CHAPTER — 2

Exploitation of Woman in Githa Hariharan’s

The Thousand Faces of Night

and

When Dreams Travel
Since ages woman has been the victim of male domination and oppression. Women who constitute half of the world’s population are paradoxically not treated with men in all spheres of human activity. They are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized in the matter of sharing the available opportunities for fulfillment of their lives, despite the fact that every woman slaves for the development of her family, her husband and children. She has always been treated like a commodity. Man has always looked down upon her as the weaker sex. The religions of the world have given sanction to the female’s subjugation to the males. The Bible clearly tells, “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands as to Lord”. In the Bible at various places the superiority of man over woman is stressed. Adam is shown as the master who gives name to his wife and calls her eve in the Biblical myth. St. Paul also gives a secondary position to woman. In the present chapter of the research, exploitation of woman in Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night and When Dreams Travel is studied. Woman’s primary role has traditionally been confined to the family. The woman is often ‘marginalized’, ‘repressed’ or ‘silenced’ in literary works. Feminist criticism is a specific kind of political discourse which takes a stand against patriarchy and sexism. Woman’s oppression is not only due to individual male violence but it is based on the patriarchal structure of society.

From the beginning, women novelists have been considered good at depicting scenes of domestic activities and issues of family life. Under the patriarchal structure, woman’s manner, her very soul and ideas are modified by the constant pleasures of masculine standards. Woman has always been projected as secondary and inferior. The bias against woman can be seen right away from the day of creation. It is said that God created man in his own image. The suggestion is that God is male. Further, it is said that God, after creating man, made woman from the rib of man. As Adam, the first man on the earth, remarks about Eve: “this is now bone of my bones,
and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called woman. Because she was taken out of man” (Krishnaswamy 73). Thus, man is created first, and woman is taken out of man. In other words, woman is secondary to man. Stating woman’s secondary position, H. M. Parshley also argues that:

. . . since patriarchal times, woman has been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men, a position comparable in many respects with that of racial minorities in spite of the fact that women constitute numerically at least half of human race, and further that this secondary standing is not imposed of necessity by natural ‘feminine’ characteristics but rather by strong environmental forces of educational and social tradition under the purposeful control of men. (Parshley 9)

This is what Kate Millett has taken up is ‘Sexual Politics’. Millett states, “The term ‘Politics’ shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another” (Millett 23). Man is superior, God like: female is inert, passive, “doomed to immanence by man”. Commenting on the status of woman, Juliet Mitchell observes: “Production, reproduction, sexuality and socialization of children are the key structures of woman’s situation” (Mitchell 100).

The post-colonial woman novelist Githa Hariharan, mainly interested in the portrayal of woman character. She explores in her first award-winning novel The Thousand Faces of Night, the marriages, old traditional values, story and myth, passion and loneliness in the lives of Indian women. Marriage becomes an instrument of female exploitation and oppression leading to the loneliness, hollowness and incapability. “There is no remedy to sexual politics in marriage” (Millett 147). This statement is explored by Githa Hariharan in her novel The Thousand Faces of
Night. This novel is yet another version of female ‘novel of marriage’ in which the woman does not live happily even after on getting married. Germaine Greer, in her The Female Eunuch, tells women that “to be emancipated from the helplessness and need to walk freely upon the earth is your birth right”, maintaining that marriage is the chief cause of woman’s helplessness and oppression (Greer 53).

Simone de Beauvoir writes: “It is said that marriage diminishes man: it is often true; but it almost always annihilates women” (Beauvoir 530). Hariharan in her novel has focused on the inner life of woman through three generations – Devi, the daughter; mother Sita and Mayamma, each has her own life story to tell. The experiences of Devi, Sita, Mayamma and other minor female characters show how disillusionment, springing from the absence of healthy communication and reciprocal care, results in the estrangement of individuals and creates bad marriage, which leads to depression in a woman. Simone de Beauvoir defines marriage as:

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution. (Beauvoir 451)

Marriage which has been a traditional basis for man-woman relationship may or may not provide the conditions necessary for individual growth. It seems that marriage, that “sacrificial knife” that marks the beginning of the whole sacrificial project, is as much an investment by men as by women. Nayantara Sahgal also describes marriage as a ‘life long damage’ if the other partner is not sensitive enough to communicate. Marriage opens up a whole range of demands — demands of motherhood and sacrifice. Writing in Femina, way back in 1976 she writes:

I have often wondered since at the life long damage this stern and implacable expectation inflicts and the young and sensitive, especially those young women
who have just begun to spread their wings and not had time to discover even a fraction of them. (Sahgal 150)

In a patriarchal society system, a female child is brought up under the strict control of her parents with the view that she is to be given to a new master, her husband, who will determine and shape her for the rest of her life. The traditional feminine virtues and graces are instilled in her so that she could be an attractive commodity in the marriage market. She is groomed to be an object of sale right from her childhood. Generally, marriage is projected as a norm and an end all and be all for woman in the society. They often “become the victims of an ingrained social pattern because, right from childhood, a girl is conditioned to think of marriage as her main goal in life” (Dharker 124). What woman undergoes to fulfill the societal expectations of being perfect daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and mother does not concern society. Through the experiences of female characters of the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, it has been tried to find out how they suffer and struggle for their identity in life. Like other girls, Devi is prepared by her mother ‘for show’ to be viewed ‘as a potential bride’ for the Srinivasans (16-17). The Srinivasans are, like in the matrimonial ads, looking for a “fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to ‘adjust’ bride for their son” (17). Girls are brought up in a way to please the groom and his relatives. Stress is laid on physical beauty and fairness. Devi’s grandmother would rub her with coconut oil and turmeric till she is ‘fair’ like Damyanti. Indian mothers are always aware that their daughters are mere guests in their houses. From their childhood, they start constructing them in a way that they can be easily accepted in new environment. They feel threatened by the thought that if their daughters do not fit into the framework of the given patriarchal image of an ideal wife or daughter-in-law, they would probably face rejection and unhappiness like Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. 
For centuries, the Hindu woman idealized the mythical models from *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and other *Puranas*. Indian women were asked to get inspired by the archetype women like Sita and Savitri. Githa Harihara makes ingenious use of Indian myths for plot-development and characterization in the novel. Myth is a traditional or legendary story, usually concerned with deities or demi-gods, sacred beings or great heroes. Myths as an integral part of literature have always had a privileged place. A myth is defined in various ways. Roland Barthes states:

> A myth is a type of speech, so that everything can be a myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse . . . Myths are stories drawn from a society’s history that have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society’s ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness- with all the complexities and contradictions that consciousness may contain. (Quoted in Mouli and Ghanshyam 177)

The patriarchal practices which reduce woman’s status to inferior social being are further perpetuated by myths and traditions which unfortunately have been implanted in the fabric of every society. The story telling traditions continue over the generations and these stories are a permanent and typical feature of the Indian family life. The opening of *The Thousand Faces of Night* strikes the keynotes of the cardinal problem i.e. the conditioning of a girl child. Women especially mothers and grandmothers show concern in encouraging their daughters to follow the stereotypes. The myths of Amba, Gandhari, Ganga and others are built up and repeated to promote the traditional image of woman that leads to selfless behaviour and in turn insensitivity to injustice. Even today, these stories become dictums for women and lay down a chalked path to be adhered to. Devi’s grandmother narrates such tales. Devi’s grandmother is a feminist in her
own way asserting her individuality and sheltering women who are victims of patriarchal society. Grandma’s stories of “predestines husband and idyllic marriages” which Devi’s mother Sita also, “fed and stocked” 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.

As Simone de Beauvoir acclaimed, “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Beauvoir 267). Devi is given the cues of attaining the ideal womanhood by her grandmother through the mythological stories of Gandhari, Amba and others, which later her mother ‘fed and stocked’ to ready her for marriage. They try to teach her to adjust compromise and adapt. Simone de Beauvoir’s statement makes it more explicit:

She (mother) grimly forbids the child to resemble her; she wants her experience to be of some use, it is one way of having a second chance. The prostitute sends her daughter to a convent; the ignorant woman has her educated. A real conflict arises when the girl grows older; as we have seen, she wishes to establish her independence from her mother. (Beauviour 534)

The novel The Thousand Faces of Night shows with exceptional fictional skill, the subtle way in which women are bludgeoned to play subordinate roles. The novel explores how middle class Hindu society gender relations and male script roles by means of myths that women rework them in their lives and also in the lives of other. The patriarchal laws of Manu, the ancient Hindu sage runs like a thread throughout the text. These laws are expressed by Baba, Devi’s father-in-law. This male discourse is subverted by female discourse of Devi’s grandmother. If Manu speaks of female subordination, the grandmother’s discourse glorifies strong, rebellious angry
women like Gandhari, Amba and Draupadi from *Mahabharata*. In fact, the male discourse of Manu is subverted by grandmother’s revisionist myth-making.

In Githa Hariharan’s novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the mother-daughter relationship is explored from another dimension. Sita poses to be a strict disciplinarian and Devi craves motherly touch. The mother is undemonstrative; Devi misunderstands her as ‘too snobbish to caress freely’ (85). The only memory impinged on her mind of her tender touch is of when she once fell sick and her mother caressed her while Devi had pretended to ‘feign deep asleep’ (85). On close reading, we discover that Sita has covert love and sympathy for her daughter. Her motto is ‘order, reason, and progress’ because she herself had to acquiesce in order to be an ideal daughter-in-law and wife (26). Even in contemporary India, the socio–cultural discourse assumes that a daughter is born to be married, bring honours to her family yet mostly be a recipient of dishonour unless she becomes the mother of sons. It is a son that is still wanted, pampered and loved in most homes across all strata of Indian society within the narratives, hegemony other functions different ways in the lives of the educated Indian women.

Devi’s entire academic background is disregarded and she is expected to transform herself into the traditional wife busy with her household. Mahesh (Devi’s husband) remains constantly away from home for official work. His attitude to marriage is that it is a convenient entanglement. Devi comments on Mahesh, “he does not believe in talking about ifs and buts at least not with his wife”. All that spewing out of feelings is self-indulgent, he says. Mahesh’s inevitable long absence from home due to his official tours makes Devi lonely.

In India, since woman is considered to be an “embodiment of sacrifice, silent suffering, humility, faith and knowledge” (Everett 76). She should be virtuous, chaste, submissive, homely, graceful, and devoted to her husband and his family. She must seek pleasure in these
relationships. In the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi’s mother Sita is also victimized. Married at the age of twenty, she goes to her in-law’s house having a “resolve to be the perfect wife and daughter-in-law” (36). In order to maintain harmony and fulfill her endeavour to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law, she had to pay a price, one thing that she loved playing was her veena and she equated herself worth so completely in terms of her music (136). Once when her father-in-law sat in front of the gods, ready for his morning prayer couldn’t find a thing he needed. He called Sita who did not hear him, but from her room he hears the sound of the veena. He roared, “Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (30) This was a call for self- sacrifice. Rukmini Bhaya Nair says:

> Women, conventionalized into their roles of wives, sisters and mothers have, as a result remained within a powerful cross cultural metaphor that violently divides the genders making as all, in one way or another, victims of Lawrence’s Pansay-Syndrome. (Nair 9)

This instance shows that in a male dominated society, a woman is recognized only in relation to others and her multifarious roles in the family. She is supposed to be an ideal wife, daughter-in-law, mother and home-maker. Her individual self has no recognition. Sita in frustrated fury, burnt all her photographs posed with her veena and she from “her own mother, father and 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). After this, she did become ‘a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbours praised” (30). Traditionally, a “good woman” is always synonymous with good wife and a good wife must be chaste, faithful and virtuous like Sita and Savitri. “For both men and women in Hindu society the
ideal woman has been traditionally personified by Sita who is portrayed in the *Ramayana*, as the quintessence of wifely devotion” (Uma Chakravarti 70).

A woman’s identity and her perception of the self are seen in connection with others. The Indian community expects every woman to merge herself with her husband, thus earning the status of ‘Ardhangini’. This implies that a woman has to sacrifice her ‘self’ and avoid attainment of a distinct ‘selfhood’. In the Indian culture, marriage is a sacred institution where the wife is the half of a man, Ardhangini, but ironically submits completely to the husband for he is Patiparmeshwar, an earthly substitute for God around whom her whole being resolves. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Sita’s husband, Mahadevan is like a wooden character. His inability to create emotional ripples in Sita’s heart results in her alienation from him. They seem to be two bulls yoked together to cover the tedious journey of their marital life. After her marriage, Sita is forced to give up playing on veena. Most of time, women’s ‘self-sacrifice’ retard their own self-development. “Women have been so encouraged to concentrate on the emotions and reactions of others that they have diverted from expressing their own emotions” (Miller 39). Wifehood is considered as the main aim and every woman who marries is expected to aim at its excellence. Sita channels her frustrated musical talent into trying to ruthless shape the lives of her husband and daughter. It is the silent exposition of female power:

She took her husband by hand and led him from promotion to promotion till he was within the exclusive circle of fast-rising executives who brought home three thousand a month. And this was, she explained to him with infinite patience, only the bottom rung of the ladder he was to climb. (104)

Feminists hold that care and its associated qualities — empathy, nurturing, subservience and tolerance are acknowledged and stressed by tradition as the emblems of womanhood, and
contend that a woman’s “identity is defined in a context of relationship and stressed by a standard of responsibility and care” (Gilligan 160). They argue that a woman is not born with devotion, love, care, tolerance, generosity and compromise towards her family and other relations, but is conditioned to assimilate these virtues. Her worth is equated with her ability to exhibit these virtues regarded as essential for the development of the other members of society. They see themselves in relation to the others and consider it their duty to care for and look after the males so that the male members can create history and achieve success. “In a patriarchal society, spare time is for one gender by converting the whole time of the women in the labour time” (Rose 164). Thus, a woman’s status is relegated in favour of man in the patriarchal set-up.

Similarly, Mayamma’s 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 by a tyrant husband who hurts her. Conditioned strongly in her feminine role she attributes her sufferings to her fate and bears the physical and emotional violence at the hands of her mother-in-law in union with her son, stoically. To understand Mayamma’s mother-in-law, one needs to dive deeper into the Indian ethos where the son is regarded as a refuge in the old age. The old woman is annoyed because Mayamma cannot produce children. Again, Mayamma’s failure to weave an emotional bond with her husband threatens her desire for security. Mayamma’s grandmother curses Mayamma for many things: the birth of a stillborn baby, the abandonment by her husband and the crushing poverty. However, Mayamma cannot offer resistance because traditionally, a bride is not supposed to have a voice of her own. In a traditional society, those women can be happy who blindly and unthinkingly accept the roles it assigns them. As Kakkar says:
The bride usually occupies one of the lowest rungs. Obedience and compliance with the wishes of the elder woman of the family, especially those of her mother-in-law, are expected as a matter of course” (Kakkar 73-74).

She submitted herself to the patriarchal values according to which women are “to be mere ‘dolls’ for men. Men mostly prefer doll-like girls who never ask question for any of their ideas or actions” (Alison 25). Mayamma, the housekeeper at Mahesh’s house too suffers psychological and physical violence. Her husband hits, slaps, kicks, beats and indulges in non-consensual sexual activity. Unable to bear a child, her agony is enchanted by her indifferent husband who “woke her up every night, his large, hairy thighs and heavy on her, pushing, pushing” (80). Once she reminded of a song, her mother used to sing, she hums the tune while making a “Kolam”. Her husband like a tyrant on her bent bottom saying, “so you’ve taken to saying in the streets, have you, you shameless hussy” (111). She remembers him as a cruel man:

He snorted like an angry bull. He pushed my sari aside even before my head touched the pillow, I was a silly little girl then, and his grunting frightened me. If I turned away to sleep, he held my hair tightly with one hand and hit me with the other . . . satiated with his carnal night on the field and draw me to himself with rough tenderness. (118)

Mayamma’s husband deserts her and frees her from his cruelty but his going away adds to her suffering because having ran away from his responsibilities, he burdens her with the responsibility to look after his mother, his son and support herself. After her son’s death, she seeks shelter at the home of Parvatiamma, unable to forget her long bout of suffering.

Sita too laboured hard and the ‘long hours she had earlier sat bent over her Veena were now spent in kitchen’ (102). Expert in management and economy, she runs the home deftly
saving “a cabbage here, a spoon of oil there . . . later tens” (102). Mahadevan’s achievement was practically due to his wife to whose “gracious parties’ invitations were keenly sought” (104). Sita’s character reveals how woman is seen in relation to man as ‘the other’, ‘the second sex’, created solely for him. She is seen what man is not, and man is seen as what woman is not.

Devi is also, one of the many conditioned females who have no choice but to judge themselves from the yardstick of others. Her relation with Dan, her Black-American lover is affected by the dominant discourse. She dares not accept Dan’s offer of marriage on two significant grounds — the first is more personal and the second more conventional. She rejects his offer because she sees the cultural divide, which she would not be able to bridge and second, he would not be acceptable to Indian community. She goes back to home and quietly agree to marry the man of her mother’s choice. Devi appears to expect to fulfill dreams of romance within an arranged marriage. However, Mahesh’s pragmatic and often heartless approach to marriage and romance deny the fulfillment of her fantasy, upon which she, in a familiar cinematic pattern, elopes with her musician lover, Gopal.

Devi unable to conceive for a long time, is advised by Mayamma, who had herself ‘waited ten years for a son’ (112) to undergo penance to turn the wheel of fate “Pray, pray, Devi. Tell the beads until your finger are calloused. And numb with exhaustion. Sit between five fires in a grove of penance for the sake of your unborn son” (93-94). Mayamma records how her mother-in-law thrived on the astrologer’s promise that Mayamma would bear her many grandsons (80). Disappointed, she made her do penance to change the course. As a woman’s honour is doubled at the birth of the son, who is supposed to be the carrier of his father’s name to the future, women too desire sons. Mayamma “prayed, made vows… starved every other day, she gave up salt and tamarind… she meditated for hours ... she fed the snakes her rice and curds .
Devi, too, suffers like Mayamma. She loses all zest for living when Mahesh refuses to adopt a child. Life becomes dull and Devi loses her sense of humour and ‘my girlish ability to giggle’ (91). Eichenbaum and Orbach acclaimed that childlessness is still a stigma because:

being a wife and becoming a mother are so deeply entwined that a woman who has been married for several years and has not had a child senses the curiosity and concern of others about her childlessness and may feel somewhat odd herself.

(Eichenbaum and Orbach 6)

To remove the stigma of childlessness, Mayamma suffers the orthodox methods, whereas Devi has to undergo various medical tests. It is synonymous with what Germain Greer felt:

In her late 30s when she desperately wanted a child, she was unable to conceive and turned to expensive medical interceptions, all of which failed . . . her denunciation of elaborate fertility treatments as causing untold “damage” to desperate woman . . . (Gurdev 1)

Gender discrimination in imparting education to a girl is also conspicuous in Githa Hariharan’s writings. Mahesh, Devi’s husband is a classical example of the hegemonic view. Instead of showing a sense of understanding for the cause of his wife’s depression, he attributes her trouble to education: “That is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn’t she a happier woman than you are?” (74)

New term such as ‘convented’ has been coined by Indian advertisers in their intensive search for the right match. The term ‘convented’ contains within itself many related words. Its technical interpretation is that it is desirable for the bride to have completed her schooling at convent school, where English is the medium of education and girls hailing from such schools have greater fluency. Also the fees charged by such schools are higher than ordinary state-run
schools and this denotes the secure financial status of the family and is the matter of prestige. Furthermore, these convented girls are more conversant with western behaviour, thus making them suitable for educated boys based in the West. The irony lies in the assumption is that such “liberalized” education based on an occidental foundation is not supposed to alter in any way the hegemony-oriented upbringing and character of the chosen bride. Devi’s (The Thousand Faces of Night) meeting with bride hunting Srinivasans reveals this aspect of Indian Society: they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her scientist husband’s friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday Papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home loving and prepared to ‘adjust’ (17). This perspective is also visible in Mahesh’s marital expectations about Devi. He completely ignores her qualifications, including her American Masters’ degree and expects her to settle down to mundane housewifely duties, completely discarded any emotional and intellectual needs that she might have. He states “there is so much for you to do at home” (56). In a male dominated society, woman is supposed to be an ideal wife, a mother and an excellent home-maker with multifarious roles in the family. Her individual self has very little recognition in the patriarchal society and so self-effacement is her normal way of life. The author uses instances of such indifferent pragmatism to expose the negative aspects of the discourse governing urban arranged marriages.

One of the patriarchal beliefs that masculine activities are superior has been instrumental in devaluing woman’s work. Generally, work implies paid work and hence, domestic work is trivialized. The popular idea that tougher work is to be done by men and easy work by women leads to the subsequent devaluation of women’s domestic work. One typical example that can be quoted is that of Mahesh, who wonders how Devi could do nothing and pass her time. He laughs when Devi tells him that during his absence she did ‘nothing’. “Nothing. How do you do
“...nothing?” (55) And adds that he would “pray to be born a woman in next birth, he teased. Then I
won’t have to make a living at all” (54). Successful women in their professions often confront
the indignation of their spouses if they fail to balance their work and domestic responsibilities,
for it is thought that domestic field is not the domain of males. Githa Hariharan exposes how
women are expected to submit to certain archetypal images perpetuated by and glorified in
televised serials advertisements and print media. These notions, which constitute Indian
womanhood, are reflected in prayers as well:

Like Sati you must burn yourself to death, like Sati you must vindicate your
husband’s honour and manhood. Like Hemavati you must turn that black skin on
your sinful body into golden sheen of light and beauty. Like Gauri you must reap
the bountiful harvest that will be yours if you embrace the lingam on the
sacrificial alter. (94)

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Uma, Devi’s cousin, is also deserted after a year of her
marriage, gravely ill-treated by her husband and molested by her father-in-law. She mutely
resigns herself to her fate and leads a life devoid of happiness. All these women—Mayamma,
Uma and others embraces the traditional picture of the ideal woman and totally obliterate their
selfhood in favour of their spouses. They are similar to the kind of women Ruth Prawar Jhabvala
illustrates: “Beat them, starve them, and maltreat them how you like, they will sit and look with
animal eyes and never raise a hand to defend themselves . . .” (Iyengar 41-42). They do not show
any reaction or rebellion, but remain quiet and submissive. At time, the woman’s ‘dependence
syndrome’ (Nahal 17) and need for ‘mothering, love, affection. Shelter, protection, security, food
and warmth’ make them continue with their masochism (Stiver 146). This is the reason why
Mayamma does not leave her cruel husband. For many women, going away from their suffering
relationship is not easy for it is “often perceived by others, and consequently by herself, as aggressive and hurtful. She may them hold on to or stay in the position of relative weakness in order for this most significant relationship to survive” (Stiver 148). They meekly follow the stereotype role-models: Sita, Savitri and Sati. Their identity, rooted in tradition which does not empower them to react. Woman sees herself in relation to others. As Gilligan said:

She stays with, builds on and develops in a context of attachment and affiliation with others . . . eventually for many women, the threat of disruption of an affiliation is perceived not just as a loss of relationship, but as something closer to a total loss of self. (Gilligan 69)

In order to continue and save relationships from disruption, woman suffers compromise and adapt even to battering relationships without raising her voice. She undergoes suffering as a result of physical and psychological violence. It is the ideal of womanhood not to voice grievances. She suffers at the hands of brutal victimizers wordlessly, for the Indian tradition, idealizing the myths of Sita and Savitri expects and emphasizes with submissiveness in women. She eradicates her very being to serve her masters. Miller puts it more explicitly:

The woman is not encouraged to take her own needs seriously. To explore them, to try to act on them as a separate individual. She is enjoyed from engaging all of her own resources and thereby prevented from developing some valid and reliable sense of her own worth. Instead, the woman is encouraged to concentrate on the needs and development of man. (Miller 18)

Devi’s grandmother and Uma in The Thousand Faces of Night, mutely embrace their lot without voicing their discontent. The same discontentment can also be seen in Mrinale Pande’s Daughter’s Daughter. In this novel, the Professor’s second marriage is occasioned because of his
temperamental incompatibility with his illiterate wife, Ganga. His dissatisfaction and failure to educate her, make her read the books he likes, to become his companion, invokes in her an urge to win the company of an educated, thinking woman, Virmati. Ganga played her role of dedicated and dutiful wife, mother and daughter-in-law to the hilt. She organizes her life by serving others, especially her husband. Unable to conform to her husband’s standards, she feels unhappy and dissatisfied. In order to overcome the situation, she converts herself into her husband’s serf, thinking that this would win her his devotion, too.

Some women come to believe that others will love them (and become permanently devoted to them) because they are serving these others so much and so well. Here the tragedy is that people do not usually love others for this reason. They may become dependent on their services, but that is different from real love and interest. (Miller 64-65)

For an Indian woman, her role is circumscribed within the emotive immersion of herself, which results in the negation of self and often leads to exploitation and conflict. In the gallery of women characters portrayed in the novel, we encounter two sets of women, one which submits to the dominant discourse for validation and the second which favours the inner validation in search of a free self. The first set adopts the community’s charted path. Thus they are safer because they live in a fearful survival strategy. In the second case, it is because of the lack of social support and the resultant humiliation. Mayamma falls victim to the patriarchal pressures to survive. On the other hand, there are other women, like Devi, Sita who reject the hegemonic structure in their quest to be more than a mere housewife.

Githa Hariharan’s *When Dreams Travel* (1999) is a rewriting of the *Arabian Night’s Entertainments* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. By rewriting Shahrzad’s story from a feminist
angle, Hariharan imposes on the reader a whole re-thinking of the hatred of woman so obvious in
the famous translation of the Medieval Arab anthologies. By deconstructing stereotypical
characters and plots in story telling, Hariharan is doing the implicit morality and prejudice of
traditional texts. In her novel *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan takes the help of ancient history to
show how the kings at one time used to exploit woman by hiring her for being one night
concubine. Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad are the names of the three main female characters
in the novel. They are women story tellers, linked to each other by bonds of family, love and the
palace life. Because of the particular circumstances of their lives, they understand the power and
pleasure and the responsibility of story telling and, each in her way; carry out this activity, as an
entertaining gift for others and as a form of empowerment to manipulate opponents. In the
original version, two brothers, the sultans of different cities, discover that the lovers of their
wives are lower in rank, actually slaves. As revenge for adultery, wives, lovers, and attending
slaves are killed in a bloodthirsty rage to make up for this wrong. Eventually, one of the brothers,
Sultan Shahryar, convinced that no woman is chaste, decides to marry a virgin every night and
have killed her in the morning, to prevent “disloyalty”. It is ridiculous that a man could take for
himself countless women he wants, but his right of doing so was never questioned. According to
Manu:

> A wife must ever remain devoted to her husband and always please him while he
> is alive. After his death she would never think of any other man. Although the
> husband may be of bad character seeking pleasure elsewhere even then he must
> be worshipped. (Quoted in Arora 11)

In the city where this carnage takes place, the sultan’s wazir had two daughters: Shahrzad
and Dunyazad. Shahrzad was witty, courageous, had a prodigious memory and had applied
herself to philosophy, history, physic and liberal arts. She was a “perfect beauty”. 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. Every night, till dawn Shahrzad starts narrating a tale, full of adventures, suspense and magic. The sultan is so fascinated by the tale that he postpones Shahrzad’s execution until he has heard of her story.

The inherent association between masculinity and violence is coherent with the pattern developed in the long canonized version of *The Thousand and One Nights*. As Hariharan points out in her own rewrite, the main male characters are always part of a dynasty, which passes power own, from father to son. Power is so much basis of definition of male identity. Shahzaman means ‘Shah of time, ruler of the age’, Shahryar means ‘Friend of the city, master of the city’ (9). Shahrzad means ‘born of the city’ and Dunyazad means ‘born of the world’ (37) which are the names that stand in opposition to ‘Master of the city’ and to ‘chosen one of the palace’. As Virginia Woolf said, “For most of history, Anonymous was a woman”. Both the ruler and “the chosen one” are creatures of the palace. Similarly the main thesis of *The Second Sex* revolves also around the idea that woman has been held in a relationship long-standing oppression to man through her relegation to being man’s “Other”. As Beauvoir explains in the Introduction part of *Sexual Politics*:

She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other” (Beauvoir 6)

The connection between sexuality and power is continuously reiterated in *The Thousand and One Nights*. As Hariharan points out, in all the versions of the tales the lovers of adulterous queen is always someone lower in the social rank than the husband. The queen is found with
“one of the meanest officers of the house hold”. Thus from the close study of the novel *When Dreams Travel*, it is clear that female sexuality is not only a source of power but it is also the source of death. Evidently, “the power that men assume over women corrupts basic human relationships” (Sampson 7).

In *When Dreams Travel*, “Githa Hariharan has carefully brought out the subtext of pain and cruelty which lies submerged in the colourful text of adventure and fantasy, and has tried to sensitize the tale” (Mithapalli 181). Hariharan’s Shahrzad explains this terror through her creative art: “Only those locked up in hovels and dungeons and palaces can see and hear these dreams. Only those whose necks are naked and at risk can understand them” (20).

For an Indian woman, her role is circumscribed within the emotive immersion of herself, which results in the negation of self and often leads to exploitation and conflict. Women have always been exploited beings in the society. We can observe the same in the gallery of women characters portrayed in the novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* taken for study. All the female characters are exploited in one way or other. To keep a woman conformed and oppressed, old conservative values and ideas are supported and is forced to face every challenge to keep these ideologies.
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