



QUEST FOR IDENTITY IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S 'THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT'

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ABSTRACT

"The Thousand Faces of Night" by Githa Hariharan largely focuses on the treatment of an Indian "wife" in modern life. This novel highlights how women's dreams are shattered after marriage and depicts the various oppressions faced by women in Indian society. Githa portrays women's struggles in their relationships with men, and the plot revolves around the lives of three female characters in the novel: Devi, Sita, and Mayamma. The role of their families and society in shaping their personalities from childhood onwards is also explored. The novel underscores how women have been subjugated and overshadowed within the confines of marriage, labeled as wives in order to prioritize family growth. Despite being aware of this, they do not attempt to break free from these circumstances. They survive by accepting the harsh realities surrounding them. However, the survival strategies employed by traditional and modern women to overcome challenging situations differ.

KEY WORDS: marriage, subjugated, tradition

INTRODUCTION

Githa Hariharan is a 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 "The Thousand Faces of Night," published in 1992. It was her first step towards feminist literature, and she received the Commonwealth Award for her painstaking fiction.

During her career, spanning from 1992 to 2009, she contributed five significant novels. Her debut novel, "The Thousand Faces of Night," published in 1992, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize. It is followed by four novels: "The Ghost of Vasu Master" (1994), "When Dreams Travel" (1999), "In Times of Siege" (2004), and "Fugitive Histories" (2000). Apart from these novels, she has also written a few short stories. Her collections of short stories are "The Art of Dying" (1993) and "The Winning Team" (2004).

The female characters in the novel "The Thousand Faces of Night" - Mayamma, Devi, Sita, and Parvati - belong to different generations. After experiencing unhappy marriages, they become conscious of their trapped lives and search for the route to find real meanings and values. They show signs of progressing to the next stage to lead a liberated life. Women's emergence from subjugation leads them to rebel against patriarchal society for their freedom and identity.

In "The Thousand Faces of Night," Githa strongly points out that women are chained by marriage for their entire lives. Jasbir Jain makes a fascinating and relevant point about the term "marriage": "Marriage, home, the claims of the family are traditional goals set for the female child."

Similarly, the same point is emphasized in "The Thousand Faces of Night" by Githa Hariharan through the character Baba, Devi's grandmother, and Sita's father-in-law. Women are bound to the family, and their family pride depends upon them. Marriage has been considered sacred in human beings' lives since ancient times. V.V. Rao and V. Nandhini state, 'Marriage is regarded as a ritual and a sacramental union. It is an indispensable event in Hindu religion. However, this marriage was found to be a trap for women who desire to achieve great heights.' In childhood, a woman should be under her father's control, and in her youth, she is expected to be under her husband's control. This was the condition of a woman in Indian society. After marriage, a woman was treated like a slave by her husband. Her primary concern should be about doing housework and having children. Despite countless revolutions and developments, more than half of the world's populations are women, yet they are not treated equally to men.

In this male-dominated society, she is expected to serve, sacrifice, submit, and peacefully tolerate all crimes against her. Her true self is rarely recognized in the patriarchal society, and egotism becomes her normal way of life. Women are considered inferior to a complete self. They have no distinct identity and are always expected to be in harmony with their husband's wishes. They possess the same spiritual and moral strength, but they are not recognized as equals. But, when the educated woman, due to the socio-economic crisis, stepped out of the house, she can be able to realize her potential beyond cooking and cleaning. This new awareness has awakened women to realize their new position and position in the family and society, and at the same time, the women become aware of whom they are. This new woman tries to assert her human rights and seems determined to fight for equal treatment with men. This is where the emergence started to begin in society.

Githa Hariharan perfectly strung together the various generations of women and tells us how they evolved over a period of time. The first generation was Devi's grandmother. The term 'tradition' refers to the habits, beliefs, or behaviors that have been passed down from generation to generation. Devi's grandmother was a woman who mindlessly followed the old beliefs and principles that they must uphold by following the path that their elders have laid out for them without challenging the principles or customs.

Devi's grandmother is an uneducated yet knowledgeable old woman. She belongs to the generation of women who accept male dominance and follow their lead. Devi's grandmother lived in a little drab house in Agraharam. In her early thirties, she becomes a widow. Devi and her grandmother share a strong emotional bond. She would wait for Devi every summer, and when she arrived in her father's car, she would carry her out with tears in her eyes. She would first rid Devi and her family of any spirits they may have carried with them from their city life by drawing circles in the air with a bowl of turmeric-laced water and then emptying it in the street, and only then would she let them in. Due to the grandmother, Devi and her family are able to enjoy a different life in the summer. The home of Devi's grandmother was a refuge for many women tormented by a male-dominated society. We see some orphaned, abandoned, poor, widowed husbands, orphans, and widows seeking refuge, help, and guidance from their mothers. "Five months old and weak, she welcomed many more wounded refugees into her home, wandering for charity."(Hariharan 39)

Devi's grandmother used to tell her stories about ancient mythical women, hoping Devi would receive some valuable messages based on these ideal ladies. Grandmother recited stories of Damayanti, Ganga, and Amba with tremendous enthusiasm. The prime aim of her grandmother's stories was to enlighten Devi about the lives of these ideal women who enriched the magnificent Indian tradition through their noble ideals and moral standards, so that Devi could be inspired for her future life as a wife and mother. Despite the fact that Devi's youthful psyche cannot unravel the genuine reason hidden behind this mythological story, it left a permanent imprint on her, revealing that patriarchal society is desperately trying to demonstrate that a girl or woman is an artifact that can be given to anyone in marriage without even a single consideration for her wishes and desires, and that an ideal wife should happily accept a husband even if he is a snake.

Like Devi's grandmother, Mayamma is also an uneducated old woman and belongs to the generation of women who accept male dominance. Mayamma, an aging family maid, is the typical female who accepts her fate without question and goes about her duties. She bears the trauma that patriarchal families inflict on women in the roles of daughters, wives, daughters-in-law, mothers, and deserted women. When Mayamma was a child, her father married her off to a man from a neighboring village. Mayamma is an illiterate woman who is too young for marriage. Her mother-in-law is a traditional Indian woman who always had the upper hand.

Her mother-in-law had it confirmed by numerous astrologers before her marriage to her son that her would-be daughter-in-law would undoubtedly bear strong and healthy children. However, after a few years of marriage, when Mayamma shows no signs of motherhood, her mother-in-law lost her cool and made Mayamma's life even more difficult. Mayamma undertakes severe penances and lives a life of abstinence when she is young, all for the sake of becoming a mother and carrying the family name forward. Mayamma recalled an old incident, she said: "You have been admiring your fine new sari, have you, continued the mocking voice. What has your beauty done for you, you barren witch? She pulled up my sari roughly, just as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly-ground spices into my bareness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails. The next time it was my breast. Cut the right one open, here, take this blade. Take the silver cup with the blood from your breast and bathe the lingam." (Hariharan 113). "No, no, Maya. No rice for you today. It's Friday. No rice today, no vegetables tomorrow, no tamarind the day after. Stop thinking of food, daughter-in-law, think of your womb. Think of your empty, rotting womb and pray." (Hariharan 114).

Mayamma is mercilessly tortured by both her husband and her mother-in-law for failing to produce a son. Mayamma becomes the victim of society's expectations. Mayamma never questioned the family members never raised her voice, and never attempted to leave from her patriarchal family. Mayamma has slowly learned the skill of survival. After going through these unfortunates events in her life, she realized that even if a woman puts her soul and devotes her life to serving the family members, she remains unimportant in her own family.

She gives birth to a boy after many sacrifices and penances, and she strives to raise him well. Her mother-in-law becomes pleased at times because she finds considerable happiness and convenience in her grandson. Mayamma begins to be concerned about her son's future as he grows older, and she takes him to a teacher so that he might receive a great education. She tries to instill meaning into her son's life after weathering the brutality of her husband and mother-in-law, only to realize that her kid is an exact image of her husband. On the day her son died, her buried wrath and sufferings surfaced in the form of tears. She wailed her heart out, remembering her adolescence and her past.

Her hunt for some meaning in survival began after this experience. She ended up in the house of Parvatiamma, the mother-in-law of Devi, where she worked as a family maid and made a comfortable living. When Devi's mother-in-law, Parvatiamma, departed the house in quest of God, Mayamma continues to look after Mahesh and Baba. Mayamma had the determination to live despite the fact that she is a mute and submissive sufferer. She does not lose her life by losing her spouse and son. She seeks to discover a meaning for her existence. Through the characters like Mayamma, the grandmothers of Devi, Hariharan reveals the helplessness of illiterate women who belong to an era of Indian women who were meant to be perfect and virtuous and they have been oppressed for generations. For ages, women have been the victims of Marriage and male supremacy society where they have toyed for their family needs. These oppressions are not only by the family members but also by the patriarchal society. Next, we can see how the patriarchal society trounced the insurgency of feminism through Sita.

Sita was a well-educated and talented young lady who lost her identity and changed herself for sake of her family. On the close reading, we can see that Sita lost her identity due to the covert love and care for her new family. Sita got married at age of twenty and enters the new family “to be the perfect wife and daughter-in-law” who stronghold the pride and prestige of the family. To accomplish this and to endeavor the title of her perfect wife she paid price by sacrificing her goals and dreams. “Good housekeeping, good taste, hard work. These were Sita’s guiding mottos as she has taken charge as a young bride.” (Hariharan 101).

Mahadevan, her husband, assumed that she is “a woman who knows how to make sacrifices without fanfare. Sita was such a woman, he thought and she had earned his unanswering loyalty” (Hariharan 103).

Sita was chosen by Mahadevan and his family because of her talent of playing veena, despite the fact that she is not an attractive girl. Sita’s family gives Veena as a gift after they marry, and she plays her once she finishes her domestic tasks. One day when her father-in-law sat for prayer he couldn’t find a thing needed that he was searching for. He called sita who did not hear him, but he hears the sound of veena coming from her room. He finds that sita completely lost in the music. He roared, “Put that veena away. Are you a wife and daughter in law?” (Hariharan 30).

Sita's squirming heart could be acknowledged through her own response: Sita hung her head over the veena for a minute that seemed to stretch for ages, enveloping us in an unbearable silence. Then she reached for the strings of her veena and pulled them out of the wooden base. They came apart with a discordant twang of protest . . . said in a clear, stinging whisper, 'Yes I am a wife, a daughter-in-law' (Hariharan 30). She vows that she will never touch the veena again in order to prove to her family that she is a perfect wife and daughter-in-law. For the sake of achieving ideal femininity, Sita chooses the pathway of self-sacrifice.

This shows that how Sita was victimized not only by husband but also by her husband’s family. This instance part from The Thousand faces of night shows, that woman are marginalized only in relation to others and diversified person to the family. They were considered only as “resource”. She supposed be an ideal wife, daughter in law, mother and home maker. They don’t have any recognition. They lose their own identity that they were once and completely change. Sita in frenzy frustration burnt all her photographs posed with her veena. This was done to avoid the “obsolete memories”. After this incidents sita became a “dutiful daughter in law the neighbors praised (Hariharan 30), but she lost her identity as Sita who used to love playing Veena.

In The Thousand faces of night, Sita's husband Mahadevan was failed to create emotional ripples in heart of Sita results in no form of bond as a loveable husband and wife in their marital life. Sita had to cope with the horrible situation of her life due to a tradition-bound society. Sita was alienated even though she had a family.

We can see Sita stopped playing veena after the incident which she faced with her Father-in-law. This shows that Women have been encouraged to concentrate on the emotion and reactions of others than expressing their own emotions. Sita reshaped herself to shape the lives of her husband and daughter. It is the silent exposition of female power. Sita took her husband's hand and led him promotion to promotion supporting thorough out even though there is no recognition for her sacrifice. She has the qualities of empathy, nurturing, and tolerance as the emblems of womanhood which is the base that withstands the feminist quality. She has a great deal of wisdom and patience. Unlike other mothers, she remains calm during her baby's delivery and is a model patient. She refuses to let the nurses touch the baby and takes her into her arms the minute she delivered. She is for her "a new veena to play on." (Hariharan, p104). She decided that she wasn't going to give it up lightly. She has been a controlling figure in the life of both her husband and daughter. "Now the goddess she worshipped was no veena-toting Saraswati, all femininity and ambiguity; her god rode the most practical, the most tangible (and hence most ferocious) of chargers" (Hariharan 105).

Even after her husband's death Sita performs all the rituals in Africa and returns to India. Thus Sita embarked on the Customs of Hindu society. Sita defended her family as a single mother. As a Victim of a patriarchal society, she is aware that she has to give a good education for her daughter will save her from society. When Devi reached Madras after completing her education, Devi's mother, through her endeavors, brings some respectable and trustworthy man for marriage, as Devi's dad died a couple of years prior, and the obligation of observing Devi an appropriate match lays on her mother. Later, we can see that there is an identity conflict that rises within herself when she starts to think about the situation of Devi, where Sita learns she had lost herself and her identity for years. In the end, she emerged like a phoenix starting to play the veena. Sita breaks the chain that is tied for a long and brings forth the ideology of creating her own identity and living for herself rather than for the family and society. Every woman expects their marriage life to be compassionate, empathetical, freedom, nurtured with mutual understanding. In reality, marital status life in India lays loads of prohibitions and constraints which restrict women from leading a life with their alternative of freedom.

For a woman in India, marriage is visible as a trophy for which she has to be prepared to surrender everything and lose herself. Devi was also been a prey to the patriarchal society, who faced the situation of every Indian women who sacrifices everything for a wedding ascertain protection, love, compatibility, and happiness. Later, she overcame the patriarchal society ideology and paved the path for the upcoming generation that women do not need men for their survival. Women have talents and goals to achieve in their life and they also have proficiency to lead an independent life and to support their families.

Devi, one of the protagonists, is a modern, educated woman who belongs to an orthodox Brahmin family. She is the only child of her parents. Devi had a strong bond with her grandmother. Devi spent every summer at her grandmother's village house in her childhood, where she learned various stories of women from the past such as Damyanti, Gandhari, Amba, and Ganga, These were not the ordinary bedtime stories, Devi's grandmother relate these accounts with those of everyday women, such as Sita (Devi's mother), Uma (a servant at Devi's house), and Gauri (Devi's cousin), etc.

In fact, through the stories, Devi's grandmother educated Devi and made her aware of the facts of life, as well as prepared her for her future. All these stories of the grandmother ended with a piece of advice, which suggested that: "a woman meets her fate alone." (Hariharan 28)

Devi received a scholarship to study in the United States for a Master's degree, so sent to the United States for further education. She develops a deep bond with a black American Dan while studying there. When Dan proposes to her there, she declines to owe to her ambivalence toward American culture. When he suggests

marriage, she pretends to be surprised to absolve herself of any responsibility. Her motherland and her widowed mother pulled her back into Madras. She gets back to live with her mother. She explains her return to India: "Amma's letters brought with them an unspoken message of loneliness, poignant in its quiet dignity ... But the image of her alone by the sea teased me like a magnet ... That she might need me, my hesitant, self-doubting presence, was intoxicating." (Hariharan 16).

Devi faces some challenges, like adjusting to day-to-day realities after she returns to Madras from America to live with her widowed mother. Her dream of visiting America dies as soon as she arrives in India. Sita has her plans for her daughter's future, and she keeps herself busy looking for a suitable partner for Devi, as Devi has reached marriageable age and should start a family.

Devi does not like the idea of an arranged marriage, but she accepts the proposal of the arranged marriage voluntarily for the sake of her mother. Devi's mother, through her efforts, brings some decent and reputable matches for her, as Devi's father passed away a few years ago, and the responsibility of finding Devi a suitable match rests on her mother, who advises her to choose one of the best life partners for her life. Devi meets several potential bridegrooms over time and finally chooses Mahesh as her life partner.

Devi is wedded to Mahesh, a Regional Manager in a multinational company. When Devi visits her husband's home, Devi is welcomed by Mahesh's family members. She observes that there are just two members in the family other than Mahesh - his dad, Baba, and an old house cleaner worker, Mayamma. Devi dedicates herself to her better half and his family. As her husband is frequently out on business visits, she resides alone at home. After at some point she begins feeling like an outsider in her own home as he invests next to no energy with her. Feeling lonely she says, "More than a year has crawled by, only my world whirls in smaller and smaller circles, the center -point the jacaranda-surrounded ancestral house" (Hariharan 53). Devi believes that she is in this circumstance because her education has not equipped her role as a wife. He once purposefully compliments his junior colleague Ashok's wife Tara to taunt his wife and make her conscious of Tara's obligations. Tara's enormous energy, her effervescent, irresistible excitement is something Mahesh admires. "She keeps herself busy but has enough time for her children," he says. "I have never seen such well-behaved children before. Lucky Ashok!" (Hariharan 56).

Mahesh appears unconcerned with Devi's uniqueness and personality, which may require her to express herself in a capacity other than that of a wife. At the point when Devi wished to apply for the post as a research assistant, he puts her down. "What can you do?"

Mahesh asked, like a ruthless interviewer stripping away the inessential ... You need at least one more degree for that, he said. And what will you do when the baby comes?" (Hariharan 64- 65). Mahesh started to ignore her pleadings and entertains his friends by turning the house into a party and card-playing venue. He seems unconcerned about Devi's sentiments and emotions, leading her to believe that her independence has been stifled. Her disappointment and rage grow.

Devi's Marriage life becomes a means of oppression resulting in minor issues such as a breakdown in communication, solitude, emptiness, and ineptitude. Simone de Beauvoir writes, "It has been said that marriage diminishes man, which is often true, but almost always it annihilates women" (Beauvoir 496).

She tries to alleviate her loneliness by developing a strong relationship with her father-in-law, Baba, who spends his time reading old Sanskrit scriptures and listening to classical music. Mahesh disapproves of Devi's spending so much time with Baba and Mayamma, as he wants to see his wife take charge of his home. "a kritya, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted" (Hariharan 69). According to Mahesh, Devi has not been properly prepared to perform the role of a perfect married woman. View on

Marriage, according to Mahesh, is a cultural obligation that must be fulfilled, and it is the wife's responsibility to keep her husband happy by gratifying his desires. He also had asked questions, irritably: "Did your mother need books to tell her how to be a wife? I have never met a woman more efficient than your mother." (Hariharan 70). Devi has anticipated that Mahesh should impart everything to her, but he is a conventional husband, who used to see her as a homemaker, to keep up with the house appropriately, and cook. Devi has been absolutely against his thought and she wanted an equivalent commitment in her marital relationship.

Devi, who turned passionate about Sanskrit and Karnatic music, adores her father-in-law and treats him as if he were her father. Baba teaches Devi about the traditional Hindu concept of Dharma through his stories from Sanskrit scriptures about saints and spiritual men, based on the role and traits of an ideal Indian woman who aids her husband's spiritual advancement. In a hypnotic voice, he says: "The housewife 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 does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does." (Hariharan 70-71). He likewise solidly trusts that, if a woman serves her husband, she will be honored in heaven. Baba, Devi's father-in-law, had achieved distinction as a professor and knowledgeable man in the field of Sanskrit literature. For his outstanding proficiency in Sanskrit, he got numerous awards and medals throughout his life. When his mother urged him to marry a girl, he chose Parvati from among Hema, Mohana, and the other two girls as his wife since the name Parvati sounded like a well-mannered cultured girl. He never sees the girl before his marriage since he trusts his mother's judgment. He never doubts his parents' judgment.

Parvati was an ideal wife, who dedicatedly served Baba's parents as well as Baba. She devoted all of her time to worshipping God after her son had gone to boarding school. One day, When Baba was out for business, she abandoned her home and went in pursuit of God, handing over the keys to Mayamma and advising her to look after the house and her husband. When Baba returned, Mayamma informed him of Parvatamma's leaving. Devi has no emotional support from her husband and she is relieved to find only her father-in law and an old maid Mayamma. Mahesh is so preoccupied with his tours and meetings that he barely has time for Devi. She develops an affinity and connection with Mayamma while listening to her married life is depicted as a never-ending stream of suffering. Mayamma's terrible story to Devi emphasizes the reality of her anguish and grief. Mayamma's story has a severe impact on Devi, who learns about the emptiness of being a wife and mother via the narration.

Devi started to feel alone in the house with Baba's orphaned books after Baba leaves for New York to visit his daughter. He dies soon after when he was in New York. Baba's death has left her feeling more alone than when her father died in Africa while she was in the United States. When Devi has still been struggling to live with the disappointments, Mahesh suggests to Devi that they will have a child. When he returns to home after a longer tour he turns to Devi and used to ask: "Any news". His eyes quickly appraise my body, all bones and flat stomach.

No new, I say". (Hariharan 86).Devi has no desire to have a child, but Mahesh believes that parenting will teach Devi to be a better person. Devi is unable to conceive despite numerous attempts. Devi's failure to become a mother has had a significant impact on her personal growth. She frees herself from the responsibilities of motherhood to become free.

Mahesh has never revealed his professional intentions and ambitions with his wife. She is, meanwhile, involved with Gopal, a classical singer, because she feels isolated. With the arrival of Gopal, Devi's enthusiasm in life is reignited. She finds happiness in a brief connection with Gopal.

Devi felt like, she is imprisoned in the position of wife, and she thought the only way out is for her to commit adultery. Devi ultimately decides to leave Mahesh because neither one of them could be what the other one

needed, so decided to run away with Gopal in search of happiness and freedom. Devi fled with Gopal because she believed that they would have a wonderful life together. Rather than Magesh, he makes her feel more comfortable. She travels with Gopal on all of his musical tours, but after a few months, Devi realized that she no longer loves his presence. Devi is dissatisfied with Gopal, when he cannot provide peace mind for her which she desires. With Gopal's success growing by the day, Devi's alienation is increasing as well. Devi is heartbroken as Gopal discloses his future plans: "let's celebrate. If everything goes well, your panditji will be in America next month. Eight cities in three months, all expenses paid." (Hariharan 134). Devi believes Gopal is a diligent worker for his progress in his music field, as Mahesh is to his business.

Thakur and Shelly observe: Devi recognizes her independence and by resolving the conflict between individual and restrictive domestic social norms achieves it. Until now she had been seeing her reflection mirrored by the others, not the self; she has been at the place provided by the other, by the male-centered community. (53) Devi starts to feel that it's probably time for her to wave farewell to Gopal; "if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned to drift between worlds, a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland"(Hariharan 138). Devi sees herself in the mirror the night before she departs from Gopal and she realizes another version of herself. Devi had no identity before she leaves Gopal; she was constructing her identity based on the values offered by others. Devi drapes her sari over the mirror, this action that signifies her reason to change her previous identity and initiate a unique one: "She looked into the mirror, but it was as if she was still looking at Gopal's sleeping face. It threw back at her myriad reflections of herself. Devi undraped the sari and folded it carefully, lovingly, till it was one long, multi-layered curtain. She covered the mirror with the silk so that the room suddenly became darker, and everything, the bed, the table, the sleeping body of Gopal, were themselves again, no longer reflections." (Hariharan 138) Devi's action shows that she is no longer reliant on others and is unconcerned about society's expectations of her, prioritizes own feelings and views herself as a feminist rather than a conventional woman.

The novel concludes by stating that the future still undestroyed: "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." (Hariharan 139) Though Devi couldn't seem to find a significant purpose in her life, Devi returns to her mother in search of her own self-identity.

Conclusion

Through this novel, we can explore the suppression of women's talents by assigning them roles as subordinate beings, tasked only with looking after family members once they enter their second home. We can also observe how they overcome these challenges by fighting for self-sufficiency and a dignified existence.

In "The Thousand Faces of Night," Hariharan portrays her female characters in numerous diverse ways. These characters span various age groups: from old age to middle age, from youth to childhood. Among them, there are married women, young girls, and even widows. Hariharan employs symbolic characters in the novel, with the names of these characters reflecting their mindsets. The epic character Sita from the Ramayana is portrayed through Devi's mother. Sita, known for her patience, womanly responsibilities, and deep respect for her husband Lord Rama, remains faithful to him even after his rejection and steadfastly refuses to marry anyone else. Devi's mother embodies a similar persona. She relinquishes her dream of becoming a veena player in favor of embracing the role of a homely daughter-in-law.

Devi, a Hindu mythological character, is revered as the goddess of all goddesses. Drawing inspiration from the characters in her grandmother's epic legends, Devi envisions herself as a god-like hero, aspiring to possess the strength of Devi Durga. "They call me an incarnation of Durga (Hariharan 43).

Hariharan primarily represented three portraits of Indian married women belonging to different generations in her book: The female characters embodying the ideal and traditionally accepted image of a subservient woman seek to change their status while adhering to certain parameters, without completely breaking from tradition - like Mayamma, Devi's grandmother. The next portrait is of a woman searching for a meaningful life - like Sita. The third portrait depicts a woman aware of the importance of her own identity and striving to lead a liberated life - like Devi.

A societal group formed through marriage is known as a family. Within this group, women play a significant role. Despite being the family's dignitary, they live a life of enslavement, poverty, and oppression. During their childhood, they were raised in a caring and affectionate manner. However, after marriage, they begin to transform regularly. Their primary responsibilities include raising children and maintaining the household. The women in "The Thousand Faces of Night" are in some way enslaved by their marriages. They are not opposed to the concept of marriage initially, but when it fails to provide fulfillment, they do not hesitate to emancipate themselves. They may not be brave enough to resist customs from the start; circumstances and life experiences compel them to live for themselves.

Marriage is a bond that unites two individuals and forms a healthy family. The goal is to always support each other and discover each other's purposes. However, after marriage, women are often not allowed to have personal goals or passions. We can observe that the protagonist of the novel, Devi, and her mother, Sita, have dealt with the same issues. When marriage involves oppression, suppression, and repression, women may even consider suicide as an escape. In contrast, Hariharan presents progressive women who discover themselves after breaking free from the male-centered world's constraints. Even the minor female characters aim to change their status by deviating from tradition. Parvatiamma, Gauri, and Uma do not silently endure oppression and exploitation. They take steps to make their lives more fulfilling. They distance themselves from situations that make them feel out of place. To achieve her goal, Parvatiamma abandons her children and her home. When Gauri is unhappy with her drunken husband, she seeks solace in her brother-in-law's company. Uma, Devi's cousin, leaves her husband's home due to mistreatment from her husband and father-in-law.

At the end of the chapter, Hariharan uses the "Wild and overgrown" garden of Sita as a symbol of Sita's inner desires no longer being suppressed. Sita recognizes that her pride in wielding authority over her husband's and daughter's lives has driven her ambitions away. Sita welcomes her daughter back with music, playing her veena faintly. This indicates her decision to liberate herself and fulfill her ambitions.

Devi transforms into a woman ready to grow, flourish, and fight for her identity. Her earlier decisions were influenced by family members; her mother drove her marriage to Mahesh, and Mahesh played a role in her elopement with Gopal. She realizes that letting life's pressures dictate her choices is futile. Her new beginning signifies a self-determined start, free from pressure, emerging like a phoenix from the ashes to claim her true identity lost in the male-dominated society.

While highlighting the challenges faced by women in patriarchal societies, the novel also presents various feminine responses through its female characters. Instead of passive endurance, there is a new impetus to react and revolt. A shift from submissive attitudes to assertive ones becomes evident.

In contrast to enduring suffering or allowing other women to suffer in isolation and depression, a change is observed in women's mutual support. For instance, Mayamma doesn't take revolutionary steps herself but supports her mistresses Parvatiamma and Devi in their liberation. When Parvatiamma leaves her family, Mayamma assumes responsibility for her household. Similarly, Sita welcomes her daughter by endorsing her

decision. The female characters in the novel represent a shift in traditional Indian women's attitudes as they march toward self-fulfillment.

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