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**The Paradigm shift from Conventional Mythology to the Vortex  
of Feminist ideology in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of  
the Night***

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**Abstract**

Githa Hariharan (born in 1954) is primarily known for her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. She won the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Novel. But here she reveals herself as a master of the short narrative as well. The second published literary works of the renowned Indian English writer, *The Art of Dying* (1993) won wide applause for its relevant and bold theme. She is also a social activist who portrays social issues in her literary works. She belongs to the new generation of Indian writers who have earned greater visibility and readership for Indian English Literature. As a writer she is preoccupied with human condition which to her is the pre-requisite and the essence of creative writing in general and of literature in particular. Apparently, she chooses a small space for almost all her novels but endeavors to enlarge the limited space to such an extent that it becomes an elaborate presentation of human condition. Hariharan believes in inclusiveness, which extends and broadens an individual's social horizon. She thinks that writers have a socio-political responsibility as well.

**Keywords-** *Self Actualization, Realisation, Monolithic, Struggle, Stamped*

Githa Hariharan's *Thousand Faces of Night* is no less a process of Self-actualization as the protagonist wrestles with the obstinate paradigms and syndrome precipitated by the myths, legends and the conservative elements in the community. Devi entails living in the continuity

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of the tales narrated by grandmother, Mayamma and her mother Sita with a thin margin between myth and the reality. The protagonist takes the support from her previous generation and simultaneously attempt to be variance from the order to gain more visibility from the darkness enveloped. The idea of the self does not exist in abstraction it is deeply rooted in one's awareness of one's body when the realisation occurs within. The question of "Self" arises when there is a denial of emotional space, respect and dignity and expect for the change of perspectives and strive to change the monolithic values. The struggle and stampede realise them to question the misconceptions created the society and men. They try to evolve and come out of the stereotype. The Protagonist from the Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of night* go from a painful sense of alienation and a self divided between old acquiescence and the new urge towards individualization to revolt against and to reject patriarchal imposition.

### **The Real...**

Suppose you cut a tall bamboo  
In two,  
Make the bottom piece a woman  
The headpiece a man:  
Rub them together  
Till they kindle  
Tell me now  
The fire that is born,  
Is it male or female, (Rao:12)

### **Positioning the Journey**

When women write they often write not in their unique voice but expand their horizon and write instead as victims of gender, biology and circumstance, from within the bars as Devi is the best example who embraces her destiny but break from the cage when her voice becomes unheard. She accepts the concept of arranged marriage. She returns to Madras after obtaining a degree from the USA and she returns only to fall prey to the chaffing pressures imposed upon her by the existing old order so they were looking for an accomplished bride, a young woman who would talk intelligently to her scientist husband's friends, but who would also be, as all the matrimonial ads in the Sunday papers demanded, fair, beautiful, home-loving and prepared to adjust. (Hariharan 1992:17)

Her marriage fixed with Mahesh the regional manager as she wished to share her feelings and the art of giving away the complete womanhood to the man known to her a day before. The thoughts of sharing the feelings and a desire to be understood arise due to her education but its just the gateway to enter into the circle of marriage. Her life with Mahesh has become materialistic and he stopped her by telling her not to overlook her shoulders. His behaviour scathed her soul, repulsed she had nothing to turn to but her unfinished dream, she

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tried to revive her glory but kept silent due to the stories heard by her grandmother and mayamma. She was not allowed to argue, no words of protest, no argument for exoneration but her silence has become provocative and whipping as she struggled between the tradition and revolt. Her wishes towards the marriage curdled into hate, trust into distrust she felt she could live with him but with the deception. His perverted proclivity for being everything robbed the tranquillity and created hatred in her mind. She had become soul searching that has given her impetus and cajoled her search for 'Self'. Male audacity with blinding physical prowess eliminated him to understand the women. When he felt the need to attack women, covet the wife or use dubious means to counter her for becoming a mother, where he failed to maintain equilibrium in understanding her emotions. She thought that he is spectacularly ill-suited partner. She tried to condone him but she never thought to get away her transgressions but finally prepared to step out of the system. Devi's ensuing her pain, misery and hate had resulted in challenge the epic proportion subjected to Indian women. The cautionary tale narrated by grandma blighted as well but her inner self made her to join the dots and her new penitence intoned her with mock solemnity. "Men view the bed as the proper terrain for asserting his aggressive superiority. He is eager to take and not to receive not to exchange but to rob. He seeks to possess the woman to an extend over and above what she gives him; he demands that her consent be a defeat and the words she murmurs, he tears from her demands that she confess her pleasure and recognise her subjection".(Kishwar 1999:125). Devi had been nourished by her grandmother's stories inspired by the lives of gods and goddess. She imagined herself as the powerful Devi as her name personifies but utterly failed to save herself from the shame and humiliation. She thought about the bizarre relationship and mused about the relationship and thought about her volatile emotions but surrender to the pressure of Arranged marriage.

She thought about Dan "Dan was a friend, an experiment for a young woman eager for experience. The possibility of imposing permanence such as marriage- however flexible in transient America-was somehow obscene." The symbol of love and marriage turned as loss and hate. Mahesh search for the materialistic pleasures left her in agony and ripped her feminine qualities as she has become harbinger of searching the 'self.' Her pretence never helped her to accept the reality as she choked with emotion and astutely became insightful as she searched for the plausible justification and ashamed to acknowledge as WIFE. The stories she heard kept woman as the accepted sex in all the stories. Gandhari, decides to live blind folded because her husband was blind, the woman feeds her snake child, and her own mother forced to give up playing the Veena.

In her pride, her anger, Gandhari said nothing. But she tore off a piece of her thick red skirt and tied it tightly over her own eyes. She groped towards her unseeing husband, her lips straight and thin with fury, Gandhari was just another wilful proud woman, 'Said my grandmother, summing up. She embraced her destiny- a blind husband – with self-sacrifice

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worthy of her royal blood. She was then the girl who never had an idea about how Gandhari and her mother are related. She felt that even in mythology males of the species had been given more chances to ill treat the female. She understood how women were made to suffer as victims of old and narrow traditions. A good woman will be a good wife, then a good mother an ideal wife means a woman who has totally surrendered herself to husband, home and motherhood.

She thought all these consequences and sacrifices of the woman and slowly drifted from the role of dutiful wife. She remembered the stories and the sacrifice of woman in her world, though the contours of the situation are special. Her own reluctance to become a mother and the ultimate source of failed marriage made her to resist as a victim in a society that can regard only being a wife and a mother as the only possible ontological realizations for a woman. She just didn't discover herself but to reshape the stories heard from her grandmother and tried to define the new space and freedom. She crossed the boundaries and had not remained confined to the domesticity of the Indian society assigned to their sex but mediated between the mythology and the reality. Intrepidly broke the taboo of the conventions and iconoclastically came out of the reigning stereotype through the knowledge derived from the intellectual pursuits. Her interplay of the self and the mythological stories gave her a new dimension to rediscover the resources of the self. The inner liberation matched the outer liberation through the revolution occurred and the spirit of experimentation to reinstate her freedom established from the idea of leaving the system of marriage. In mythology women were treated as the fantalisizing, captivating damsel and less inclined to impale dissidents and expected to be the exquisitely bovine features with the elegant appearance to captivate men. Her frustration and anger coursed inside her to erupt from her in a cataclysmic explosion to realise the 'Self.' She managed to rid herself of them all allowing the shroud of silence and nothingness to fill the sudden void in her consciousness. She found her way towards answers both for herself and everyone who had repose their dominance in her, left her buoyant and to actively seek out solutions knowing that her time had come. She was ready to take on the task as she managed to give expression to her restless spirit and found the way to deal with the emotional suppression.

### **Arrival to the Destination**

Devi's returning to her mother's house in the wake of her brief wedlock and romance. The ominous invitation to re-enter her mother's house is provided by the sound of Veena. She turned out to be unconventional and her mother unlike other mothers of the earlier decades is prepared to face the society. "After months of silence, Sita received a terse telegram from Bangalore, not from Devi, but from Mahesh. Devi has run away, he said. Letter follows. All necessary action being taken." (Hariharan 1992: 108).

The reunion of mother and daughter fulfilled the phase of unprecedented creativity in their life and augured the idea of individualism. They retained their identity by attempting to

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the favourable status of identity. A woman does not have many options to exercise either she can accept or reject, her glorification as a dutiful wife and her expected role hinders her self-realization as Devi struggled to live on the terms of others and these terms become thick layers on her self. It is an act of rebellion against social ethos .She chose her own course and followed her own ideals and responded to her inner self.

Now the time has come  
Say, which side you have to go?  
But do remember that you were alone inside,  
Alone you are, so you shall remain within  
Strong and bold to manifest (64-65).

Githa Hariharan's representation of three generation of women where two succumbed to the practices, Devi questioned the system which burdened the spirit and took cognizance to fight against the compulsions and gathered strength with each testimony bestowed on her. To evolve as the liberated woman John Lennon quotes that 'women should join the human race' to explore the unique contours of their lives.

Jasbir Jain has given particular attention to the women as writers in the newly formed social realities. In her essay "post colonial realities: Women writing History" Jain says "Women traditionally termed ahistoric bring a new awareness to their treatment of history. Rejecting the hegemony of male projections, they cross over to occupy a centrality ordinarily withheld from them." (Jain 1999:65). To think, to know, to make a choice, to brief, to act and to take decision women has limited freedom they either controlled by tradition and religion or by the patriarchy. Despite these controls exercised by the society there is a native back of tradition exists in the Ramayana and Mahabharatha. To fight against struggle not only women have contributed men have contributed to it at several levels, some major examples are Tagore's Yogayog, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee Shesh Prashan where the characters like widow survived with dignity but struggled to reconcile their freedom and love with the moral norms defined by the patriarchal society. But they find freedom in the limited degree without losing the sense of morality. The women writer brought the women to the stream of rebellion and showed them as the individual right to know their self and the right to grow.

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