An Existential Crisis
Chapter III

An Existential Crisis

An existential crisis is defined as a stage of development at which an individual questions the very foundation of his or her life, whether their life has any meaning, purpose or value. An existential crisis may result from a sense of being alone and isolated in the world. It makes one to feel that there is neither purpose in life nor have an awareness of one’s freedom. The hurtful experience of life makes oneself to search a meaning for themselves. Many theories were developed in the fields of psychiatry, psychology and sociology. During the 1940s, it sprung up through the work of psychiatrists Erich Lindemann and Gerald Caplan. Their ideas were based on observation of the reactions of survivors. They concluded that the existential depression conquer a person for long time if they are not engage themselves in anything. The environment change helps them to resolve their problem in a right way. An existential crisis is most probably a significant event in one’s life they may be during the college graduation, marriage, separation, major loss, the death of a loved ones, a life-threatening experience, a new love partner, psycho-active drug use, adult children leaving home, retirement, or old age. Wikipedia describes as: "Emptiness as a human condition is a sense of generalized boredom, social alienation and apathy". The question of making or finding meaning in one’s life is often the basis for intense episodes of psychological conflict. At certain stage of life, all have a quest for self identity which is lost in the society. Identity is a subjective sense of feeling and an observable quality of personal experience and continuity. These experiences are different almost in every
psychological, physical and social way. Over the past few years, the status of women in India has been subject to many great changes. During ancient days, women were adored and worshipped as goddesses. We know that India itself is called Motherland. Women were considered as the centre and foundation of the social and cultural life of the family. Home is the women’s sphere of activity. ‘Men make house and women make home’ is a traditional belief. But in the present scenario, both men and women work but women still tend the house. With the practical emancipation of India, women have ushered in new roles. They have broken barriers and built bridges in the professional platforms. Today, women have shown their worthy input in all fields and hence they need a lot of loving support from family members.

Githa Hariharan examines the disturbed psyche of the modern Indian women. However, the most significant aspect of TFN is that, the original feminists wanted equality for women; they did not want extra rights for women, or to take away the rights from men. The author has once again raised the burning issue of women’s freedom in the contemporary India where the protagonists find Mayamma, Sita and Devi themself in a complex human situation aggravated by social, historical and cultural changes. Perfect psychological insight is deftly utilized in this novel to comment upon the sexual exploitation of Indian women coming from different strata and statuses. Each character recalls her encounter with men concluding that most men take advantage of a woman’s loneliness, ignorance and frustration, placing the entire blame on the woman ultimately. The Indian woman lives within the constrictions of several taboos, simultaneously needing emotional release from time to time, but in the
absence of proper diversion she suffers from her inner fragmentation. A woman’s sense of self is also derived from patriarchal culture which gives rise to several sexual assumptions about a woman’s place, that a man can be aggressive but a woman should be submissive; about male control and female surrender. If one analyses some of the major characters of the novel TFN, one will easily find the tempest or tide of psychological and social problems pervading them from top to bottom. The psychological action is far more active and far more important than the physical action.

Githa Hariharan’s TFN has dealt with serious thoughts on the females’ pathetic condition in Indian society. The events and the threads of the story present a unified plot because the reality of females’ fate has been expressed through these three female characters: Mayamma, Sita and Devi. They belong to three different generations, ages, social circumstances and levels of education, but the sufferings are almost the same. Mayamma is a typical Indian female character who curses and lives in her fate but never questions. She bears the brunt of cruelty that society has ordained to a woman as a daughter, a wife and a daughter-in-law, a deserted woman and a mother. Sita, mother of Devi, a middle-aged woman, represents a life between the two extreme generations of Mayamma and Devi. Sita is a cool confident middle aged woman. Devi is the youngest protagonist of the novel. She emerges as a new woman and becomes an uncompromising survivor at the end. As mentioned above, TFN is a novel of three women “who walked on tight rope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival could fashion for themselves”. Like them more than thousand faces of
women in India who still have no better existence from their darkness of life. Swami Vivekananda said: “Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them.” With such an education, women will solve their problems, but they have all the time been trained in helplessness and servile dependence on others, and so they are good only to wipe their eyes out at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger. Along education they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. Which are very much necessary for the survival.  

There is no hope of rise for the family and the country when they live in sadness. They must be given education and allow to be themselves. After that they will act as they think best. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. In the modern society, the place of woman has been rapidly changing. She has her own realms to wander. Formerly, education was not given to a woman. Husband, children and home duties were her whole world. She was identified only through her relationship with the man she is associated with, may be her father, brother, husband or her son. She did not have an independent identity. With the spread of education and because of the wind of women’s liberation movement, she has become aware of her rights, self respect, economical independence and individual identity. Though the woman is aware of her identity, her position in society is still secondary. The Indian woman is a victim of patriarchal society. In the male dominated society, the position of woman is always secondary. Because of the basic biological difference, a woman is supposed to be inferior to man. Nurturing love and caretaking are considered inferior works of woman whereas power, success and competition are superior works
of man. The Indian society depicts woman as a symbol of sacrifice through the image of Goddess and other characters from myth like Devi, Sita, Savithiri and Gandhari. A girl child in the Indian family is treated partially. The first preference is always given to a boy child. From childhood, a woman is taught to suppress her wills and desires. She is taught to become a good wife, mother, daughter-in-law and so on. She has no identity on her own. In the Indian society, the honour of the family depends upon the behaviour of the woman. The woman has to sacrifice herself for the family. According to the patriarchal community, the woman should be a self renunciation. Tolerance, nurturing, adjustment and self-sacrifice are the good virtues expected from women. Whereas, men are not bound to fulfil these expectations.

Even today, woman is regarded as a sex object. Though she is highly educated and economically independent, she is still considered to be inferior to man. Though she is an equal earner, cooking and housekeeping are supposed to be her basic duties and are of primary importance. Though she earns equally, her income is always secondary or considered as extra money. The income of a man is a primary income. If a woman tries to escape from the overload of the responsibilities, she is called ‘selfish’. If she complains about her inferior situation, she becomes a black mark on the ideal womanhood. Even today, society is not ready to give equal status to women. The quest for identity is an important search for man and woman at a certain stage of life. Identity is a subjective sense and an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity. It can only be realized by a process of examination into past incidents and personal sameness and continuity. Githa Hariharan writes in a clean and straightforward
tone, and all her characters talk and communicate effectively. She provides the reader with an insight to probe into a social condition. In the novel TFN, the pathetic story of Mayamma states the situation of women in India. There is no place for a woman in the male dominated society. The importance of a woman is an unacceptable term. Her presence is only concerned with the help of man. She has no individual identity.

The author very beautifully reflects, the theme of a woman’s existential crisis in the novel. According to the Hindu scriptures, marriage is the basis of all religious activities and the perfect couple believe in equalitarian attitude. Both husband and wife must be affectionate and have good understanding between each other. Feminist psychologist stresses the importance of equality for both genders, emphasizing women's rights which are not given. Gender equality places a lot of emphasis on understanding the scope of the individual within the larger realm of society and social structure. A glimpse of Hindu religion’s mentality about the relation of husband and wife is clearly reflected through the seven vows uttered at the time of marriage. These seven vows are serving as an anchor to keep the couple going through all the ups and downs of life together is explained as,

Having taken seven steps with me, be my friend; be my inseparable companion. On the darkest night, let our common path be lit by our lustrous love. Come; let us walk together, with this guiding lamp between us. Let us unite our minds with the same thoughts and vows. I am the words and you are the melody; I am the melody and you are the words. I am heaven, you are earth. I am the seed, you are the bearer. I am the thought, you are the word. Let me lead you, so that we may
bear children. Come with me, lady of sweet-edged words. Step on this stone; be as firm as this stone. Stand firm on it, and defend it from my enemies. (TFN, 79)

Husband and wife are tied to each other in a sacred relationship. Even though different religions in India follow different cultures and sets of vows and different ways to perform them but the basic meaning is the same. According to Hindu mythology, man and woman represent the two halves of the divine body. There is no question of superiority or inferiority between them. Mayamma is the old housekeeper in Mahesh’s house. She narrates her tale of tears and traumatic experiences to Mahesh’s wife Devi. She is married off at a young age of twelve to a ruthless man without knowing the meaning of marriage. Mayamma’s story clearly shows us women who marry early are more likely to suffer abuse and violence, with inevitable psychological as well as physical consequences. Studies indicate that immature marriage always experiences domestic violence. Violence against women is a serious problem in India. Violent behaviour of men can take the form of physical harm, psychological attacks, threatening behaviour and forced sexual acts including rape. Abuse is sometimes perpetrated by the husband's family as well as the husband himself, and girls who enter families as brides often become domestic slaves for the in-laws. Mayamma is very young; she does not know what a marriage is. The following lines represent her childish behaviour on marriage ceremony:

The ceremonial fire, the smoke and the chanting, lulled Mayamma to sleep.
Through smarting, heavy eyes, she saw her husband-to-be turn to her for the first time, and address her, his words an echo of the priest’s. (TFN, 79)
This action of her proves her innocence at her budding age without being aware of what is happening to her. Mayamma’s mother-in-law was truly concerned about the jewellery she was wearing. Marriage is one of the most sacred and holy ceremonies in Indian society. But the deep rooted dowry system has made marriage ceremony as one of the feared institutions. In ancient Indian society, dowry, in the name of varadakshina, was offered out of affection only, but not under any compulsion. It was a voluntary practice during the Vedic period. In course of time, this voluntary practice crept into the Indian society. Dowry system is responsible for child marriage and discrimination against girls. If a girl is married at a tender age, a small amount of dowry is enough. At the same time, if she is educated, then parent has to spend more dowry to get an equal status bridegroom. The dowry has a long history in Europe, South Asia, Africa and other parts of the world. In Homeric times, the usual Greek practice was to give a bride price, and dowries were also exchanged in the later classical period. Although it is not clear when the practice began in India, the system of dowry was found widely practiced in Indian society in the early days. As discussed above in ancient times, dowry was part of the ritual. Even today, the dowry system is prevalent virtually in all parts of India. It is deeply ingrained in the social texture of the country. In modern times, however, dowry is a contemptible social evil. It turns the sacred institution of marriage into a business transaction. The dowry system has given birth to many evils. Many parents incur huge debts in order to give dowries to their daughters. They work hard during the rest of their lives to pay off the debts. The devil of dowry has put an end to the happiness of many couples even after marriage. Many
young married girls commit suicide when they find their domestic life embittered by the daily taunts of their mothers-in-law. The social evil of dowry system has attracted the attention of the government in the recent past. Women should stand up against dowry because this practice is responsible for the degradation of entire women folk. The women themselves should raise their own status. To abolish these malpractices in India, young people, both male and female, should strongly refuse to get married if dowry is given.

Social reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries clearly perceived the pernicious effects of the dowry system and assiduously strove for its abolition. Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chander Vidya Sagar and Mahatma Gandhi and many tried their best to mobilize public opinion against the system. Gandhiji unequivocally expressed his views against dowry in his book, India Of My Dreams "Any young man who makes dowry a condition of marriage discredits his education and his country and dishonours womanhood. (23)"

Social reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century clearly perceived the pernicious effects of the dowry system and assiduously strove for its abolition. Tradition has always been staunch in a patriarchal society to subjugate men and women. From the very beginning, girl and boy are expected to play their designated roles within the society. Githa Hariharan who has come under the tremendous influence of the new trend sets out to probe into the inner human feelings and emotions to find new meanings and understanding of the human minds and hearts, primarily through the new technique of psychological symbolism. Mayamma is married at the age of twelve to a useless gambler. When two years of
marriage could not bring forth a child, her mother-in-law alleges: “What kind of a girl is this. She eats as much as anybody else, but is barren. Her horoscope is a lie; she will have to do penance to change its course” (TFN,80). On the other hand, her husband grows a little crooked every day. All the promise or oath he has made solemnly at the time of marriage has turned to be in vain. He never follows his tradition and conventionality. Since she is unproductive, she is considered to be unfit to bare a child. Her husband is neither blamed nor suffered for it. Mayamma’s mother-in-law’s attitude is devilish. She feeds her with the previous day’s rice considering it is useless to feed fresh juice to a barren woman. She never allows her to wear a sari according to her wish. All her wishes are crushed under mother-in-law’s feet. Years pass and she could not conceive. Her mother-in-law compels her to strictly follow certain religious ceremonies and practices in the hope of getting a grandchild. Mayamma quietly fulfils all her expectations. She asks her to visit many temples, make her to fast and offer poojas by following all superstitious believes and practices and fill the silver cup with the blood makes her to bathe the lingam with the blood, so that God will be pleased and bless her with a son. Her husband who is a part and parcel of her is a mute spectator. As a belief, she makes her to cut her breast and a barren woman was looked down. It clearly pasteurised that childlessness causes a great hardship to a woman more than to a man. A barren woman’s presence is considered as inauspicious on some occasions which adds to the stigma of infertility in Indian society. It shows very often these women face social discomfort. Traditional theories of psychology, with its bias towards men, are harmful to women.
Mayamma never questions all these tortures nor does she grumble. Hindu woman suffered at the hands of societal attitudes. As stated earlier, from the notion of sexuality, awareness of being a woman is associated with motherhood and not with womanhood. It is natural for a woman to be proud of her sexuality but society prevents her from such pride. Mayamma attains puberty as she is praying in the temple. She is humiliated mentally and abused physically when her menstruation starts. Her gushing womanhood has tainted the sacred premises and she says,

The blood that flowed down my bare leg, hot and sticky, that afternoon when I played in the temple. The hairy priest with a pot-belly called me aside. I looked down at the blood on clear white flesh, my heart overflowing with something like Pride. Go home, he hissed, and before I could turn around to run, his heavy hand marked my cheek with a stinging slap. Hussy that I was, I had stained the purity of the temple with my gushing womanhood. (TFN, 115)

Menstruation is a major stage of puberty for a girl. It is one of the biological changes where a girl is turning into a woman. In Mayamma’s life even that is criticised by a male. The major change of a girl’s life is treated differently in various religions. Without exception, they have placed restrictions on menstruating women. According to the Indian tradition, they treat a girl’s puberty with a lot of ceremony. In South Indian tradition, girls who experience their first menstrual period is celebrated by inviting all relatives and friends. Actually, it is celebrated to propaganda that their daughters are ready for the marriage.
According to Hindu faith, menstruating women are not allowed to participate in everyday activities. She must be "purified" by taking bath before she takes part in her day-to-day activities. In many communities in India, it is customary that a menstruating woman cannot handle food or enter the kitchen and must have separate utensils. In some places, the woman must stay in a separate hut till the ‘polluting’ period is over. Women are not allowed to mount a horse, ox or elephant and gardening. Women are prohibited to enter the prayer room neither at home nor at temples, with food restrictions like avoiding fish, meat and so on. Many traditional religions consider menstruation ritually unclean. In the Ayurvedic system too, women were required to rest during their periods, considering them to be pollutants and unclean. Biologically, women undergo a lot of pain including body pain, tiredness, heavy bleeding, and irregular periods. During this period, a woman’s body needs complete rest so even yoga should be stopped temporarily. Especially certain types of yoga related to breathing because one type of prana (air circulation) which normally flows downward from the naval centre to cervix is reversed. This is useful to increase the prana in the body and to awaken the kundalini, but when menstruating, it goes against the natural flow. It will be disturbed by doing yoga as some other problems or side effects will appear. The extent of some of the taboos explored in such situations indicates a lack of understanding. Only when there is a true understanding, it will help us to modify our thoughts and approaches properly and remove obsolete superstitions from everyday life. One reason for this is the fact that it gives rest to the women during those days. Devi, the youngest main female character in the novel, tells the story of her own first bleeding:
“When I bled for the first time, my stomach cramped in knots of pain, I went in search of my grandmother. Don’t tell anyone else, she whispered to me. They’ll make you sit alone in the room at the back for three days.” (TFN, 87)

It only makes her feel alienated from her own body. Thus, the beginning of Devi’s menstrual period is connected to strangeness, a sense of disunion, discomfort and shyness. Mayamma is more directly humiliated mentally and abused physically when her menstruation begins in a temple. When Mayamma is able to recognize and enjoy her feminity, suddenly a male harsh reality falls on her as a slap by the priest for defiling the purity of the temple. Mayamma is an illiterate woman and her existence is of no value to many and above all she suffered intensely. It is an inherent feeling for a woman to have an excessive self-esteem of her sexuality but society stops her from such a feeling. The restrictions of the society truthfully do not allow most of the women to bring out clearly their worminess unlike their motherhood. This clearly reflects that Mayamma is valued by her mother-in-law as not more than a means to perform household duties and for her husband not more than the means to fulfil his carnal desires. Her joys and sorrows, emotions and feelings do not possess the least value for her husband. She has to undergo several critical penances and fasts. She gets up early in the morning and performs all her duties related to religion, mother-in-law and husband. Mayamma, after ten long years of penance, is blessed with a son born on Diwali, a day with lights and fire crackers. Now, her husband who is in his middle age, indulges himself in too much of drinking and gambling beyond the limits of
reasonable behaviour. Once Mayamma’s husband steals all the money from the house and leaves the family forever. Her mother-in-law feels that Mayamma is responsible for her son’s disappearance. After that, Mayamma never sees him. Domestic Violence is the leading cause of injury to women and children in a family. Mayamma has to face domestic violence by her husband and mother-in-law. They treat her as a child bearing machine. The drunken husband is unable to realise Mayamma’s sacrifice. Many Problems such as urban crime, poverty, rape, domestic violence, self destruction, murder or vehicle accidental deaths and high infant mortality rates are blamed due to alcohol. In India, most daily wages labourers are addicted to alcohol which has many negative connotations.

Research shows that a large content of alcohol can increase the user’s sense of personal power and dominate over others. All the bad behaviour exhibited by alcoholics result from their drinking problems. For the upper class people, it is socialism and they are moderate drinkers, but for the poor people, alcohol is a killer because they drink without any limit by spending more than they earn. Mayamma’s life portrays an irresponsible drunken husband. In *India of My Dreams* Gandhiji said: “It is wrong and immoral for a nation to supply intoxicating liquor to those who are addicted to drink.” The Gandhian activists and social organizations were taking the issue on the streets and tried to create awareness on the evils of alcoholic use. On the Martyrs’s Day, January 30, the day of Gandhi’s demise, one Sasi perumal social activist, started his fast on the beaches of Marina in Chennai. He was arrested but he stuck to his vow to continue his fast unto death until the government brings complete prohibition. This 57 year
old satyagrahi from Salem continued his protest/fast which lasted for more than a month, and at the end, on the 33rd day, he was admitted to the local hospital and subsequently withdrew his fast. Here a statistic says:

Before takeover of Retail Vending by TASMAC, the Government Revenue through TASMAC was Rs.2,828.09 Crores. It has increased to Rs.6,086.95 Crores during the year 2005-06. The additional Government Revenue during 2005-06 was Rs.3,258.86 Crores, and the growth rate was 115.23%. TASMAC is reported to have clocked revenues of Rs 14,965 crores in 2010-11 is expected to close this year at around Rs 17,500-18,000 crores. For each bottle of foreign liquor the government is believed to charge around 58% VAT.

(http://alcoholindia.wordpress.com)

Under National Drug De-addiction Programme, the Government of India has funded 483 detoxification and 90 counselling centres. Almost half of the attendees are being treated for alcohol dependency. But the health professionals say, the success of the programme is low because the states have to fund them, adequately. On one side, governments gain enormous profit through alcohol and drugs. On the other hand, they take steps to save people from drug addiction. We all see health warning label on the bottle of alcohol: “Drinking is injurious to health”. It is possible to run a government in many ways other than this. Gujarat is the only state in India where alcohol is legally banned by the government. It has banned alcohol consumption since 1961 as homage to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi.
By using psychological therapies along with the help of the family members, close relatives and friends, can recover the alcohol addicts. Moreover, psychologists can help such people by addressing psychological issues to solve their problems. These therapies will motive the drunken people to stop drinking, by deviating them to worthy activities, and develop social support systems within their own communities.

Mayamma’s son at fourteen, who is the replica of her husband, threatens to beat her to sell her last pair of gold bangles. He hits her with an iron frying pan when she refuses to give her diamond earrings. There is no end to Mayamma’s sufferings. She did not know how to take care of her son’s growth because she herself has not come out of her girlhood. First she bears the torment and humiliation at the hands of her mother-in-law and then at the hands of her own son. Mayamma fails to solve her problems but she never fails to play the role as a mother in spite of all these sufferings. Her motherhood makes her to look after her son when he falls sick with a high fever.

He remains in bed for two months and she sits by him all night and cleans him up. The son, for the first time starts to understand his mother’s love. He becomes a true son in the real sense of the term and the mother also has a soft and tender feeling towards him. His condition deteriorates day by day and he delirious and finally dies. not be saved. It shows, she never tried to save him through medicine. Again, it represents her ignorance and unawareness of disease. As Mayamma has to suffer untold miseries, she becomes the one without emotion but on the day when her son dies, she cries from the core of her heart. Remembering all her flashback, she cries heartily. She burns the horoscope and all the traces of the past along with the body of
her son. She clears out whatever was left in the house and leaves the village. She searches for a household work and finally, she reaches Parvatiamma, who continues to be her mother, sister and daughter. Mayamma, in spite of her painful married life is able to serve Parvatiamma’s family restlessly. It symbolizes the innate strength of a woman who is able to come back to normality even after shocking troubles. The author describes as:

Mayamma is a typical Indian female who accepted her fate, cursed it but never questioned it and lived her life exactly as was expected of her. She bore the brunt of cruelty that society had ordained for a woman as a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a deserted woman and mother. (TFN, 127)

J. Yellaiah and G. Pratima, professors of English at Kakatiya university Comment on the plight of Mayamma. Women of her generation are meek, submissive and bound to the traditions of the family and the institution of marriage. One has to be proud to be an Indian for various reasons. At the same time, one have to go against the harmful religious and traditional practices that are followed blindly by people. All unhealthy practices have characterised and addressed Indian trardition wrongly to the world. Today’s younger generation is having more awareness. Especially, issues related to women are very rigid and pose greater challenge to them. They want to oppose and work towards resolving evils of the society. Sita, mother of Devi, a middle aged woman, represents a life between the two extreme generations of Mayamma and Devi. Sita is a cool, confident and middle aged woman. A survey which was published in Times of India is quoted here to show the efficiency of women folk.
It says,

Women may have smaller brains than men, but they are more efficient at completing a task, a new study has claimed. It has been a mystery for scientists why women show no difference in intelligence, although their brains are 8% smaller than men’s. Neuroscientists at the University of California, Los Angeles and universities in Madrid, Spain found that women’s brains are more efficient, needing fewer neurons and less energy to complete a task. The study conducted a number of psychological tests on 59 women and 45 men, aged 18-27. They found that in women the hippocampus, which plays a central role in memory, intelligence and emotion, consumes less energy and uses fewer brain cells on a given task than in men. (‘The Sunday Times’ reported in Times of India on 5.3.2013.)

The study finds that women outperformed men in inductive reasoning and some numerical skills. They are also better at keeping track of a changing situation, while men do better on spatial intelligence. Sita is a woman who always knew what she wanted and got it. After her marriage with Mahadevan, Sita, who is a well trained veena artist, takes her Veena to her mother-in-law’s house as “she had inherited it as part of the dowry”. She has a great passion for music and also a responsible home maker. She used to play Veena only after she finishes her household duties. But very soon she is made to stop playing Veena which is her first love. Veena for which she has been accepted as a bride, becomes a crime. She practices for at least five to six hours every day. But once when her father-in-law calls her, she is deeply immersed in
playing veena. This irritates him and admonishes her. He remarks, “Put that Veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” From then she decides not to touch the much adored veena and hence in response to her father-in-law she could only whisper as “Yes, I am wife and a daughter-in-law.” And she pulls the Veena strings out of the wooden base. This incident also shows how women like Sita cannot even take the help of language to defend them. One location for patriarchal power is language and the public platforms where language is used most prestigiously. This terrible reaction represents psychological behaviour of inner mind, because, this punishment not only fuelled her own anger but it is an ever present reproach to those who had wronged her.

As patriarch and head of the family, Sita’s father-in-law stuns her into silence. Her pulling out of the Veena strings is the only reaction she can show. She cannot react back or explain things to her father-in-law as her traditional and cultural upbringing prevents her from doing so. After marriage, many women forget their talents and individuality. Even educational qualification such as a degree is given to the girl as a part of a dowry, because, today, bridegrooms search for degree holder brides to uplift his life and children.

Sita cannot transgress the domain of speech because it is the right of the man. Her social and cultural space prevents her from speaking out. Sita in turn devotes all her energy to become a good wife and dutiful daughter-in-law. She becomes the sole responsible for safeguarding the family’s name and honour. A woman’s sense of self is also derived from cultural notions, which give rise to several sexual assumptions about a woman’s place—that man should be aggressive and woman should be submissive. Sita
has to suppress all her desires, habits, love, likings and even food habits after her marriage. Sita’s husband sees her eating the leftover food at midnight in the kitchen. The author explains as:

He found Sita in the kitchen at midnight, ravenously eating the chapatis left over from dinner. He realized with shock that she missed rice: all her life, she had eaten three square meals of rice. (TFN, 103)

Her self-sacrificial pride as a dutiful wife and her suppressed resentment tell the tale of her marriage. In spite of all this, Sita’s condition is little bit better because her sacrifices and torture has been counted by her husband Mahadevan. He loves and cares for her. He could not do anything but provide a mute emotional support to Sita, but this mute support, which is nothing for him is very valuable and full of potentiality for her, because, husband’s care and support helped her to face problems in her own way. Mahadevan is pleased with Sita who manages the home carefully. He says:

A woman who did not complain, a woman who knew how to make sacrifices without fanfare: Sita was such a woman, he thought, and she had earned his unswerving loyalty. What he did not quite grasp, and when he did it was too late, was that a pattern set early in a relationship congeals into a trap. You can’t get out of it without causing pain either to yourself or the other person. And Mahadevan, Sita had meanwhile discovered, could not swat a fly without wincing. (103)
Sita’s behaviour and attitude are greatly appreciated by her husband Mahadevan. He is always loyal to her. With Sita’s assistance, Mahadevan climbs the ladder of success, getting promotion after promotion till he earns three thousand a month; she suppresses all her dreams and desires by placing the welfare of the family above her individual needs.

At this particular stage of life, a girl baby is born and she is Devi. It seems as if a new Veena is found and this time she is not going to abandon it. The stories, which she had grown up with, has prepared Devi well for a life. She develops a mechanism of self defence against any onslaught. Sita is a practical woman who believes in reality and never supports illusions. She tells her husband to stop telling fairy stories of God and Goddess to Devi. She says: “I want no more of these fantasies. The girl is almost a woman, she must stop dreaming now.” Mahadevan, her husband, is enthralled with Sita who cleverly manages the house. When they leave the village because of Mahadevan’s job, he deliberately hands over the authority of taking decisions of their lives and household to Sita. The mother should teach the concept of a “good” and “bad to the child according to the Indian value based system. Even psychological researches suggest that, The prevailing quality of the experience the child has with the parents, particularly the mother, during early childhood is of paramount experience. Sita welcomes her daughter’s coming back to India from America. They became intensely conscious of each other. When Devi wants to tell about her life in America, Sita simply smiles and gently stops her. Devi views her mother Sita as “always anchor rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self- evident fact of our
existence.” (TFN,16). Because of this capability, Sita is able to turn Devi away from indecisive confusion of her brief stay in America and tries her best to seek a suitable match for her. As a part of this process, Devi’s meeting is fixed with Mahesh and marriage followed as Sita wished. But all of a sudden, the promise Devi made to sita is not fulfilled. Sita receives a brief telegram from Mahesh in Bangalore informing that Devi has run away and necessary action has to be taken. Sita gets angry with the ignominious act of Devi as shown below,

So this was what she reaped after year of sacrifice, years of iron-like self-control. After all those quarrels with her husband about discipline for a growing child, won through silent, ferocious struggles and sleepless nights of thorough, between-the-lines planning, the best of possible lives had been offered to her daughter. And what had Devi done in return? She had torn her respectability, her very name to shreds. (108)

Sita has led a life of an ideal woman and she was not prepared for any unexpected betrayal by Devi. She writes to Mahesh: “No scandal please” She is sure that Devi would soon get back to her. As Sita expected Devi comes back to her mother’s home to restart her life in the solace of her anchor rock, her mother. Thus, Sita who is born fifteen years after Mayamma, had married late, at the ripe age of twenty, led her life with grim determination, choice and sacrifice to become a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. She has devoted her life to become an ideal woman. She suppresses all her dreams and desires placing the welfare of the family above her individual needs. Here is a case of total self-denial realized at a rather expensive psychi cost.
Sita too is reborn at the end of the novel through her daughter’s adventures in life and she retrieves her lost self by returning to her music, to her veena. She thus realizes that woman is not primarily a wife or a mother but an individual. Even at the end of the novel, she appears as strong as ever and ready for introspection. The freshly-dusted veena signifies the possibility of her now attempting to achieve what she had denied herself all these years. She stops playing veena to be a good wife and daughter-in-law, but after long years she takes to prove that she has been a good mother too. Her daughter Devi is totally different from her. Sita welcomes her daughter coming back to her. Githa Hariharan sensitively and psychologically penetrates the position of Indian women caught between tradition and modernity. Devi went to study M.A. in America. She refuses an offer of marriage from her black American friend Dan because of her ambivalence to American culture. Her period of study in America is like a dream, which is over and now she is ready to accept the Indian conventional marriage system. Her stay and study abroad left her with experience and memories totally did not suit the life that greets her on her return to India. When Devi wants to tell about her life in America, Sita simply smiles and ignores. Most of the parents ignore sharing their children’s experience. If the parent and children relationship is tied together, then children will never do anything against their lovable parents. The power of the parent and child relationship comes from being built on bonded attachment and on family responsibility. Parents must try to turn the relationship with their children into a friendship. Parent’s responsibility does not stop with physical and economical needs but it is interlinked with the psychic of their children, that is, parents
should know to read the mind of their children keenly. Parents have to sit and discuss everything frankly. Only then they will be able to guide them in the right way, but Sita ignores when Devi wanted to share her foreign experience. Devi views herself as a hesitant, self-doubting person. It is the physical, psychological and emotional intimacy that provides the tempo and tenor for Devi’s initiation into the world of women. She is the representative of the present day women. TFN successfully juxtaposes and intermingles the lives of these three women characters to present a picture of the multi-faceted Indian woman. The modernistic ideas of the west prevent Devi to adjust herself with traditional role in her own native within the social rigid structure of the male oriented society. Devi could not define her identity. She is unable to prepare herself for a future life in India. The dream life of Devi comes to an end through her mother, who now prepares her for an arranged marriage of the many choices they have before them. They select Mahesh a regional manager in a multinational company in Bangalore. Devi is impressed by Mahesh’s frankness when he talked about him for the first time. Despite the spread of education, the Hindu family structure still continues to be traditional, especially with regard to marriage. Arranged marriage is very common in India. Even the educated people prefer arranged marriage through horoscope, family, relatives and matrimonial. The twentieth century woman is in a state of moral dilemma. The increasing education has made her aware of her rights as an individual. Devi mentions:

A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must row gradually like a delicate but promising sapling. What kind of a life will
we make together? .......... A few days before the wedding, I had suddenly panicked. Who was this man, this husband whose arms I was to lie in every night? Horror stories of perversion, blind, bestial lust and importance frightened me equally. But my walking hours—this was perhaps part of Amma’s plan. (TFN-49)

The above quote reads the mind of Devi because she is not moulded for an arranged marriage but she lacks the courage to choose a man of her choice. She regards her mother very high and also her true and keen love for her mother, forced her to fulfil her mother’s wish under traditional marriage. Devi fails to realise marriage as a lifelong bond which basically needs love and care as an adhesive to strengthen and ensure a lifelong commitment to each other. Out of maternal love, she accepted an appropriate marriage for her. Devi is now married to her much admired man, Mahesh. Education has enlarged her psychological terrains thereby making her highly sensitive even to the slightest psychological ruptures that life offers. According to the Indian tradition, Devi has to leave her parent’s home to begin a new life in her husband’s house, amidst new people and new surroundings. So she starts to live in his house not as a home ruler but as a house keeper. After marriage, her relationship with her parents remains formal and minimal. All the traditional laws are dumped on women alone under patriarchal society. Marriage therefore becomes a matter of anxiety and stress for many women, till they become familiar with their new surroundings and the new people in their lives. The early stages of marriage is a make or break situation in the case of many in modern society. Even after a month of their arranged marriage,
Mahesh seems to be an alien to her. Mahesh up in a family atmosphere that considers the role of a wife as being confined to the house with non-interference even in the activities and business of a male; for him marriage is just a necessary milestone in life. He treats his wife as an object to satisfy his “organised sexual urge”. Devi considers the total neglect and indifference on Mahesh’s part as an ultimate insult to her. He goes on business tours for weeks together. His only duty is to see that his goods are delivered to his consumers. Mahesh expects that everything he does in life must bring him positive results as he is in the grip of cursory commercial world. Through the life of Devi and Mahesh, Hariharan throws light on the shortcomings of life after marriage. Today, most of the girls are looking for luxuries and comfortable life after marriage through the husband. Mahesh has everything as a young bride could wish for, such as, an executive job, a mansion in Bangalore and enormous riches. There is no need to suffer in the hands of the mother-in-law because she is not at home. But her marriage ends in failure. Marriage is not just living together of two individuals. There is much more to it. To sustain a marriage, it is important that there should be effort from both the sides. Only then a marriage can be successful. When one analyses the mental compatibility between husband and wife, in case of arranged marriage, even after many years of courtship in love marriages this problem exists most of the couples state that when they meet before marriage they are at their best to impress the other person. And they start accepting each other the way they like to see each other. But gradually after marriage when one slips into his/her natural self, one has to accept each other as he/she is. In modern arrange marriages, the prospective bride and groom
have a greater say in the opinion of marriages. Before the marriage becomes official, the potential bride and bride groom have the opportunity to meet each other and decide the future course. Devi also had a chance to select a groom according to her wish. She felt Mahesh is the best to her but later she finds herself to be wrong.

Money and luxuries alone do not make a happy life. The novel portrays Devi as a female protagonist rebels against the entire system of social relationships. There raises a question based on the concept of real love. Devi, who tries to be an ideal wife and daughter-in-law, gradually loses her individuality she says,

I cooked all afternoon as if my life depended on it. Chop, boil, stir.
Like silver eyelids the onion-skin slid on to the board, one by one.
The heat and smoke in the dingy old kitchen turned my entire body into a map of little streams. I felt my resentment, my aches and pains, trickle away, leaving me quiet, still, resigned. (TFN, 72)

The above lines express that, she forces herself to love to be a home-maker. Mahesh remains out of station nearly for three weeks in a month. Throughout the days, Devi keeps waiting for her husband. Devi confesses to herself that her education has left her unprepared for the vast yawning middle chapters of her life, but when he returns, those days prove more hankering and piercing because of his arrowlike comments which directly injure her heart and feeling. Marriage traps Devi in manmade enclosures. Her grandmother’s stories of vengeful, magnificent and strong women are replaced by her father-in-law’s discourse that is firmly patterned on Manu’s laws. According to Hindu scripts Manu is the creator of Hindu code of conduct. Law of Manu, otherwise
called *as Manava Dharma Shastra*, comprises, 2684 verses, divided into twelve chapters presenting the norms of domestic, social and religious life in India. Saint Manu had his Ashram on the bank of ‘Vadhusar River’ in the Vedic state of Brahmavarta. It is believed that the contemporary ten sages along with Manu created this book. Manusmriti is first translated into English in 1794 by Sir William Jones, a philologist and a judge of the British Supreme Court of Judicature in Calcutta. He has great respect for the book. However, a peep into the ancient times seems to reveal interesting facts on women’s status. Women enjoy a much advanced status, where matriarchy is the rule. It is believed that the family of early humans revolved around the mother. A patriarchal social set up firmly asserts men’s superiority over women and is based not on mutuality, but on oppression. Women have played a crucial role in the creation of society and have been active agents in history. It is also imperative to comprehend the cultural background of Indian women through the ages to access the plight of Indian women in the backdrop of the wide canvass of Indian women of different ages. It is interesting to note that an elevated status has been awarded to them in Indian religion and philosophical thought. Again, equal status was endowed upon women to participate in sacrificial rites on par with men during the Vedic period. They enjoyed the privileges of fighting wars, involving themselves in philosophical debates and were allowed to hold on their spinstership, if they so desired. *The Manusmriti* is a textual tradition of Hinduism comments about women as below:

Women are worthy of worship. They are the fate of the household, the lamp of enlightenment for all in the household. They bring solace to the
family and are an integral part of dharmic life. Even heaven is under
the control of women. The gods reside in those households where
women are worshipped and in households where women are slighted
all efforts at improvement go in vain. (Manusmriti 3-56)

Unlike in the ancient Indian period, the position and status of women in the Mughal
period was not privileged. Polygamy and child marriage had become common. While
the birth of a daughter was considered to be inauspicious, that of a son was an occasion
for rejoicing. On account of early marriage, there were many widows in our society.
Generally, women in the Mughal era were not allowed to remarry. Rig Veda clearly
approves of remarriage of widows. Such women face no condemnation or isolation in
the household or society. They had the right to inherit the property from their dead
husbands.

In TFN, Devi wants to learn Sanskrit so that she may be able to understand the
real meaning of Baba’s quotations and stories. Baba is a retired Sanskrit Professor and
father-in-law of Devi but when she tells her desire to Mahesh, he very rudely says:
"Don’t be foolish, he said. The English translations are good enough. And what will
you do with all this highbrow knowledge?" (52) It shows Mahesh is not giving
importance to her desires. During her conjugal life, Devi feels that it would have been
better if she had not been married to him. Out of frustration and stress when all her
attempts are neither appreciated nor recognised by Mahesh, she asks Mahesh:
Why did you marry me? I asked. ‘Whatever people get married for’, Mahesh said. He peered into the mirror and readjusted the knot of his tie. Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love. (54)

The sole motive of marriage for him was to get a baby and Devi is the means to the fulfilment of his motive. Man and woman need each other’s love for maintaining a harmony in their physical and mental health. A marriage means more responsibilities and expectations. Love is the essential ingredient that can help both to overcome hurdles. The maladjustment between the husband and wife leads to various problems. The dissimilar tastes and interests of the couple can remain united, unless with a spiritual rapport between them.

Hariharan is concerned not only with their milieu but also with their self-consciousness. This quest for identity has taken various forms. Hariharan has taken into consideration not only the problem of national identity but also that of individual identity. C.D.Narasimhaiah an Indian writer and critic, makes the point clear:

The individual artist has to discover as well as create his own identity. He does not find it readymade. Of course, in the process he discovers and creates his national identity too. Indeed …..the two are connected and not mutually exclusive. (81)

It would be far from truth to state that the older generation Indo-English writers did not write their work of fiction with the problem of the individual crisis of identity of character or consciousness. In TFN, Devi quests for a self-image, having failed to
define her identity within the framework of the male orientated social structure. Whenever a wordy argument arises between them, Mahesh points out that grandmother without education used to be a more efficient housewife. This is what comes of education on woman. Her husband ridicules her very often for being useless in contrast to Tara, who is the wife of his co-worker Ashok. Mahesh admires Tara’s boundless energy and her bubbling infectious enthusiasm. He says Tara’s husband Ashok is a lucky person. He insults Devi indirectly saying that he is unlucky to have Devi as a life partner. There is no necessary co-relation between the existence of a powerful famine imaginary in Hindu religious tradition and an elevated status of women. Devi exposed to the image of goddesses Kali (Durga) moves from self-pity to thoughts of revenge. She is simultaneously inspired by Goddesses Amba and Durga. Devi rejoices in imagining herself as Kali, ready to avenge the assault in her inner mind, she says:

I lived a secret life of my own: I became a woman warrior, a heroin.
I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons’ heads. (41)

But Baba tries to keep away from Devi as a lethal weapon kept away from children. Baba is a typical illustration of a male dominated patriarchal world. Baba’s stories always reflect that women should be devoted to their husbands. He explains the means of reaching heaven by serving the husband with devotion and care. Devi seeks refuge in the stories of Baba because all the stories define for Devi the limits of wifehood.

The housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind,
According to Baba a woman should be a devoted wife without giving importance to herself. His character is revealed through his stories about Muthuswamy Dikshitar, Purandara Dasa, Syaama Sastri and Thyagaraja are Baba. Baba decides to visit his daughters at New York. He says: “Whatever is dependent on others is misery; whatever rests on oneself is happiness; this in brief is the definition of happiness and misery. (68)”

Devi’s father-in-law, Baba equips her with a philosophy of life. The emotional and mental incompatibility between Devi and Mahesh brings Devi closer to Baba. Meanwhile, Baba dies. After that, in the absence of Baba, the house becomes a place for official parties of Mahesh. In spite of taking numerous efforts of cracking jokes, Mahesh fails to develop an affectionate bond with her. Devi wants to adopt a child to which Mahesh is reluctant. Mahesh denies her interest in taking up a job instead advises her to join painting classes. She tries her level best to compromise with Mahesh. She fights her battles alone. Whenever he returns from his long business trips, his curiosity and interest will be to know about her pregnancy. His gaze and his words about pregnancy make her feel that she is a blurred object with a stubborn womb. He takes her to a gynaecologist to set everything right with the help of sterilized instruments. The syringes and needles have their own language to torture Devi. The doctor bristles with impatience at Devi because of her inability to get pregnant. One has to notice that Devi’s husband Mahesh do not undergo any treatment or
consultation. He thought giving birth to a child is a womanly thing. From yonder years
till the present day, these ideologies have been passed on, that even elite, educated
men adhere to them seriously and fail to consider that a woman is indeed a human
with all other emotions and feelings. It is true that the novels of the post colonial age
emphasized quest for identity along different dimensions of socio-political and
economic order of India. This novel emphasises the theme of gender and identity.
It is to be noted that identity marks the convolutions and collusions of external and
internal, individual and collective, natural and cultural forces. Analyzing ‘gender
identity’ in broader prospective, it is true that gender interacts with other markers of
identity-religion, ethnic, national and familiar. Here, are can see Githa Hariharan’s
biting sarcasm about a scientific ideology that conspires with patriarchal values to
reduce women to their reproductive ability. Frustrated ambitions and loss of selfhood
mark the contents of the ‘prelude’, the novel from a psycho-social standpoint, reassesses
the objective of self-transcendence. Devi’s self-fulfilment does not lie in the bearing and
rearing of children but in recognizing her own inherent potential to live with herself
on more positive terms. Realism and fantasy interplay in the narrative to focus on the
emerging self. Devi finds a good friend in Mayamma, Mahesh’s family retainer. Devi
listens to her life experience. One afternoon when Devi is cleaning the rooms, she
finds some old photographs of her mother-in-law Parvati in a trunk. She knows only a
little of her mother-in-law from her husband and Baba. Mahesh told her very little
about his mother. He refers his mother a good woman. Mayamma tells Devi that
Parvati is a very beautiful and virtuous woman. When Mayamma exits from her
village homeless after her son’s death, Devi’s mother-in-law Parvati gives shelter to Mayamma. She spent most of the time in the pooja room for prayer. She fasted and sang bhajans (hymns) with her sweet voice. One fine day she gives Mayamma a bunch of keys and asks her to take care of her house, husband and children. She leaves the house with a bag to serve good and never returned home. The following lines explain as:

She has made her choice. For a woman who leaves her home in search of a god, only death is a home-coming.....But Parvatiamma had been more ambitious. She had, like a man in a self-absorbed search for a god, stripped herself of the life allotted to her, the life of a householder. Had she misread Baba’s stories? Or had she turned them upside down and taken the contradictions, the philosophical paradoxes, to their logical conclusion? (TFN, 64)

Parvatiamma left all the comforts of life and went in search of God. She used spirituality as escapism to avoid her responsibilities and shift it to the shoulder of Mayamma. The Hindu renunciation or sanyasa is the true mark of spiritual life. It is believed to be the simple and straightforward way to achieve moksha or liberation. The Hindu law books or the Dharmashastras, prescribe no hard and fast rules for a person to enter the life of a sanyasi. A person can take up sanyasa at any stage in his life, as long as he is acting according to his true intentions rather than some ulterior motive. The Seven Stages of Man, taken from William Shakespeare’s famous play As You Like It (Act-II, Scene-VII), describes the seven phases in a man’s life-from childhood to old age.
In Hinduism, human life is believed to comprise four stages. These are called "ashramas" and every man should ideally go through each of the following stages:

The First Ashrama - "Brahmacharya" or the Student Stage

The Second Ashrama - "Grihastha" or the Householder Stage

The Third Ashrama - "Vanaprastha" or the Hermit Stage

The Fourth Ashrama - "Sanyasa" or the Wandering Ascetic Stage

This system of ashramas is believed to be prevalent since the 5th century BC in Hindu society. However, historians say that these stages of life are always viewed more as 'ideals' rather than as common practice. According to a scholar, even in its very beginnings, after the first ashrama, a young adult could choose any of the other ashramas he would wish to pursue for the rest of his life. Today, it is not expected that a Hindu male and female should go through the four stages, but it still stands as an important "pillar" of Hindu socio-religious tradition. Although these ashramas are predominantly designed for men, women too have a vital role to play in each one of them. So, women are not actually excluded, because they are always supposed to have an active social and religious life at home. However, a woman's role is of a dependent nature. Githa Harihara understands the psychology of women and portrays them with insight, understanding and sympathy. She often thinks of herself as a floating island detached from the solidity of the main land. A women’s sense of self is also derived from cultural notions which give rise to several sexual assumption about women’s place, that men should be aggressive and women should be submissive.
Devi in her frantic attempts to be an ideal wife and daughter-in-law, gradually loses her individuality. She forces herself to be a home-maker. But all her attempts are neither appreciated nor recognized by Mahesh. Gradually, Devi finds the ground reality that Mahesh could not withstand his defeat at any point of time, and scorns at her education whenever a wordy argument arises between them: “This is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely illiterate. Wasn’t she a happy woman than you are?” (TFN -74) Mahesh, on the other hand, never takes any initiative to spend adequate time with Devi thus; it clearly indicates that a male chauvinist like Mahesh could never think of his better half to be on par with them. The sole motive of marriage for him is to get a baby and Devi is the means to fulfill. Hariharan seems to attribute such arrogance of Mahesh to the embedded conceptions about a woman’s role in Indian male psyche and woman’s powerlessness to the dominant mentalities of India.

The entire Indian great mythological women characters such as Amba, Sita, Ganga or any other hold self actualization at some point. Myth is considered as a meta-descriptor of the human condition. Hariharan portrays the psychic tumult of a young and sensitive married girl Devi who is haunted by old mythological stories. Psychologically, women have an intense ability to recall past memories that have strong emotional components. They can also recall events or experiences that have similar emotions in common. Women are very adept at recalling information, events or experiences in which there is a common emotional theme. Men tend to recall events using strategies that rely on reconstructing the experience in terms of elements, tasks or activities that
took place. The psychologist Sigmund Freud’s views on women stirred controversy during his own lifetime and continue to evoke considerable debate even today. According to him, “Women oppose change, receive passively and add nothing of their own.” She soon becomes frustrated and develops emotional pain and privation due to her conflict with the patriarchal ideals instilled within her due to patriarchal conditioning. She tries her level best to compromise with Mahesh to continue their marriage. But all her efforts go in vain because his interest was only in having a baby and Devi discovers that she cannot conceive. He ultimately neglects all her emotional needs. Devi’s recoil makes her to rebound. She gets attracted towards Gopal, an Indian singer and ultimately elopes with him. It is Mahesh’s rude, selfish and self-centred attitude that has forced her to fall for another man. Gopal’s sense of love and care has diverted her attention towards him. She elopes with Gopal hoping to find her meaningful life through him. She realizes that Gopal also cannot see beyond his passion for music. The fascination of the new relationship comes to an end with this realization. The two choices that Devi has made resulted in creating an unfathomable void in her life. She finally unites with her mother Sita. Mahesh and Gopal fail to satisfy her intense yearning for love and life; she is left in solitude. Feminist psychology is the direct result of the women's movement and revolution that took hold in the late 1960s. It stems from the theory of male domination, practices and research especially in the theory of psychoanalysis. Feminist psychology is created by women who realized that psychological counseling methods are coloured by sexism and male chauvinism. Psychological cognitive and emotional factors are involved in the evaluation of a stressor. The external situation
does not change, but the person’s behaviour or attitudes change with respect to it. When a person views stressful conditions as unchangeable, emotion gets focused. The biological view of stress and coping emphasizes the body’s attempts to maintain physical equilibrium, or a steady state of functioning. Writer Dan Millman says,

Pain is a relatively objective, physical phenomenon; suffering is our psychological resistance to what happens. Events may create physical pain, but they do not in themselves create suffering. Resistance creates suffering. Stress happens when your mind resists what is... The only problem in your life is your mind's resistance to life as it unfolds. (Way of the Peaceful Warrior by Dan Millman)

The above quote suits well to protagonist Devi because she is suffering both physically and mentally. She tries to break the bond a woman has with the society and she never wants to oblige the expectations of the patriarchal world. At the end of the novel, Devi turns back to her mother as a fugitive.

There is a psychology change in women, before and after marriage. Women before marriage are an independent personality but after marriage have to depend on husband and family. Marriages are based on commitments and not on feelings.

As the marriage progresses, the feelings develop. Githa Hariharan’s TFN throws light on reality through the character Mahesh who finds it difficult to balance between business and family. Devi is struggle for her own life. Her story is created through her dialogues with Mayamma, her mother and grandmother, and her daydreams of heroines and goddesses, and these fluid exchanges urge her to rewrite her own story.
endlessly. The stories of Devi’s selfhood formation thus flow into this stream of
diverse stories of women, mingle with them, and constitute a new form of
mother-and-daughter fiction. Hariharan makes Devi’s struggles to challenge the
traditional woman’s role. She finds herself confined in a male-ridden world the
chafing pressures imposed upon her by the old existing order. The existential crisis
becomes evident in the contrast between Devi and her mother Sita. Devi realizes her
western education cannot match with her life in India.

An important aspect of Hindu family life is the inter-dependence among
members. Marriage itself is a broad social and religious obligation, rather than just a
relationship between partners. The extended family provides considerable practical
and emotional support. One advantage is that marriage stability is not inordinately
reliant on the state of the couple's emotional ties. Good arranged marriages happen
when the parents support and help their children to find their life partners according to
their wish. Whether it is love or arranged marriage, people look for the perfect life
partner. But nobody is perfect on this earth. Everybody has certain drawbacks. But if
we really love somebody one should accept that person with his or her faults and
weakness. A successful marriage depends on two things: finding the right person and
being the right person. Here in TFN, Devi tries to adjust herself to her husband
maximum of her level. On the other hand, Mahesh do not have any true love towards
Devi. She cannot impose him to love her. So it is important to know each other well
before marriage. In general there are people who get physically attracted and fall for
each other and eventually end up in getting married. But later on, when they realise
their wavelength is not matching, they easily get separated without a second thought. In today's generation, one visualizes such incidents more when compared to the earlier generation. And this is more due to the changing social scenario. The spread of education is also a factor of great significance which took place during the last two decades. The birth of a new woman in the old society practicing quaint orders and methods was the common phenomenon witnessed in all corners of the vast social set up. Traditionally, individual happiness is less important in India, but westernization is leading to more emphasis on personal fulfillment. Western individualism in India, however, is culturally in conflict with the idea of the couple as the primary source of contentment. Western influence in India strengthens the positive image of single woman and man. The number of mature, single women is less in India. Between the ages of 25-59, 89.5% of Indian women are married. Githa Hariharan represents the reality for a considerable section of Indian womanhood inserted in a brahminical, high class environment. It also explores the identity of the protagonist against the backdrop of the Indian culture and heritage. The twentieth century is the natural extension of the thematic boldness and technical innovativeness. Through the study of women characters, Githa Hariharan provides us with a peep into the Indian tradition and culture and the position of women in the Indian society.

It is about the journey of Indian women in search of self-identity from tradition to modernity. Tradition expects a woman to consider marriage as her destiny. Marriage has always been a very different experience for man and for woman. Man is a socially independent and complete individual. Man is first of all a producer whose existence is
justified by his life work. However, in the case of woman, marriage is enjoined upon almost for biological reasons. The first reason offered is that she must provide society with children. The second reason given is that woman’s function is to satisfy the male’s sexual needs and to take care of the household. These duties imposed upon woman by society are regarded as a service rendered to her spouse. Marriage in this situation is not found on love, but on practical considerations. The relationship between husband and wife is not based on equality and reciprocity, but on a clear cut hierarchy. TFN explores many facets of womanhood. Strangely enough, all women characters are unhappy in marriage. It presents a variety of female characters, with varied wishes and frustrations, desires and agony, searching for self-identity or self liberation. Hariharan’s female characters revolt against considering marriage and motherhood as ultimate goals of an ideal woman. Marriage taxes a woman much more than a man. Women are brought up to think of their life in terms of marriage but not well trained well to follow a profession. So, they always feel dependent upon a man in marriage. French writer, Simone De Beauvoir begins her analysis of the role of a woman as a housewife with this well-known statement:

Queen in her hive, tranquilly at rest within her domain, but borne by man out into limitless space and time, wife, mother, mistress of the home, woman finds in marriage at once energy for living and meaning for her life. (*Developmental Psychology A Life Span Approach*, 467)

The above lines clearly explain how women play different roles and have more responsibilities but their search continues for their identity still. Githa Hariharan in
TFN agrees completely with feministic ideologies and supports and suggests a changed system where women have greater control of their lives. *An Existential Crisis* is representing self actualization as an identity. Every one needs to find meaning in lives. Meaning is found through interpersonal relationships. This is also pointed out by the brilliant psychiatrist and psychotherapist, Irvin Yalom, MD. The stories of three different women Mayamma, Sita and Devi, who belong to three generations, are separate yet linked. They are knit together. The novel presents how marriage differs from the female point of view and from the male discourse. The psychological differences between men and women are less obvious. They can be difficult to describe. There is evidence to suggest that a great deal of sensitivity that exists within men and women have a physiological basis. Many people fail to realize that they have enormous influence on the lives of others. There are also relationships with those at work and those one casually meet while walking in the street, riding the bus or train, and shopping in the supermarket and clothing store. It is also important to know that each of us is unique and individual. English poet, John Donne in his *No Man is an Island* says as follows:

> No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friend's or of thine own were: any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind, and therefore never send to know for whom the bells tolls; it tolls for thee. (Meditation XVII)
None of us is isolated because we are all interconnected. Devi and her mother Sita rejoin to rejoice in their own way. Mayamma, after her husband left and son’s death, spends her life in Parvatiamma’s family as a maid. Parvathi has devoted herself to the love of Almighty and self actualisation. Githa Hariharan attempts to unleash the different degrees of adjustments, oppositions, resistances and struggles, of her women characters, and thereby she points out the lack of flexibility in patterns of social organization and the high levels of frustration and suffering experienced by women. She has succeeded in putting forth through her works certain definite reforms that can be initiated to uplift the aspirations of women. As women are oppressed by this system, their consciousness to fight for their rights and break the system of patriarchy gradually arises. This awakening is usually linked by the women’s movement called feminism. Women are constantly developing their identity, from birth to the end of their lives. Various groups have been formed to give women's history a voice, to promote the study of women's history and to maintain links with contemporary feminist activists. Hariharan’s perception envelops the whole history of woman’s role and uplifts the emergence of a new woman who is true to her own self and quest for self actualization. The protagonist Devi is sandwiched between tradition and modernity, illusion and reality and the mask and the face and leads a life of restlessness. Reality is situated in the individual subjective consciousness. The inability to communicate one’s inner experiences to other leads to self imposed alienation or isolation from the society. All the three main female characters, progressing to delimiting restrictions through self analysis and self discovery, try to create both physical as well as psychological space for themselves to
grow on their own. She explains human relationship in modern Indian society, particularly the husband-wife relationship elaborately and clearly from their personal point of view. Her women characters are entirely tolerant, obedient and submissive.

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow says:

> Whereas the average individuals "often have not the slightest idea of what they are, of what they want, of what their own opinions are," self-actualizing individuals have superior awareness of their own impulses, desires, opinions, and subjective reactions in general.

(https://www.entheos.com/quotes/by_teacher/Abraham%20Maslow)

According to the noble lines of Abraham, superior awareness of Devi’s quest is to regain her lost identity and to be truthful to her desires by gaining a control over her true ‘self’. Human life has been viewed both as a journey as well as a battle. The journey charts out the progression, the movement from womb to tomb and even beyond. Self-actualization is not just about knowing and fulfilling one's purpose in life. Knowing that you have fulfilled a purpose in life is what creates us to feel worthy, happy and content with our own life. Reaching this level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is what fulfils the most happiness and content feeling of one's life. Surpassing the needs of physiology, safety, belongingness and esteem build up all together in self-actualization. Reaching the top of the American psychologist Abraham Maslow's pyramid is the source of happiness. The loss of self identity in a woman is the root cause of many conflicts; a promising search for selfhood is essential for all
round happiness. But Devi is confident of her capabilities to make choices and assumes control over her life. The courage, the dignity, the responsibility and the independent spirit displayed by her prove that she has reached a stage of self actualization. She proves that women like her are capable of ushering in a positive change in the social structure. Thus, Hariharan is optimistic that such tyranny will soon have its end, and women’s space and potential will be recognized and they will be empowered.

The ensuing chapter *Myth and Tradition* will highlight myths in a new dimension to the present scenario.