CHAPTER II
FEMINIST ELEMENTS IN
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CHAPTER II

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2.1. Introduction:

Literature is a vehicle of ideas and views. The progressive ideas of a fictional genius spread through his/her works of literature. These works later on become classic and deserve immortality. They are universally received. These fictional works attain eternity through the ages. Githa Hariharan is one among such ever-memorable celebrities. Indian women writers have tried to depict the feelings of women in an effective manner. Their writings truly examine the social relationship of men and women as well as the progressive elements of feminist ideas. The socio-cultural realities have been brought about by these writers. Githa Hariharan is a name from among such cherished writers.

Githa Hariharan, in her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night (1992)*, also mentioned TFN in some places, is confronted at the very outset with a question which makes the work stand out. It shows couples ‘surviving’ and ‘existing’ with each other, in a social framework of marriage in Indian society. To them, marriage is a social obligation, a necessity and therefore desirable and inevitable. However, it has nothing to do with love, sentiments and emotions. It is all about duties of a wife towards her husband and his family, who in turn have almost no duty or obligation towards her except for accommodating her in a family in which she is expected to serve. Githa Hariharan shows that the situation is the same for an educated modern young woman of today who has lived abroad all alone, and for an educated or uneducated housewife
of earlier generation. The novel has subversive method adopted in the expression and storytelling mode. In this chapter an attempt has been made to highlight the feminist elements recorded by Githa Hariharan with a specific angle. Her feminist spirit has been properly analyzed and neatly highlighted herein.

In literature, feminism has a multifaceted approach. It has touched almost all paths of life revealing its progressive elements in varied forms of literature, fine arts and culture. Feminism as a phenomenon has wider ramifications, both in short stories and novels. In the coeval modern literature, both in the west and the east, feminism has affected various dimensions in an interesting manner. Feminism has reflected upon women’s aspirations, their rights and responsibilities with a new progressive aspect. Mostly Indian women writers have aptly described identity crisis in Indian life. The feminist consciousness of modern women writers in India is a unique phenomenon revealing anger, grief and revolt against the system. The women writers have tried to reveal dilemma and conflict of the inner mind of Indian womanhood. The study of emerging images of women is a core reflection of Indian women’s writings. Gender consciousness of Indian women writer is distinctly different from that of the western women writers. How Indian women writers respond to feminism could be examined by conducting case study of Indian women writers. In this work, writings of Githa Hariharan have been studied with a feminist perspective. In the present chapter Githa Hariharan’s ice breaking novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* which is a true revelation of identity crisis of Indian women has been dealt with. This chapter portrays Githa Hariharan’s attempt in presenting reality of the women of today’s generation and their composite portrait has their own reality.
It is more significant to understand Githa Hariharan’s different works under feminist outlook. A totally new approach has been adopted for understanding feminist reflection in Githa Hariharan’s works. In the age of globalization, women are suffering more in a country like India as the process of victimization of women still continues in the traditional society. Globalization has further aggravated many issues of serious nature in a complex form. In the post modernism phase, women suffer more. In the traditional social structure, women were always neglected and now in the post globalized period, her images are further misused for marketing by the media and entertainment industry. The spectrum of feminism reflected in Githa Hariharan’s works can be examined as part of this wider viewpoint. Githa Hariharan mainly focuses on the ceaseless quest for self realization and liberation from the rigid social structure in which the Indian woman is a constant and endless sufferer. Earlier there was a conflict between tradition and modernity. Further, sometimes religious fanatics versus progressive vision of social justice are also reflected in literature. A study of women’s quest for feminism has been explored in this chapter with a special reference to *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

Githa Hariharan is a fore-front modern English writer who has established herself in the annals of literature as a feminist writer. Her major contribution lies in the form of her novel entitled as *The Thousand Faces of Night* published in 1992. It was really a turning point in feminist literature and she bagged Commonwealth Award for her painstaking fiction.

Dr. Padmini and S.K. Sudha have rightly observed that:

“In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Githa Hariharan sensitively portrays the condition of Indian women caught between tradition and
modernity. She diligently captures their split consciousness as a result of which we find through a set of representative characters, both their submissiveness and their struggle for individuality.” (Padmini and S. 126)

Every work of fiction by Githa Hariharan truly manifests seeds of feminism, deeply rooted in her philosophical base. A cross cultural section of Indian society is depicted in her novels of female. She is a voice of women. Through her writings, she has portrayed the protagonists in the society. The Thousand Faces of Night focuses on Devi, the protagonist who undergoes identity crisis.

This identity crisis can be witnessed in the stylistic representations that Githa Hariharan has ably made. The story of the novel centres around the character of Devi, who represents predicament in the mind of typical Indian women. Devi, after her post-tertiary education, from America comes home to Madras with the memory of her black American lover, Dan.

The character of the protagonist is woven to reveal progressive feminist ideas. Devi, the central character is neither an ideal woman like her mother, Sita, nor is she spiritually superior as her mother-in-law. She is an ordinary woman; an educated modern Indian woman who is prone to desires and ambitions in the society of her own times. She belongs to act, to take a controlled status of a wife in married life and does not make a compromise with her biological and emotional needs. Devi represents the modern educated Indian woman whose beliefs and perceptions of women spring from the consciousness of the past as well as her intellect and desire for self-satisfaction. The struggle between the values of past and present truly throws to the world human
beings dependent nature and narrowly defined social roles of passive sufferers reflected in this novel.

The success of this novel lies in the social realities mirrored by Githa Hariharan. Devi is depicted as an independent individual who does not fall prey to passive suffering. She is ready to reach compromise and adjustment with a sense of loss when she decides to stay with her mother, Sita. The novel presents Devi as a woman with whom one can identify - intelligent, questioning women, who are not content with statuesque.

2.2. Feminist Approach of Githa Hariharan:

The study of Githa Hariharan as a feminist writer is undertaken by understanding her approach based on her philosophy. Devi’s mental faculty is shaped under the influential effect of mythological and historical stories narrated to her by her grandmother in her childhood and her practical exposure to the real living world around her. The novel adopts psycho analytical approach in its narration.

_The Thousand Faces of Night_ is not an exception to these stories. Feminism is a revolt against male-dominated society. After marriage, the status of woman changes. With arranged marriage, she plugs in to a world of disillusionment, and _The Thousand Faces of Night_ is set largely on her treatment of Indian ‘wife’ in a modern life, the most thorough and accurate in Indian literature. Her achievement is all the more significant in that so few writers have presented the traditional package that a woman carries with whom many Indian women can identify - complex, intelligent, questioning, the women who are not content with their incurable life and who rebel against the established order. Devi has accepted as a bride her talent but it is curse for her. Her father-in-law orders her in anger to put away her _Veena_ because, according to
him, she is neglecting her duty as a wife and as a daughter-in-law. Sita’s training as an Indian girl prevents her from asserting her individuality. She is like a volcano, seething with rage inside, but presenting a cool and calm exterior. She gives up her passion for music. She never picks up the *Veena* again, which was a part of her dowry. It is true that, “Philosophizing and thinking ….outside and making possible, yet impossible to assimilate to male reason, matter is what makes women an identity and an experience of their own, forever apart from male power and male concepts.” (Nawale 229)

Githa Hariharan has revolted against the male dominated society. She has depicted social reality in the multi-cultural society. She has been successful because she manages to bring together the personal and the cultural. Myth criticism also holds promise for scholars interested in how various ethnic groups, especially minorities, can maintain their own traditions and at the same time interacts with other mythologies. In this novel, a Mayamma is the housekeeper who represents a local ethnic group and Devi a woman who knows her voice and persona.

Devi wants to humiliate Mahesh by condemning him to a life without child and wife. Thus she registers her protest by walking out on Mahesh:

> “Humiliating Mahesh. ... I do something bloody, final, a mark of protest worthy of the heroines I grew up with. ... You have trampled on your marital vows. I say like Ganga. For that you will be left alone, without wife or child. I will gather together the fragments which pass for my life, however laughably empty and insignificant, and embark on my first real journey...I can learn to be a woman at last. I will soar high on the crest of Gopal’s wave of ragas.” (Thousand Faces of Night 75)
This characteristic of Devi shows that individually she is able to take a decision and cross the bindings of society, which she has learnt from her grandmother through her childhood. The study of Githa Hariharan’s feminist approach is conducted on these lines as Shukla Kaushik says that Devi in the novel shows how an Indian woman displays “a multiple existence”.

Feminism has been proclaimed not only as a philosophy but also as a way of life by Githa Hariharan; in her novels she has selected woman images of three different phases. The story presents three generations of women—each representing their generation and tradition. It can be said that while the grandmother represents the traditional woman and Devi the modern contemporary woman, Devi’s mother is a bridge between these two. Githa Hariharan has a fusion of tradition and modernity reflected in her novels. The dilemma between the values is depicted in the fiction. The critic referred to above remarks, that Githa Hariharan shows the significance of the myths from the Indian epics from where the Indian women draw their role models which focus on their pride, chastity and self-sacrifice.

Githa Hariharan’s feminist view shows how Indian women can be liberated from the shackles of outmoded and debilitating tradition of dark ages against which the women are suppressed to accept crushing and superstitious traditions. The novelist presents Devi’s psychic impasse and presents a paradigm of her divided self in the present crisis and depicts Devi’s psychological lock dead through the break-down of her light mental defenses. She recognizes the intent of her vulnerability and weakness as a woman, her relationship with two men, Dan and Gopal. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a narrative story of Indian woman written in a subtle and tender style to project the subordinate role of women in the male dominated orthodox society.
*The Thousand Faces of Night* was widely appreciated by critics for Githa Hariharan’s feminist approach and the fiction came on the right time in 1992, when feminism was making way ahead in India. By 1960s feminist criticism had become an emerging trend in the world.

Feminist critics in this age were searching for creative works of high reputation which were proclaiming women’s rights and their issues. Githa Hariharan penned her works at the right time. The wide-ranging critics of cultural identities rose to the forefront and they were trying to understand the essence of women writers in a righteous manner. In this process after two decades, there was the emergence of a feminist writer in South Asian sub continent, known Githa Hariharan *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel that exposes bitter truth in an authentic manner.

Githa Hariharan has narrated a true picture of Indian womanhood in a pathetic manner to unveil the truthful realities in it. There was a radical change in the power shift in 1990s and that led to the rise of feminism. Michel Foucault points out that, “All knowledge is contextually bound and produce within a field of shifting power relations was a formula of the rise of feminism proclaimed.” (Leavy 89)

Feminism is the focal point of Githa Hariharan’s creative force omnipresent in all her novels in general and *The Thousand Faces of Night* in specific. Githa Hariharan is making a critical analysis of Indian myths and presenting the reality. For Devi, it is companionship. She feels “A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually like a delicate but promising sapling.”(TFN 49) She wonders how the acute businessman’s eyes with all their shrewd power really be weak sighted that he does not see that it is too early for quietness and too soon for the “companionship of habits.”(49)
Devi feels that her education has not prepared her for “The vast, yawning middle chapters of her womanhood.” (54)

Githa Hariharan has rightly pointed out various myths of Indian womanhood and she has ably uncovered them in her creative exhibits. Vithu Mohan has rightly “wondered what would happen to ordinary women, when Sita was exiled for none of her faults and had give fire proof for her chastity. Droupadi was humiliated with “cheer Haran” and Gargi, Maitreyi had “Shastrath” with man.”

Githa Hariharan has unfailingy answered these questions in a befitting manner and has portrayed miseries of the common woman in her fiction. Vithu Mohan has noted that the value of women’s worth mirrors the value of society.

Githa Hariharan has brought in the essence of Indian feminism in a the bird’s eye view. She has displayed Indian myths and turned them down into reality. She has tried to cover different approaches of Indian womanhood. Indian women are entwined with such fallacious images and Githa Hariharan has tried to give exposure to these myths in her works. The concept of feminine worth is an index of the individual and collective role of women in society. It represents the values of the society in relation to women and their attainments. Devi’s grandmother recounts several mythical tales about many mythological women, their attitude, exploits and achievements. So here Devi has her own opinion and aspiration regarding her life. This attitude towards the life can be observed in her personality. Therefore, Devi says in the Prelude to the novel, “I must have asked grandmother why? Thousands of times?” (75) Githa Hariharan has illustrated this fact in her novel. Githa Hariharan’s feminist approach has her own philosophical vantage point evolved by a creative writer. About feminist reflections of Githa Hariharan, it has been pointed that “We find the women depicted
in the novel, struggle for their survival and to endure the trials of their womanhood. The means chosen by the women might be different but they all are means of survival they could fashion for themselves.”(Nawale 203)

The struggle of existence of women is the quintessence of Githa Hariharan’s novel. The quest of Githa Hariharan in search of feminism has been largely successful in her first novel which has brought her to line light of the world of Indian literature.

In this work, an attempt has been made to search for the various manifestations of identity crisis reflected by Indian women writers, especially by Githa Hariharan. Reinvention of literary works of Githa Hariharan can be possible by adopting a new sociological approach.

2.3. The Sociological Approach:

Literature is a part of social cross-section of society. When a woman writer describes social problems, she has to critically examine social relationship. Sociologists believe that the things are not as they seem. The truth behind this logic is that the revelation of life becomes a more realistic probe made by author to express it in a more factual manner. The spirit of any writer depends on how he or she absorbs, discovers, and describes real society and social life. Many a time things are not as they appear to be on the surface. Then the writer, by questioning social realities, describes the bitter truth in the form of literature. Each woman writer develops her own sociological point of view, studies social institutions, observes social relationship and portrays conflict and struggle between different forces. The author with her creative force, delineates life with a greater efficiency, greater ability and understands the social fabric in a truthful manner. The world of women described by Githa Hariharan is not far away from her realistic social imagination. Though Indian women
writers had gone a long way to portray women’s miseries, many of them like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Shobha De, have been largely successful in portraying these social issues through their works. The social upheavals and cultural turmoil, which is absorbed by women writers, depend on their creative abilities of depiction of truth. Understanding social situation depends on participant observation of a writer. To put the same in the words of Ron Matson: “Society, in all of its complexity, has multiple layers. Much like an onion, what we see on the surface tells us little about what lies beneath.” (Matson 4)

Githa Hariharan has tried to unfold these layers in a very careful manner. She has put forth micro aspects of Indian social life on the one hand and exploitation of women on the other. It has been observed: “Having a sociological imagination will truly be a gift that comes from the discipline of sociology, but a gift we give ourselves through increasing awareness about society and our personal lives.”(4)

Githa Hariharan has carefully studied all the minute struggles and means of exploitation which women as part of society are undergoing in India. Women writers possess a very high quality of social observation. They not only observe but describe social realities in a dynamic fashion. Novel as a form of literature has been described as a graph of social inequalities, injustice and many imbalances prevailing in social structure. Social stratification systems create ‘layers’ of the people in society based on the unequal distribution of scarce rewards. Social classes are the relative position of people based on such things as income, education and occupation. The position of women in Indian society has become much critical due to all these scarce resources which further keep women at a lower and neglected level. This sociological approach to the problem has brought to light three important facts.
Firstly, woman is part of feminist system. Feminine identity requires a more larger and vibrant dimensions in India because the issues are complex and they require a faithful treatment.

Secondly, Indian motherhood has been undergoing many challenges. Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai and Githa Hariharan have focused on the complex issues of women’s health, social environment and many more burdens on them. In Thousand Faces of Night Devi is a character that, after marriage, presents many sacrifices like putting her Veena off for ever. This example shows the social onus of the depiction of characters. Suman Singh has observed,

“It is evident that Devi expected marriage to be a perfect unification of two individuals. But Mahesh, like most of the Indian men took marriage to be a social responsibility. Devi soon begins to feel an ‘awesome loneliness’ and a kind ‘uselessness’ creeps into her. Under such mental condition, she meets Gopal in whom, she feels she could seek her unfulfilled feminine desires. She wanders with him for a few months but soon gets disillusioned.”(Singh 74)

The third and important aspect brings out gender gap. The issues related to harmony between the two sexes have been distinctly unfurled by many women writers. Setting social cohesion is a challenge which has been faced by Indian women writers. Mostly, men and their families look for brides who would make adjustments. Devi, like the other girls, is “prepared” by her mother “for show”, to be viewed “as a potential bride groom.” Githa Hariharan rightly says, “So they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently… fair, beautiful, home loving and prepared to adjust”(TFN 17)
Thus, Indian women writers have tried to point women images in a prominent way. The study of Githa Hariharan’s work *The Thousand Faces of Night* has thus sociological elements. It is true that feminism and feminist movement as well as feminist literature go hand in hand. In India, as feminist movements were gaining growing on 1970s onwards, women writers also began echoing these voices.

Githa Hariharan’s novel mostly discloses social facts in an objective manner with a creative touch. The foundation of her feminist novels is essentially humane and equally progressive. She is not egalitarian, nor is she mere imaginative, nor has she merely flown in the air with idealism but what is more important is her social understanding at the grass roots level. The concept she has treated and loaded has a new design of a society, new women and new culture. Devi establishes her individuality by resenting and rebelling against the culture, customs and traditions of the patriarchal commune. Thus, the novel presents the image of a new woman who breaks her marital ties with her husband to assert her identity and liberate herself from the male domination. Suman Singh has observed that, “It is evident that Devi expected marriage to be a perfect unification of two individuals. But Mahesh, like most of the Indian men took marriage to be a social responsibility.”(Singh 198-9)

Githa Hariharan’s feminism is a serious endeavor in search of women’s human rights. She is a humanist who believes in liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. She has produced her characters as social representatives of Indian social structure. The author has closely witnessed the miserable conditions of Indian women who are caught between tradition and modernity. On one side, she has a profound impact of epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata and on the other, she is influenced by modern liberal values which have come from the west. Githa Hariharan has
absorbed the new wind of change and rightly incorporated it in her fiction. Her presentation are very slow, creative, minute and carefully operated. She has ably planned the story and placed her characters in the niche of it. Her woman images are fighting for social justice and they echo the new wind of change. Githa Hariharan’s new meditations are quite balanced and she has manifested the women’s voice in a high tone with care and caution.

Devi’s mother decides that she has married her daughter to the sociological rules and for that, in order to make her only daughter, Devi, settles down, Sita decides to call her back from America. Here the orthodox attitude is that way any mother thinks like Sita. The author elaborates on this situation and the sufferings of women find and expression in her. She has described how woman is cornered in the system and how she is exploited in the Indian social, today, even after independence and modernization.

The feminist approach of Githa Hariharan is original and clear. She is not imitating the western approaches but has developed her own Indian view which is rooted in the ethno-cultural processes.

2.4. Myths and Lores:

The term ‘myth’ is derived from the Greek word “mythos” which simply means “word.” Later, its range of applicability was extended to higher and wider levels of meanings such as history and communication. For a mythologist, myths are colorful pieces that constitute the beautiful mosaic of a people’s cosmology which is the totality of the world in which they live. It is an explanation and justification of the world past and future as they see it. Myths appearing in literature may be different from true myths, but still they retain the remnants of a ritual connection and they can
be easily traced back to a mythical source. Myths and literature are the two ways through which we enter the labyrinth of life in order to unravel the intricacies and complexities of existence.

Literature is a life-giving myth and myth is life-giving literature. A substance drawn from real life has always been there, at the beginning of the myth. In the greatest age of literature, there has always been a power of preserving a balance between the two opposing elements; the expression of boundless primitive emotions and the subtle representation of life. It has been fulfilled in different ages through the mythopoeic orientation of the writers. Myth offers the artist a theme which sounds a basic motif and thus makes it possible for him/her to return to the world-wide audience.

Githa Hariharan’s feminism is based on understanding of myths and lores. She has given a finest treatment to the myth and reality in Indian social life.

According to Padayachee and Pillay, “A myth is a belief shared by most people, but which is usually not true.” (Mohan 273)

Myths have got great evocative power in a world where word rhymes lose their communicability. Myths enable the writer to arrive at a perfect union between his/her unconscious and that of the reader. While using myth as raw material quite often, the writers are capable of transporting their fictional world into the status of a living myth. In artistic creation, the mythic process is functional; in other words, it is the life-force of art. The creation of myths through fiction is necessitated by the narratorial strategy and also by the demands of time. The writer, detaching himself/herself from his or her personality and resorting to an extraneous element,
becomes one with humanity at large and with history where the boundaries of past, present and future dissolve into a single entity. The writers thus create a new language and a new dialectics of myths.

It has been observed that: “A myth is a belief shared by most people, but which is usually not true. Many such myths exist in the perception of feminine status and worth. Our history too is replete with the contradictions in the perception of women’s status.”(273)

Githa Hariharan has tried to foster progressive values by changing the traditional myths. Marriage is a social institution which is debated by Githa Hariharan. Critics observe that, “A happy married life is based upon genuine love, mutual respect and appreciation for each other, trust and sense of duty towards each other.” (Singh 274)

Githa Hariharan has many more considerations in her work about married life. Devi finds her married life miserable due to her husband’s cold and indifferent relationship. Despite her grandmother’s mythological stories about ideal women, she tries to find fulfillment in her neighbor Gopal, a musician. She soon realizes that his association is also a mere fascination and leaves him behind to be free from everything and to reach her mother’s home.

Devi’s father-in-law, whom she fondly calls Baba, has an array of not so ancient allusive stories. These do not pertain to mythical characters, but real men and women, forming a part of the rich cultural heritage of fanatic music. He tells her the story of muttuswamy Dikshitar, a seventeenth century composer, who lived with his two wives, a dark one and a fair one. Through this story, Baba impresses upon Devi that women should forget their desire for ornaments. Another composer of the 16th
century, Purandara Dasa and his wife Saraswati Bai’s story reinforces that, “It takes the wife’s flame of dharma to light within a man, the divine lamp that is rusting with neglect.”(TFN 66) Therefore the burden of keeping the flame of dharma alive rests on Devi and not so much on her husband, Mahesh. He reads out to Devi a passage about Thyagaraja, another 18th century composer’s composition, Kriti. He skillfully skips and does not read to her about ‘Kritya’, a ferocious woman who hunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. There are also other virtuous wives whose stories are recollected so as to set an example for Devi. All the allusive stories which Devi’s father-in-law narrates, strike home just one point that a wife should be good, virtuous, dutiful, selflessly devoted, etc. These stories sum up an all pervading and truly significant segment of Indian beliefs, religious traditions and social customs. Thus the significance of the myths mentioned by Githa Hariharan has to be decoded. The issues they raise have to be understood and the answers to the questions they pose, are to be sought. Devi’s grandmother is not unaware of the thousand faces of the night engulfing matrimony, yet she is optimistic and hopeful for Devi. Her myths are stories were a window to look at a mysterious, unknown world outside. She wants Devi to be aware of feminine frailties, frustrations as well as fortitude, so that she could endure these dismal hues and somehow survive, therefore her mythical stories are linked to situations in Devi’s life and women around her.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is a unique example of such narration. The myth and reality in Githa Hariharan’s novels form her unique tradition of the complex issues of women. Her able thinking echo a new voice and new awakening coming in the world of women. It seems that she has carefully studied feminism and feminist movements in contemporary India and has treated these complex issues in a careful style. She is anticipating the arrival of ‘New Women’ in the new millennium on
Indian horizons in a bold manner. The problem faced by new women has been described by Githa Hariharan by pin-pointing different facets of myth and reality. The women in her fiction are progressive, change-oriented and still they are sophisticated and elite. The study of Githa Hariharan’s fiction can be interesting if one understand the social fabric on which she has depicted her images. The traditional Indian social structure is based on patriarchy which is dominated by male and female is given a secondary treatment. This gender bias is truly reflected in her works which record feminist elements in a systematic way. The understanding of myth and reality brings one to the opinion that she is drawing a clear line between the myth and lores.

On this background it would be interesting to study patriarchy and marriage relationship reflected in the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

### 2.5. Patriarchy in *The Thousand Faces of Night*:

Patriarchy literally means ‘rule of the father in a male-dominated family’. It is a social and ideological construct which considers men as superior to women. Patriarchy is based on a system of power relations which are hierarchical and unequal where men control women’s production, reproduction and sexuality. It imposes masculinity and femininity character stereotypes in the society which strengthen the iniquitous power relations between men and women. Patriarchy is not constant and gender relations which are dynamic and complex have changed over the periods of history. Patriarchy is ‘father is the head of the family.’

Indian society is traditional and caste based. The system of patriarchy has prevailed in our society right from ancient Vedic period. The epics, ‘Ramayana’ and ‘Mahabharata’ also express the feeling of patriarchy through different angles. Githa Hariharan has carefully showed Indian social system and has depicted the patriarchic
system in her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her depiction of patriarchy is based on her clear social inspection and realistic social analysis. Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a fiction that advocates feminist ideology. The theory of feminism is based on revolt against patriarchy prevailing in human society. Patriarchy is an important character of Indian society because Indian social structure is deeply rooted in customs and traditions. Woman is a mirror of society and societal expressions to be accepted as women are part and parcel of family culture.

This space search has been truly demonstrated by Githa Hariharan in her novel. Subordination of women is due to patriarchal system. The logic of male theory is a base behind the logic of patriarchy. The male mind is considered as superior to the female body, therefore in the marriage market it does not get the same status as the male mind.

Male dominated features also appear in literature. Patriarchal power politics prevails in every traditional society and family system as well. Women’s priorities are neglected by men in their marital life.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, three women Devi, Mayyamma, Sita are all in the crunch of patriarchy. Male bias of Hindu men helps women to see their culture through their own eyes. This is what the novelist evokes in this novel. The study of Githa Hariharan’s novel also shows how these differences are focused. Cultural structure in life has perpetuated patriarchy.

In India the cultural super sense today is based on patriarchy. The caste system and patriarchy are related to these cultural standpoints. Women’s progress in society is not from myth to truth but from myth to myth which has caused awe and terror in society.
The women, today, are facing many complex problems in our society. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is full of such complex problems. Devi’s attempt to change old ideas into modern concepts miserably fails.

Devi’s character stands for victim of cunning patriarchy. The relationship between patriarchy and culture is also shown by Githa Hariharan. Sita suppresses the artist in her in order to achieve her aim in sending her unmarried daughter to America.

Thus, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel example of women’s sufferings in the patriarchal cultural matrix of Indian traditional society. In the novel, the author gives a patriarchal example like Devi’s grandmother pretending to listen to the other heralds. It looks like Devi, the princess would not be losing sight of her prince, finally she would get him only, though others divert and tempt her for them on her way to achieve her goal.

The patriarchy in Indian society has exploited Indian woman and kept her in the corner of Indian society and has kept her in an exploited situation. The patriarchy is a rigid social system which is very much complex and makes women suffer to a great deal. The cogitations made by Githa Hariharan are true, realistic and very much fearless. Her major works wake up against this patriarchal system and demand social justice for women. Thus the patriarchy described by Githa Hariharan is an outcome of her serious investigation made in to a systematic mode.

### 2.6. Characters in the Novel:

The study of plot and characters is backbone of the novel. These two are interrelated; the characters evolved by the author are social representatives. They are the examples of human behavior and social segmentation of a class in a structural
stratum. The sociological analysis of these characters can be made in a fruitful way. This approach is based on a clear understanding of these characters of Githa Hariharan. Her characters are representatives of socio-cultural realities. The characters play an important role in the craft of novel writing. They are the representatives of social process and structure. Githa Hariharan, as a champion of feminism, has selected her characters to represent both Indian tradition and reforms in its structure. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is centered on Devi, is concerned with the struggle of three women of three consecutive generations for their survival, freedom and individuality. It brings out the struggle of the new woman in a male dominated society for the sake of protecting her identity. The novel is a mixture of facts and fantasies telling about love and death, men and women, passion and loneliness. It is a continuation and articulation of female experience, asserted through the reworking of myth and folklore as the novel is interwoven into the mythical stories.

Devi’s marriage in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a marriage arranged and fulfilled by her mother. Devi refuses an offer of marriage from her African–American friend Dan because of her ambivalence towards American culture. The way Devi and Dan’s relationship shapes, its logical culmination would be marriage. In fact, close to their graduation time, Dan does propose Devi, yet when the question is put to her, she is shocked. Dan attributes her reluctance to the fear of taking risk. He is much disappointed. Her reluctance is, however, due to the fact that Dan and she are very different in terms of their beliefs, culture and traditions. At one point, when Devi goes to meet Dan’s family, she decides to shed her inhibitions, her burden of Indianness. But she is unable to do so. In forming a bond of friendship both make efforts to bridge these differences; but she also knows that these differences would always prevent them from union. She confesses that her education and stay in America have instilled a
sense of liberation in her. Devi turns to men either for security or to affirm her value. She exorcizes Dan and uses him as a shield in die white claustrophobia of an all-clean, all-American campus. She knows that her enjoyment with Dan is with the idea of that there cannot be oneness with him. She is shocked when Dan proposes to her for marriage. Devi’s indulgence in smoking hashish or establishing intimacy with Dan can partially be seen as a revolt against her mother who instructs her to make friends belonging only to good Brahmin families.

She returns to India for the sake of her widowed mother. Sita leads Devi to the altar of marriage. She agrees to a negotiated marriage like a good Indian girl. Devi’s broad-mindedness, education and experiences challenge so many blind beliefs, but she sheds her desires to fulfill her mother’s desire and to uphold the family honour. Sita allows Devi just enough time to become adept at wearing the right smile and proper jewels and a sari. Before she plays her next card and invites prospective grooms and their families to meet her. Once Devi comes back to India, she is forced into a sociological niche where all the force of tradition, mythology and collective psychology begins to work upon her. She recollects the shaping influence of her childhood memories which initiated her into womanhood. Mahesh, even before their marriage, openly tells Devi about his nature of work, his tours and informs her that his father and maidservant will be there and he will be lonely sometimes. Devi too thinks from that vantage point and decides that she could cope with this problem. In fact she admires Mahesh’s and admits is honesty and saying he needs a women who will be a wife and mother. But later, she realizes that she cannot cope with his attitude towards marriage and her loneliness. One can see the total boredom that assails her in such a life when she says that she spends her afternoon in opening dusty rooms and cup boards infected with cockroaches.
Mahesh does not share business matters with Devi, considering it unnecessary. He is totally unaware of her loneliness. When Devi asks him to postpone his business trip, he comments ironically that he would be born a woman in his next birth so that he will be free from earning his living. He wants Devi to attend to his father, himself, to manage the housework and to receive his friends well. Mahesh, like all other men of Indian society, wants his wife to be submissive and passive. Mahesh takes married life for granted.

Devi is unable to defend against Mahesh’s supreme confidence and superciliousness whenever she expresses a wish to do something like learning to play cards so that she can be with him. When she wants to learn Sanskrit so that she could understand Baba’s quotations better, he quips that there is no need to learn Sanskrit and that would be learning high brow language. If she carries a body Mahesh’s disapproval appears to her to be a cunning move for a defenceless woman. According Mahesh, education is not needed to make a woman happy. Her grandmother was a very happy woman without education. She understands that Mahesh needs a woman who is subservient and obedient. There is another set of allusive stories narrated to Devi, with a different motive. There is another character in the life of Devi, Gopal, a Hindustani classical singer and occasional visitor to her neighborhood. Devi sees him when his sister invites her to listen to his music. She is impressed by his music:

“The music wafts in faintly from the house beyond the high wall. First a slow teasing of notes, suggestions of melody. A note is struck, pure, a liquid circle glimmering in its completeness, and held for so long that it permeates the helplessly responsive pores of my skin. A warm glow begins to stretch its caress across my body, and the scales sway their
way down a zigzag path, a curve here, a detour there, and a pattern
forms itself flowing sensuously like the life-giving waters of some
ancient river.” (75)

Hence, she elopes with Gopal to get her desires fulfilled. Her decision to live
with Gopal is her alone and she feels that she will start the first real journey. Gopal’s
stroll into her garden every day misses nothing. Devi remembers her happy
movements with Gopal, “He knows every muscle on my face, he sees the shadow
before it falls across my eyes. We talk, he sings. When he takes my hand and
brushes the fingertips with his moist mouth, the lush prison around me dissolves into
a green blur.”(78)

Sita in the novel has expresses that, “I have often wondered about, those trees,
those tender bridal saplings that grew so well side by side. Which I wonder, was the
male, which the female?”(59)

About reflection of Indian mothers train, protect and guide their daughters on
all their endeavors. With their mother’s guidance and emotional support, they
internalize their femininely. The three women belong to different generations and are
different in terms of education and social circumstances. Mayamma could not bear a
child for several years, Sita has a girl child, and Devi couldn’t bear one. Mayamma’s
husband and mother-in-law have tortured her physically. Sita’s troubles are more
mental; and Devi’s are due to her husband’s indifferent attitude which disturbs her
emotional equilibrium. Devi observes:

“Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well
before she had team to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of
unhidden bestial cruelly, firsthand. She had no choice really.... And she
had won some small victory if you could call it by such a grand name.”

(95)

As compared to Mayamma, Sita’s case is different. Sita has married ‘late, at the ripe age of twenty. Unlike Mayamma, she came to her in-law’s home with a determination to be a good wife and daughter-in-law on the basis of her talents; but she too, “Had paid the price for it, not a light one for someone who measured her self-worth so completely in terms of music.” (136)

The frustrations of these women Devi i.e. Sita and Mayamma are vividly portrayed, projecting a fact of Indian ethos. For this, Indian customs, traditions, rituals and superstitions are woven into a rich literary fabric with a profusion of ancient myths and not so ancient allusive stories. The fact that the writer explains some of these in a glossary given at the end of the book, for the benefit of non-Indian readers, shows how significant they are for understanding appreciation and consequent success of the novel.“My grandmother’s stories were no ordinary stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childhood questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded.” (135-6)

This shows that Devi is having deep impressions of her grandmother stories which she listened to in her childhood and also when she comes to India her grandmother tells her all the ritual and the rule of the society. At present stage she does not have an answer from the story of her grandmother. It has been observed that,

“There are three women characters Devi, the central character; Sita, her mother and Mayamma, the care taker cum cook. Githa Hariharan deftly explores the prescription of the gender relations by means of
Indian mythology. The stories of Gandhari, Amba, Damayanthi, and others reflect on the life of these characters in the novel.”(27)

Githa Hariharan, being brought up in a traditional Hindu family, might have been acquainted with all these myths as she perfectly blends the myth and reality in the modern Indian life. Githa Hariharan can be compared to Kamala Markandaya in feminist characters. It has been pointed that, “Kamala Markandaya as a woman writer uses her text, as part of a continuing process involving her own self definition and her empathic identification with her character.”(Arora 7)

This can be testified to Githa Hariharan’s characters. Devi’s feelings are about marital life in the following passage:

“He is far too civilized to raise his hand and bring it down on my rebellious body. He snarls instead about women’s neurosis and my faulty upbringing. Am I neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the thali round my neck? A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body when his hand reaches out, and dreams instead, in the spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight? (Manohar 139)

Finally, Devi returns to her mother and she aims to make a fresh beginning. What happens in the future is a question unanswered by the novelist. The characters in her novel truly represent various cross sections of Indian society.
2.7. Tradition and Rebel:

The English word “tradition” comes from the Latin tradition, the noun from the verb tradere or trader. It was originally used in Roman law to refer to the concept of legal transfers and inheritance.

Traditions may also be adapted to suit the needs of the day, and the changes can become accepted as part of the ancient tradition. Tradition changes slowly, with changes from one generation to the next not being seen as significant. Thus, those carrying out the traditions would not be consciously aware of the change, and even if a tradition undergoes major changes over many generations, it would be seen as unchanged. Indian woman is brought up in traditional culture. It has been observed that,

“Basically, culture offers a lot to the distinct fields of human existence. It stands as a set of accumulated oppositions too, with regards to its literary and scientific perspectives. Sociology may put it forward as the institutionalized modes of living of a specific group of people whereas literature takes culture as a cluster of diverse values.” (Padmini and S. 124)

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is a reflection of such diverse values. Though the writer’s individual talent should be rooted in the tradition of a particular society and culture, the real strength of the modern literary imagination lies in its evocation of the individual’s predicament in terms of alienation in his/her own society. This is a typical feeling expressed by Devi about her mother. The traditional set mind of Indian women is reflected by Githa Hariharan in an interesting way. She must be credited for
depicting such characters. Devi is not interested in marriage she accepts the proposal because she does not want to hurt the feeling of her mother. The mother “weaves a cocoon a secure womb.” Awakening feminine consciousness is the major objective of depiction of typical characters in Githa Hariharan’s novels. The Thousand Faces of Night is the narrative that constantly challenges expectations about what it is to be a good wife, mother, and woman. All the characters move around, social realities of Indian women. About the crux of the novel it has been rightly pointed that, “One of the important concern in The Thousand Faces of Night is how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society.” (Paul 108)

The feminist values have been rightly depicted through Githa Hariharan’s novel. Sita, the mother of the protagonist, has been compared to the mythological character of Gandhari by her mother in law. She is an embodiment of self sacrifice and self restrain. Later on, she realizes that she has to give secondary importance to her hobbies and prime focus on domestic work. In the novel she says that she is a wife and daughter-in-law. The novelist has further described Sita’s feeling in an effective dialogue, when she points out: “A house wife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word, and body, she who doesn’t transgress her attains heaven even as her lord does.” (TFN 70-1)

This is a traditional approach which Githa Hariharan has described. Feeling of rebel is a true sense of feminist identity. Feminism is generally based on protest and revolt against the established orders. It has been observed: “Devi internalizes all the pains borne by Sita, Mayamma and Parvatiamma and finally revolts against the social institution of marriage. This was her way of turning the contradictions of life upside
down.” (Padmini and S. 126) Githa Hariharan has portrayed Devi’s rebellion against the system with a feminist passion. She wants to represent struggle of women in the process of tradition and modernity.

The character of Devi is a unique contribution by Githa Hariharan. The life and struggle of Devi are given proper disclosure by Githa Hariharan. One finds a true humanist approach adopted by the author in this novel.

2.8. Analysis of Language and Discourse in *The Thousand Faces of Night*:

Discourse analysis is a qualitative method that has been assimilated and developed by social constructionists. Although discourse analysis is used by a handful of cognitive psychologists, it is based on a view that is largely anti-scientific, though not anti-research. Social constructionism is not easy to define but it is possible to outline some basic assumptions of the approach.

The study of any kind of fiction in the post modernist period can be conducted shared by making a careful re-examination on the basis of discourse analysis. The unique facet of this novel is that it has recorded some interesting social messages that can be studied by making a careful examination of the concept tackled in this novel. The true and real reflections on feminism can be observed here. Discourse analysis is a technique of understanding novels anew. Discourse analysis of the novel of the premise:

“In the 1970s concerns itself with the use of language in a running discourse, continued over a sequence of sentences, and involving the interaction of speaker and auditor in a specific situational context and within a framework of social and cultural conventions.” (Abrams 66)
One finds a latitude to make a discourse analysis of Githa Hariharan’s novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The discourse analysis of the novel brings to light the following five aspects in this connection:

- The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a righteous reflection of elements of feminism well treated by the writer with an appreciable view.

- The study of dialogues in the novel truly reveals the ethos of struggle made by Indian women. Devi’s character is a unique example of this process.

- Indian society is patriarchal and it is based on a rigid social structure which can be changed in the way of social awakening.

- The myth and reality of Indian social life are finely echoed by Githa Hariharan in her writings. She is critical, fearless and truthful in her meditations.

- The social awakening and awareness which women is experience in the contemporary world find certain scope in Githa Hariharan.

Thus these neglected aspects concurrent in Githa Hariharan’s work *The Thousand Faces of Night* show that the elements of feminism could be equally and equally accounted for in her all novels. Her ideas are bright, progressive, and well thought. She has studied, it seems various schools of feminist ideas and she has narrated her ideas in her works in a creative style. The most significant and progressive views of Githa Hariharan have been revealed based on discourse analysis made in this research work. All these aspects are quite significant and igniting which display feminism in an interesting manner. The careful study of this work is self-revealing and self reflective. The significant contribution of Githa Hariharan lies in
her progressive ideas, which are ahead of her time. Thus, all these views can be examined in her works, one after another. It has been stated by Abrams,

> “Some proponents of stylistics include discourse analysis within their area of investigation. And since the late 1970s, a number of critics have increasingly adapted discourse analysis of the examination of the dialogue in novels and dramas. A chief aim is to explain how the characters represented in a literary work, and also the readers of that work, are constantly able to infer meanings that are not asserted or specified in a conversational interchange.”(66)

Verbal material is the primary concern of literary criticism in this technique. While making discourse analysis of Githa Hariharan’s novel, three aspects are focused here, language and style, content and essence of the message reflected through conversation.

The language and style of the narrative represent experimental and factorial skills, the subtle and every day way that is depicted by the writer. Her diction is pointed and the textures communicated exquisite. In terms of techniques her writing is masterful. It is stated that, in terms of technique, her writing contains expertise she could not write of an experience but could animate it with sharp and vivid life. There is not a single flat sentence in her book.

Her narrative texture changes from scene to scene, taking on chameleon life, the mindset of the characters being described as meaningful. The content of Githa Hariharan’s novel is based on progressive ideas: “Githa Hariharan depicted the struggle of Indian woman in relation to society and man for the sake of preserving her own identity. Devi, the protagonist of her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night,*
exemplifies the multiple existences of Indian women in all its complexities.” (Kaushik 240)

The content of Githa Hariharan’s writing is based on humanism. The story of *The Thousand Faces of Night* presents different generations of women each representing her time and traditions. Another pattern of discourse analysis is based on the study of conversation and dialogue. There are ample examples depicting feminist ideas throughout the novel. In one of the passages it has been referred to that “She thought of the three of them, Mayamma, Sita and herself. Three of the women who walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance, for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves.”(TFN 135)

Githa Hariharan has depicted struggle suffered by Indian women for their existence. Even Mayamma realizes that for a woman who leaves her home in search of god, only death is the homecoming. Parvatiamma’s son Mahesh calls her irresponsible and a traitor. The novel ends with a graphic description which is very meaningful: “Suitcase in hand, Devi opened the gate and looked wonderingly at the garden, wild and over grown, but lush in spite of its sand choked roots. Then she quickened her footsteps as she heard the faint sounds of a Veena, hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house.”(139) Devi’s character has is representative of many complex issues of Indian society. Devi represents:

“The present day intellectually strong woman with a different vision to perceive life around her and she confronts her loneliness and alienation with courage. She becomes ‘a woman warrior a heroine and rode a tiger and cut off evil, magical demons’ heads.”(41)
Thus, this work is a very ideal illustration of Githa Hariharan’s progressive social values.

2.9. Summary:

This chapter has attempted a critical analysis of elements in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

There has also been an attempt to thoroughly explain certain features in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The most significant aspect of it is that the author has been successful in crafting the novel effectively, particularly on the basis of feminism.

Initially, the background is given regarding the rise of Githa Hariharan as a novelist. Further, feminist approach of Githa Hariharan is properly pinpointed. The specific study of myths and lores has also been conducted. A special focus on patriarchy and marriage relationship in India is given from the literary sociological perspective. Further, the four important characters in the novel are described. The struggle between tradition and modernity is also depicted.

The discourse analysis based on three aspects is properly conducted. The whole chapter analyzes success of Githa Hariharan as it appears in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her gifted pen has taken a new colour of progressive ideas. Her keen observations of life and pains and splendor have affected unsuspecting wonders.

Thus, the study of this novel shows that it is a new beginning and new era for mirroring pains of Indian women portrayed in three parts of novel, woven together effectively.
In the next chapter a different view of the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is undertaken.

**Works Cited:**


