greater than themselves, and who have to work towards finding their own self-
definitions in the course of the narrative” (Ghosh-Schellhorn 31).

To sum up the discussion on Githa Hariharan’s unique style of narration, it
would be apt to quote the writer herself:

My novels would be impossible without plurality in many ways—of
narrative voices, alternative scenarios, reinterpreted tales and so on
. Perhaps this is also a comment on the nature of the eternal tale. And
it is in the nature of these stories all of us hear retell that they are
never finished. There is no authoritative version; They must be
twisted and retold for our times and lives” (Pioneer, 1999).

In keeping with this philosophy none of Githa Hariharan’s novels discussed here
have neat, complete endings. In each of the novels, the end leaves the reader’s
thirst still unquenched, with pointers to different possibilities, new beginnings
contained in it. Shiv’s question in *In Times of Siege* seems to sum it up. He asks:
“Is all narrative doomed to be inconclusive?” (105).

**Chapter – V**

**SUMMING UP**

A feminist reading of a text presupposes the adoption of the feminist
approach. But there is no feminism now, but feminisms. The researcher therefore
examined the key precepts of different feminist theories and applied a few of them
as tools to attempt a feminist reading of four of Githa Hariharan’s novels.
Githa Hariharan occupies a prominent place among the postcolonial Indian writers in English. Srilata Ravi in her critical essay included in the book, *Fifty Years of Indian Writing* observes that the interaction of gender identity and national identity is a major aspect of postcolonial women’s fiction. Though Githa Hariharan asserts that her novels are not handmaidens to any feminist ideology, her novels do lend themselves to feminist study, considering the array of women characters in her novels and her own assertion that she cannot write a page that is not informed by her feminist beliefs and what she perceives as the feminist choice.

Feminism as an organized movement is usually associated with the demand for voting rights for women in Europe in the 19th and early 20th centuries. In modern India, feminist issues were first taken up by the Indian nationalist leaders, who aspired towards economic and social freedom for the people of India along with political freedom from the British rule. Leaders like Gandhi invited women to take part in the mainstream national freedom movement. Social reformers like Rajaram Mohan Roy, fought for the abolition of ‘sati’ and the evils of dowry system in North India, while in South India, the reform movement was spearheaded by revolutionaries like Periyar E. V. Ramasamy Naicker, who advocated widow re-marriages and condemned the torture of widows in the banner of superstitious religious beliefs.

In literature, Ruthven cites Aristophanes’ comedy by name *Lysistrata* as being among the earliest pieces of literature to have recorded women’s resistance. In oppressive, male-dominated society, the act of writing by women is itself a
mark of resistance. The beginning of the contemporary women’s movement in
literary criticism is equated with the writings of Beauvoir, Kate Millett and Betty
Friedan. Simone de Beauvoir revolutionized human thought about the status of
women with her epoch-making book, *The Second Sex*. In the book, she points out
that sex is a biological construct while gender is a cultural construct. Woman has
always been defined with reference to man. Man is the ‘one.’ Woman is the
‘other.’ Though woman represents the victimized class, she is more bound up with
her oppressor than with other members of her class. Beauvoir describes marriage
and motherhood as tools for women’s oppression.

Virginia Woolf made her famous statement about the need for “a room of
one’s own,” to enable women to write in the year, 1928. A prolific essayist and
novelist, Woolf elaborates on the possibility of the androgynous mind in her
famous work, *A Room of One’s Own*. She refers to Coleridge’s use of the term and
talks of androgyny as the ideal state of mind. According to her, a mind realizes its
fullest creative faculties, when it is of the androgynous nature. She cites
Shakespeare’s mind as the perfect example of the man-womanly mind.

Sherry B. Ortner attributes the universal devaluation of women to the fact
of woman being seen to be closer to nature than man. As man is more involved in
projects that attempt to transcend nature, he is seen as being superior to women.
Julia Kristeva states that traditionally man has been associated with time and
woman with space. She criticizes Beauvoir’s rejection of motherhood and
demands a new discourse of maternity. The French feminists like Irigaray and
Cixous advocate the formulation of a feminine language or écriture feminine, as they declare that language is sexually biased and hence is a tool of patriarchy. They associate the source of écriture feminine with mother’s milk. They also insist on the writing of female bodies by women writers.

Elaine Showalter uses the term gynocritics in her essay, “Toward a Feminist Poetics” to define the construction of a female framework for the analysis of women’s literature. Toril Moi, another American feminist critic is against Showalter’s concept of gynocritics and announces that there is no fundamental female self. Wittig also argues that language is not misogynist in its structure, only in its application.

Indian literature has a long tradition, of which quite a large number of women writers have been an important part, starting from the Vedic and Sangam periods. Gosha, Gargi and Maitreyi from the north and Avvaiyar, Velliveedhiyar, Ponmudiyar and Adhi Mandhiyar from the south are a few of them. The Therigatha nuns are credited with one of the earliest records of resistance against the confining bounds of family life and housework. Among the modern Indian feminist writers, Mahasweta Devi is an activist and her heroines break through the tradition of home, hearth and veil to fight the establishment with improvised weapons like the sickle, hatchet or sulking detachment. Anita Desai and Shashi Deshpande have presented the universal female experience in their writings.

Gayatri Spivak is credited with the ushering in of postcolonial feminist literary criticism in the West, with her book, Three Women’s Texts and a Critique
of Imperialism. Sarojini Sahoo, writer and critic considers the maxim, “woman’s body, woman’s right” as one of the defining principles of her writing. She observes that Eastern women need liberation both from financial slavery and restrictions on female sexuality. To record the views of a few essayists, Nilufer E. Barucha speaks on how patriarchy has influenced societal vision to consider the biologically recessed female space as being synonymous with feminine reductiveness. V.Geetha observes that the paired idea of the wife and the concubine, the lover and the vamp, the good woman and the bad woman makes women fundamentally anxious and tentative about themselves so that in a desire to please, they fall in with the design of patriarchy and choose romance, marriage and child-bearing as desired prospects.

Various institutions that have been a part of society, which have in fact served as well oiled wheels on which patriarchally constituted society has been running smoothly have been questioned by feminists. While family and motherhood are seen as core sites of women’s oppression, feminists have expressed their dissatisfaction with other societal institutions too considering the absence of female participation in their concept and establishment. When Githa Hariharan’s novels were examined from this point of view, it was found that there is a marked disenchantment with a variety of institutions including religious, political and educational institutions apart from traditional concepts of family and motherhood.
The happy family picture is almost absent in all four of them. In The Thousand Faces of Night, the relationship between Mahadevan and Sita is like that between the puppet and the puppeteer. As for Devi, Mahesh’s passionless approach towards marriage and his casual expectation that Devi should not only fit into moulds that his conception of marriage and woman had prepared for her but also be happy about it, makes her marriage stifling and claustrophobic for her. She understands that she is not Devi, a woman, an individual but a plain WIFE, somebody who has assumed the role and is expected to fulfill all its attendant responsibilities and duties including the mothering of a child, which her recalcitrant womb is however not ready to satisfy.

Devi’s attempt to escape, defy rules do not however liberate the insulted and oppressed woman in her. Music which refuses to follow any set of pattern and which soars beyond and above all confining rules is what first attracts Devi towards Gopal. But disillusionment sets in when Devi finds that Gopal does not see anybody beyond himself. She finds that she is herself a reflection. The real Devi is not important for Gopal. Thus Devi’s attempts at establishing a heterosexual relationship through marriage and out of marriage turn futile.

Mayamma, one of the major characters in the novel and several minor characters also do not find happiness within the institution of marriage. Mayamma’s husband is an insensitive monster and Mayamma is a convenience at home to provide him pleasure at night and to please his mother. She becomes the object of ridicule and torture from her mother-in-law because she is unable to bear
the sons that her horoscope had promised. Mayamma’s life is one long story of pain and patient suffering. Even the long awaited motherhood is a fresh source of pain for her. Her wastrel son dies, after beating her and torturing her much like her husband had done, before succumbing to a mysterious fever. Her role as mother strangely becomes perfected only at Mahesh’s household, where she is the mother figure looking after the family.

Sita’s survival strategy, when she is faced with the confining roles that family and society have prescribed for her, is that of anger and the channelling of that anger into domination. She is criticized for having ideas and wishes of her own. It is stressed upon her that she should be a wife and a daughter-in-law rather than an individual. She accepts the ruling with a blind anger that is comparable to the anger of Gandhari of *The Mahabharata*, who blindfolds herself after finding out that her husband is blind. Sita’s anger however transforms itself into a passion for domination. Denied control over her life, she seeks to control and direct her husband’s and daughter’s lives.

The other major character in Devi’s life is her mother-in-law, the absent Parvatiamma, who nevertheless is a haunting presence in the household. Parvatiamma’s marriage with Baba has been a failure. Her escape route is through religion. Baba preaches that the denial of self is the ideal of womanhood. This is not acceptable to Parvatiamma. She challenges the maxim that a woman needs to do no penance of her own and that in serving her husband and family, she rises to heaven. Parvatiamma leaves home and her family in search of an independent
salvation. In leaving, she makes a strong statement against dependence and the secondary status of women.

Besides these women whom Devi sees or hears about in her real life, there are a host of other women, some of whom are presented to her from the numerous legends that her grandmother tells her, like Gandhari, Amba, Ganga, the woman who marries the serpent etc, and others like poet Jayadeva’s wife and Rupavati, who are presented to her as examples of virtuous wives in the stories told by Baba. The lives of all these women represent the different positions of women entrapped in typical male structures, each striving in her own way to survive within the confines. After a ruthless probing into the lives of these women, Devi decides that she would have a story of her own. She decides that she would stop making an attempt at walking the tightrope in her life. She would live on her own terms and would try to find her Self.

Towards the end of the novel it is found that Sita has also come to realize the futility and foolishness of her life. The goals that she had pursued and succeeded in realizing as substitutes for her thwarted desires were but superficial attainments. The power that she had been proud and happy to wield over her husband’s and daughter’s lives had taken them both farther and farther away from her. Devi’s final rebellion brings home the truth to Sita. Her return to her veena and the lush overgrown gardens of Sita’s household mark Sita’s attempts to be honest to her self and to not only break free from male defined structures but also to stop being an agent in their promotion.
Githa Hariharan has refused to see motherhood in its romanticized rosy hues. She stands with most other feminists in seeing the halo attached to motherhood as an ingenious tool used by patriarchy to have women, where they wanted, and there as a community, completely satisfied with their lot. Devi’s grandmother tells young Devi that mothers are not all self-sacrificing and noble. She tells her the story of Ganga who drowned her sons. Mayamma shows Devi, the fish that devours the baby guppies. Sita’s handling of Devi is an expression of her thirst for power and control. Devi herself is unable to become a mother.

In the lower financial strata of society, Mayamma’s place in her husband’s household requires the justification of motherhood. In the higher educated financially comfortable household of Devi and Mahesh, no less a pressure, is exerted on Devi, albeit in a more subtle and refined manner. Mahesh suggests that Devi is in some way less feminine because her body doesn’t seem to cooperate in the act of conception. Ironically however Devi’s inability to become a mother precipitates her development as an individual. Even though disturbance and unhappiness have been brewing within her mind, for quite some months, even though the rooms in Mahesh’s household have been reeking of her tears, Devi makes the decision to strike out on her own and to try and discover new meaning in her life, only when Mahesh forces her to take steps to conceive a child.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* again, not only the institutions of marriage and motherhood but also the rigid, closed in education systems that the society has to day are analysed, found wanting and are stripped of their sanctity. Vasu
Master’s wife Mangala is only noticeable by her absence in the major portion of the novel. Vasu Master sees his dead wife’s belongings with a curious detachment. He feels that he has not known his wife, in the full sense of knowing. Even when he tries to imagine her form, he sees her always with her face towards the sea and her back towards him. Mangala had indeed come alive in her friend Jameela’s company as she had never done in her husband’s. Vasu Master thinks of the couple, Jameela and Mangala as perfect complements to each other.

When Vasu Master has his flashbacks, it is known that his mother, Lakshmi, so named by the whim of a servant maid, the parents having been too ashamed and reluctant to acknowledge their sixth daughter, was always part of the shadows of the tyrannical household, lorded over by Vasu Master’s father. As for motherhood, the famed noble attributes of mothers, particularly the maternal instinct is clearly presented as something that gets developed by conscious will, and not inherited by virtue of being a woman.

Vasu Master in his new period of enlightenment after retirement notes down the attributes of a teacher in his notebook. He concludes that along with a variety of skills, a good teacher must grow a womb and learn to be a mother. Vasu Master decides to grow one, as he evolves, stage by stage into the teacher that Mani needed, in the process, drawing Mani out, slowly delicately as if he were easing the butterfly out of its cocoon. In fact, Vasu Master is more of a mother to papaya-headed Mani in the novel than Mani’s biological mother is to him or the retiring reticent Lakshmi and Mangala are to their sons.
In *When Dreams Travel*, the only sincerely loving relationships are between Shahrzad and her sister Dunyazad, and between Dunyazad and her friend Dilshad. Intrigue and treachery, distrust and cruelty mark the marital relationships in the novel. Shahryar and Shahzaman are deceived by their queens. In spite of having a harem full of women to pleasure them, they take it so to heart that strange events result. Shahryar decides to marry a virgin everyday, take her at night and behead her the next day. As the number of virgins dwindles in the kingdom and the Wazir’s daughter Shahrzad takes it upon herself to face the sword, with her cliff-hanger stories that stretch from night to night always leaving the king in suspense as dawn comes, slowly, gradually the miracle happens.

The king is redeemed at last and the daily marriage ritual comes to an end. There is no evidence of devotion and affection between the king and the queen, beyond the call of duty. On the night that Prince Umar is born, Dunyazad is ready and dressed to take her sister’s place in Shahryar’s bedroom. She has her dagger in hand, because the Sultan is now dispensable, but Shahrzad stops her, not because of the conjugal felicity between them, but because she does not want to add more blood to the already bloody trail in the palace.

As time passes, and inevitably Shahrzad becomes older, Shahryar starts filling up his harem once again. Theirs is not the blissful marital relationship that mellows with age. Again it is seen that Shahrzad also becomes enchanted with the merchant from far off lands who tells her and the rest of the court, fascinating tales of his travels. Her, by now, cold and lonely bed is warmed by the traveller’s
presence one night and when the all-seeing eyes of the Sultan come to know of it, Shahrzad is banished to an obscure corner in the kingdom. But the Sultan, unwilling to confess to cuckoldry once again and also redeemed enough not to want to kill Shahrzad, spreads the news that she had died of some sickness.

Dunyazad’s taste of marital life is equally lacking in love and sincerity. Her husband, Shahzaman is a demented man, suspicious of everything that even remotely reminded him of his earlier queen’s faithlessness or other incidents of cuckoldry that he had been connected with. He disappears in the night, wandering for long. He bans rings in his kingdom and also slaves. He lets loose a reign of terror and suspicion in his kingdom, which is almost a reflection of the sickness in his mind. In the end, he dies a sudden, mysterious death. There is a strong suggestion that there is Dunyazad’s hand behind his death. In contrast to these heterosexual relationships which are marred by treachery, intrigue and insincerity, the enduring faithful love between Dunyazad and her sister Shahrzad is beautiful and touching. Indeed the relationship between Dilshad and Dunyazad with its lesbian overtones has more of camaraderie, love and closeness than any marital relationship showcased in the novel.

Motherhood is just an incident in both Shahrzad’s and Dunyazad’s lives. There is not one scene showing motherly sentiment in the novel. Both of them are mother figures for their respective kingdoms, more interested in and committed to restoring normalcy in their kingdoms than attending to the everyday needs of their biological off-springs.
Shahrzad points out in the end that in a way she is the mother of all the young girls born into their kingdom. It is because their mothers had been saved by Shahrzad’s tongue that their own birth and existence had been made possible. It is an act of transcending the limited world of maternity and motherly care for one’s physical off-springs alone, in order to be a mother figure for the whole country.

It is Sahiba who looks after Shahrzad’s children while she is engaged in more important matters of life and death. Dunyazad also has the responsibility of the sanity of the city on her shoulders. Her quiet ways heal the city of the wounds inflicted by its mad king. She transcends her role as a mother to her son and becomes the mother-figure for the kingdom in favouring her step-son’s crowning as king rather than her own imbecile son.

Monarchy as a political institution is a failure in the kingdoms represented in the novel. In Shahryar’s kingdom, anarchy reigns and the role of king as benefactor of the country and its people is given the lie with the king choosing the path of blood and lust to pacify his feelings of injustice at his cuckoldry and urge to avenge the same. Citizens of the country spend their time cowering from the cruel arm that sought virgins. Even after Shahrzad manages to stop the heartless killing with her stories, it is not the country and its development that troubles the king. First, he and Shahrzad are locked in a daily ritual of stories and their excitement that keeps the hanging sword at bay. Soon the stories are no longer necessary, but the king turns his attention towards increasing the population of his harem. Instead of making efforts to control the damage caused by his insensitivity
and blood thirstiness, he is intent on satisfying his own whims. Badly needed resources are diverted to the building of a magnificent tomb in memory of his supposedly dead wife, Shahrzad.

It is young Prince Umar who has a real view of the city that spills outside the palace gates. He criticizes the use of labour and resources for the building of a tomb. He points out that a dam or some such structure of public utility would have been worth the expense.

In *In Times of Siege*, Rekha, Shiv’s wife does not inspire him with feelings of passionate love or attachment. Her methodical perfection turns him cold. He’s already had the occasional sexual escapade with his colleague, Amita and with Meena, it is as if he has found his soul mate. He understands her perfectly and she understands him. Shiv feels that there is no need for words between them. Strangely his growing closeness with her is coupled with his growth into a courageous individual who is prepared to stand up for what he believes in. The sanctity and sexual and emotional fidelity which are supposed to be attached to marriage, particularly in a country like India are not only left unstressed but the opposite is presented as casual and customary in the novel.

The breakdown of political institutions is shown at two time levels. In the history lessons that Shiv writes for his unseen students, the city of Kalyan with its ideal casteless society that Basava had toiled to create out of his cherished dreams and ideals, burns before his very eyes. And in the present, it is a repeat performance. The fundamentalists object to the depiction of the saint-poet,
Basava with human doubts, misgivings, unhappiness and a sense of failure that had led to his drowning of himself. They wish those aspects or details of Basava’s life or principles that detract from their own principles and opinions to be glossed over.

When Shiv is not ready for such sanitization of history, anarchy breaks out. Shiv’s room at the university campus is broken up and Shiv himself escapes by a hair’s breadth. The hate mail and the threatening phone calls, coupled with the official memos and hostility of his colleagues mount psychological pressure upon Shiv to buckle and give up. He seems to have no control over the events building up around him. Political institutions do not serve their purpose and anarchy reigns.

Religion is one more institution in which Githa Hariharsn’s characters do not have faith or trust. Shiv’s house is described as a house “that did not pray.” Worship and the arrangement of images of gods in framed pictures for the same is commented upon as a form of corruption. In The Thousand Faces of Night, Devi’s grandmother narrates the story of Damayanti’s ‘swayamvara’, and her narration has a satirically irreverent tone as she talks of the gods whose feet don’t touch the ground because they don’t want their feet to be sullied by the dirt on the ground.

Mayamma is scolded by the priest because the precincts of the temple had been made impure by her menstrual blood. But elsewhere in the novel, Devi questions her grandmother how it is that the gods themselves are responsible for
giving a child to a woman and yet, when they don’t do so, the childless woman goes to hell. The same question by extension seems to question the other issues also namely the gods refusing to dirty themselves with the mud and the dirt, they had created and the temple becoming impure by something that the gods had given.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Vasu Master refuses to wear his caste marks as he poses for the class photograph. The other teachers sitting erect with their turbans flushing and their caste marks sitting prominently on their foreheads look like comical figures to Vasu Master. There is no reference to prayers or worship or gods except in an ironical, satirical tone in any of the four novels. In *When Dreams Travel*, Prince Umar blames his father for wasting the state wealth and human resources in building the magnificent tomb that Shahryar hopes would be the most splendid and unique of its kind. This is especially significant, considering the fact that the tomb is supposed to contain his mother’s remains and tombs are usually places of worship too in the Islamic religion.

The third chapter looks at the world of women as it has been depicted in ancient times and the images of women, seen in the novels of Githa Hariharan. As predicaments, problems and responses of women are as varied as there are variations in culture, and in the educational and economic status of women across the different countries, it becomes imperative to study the images of women in a corpus of work against the specific socio-cultural background of the world present in the novel.
In India, women of the early Vedic and Sangam periods enjoyed reasonable freedom in their lives, with access to education, with the right to choice of marriage partner etc. There were also women philosophers and several poetesses, whose poems are a part of the ‘Vedas’ in the North and Sangam age anthologies in the South. The place of woman was however believed to be mainly at home and she was supposed to be dependent on men all through her life. Society expected women to be chaste and virtuous, while no such sanctions were imposed on men.

The chastity of Kannaki as a powerful force that destroys the city of Madurai, is the focal point of the Late Sangam Age classic, Silappadikaram. Prescriptions for the Tamil woman, as mentioned in the Tholkappiam, the earliest extant work of Tamil literature are unique. Four qualities have been recommended for a good woman in Tamil culture, namely ‘acham,’ ‘madam,’ ‘nanam,’ and ‘payirppu.’ A woman should possess fear, should not exhibit her knowledge, should be bashful, and should have an aversion for even the dress of men, other than her husband’s. The concept of chastity as an important attribute of women has a stronghold on the Indian psyche to this day.

Two parallel streams of thought and action seem to have steadily run through Indian culture right down a social and literary history of more than two thousand years. On the one hand there are records of the existence of women philosophers and poets, whose conspicuous presence in a country’s literary tradition finds few if any significant equivalents elsewhere in the world. Again, the Hindu religious system in India has almost as many goddesses as there are
gods. On the other hand, we have the *Manu Smriti*, long considered to be the authoritative code book which has directed the functioning of Indian society since ancient times, putting forward the idea that woman is ‘for man.’ She is not an independent individual but someone who has to be dependent on a male all through her life, starting with the ‘father’ and proceeding through ‘husband’ to ‘son.’

Regarding the role of the plethora of Indian goddesses in promoting the cause of feminism, feminists are divided in their views. Some regard the goddesses as champions of patriarchy in the sense that they feed women with divine images of decent, submissive, married goddesses or frighteningly out-of-control, unmarried goddesses, thereby putting across the message that since independence makes females violent and bloodthirsty, women should imitate the chaste, submissive Sita and not the fiercely independent Kali. Others like Rita M. Gross feel that the reaction of the common Indian to powerful female deities is not fear and the presence of divine females in a variety of poses has not only promoted the humanity of women through positive female imagery, but also made the assuming of powerful positions in politics and other social spheres by women in India, more acceptable to men.

More research in this direction attempting feminist interpretations of the multiple images of goddesses in this country and comparisons with Western feminist theology would yield interesting insights into the evolution of thought and philosophy in the Eastern and Western cultures and their reflections in
literature and society. This researcher believes as Rita M. Gross observes that expansions and elaborations of such discussions will be intensely interesting and would not only be relevant to Indian society but also to feminists the world over.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the various women characters present an interesting study. Mayamma’s mother-in-law is the lone example for the kind of women who have absorbed patriarchal ideologies so thoroughly that they are even more vehement champions than men of the existing social set up. She subjects young Mayamma to her relentless iron rule. Devi is seen as a mixture of conforming and rebellious instincts in the beginning of the novel. Her life has always been directed by the invisible strings that Sita holds in her hand. That Devi is conscious of it and rebels against it is shown in her frequent bouts of dreaminess as a child, her brief affair with Dan and the smoking of drugs in America and in the terrible dreams of her adult married life, in which her husband Mahesh and her mother Sita appear as monstrous accomplices who conspire together to thrust her into a prison of prescribed roles and predetermined life decisions.

At times Devi feels secure, being gently guided by the strings that Sita holds. Devi falls in with her mother’s plans and she comes home to India, where she feels drawn by her mother’s love that seems to make the two of them into a single-celled unit. The marriage that Devi gets into, at her mother’s instigation however, soon presents her with disenchantment. “The brief coupling of bodies at night” with no real understanding or companionship, with no space for the growth
of both parties involved as mature individuals in their own right, leaves Devi unsatisfied.

Devi has imbibed the positive imagery of the powerful goddesses of Hindu religion. She dreams of being like goddess Durga riding a tiger and cutting off the heads of demons. She is fascinated by the story of ‘kritya’ that her father-in-law strives to keep from her. A kritya resides in every house that insults a woman and it destroys the household. Devi, at the limits of frustration with her unfeeling husband, wishes to become a ‘kritya’ herself.

Mahesh however has absorbed none of the positive imagery of the Hindu goddesses. He has not tried to understand even his mother. The powerful colonial legacy that has impressed the superiority of everything ‘Western’ and the inferiority of anything indigenous, on the Indian psyche has Mahesh also under its influence. He makes fun of Mrs. Lal, calling her a country bumpkin who does not know how to adapt to the Western style drinking habits of her husband. His father’s talk of religion and spirituality leave him cold and yet he has absorbed his father’s ideas of the traditional limits of wifehood from his father. He has his own ideas of a modern Western educated woman, who would be an asset to him. The positive aspects of neither culture have penetrated him enough to give the insight to understand his wife as a human being.

The oppressive weight of Mahesh’s expectations proves to be too much for Devi and she leaves him, seeking solace in Gopal’s relationship and his music that soars beyond boundaries. But a few weeks are enough to show her that she is no
more an individual in Gopal’s sphere, than she had been in Mahesh’s. Tired of seeing herself as a reflection of other people’s desires and opinions, Devi returns to her mother’s home. Her journey of survival is over. She is going to start living for herself on her own terms.

The other women characters respond to the stress of prescribed roles in different ways. Sita, when she is faced with the accusation that she is not a good wife or daughter-in-law, because she had indulged briefly in her passion for music, tears down the strings of her veena. Her seemingly obedient attempt to conform to her role is however a mask for the fury of denial that lies deep down, too deep even for her to be conscious of it. The lack that she has suffered expresses itself in a fierce thirst for power and domination, whereby she takes up both her husband’s and daughter’s lives in her hands. Her single-minded domination however drives them farther away from her and Sita realizes the folly of it all, towards the end of the novel when the perfect marriage Sita had engineered for Devi goes awry and news comes of Devi’s flight. Sita decides after a deluge that continues for two days and which gives time and space for Sita to consider and weigh, reflect and rue, that she would start understanding herself and stop planning for others. Of the other two characters, while Mayamma chooses abject submission to the roles that get thrust upon her, Parvatiamma chooses rejection. She rejects prescriptions and roles. The spiritual path offers her a convenient way out.

Shahrzad of *When Dreams Travel* proves herself to be one woman, who dares to think beyond roles that girls like her are willingly or unwillingly donning,
all around her. The male, female role distinction disappears in the way she transcends the limitations imposed by her social situation, her bodily preoccupation with childbirth and the dagger hanging literally above her neck to try and change the path of history in her country. She not only redeems the sultan from his bloodthirsty ways of revenge but makes life possible for generations of women after her.

When her father, the Wazir tells her that she would have to be the next virgin to be offered to the Sultan, she readily accepts it as a challenge. She proves to be a very wise woman for her age, and she has the courage to cross over from the harem, with its closed in, secure, limited life situations to the external predominantly male world, where she would need to use all her wits, intelligence to better them at their own game. She refuses to submit to the finality of the Sultan’s dagger and with great courage and wisdom, plans her strategy to blunt his sword.

Shahrzad weaves her tales carefully not only to escape the killing for that night, but to try and stop the killing forever by healing and challenging the sick mind of the Sultan. She shows wisdom and love for her country also in her preference for the non-violent path. When Prince Umar is born, Dunyazad suggests that they should do away with the king. But Shahrzad stops her saying that she does not want to add more blood to the blood stained pages of their country’s history. She dons the role of biological mother to her three children lightly, so that she could be mother figure to the unborn daughters of the virgins in
her country. In this way, she transcends the prescribed roles set aside for women and proves herself to be a real heroine.

Dunyazad, affectionate sister to Shahrzad and also able accomplice to her sister in the mission, the latter has set out to fulfill, is a heroine too in her own way. She watches over her sister with the sharp eye of the mother eagle, crouching by the bedside of Shahryar and Shahrzad, the dagger ever ready and nestling in the folds of her dress, should anything go awry in her sister’s plans. Once the Sultan is redeemed and her marriage with Shahzaman is over, she takes the city of Samarkhand in her hands. She watches and waits as Samarkhand reels under the sick rule of its sick ruler. When the time comes, she quickly disposes of her demented husband and takes over the reins of the country till her stepson comes of age. She makes wise decisions and takes the right steps to help the country limp back to normalcy. She also shows herself to be more of a mother-figure for the country than an ordinary biological mother in choosing her more efficient stepson to be the ruler of the country rather than her own imbecile son.

When Dunyazad gets the news of her sister’s sudden death, she doesn’t accept it calmly, but rushes to Shahbad in male disguise to investigate. Shahryar’s grand plans for the magnificent tomb in Shahrzad’s memory do not impress her and she keeps her eyes and ears open. Rumours about Shahrzad’s partiality for a merchant traveller who had enchanted Shahrzad with stories of far off lands reach her and she is wise enough to come to the conclusion that Shahrzad had definitely not died of any sudden illness.
Once Dunyazad realizes Shahryar’s possible role in her sister’s absence, she makes a decision. When she hears that Shahryar is planning to get married again, she suggests that the couple should go over to Shahrzad’s tomb to offer prayers. The banished prince Umar easily imprisons his father there and crowns himself, Sultan. So Dunyazad is instrumental in bringing a popular balanced ruler to the throne in both Shahbad and Samarkhand. Indeed the male attire that Dunyazad dons is not physical alone. She does walk boldly into male preserves, showing courage and wisdom in taking decisions that would safeguard the peace and people of Shahbad and Samarkhand.

Dilshad and Satyasama are two other female characters in *When Dreams Travel* who along with Shahrzad and Dunyazad make the male characters pale into the background. Satyasama is the fearless idealist who sings of love and brotherhood and continues with her singing even in the face of torture and death. She is symbolic of all the good things that are endangered by the presence of hatred, suspicion and communal violence.

Dilshad with the legacy of love from Satyasama in the form of the date shaped patch in her face, is also instrumental in the transfer of power from Shahryar to Prince Umar. Rising above her role as slave girl in the palace, she sifts and analyses the happenings in the palace and decides to play a role in shaping its destiny. She helps Dunyazad grasp the truth about Shahrzad’s supposed illness and death and facilitates a meeting between the idealistic Prince Umar and Dunyazad, which ultimately leads to the transfer of power in the
country. She finishes putting the final symbolic touches to the reign of terror in the palace by setting fire to the royal bed chamber housed securely in the palace dungeons. Her close friendship with Dunyazad has lesbian overtones. In the course of the merry journey both undertake after they are done with the handling of power and politics, they tell each other stories, some of which at least are probably from Shahrzad’s notebook, which Dilshad carries as a special treasure.

The transcendental nature of the achievements of Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad are especially significant and that much more difficult and deserving of admiration, considering the confluence of the time of their existence and their socio-ethnic background then.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Eliamma seems to be a representation of “Woman.” It is as if the primordial story of “Woman” is replicated in Eliamma’s predicament. She gives her body to her companion for safe-keeping and enjoys being invisible for a while. But her companion takes advantage of the situation and makes away with her body. Eliamma has no other go but to continue to remain invisible. Her pathetic pleas to people remain unheard and she remains unseen. There is a strong suggestion of what “Man” did to “Woman” in this story. Mangala tells this story to her sons, Vishnu and Venu, when they ask her for a ghost story. To Vasu Master, Mangala indeed remains invisible till her end. He does not make an effort to understand her as an individual or her desires, fears and emotions, a fact that he realizes and rues long after her death, when his special
student, Mani helps him shed the blinkers, he didn’t know, he had been sporting in his attitude towards life.

Mangala almost always depicts the sea in all of her sewing, but she refuses to go into the sea, when her children invite her in. It is not as if Mangala is afraid of water because, the reader gets to see images of Jameela and Mangala swimming about in the water as young girls: “two brown bodies completely at ease with each other and the water.”

Vasu Master had not tried to reach out to Mangala and understand her and she withdraws into herself. She prefers to remain the invisible person. Her husband doesn’t think beyond the way, she fulfills her duties at home as wife and mother. She opens out, blooms in the company of her friend and soul mate, Jameela, which is a pointer to the real individual with live emotions, desires, opinions forced into hiding inside the almost silent exterior, she presents to her family. Mangala’s reaction to the roles thrust on her is a firm rejection and a repulse. The image of Mangala in Vasu Master’s mind, with her back constantly turned away from him is symbolic.

It is one of Simone de Beauvoir’s theses that man suffers garrulousness in women gladly when they are old and past the stage of wife and therefore there is an association of the storytelling tradition with old women. In keeping with her views, two grandmothers in the novels under discussion here are self-opinionated women who do not shy away from using their voice.
Devi’s grandmother initiates Devi into a world of stories where the characters and actions and the narrative all puzzle rather than clarify, force the listener into raising questions rather than silence with satisfactory answers. As Devi mentions in the Prelude to the novel, grandmother’s stories are not whole, well-rounded ones but ones with jagged edges. They prepare Devi to the innumerable possibilities of life and womanhood. Sifting through and interpreting the women from the various stories, Devi comes up with a conception of what kind of a woman she would prefer to be and who would be an ideal companion and husband for her. Devi’s grandmother does not present a romanticized version alone of love, marriage, and motherhood. Devi shares a special bond with her grandmother.

The other forceful grandmother is Vasu Master’s grandmother. When Vasu Master thinks of his mother and his wife as shadow-like in their hesitant hovering around not only the household, but around life itself, his reminiscences of his grandmother show her to be a powerful assertive presence. Even in a household dominated first by her husband and later by her son, the six-foot, booming-voiced ayurvaid, she had managed to hold her own. A rational thinker, who had looked at her husband’s failings with an irreverent amusement, she had had the courage to act according to her beliefs and principles. Even though her husband was in the British government’s pay, she had given away her bangles in the nationalist cause to Mahatma Gandhi. When her son was a qualified ayurvaid, she had believed in
her culinary methods and concoctions and had refused to be overpowered by the former’s superior knowledge.

Meena from *In Times of Siege* is a modern woman, who knows her responsibilities. Of all the female characters created by Githa Hariharan in these four novels, if Shahrzad is the wisest and most compassionate, Meena is the epitome of what most feminists would have a woman to be. She seems to represent the author’s idea of how a liberated woman aware of both her rights and responsibilities would be. Right in the beginning of the novel, as the reader is introduced to her at KNU campus, it is seen that she displays no unnecessary bashfulness in accepting Shiv’s help. She is confident, unselfconscious and frank. Qualities that have long been unfairly described as attributes of a good woman in the Indian context are not sported by her.

Meena’s behaviour with Shiv and her male college mates is no different from her behaviour with her girl friends. She seeks Shiv’s help while going to the bathroom and while washing her hair in much the same way, she does with Kamala or Babli as a human being to fellow human being. There is no awareness of her gender, every time she comes in contact with a male. At the same time, she is not promiscuous. It is Shiv who gets fascinated by her personality. She has opinions, ideas, beliefs of her own and she takes a stand in issues. The poster in her rooms proclaims loud, that it is important to stand up for the fellow human being. And she does stand up for the sake of Shiv. She shows courage and presence of mind when Shiv is threatened by the fundamentalists who take
exception to his realistic portrayal of the saint-poet, Basavsa. She immediately collects together the support of student groups who believe in the right to freedom of speech and opinions and also in the secular nature of the nation. Her zest and spirit are the source of courage and inspiration for Shiv, when he feels like giving up his struggle.

The completely unheroic, staid professor Shiv discovers the hero in him and his previously unknown reserves of strength, by the example of the young girl, Meena. Meena also shows extraordinary maturity and compassion in her handling of Shiv’s sexual passion for her. She understands him perfectly and knows that the unfamiliar atmosphere of threat, fear, excitement and heroism that surround Shiv is coupled in his mind with his growing attraction for her. There are a few minutes of passion between them, when they seem to have an intense communication between themselves. For Shiv at least, the moments are very intense and significant. Meena doesn’t make much of a fuss about it and characteristically ends the moment with uncontrollable laughter at the almost ludicrous interruption provided by the mosquito at first and the security watchman later.

In the end, roles are reversed as Shiv who had promised to look after Meena as she is his ward, is the one who actually needs looking after. Meena looks after his spirits, eggs him on as his spirits flag, and on the whole contributes to his further development as a strong individual who has the courage to stand up for his beliefs.
So Meena is young, friendly, committed, compassionate, strong, persevering, and is not confined by narrow, limiting notions of femininity as equivalent to chastity. She transcends the role and place that patriarchal culture has reserved for women and actively takes a role in shaping the character of her society, criticizing and vehemently opposing its narrow prejudices and supporting the positive aspects like academic freedom, truth and secularity which would help it grow stronger.

Indeed, she validates the truth of Devara Dasimayya’s ‘vachana’ that Githa Hariharan quotes as a prelude to *The Thousand Faces of Night*: “Suppose you cut a tall bamboo in two; / Make the bottom piece a woman, / The head piece a man; / Rub them together ./ Till they kindle: tell me now, / The fire that’s born, / Is it male or female, O Ramanatha?”

The fourth chapter examines the contention of the feminists that language itself is sexually biased. When that language is inextricably connected with the thinking process, the whole system of operation of the world, its daily life, everything becomes tainted with the bias. The change that feminists seek should be effected at every level of every walk of life. Only then, the patriarchal tilt of the world would be made neutral. In the world of fiction, feminists have sought to rediscover the forgotten and neglected women writers, have sought to talk ‘her’ story instead of the ever dominant ‘his’ story, have indeed sought a questioning of every norm that has been in existence down all the centuries of patriarchal domination. In this process the possibility of evolving a ‘feminine écriture’,
comparable to the milk of women, has been debated by the French feminists and has been experimented upon by several women writers since.

The novel with its comparatively less focus on a rigid form has come to be associated with women. And the traditional structures, techniques used in writing have been challenged. Virginia Woolf celebrates her contemporary Dorothy Richardson’s writing, crediting her with the evolution of “the psychological sentence of the feminine gender” (“Dorothy Richardson” 191). Cixous declares in her essay, “Laugh of the Medusa” that women’s writing symbolizes the essence of a woman’s body, whose sexual pleasure has been repressed. She insists that the writing of their own bodies will help women to realize their sexuality and also a new feminine economy of giving, in contrast to a male economy of hoarding. The French feminists of the 1970s and 1980s champion in their writings the use of avant garde linguistic forms to circumvent the patriarchal leanings of language.

Indian women writers of ancient times wrote on varying themes, ranging from love to personal freedom to politics and philosophy. In contrast to the Western women writers for whom discussion of love and sex was taboo, till recent times, Indian women’s writing of the Sangam age celebrates womanhood and sexuality. Early post colonial women’s fiction focused on the man-woman relationship to define the Indian woman’s identity. Recent women writers however express dissatisfaction with the considering of man-woman relationship as the eternal central focus of writing, and promote female-female bonding in their writings.
The place of Githa Hariharan in this vibrant female tradition that seeks to evolve in whole new ways and through varied experiments in theme and writing style and her own contribution to it has been discussed. Each of her novels deals with a different theme and employs a different treatment, yet a common technique can be identified. As she herself has stated, she seems to have a partiality for multiple voices. The story does not carry the voice of a single narrator. The story emerges from a background that has a medley of voices, each with its own version, opinion and point of view. This medley of voices comes from the stories based on Hindu mythology and the lives of saints told by Devi’s grandmother and her father-in-law in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the multiple voices come to us in Vasu Master’s father, the ayurved’s words, and in the various fables that Vasu Master relates to his special student, Mani. *When Dreams Travel* carries the technique to intriguing heights. There are a whole lot of voices mingling together in the novel, presenting a mosaic from which the pattern has to be figured out.

In *In Times of Siege*, the use of the technique is brought to a bare minimum, with the time of Basava’s life, events then and his voice coming up now and then in the course of the story, providing a foil to the happenings of recent times and suggestively pointing out the repetition of history in the anarchy, hatred and intolerance. Shiv’s father’s voice is the other voice that surfaces from the background. Altogether in all four of the novels, the story is virtually carried forward by stories.
True to Githa Hariharan’s favourite philosophy of writing, symbolism and metaphor find a prominent place in her novels. She speaks in the narrator’s voice in *When Dreams Travel*, “The man is telling the woman a story. Or wait, perhaps it should not be called that, shy as it is of fantasy and symbol and fiction”(97). In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the bonsai trees, and the jasmine climber which she steadfastly trains to creep along horizontal rails constitute an objective correlative for Sita’s tight control over her husband’s and daughter’s lives. They are also involuntary expressions of frustration at the painful self-denial, she had inflicted upon herself, and which, lying deep down like an infected wound was foisting a similar kind of curtailment on other people’s freedom.

The veena is again a potent symbol. The veena and its soulful music that knows no boundaries represent the desires and inclinations close to Sita’s heart. Her tearing of the veena strings and her fierce commitment to worldly success for her husband and daughter are both an expression of her rage and her acceptance of the roles prescribed for her with a vengeance. Towards the end of the novel, her return to the veena represents her decision to try and live life on her own terms rather than survive by sticking to prescribed roles, a decision that her daughter Devi, by her surprising transition from a pliable weak-willed person to a mature woman with a mind of her own had helped her make.

The myths and stories that Devi learns from her grandmother and her father-in-law, enrich the background of the novel and make it multilayered. The myths that fill Devi’s young life particularly serve to explicate some truth in one
instance, provide ironic contrast in another, serve as caustic comment on yet another, thus forming an elaborate web that holds the story together. In keeping with the technique used by women writers to get around the unwritten taboo on discussion of sexuality, that the colonial legacy, with its pinning of a sense of shame onto the sexual act and its discussion, particularly by women, and a general disregard of and contempt for native culture and literary tradition, have engendered, Githa Hariharan also uses nature motifs to describe and externalize the blossoming of sexuality in Devi.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* the disturbed stomach/bowels is a continuous metaphor. When Vasu Master’s life as a teacher at school nears its end he starts with his irritable bowel movements. The tale of the single uniform-size beds, made by Procrustes, beds which did not suit all the travellers, stands for the courses, curricula and teaching methods in the current educational system, which not only do not respond to the individual needs of students, but also kill the creativity and enthusiasm in many a student by their rigid notions of right and wrong. The tale of Ammukutti, Nanikutti and Ummikutti, the three silkworms, is the tale of women down the ages. Ummikutti is the author herself or women writers like her who weave the tales of their lost sisters. Eliamma represents the universal ‘woman’ who has been made invisible by the cunning of Man. But it is significant here that whatever the invisible Eliamma touches, decays and dies. It seems to reflect the truth that a lack in one causes a lack or decay in the other too. A society, where a
woman is as visible as a man and participates equally in all its activities, flourishes.

*When Dreams Travel* has a complex structure. It is almost an illustration of the definition of metafiction. The fictional narrative contains the critical perspective within itself. In other words, it is a fiction about fiction. The novel is in two parts. The first part recasts the original legend of the *Arabian Nights* with its misogynist patterning and content in the postmodern concept of feminism. The actual stories told by Scheherazade in the original tale are not only replaced in *When Dreams Travel*, they are also displaced to the second part of the novel. The stories are allegories of modern, ethical and feminist issues and they are narrated by Dilshad and Dunyazad to each other.

Dilshad, an ugly slave girl, who does not find a place in the misogynist world of the original novel and Dunyazad, a marginal character, are both made into central characters in the novel. Shahrzad is presented as the wise saviour of the kingdom and her act of storytelling, a powerful, ingenuous form of ‘feminine écriture.’ The novel does not hold any specific geopolitical reference, nor does it point to any specific time frame. The lack of both is aimed at pointing out the pervasive nature of oppressive patriarchal beliefs and systems through the ages and in all locales.

*In Times of Siege* veers away from the realms of magic and fantasy to deal with the ugly realities of everyday life. The novel is an outcome of the author’s mental compulsion to write about the increasing fundamentalism in the country.
and the decreased space that is being made available to individuals, because of it. Shiv, the university professor’s lesson on the poet reformer, Basava is retracted and he is forced to tender an apology to a group of fundamentalists, who have taken exception to the portrayal of Basava as a human being with doubts and failures also along with his saintly qualities. Shiv refuses to submit the apology.

The repercussions that Shiv faces and the inexplicable infatuation that grows in him for the young Meena staying in his house, subject him to twin struggles in the public world and in his personal world. The fascination for Meena brings out the hero in him. Basava’s story and the happenings of the city of Kalyan appear in the background providing parallels to the violence in the present. The cast on Meena’s leg is a metaphor for the restrictive institutions that hold women in a tight bind.

Feminism as a mode of literary study has come to include several wide ranging ideas, beliefs, inquiry systems and methods, since the original concept of feminism itself evolved as a social tool to give voice to the centuries long silence of one half of humanity, and then slowly diversified its influence to include a whole range of fields of activity including literature.

Chitra Sankaran quotes Hilde Lindemann to point out that consideration of feminist ethics is in a way, a moral act, because it seeks to criticize and rectify the unequal distribution of power between the two human categories, men and women. In this line, the works of Githa Hariharan and other feminist writers, who “reworld patriarchal ideologies” by re-visioning existing myths, stories and
legends, recasting them in a feminist perspective and prompting the discovery of
the underlying patriarchal agenda become invested with enormous significance.
This re-visioning is done by Githa Hariharan with a fluid felicity that transforms
well-known myths and legends into myths and legends with layer after layer of
hitherto unperceived meanings. The changed point of view, perspective shocks the
reader into a perception of the chauvinism, cruelty, misogyny and exploitation,
well-hidden within the charming facade of the time-worn stories.

Githa Hariharan’s novels also seem to uphold and highlight the message of
the triumph of art over life and the possibility of art as a liberating device for a
woman imprisoned within patriarchal norms. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*,
Grandmother’s stories lay the foundation for Devi’s struggle to find and free the
woman in her. In *When Dreams Travel*, stories told by Shahrzad, have an
ennobling effect even on an insensitive mind of such a degree as Shahryar’s. They
are ultimately responsible for the saving of Shahrzad and by extension, the whole
city. Again, in the same novel, in the story of “Lonely Voice,” the stories that
‘Lonely Voice’ tells Dilshad, bring down one by one the walls, that Lonely
Voice’s brother had built round her. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, stories break
through the impenetrable barriers that undiscerning and insensitive social and
educational institutions had built around the cowering, frightened, sensitive soul of
Mani. Even in *In Times of Siege* it is the story of Basava that is both a source of
inspiration and means of raising the timid professor in him to heroic heights.
This thesis has been an attempt to look at the literary works of Githa Hariharan, a woman author, who has shown herself to be involved with women’s issues all through her adult life, from a feminist viewpoint. Her first two heroines, Devi and Mangala are relatively passive women, probably representative of most Indian women in real life situations. Yet their passivity is only seemingly so. They do show their resistance to the confinement and suffocation that patriarchy approved roles and attitudes force upon them. Both Mangala and Devi hold their real selves from their husbands who refuse to come halfway and try to understand them. Devi strikes out on to her own path in the end, putting an end to the endless compromises that is expected of a woman in her survival attempts within the limits of marriage.

Shahrzad and Meena are powerful heroines who would stand comparison with the most memorable in literature. The rather shadowy Shahrzad of the Arabian Nights fills out in Githa Hariharan’s hands into a woman of powerful presence and character, with boldness, compassion, wisdom and an extremely creative mind coupled with a ready tongue. Meena is the modern woman who would make any feminist proud. With the positive mental attributes of a male and female in equal parts, she is the androgynous individual that feminists like Virginia Woolf and Elaine Showalter speak about, in their deliberations on gender and Devi of The Thousand Faces of Night fantasises about as the ideal for herself. Having shrugged off qualities like self-consciousness, shyness, traditionally ascribed to females, Meena takes charge as the situation gets tough. The big
poster in her room screams out in red to stand up for the fellow being and for what one believes in. That’s exactly what she does and encourages and inspires Shiv to do too. She shows courage in her decision to stand by Shiv and take on the fundamentalists, and wisdom and sharp intellect in her collaborative efforts with Amar and other student support organizations.

Woman is engaged forever in a survival saga of her own, over and above and in addition to the common biological survival that is the lot of men and women alike. That woman cannot afford to be complacent with the small victories won, the little recognition gained and the small measure of indignities thwarted and that too in woefully small pockets of the world, is well understood in the final words of warning given by the wizened, old, Shahrzad to the young girls attending on her: “The day cannot last forever……..” (WDT 275). Women need to forge bonds between themselves, gaining strength from each other, so that they are always on the alert, wise and awake, not ever to give in to a secondary state, once more, over and above the one they are already unable to free themselves from.

In her novels, Githa Hariharan seems to put forward twin possible solutions to set right the oppression induced secondary state of women. One is in line with what Simone de Beauvoir states as essential for women, the world over, namely education.

It is significant that all of Githa Hariharan’s heroines, who transcend their roles, have had good education as their source of inspiration and courage. Both Shahrzad and Dunyazad are widely read and Satyasama has taught Dilshad to read
and write. Devi and Meena have had quality education too. It is definitely not accidental. Indeed there seems to be a pointer here that women’s progress in their struggle for half the sky and equal status under it is definitely dependent on education for women.

The other possible solution is in line with what feminists like Sherry B. Ortner and Betty Friedan suggest, namely the need for men and women to participate equally in activities of creativity and transcendence. Woman leans heavily upon man, because she is not allowed to rely on herself. Man will indeed be freeing himself in freeing her, that is, in giving her something to do in the world. Betty Friedan states: “The only way for a woman, as for a man, to find herself, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own. There is no other way” (Interview Sherman x).

Thus it is seen that while Mayamma’s mother-in-law, Mayamma, Sita, Mangala and Razia serve as examples of varying levels of absorption of patriarchal ideologies, traditions and conforming to roles, Devi, Meena, Shahrzad, Dr.Shiv, Vasu Master, Dunyazad and Dilshad, along with the revisioned Amba of the legends transcend their gender specific roles to shine as explications of Githa Hariharan’s version of the androgynous principle that recognizes no distinction in the responsibilities and endeavours of men and women and which is recognized as a high ideal by most feminists.

In sum, an assertion of female sexuality, a refusal to endorse the glorifying of mere biological motherhood, a rebellion against marriage and all restrictive
institutions, an explication of misogyny and its assimilation and perpetration by men and women steeped in the traditions of patriarchy, a rejection of mere survival as mode of existence for women, the concept and realization of androgyny by empowered women and enlightened men, an espousal of a new feminine language that glories in its meandering style and multiple perspectives, discontinuous narration, rejection of neat closures and a re-vision of myth and history are some of the major findings, the researcher has identified in the writings of Githa Hariharan as represented by the four novels taken for study. Also there is a strong impression of Githa Hariharan’s belief in the evolution of “the androgynous mind” as a favoured ideal and as the best possible solution to cure the society of the sickness and injustice, caused by continuous centuries of gender-bias, the means towards such a state being the provision of a wholesome education and equal opportunities for both sexes to participate in activities of “creativity and transcendence.”

It would also be fitting to note that representations of the plight and situation of different women is very suitably put across in the title of Githa Hariharan’s first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* though the canvas of representation itself spreads across all of Githa Hariharan’s works. The novels included in the purview of this research, are rich in the multilayered meanings, the subtle images and metaphors, the wealth of fables and stories, the impressive array of women characters and would yield themselves to many more feminist readings