story of Amba, “the princess who shed her womanhood through her dreams of revenge and become a man” (35). What lies beneath this story is the difference between sex and gender. So, one can say that the stories, which Devi had grown up with, had developed within her a mechanism of self-defense against any onslaught from the other side. Here, it becomes very clear that the mother’s influence on the daughter’s life indubitably leaves indelible impressions and influences her life and self-estimation. By focusing on the male point-of-view, the mother becomes instrumental in instilling the patterns of inferiority and submission in her daughter’s psyche that later on germinate the feelings of ambivalence in the daughter. The changing socio-cultural demands and the generational gaps add to this tussle as the two women have different expectations and challenges to meet in their individual lives.

Through all these mythical stories, Hariharan criticises the western structures of knowledge and power and its thought on philosophy and history, as well as she questions patriarchal power structure. The questioning and recalculation of the male-dominated society by Indian women authors have assumed great significance. Hariharan has given much importance to the idea of ‘memory’ as a means of reconstituting identity. Thus, testimony is of great importance as she has portrayed characters who have been denied access to history. In other words, Hariharan displays in her novel the history of gender injustice in community by linking women’s lives and struggle across generations and barriers of caste and class. Indian women have a number of images to follow which are based on class and caste hierarchies and stratification. So, the degree of humiliation and exploitation varies from class to class and caste to caste. In course of the novel stories are retold in different ways from gynocentric perspectives. It is the process of networking among women of different ages, generations and castes in myths and real life stories.

Devi goes back home to join her mother because she feels the necessity to start from the beginning. *The Thousand Faces of Night* redefines mother-daughter
relationship. In a patriarchal set-up, mother-daughter relationship is ‘deformed’ and motherhood has a limited meaning but Devi subverts the dictates of patriarchal systems and seeks to empower herself by giving a new meaning to the mother daughter relationship. In the Indian context, mother has been assigned a very high status since the pre Vedic age and mother worship is prominent part of Indian ethos and psyche. Even Manu said,” While the teacher was more important than ten instructors, the father more than a hundred teachers, the mother was more important than a thousand fathers” (Nabar 182). Having failed to define her identity within the framework of the male-oriented social structures, she finally returns to her mother, “to stay and fight and to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning” (139). Devi has been building her identity by means of disagreements with the others, challenging the traditional feminine roles. And this is the very moment when Devi realizes that something is missing, and says, “I was too well-prepared, and not prepared at all. America, Jacaranda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from my trials, my tail between my legs, … She was, for the first time, no longer on the run” (137-138).

Her visit to her mother’s house by the sea where she stays after her husband’s death brings Devi close to her own independence. Her education and maturation is complete with the realization of her genuine feelings. As Hirsch points out, “the process of en-genderment is tied to the process of transmission and the relationship to previous and subsequent generations of women” (11). Devi’s mother-Sita- after playing the roles of a good daughter-in-law, wife and a good mother, finally faces liberation after the death of her husband. In the end, the image of her “wild and overgrown garden” which displays too much “lushness” metaphorically suggests Sita’s transition from a traditional mother to a self-reliant being whose womanhood is not pruned and potted by societal conditions. Now the sound of her musical instrument Veena suggests the possibility of
her attempting to attain what she had denied herself— to live her own life. To her pleasant surprise, Devi hears the sound of her music welcoming her into the house. Her mother’s gesture is a clear indication that they are now free to be true to their own selves.

In Dignan’s terms Devi values her “ego identity” more as she strongly identifies with her mother. This identification of daughter with her mother clearly indicates their achievement of identity. This female bond derives its power from the women’s previous sense of isolation, from their ill treatment by men and from their discovery, through suffering, of the saving grace of shared experience. This mother-daughter relationship embodies the ultimate peace and reconciliation which is sought by both of them. “Sita and Devi share one thing in common: both are strong-willed but in the older woman her will-power became an iconoclastic rage, in her daughter, the spirit to survive by hook or by crook” (Bande 113). For Devi, there is a hope and a sense of rejuvenation as the past is erased and the present becomes an experience to build a future. Devi’s final assertion of her autonomy is thus the celebration of the power of the divine Devi as well as that of the entire community of women. Women are no longer vehicles towards somebody else’s ends, nor are their adventures other people’s quests but instead they are questers seeking their own salvation.

In the Indian cultural context, reviving this relationship is particularly symbolic when it concerns the relationship between a mother and a married daughter. Daughters are conventionally brought up to believe that their parent’s home is a temporary abode and that it is the husband’s house which has to be eventually considered as home. Once married they are treated as visitors when they visit their parents. But ‘returning’ married daughters cause shame to the family’s reputation and are a source of despair to their mothers. In the light of this cultural background, the determination of the women in this novel to review the meanings of ‘home’ and ‘motherhood’ takes on powerful overtones.
The ending in which she returns to her liberated mother’s house by the ocean hints at her future return to her own self. Her extra-marital affairs fail to help her in gaining her identity therefore she moves to her mother’s house where she can repair her wounded self. She no longer needs to feel acknowledged as an archetypal wife, she does not even set the standard for motherhood excellence. Finally, Devi experiences exile from the community, first eloping with a lover and then returning to her mother, who is found playing the Veena in a slovenly house by the ocean. By adapting her grandmother’s, Mayamma’s and Baba’s oral tradition of talk-story to her own enunciation of self as an individual, Devi has achieved her purpose, offering an open-ended space for further development.

Sudhir Kakar talks of the dominant narrative of Hindu culture being that of the Devi or the Great Goddess, especially in the manifold expressions as mother in the inner world of the Hindu son. “The maternal- feminine is more central in Indian myths and psyche than their Western counterparts, and affirms the permeability of gender boundaries” (65-66). Hariharan’s desire for the removal of gender polarities suggests the incorporation of feminine values in the male. But an avenging powerful kritiya, the angry Gandhari or the bitter and frustrated Amba, remain unsatisfactory models of power and agency. Devi’s introspection and self-knowledge lead her to an admission of her failings, but there is also a self-justification; “I have mimed the lessons they taught me, an obedient puppet whose strings they pulled and jerked with their love” (136-137). The simultaneous projection of a mother image of protector/nurturer, as well as a devouring one, is very much in keeping with Devi’s ambiguous feelings towards Sita. She returns to the maternal, with which she unites with the maternal feminine, seeking to start from the very beginning: “I have made very few choices, but once or twice, when a hand wavered, when a string was cut loose, I have stumbled on-stage alone, greedy for a story of my own”(137).
Devi becomes the androgynous principle, a self in quest of self-hood. While moving towards “androgyne”, Devi attains the stage of “identity achievement”. In Poppen’s terms she shows more sophisticated levels of psyche. It is the knowledge and acknowledgement of the reality of life that leads her to an acceptance and a final transcendence. A clear instance of it is the significance of the epigraph—a vachana by Devara Dasimayya in D.R.Kinsley’s Hindu Goddesses about the “Bamboo” tree and also in the marriage ritual of newly-weds garlanding the “Neem” and “Peepal” trees. The “Neem” then would seem to suggest Devi’s mother Sita, who stood for all that was reasonable, scientific, and not for a world of myths and dreamy nonsense. Devi becomes Devi, “the androgynous principle—neither male nor female, but a self in quest of selfhood” (136-137). The construction of an androgynous male or female subject is a desired alternative to pronounce gender polarization. The conscious interplay of masculine and feminine aspects of the individual subject is not impossibility in a culture where gender binaries among mythical gods are not so sharply demarcated, and finds an echo in religious mysticism which advocates that human beings acquire qualities associated with the maternal.

Thus, the novel projects the three main characters—Devi, Sita, and Mayamma, who “walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (135). Mayamma after accepting her cruel fate lives again through Parvatiamma and Devi. Sita too has some impediments in her married life but maintains her individuality and in the end even finds the support of her daughter Devi. Devi rebels against the suppression of her identity and takes revenge like Kritiya, Durga or Kali. She surfaces as a new woman who emerges from her own ashes like a phoenix.