

# **Postmodern Perception in Githa Hariharan's Select Novels**

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## **Doctor of Philosophy in English**

Submitted by

**S. Harini**



Under the Guidance of

**Dr. (Mrs). S. Lavanya, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D.,**

Assistant Professor

Department of English



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## *Chapter VII*

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### Summation

Githa Hariharan's novels examine themes of gender disparity, such as the subjugation of women under patriarchy and documents women acquiring self-identity through various strategies. Githa Hariharan proves herself to be the tireless supporter of the feminist cause. Githa Hariharan in her article 'New Voices and New Challenges' says,

I am especially pleased to write on the theme of new voices. Not only does this imply new writing in our midst; new perspectives on the themes and issues that hold us in thrall; but it also means that we can use this opportunity to assess afresh the challenges that writers face today, in the world at large, and in India in particular. (Sahitya Akademi 31)

Feminism as a collective movement bloomed in the late nineteenth-century developed and gained momentum in the early twentieth-century. Feminism is a political movement which interrogated the patriarchal culture that suppresses the identity of women. "The emergence of feminist ideas and feminist politics depends on the understanding that, in all societies which divide the sexes into different cultural, economic or political spheres, women are less valued than men" (Humm 102). The main objective of this movement is to decentralise male hegemony and the resultant subjugation of women prevalent in almost all strata of society. This movement witnessed the gradual improvement in the condition of women in society. But there is still a long way to travel to achieve gender equality in society. Feminism would remain vibrant as long as the inequality between men and women is predominant in society.

More recent feminist criticism warns against understanding ‘women’ as a homogenous category and emphasizes the mistake of eradicating the unique characteristics of different groupings, in the late nineteenth century the emergency of a solidarity across national and class barriers was perceived as so novel that the common factor of being a woman was perceived as outweighing the difference. (Knellwolf 193)

The first wave of feminism came into force in the mid-nineteenth century and it concentrated on the campaign for women’s suffrage. The main objective of the second wave was focused not only on political emancipation but women’s liberation at the domestic sphere. The second wave feminism also analysed gender difference in the public and private sphere. Simone de Beauvoir’s *Le Deuxieme Sex* (1949), translated into English as *The Second Sex* (1953) is considered a ground-breaking and revolutionary work of feminism. “The feminist approach to the study of literature pursued several goals: a revisionist engagement with history and literary history, a revision of aesthetic standards and a radical critique of the representation of gender and roles as part of a larger critique of cultural self-definition” (Knellwolf 197).

The third wave strongly advocates the celebration of femininity. “Third wave feminism speaks to a generation of younger feminists—born in the 1960s and 1970s—who see their work founded on second wave principles, yet distinguished by a number of political and cultural differences” (Genz and Brabon 156). The third wave is closely attached with political activism and fights against social injustice which still oppresses women. The most significant aspect of third wave is that it represents a complex effort to move towards postfeminism.

Third wavers came of an age in a world where feminist language is part of the public dialogue, but authentic feminist struggles are not accounted for in that dialogue except in terms articulated by the mainstream, which still perpetuates a conservative and sexist status quo. Young women have to have a feminism that can counter the dangerously sophisticated pronouncements of the failure and inadequacies of feminism coming out of postfeminism.

(Kinser 135)

“Postmodernism is an umbrella term which includes feminism, post structuralism, post colonialism and deconstruction” (Taylor 112). Postmodern feminism is an amalgamation of postmodernism and feminist theory. It emerged as a powerful feminist theory in the last few decades. Postmodern feminist critiques attach more privilege to feminist ideals which puts forth avenues for women’s liberation. Like postmodernists, postmodern feminists promote the idea of multiplicity, plurality and difference.

Postmodern feminism is a movement anteceded by the publication in 1949 post war France of Simone de Beauvoir’s *La Deuxieme Sexe* (The Second Sex). Asserting that “woman is made not born,” de Beauvoir investigated that women’s behaviour was conditioned by cultural constrains. She questioned the gender disparity and suggested that women should break their status of victimhood.

To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist to him also; mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other an other. (Beauvoir 248)

The postmodern feminist writers take into account the differences that exist among the women on the grounds of class and race. Sarah Harding has suggested that the concept of 'woman' can be replaced by that of "myriads of women living in elaborate historical complexes of class, race and culture" (qtd. in Sim 36). Helen Cixous, Lucy Irigaray and Julia Kristeva are the most prominent writers of postmodern feminist philosophy. Jane Flax argues that feminist theories, "like other forms of postmodernism, should encourage us to tolerate and interpret ambivalence, ambiguity, and multiplicity as well as to expose the roots of our needs for imposing order and structure no matter how arbitrary and oppressive these needs may be" (635). The Postmodern feminist theorist intend to:

1. Identify feminist perceptive of society.
2. Examine the way social world affects women.
3. Analyse the role played by power relationships in shaping the women's perception of the social world.
4. Devise the ways through which social world can be changed (Flax 624).

Both feminism and postmodernism argue that the metanarratives have lost their hold in shaping the cultural ethos of a society. Postmodernism and feminism offers, "a profound skepticism regarding universal (or universalizing) claims about the existence, nature and powers of reason, progress, science, language and the subject/self" (qtn. in Brodribb 11). The social condition of the postmodern society led to the development of postmodern feminist politics. Postmodern feminism deconstructs patriarchy which has established itself as the hegemonic power structures in society. Postmodern feminism insists upon self-creation of moral and ethical frameworks by individuals.

The appearance of Githa Hariharan in the arena of Indian English Fiction during the 1990s is a milestone. She is one of the women writers who not only contributed her best to the domain of literature but also brought about radical changes in society by standing up as a feminist with a social cause. In 1995, she challenged the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act as biased in the Supreme Court of India and as a result of this, mother and father both began to be considered as natural guardians of a child. Githa Hariharan intends to deconstruct the hegemonic patterns in society by employing postmodern techniques like demythification, magical realism, pastiche, historiographic metafiction, intertextuality, story-within-a story and multiple narrators. Viney Kripal compares Indian Postmodernism with Western Postmodernism thus,

... while the same themes of gender relations and self-identity, history, political and social reform, have been addressed in the Indian English novel since the 1920's, the technique has changed dramatically since the 1980's. Again although the Indian novel has been influenced by the dominant literary trends and theories prevalent in the west, novelists have invariably adapted them or chosen out of them eclectically to suit representations of their society. Thus, the 1980's novelists may have been influenced by current postmodernist writing and poststructuralist modes of thinking but their novels can, by no stretch of the imagination, be described as postmodernist in the Western sense. The postmodern novels of the Euro-American world are a continuation of the modern novel and carry to the extreme its contratraditional experiments particularly those with language. (Kripal 30)

The theme of women entangled in the web of patriarchy is predominant in Githa Hariharan's novels. She depicts Indian women who deliberately fail to take stand on their rights of equality, freedom and other human rights conferred on them as citizens of free India. Their long cherished dream of enjoying life as equal partners within the institution of marriage is crushed due to patriarchy. They are made to struggle hard to assert their identity. Women have been complacent with the structured gender roles within the paradigm of patriarchy. Feminist discourses warrant as key element to displace the dominant element that is patriarchal power.

... feminist discourse draws within it a configuration of rhetorical and interpretative strategies. The concept of language as fluid and multiple frees it from its closed system. One of the original insights of the women's movement was that the personal is political, that is, the relation between experience and discourse constitutes feminism. The consciousness of self, like class or race consciousness is configuration of subjectivity, produced at the intersection of experience with meaning. This consciousness of self is never absolute or identifiable because it is constantly being reshaped, as it is grounded not only in personal history but also in the horizons of knowledge and meaning dependent on culture specifics at given moments. (Begum 145)

Githa Hariharan has used the postmodern technique of revisioning metafiction to discuss feminist ideology. By subverting the metanarratives the novelist brings to forefront the postmodern concept of feminism which insists upon individuality and emotional independence. *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* are replete with



critical retelling of myth, legend and folklore. Such revisioning of accepted tales makes the reader to restructure their understanding of reality. While answering a question in an interview with Chakladar, Githa Hariharan answers thus,

There are two questions here. Am I a writer particularly concerned with “women’s issues”? And am I a feminist? The answer to both questions is yes. I want to make it quite clear that in my life my choices have been dictated by what I perceive as the feminist choice. I want to say this because many women are very anxious for some reason to say “I’m a humanist, not a feminist, “that sort of thing ... We can't be wary of the word feminist because there are people in the world who misunderstand the word or have done disservice to the word -- you can't use most words then! And anyway, however you define yourself, all our work is informed in some way or the other by feminism, along with the ideas of Freud and Marx. And this goes for both men and women, of course. So the answer to your question would be that I am a writer (as opposed to a woman writer) who is a feminist, along with several other things.

As a postmodern novelist, Githa Hariharan questions and challenges the established social norms and metanarratives by employing various postmodern techniques. The characteristics of postmodern fiction is presented by Tim Woods in his book *The Beginning Postmodernism* thus: “Narrative fragmentation and narrative reflexivity; narratives which double lack on their own presupposition; an open-ended play with formal devices and narration artifice, in which narrative self-consciously alludes to its own artifice, thus challenging some of the pre-supposition of literary realism” (66).

To develop the theme of subjugation of women in the contemporary patriarchal setup, the author has also employed the postmodern technique of intertextuality wherein meaning is not directly imparted to the reader but implied through another text. Julia Kristeva popularised the term ‘Intertextuality’. Kristeva defines intertextuality in the essay ‘Word, Dialogue and Novel,’ thus: intertextuality is “a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double” (qtd.in Moi 37). Postmodernists’ contention is that texts lend itself to pluralistic interpretation and a text gains its meaning in relation to other texts. Githa Hariharan has brought in intertextual references in her novels from mythology, history, legends etc to bring to light the contemporary social conditions.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night* the novelist presents series of stories, myths and fables from *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and *The Puranas*. These age-old references from the ancient epics are retold by the novelist in order to reinstate gender equality. The technique of demythification employed by the novelist is essential to understand the influence of the native culture and reinterpretation of myth becomes essential to suit the precepts of the postmodern age.

A number of intertextual references such as Sati who burnt herself to death to vindicate her husband’s honour and manhood, Parvati who stood neck-deep in the cold turbulent water, Himavati who turned her black skin on her sinful body into golden glittering of light and beauty, Durga who rode on the lion to kill the sinners, Kali who was thirsty for war and is known for heroic feats in battle is put forth by the novelist to make the readers perceive reality from feminist perspective through these intertextual reference.

Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (1999) is an archetype of Arabian legend *The Thousand and One Nights*. The suppressed voices of women find expression in this novel. The novelist has employed the legend of Shahrzad from *The Arabian Nights* as an intertext to portray the true condition of women due to sexual politics in patriarchal society. The first part of the narrative is the retelling of the original legend wherein Shahrzad deceives Sultan Shahryar and stops him from killing the virgins in the kingdom by her talent of storytelling. In the second part of the novel Duniyazad and the slave girl Dilshad revive the memory of Shahrzad by retelling her stories. Satyasama narrates Indian folklore. Thus the novelist has used legends and folklore as intertextual elements to comment on the condition of women from a postmodern perspective. Through the technique of intertextuality, Hariharan voices women's sense of protest against the past as well as contemporary socio-cultural practices by rewriting the stories from a feminine perspective which displays new perception of truth.

Thus, we see that Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* exists in referentiality to the original text of *The Arabian Nights*, along with significant echoes and more significant departures. She crystallizes the elements of the legend to write her own novel, which is a ceaseless pursuit of truth about the making of a fiction or a story, which is essentially 'Her story'. (Ghosh 121)

Githa Hariharan has employed postmodern technique of intertextuality in the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Githa Hariharan has used quotations from Charaka, William Shakespeare and Mahatma Gandhi as intertexts. These references show that her protagonist, Vasu Master is very familiar with English language and literature. While teaching

William Wordsworth's poem 'Daffodils' Vasu Master compares his own melancholic nature with Wordsworth's happiness. Further, he often alludes to Shakespeare as the poet of humanity. Githa Hariharan highlights the importance of Ayurveda through Mahatma Gandhi's views on Ayurveda which is used as an element of intertextuality. The protagonist Vasu Master is greatly possessed by Shakespeare's works such as *Taming of the Shrew*, *Collected Works of William Shakespeare* as well as by the works on medical science like *A Manual of Physical and Mental Hygiene*, *Issue of The Vegetarian*, *Golden Path of Reader*, *Panchangam* etc. Hariharan has borrowed ideas from Sushruta and Charaka, the famous ayurvedic surgeons of ancient India who were able to cure chronic illnesses. About 'intertextuality', the novelist herself admits in the beginning of her acknowledgement that the quotations and thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi included in the novel are taken from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi, Volume I-XVI*.

*Fugitive Histories* is replete with intertextual references. Quotations and references in this novel are borrowed from different sources that pave way to different perceptions of truth. The noteworthy reference is made to the burning courtyard and broken bangles. This incidence makes a clear reference to the lines in a poem by Aatish Bodovi which is cited in a report 'Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in Riot Affected Women in Ahmadabad' 2002 by Mehta and Vankar. Githa Hariharan has employed letters, manuscripts, articles, photographs, films as intertextual elements and books such as *My Life is My Message*, *Gandhi in Ahmadabad* gives a clear glimpse of Mahatma Gandhi's biography. In addition to this, the author has intertextualized lines of Narsi Mehta 'Ishwar Allah tere naam, sabakosanmati de bhagwan' in the scene where Mahatma Gandhi's ghost keeps singing

to emphasise the message that we are neither Hindu nor Muslim but Indians. Mahatma Gandhi's life and philosophy is used as an intertext as his ghost appears and whispers in Sara's ears "in the dictionary of satyagraha, there is no enemy" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 176).

The author has employed intertextual references from various sources in *The Times of Siege*. The novelist presents a perfect collage of the life and work of the Saint Basava by referring to his doctrines, news reports, slogans, proverbs etc. Intertextual references express varied perceptions of truth and they reflect the social situation in the times of Saint Basava in the twelfth century. The novelist has also made use of Saint Basava's 'Vachanas' as intertextual element. The author admits this in her acknowledgement:

The lines by Saint Basava "The mind is the snake; the body is the basket...." are from Vachana 160, translated by Kamil V. Zvelebil and quoted with the permission from the publisher. All the other Vachanas by Basava quoted in this novel are from A. K. Ramanujan's translation in *Speaking of Siva*. (Hariharan, "Times" 205)

The poster in Shiv's room insists the point that one has to speak before it is too late. Shiv gets motivated by the words of Saint Basava and gains courage to fight against the fundamentalists. Saint Basava's Vachana No. 212, "If you risk your hand with a cobra in the picture, will it let you pass?" (Hariharan, "Times" 86) seems to suit the condition of Shiv as his fight against fundamentalists is very risky but still he pursues his protest against such fanatics. Shiv's colleague, Prof. Guru Khote, gives references from *Encyclopedia of Great Quotations* as well as Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* when he says, "My own mind is my own church" (Hariharan, "Times" 132).

To clarify the mission of Saint Basava, the novelist has taken precepts from Kamil V. Zvelebil's book on Basava entitled *The Lord of the Meeting Rivers: Devotional Poems of Basavanna* (1984) such as, "Certain gods always stand watch at the doors of people. Some will not go if you ask them to go. Worse than dogs, some others. What can they give, these gods, who live off the charity of people, O lord of the meeting rivers?" (Hariharan, "Times" 63). "Cripple me, father that I may not go here and there. Blind me, father that I may not look at this and that. Deafen me, father, that I may not hear anything else" (Hariharan, "Times" 156). The lines quoted in this novel reflect that the mind is the coiled snake and the body is the basket. To be determined in his decision, Shiv, resorts to Basava's thoughts to empower him.

Magical realist writers infuse a sense of mystery in the narrative to communicate certain ideas beyond rational thinking. The interweaving of magic and reality is brought about by including dreams, memory, ghosts and fable. Fragmented narrative is an aspect of magical realism as it best describes the postmodern condition of dissolution of the sense of unity put forth by the cultural metanarratives. Stephen Slemon views magical realism as "a concept of resistance to the massive imperial centre and its totalizing systems" (410). The critic Angel Flores writes: "The practitioners of magical realism cling to reality as if to prevent literature from getting in their way, as if to prevent their myth from flying off, as in fairy tales, to super natural realms. The narrative proceeds in well-prepared increasingly intense steps, which ultimately may lead to one great ambiguity or confusion" (104). Wendy B. Faris observes the characteristics of magical realist texts as:

- (i) "irreducible element" of magic, (ii) detailing of a strong presence of the phenomenal world, (iii) reader's unsettling doubts in reconciling to

contradictory understanding of events, (iv) merging of different realms in the narrative and (v) disturbance of the received ideas about time, space and identity (7).

Githa Hariharan has employed magic realism to critique the dominant hegemonic structures in the society that destabilizes equality. In fact, magic realism is one of the most extensively used technique in narration that integrates real and unreal by interweaving fantastic elements into the narrative. Hence, myths, legends, fairy tales, fantasy, fables become part and parcel of the narrative. Dreams express the suppressed desires of the narrator. This technique makes fiction a fusion of realistic and fantastic elements with marvellous time shifts.

Githa Hariharan has employed magic realism in *The Thousand Faces of Night* to emphasise feminist ideology in postmodern perspective. Grandmother's stories are steeped with elements of magic realism. Devi's dreams never fail to precisely focus the reader's attention on magic realism. The mythical stories, dreams, legends, and fables included in the novel bring out the contemporary situation of women in the society.

While narrating the swayamvara sequence of Damayanti and Nala, Devi's grandmother gives a magnificent description of the Gods whose feet don't touch the ground; they seem to float in the air. It is also fantastic to perceive the wild swan singing a sweet song to win the heart of Damayanti for Nala. Grandmother narrates the story of the woman giving birth to a snake and snake marrying a woman and then the snake transforming into a handsome young man is full of magical realistic elements. The mythical story of Amba is a perfect example of magical realism. Amba is betrayed by Bhishma, she prays to Lord Shiva who offers her a magical garland saying, "whoever wears this

garland will surely kill Bhishma” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 39). It is also magical and highly mysterious that Amba dies in the forest and is reborn as Draupada’s daughter and at the right time, she is changed into a man and avenges Bhishma. Devi realises magical elements in her grandmother’s stories. She comments that her grandmother’s stories “reached a frenzied pitch of fantasy” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 39).

Dreams are an aspect of magical realism. Devi’s dream explicated her inherent desire to avenge the male chauvinists who deter freedom to women. Under the intoxication of frantic imagination and fancy, Devi picks up a fruit from a bush, bites it till she can see its core and she hears a voice saying, “Are you ready?” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 41). Devi is carried into an eagle shaped chariot that flows swifter through clouds and gets down at the end of the tunnel of clouds. A beautiful mountainous woman helps her to descend. She was a giantess who gifted Devi a bow and arrow and taught the art of shooting arrows. As days moved on, she develops three extra layers of skin to save herself from heat, cold and evil eye. The giantess bathes her, dresses her, gives her a magic vest covered with little mirrors and makes her a faithful disciple to battle with men and vanishes down to the earth bidding good bye to Devi. Devi looks around her with a hunter’s eye in search of an enemy and finds a fat, greedy man who has imprisoned an innocent village girl in his harem. Devi lashes him with her magic chain of iron and his head rolls to the ground. She travels far away in search of evil men and finds one who calls Devi a Goddess, and both live together for ten years giving birth to strong sons and daughters. When her younger daughter goes into valley and returns with broken and bloody leg, Devi goes in search of the evil man, fights with him and bloody river flows between bodies. Then there appears a man with two horns and a long tail. In the fight,



Devi takes out his eyes, cuts off his head by her sword. The entire story is an instance of magic realism. Devi's dreams are stuffed with elements of magic realism. Her dreams of flying in the sky, touching the ground, seeing a staggering ghost etc. appear very fantastic.

The various stories narrated by Mayamma also deals with magical realism. She tells Devi, "I have seen Yama's eyes of fire. He twirls his lush moustache with arrogance" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 111). She further says that she has baffled Yama like Savitri. Though these descriptions are aspects of fantasy yet they are meaningful and realistic at the same time.

Magic realism in *When Dreams Travel*, helps us to understand female subjugation as represented in the legends. The story of Rupavati's Breasts narrated by the old woman is exceptionally replete with characteristics of magical realism. Rupavati, a lovely woman encounters a mad woman who was very hungry. Out of her hunger she was about to eat her new-born baby. Rupavati immediately tears her breasts off her body and feeds the woman. Little later the news reached Rupavati's husband who was surprised and frightened by his wife's action, prays to God to restore Rupavati's breasts. Immediately the breasts came flying through the air. God Indra interrogates her if she wanted to be a God. Rupavati confides that her intention was only to save the life of the woman.

On hearing the reply of Rupavati, Lord Indra transforms her into a man. Her breasts disappear and she becomes a man named Rupavata. Later on, this Rupavata is reborn as a Brahmin called Chandraprabha who sacrificed every inch of his flesh and every drop of his blood to feed the hungry tigers. The above narration is an example of magic realism. Then the old man narrates the story of Buddha who was born as a beautiful and virtuous man, called Rupavata. He marries a poor destitute woman, Rupavati, and adopts her

new-born child who was indeed saved from being eaten. She also serves Rupavata with full devotion, but her ungrateful son plots a plan to rob Rupavata and beats him with iron rod. After listening to the screaming of the name of Rupavati, she plucks her one breast and pushes it at her son's feet saying, "take the breast which milked an ungrateful son" (Hariharan, "Dreams" 183). She was about to pluck the other breast also but she is stopped by Rupavata from doing so. She calls Indra and requests him not to let her see such ungrateful son, and let her remain one breasted forever, and her wish was granted by Indra. This story is a fine example of magic realism that depicts new perceptions of the truth about the fate of a woman named Rupavati. The story presents alternate versions of reality by juxtaposing male and female rendering of the same story.

*The Ghosts of Vasu Master* captures the world of dreams and fantasy of a retired school teacher, Vasu Master, the protagonist and the chief narrator of the novel. In his loneliness after retirement, he keeps pondering over his past memories, dreams and fantasies. The novel concentrates on the problem of educating a slow learner very effectively. Vasu Master's nostalgic memories begin from his scrapbook which comprises of photographs commemorating important occasions in his life. In his dreams, many dead family members such as his grandmother, father and wife Mangala walk into his fantasy in the form of ghosts. His father, who died many years ago, visits often in his imagination in the form of a ghost. This imagination came to him as a blessing to his loneliness that he felt after retirement, Vasu's dream and fantasy world moved in a fast pace forcing him to overcome all his personal sorrowful episodes in his past life. Once, he had a dream that he is flying, gliding high over roads, the roof tops and feels warmth of the evening sun on his back. But after waking up from his sleep, he forgets that heavenly blissful dream.

Dream becomes a part and parcel of magic realism in portraying fantasy and fabulist aspects of human life. The dreams of Vasu Master conceal his desires. Vasu Master admits that the ayurveda physician always insist to examine the health of a patient's mentality by investigating his dreams. When he dreamt of a crow plunging his beak into fleshiest part of a dead rat lying on the road, and drilling a hole into its flesh, Vasu interprets this dream and compares his own situation with that of the dead rat. Dreams and memories propel Vasu Master towards self-realisation. He recounts the dreams of animals such as Grey Mouse, Blue Bottle, the flies, wasps etc. In this respect, Vasu Master narrates, "But even a housebound mouse can dream, and Grey Mouse took to dreaming" (Hariharan, "Vasu" 118). In Githa Hariharan's narration the boundary between the real and the imagined disappear.

Supernatural elements are more profusely used and it becomes a part of magic realism. The novelist has introduced fantastic and unbelievable elements into the narrative. When he looks into the mirror, he saw a ghost of his father with a grey, thin hair, scared face and creases on his face. In addition to this, he sees a ghost of his wife, Mangala, by the seashore who is now no more. He describes the ghost as if he has really met it. Vasu master narrates fables, retells the ghost stories narrated by his wife and creates stories by infusing his dreams and memory to instil an interest in Mani to listen and to bring him towards mainstream learning.

Githa Hariharan uses the technique of magical realism to address the contemporary socio-political problems and thereby to reinstate a sense of patriotism in *The Fugitive Histories*. Stephen Slemon considers magical realism as a weapon of the "silenced, marginalised, disposed voices" in their fight against "inherited notions of imperial history" (342).

*The Fugitive Histories* bounds and leaps with dream, memory, fantasy, fable which constitute magic realism. Sara beholds in her dream dead people like Asad and recalls her father's discussion of the right way of life. Sara sees Mahatma Gandhi's ghost with a familiar glorious smile. A rumour is wide spread that Mahatma Gandhi has come back to the ashram. The ghost of Gandhi is hiding in the city's abode of peace that is the Sabarmati ashram singing soothing lines of 'Vaishnav Janato'.

Sara, the protagonist, strongly believes that though Mahatma Gandhi is dead, his ghost continues to do his mission. When she can't see the ghost visually, she imagines that it might have gone for a walk. Sara sees an old man like Mahatma Gandhi on the mat preoccupied in spinning by the riverside. Further, she could perceive the ghost of Gandhi sitting, closing its eyes and singing his favourite song, 'Ishwar Allah terenaam, sabakosanmati de bhagwan' (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 175). She further thinks that the birds flying around are his messengers of peace, nonviolence and ahimsa.

Gandhi's ghost delivers a speech to Sara and the violent mob. The ghost of Gandhi said that it does not have spears, kerosene, flags and soda bottles but has only a spinning wheel, a pair of cymbals and a few old hymns. The ghost itself revealed that it is only a ghost and the word defeat and triumph are not found in its dictionary. There is an exchange of words between the mob and the ghost. The mob makes fun at the ghost of Gandhi. The mob said that they never read books but either worship them or burn them. The ghost replies to them, "I can't watch the destruction of all I have lived for. I would rather drown myself in the water of Sabarmati than harbour hate or animosity in my heart" (Hariharan, "Fugitive" 176). Then mob sarcastically asked why he doesn't drown himself and die faster instead of fasting.

Sara could witness the ghost weeping and tears rolling down, it tells Sara that the Ashram was full of snakes when they built it but they didn't kill a single one as he was followed the principle of nonviolence. Then the ghost turned towards the river with a smile on his face and plunged into the water, swam away from the bank. Through the touch of magical realism, the author lays emphasis on the thoughts of Mahatma Gandhi who paved way for India's freedom. This is unrealistic but it seems to be realistic one because the chief purpose of the author is to reinstate the value of unity in diversity is fulfilled through the ghost of Gandhi.

Githa Hariharan has used certain characteristics of magical realism to present her appraisal of the significance of history and to record her dissent against raising fundamentalism and extremist tendencies in the contemporary society. The novelist has employed 'memory' as one of the components of magic realism. The life of Basava a twelfth century saint and religious reformer is presented as an aspect of cultural memory. Indian society has witnessed many eminent personalities who have tried to annihilate disparity in the society. The cultural memory of Saint Bassava is politicised to validate history in the contemporary context. As Edward Casey says,

Neither the human mind, nor even the individual rememberer in his or her self-identical being, could any longer claim to be the unique vehicle of memories. Instead, remembering can be said to be going on between the embodied human rememberer and the place he or she is in as well as with the others he or she is in the presence of. (qtd in Rzepa 23)

In this novel memory is not presented as a mental phenomenon but as a combination of cultural and historical memory with individual memory. *In Times of Siege*, Shiv is able to come to terms with himself with the help of the past memories of his father and the instances he had read about the life of Saint Basava which motivates and shapes his ideal. Therefore, he blends past memory to fight against the injustice in the contemporary socio-cultural situation. When he gets into troubled waters based on the course module designed by him, his self-discovery is geared up.

Retrospections of his father's memory, gives him courage to fight against the protesters. His father was a freedom fighter and went missing after attending a political meeting. Shiv remembers his father's selfless sacrifice for the freedom struggle of India. One day, he recalls the memory of father driving a bullock cart holding Shiv's hand shouting slogans of the freedom movement awakening his countrymen to resist colonial rule. Whenever he gets into a controversial problem, he sees hallucination of his fathers' voice, "Shiv, do you imagine an ordinary man can't be a hero?" (Hariharan, "Times" 64). He wants to reconstruct his father's concept of freedom with his own reflection of truth which helps Shiv to win the battle against the fundamentalists.

Story-within-story is used as pedagogic discourse by Githa Hariharan to deconstruct the binary oppositions that operates as hegemonic power structures within society such as patriarchy, religious differences. Story telling is a post-modern strategy in the novels of Githa Hariharan, the narratives in her works are ironic in content as she revisions the interpretation of the age old tales.

The technique of storytelling in *The Thousand Faces of Night* connects the lives of Devi, Sita and Mayamma by bringing to forefront the subjugation of women through

the ages. The prelude sets the tone of the story: "I have always liked the story that comes whole and well-rounded, complete with annotation" (vii). In the novel Devi's grandmother, her first teacher; imparts her knowledge by narrating the tales of the forgotten women of the past - Damyanti, Gandhari, Amba, Ganga etc and preparing her, "with her stories and experiences for the awful life that awaits her as a woman." (Paranjape 160)

The stories of mythological women narrated by grandmother to Devi, portrays the life of women who protest against injustices meted out to them by unreasonable and strange patriarchal norms; and thereby, grandmother trains Devi's to face these unpredictable turns that life would lead her to. The stories are a panacea to Devi's wounds moreover the stories bring out the real status of Indian women since ages. "A woman meets her fate alone" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 28), "A woman without husband has no home" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 38), "A woman fights her battle alone," (Hariharan, "Thousand" 36) and "a woman gets her heart's desire by great cunning" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 20) - are the replies that grandmother gives to Devi whenever she raises queries regarding the suffering of women in the stories. "It is through (this) inspired tutelage of her grandmother that Devi's artistic vision is first unleashed and her creative yearnings are tenderly nurtured imparting a secret knowledge to her through a purposeful retelling of the tales of the forgotten women of the past." (Vijaysree 178)

Grandmother narrated the story of Gandhari who was given in marriage to Dhritarashtra - the Prince of Hastinapur. In her bridal ceremony Gandhari was impressed by the culture and the grandeur of Hastinapur, but she was heart-broken when she realizes that she was married to a blind man. Devi understands that Gandhari out of her wounded pride and as a sign of protest tore a piece of cloth and tied it tightly over her eyes and

blindfolded herself forever. Grandmother narrated the story of Gandhari when Devi saw a photograph and questioned if her mother would play the veena. Grandmother told Devi that her mother once used to play the veena but she gave it up forever to become a dutiful daughter-in-law. After listening to this interpretation of Gandhari's choice and its connection to her mother's sacrifice Devi says: "...the lesson I learnt was different ... it brought me five steps closer to adulthood" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 29).

Devi's grandmother finds parallel to the dilemma faced by ordinary women like Sita, Uma, Gauri, Devi with that of the mythical heroines who stand as symbols of heroism and suffering, "The link between their lives, thus, proves very vital one" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 30); thus, Devi learns that stories are meant to be revised and retold. Retelling a tale of the past thus turns into an act of restoration of the lost tradition. Amba, is an avenger, who challenged fate by avenging her offender, Bhishma. Ganga drowned her children and walked out of marriage when her husband broke his promise. Devi contemplates: "Amba's story or maybe it was Uma's made a deep impression on me, like an irresistible horror-film, and I day-dreamed more and more about female avengers" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 40).

Baba's stories led Devi further into the complexity of patriarchal philosophy. The story of Muthuswamy Dikshitar who had two wives clearly expresses the chauvinistic behaviour of men. Dikshitar's second wife asked for jewels to match her beauty. He said that when the Goddess Lakshmi was with him, why he should care for unworthy worldly happiness. The same night Goddess Ambika, came in her dream and the sight of the Goddess made her to forget her desire for ornaments. There is always less consideration for women's wishes and she always has to sacrifice for the sake of her husband or family.



By complementing upon her grandmother's stories, Devi empowered herself to make choices of her own. She says: "I have learnt how to wait, when to bend my back, when to wipe the rebellious eyes dry" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 126).

The stories told in the novel, brings out the fact that survival is the highest ideal in the struggle-ridden life of a woman. These stories rejuvenate a spirit of revolt in her mind. She now transforms herself into an active participant, viewing all the heroines as "a source of over-rich, unadulterated nourishment", and strives for her own story in her vision: "I was Devi: I rode a tiger and cut off all evil, magical demons." (Hariharan, "Thousand" 41)

The technique story-within-story does not lose its charm in the second novel of Hariharan – *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Vasu Master, a retired teacher, takes up the challenge to teach Mani, a slow learner and to facilitate the process tells him one fantastic story after the other as he faces the biggest challenge of healing Mani. Vasu Master retells the stories of Mangala, his grandmother, Jameela and his father; he has also included non-human characters like mouse, spiders and crows. "Her foray into the world of fable from which she returns to retell the lives of her human protagonists where the reader can hear the voice of her human characters in the tales of the mouse and the crow, the spider and the fly" (Roy 87).

The stories narrated by Vasu Master are meant not for mere amusement but to redress serious issues in the society. Through the stories Githa Hariharan has experimented a new technique in education; "Holistic healing, the polarization of the country and the concept and techniques of education from the gurukula system of ancient India to recent developments." (Seshadri). "History repeats itself as a twentieth century schoolmaster

emulates the methods of a venerable old teacher, Vishnu Sharma, to awaken the intelligence of his simpleton ward by presenting the ways of practical wisdom in the guise of simple stories, the magic mantra, as it were, for healing and teaching.” (Roy 28)

*When Dreams Travel*, the third novel of Hariharan, explores the story of the archetypal storyteller- Scherazade. Rama Kundu opines that *When Dreams Travel* is “... a fantastic book for anyone who is interested in telling stories and the how’s and why’s of storytelling ... reverberates with echoes from the text of the past and at the same time carves out daring lines of departure” (180). The most redeeming feature of storytelling in the novel is that the male characters in the novel keep listening and they repeat the stories they have heard, but it is women who invent them creatively.

Shahrazad, Dunyazad and Dilshad are the three main women story-tellers connected to each other by the strong inseparable bonds of family and friendship. Because of particular circumstances in their lives, “they understand the power, the pleasure and the responsibility of story-telling” and, each, in thier own way, “carries out this activity, as an entertaining gift for others, as wise lessons in life and as a form of empowerment to manipulate opponents.” (Bhanulakshmi 260)

Hariharan, divides the narrative into two parts: the first includes her retelling of the Arabian Nights story, and the second part contains tales told by Shahrazad. Memory plays a key role in storytelling as it manipulates history. Shahrazad has the potential to invent or to restructure a story. Shahrazad, the narrator of *The Arabian Nights*, has become an archetype for a story teller. She could feed the curiosity, retain suspense and thus hold her magic spell on the King through the stories that she narrated. Dilshad and Satyasama narrated stories from the Indian context. They present the male and female version of the

same story to emphasise that the fact that male narratives have been structured with the motto of suppressing women's emancipation and to keep them confined within the domestic sphere. John Barth calls "the effect of the regressus in infinitum produced by the story-within-a story, and the process whereby characters in a novel become authors or readers within the fiction, reminding us of the fictitious aspect of our existence." (189)

Githa Hariharan employs multiple narrators in her novels to present different reflections of truth and reality. Her novels are an amalgamation of multi-narratives wherein various characters narrate stories which reflect their perception of truth. Temporal distortion is employed by the novelist as the narration moves from the past to the present and then back to the past. The narration in postmodern fiction doesn't follow chronological sequence of narration, the time sequence is shattered as the narration has to incorporate the perspective of the multiple narrators. Her novels are open ended to enable the readers to participate in interpreting the intended meaning of the text. Another way of allowing the text for an open ended narrative is by "breaking up the text into short fragments or sections, separating by space, tittles, numbers or symbols" (Sim 127). The author in her interview with Anuradha Marwah says about the significance of the use of multiple narrators in her novels:

My novels would be impossible without plurality in many ways of narrative voices, alternative scenarios, and reinterpreted tales and so on. Perhaps, this is also a comment on the nature of the eternal tale. My novels have been, so far, preoccupied with the powers of the simple but not simplistic tale. And it is in the nature of these stories of all us hear and retell that they never finished. There is no authoritative version; they must be twisted and retold for our times and lives. (Hariharan)

Githa Hariharan has used the postmodern techniques such as pastiche, intertextuality, metafiction, temporal distortion, magical realism and so on. The novelist has presented a revisioning of myths, legends and history with sarcasm to point out that still emancipation of women and unity in our pluralistic society has not been achieved in the true spirit. Flashback technique, memory, dreams leads to temporal distortion thus the novel is narrated in nonlinear pattern. Magical realism blurs the difference between fantasy and reality to strike hard against the stark reality of the contemporary socio-political scenario. By presenting varied interpretation to the metanarratives the novelist attempts to deconstruct the hierarchies within the established institutions in society.

Githa Hariharan's fiction is treated as a critique of contemporary Indian life. She has made use of all the important postmodern narrative techniques in her works. She has been able to give voice to the sensibility of the marginalized groups like women, people with special abilities or slow learners, people from minority communities and the underprivileged people. She critiques the socio-cultural, political and historical aspect of Indian life.

Githa Hariharan depicts through her fiction that the differences such as gender, caste, class, religion, race and ethnicity affect the lives of the people adversely. Githa Hariharan's oeuvre is outstanding as it throws light on the psychology of the people who are marginalized in the society. It gives us idea of dissenting voices of those who want to decentre the privileged ones and liberate themselves from the hegemony of the established class of the people in the contemporary society.

Githa Hariharan has used postmodern techniques to subvert patriarchy. Her women characters are truly empowered. They are no more the marginalised voices; they are echoes of women who can accomplish great many things. As a postmodern feminist

writer Githa Hariharan has infused the ideal that women being empowered socially and economically can think rationally and chart out their life to accomplish their goals and to maintain dignity within the marital bond. Githa Hariharan has employed postmodern strategies to discuss the condition of women who struggle to assert their self-identity.

The decentered and fragmented subject of the 'Postmodern condition' is one which has been created, at least in part, by postmodernism itself ... It is present in much postmodern writing at least as a structure of feeling. Recent mature scholarship has shown why women are unlikely to have experienced history in this form. For, feminists, therefore, the goals of agency, personal autonomy, self-expression and self-determination, can neither be taken for granted nor written off as exhausted. They are ideals which feminism has helped to reformulate, modify and challenge. Feminism needs coherent subjects and has found a variety of ways of articulating them, which avoid the fetishisation of Pure Reason as the locus of subjecthood and the irrationalism born out of the perceived failure of this ideal.

(Waugh 125)

Githa Hariharan's novels establish her as a postmodern feminist presenting the problems of Indian women within the socio-cultural milieu. Through her writing she advocates social justice for the minorities, the marginalised and the underprivileged. Through her works the novelist has discussed social realities such as religious discrimination and religious fanaticism which is disrupting the democratic doctrine of our country. In the process of revisioning mythology to suit the tenets of contemporary feminist ideology, the novelist makes it crystal clear that mythologies based on Indian epics have been

ingrained in the cultural ethos of our country. Her novels awaken a concern among the readers regarding gender disparity, religious intolerance and raising fundamentalist philosophy in the contemporary society which might be detrimental to the development and unity of the country. By deconstructing the accepted interpretation of mythology, history and legends the novelist attempts to create a just society where secular values are followed with the true spirit. The past has a significant impact on the present as the myths, history find significance and provide meaning to the present dilemmas.

This thesis proves that Githa Hariharan has employed postmodern narrative techniques to discuss various societal problems such as women's struggle against patriarchy, to refute the claims of raising extremism and fundamentalism and to give voice to the repressed section of the society. There is always a tussle between individual conscience and the societal rules and regulations. Githa Hariharan has written with the motto of enticing the readers with social consciousness and to ingrain in them the spirit of oneness as Indians and to stand up to the cause of social justice.

The ensuing researchers who are willing to work on this author shall delve deep into the sea of the thoughts, emotions and feelings imparted in Githa Hariharan's fiction and analyse her works from the perspective of postmodern feminism, social realism and psychological analysis.