

Chapter II

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The Thousand Faces of Night– Revision of Metanarratives

Postmodern reading proposes deconstructing the meaning established by metanarratives thus enabling diverse interpretation. Postmodernism destabilises the traditional authority enjoyed by the myths and has developed “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). According to John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, a metanarrative, “is a global or totalizing cultural narrative schema which orders and explains knowledge and experience” (6). The prefix ‘meta’ means beyond and ‘narrative’ refers to stories; metanarrative means stories designed to create a totalizing effect which are integrated as part of the cultural construct of a society. The postmodern era being more scientific and rational in temper has rejected to accept the traditional belief systems. Postmodernism is a pejorative term that refers to loss of authority in the established institutions wherein the strong hold of the metanarratives is questioned. “Postmodern discourses are all deconstructive in that they seek to distance us from and make us sceptical about beliefs concerning truth, knowledge, power, the self, and language that are taken for granted within, and serve as legitimation for, contemporary Western culture” (Flax 41).

Meta narration and metafiction are umbrella terms designating self-reflexive utterances, i.e. comments referring to the discourse rather than to the story. Although they are related and often used interchangeably, the terms should be distinguished: meta narration refers to the narrator’s reflections on the act or process of narration; metafiction concerns comments on the fictionality and/or constructedness of the narrative. Thus, whereas meta fictionality designates the quality of disclosing the fictionality of a narrative, meta

narration captures those forms of self-reflexive narration in which aspects of narration are addressed in the narratorial discourse, i.e. narrative utterances about narrative rather than fiction about fiction.” (Neumann)

Metanarrative includes classical mythology, historical account of legendary heroes which have gained universality and has shaped the value system of a culture. Postmodernism attempts to deconstruct the ideological imperatives established by the metanarratives so that it suits the present context and address the problematics of the present age. In this novel Githa Hariharan has attempted to revision Indian mythology and folklore to address the predicament of women by deconstructing the meaning of metanarratives as the pedestal of patriarchal ideology. Feminist revision of mythology by the novelist proves that the society has acquired cultural sensitivity towards women’s autonomy. “One of the major components of postmodernism is the decanonization of all existing master codes, conventions, institutions and authorities. Any text that tries to displace the dominant discourse becomes postmodern” (Kottiswari 2)

Mythopoeic literature is defined as a modern literary genre envisaged and developed by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis in the 20th century. Mythopoeic literature encompasses fairytales, folklore and mythology. Mythopoeia is very closely associated with the postmodern literary theory. Mythopoeia or the art of myth-making through story telling is essential to restructure the past myths to suit the contemporary social ethics. Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* has revisioned the import of ancient myth, specifically to suit the cultural construct of the postmodern readers. Her concern is “not with myth as a traditional content or as a means of literary organization. It is rather with the underlying outlook that creates myth; or, more precisely again, sees the world in mythic terms” (Bell 1-2).

Mythology adds credibility and insists the universality of human predicament from time immemorial. The word ‘myth’ comes from the Greek word ‘mythos’ which means ‘story’. Myth always has symbolic significance and represents the quintessence of the cultural heritage. Myths are like pearls of wisdom that guide and enrich one’s life. Myth encapsulates wisdom of the human race. Myths are symbolic, metaphorical narrative which is steeped in religious rituals, culture and tradition.

Myth is a form of poetry which transcends poetry in that it proclaims a truth: a form of reasoning which transcends reasoning in that it wants to bring about the truth it proclaims; a form of action, of ritual behaviours, which does not find fulfillment in that act but proclaims a poetic form of truth. (Frankfort 16)

In the present postmodern the word myth has acquired a new connotation and significance. Myth are mostly symbolic tales through which one can connect to the distant past and relate it to the present problems. “The very idea of postmodernist mythopoeia seems paradoxical. Presumably, mythical narratives presuppose an attitude of belief in their auditors, while postmodernist narratives typically go out of their way to foreground their fictionality and ‘demythologize’ themselves” (Polanski).

Through myths the culture, history and reality of the era are evident. The mythological discourse is always male – centred such that mythological stories have represented feats of masculine prowess, whereas there is no representation of feminine prowess. Myths are employed as a powerful tool to subjugate women. Through mythology the patriarchal norms have been reinstated in the society. The masculine narratology highlights the superiority of men over women. Only a feminine perspective of interpreting myths can

unravel or justify the authentic reason behind the mythic characters behaviour in a unique situation. This attitude of writing made the feminist writers to look at the women characters in a different lens which captures them as all powerful. This magnificent portrayal necessitates re-reading and revision of myths, this facilitates the representation of the women from feminine point of view. Meenakshi comments about Githa Hariharan's attempt to reinterpret myth thus: "That to reinterpreting myth and legend in the service of themes and issues dearest to her heart. She makes her concerted use of myth and folk tale to enlarge the lives of "real" people, especially women". (112)

Feminism emerged as a kind of protest movement and covered the vast sphere of life. The oxford advanced learners dictionary defines the term 'Feminism' as "the belief and aim that woman should have the same rights and opportunities as men and the struggle to achieve this aim".

Feminism is a politics. It is a politics directed at changing existing power relations between men and women in society. These power relations structure all areas of life, the family, education and welfare, the worlds of work and politics, culture and leisure. They determine who does what and for whom, what we are and what we might become. (Weedon 1)

Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* employs feminist revision of mythology to bring out the quintessence of womanhood in the postmodern era. She attaches more importance to the status of women who have been entangled in the web of patriarchy. Indian culture insists that women are always destined to male domination. Githa Hariharan observes the plight of woman living in the shadow of male domination and their loss of self-identity. She wants to infuse a new lease of life into the self-respecting modern

women. A surging urge for liberation which has been kept dormant in the psyche of women for many centuries keeps reverberating through the characters created by Githa Hariharan. She delves deep into the female psyche and mirrors the feminine quest for self-realisation.

Feminists, like postmodernists, have sought to develop new paradigms of social criticism which do not rely on traditional philosophical underpinnings. They have criticized modern foundationalist epistemologies and moral and political theories, exposing the contingent, partial, and historically situated character of what has passed in the mainstream for necessary, universal, and a historical truths. They have called into question the dominant philosophical project of seeking objectivity in the guise of a "God's eye view" which transcends any situation or perspective. (Fraser and Linda 26)

The postmodern feminist writers indeed wanted to elevate the social status of woman in the family as well as in the society. Githa Hariharan being a postmodern writer has very consciously captured the anger, grief and the frustration that women face in the male dominated society. Michael Foucault points out, "All knowledge is contextually bound and produce within a field of shifting power relations was a formula of the rise of feminism proclaimed" (Leavy 89). In this age of globalization, women still remain victims in the domestic sphere. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is an epitome of the feminine quest for identity. The three women characters in this novel who try to realize their self are prototypes of Indian women in desperate search for self-identity.

Indian women's identity is one that is usually connected to and denied by the societal and cultural norms of a particular familial structure. This identity is denied within the parameters of their social relationship to men. They are traditional conservative, and therefore they are reluctant to cross the 'Laxman rekha' of their family and culture. They are regarded as preserver of essential nationalist spirit. They are to smile always, welcome their guest and entertain them, care for their family performing all household duties and if there is any pain, they are to hide it behind their veil. They are to become true symbol of Indian tradition and culture. Thus, Indian women become a metaphor for purity, chastity and sanctity of the ancient spirit that is in India. The national construct of Indian women attributes to the spiritual qualities of self-sacrifice, devotion, and religiosity and so on. Consequently anything that threatens to dilute this model of Indian womanhood, constitutes a betrayal of all that. (Chandra 22)

Githa Hariharan has revisioned myth in this novel to unravel gender inequality and socialization of women to accept patriarchy as a social norm which project women as confused, disappointed and completely frustrated. By rewriting myth, Githa Hariharan gives a glimpse of unjust portrayal of women in canonical texts such as mythology. Patriarchy is still an obstacle to women's liberation and development. In the modern world where women move ahead by their merit in the social sphere yet patriarchy creates hindrance for women to march forward. Patriarchial society gives absolute power and priority to men and narrows down women's opportunity for success. Githa Hariharan reinforces the importance of women by rewriting and revisioning myth.

Re-vision – the art of looking back until we understand seeing with fresh eyes of entering the old text from a new critical direction is for women more than a chapter in cultural history. It is an act of survival until we understand the assumptions in which in, we are drenched. We cannot know our selves. And this dive to self-knowledge for women is more than a search for identity. (Rich 18)

Githa Hariharan has adopted the narrative technique of rewriting myth because mythical stories are stamped in our consciousness from ancient time. Through revisioning myths, the writer explores new shades of meaning to support women empowerment. By rewriting myth, she tries to instill in every woman a set of values which will definitely make women realize their potential to reach their intellectual horizon with profound sensibility. Re-vision or rewriting myth is a genuine attempt to rediscover a space for women amidst the male dominated narratology. Githa Hariharan has reinstated appropriate cultural consciousness by analysing the gaps or dark space in the original rendering of the myth that had subdued the authentic emotions of women characters.

The novel presents the lives of three women Devi, Sita and Mayamma. All these three characters are oppressed and subjugated by men. By rewriting and retelling of the myths, Githa Hariharan highlights the emotional turmoil of her characters in the novel. The life of the three women belonging to different generation presented in the novel highlight the society's patriarchal pattern. The story begins with Devi, a young girl who is pursuing her education in American returns to India before being steeped into the western culture. After marriage she finds very difficult to cope up with her husband Mahesh. He works in a multinational company and is most of the time on business tour.

She feels completely isolated and experiences a sense of alienation. Every woman expects that her life partner will provide protection, love, compatibility and solace. She has her own expectations and waits to lead a very happy life with mutual understanding and affection. But the harmony of the married life is lost in the life of Devi. She ultimately suffers disappointment and frustration. Devi suffers an identity crisis and feels her individuality remains lost in the labyrinth of marriage. She feels confined in the social institution of marriage and decides to come out of the shackles of marital bond.

Having arrived in India, Devi realised her mother's intention of arranging her marriage through swayamvara. Devi's mother, "weaves a cocoon a secure womb" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 13); protecting and guiding her daughter in all her endeavors. This wedding arrangement makes Devi recollect her grandmother's story of swayamara of Damayanthi an excerpt taken from the Mahabharata. It was a day of celebration, a long procession of Kings, Princes entered the lofty portals and were waiting for the beautiful Princess to arrive and garland them. Damayanthi, the most beautiful Princess entered the splendid hall and walked slowly and stopped near the King of the Nishadas and garlanded him. She decided her own fate by choosing Nala as her husband. Grandmother replied "a woman gets heart desire by great cunning" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 20). Through the story of Swayamwara of Damayanthi, the novelist courts the comparison to the predicament of women. This story reminds Devi how she chose her husband Mahesh. Devi recollects: "For many summers, I thrived on a diet of her caressing gnarled fingers and her stories of golden splendour" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 27). Though Devi is not interested in the wedding she gives her consent for the sake of her mother. Devi was fascinated by the story of Nala –Damayanthi and she formulated her understanding of Swayamwara as a culture

which makes everyone overwhelmed with joy, but with her Swayamvara, she clearly accepted it was all a customary humbug.

Devi's mind is preoccupied with the story she heard from her grandmother. Every summer she visited her grandmother and listened to various mythical stories. Grandmother's stories prepared Devi morally to face the setbacks and challenges in life. Grandmother's stories are a prologue to womanhood. It has rich and valuable lessons to teach the younger generation that lacks the qualities of endurance, patience and perseverance.

Grandmother's mythical stories add a special flavor and splendor to the novel. Devi says:

My grandmother stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question but her answers were not simple they had to be decoded. A comparison has to be made, illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out. Like the sugar shapes she made for me, a rich, over-sweet syrup that was magically transformed over the fire into ornamented little elephants, swans with each feather delicately etched, her stories fashioned moulds. Ideal moulds, impossibly ambitious, that challenged the puny listener to sketch her frame and fit into the vast space, line up to her illustrious ancestors.(Hariharan, "Thousand" 27)

Devi has a very receptive mind that she correlates the mythical characters with the situation she encounters in her life. She observes: "I lived a secret life of my own: I became a women warrior, a heroine, I was Devi, I rode a tiger, and cut off evil magical demon heads" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 41).Githa Hariharan has in-fact infused a new lease of life to the

mythical stories narrated by the grandmother. “Devi thinks her grandmother has inherited the art of story telling and she knew how to twist it, turned it inside out, and cooked up her own home-made yardsticks of life” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 20). Grandmother becomes a passive character and her mythical stories are inseparable such that they move with the action and development of the plot. As Marie-Lousie von Franz puts it,

If an individual has wrestled seriously enough and long enough with the anima (or animus) problem so that he or she, is no longer partially identified with it, the unconscious again changes its dominant character and appears in a new symbolic form, representing the Self, the innermost nucleus of the psyche. In the dreams of a woman this center is usually personified as a superior female figure – a priestess, sorceress, earth mother, or goddess of nature or love. In the case of a man, it manifests itself as a masculine initiator or guardian (an Indian guru), a wise old man, a spirit of nature, and so forth. (qtd. in Lockerd 32)

Devi tries to accommodate to the new life and settles down in Bangalore. In the beginning she finds everything comfortable, and keeps herself happy in the presence of her father-in-law, Baba and the care taker Mayamma. Whenever Devi feels lonely and isolated, she recollects the stories of her grandmother as a deliverance from the present alienation. As a small child, she did not understand the impact of the mythical stories, but with age and experience she relates the mythical characters to the real life situations and finds a very wide gap which can be never bridged. She would often recollect the happy childhood life she enjoyed in the grandmother’s home.

Thus, we lived ordinary lives most of the year, in a house Amma filled with her mottoes, the words I heard most often from her as I was growing up: order, reason, and progress. But every summer we lived another life with my grandmother It was also richer, irresistible; through her I fell in love with the God-like heroes and heroines whose stories were real, more real, to her than our own. (Hariharan, "Thousand" 26)

During one of her visits to grandmother's house Devi noticed an old photo of her mother Sita, playing veena. Immediately grandmother drew a comparison of Gandhari, a mythical character and Sita's mother. Although Devi was too small to understand she simply listened to it. Grandmother said: "Do you know about Gandhari, little one? Listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 28).

Gandhari entered a grand palace with the expectation that she will be the Queen enjoying all the prosperity and her joy knew no bounds and she was very eager to meet her husband Dhritarashtra. When he comes to the portal, she is taken aback as he is blind. Gandhari did not expect such a disappointing wedding and was shocked. She saw, "the white eyes, the pupils glazed and useless" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 29). In a fit of anger, Gandhari bound her eyes with a veil and pledged not to see the world again. "In her pride, her anger, Gandhari said nothing-lips straight and thin with fury. Gandhari was just another willful proud woman. She embraced her destiny-a blind husband-with self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 29).

Devi is shocked and convinced by the reply of her grandmother, but later Devi learnt that Gandhari bound her eyes not because of her royal blood but because of fuming

unquenchable anger and deceit she received in the royal family. She never wanted to see the world which cheated her considerably.

From her grandmother Devi learnt that her mother used to play veena very beautifully. One day she was completely lost in playing veena, her father-in-law scolded her for not completing the domestic work and rebuked her thus; “Put that veena away, Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?”(Hariharan, “Thousand” 30). Thus instigated Sita pulled off the strings and henceforth stopped playing the veena. Devi understood that like Gandhari’s self sacrifice, her mother also sacrificed her most favorite veena for the sake of becoming a dutiful daughter-in-law and wife. Grandmother recollects:

Sita hung her head over the veena for a minute that seemed to stretch for ages, enveloping in an unbearable silence. Then she reached for the strings of her precious veena and pulled them out of the wooden base. They came apart with a discordant twang of protest. We never saw her touch the veena again. She became a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbors praised, and our household never heard that heart-rending music again. (Hariharan, “Thousand” 30)

Thus Sita is a stereotype of an ideal woman who lives and adapts to live in a patriarchal setup. She never questions but readily accepts her fate. She willingly gives up her individuality and happiness for the sake of the family. Gita Hariharan says her idea in incorporating the scene as:

...but what I am suggesting in the book is that she does it out of anger.

Then that story, and the anger that motivates Gandhari deliberate blindness is

linked with Devi's mother's blindness in the sense of giving up a talent that she has, giving up her music for the sake of her marriage. (Nasta 23)

Devi's father-in-law is a typical example of the patriarchal culture. His stories put forth the defined rules for women and their duties for being a perfect daughter, wife and mother. He blindly believed Manu, the archetypal first man of the human race. His fame rests as the legendary author of Hindu religious law, the Manusmriti. Baba was deeply absorbed in the Vedas and Sanskrit hymns. Being a follower of Manu, Baba fits well into the norm of patriarchy. Baba asserts that women are not to interrogate and demand a reason or pick up argument with men. He formulates perfect parameters for being a good wife. He gives a perfect picture of an ideal womanhood thus:

The path a woman must walk to reach heaven, says Baba, is a clear, well-lit one. The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting, by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens. On the death of her husband, the chaste wife established in continence, reaches heaven, even if childless, like students who have practiced self-control. (Hariharan, "Thousand" 55)

Baba often reminded Devi that a wife has to be very modest only then she can walk into the kingdom of heaven. According to Baba's a wife is supposed to be selfless, loyal and devoted to her husband. Baba narrates the story of Saintly Syama Sastri. The saint had had two wives, his first wife died before the death of the saint. It was considered that a virtuous wife will die before her husband. On her death bed she called upon twelve married women for the feast. After the feast, she gifted them bangles, kumkum, turmeric and betel leaves with areca nuts. After performing these rituals, she slowly embraced

death. This belief paved way for the understanding that those failed to fulfill the above norms are considered as sinful woman. The second wife wanted to do something unique to express her virtuousness. Hence Devi says,

Baba's stories remind me of my grandmother but they are also different. Her stories were prelude to my womanhood a limitation into subterranean possibilities. His define the limits. His stories are for woman who has already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear. (Hariharan, "Thousand" 51)

These stories narrated by Baba were male narratives that were structured in such a way that women remain submissive to men. Women did not question the wise sayings in the Vedas; they blindly strived to incorporate the image of the virtuous. But Devi realised that the modern women are vested with more power and grace to rewrite their life by recreating the concept of womanhood by themselves. Women who were accepting the indifference meted out to them have started to question the society about the meaning of womanhood. The stories narrated by Baba make Devi to understand that Mahesh and Baba are representatives of the patriarchal society.

Father-in-law's stories are almost entirely in the perspective mode of instilling patriarchy. They're meant for a virtuous woman who is obviously a wife about to produce a child. It's all very neat: these are the boundaries and you can't step out. In grandmother's stories- which tells us why I think they hold the key to the novel – all kinds of possibilities are there. The possibility of subversion because everything is double edged and things

are not always what they are ; not always what they seem; and there's irony. (Sorensen 43)

Mahesh expects his wife to be subservient and obedient. When Devi wanted to learn Sanskrit to understand Baba's interpretation of religious discourse, Mahesh dissuades her by telling that the English translations are good enough. "When she wants to look out for a job, he snubs her asking what she would do "When the baby comes" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 65). Mahesh's disapproval and humiliating remarks aggravated her frustration; to add fuel to the fire when he said, "this is what comes of educating a woman your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman than you are" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 74).

Devi being left alone in the house with Mayamma, the old house keeper after Mahesh's departure to NewYork feels lonely. Devi says, "but a wife needs her husband not her father-in-law or her father" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 68). The sense of loneliness overwhelms her and threatens her existence. Devi expresses her existential angst thus,

The sacrificial knife, marriage, hung a few inches above my neck for years, and I see now that I had learnt to love, to covet my tormentor. I am still a novice in the more subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear rip across my neck, and let the blood gush, the passion of the sacrifice whole, all en-compassing. (Hariharan, "Thousand" 54).

Devi remembers the mythical belief in Kritya who would avenge men who ill-treated women. "I read about a Kritya, ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. She burns with anger, she spits fire. She sets the

world ablaze like Kali shouting in hunger. Each age has its Kritya. In the age of Kali I read each household shelter a Kritya” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 69-70).

Devi keeps introspecting more often about her present condition and her necessity to depend on Mahesh who is inconsiderate. With utmost desperation she says, “I am a wooden puppet in his hands, I stand by him, a silent wife, my wet saree clinging to me like a parasite” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 83-84). Devi considers that her marriage with Mahesh is an absolute failure because her education has left her unprepared for her married life which demanded her to make a lot of compromises. As Suman Singh has observed,

It is evident that Devi expected marriage to be perfect unification of two individuals. But Mahesh, like most of the Indian men took marriage to be a social responsibility. Devi soon begins to feel an awesome loneliness and a kind of uselessness creeps into her. Under such mental condition, she makes Gopal in whom, she feels she could seek her unfulfilled feminine desires. She wanders with him for a few months but soon gets disillusioned.
(qtd in Sidiqii 27)

Devi is totally disappointed with her married life and moreover Mahesh, never tried to understand and respect her desires. When she wanted to go to work to break the monotony of being left alone at home, he never allowed her. He only insists her to be a perfect wife performing domestic chores. He is a perfect and a typical symbol of male chauvinism. He often felt that the women who are not literate like Mayamma are happier and lead a contented life without grievances. This excruciating remark humiliates and reminds Devi she is indeed helpless and struggling to climb the rungs of the ladder to

reach her ultimate destination as an ideal wife. Devi finds it difficult to identify her position in the male dominated society; she can neither define her identity as a wife nor as a girl who is educated in the United State of America. She stands totally fragmented in her identity.

Devi wants to have a child and craves for motherhood. She thinks that at least a baby will give her a meaning and purpose to her life. “An American-returned Devi suffers the same humiliation that Mayamma, an illiterate, ignorant village woman, did a few decades ago. The only change is that modern woman is humiliated through modern technology – “smear”, “injection” and fertility centre” (Khan 138). After the humiliation, she reluctantly accompanies him for a checkup. Devi hence in despair accompanies Mahesh and also recollects, “Now I am really a woman a mother in my receding past, a husband before me. Now I must follow his self- contained foot prints, with clumsy feet that stumble at sharp edges and curves” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 84).

Githa Hariharan throws light on the plight of women whose confidence and strong will is shaken to the core and reduced to nothing after marriage. Earlier, Devi dreams of getting married to a passionate husband to whom she would love to bear many children. She remembers, “I dreamt often of a god-like hero, a hero who flew effortlessly across the night sky, and who guided me gently when he saw my own desperate desire to fly with him” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 46). This clearly holds mirror of the life Devi expected to live after marriage but in reality she lives a life completely devoid of warmth, care and affection from her husband. Devi strongly decides to deprive him of fatherhood as an act of revenge for his baseless humiliating rebukes. Gita Hariharan personally feels in one of her interviews:

Motherhood is not something that is pretty tender or even the other side of motherhood that we talk about, which is the first year of giving up your job and sitting at home with the baby, and these are times when you want to throw the baby out. The boredom and the desperation and the loneliness that is legitimate. (Sorenson)

Devi takes a drastic step of deserting Mahesh as she is unable to bear the mental agony further. She recollects the story of King Shantanu told by her grandmother when she was very young. The story failed to create a big impact as Devi was a little girl, but thrown at the situation, she was able to discern greater relevance. King Shantanu Shantanu was hunting at the bank of the River Ganga. He saw Goddess Ganga and fell in love with her. She readily accepted his love but on a condition that he should not question her actions. The King agreed and they were happily married. The kingdom was eagerly awaiting the birth of the Prince. When the child was born, Ganga carried their son towards the river. The King followed her and was confused at her act of drowning of her own son. The King was tongue tied because of his promise. One after the other Ganga drowned their sons. The King was grief stricken and could not any longer withstand the death of his own children and Shantanu protested and demanded a reply for her cruel action. The pretty queen tells him: "Then take him and be the father and mother to him. I shall not free him from life" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 88). Saying this she plunged into the river and drowned to purify her own sins. Like Ganga, Devi decides to desert Mahesh. She feels that Mahesh should be left with no wife and child like King Shantanu. She wants to repay Mahesh for all humiliations she had faced. Devi now understood the true essence of motherhood. She says, "To be a good mother, to be a mother at all, you have to earn

the title, just as you have to renew your wifely vows every day” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 89). Like Ganga drowning herself to cleanse her sins, Devi drowns herself into the waves of Gopal’s music of and accompanies him.

All the bedtime stories that Devi listened from her grandmother had no relevance when she was a child. She recollects the stories and finds a new connotation in the present scenario. Gauri is a servant in grandmother’s household and she works hard to save money for her wedding as every groom asked for dowry. Devi remembers, “She had been working to build a little pile of dowry-gold, chain by chain, bangle by bangle” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 31). Some years later she comes back to her grandmother’s house in the hope to be employed again, but Devi’s grandmother sends her away without sympathy. Gauri deserts her husband because she was very badly treated. This growing hatred towards her husband resulted in an illicit relationship with her brother-in-law. Devi’s grandmother immediately comes out with the fitting story as an answer to Gauri’s fate. Grandmother tells, “It’s never their fault it’s always ours” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 33). Grandmother is of the view that women have to shoulder the blame when the marital bond is broken beyond redemption.

The parallel story that grandmother narrates to Gauri’s life is about a snake-man who gets married to a beautiful girl. Everybody wants the girl not to marry the snake-man. But she is very devoted and steadfast in her decision that she immediately gives her consent to marry him. To everyone one’s surprise, the snake-man is transformed into a handsome young man. Grandmother tells, “Her loving hands and her devotion are seemingly the reason why the snake turns into the sweet-smelling youth” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 34). The above story clearly narrated by the grandmother tells that, “a girl is given only once

in Marriage” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 33) and that she has to accept her husband in any form. And it is her duty to serve the husband with care which would certainly transform even a beast into a man.

According to the grandmother, the role of wife is to accept the husband as he is and the wife is expected to show absolute loyalty to her man. Devi realizes that women can no longer tolerate a man who keeps harassing her psychologically and physically. So she supported Gauri for her very bold decision of leaving her tormenting husband and accompanying her lover. Later, in her own life also, Devi chooses Gopal for Mahesh. Through Devi, Githa Hariharan observes that modern woman can no longer tolerate emotional and psychological torments meted out by their male counterparts. They step out boldly and interrogate rather than embrace the monotonous life. Devi wages a rightful protest to set a firm space for her.

Githa Hariharan has interceded the plot with parallel story from mythology to bridge the gap between the past beliefs and present reality. Uma’s dreadful experience is associated with the situation encountered by the mythic character Amba. Uma, elder cousin of Devi is married into a family where she has to put up with a drunken husband and father-in-law. She is very badly treated by both father and son that she leaves her family as Gauri did. There are many similarities between the lives of Uma and Amba. The only difference is that Uma could not go against the wishes of her husband and father-in-law, but Amba, a very famous mythological character undergoes deep penance to take revenge on those who tarnished her prospects of leading a happy life. Amba, the Princess sheds her womanhood and becomes a man named Shikandi to avenge her enemies.

Yes.... This is the twist, because in the so-called literary tradition you have stories that are double edges. So, on the other hand, you have the woman who is seen as someone who can even bring back to life and you have several stories to that effect ... of other possibilities, whether it's escape or subversion, whether it's a woman turning into a man, for instance, to get revenge on someone who rejected her, or a woman committing infanticide. (Nasta 23)

Amba's story once again highlights the patriarchal setup. Amba is abducted by Bheeshma, in her swayamvara, when she returns to King Salwa, he did not accept her saying "I don't feast on left overs" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 38). This attitude of King Salwa infuriates Amba and so she asks Bheesma to marry her. But Bheeshma rejects her as he cannot break his vow of celibacy. These words of both the men provoke her consistently and this probably makes her to undergo deep penance and receive a boon from Lord Shiva to destroy Bheeshma. Devi manifests these patterns of heroism of Amba as an inspiration and imagines herself as a feminine warrior. Her fantasy makes her to land in a utopia governed only by female forces that avenge the atrocities done by men.

I travelled far and wide, a right womanly youth in my disguise of armour, here making the devouring body for life, there putting out with one swift arrow the evil eye. After a while, men whispered to each other of the bloody trail that dripped on my path. They called me an incarnation of Durga, walking the earth to purge it of fat-jowled, slimmy-tailed agreed.
(Hariharan, "Thousand" 43)

The more Mahesh expects her to be perfect housewife, she is driven by her rising consciousness to think of her own worth as an individual. In mythology, Mahesh is one of the names for Lord Shiva and Devi refers to Shakthi, a varied manifestation of the Goddess. Devi represents the existential crisis of modern women. Devi's existential crisis is induced because of the psychological trauma she undergoes after marriage and she becomes obsessed with too many unanswered questions about meaning of life and existence. Simon Beauvoir's analysis of oppression of women is based on the following principles:

(1) Woman in patriarchal society is defined as man's Other. She is immanence (passivity, objectification) and he is transcendence (activity, striving, subject-being).

(2) There is no such thing as a female nature, no essence of womanhood. All theories of the 'ewig Weibliche' or 'eternal feminine' are patriarchal mystifications. (qtd. in Moi)

Devi's feels like a caged bird deprived to taste the fruit of freedom. In an utter despair she takes a very brave decision like her mother-in law Parvathamma, to walk out of the house. Devi decides not to yield and become submissive but to revolt. She has a kind of courage that makes her not to become blind like Gandhari. The anger and the irrevocable blow that she resisted all these years made her to become very egoistic like mythological characters Amba and Ganga. Devi wanted to give him a blow from which he can never come out. Hence to humiliate Mahesh she elopes with Gopal. She wanted to establish a happy relationship with Gopal, but that attempt also turns out to be a mirage. In utter despair, she says: "I have no husband or lover only their blissful ambiguity of

darkness, filled with raga that reaches higher and higher beyond the earth-bound demands of passion” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 129). After the disappointed affair with Gopal, Devi is not shattered and broken, once again manifested with a strong will power and overwhelming confidence, she goes to her mother to rediscover her new identity.

Sita, Devi’s mother is more practical down to earth woman. She is a trained veena player. After her marriage with Mahadevan, Sita goes with veena to her in laws house. She used to play veena and her musical talent was greatly appreciated. One day the same enchanting divine music invites the anger of her father-in-law. She never expected such insult that she immediately pulled the strings and stopped playing veena. Sita can be accepted as the modern version of Gandhari’s personification of self-sacrifice. But Devi is able to observe a kind of an unnoticed unique difference between Gandhari and Sita. Sita is very soft spoken and does not utter a word, when rebuked but Gandhari protested rightfully for the injustice. Devi explains:

I listened to my grandmother’s interpretation of Gandhari’s choice, but the lesson I learnt was different. The lesson brought me five steps closer to adulthood. I saw, for the first time that my parents were afflicted by a kind of blindness. In their blinkered world they would always be one, one leading the other, one hand always in the grasp of another. (Hariharan, “Thousand” 29)

Sita is tailor-made and takes up her role as a perfect wife. She gets rid of all the disturbing ideas and assists her husband. In fact her blemishless attitude made Mahadevan feel very proud and he said that Sita is a precious jewel to him who did not complain and willingly made many sacrifices. When Devi was born, Sita’s joy knew no bound, she said “I found a new veena to play and this time she was not going to give it up so easily”

(Hariharan, “Thousand” 53). She is a gentle woman who was not led astray by dreams and fantasy. Devi recollects:

My mother was not moved by the noble life of the Gods. She frowned at my dreamy, inspired eyes which sought something beyond the mundane, literal world she arranged in neat, dust-free pigeon- holes around me. She said to my father, “This has gone far enough. Your picture books, her feeble-minded fairy stories of Gods and Goddesses. I want no more of these fantasies. The girl is almost a woman. She must stop dreaming now”. (Hariharan, “Thousand” 45)

Sita does not lose her determination after her husband Mahadevan suddenly died in Africa. She sends her daughter to USA to complete her higher studies. Devi calls her mother as “always anchor-rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self-evident fact of our existence” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 16).

Sita receives a letter from Mahesh stating that Devi has eloped. Sita feels, “So, this was what I reaped after many years of sacrifice” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 108). Sita understood that Devi would have decided to walk out of the married life because of her incompatibility with Mahesh. After a calm introspection she writes a letter to Mahesh “no scandal please” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 109). As per Sita’s expectation; Devi returns to her mother with a hope of starting a new life.

As Devi enters her mother’s house, she finds the house reverberating with the faint raga of veena “hesitant and childlike, inviting her into the house” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 139). The rhythm of veena signifies a new, positive life and synergy between Sita and Devi. The music of veena symbolises the renewal of relationship. Devi craves

for the motherly touch when she comes to India from USA but she did not experience it at that moment. Now with her second home coming the mother and daughter experience an ecstasy and joy which can never be explained in words. Hence Sita chooses to play the mesmerizing tune to express her excitement. Both their eyes are welled up with the tears of happiness and both rediscover their lost identity. Devi thinks, “She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her love. To stay and fight, no make sense of it at all, she would have to start from the very beginning” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 139).

Mayamma recounts her painful story of her survival to Devi. Mayamma was married at an early age of twelve to a useless drunkard. Her mother-in-law examined Mayamma very closely before she arranged marriage with her son. After Mayamma’s marriage, “She watches Mayamma’s slim waist intently for the first year and second year, she breaks into complaints” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 80). She abuses Mayamma very badly, “and she demands her by saying, ‘fill the cup with the blood from your breast and bathe the lingam’” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 113). Devi is surprised that Mayamma endured such unbearable torture.

Mayamma’s mother-in-law treated her very cruelly. She forces Mayamma to observe fasting every other day and to do all hard and rigid penance to alter her horoscope and change the movement of stars. “Mayamma welcomes her penance like an old friend. What also would keep the coming eye still?” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 80). Her prayers were more like a penance. Mayamma’s unstinting prayer was answered. One day the Goddess she had prayed blesses her womb. She remembers, “Then the blood came, too

soon too soon. No expense was spared; my husband wanted the new village doctor, not the midwife” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 122).

Mayamma’s husband deserted her taking away all the money she kept at home. The son was only the replica of her husband. He grew up into a boy without affection and abused and tormented her. Her son was seriously ill and died unexpectedly. Mayamma was left alone without anybody; she wept very bitterly for her ill-fate. She realized that she lost her youth, her husband and her useless son. She understood the role that fate played in her life which had snatched away all happiness. Devi understood the sad life of Mayamma.

Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood. Well before she had learnt to serve she had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, firsthand she had no choices really? She had coveted birth, endured life, nursed death. And she had won some small victory-if you could call it by such grand name- through that ragged belief she carried within her. She snarls and sulks, thought Devi with wonder, but she has no bitterness. (Hariharan, “Thousand” 136)

Mayamma recollects with gratitude and unfailing memory of Parvathiamma, she says, “From that day Devi, Parvathi amma was my sister, my mother, my daughter but they all leave, child, no one stays long enough” (Hariharan, “Thousand” 82). Mayamma is shaken when Parvathiamma decides to leave the home to seek God’s splendid blessings. Parvathiamma was religiously inclined and left for Kasi to attain salvation. Mayamma once again musters courage and surprisingly leads the whole family.

Mayamma readily accepts her shortcomings as fate. Mayamma's curses her badluck but never questions nor tries to alter her situation. She silently and boldly faces the cruelty that patriarchal society has ordained for women. She faces a severe blow from fate, but she regains and bounces back to face the varied trials. Women need to have the mental strength and poise to endure the fate and its subsequent consequences. Mayamma has the above quality and that is why, she blesses Devi when she leaves the house, saying "Seek the river, miles away, where the dark forest gives way to a clear transparent flood of light" (Hariharan, "Thousand" 126).

Mayamma is the representative of the traditional patriarchal society. She readily embraces the law of Manu, which instructs that men are superior and woman are bound to serve their family. On the other hand, Devi is very bold and rebellious and she cannot imagine herself becoming a prey to the male domination. This indeed makes Devi to brave Mahesh and accompany Gopal and later to live an independent life with her widowed mother Sita. Sita stands divided between the two generation, she is neither traditional like Mayamma nor modern like Devi. Through all the women characters Githa Hariharan clearly indicates that women can emerge powerful and live life to the fullest.

Githa Hariharan is more inclined towards projecting her writing as highly committed to the cause of the women emancipation and social issues. Githa Hariharan is very keen to portray the place occupied by women in the modern society. The novel is a realistic picture presenting the myriad problems faced by women and the sacrifices and compromise they make to keep their family happy. In every generation, women become prey to the male domination irrespective of their education. The three women characters belong to

different generation but the common thread that unites them is the “secondary status of women in society is one of the true universals, a pan-cultural fact” (Ortner 237).

Gita Hariharan articulates feminist ideology by introducing the less prominent figures from the Indian epics and Puranas. Githa Hariharan resorts to rewriting myth to present the reality of the society in its true colour. “We find the women depicted in the novel, struggle for their survival and to endure the trials of their womanhood. The means chosen by the woman might be different but they are all means of survival they could fashion for themselves” (Nawale 203).

The mother of Devi’s rebirth are thus, manifold. Besides her mentors, there are many other women whose lives offer new and useful lessons to Devi. She draws on her biological matrilineage as well as spiritual and mythical heritage. This invisible energies of the ancient Goddesses – Devi, Kali, Saraswati among others as well as genetic inheritance from all women who lived in the past ages and experiential wisdom of her own contemporaries – all these contribute to the eventual psycho-spiritual growth of the protagonist. (Vijayasree 181)

The Thousand Faces of Night, mirrors the society in which women are made subordinates and puppets in the hands of male domination. Devi establishes her individuality by revolting against the patriarchal society. Thus, the novel clearly makes an attempt to present the dynamic image of new woman by challenging feminine stereotypes. The characters in the novel present the social and cultural milieu of the time. Catherine Simpson says,

Cultural laws of gender demand that feminine and masculine must play off against each other in the great drama of binary opposition. They must struggle against each other, or complement each other, or collapse into each other in the momentary, illusory relief of the androgynous embrace. In patriarchal cultures, the struggle must end in the victory of the masculine; complementarity must arrange itself hierarchically; androgyny must be a mythic fiction. (qtd in Sathupati and Prasad 110-111)

The novelist comes out with a strong reverberating message that in Indian society a woman is not married to an individual man, but ties the sacred knot to the entire family and to the social, cultural values imbibed in her which makes her suffering perennial. Devi had finally won the battle with the men who tried to exercise their power on her. She knew things are beyond redemption and hence without any regrets decides to begin her new life. She takes the bold decision because her subconscious mind is full of determined heroines from mythology who take bold steps in spite of all earlier setbacks they faced. Devi emerges as the heroine of the novel by breaking the marital bond which enslaved her.

The common place story of marital discord and women's quest for identity outside marriage is turned into a remarkable rendering of the collective struggle of women for self-liberation through the author's play with narrative structures – framing text within texts, with texts overlapping in curious ways; her carnivalesque accumulation of intertexts ranging from the tales from the Mahabharatha to folk stories and her deft interweaving of these with the lives of real women. Hariharan's narrative voice strike's

a powerful chord in contemporary literature returning to the multidimensional vibration of voices unfolding within a vast mythic social time space.

(Vijayasree 177)

Patriarchal ideology was disseminated within the culture through myths. While the edifice of the culture is to be restructured to give women their due place, revisioning mythology from feminine perspective becomes essential. In this novel Githa Hariharan has created a feminist mythopoeia to instill the concept of new woman who claims for self-respect and is ready to rupture the bastion of patriarchy. Such revision of metanarrative like this novel is essential to bring a social change because,

First, it can help us understand how people's social identities are fashioned and altered over time. Second, it can help us understand how, under conditions of inequality, social groups in the sense of collective agents are formed and unformed. Third, a theory of discourse can illuminate how the cultural hegemony of dominant groups in society is secured and contested. Fourth, and finally, it can shed light on the prospects for emancipatory social change and political practice. (Fraser 152)

The novelist has used mythology as an element of intertextuality to prove that the ideal of womanhood has remained unchanged in the Indian society. Women have always looked upon as a symbol of self-sacrifice and self-negation.

Like Sati you must burn yourself to death, like Sati you must vindicate your husband's honour and manhood. Like Parvati you must stand neck-deep in cold, turbulent waters, the hungry, predatory fish devouring your feet. Like

Gauri you must reap the bountiful harvest that will be yours if you embrace the lingam on the sacrificial alter. (Hariharan, "Thousand" 94)

Through this novel Githa Hariharan insists that the status of women should change as the country is marching forward in various domains. By revisioning mythology Githa Hariharan has created subversive narratives to rupture the totalizing effect created by the masculine narratology that had upheld patriarchal ideology in the society. Revisioning is a strategy adopted by the novelist to register women's resistance against patriarchy. By resurrecting the metanarratives the novelist attempts to provide the intensity of human experience from a feminine perspective thereby reforming the societal outlook wherein women will have a broader horizon to achieve their self-actualization. Such revisioning myths provide women with a sense of purpose and optimism to achieve greater heights.