

Deconstructing the “Myth” in the Selected Novels of Githa Hariharan

Thesis Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

at Jadavpur University

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2023

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to my PhD Supervisor, Dr. Saswati Halder who has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement during all these years. Without her motivation and guidance, this research project would not have been possible.

I express my deep sense of gratitude to Prof. Sanjukta Dasgupta who provided confidence in my ability to pursue research in this area of Indian English writing. The support that I received made my academic journey easier with the passage of time.

A special due of thanks should be accorded to Pranab Kumar Mandal, my fellow PhD student, for his unending help and support. I will always be thankful to him.

I wish to extend my thanks to Kakali Mitra, the Headmistress of my school, for allowing me leaves to complete my research engagements.

I am grateful to my mother who supported me beyond all limits and stood by me through thick and thin to complete my academic endeavour. And last but not the least, I am indebted to my one-year-old son Abir who gave me love and hope in his special ways to do better in each step. Lastly, I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my father who motivated me to English literary studies. I have missed him badly during this long PhD journey.

Table of Contents

Introduction	1-30
Chapter One	
<i>The Thousand Faces of Night: A Juncture Where Myth Meets Reality</i>	31-64
Chapter Two	
<i>The Ghosts of Vasu Master: Myth as a Means of Healing</i>	65-89
Chapter Three	
<i>When Dreams Travel: Myth as a Means of Survival</i>	90-114
Chapter Four	
<i>In Times of Siege: An Enquiry into the Supremacy of Myth</i>	115-139
Chapter Five	
<i>Fugitive Histories: Crossing the Lines of Myths Burdened on Nation</i>	140-163
Conclusion	164-177
Works Cited	178-186

Introduction

The last decades of the twentieth century have witnessed the emergence of a new set of authors who dare to dissent from the conventional line of thinking and tend to focus on women's issues. Githa Hariharan, among other postcolonial writers, accomplishes great readership and visibility in Indian English Literature. Hariharan's articulation of changing social paradigms is shown in her fictional works. She is a writer of much critical acclaim, not only as a feminist writer but also as a social activist. The themes range from socio-cultural problems to various political confrontations, religious animosity, gender inequality and the blending of fact and fiction. There is no denying the fact that Hariharan is preoccupied with women's issues wherein they are subjugated and exploited in all possible spheres. She has shown her mettle time and again in underpinning her worth as a writer, feminist, social activist, and so on. Hariharan takes great interest in the dynamics that work behind the issues of several socio-cultural contexts. She has been involved in women's movement for a social change in the political and personal space. Her role as an activist was further evinced when she registered the case against the Reserve Bank of India in her fight to be the natural guardian of her ward. Her promptness includes editing pamphlets, participating in rallies, distributing leaflets and many more. Hariharan's works leave an experience of enigmatic features which come straight from a feminist overview. Undoubtedly, the novels bring forth the poignant life stories of women who dare to dream, and survival is their only motive. As a writer, Hariharan has always propounded the fact that authors have the preliminary responsibility of articulating an individual's position in socio-political contexts. It is the writers who should exert social and cultural ethics in their writing to make the readers conscious of their duties as responsible citizens. She believes that she should not be named just "a writer," but rather "a feminist," "Indian English writer" etc. This is because mere compartmentalisation confines a specific writer to a particular area repudiating variegated

aspects of human conditions. Therefore, “a writer” is a desirable term to attain a sense of equality amongst literary circles. Since Hariharan’s literary oeuvre consists of several diverse issues and thematic frameworks, it is not fair to cluster her work under a single heading. The credibility of Hariharan as a writer is not restricted to being a feminist writer, rather she is equally adept at penning down the social, political and religious issues. In the essay “Discrete Thoughts,” Hariharan opines: “Even if a writer does not write what is usually perceived as political writing- direct social commentary, or unbending realism or something ‘authentically’ Indian – the writer should aim at revealing truths, questions answer/ or answers, that are fundamentally political. Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations” (“Discreet” 214-15). Hariharan envisions a new world with the usage of ancient myths, folktales from both the East and the West and the perfect blending of myths into the contemporary setup. The author’s preoccupation with several human conditions is reflected in her five novels. The little space with which Hariharan begins all her novels is thoroughly expanded and elaborated to form an organic structure. An in-depth analysis of the five novels has been conducted with due emphasis on the richness and density of the reinterpreted texts. Though there are a few research works where the works of Hariharan have been studied in the light of socio-cultural and feminist angles, the issue of deconstruction of myth has hardly been explained earlier. My research attempts to correlate myth and societal structure which hitherto has not been explored. Myth and its subsequent relevance on individuality and society are not focussed in the previous research projects. Hence, I have tried to analyse Hariharan’s fictional discourse that deconstructs “Myth” extensively. The myth of male supremacy has been propagated by mythological stories and folk tales. Hariharan’s fiction challenges the ideals of gender disparity through the deconstruction of myth. Many researchers have worked on the feminism, identity crisis, and the socio-cultural aspects of the novels but the theme of construction and deconstruction of myth has hardly been explored. This particular research

examines the influence of myths on individuals and society. Furthermore, the false notion in the name of preserving religion and culture has been addressed in the research project. While myths in classical texts have been reinterpreted, the myth around racial and cultural stereotypes is also questioned. The fixed and over-generalised notion regarding cultural practices has been interrogated for the sake of a more balanced way of life. Stereotypical beliefs and prejudices often lead to irrational behavioural patterns and discrimination. The beliefs of an ethnic group often lead to hackneyed ideology due to the collective relatability of the group. Most of the time, it is seen that there is no truth in this stereotyping. Hence, it lies on the shoulders of the writers and social activists to examine the cultural and national stereotypes. Hariharan's narrative deconstructs the traditional notion of racial, cultural and national stereotypes. Moreover, Hariharan also defies gender stereotypes in her works. Although women are expected to behave or act in a certain way, the literary works of Hariharan call for further exploration and interpretations. Hariharan addresses the increasing need to examine detrimental gendered stereotypes.

Indian English literature is a reflection of people, culture and the everyday practice of life. Moreover, women's writing has been a matter of great enthusiasm as the writers concerned delve deeper into the issues of feminism, class struggle, socio-political themes, impositions of age-old traditions, analysis of family infrastructure and patriarchal hegemony. I've always had a keen interest in postcolonial contemporary women's writing, especially on gender issues and the relevance of mythology since my post-graduation. If we want to study and critically analyse the novels of Hariharan, we must look into her biographical details. Born in 1954, Hariharan was brought up in Bombay and Manila. She graduated in English and Psychology from Bombay University in 1974. Hariharan got a Master of Arts from the Graduate School of Corporate and Political Communication from Fairfield University, Connecticut. After working as a staff writer at WNET- Channel 13 in New York, she came back to India. Besides being an editor in the

offices of Orient Longman, she served as a freelance professional editor at academic institutions and foundations. As of now, she describes herself as a full-time writer along with other dominant identities. The novels that I will be discussing are *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). Indian English writing acquired global recognition by dint of its wide array of themes. Authors like Anita Desai, Kiran Desai, Manju Kapur, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee have worked extensively on an astonishing variety of themes and each author's writing is marked by a distinct personal voice. Since I have always been fascinated by the area of Indian English writing, Hariharan's stance as an activist caught my attention. Section 6 of The Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act, 1956 proclaims that the father is the natural guardian of a ward denying all rights of a mother. Hariharan fought against this irrational verdict and filed a writ petition to strike down the notion. I started reading her novels to understand her thematic concerns. Consequently, I decided to do my PhD on the selected novels of Githa Hariharan. I had the privilege of meeting her at the launch of her latest novel *I have become the tide* at the Oxford Bookstore, Kolkata in March 2019. Therefore, I developed a nuanced vision of Hariharan's ideology. My research would examine how myth in Hariharan's fiction is connected to the current socio-cultural set-up. The myth has been used as survival strategy presenting the changing aspects under the façade of ideological veneer. In this context, it is to be noted that eminent writers like Devdutt Pattanaik and Amish Tripathy have used mythology to provide fresh insights into traditional belief systems and societal infrastructure. Pattanaik has retold the epic and other mythological stories from a feminist perspective, for example, the retelling of *The Ramayana* has been shown from Sita's angle. Thus, a fresh narrative is demonstrated giving voice to the unvoiced. Hence, retelling of myths has become a modern trend wherein it is attempted to reframe the prevailing perceptions. The revision of culture with the help of the reconstruction of myths can be seen as a global phenomenon. The Indian women

authors have created a collective tone that underscores the sovereignty of women wherein the women dare to interrogate the oppression of societal structure. Traditional myth and modernity are subjected to change to ameliorate the predicament of human civilisation and women in particular. While myth is restricted to the beliefs and customs of a certain culture, tradition is radical in terms of modification as per the needs of current times. In the tussle between myth and modernity, women are victorious in their struggle to break the myth of duty-bound traditional women. Though primitive, the myths are conducive to bringing out the growth of human conditions. The Indian English writers are thoroughly influenced by the myths and they have attempted to articulate the cultural heritage and religious beliefs in their writings. Implementation of myth varies as per changing generations across time and space. The myths have different impact on different generations. Supremacy of class distinction and gender disparity is a myth which needs to be transformed according to changing socio-cultural conditions. All five novels of Hariharan deconstruct myth invariably and bring forth fresh perspectives on ways of life. The role of myths can be moulded by the changing trend of characterisation in Hariharan's fiction. She weaves the myth of the epics of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* and connects the myth to the lives of her fictional characters. The women dare to break the age-old obstacles witnessing the strength of mythical characters. Therefore, the present study explores the influence of myths on the individual identity of women. My research project would examine how Hariharan deconstructs "Myths" as delineated in five of her novels. It can be concluded that mythical anecdotes in contemporary literature carry forward the aesthetic and emotional experience to the reader. In *Myth and Literature*, Joseph Dorairaj contends:

Myths are uncanny phenomena. They are at once regional and yet universal; static and yet dynamic; stable and yet protean; archaic and yet contemporary; profligate and yet hallowed; fantastic and yet highly structured; divine and yet human in that they are as

much about gods and goddesses as about human beings. Though they belong to a pre-literate and pre-historical era, they keep recurring in all ages and are a part of our contemporary society... In short, myths are endowed with flexibility, adaptability and resilience which help creative artists to transpose and transplant them in diverse cultures and media. (9)

Fiction writing in postcolonial India gives primary importance to oppressed and dominated women who have been long denied access to self-respect and dignity. Many women writers of this era started writing about women's issues wherein the fight against superstitions, age-old customs and traditions found place on a large scale. The subjugation of women varies according to different social and cultural backgrounds. While some women are prohibited from exercising their life choices, some are confined to the thresholds of the household. Besides feminist issues, there are other themes like revisionism of myth, the tussle between tradition and modernity, the de-colonisation of mind, the need for women's emancipation, and East-West encounters in postcolonial writing. During the 1990s, trends were rife for the thematic concern of myths in prevalent socio-political conditions. Indian women's writing is conducive to understanding the problems of women in postcolonial states. The refusal to conform to tradition and the proclivity towards modernity is highlighted in the novels of women writers. One of the prolific writers of this generation is Githa Hariharan who portrays characters with a craving for unconventionalism and modern approaches. Hariharan's fiction offers new outset for women to set fresh standards of unchangeable thoughts about the female psyche. The genre of feminist concerns has been explored in the entire gamut of postcolonial women's writings. Authors like Anita Desai have articulated the subordination of women in novels such as *Cry the Peacock* and *Voices in the City*. Desai's novels deal with the tumultuous psyche of modern women and project the women's position extraordinarily. Her characters' transformation from self-

alienation to self-identification defines existentialism. Desai's novels examine the troubled psychological conditions of modern Indian women and their due place in socio-cultural norms. The fiction puts forth new approaches subverting the conventions that can be related to global trends. Desai's works offer a profound insight into the complex and variegated dimensions of the postmodern movement. Bharati Mukherjee, an immigrant writer, presents women as "New Women" and her characterisation raises concern for repressed and dominated voices. Interestingly, her themes deal with diaspora and try to underscore a link between cultural differences. Most of her characters travel from third-world countries and settle down in Western countries. This immigration puts forth racial conflicts as a dominating theme along with other issues. Mukherjee explores the sense of alienation, the issue of migration and the dilemma of identity crisis in her fictional works. Furthermore, Arundhati Roy's women transcend the barriers of class and race and prove their worth as a distinct voice who demands equal rights along with their male counterparts. Her novels provide primary importance to the issues of feminist overtones, postcolonial diversions, and an overt overview of political perspectives. In this context, another author's name must be mentioned i.e., Shashi Deshpande whose writings raise voice against the injustice meted out to the fairer sex. Contemporary middle-class scenarios and the status of women feature well in Deshpande's works. Deshpande's articulation of modern, career-oriented and urban women is remarkable as she attempts to bring out financially and ideologically independent entities. The inequality of gender equation has been propounded in the literary works of the postcolonial era. The authors have shown the themes of identity crisis and the quest for individuality in their respective fictions. Kamala Markandaya, one of the remarkable writers of the era, portrays characters with pleasing dispositions. Markandaya offers clarity and sharpness to the issues of human misery and degradation, racial conflicts, and cravings for modernity. The characterisation of her novels serves as an exemplar of unconventional and out-of-typical social structure. Her maiden novel *Nectar in a Sieve*

depicts the plight of Rukmini who migrates to a city as an outcome of depredations of modern industrialism. She presents the conflict between Eastern and Western values where modernity is represented by the Western side and traditionalism is denoted by Eastern values. Her other novels *A Handful of Rice* (1966) and *Nowhere Man* (1972) offer a struggle for identity in a seemingly increasingly Westernised world and the after-effects of colonialism. Moreover, the novels of Nayantara Sahgal reverberate with the notion of the conditions of female protagonists and the upheavals of political situations. Sahgal talks about individual freedom which prompts her female protagonists to walk away from the abusive relationship that they are in. The theme of the dichotomy between idealism and moral decline in the post-independence era features in her novel *Rich Like Us* (1985) and she has been awarded the Sahitya Academy Award for her excellence. Eventually, Sahgal protested against the growing intolerance by returning the award. Moreover, Sahgal's other works deal with personal conflict amid political upheaval.

Githa Hariharan's works too loom large on the issues of female consciousness, an amalgamation of myth and reality, tussle between secularism and communalism to name a few. Hariharan's protagonists fight against the existing social hierarchy that refashions women's predicament and reshapes their parameters. The voice against male chauvinism paves the way for a more equal social disposition in the literary field. The entire gamut of her fictional works resonates with her notions about socio-cultural ethics and political beliefs. In an interview to Joel Kuortti, Hariharan observes:

Certainly all my books in some sense or the other deal with the plight of the women, they do place women's lives in the foreground. But I think finally the real issue we examine over and over again through women's lives, occasionally through all lives, is the continual contesting of tradition and modernity. So women's status in society has always been some sort of an index of whether the society is barbaric or civilized. ("The Double Burden" 25)

Hariharan makes use of the technique of revision and reinterpretation which provides a vital dimension in narrating a story. While doing so, the author needs to investigate the “Past,” which works as a central concern to her. Hariharan’s views are pertinent in this context:

There are something you can twist and turn—you can retell the tale, but something you can’t, and you don’t want to throw it out either.... So I think my position, and I hope I am not being confusing or confused ... you want to make certain aspects of it[culture] live in a way that is meaningful to you and to your society at large. More than anything you want to be part of a debate with other stakeholders on how we are to refurbish and reinvent what we keep. This is something I am interested in my fiction, my non-fiction, and in my life... making sense of the past, becoming part of the larger debate on our multiple pasts. (“The Double Burden” 16)

Reference to the past has featured in both the fictional and non-fictional works of Hariharan. According to her, literature serves as a more powerful medium for representing the past. If we are to compare literature and history, it is evident that literature will excel in terms of narrating the past. Hariharan’s novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* are narratives of mythical anecdotes where she makes a small space spacious. Hariharan brings into light thousand faces of the marginalised women wherein the major characters learn to live like the mythical heroines. While societal structure tries hard to subvert the ways of life of women, Hariharan’s characters are portrayed in normative and subversive ways. As far as storytelling is concerned, Hariharan has always been inspired by timeless classical texts such as *Kathasaritasagara*, *Buddhist Jataka Tales*, *The Panchatantra* and *The Mahabharata*. Stories play a pivotal role in defining the eternal quest of the characters. Hariharan’s presentation of a subject with other co-related issues is remarkable and the way Hariharan puts the themes together in a complicated mosaic deserves much critical attention. Since Hariharan reinterprets mythical scriptures in her fiction, it is important to analyse the role of myths in contemporary

literature. Although myths originate in the remote past, their significance to the particular culture continues to inspire readers across the ages. The flexibility of incorporating myths into mainstream literature provides ample possibility for a diverse range of interpretations. Myths, an essential part of human lives, define cultural beliefs mingled with historical traditions. Myths serve as fundamental basics that bind the members of a particular group and make them distinct from others. Thus, myths are conducive to forging a collective identity. There are many layers to be peeled off in exploring the various aspects of mythology. According to Laurence Coupe:

.... myths are both necessary and relevant to human lives, they come out of some human need. We are looking for a fresh knowledge of ourselves in them, trying to discover what is relevant to our lives today. We don't reject the ideals, but we know we can't approximate to these pictures of ideal womanhood. And we will not bear any guilt that we cannot do so. More important than knowing what we are not is to know what we are, what is possible for us?... but as mythologies do not offer anything more positive, it has to be seen as a variation on demythologization, propounding its own myth as mythlessness. (24)

Both *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* comprise in themselves eternal dilemmas and other predicaments in life that we come across in our daily lives. The characters in the myths have been viewed as stereotypes with unquestioning acceptance. In the fictional vision of Hariharan, women are seen as defiant who believe that traditional roles are no longer relevant and they opt for revolutionary notions. Hariharan makes use of the myths to create an oppositional viewpoint against patriarchal dominance. The inclusion of myths in the main narrative enhances the grandeur of significance of the storyline. Therefore, it is to be pointed out that Hariharan uses the approach to enlighten the limited space of women's lives and rather the mythical characters from Sita to Kali are helpful to understand Indian women's way of lives. In *Myth, Fiction, and Displacement* Northrop Frye observes: "No rendering of any myth into conceptual language

can serve as a full equivalent of its meaning. A myth may be told or retold, it may be modified or elaborated, or different patterns may be discovered in it and its life is always the poetic life of a story, not the homiletic life of some of illustrated truism” (65).

It is quite interesting to note how Hariharan comes into prominence as a full-time writer. In an interview with Arnab Chakladar she explains that being a full-time author:

Even as a child I was pretty sure I would do something with the written word. I was always a voracious reader- though, of course, it would be unfortunate if all voracious readers took to writing! As an adolescent I wrote reams of what I thought was poetry. In retrospect I see this was not really a wasteful exercise. Beyond the therapeutic value of adolescent writing, something like ‘notes to yourself’, it also meant I acquired some discipline, training in using patterns of imagery, nudging together image and idea, using time in different ways in a narrative. All this would become, much, much later, some of the important concerns of my craft. (“A Conversation with” 5)

Hariharan is quite displeased being called a woman writer. Rather she believes that feminist writing does not speak about feminist manifestoes only. She opines:

Exactly, being a writer and a feminist doesn’t mean that you write tracts and pretend they are novels. I was not writing a blueprint. I wish I could- then I would not be a useless novelist but doing something much more useful. But I didn’t/don’t have a blueprint. As for being a ‘woman writer’ I would say such a label is legitimate or useful only if it is used with some rigour. It is useful to study women’s writing and Dalit writing and so on in an academic context. I don’t think it is terribly useful if the labels become lazy, a way to ghettoize. (“A Conversation with” 6)

Hariharan’s presence in the arena of Indian English literature further aggravates the theme of emancipation of women. In this context, it is important to remember how Hariharan’s stance

regarding the Hindu minority and the Guardianship Act marks an exceptional beginning in women's position in contemporary societal structure. When Hariharan discovered that she was not the natural guardian of her minor son, she challenged certain sections of the Hindu minority and Guardianship Act 1956 in favour of Articles 14 and 15 of the Indian Constitution. The verdict came with the conclusion that a mother is also the natural guardian of minor children. This incident records Hariharan's viewpoint and establishes her position as a strong individual. Her maiden novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize placing her among the most renowned writers of Indian women's English fiction. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is considered one of the pioneer novels of the era in terms of condemnation of the patriarchal convention. It is important to analyse the social and economic background in which Hariharan articulates her fiction. With the advent of television and the internet, the human psyche of common Indians is shaped and conditioned in modernising cultural history. The emergence of the "New Woman" in the backdrop of ancient social order becomes the phenomenon in the fictional works of Hariharan. Devi, the protagonist of her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, is victimised by the imminent social pressure in the name of tradition. The seemingly happy marriage of Devi crumbles down in sharp contrast to the existing social set-up. Postcolonial English literature highlights the marginalised and oppressed section of society. Githa Hariharan along with other writers of the post-independent era attempted their hands at uplifting the downtrodden and deprived class. *The Thousand Faces of Night* falls in the category where the author foregrounds women's predicament and reverberates the mythical folklore of ancient India. The skillful amalgamation of traditional myth with contemporary setup further accentuates the relevance of the writer in every way. J. Yellaiah and G. Pratima observe:

Devi's grandmother's narration is a kind of revisionist mythmaking in its own right: she does not dwell on the more prominent figures of the Hindu myths – Sita, Savitri or

Anusaya often celebrated as paragons of female virtue. On the other hand, she retrieves the marginal figures of Gandhari, Amba and Ganga – long relegated to minority status.

(191)

Devi learns from the mythical tales how the fictional characters stood up for their rights and established their individuality. Hariharan writes against patriarchy that deals with the preconceived notions of masculine and feminine concepts. Her writing aims to celebrate the unconventional way of defying masculine authority. The deification and subjugation of women run parallel to the main plots of the narrative. Both the text and the intertext raise concern for the deprived and dominated voices. Devi fails both as a submissive wife and rebellious lover and this leads her to shrug off the stereotyped role of a typical housewife. She begins to look for an alternative identity by deviating from the prescribed form. She thinks that it is not easy for all women to reach the optimum heroism of the mythical characters, rather the characterisation fulfils the escapist dreams of real-life characters. C. Vijayshree comments: “Devi fed on these stories of her mythical ancestors, grows into a dreamer, inhabiting occasionally an extra physical realm. In her dreams and visions, she enjoys an intimacy with her mythical heroines, a contact with deities and entities of the other world” (179).

The dissertation is divided into five chapters excluding the Introduction and Conclusion- Chapter I on the mythical explorations of the first novel titled, “*The Thousand Faces of Night: A Juncture Where Myth Meets Reality*,” Chapter II on the procedure of healing through mythical tales, titled “*The Ghosts of Vasu Master: Myth as a means of Healing*,” Chapter III on the ways of survival through myths titled, “*When Dreams Travel: Myth as a Means of Survival*,” Chapter IV on the deconstruction of cultural stereotypes, titled “*In Times of Siege: An Enquiry into the Supremacy of Myth*,” and Chapter V on the myth of unified nation, titled “*Fugitive Histories: Crossing the Lines of Myths Burdened on Nation*.”

In the first chapter, titled “*The Thousand Faces of Night: A Juncture Where Myth Meets Reality*” it is shown how Hariharan’s maiden novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* portrays Hariharan’s multiple viewpoints with her deft vision and nuanced precision. While highlighting patriarchal atrocities, the novel underscores the marginalisation of women in society in the name of protecting the culture and tradition. The chapter offers a detailed study about the role of myth and its existence in society with particular reference to the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Devi, the protagonist of the novel, comes back from the US in search of her roots and acquiesces to arranged marriage with Mahesh. Having a strong individuality and overt willpower Devi cannot conform to the traditional norms and age-old conventions. Consequently, she decides to leave everything behind and begins her own life on her terms. She feels an acute sense of loneliness and alienation due to her failed marriage with Mahesh which compels her to take a mighty decision to establish her worth. Three generations of women Devi, her mother Sita and caretaker Mayamma suffer the same fate irrespective of social class and generation gap. Sita is forced to give up the desire of her life i.e., playing the veena for the sake of her home. She learns to suffer mutely and compromises with her demanding situations. Mayamma, the old family retainer, faces extreme subordination both at the hands of her husband and mother-in-law. The notion of male supremacy further accentuates the oppression of women. Devi decides to start a new life with Gopal, a musician and leaves Mahesh. Unfortunately, it takes no time for her to discern that there is no difference between the two men as both are preoccupied with their stuff. Therefore, Devi has no option but to leave Gopal too. Finally, she begins her new life with her mother, and she wants to forget the old bitter memories. Indira Nityanandam’s observation is pertinent here:

However, it is Devi who is the modern feminist. Though she lacks the will to choose, and her early decisions are faltering, we note a development in her character. Initially, she is easily influenced by societal role expectations; she quits the U.S.A. leaves behind

Dan because of a sense of filial piety, marries Mahesh as a good daughter should, attempts to be a full-time wife and house maker as an Indian pativrata should. Gradually she shows her resolve in waking out with Mahesh and even greater determination in waking out on Gopal. (187)

As a matter of fact, all three characters “walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance: for some means of survival, they could fashion for themselves” (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 135). Interestingly, Hariharan critiques the socio-cultural paradigm where women are expected to produce children without their consent. A woman’s status reaches a height when she bears a child that provides her with a significant and decisive place in society. While Devi is chided by her husband for not being able to become a mother, Mayamma also faces immense humiliation for remaining barren even after two years of marriage. It is appalling to note that both Devi and Mayamma go through humiliating situations despite having different socio-cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless, the timeframe of the two incidents is different. The intertext has shown how the mythical characters survive with resistance and transgression. Smriti Sing opines:

One of the most pressing problems confronted by the Indian women in modern India is the desire to find self-fulfillment while conforming to the values of the past. How to conform? How much to break away to assert one's individuality? This inner struggle to find a balance between tradition and modernity has been portrayed more authentically by the woman writers, than by men. (10)

Devi has been presented as a modern-day feminist who can think on her own and act accordingly. She propounds her mettle and strong individuality by deciding to live on her own terms. Although her early decisions lack inner strength, she imbibes greater determination over time. It is evident that the protagonists of the text and the intertexts are survivors in their own

way and these tactics of survival come from their ability to break free from the shackles of existence. Sometimes the characters suffer silently and sometimes they attempt to make a change in their way of life. Whereas the characters represent growth and maturity, they stand for withdrawal and regression. Interestingly, both the text and the intertexts present women's sufferings and their emancipation which foregrounds female autonomy. According to conventional and contemporary societal norms, women are expected to produce children after marriage. Society leaves no stone unturned if a woman decides to dissent from the prescribed form and write her own story. It is evident that all the protagonists of the fictional discourse are victims of ill-fate, but it is their sheer strength to combat their destiny. There is no denying the fact that one of the most prominent themes of the novel is identity crisis as the major characters show struggle for their identity. The novel is remarkable in its portrayal of women who have rejuvenated themselves and established their worth alongside their male counterparts. The marginalised characters revive by dint of their self-assertion and attain salvation. In this tale of Devi, Sita and Mayamma the protagonists decolonise their psyche through progressive self-discovery. Surprisingly, in this era of modernisation women are victimised as an outcome of traditional and orthodox norms. Moreover, Hariharan critiques the institution of marriage in the socio-economic dynamics. Marriage is inevitable and a means to maintain social relations for many. This notion has been portrayed in the novel where it is observed how Devi fails to conform to the pre-determined role of traditional housewives. Devi is an embodiment of women who need to assess their own stories of patience, endurance, fortitude, and courage. Through *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan establishes her expertise in debunking the myth of "divine supremacy" that upholds the superiority of men over women through the retelling of *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*.

The second chapter, titled "*The Ghosts of Vasu Master: Myth as a Means of Healing*,"

records the chronicles of a retired schoolteacher who is on a quest for a fixed identity. The impact of colonial education is highlighted in this fictional work of Hariharan. Since this fiction deviates from the way Hariharan presents her works, it attracts a lot of critical attention. Vasu is determined to uplift a mentally disabled child Mani through an unconventional method of teaching. Hariharan underpins the importance of storytelling in the process of healing the boy while highlighting the complexity of human relationships. A thorough scrutiny of this work of Hariharan requires a minute analysis of the pedagogic concerns of contemporary times. I have endeavoured to examine *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* where the characters undergo psychological transformation enmeshed in varied sets of power relations. The diverse issues such as the contemporary education system, the role of an ideal teacher, the position of women and the teacher-learner relationship all come under the scanner in this fictional discourse. In the interaction between highly intellectual and underdeveloped individuals, the fiction underscores the attempt to occupy the centre for the marginalised. Surprisingly, three parallel plots run in the novel. While Vasu narrates fables to impart teaching to Mani, he comes across many ghosts from his memories. Other characters narrate different stories to Vasu. The independent chapters of the novel with digressing themes consist of mythical folklore and various allegories. In Vikash Bhardwaj and Surender Kumar's words:

Vasu Master begins to weave a web of fables and parables and tales of undigested 'karma' with more real-life images to inspire, to teach and to cure Mani of his unexplainable reticence and defiance. Through these fascinating and fantastic stories, he travels into his own childhood and into his innermost recesses of fear and weaknesses. He recounts scenes from his past, trying to understand the present. (69)

The Ghosts of Vasu Master, as the title suggests, deals with the protagonist's encounter with ghosts and memories of the women in his life. The issue of the emptiness and meaninglessness of a retired teacher is addressed dexterously, and he is thoroughly haunted by the thoughts and

dreams which is quite discernible from the discourse. The novel marks a distinction in the arena of Indian English writing as it talks about the rediscovery of the self and lifestyle of the central character. In a consolidating attempt to amalgamate variegated notions of knowledge, Hariharan presents reality under the façade of fantasy. It is important to note how Vasu introspects his own life and interrogates the reason behind the coming together of Mani and him. He analyses: “What Mani and I face together is our common need to make more sense of the world around us; so that we can do more in it. Together, can we prove that learning to live and knowledge are not two separate things?” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 221). The ancient method of teaching i.e., Gurukul is propounded by the author to establish a direct teacher-student relationship. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is a critique of the contemporary education system where the hollowness of the system is reassessed. Hariharan advocates education that does not confine learners to the fixed prescribed notions. By challenging the existing notions of teaching, Hariharan brings forth radical thinking in terms of imparting quality education. The most difficult thing is to make Mani speak and the need to bring him out of his silent zone becomes apparent as the novel progresses forward. It is important to note that silence is instrumental as a defence for Mani as he fails to communicate verbally all the time. Vasu’s innovative ideas aid in ameliorating Mani’s imaginative status. Each tale narrated by Vasu insinuates a new message on the human psyche and demonstrates a new vision of life. Eventually, Vasu realises “the trap comes with the bread. It is foolish to expect one without the other” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 261). It is important to analyse varying degrees of psychological exploration of Mani while treating Mani. The way Vasu comes to terms with his true self deserves critical attention that culminates in further study in the respective area. Hariharan tries to foreground moral values in sharp contrast to the degrading and deteriorating moral values of current times. Being retired Vasu gets the opportunity to exercise his choice of teaching to Mani and cast a profound influence on him. Gradually, Mani’s progress is felt by his drawings which he creates out of the stories narrated

to him. Thus, he communicates through signs and symbols depicted on a piece of paper. Vasu is successful in improving Mani's predicament and through this process, he gets rid of disagreeable societal barriers. The improvement of Mani has been somewhat equated with the discovery of Vasu's potential as a teaching professional. During the narrative, it comes to light that Vasu's instincts were repressed for a long time and it finds a place to prosper in the form of Mani. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is remarkable as it marks the importance of storytelling in the method of healing in traditional teaching. Written amidst globalisation and other technological progress, the novel underscores self-identity and, the relevance of myths, fables, and allegories. The replacement of new values with the older values makes its due place in the fictional discourse. Openness is of primary importance as both the teller and the listener take part in this intrinsically co-creative process. While Vasu narrates the flow of stories to Mani, he visions a complete story as a unique and personal way of thinking. It can be said that no story is a "definite" story, each story signals other stories as well. As Kroeber opines:

Storytelling is a proliferative activity. Inconclusive, question-provoking endings merely render visible this fecundity, that the closer inherent to narrative as a whole creates new openings, possibilities for other stories that, in fact, are a major empowerment of any story's successful social functioning. The central purpose of storytelling is to facilitate tellings. The end of any story makes possible more storytelling which is encouraged by whatever is enigmatic or debatable in a particular conclusion. (72)

The method of storytelling is enriched by employing its gaps and absences. And this gap accentuates further interpretations which we might have hitherto ignored somehow. Hariharan believes that stories do not end. Even if a story is inconclusive, it opens new ways for subsequent beginnings. The stories do not have any authoritative version. The stories that Vasu tells are amazing but the tales are replete with realistic elements which help Mani "grow into something more, something closer to his silent reality rather than graft him on to romantic

superfluous dimensions” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 120). The fables not only break Mani’s silence but also expose him to many occurrences about multiple ways to deal with. Fantasy plays a crucial role in helping Mani to come out of his complacency and become one with the larger whole. Therefore, the myth of ideal system of education is condemned by the author with the aid of alternative method of employing myths. Besides being a narrative strategy, storytelling unearths the complex nature of human relationships and the aspects of reality.

The third chapter, titled “*When Dreams Travel: Myth as a Means of Survival*,” offers the reinterpretation and revision of the *Arabian Nights* from a feminist perspective. In *When Dreams Travel*, the principal women characters’ eternal quest for individual identity is foregrounded under the façade of patriarchal domination. The novel is replete with stories of labyrinth structure, this story within story format underpins the sexual power games of male hegemony. Ironically, the box within the box system is quite entertaining until it touches the last string of the cord. The inherent stories are Hariharan’s invention that strikes a close affinity to contemporary life. In this context, it should be noted that Hariharan shrugs into the past not to imitate anything but to utilise the past in an aesthetic and creative sense. The stories embedded in the novel insinuate innovative dimensions which is extremely relevant to the present scenario. The novel talks about the decolonisation of the women’s mind. Hariharan makes use of the technique of inter-text that resurfaces modern fiction theory through storytelling. The fictional discourse highlights the fact that Shahrzad survives only by consummating storytelling. Being caught in the dungeon of a chauvinistic and powerful patriarch, Shahrzad experiences reeks of blood, semen, and sweat and tries hard to create an ambience wherein gender disparity is at a marginal level. A wide array of stories comprises the novel with a comprehensive range from medieval to contemporary times. The fiction brings to light the subjugation of women in a typical patriarchal set-up. It is astonishing to note how Shahrzad possesses such profound knowledge and how she manages to save her life at the sharp

edge of a sword. By narrating a diverse range of stories to the sultan, Shahrzad empowers not only herself but also women in specific. *When Dreams Travel* has been presented with a changed paradigm with a feminist outlook and multiple narratives. Hariharan articulates the predicament of marginalised and oppressed characters. Rustam Brahma's observation is pertinent here:

Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* is a strong feminist critique of the traditional concept of women as mere lustful and traitor or cuckolds, child bearing machine, an object of man's desire, an object of use and throw, established by Arabian Nights, that has led patriarchal society to disrespect and devalue them in the society. (181)

Interestingly, the title of the novel indicates what happens when dreams travel. The mindset of people cannot be stagnant, it travels with the help of imagination. The apparent myth about male supremacy over the female disposition and the myth of virgin women are the predominant themes here. *When Dreams Travel*, a labyrinth of tales, deals with both storytelling and storytellers. In the amazing maze of reality and fantasy, the novel makes a niche for itself that serves as a chronicle of a devoted sister in search of her missing sister. Apparently, in an attempt to subvert the domination of male hegemony, Hariharan foregrounds the innovative ideas and imaginative power of the protagonist. The author propounds this ideological text by challenging the traditional mode of fiction writing. Hariharan makes her women speak for themselves and the women bring out their version of the story. It is obvious that *When Dreams Travel* excavates the remains of ancient texts and explores unexplored backgrounds through the intermingling of past and present. The novel resonates with the notions of magic realism which talks about geniis, ghosts and other various supernatural elements. It is important to note that *When Dreams Travel* celebrates the power of womanhood it serves as a subtle critique of the misogynist patriarchal ideology and sexual politics. Shahrzad, Duniyazad and Dilshad are the principal characters who are bound to narrate different stories to survive the cruel clutches of the sultan.

When Dreams Travel begins after *One Thousand and One Nights* and it abruptly ends when Dunyazad receives the news of her sister's demise. Both Shahrzad and Dunyazad may be termed as saviour queens who reconstructed the past with the aid of magnificent magic stories across generations. The novel articulates the fact that women do not travel by nature and this absence of mobility is not reflected in her narration to Shahryar. This nuanced skill grabs the attention of all listeners which holds her in high esteem by the emperor. There is no denying the fact that dreams and imagination do have the potential to travel by any means.

Thus, Hariharan highlights the importance of storytelling to empower the women folk and liberate them from the spiteful clutches of the patriarchal set-up. Both the canonised version and the present text underscore the fact that Shahrzad's myth continues to amaze us as these narratives prioritise women's individuality and solidarity. Shahrzad's story can be termed a modern myth that works for collective cultural heritage. This is not to deny that the Arabian myths are ambiguous and multi-layered which opens the ways to diverse interpretations. In the most adverse situation, Shahrzad emerges from being victimized to be empowered with the help of the myths. Eventually, Shahrzad is turned into a myth. Hariharan articulates: "She is now a myth that must be sought in many places, fleshed in different bodies before her dreams let go to Dunyazad or her descendents" (Hariharan, *Dreams Travel* 25). The novel is a modern myth that serves as a symbolic projection of women's individuality and empowerment.

The women that Hariharan portrays are not individuals only, rather they are constructed as agency to be pitted against the ideological constructs of nationalism. The image of Indian women is dexterously underscored in the literary works of the author and these portrayals defy the normative models from the distant glorious past. The idea of purity, chastity and sanctity of Indian women is overwritten by Hariharan in her fictional works. Interestingly, the status of the Indian women is subjected to be overpowered by the dominant hegemonic patriarchal nationalism. Following Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's comment, it can be said that "women's text

cannot be regarded simply as the transparent medium of self-expression but becomes a significant mediator between the private self of the writer and the public world of the letters” (223). The characters make remarkable diversions from expectation to reality. It is important to note Chandra Talpade Mohanty’s notion where she opines that Western feminism cannot be applied to third-world women due to its liminality on the predicaments of women of third world countries. It is not appropriate to label third-world women as poor, uneducated and victimised as this categorisation fails to notice the diversity and multi-layered consciousness of third-world women. Especially in non-western countries, women are exploited in the name of adhering to the prevalent myth, but Hariharan makes her women expressive through their dominant mode of action. Interestingly, it must be noted that Hariharan is not only concerned about women’s liberation but also, she is unequivocal regarding men’s psychological emancipation. Whereas women are circumscribed by the barriers of myth-oriented societal fabric, humanity is at stake at the vicious effects of fundamentalism. Hariharan deconstructs the myth of nationalism by highlighting the outcome of intolerance and hatred amongst various communities. In my thesis, I have made an attempt to connect and correlate myth and prevailing social construction. Nevertheless, the struggle for identity comes to the forefront while analysing the interrelation between myth and contemporary context. It is important to mention that I have used an analytical method where information has been collected and reinterpreted. Finally, I have concluded the critical examination of both the primary and secondary texts.

In the fourth chapter, titled “*In Times of Siege: An Enquiry into the Supremacy of Myth*,” I have analysed the theme of the conflict between secularism and communalism in the backdrop of university politics. *In Times of Siege* unfurls the multi-layered human psyche along with ethnic and nationalist dimensions. The novel revolves around Shiv Murthy, a professor of History at an Open university in Delhi, who finds himself in deep trouble when he writes a module on 12th century social reformer Basava. As an outcome of his work, he is accused of

not glorifying the Hindu religion at a certain point. The self-proclaimed preserver of History named “Itihaas Suraksha Mancha” demands an apology from him. Basava has been portrayed as a revolutionary poet who believes in an egalitarian social fabric and opposes a hierarchical system. Shiv challenges the prevalent notion of primitive religion in his way with the help of young activist students. Thus, a middle-aged professor shows the mettle and fortitude to stand in defiance of the established myth of religion. Hariharan deconstructs the myth of equality and the myth of the wound in this fictional discourse. Though Hinduism thrives on diversity, Hariharan attempts to reframe the established mythic dissonance through her writings. The novel delineates resistance and interrogates the preconceived notions prevailing in society. The idea of a secular nation is questioned throughout the novel. The author reinterprets historical facts and attempts to provide an unbiased and unprejudiced perception. This is a time when free and secular minds are under siege. Basic human rights are violated and liberal ideals cannot be exercised on a larger spectrum. Hariharan advocates tolerance and plurality in a multireligious country like India. She voices her concern against fundamentalism which leaves no space for multiple voices to co-exist in the socio-cultural fabric of the nation. Therefore, the need to speak for the vulnerable is the essence of the novel. *In Times of Siege* dexterously portrays how the women from minority communities suffer at the hands of ill effects of fanaticism. It is high time to understand that the idea of a homogenised nation is a myth and we should dissect this myth accordingly. Anita Singh’s statement is quite pertinent here:

This work is a progressive criticism of communal fascist forces. It is a prophetic work, which envisages and predicts our present day’s violation of human rights under various pretensions, which has virtually taken the whole world under siege and turned it into the heart of darkness. (106)

In the fifth chapter, titled “*Fugitive Histories: Crossing the Lines of Myths Burdened on Nation*,” I have focused *Fugitive Histories* that depicts Gujrat riots of 2002. The novel deals

with fragmented identities as the thematic discourse in the narrative. The riot affected Muslim women who strive hard in search of their identities after heinous religious atrocities. Hariharan deconstructs the myth of a typical minority woman through the character portrayal of Sara, Yasmin and others. The female characters shun the age-old custom of veiling themselves and making enough moves to establish their true selves. Hence, the representation of Muslim women renders fundamental human values in a time-space continuum. The fiction records religious intolerance and its subsequent repercussions of the mayhem. One of the main features of this work remains the outrageous violence in the community of minority women which serves as a dominant weapon of opposition to take revenge. Fundamentalism is a misconception that is used in the seemingly misleading name of nationalism. It is a myth that nationalism eradicates regionalism and this myth of religion has been negated by Hariharan. In this novel, Hariharan articulates how fanatics make an arduous attempt to subvert the dissenters of their beliefs. The extremists leave no stone unturned in grasping the centre of the centre-margin paradigm by pushing forth the marginalised. Furthermore, the myth of a fixed identity as propagated by earlier generations is smashed by the author in this fictional discourse. Sara and Asad exemplify mixed parentage as their father belongs to the Muslim community and their mother, Mala is Hindu. The inter-faith marriage of Asad and Mala connotes the collapse of myth and arouses the feeling of humanity at large. Breaking traditional myths and maintaining social justice in terms of religious equation have been sought by the author through this novel. Fundamental rigidity results in shrinkage of space that does not allow any community to provide ample space for others to flourish independently. Despite being poignant, the novel is a celebration of life at the cost of all odds. The readers are filled with hope for a diversified yet unified nation which culminates on humanitarian grounds at large. Young minds often get trained by fundamentalists to follow certain practices and believe in a fixed way. Most of the time, they do not question the relevance of these myths in a contemporary context.

Postcolonial feminist criticism interrogates the stereotypical assumptions about women in contemporary social set-up. Both colonialism and patriarchal domination have exerted their power on the status of women in general. Postcolonial feminists underscore the fact that women are oppressed and marginalised in their respective literary works. Feminist critics such as Gloria Anzaldua, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak etc. write in favour of the variegated nature of women suppression and turn down the notion of singularity and monolithic commonality among women across the globe. Humm observes: “Third world feminist criticism focuses on here major issues: on the politics of universalism; on cultural controls and misrepresentations; and on the homogeneity of the canon” (252). Third world criticism is quite eclectic because this kind of criticism is a response to different social and cultural backgrounds. “Third World Feminism” originated in the 1980s and 1990s and this is conducive to highlighting the multiple layers of women’s subjugation. The feminists’ attempt to foreground the need for plurality while embracing personal contradictions is quite remarkable. The new wave of feminism requires much attention as it deals with current social and political backgrounds. It advocates women as strong agents who can assert themselves portentously. In *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*, Rebecca Walker opines: “For many of us it seems that to be feminist in the way that we have seen or understood feminism is to conform to an identity and way of living that does not allow for individuality, complexity or less than perfect personal histories” (33). The alliance among different kinds of feminists is delineated through the new wave of feminism. Thus, feminism insinuates a movement wherein the deprived ones get the opportunity to establish their claims. As far as postcolonial Indian English is concerned, the emergence of three eminent writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan and Raja Rao modified the thematic framework of the literary arena. In Hariharan’s fictional works, liberated and strong-willed women do find their due place. The author interrogates the misogynist attitude of the times and deconstructs the

gender stereotypical perceptions. Having been brought up in a Tamil Brahmin family, Hariharan could indulge herself in Victorian classics and Japanese novels. Her works comprise not only women's issues but also, she is equally bothered about communal disharmony. Apart from the fictional works, Hariharan's *The Art of Dying* (1993), a collection of twenty short stories about contemporary Indian life, talks about the theme of male superiority which curbs women's individuality. The twenty stories deal with the common theme of death. Since the title of the book indicates death, each story reverberates with the issues of the ultimate truth of life i.e., death. The stories are poignant yet universally compassionate in style. They are optimistic beneath the façade of guile, doubt, suspicion, passion and uncertainties. The stories are potent enough to startle the readers as these tales turn the traditional notions upside and down and propound their own ways of unconventional take. For example, one of the short stories, "The Remains of the Feast," depicts an old woman who wants to enjoy all the food which have been deprived of her for ages. This tale reverses the age-old concept of forbidden stuff for widows. The stories in this collection are marked by the plurality of the subject matter and leave an indelible impression on the readers' minds. One of the significant features of Hariharan's narrative is an understanding and communication between people. *The Winning Team* (2004) elucidates children's fables set in the contemporary times. Again, *A Southern Harvest* (1993) translates stories from major southern languages i.e., Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Kannada. This work marks her transformation from fiction to non-fiction. It was launched at the Hyderabad Literary Festival in 2014 where she commented that reality is much more shocking than theoretical description of the situation. Since India has a strong affinity with the Arab world, the Indian freedom movement witnessed the struggle of the Palestinians against colonial power. The collection consists of fourteen critical essays by several writers and scholars. This non-fictional work of Hariharan underpins the plight of the women and children who are forced to carry their ID cards all the time. The stories discuss the themes of the region, occupational

problems, viewpoints about war and many more. Hariharan wants to delineate the discrepancies of the freedom movements in India and Palestine. This book serves as a critique to comprehend the variegated ideology of the nation. Another collection of essays, *Almost Home: Cities and Other Places* was published in the same year. Hariharan's fiction has been translated into several languages such as Italian, French, Spanish, German, Dutch, Greek and Urdu. Salman Rushdie includes Hariharan's works in his famous anthology *Mirrorwork: 50years of Indian Writing 1947-1997*.

The dexterity and perseverance of Indian women writers question the restrictive and traditional set-up of ancient India. They voice out concepts which are detrimental to the conventional scenario of socio-political structure. Along with women writers, women critics were also on the upsurge to change the gamut of literary provinces of postcolonial India. Hariharan, one of the pioneer novelists of the timeframe, expresses her comprehensible ideas through her fictional works. Moreover, she distinguishes the maladies of societal structure and addresses them through the amalgamation of fact and fiction. A phenomenon that originated from a particular class of elites transcends into all segments of life with the aid of these Indo-English writers. Despite the prevailing patriarchal conventions, the women writers create a space wherein gender justice has been attempted. This thesis aims to understand the after effects of colonialism and its subsequent changes in the native Indians. Women have been subjected to double marginalisation because of their gender and the outcome of colonisation. While they are treated as inferior due to racial conflicts, they are also regarded just as sexual objects by the colonisers. Their sole attempt has been to enjoy women and satisfy their physical needs by ravaging the modesty of third-world women. Besides, Hariharan's disgust over the breakdown of the secular fabric is reflected in two of her novels, *In Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories*. She puts under the scanner whether nativism is of prime importance in times of globalisation. She plunges into the responsibility of unearthing the past glory and cultural heritage of ancient

India. These two novels further bring forth the adverse effects of communalism in a multireligious country like India. The identity crisis faced by the female characters has been thoroughly examined in these novels. Most of the characters are in eternal quest to establish their individuality and this has been underscored in the fictional works of Hariharan. Hybrid culture has had a dual effect on the minds of the characters. Hariharan addresses this issue of amalgamation of various cultures in the novel, *Fugitive Histories*. Hariharan advocates multiculturalism as life cannot be circumscribed by one single cultural doctrine. The superiority of cultural hegemony is negated based on cultural considerations. It is a culture that influences and reshapes the thoughts and behavioural patterns of individuals. A cursory look at the novels insinuates the fact that Hariharan propounds several socio-cultural factors that amount to race, ethnicity, social class and gender. The current age of demythologisation and remythologisation is conducive to understanding Hariharan's fictionalised historical account where myth is retold and reinterpreted. Contemporary writers have revolutionised the genre of Indian writing in English and made the readers acquainted with the heritage of India. The new breed of Indian English writers tends to look at myths because they believe that the meaning of the present lies in the unravelling of the ancient past. My research project explores Hariharan's stance regarding myths being rediscovered in a broad spectrum. Since most urban educated readers opt for novels written in English, it has become the responsibility of Indian English writers to convey Indian traditional values through their writings. Contemporary writers are attempting to interrogate the long-established set of codes and they continue to underscore the rationalised pattern of social fabric. It can be said that Hariharan falls in the group of experimental writers who, along with other contemporaries are committed to making a difference in societal structure and are hell-bent on improving the changing facets of the nation.

It is a discernible fact that Hariharan's fiction needs to have a comprehensive study and this research project of mine endeavours to explore her novels from the perspectives of myth

studies. Hariharan articulates her notions of myth through the gradual change of her authorial concerns. The deep-rooted myth functions to explore the mysterious natural phenomenon. Human conditions are manifested in their myriad forms through ancient mythical scriptures and the notion of myth i.e., false ideas. Since the thesis examines Hariharan's novels, her non-fictional works have been excluded from detailed discussion. Therefore, it can be said that the present thesis attempts to highlight the significance of myth in Hariharan's novels. My research project examines how Hariharan deconstructs myth both in the context of classical myth and the cultural stereotype. Hence, Hariharan's works serve as a rejection of prevalent myths both in classical and stereotypical contexts.

Chapter I

The Thousand Faces of Night: A Juncture Where Myth Meets Reality

Githa Hariharan, one of the leading women novelists of the postcolonial era, has carved a niche for herself when it comes to feminist literary concerns in the post-independence era. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the protagonist is no longer a victim but emerges as a strong empowered woman. Through the characters of this novel, Hariharan presents women's oppression to liberation which ultimately culminates in making the novel one of the pioneer works in the field of postcolonial literature. In the post-independence scenario, women writers engage themselves in writing novels which deal with domestic spheres in the lives of women. Githa Hariharan is no exception. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan articulates gender through the skilful usage of Indian mythology and in this way, the novel remains an exemplar of how myth can be infused into mainstream literature. In classical Greek, "Mythos" denotes any story or plot, no matter whether it's true or untrue. According to M. H. Abrams: "A myth is one story in a mythology, a system of hereditary stories which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group and which served to explain why the world is as it is and things happen as they do and to establish the rationale for social customs and observations and the sanctions for the rules by which man conduct their lives" (230). Hariharan's focus mainly lies in the search for self-realisation within conventional patriarchal social structures where women have always been subjugated. Hariharan makes use of the notion of revisionism and reinterpretation of myth from ancient texts as a means to subvert patriarchy. Re-vision is important when one needs to analyse an old text from a fresh perspective. Hence, it helps in recasting the past and shaping the future. The novel advocates gender justice by deconstructing the conventional myth and by reconstructing the present. It is important to study in detail how

myths have secured a dominant place in contemporary literature. Warner's observation is pertinent here:

A myth shows something, it's a story spoken to a purpose, it issues a warning, it gives an account which advises and tells often by bringing into play showings of fantastical shape and invention – monsters. Myths define enemies and aliens and in conjuring them up they say who we are and what we want, they tell stories to impose structure and order. (19)

Myth is an integral part of human civilisation as it is an active force which carries forward primitive ideology and moral values. It opens a new vista for Devi who finds an opportunity to escape from male chauvinism. Interestingly, myth can be interpreted in several ways that are believed to be a precursor of a more meaningful present and future. More significantly, Hariharan voices her concern for subjugated women who should exercise their personal choices accordingly. The amalgamation of myth and reality in the novel further explores self-assertion and psychological consciousness. In Indian folktales and oral narratives, myths are employed to demonstrate specific notions regarding culture, morality, ethics and so on. Myth is the inevitable outcome of imagination that functions through symbols. Since sociological perspectives change over time, myths do have a transforming equation concerning that. The different facets of mythical anecdotes are conducive to understanding the variegated human conditions prevailing in society. Hariharan articulates women's predicament by referring to the mythical elements. The themes of women's identity feature well in contemporary women writers like Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Jhumpa Lahiri, Nayantara Sehgal and several others. Surprisingly, in mythological works, women are marginalised in the name of upholding tradition. They are subjected to mental and physical torture by their male counterparts. The mythical heroines do stand up for their rights and fight against gender discrimination on a larger spectrum. *The Thousand Faces of Night* attempts to break down man-made barriers and

uncovers all sorts of suppression from a male-dominated set-up. It is also to be noted how the novel is a celebration of womanhood and self-expression of individual worth. In the evolving and layered body of myths, writers and other creative artists find a storehouse to exercise their creativity. The usage of mythology in these novel yields more straightforward moral stories unexpectedly. The mythical characters serve as a means for Hariharan's characters to free themselves from male bondage and escape to a better place. This is not to deny that myths need to be reinterpreted and refashioned with the changing social paradigm. Since the two epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* cast a pervasive influence on Indian minds, the women characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night* are modelled on the myths unerringly. Devi's journey accentuates a woman's desire to perform and the need to navigate a socially approved pattern of life. Hariharan has expressed her opinion regarding the use of mythology in one of her interviews:

When I was writing my first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, I was genuinely puzzled by the apparent thinness of my main characters' lives. Then I realised that if I was to do their individual voices justice, I would have to fill in the background with a thousand voices of all the real and mythical heroines whose life stories tell these three women how to live, in both normative and subversive ways . . . I have been influenced by the timeless and sophisticated Indian story-telling traditions – these include classical texts such as *Kathasaritsagara* and the Buddhist *Jataka* tales; and the written and oral versions of the *Panchtantra* and the epic *Mahabharata*. (“The Unknown Corner”)

We are presented with a novel where three generations of women are depicted along with their similar kind of experiences in terms of their marital lives. The story revolves around the protagonist, Devi who comes back to India after completing higher studies in the US. The

novel deals with different facets of Devi's life viz., life before marriage in the US, life after marriage with her husband Mahesh and life after separation with Mahesh. In the US, Devi's Black American friend proposes to her but she rejects it. She thinks that she cannot acquiesce to American culture and tradition and decides to come back to India in search of her roots. Indian culture is so ingrained in Devi that she finds American culture to be unacceptable. She knows that "going back is a bigger risk" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 6) but she is prepared to take that leap which eventually lands her in her own culture. While coming back, "she felt her American years slip away from her shoulders and trip her up in dank, stagnant puddles around her feet" (11). Despite being educated in the US, she agrees to be a part swayamvara which Sita arranges. Like any mother, Sita wants to see her daughter married and well-settled. Sita does not have any choice but to choose this path for Devi as this procedure has been prevailing since time immemorial. The return of Devi from the US is somewhat unacceptable to the readers as it is Sita who sends her daughter to enjoy her freedom and to live her life on her terms and again it is Sita who calls back Devi to fix her marriage in a traditional arranged marriage scenario.

Devi's return to the motherland marks the discord of the dichotomy from the clash of voices that comes from within. In this context, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan remarks:

Hariharan creates in Devi ... a product of privilege and leisure who is prey to profound existential aimlessness and angst ... She is therefore only in a manner of speaking 'responsible' for her actions – while at the same time it is not possible to 'blame' the family, society or circumstances for her situation either. If the sensitive heroine is crushed by her family, it is as much due to her helpless passivity (and sometimes halfhearted, futile rebellion), as to her destiny as 'woman'. (229)

As a single parent, the whole responsibility of finding a good match for Devi falls on Sita which she tries to do sincerely. The fact that Devi agrees to be a part of the matchmaking process shows her respect for her own culture. Marriage is an institution in the Indian traditional

system where a wife is expected to shun her identity and independence and follow what her husband tells her to do without murmur. Thus, it is a deliberate attempt to subvert a women's desire from the day she is married. Simone de Beauvoir focuses on the pathetic condition of women in traditional society. She observes:

It is the husband's duplicity that dooms the wife to a misfortune he later complains to be the victim. Just as he wants her both hot and cold in bed, he claims her gave and yet weightless; he asks her to fix him to earth and to let him be free, to ensure the daily monotonous repetition and not to bother him, always to be present and never nag him; he wants her entirely for himself and not to belong to him; to live in a couple and remain alone. (497)

As the novel progresses, it is shown that Devi meets some prospective grooms and finally decides to marry Mahesh, a manager in a multinational company. After marriage, she comes to Mahesh's house with a lot of expectations. But her expectations do not get fulfilled. Mahesh remains busy with his office tours and Devi is confined in his house. The novel is narrated from the point of view of Devi and other female characters and in this way Hariharan defies the age-old tradition of narrating a novel through male characters. In this new house, Devi's father-in-law, a renowned retired Sanskrit professor becomes her only solace in times of acute loneliness and alienation from her married life. Baba's stories play a significant role in shaping Devi's perception as an individual. His stories emphasise the importance of being a devoted housewife. He believes that a woman should serve her house and husband with utmost care and dedication. According to him, the characteristics of a wife are solely responsible for the smooth running of a house. He thinks:

The path a woman must walk to reach heaven is 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 practised selfcontrol. (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 55)

He tells Devi the classical tales from the Sanskrit language. Devi is reminded of the stories told to her by her grandmother in her childhood. She finds similarities between women in mythical stories and women in contemporary life. She believes:

Baba's stories remind me of my grandmother's, but they are also different. They are less spectacular, they ramble less. Her stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities. He defines the limits. His stories are for a woman who has already reached the goal that will determine the guise her virtue will wear. They make one point in concise terms: that the saints lived according to the laws of time-tested tradition. (51)

Hariharan defines the complexities of life by taking her storyline to the mythical folklore of ancient times which aids her to reach out to the sensibilities of readers of all ages. The amalgamation of myths and reality is potent enough to make that much-required connection between the author and the readers. Through the perfect blending of myths to the main plot of the novel, Hariharan can consign her fictitious world to another level of an exceptionally crafted oeuvre. After listening to the stories of virtuous women from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*, Devi can relate her own life to those mythical women. Human manifestations like anger, revenge and determination are portrayed through the characters of Damayanti, Amba, Gandhari and Ganga. In her grandmother's stories, "there was room only for heroes and heroines. Princesses grew up secure in the knowledge of what awaited them: love, a prince who was never short of noble, and a happy ending" (20).

Devi is acquainted with the real-life stories of Mayamma, her in-law's maid as well. Therefore, all the stories of her grandmother, her father-in-law and Mayamma infuse into Devi's life and it is seen how important the myths are in the representation of women in patriarchal society. Devi imagines herself to be a Devi i.e., a Goddess who rides a tiger while destroying mythical demons. Mythology has a place in Indian literature in all cultures across the ages. The two great epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* are replete with mythical elements and folklore. Abundance of myth is found in contemporary Indian writing as well such as Girish Karnad's plays, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh and Shashi Tharoor's novels. Githa Hariharan comments about the importance of myth:

I think myth has always been important in all cultures. I think today that it is particularly important, even in the West, where you have a certain breakdown of conventional frameworks, where institutionalised religion doesn't really work as it did, and so there's a great desire to make contact with this vast, apparently irrational baggage, that you carry around with you. So, I think myth is always important for people everywhere; there's always the need to reinterpret and see for yourself what myth means for you in your times. ("Hariharan talks to" 23)

The principal characters of *The Thousand Faces of Night* are women who hail from three different generations - Devi who faces the conflict between tradition and modernity in her perception of self-assertion, Devi's mother Sita who is considered to be an ideal wife and daughter-in-law, and her in-law's maid Mayamma for whom endurance of pain was the only option. Being an inquisitive child, Devi used to ask many questions to her grandmother. In reply to her questions, her grandmother used to tell myths from *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* just to enlighten Devi. The procedure of gaining knowledge is different for everyone as Sigmund Freud observes: "Widely different sources from fairy tales and myths, jokes and

witticisms, from folklore...sayings and songs of different people and from poetic and colloquial usage of language” (166).

In the mythical stories, it is found that there are two kinds of women depicted in the course of the novel. While women like Damayanti and Gandhari are submissive in their roles of ideal wives in a household, women like Amba and Kritya rebel against their destinies in their respective lives. Devi says about the importance of mythical stories:

My grandmother’s stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chooses 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 had to be made, an 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 stretch her frame and fit into the vast spaces, live up to her illustrious ancestors. (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 27)

It is assumed in traditional Indian scenarios that the first and foremost responsibility of a mother is to teach their daughters how to be perfect wives and daughters-in-law in her future in-law’s house. When Devi comes to know about her impending swayamvara, she recalls the story of Damayanti taken from *The Mahabharata*. Her beauty is narrated as the “fresh spring water flowed over her and then her fair body was dried with silk. Her hair braided with pearls emeralds, her eyes darkened with kohl, a vermilion circle glowing in the centre of her forehead, she floated like a fresh lotus down the carpets of the hall” (19). Damayanti marries the man of her choice through the process of swayamvara held by her father. She marries Nala, the king of Nishadas, known for his skill with horses and culinary delights.

Devi's grandmother ends the story with a moral, "a woman gets her heart's desire by great cunning" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 20). Being fascinated by the story, Devi hopes to get her man of choice through swayamvara. Devi's young mind becomes excited at the prospect of having a princess like life and the splendours that await her.

Next to this, Devi is moved by the story of Gandhari from *The Mahabharata*. On seeing her blind husband for the first time, Gandhari blindfolded herself to protest against her destiny. She instantly decides not to see the world again. Though there are several interpretations behind her motive, Devi's grandmother presumably holds the view that Gandhari did it out of anger and pride. In her words: "She embraced her destiny – a blind husband - with a self-sacrifice worthy of her royal blood" (29). Regarding Devi's concern about Gandhari's obliviousness about her husband's blindness, she gets the answer: "Because, my child, a woman meets her fate alone" (9). The story of Gandhari can be related to the story of Sita, Devi's mother. Devi comes to know from her grandmother that Sita loves to play the musical instrument, the veena. She was an excellent veena player. After marriage, she used to play the veena after completing all the household chores. One day, while playing the veena, she could not hear that her father-in-law was calling her for some work before the puja. Out of extreme anger, her father-in-law shouted: "Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" (30). At once, Sita pulled the strings of the veena and took a vow never to touch it again. In the words of Hariharan: "Sita hung her head over the veena for a minute that seemed to stretch for ages, enveloping us in 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" (30). Sita did it as a protest against the injustice that had been hurled at her. Like Gandhari in *The Mahabharata*, Sita also rebelled against her destiny. As if in a whisper she said: "Yes I am a wife and a daughter-in-law" (30). This incident is mentioned again in part III: "She tore the strings off the

wooden base, and let the blood dry on her fingers, to remind herself of her chosen path on the first difficult days of abstinence” (103).

Another incident of Sita’s life that needs to be analysed happened in a midnight kitchen. Sita’s husband Mahadevan found that Sita was having chapattis leftover from dinner. Sita was not getting rice which she used to have before marriage. “Marriage had meant that Sita would have to learn to eat dry chapattis, which refused to go down the throat like sticky, wet balls of mashed rice” (103). She did not complain because she had wanted to be an ideal wife which was of great appreciation in the traditional orthodox society. There was a striking conflict between self-sacrifice and craving for passionate things in life. Here a dutiful wife won and a woman’s desire lost. This incident in the novel is a clear indication of the fact that a woman’s existence is restricted to the domestic sphere only. Sita was caught between her role as a typical traditional Indian wife and self-expression and out of these two she chose to embody the perfect example of an ideal wife. A woman is appreciated only when she sacrifices her individuality and independence for the sake of her familial duties. It is stated in the novel: “She became a dutiful daughter-in-law the neighbours praised, and our household never heard that heartrending music again” (30). Helen Cixous opines:

Every woman has known the torment of getting up to speak. Her heart racing, at times entirely lost for words, ground and language shipping away – that’s how daring a feat, how great a transgression is for a woman to speak even just open her mouth – in public. A double distress, for even if she transgresses, her words fall almost always upon the deaf male ear, which hears in language only that which speaks in the masculine. (880-81)

There is another mythical story about a beautiful girl married to a snake. When the girl saw the snake as her husband for the first time she said: “A girl is given only once in marriage” (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 33). And the snake turned into a young and handsome man after

spending the wedding night with the girl. So, the idea of the Hindu rebirth myth is narrated in the novel.

As Devi grows older, the course of story-telling by her grandmother gets changed. The story of swayamvara by three beautiful princesses – Amba, Ambika and Ambalika are presented. Though it was a swayamvara, Amba was in love with Salva, King of Saubala. She decided to garland him but at that very moment, Bheeshma came and abducted three princesses for his brother Vichitravirya. At his place, Bheeshma came to know that Amba was to be married to King Salva and he at once sent Amba back to King Salva. But Salva disapproved Amba: “Do you think I feast on left overs? I am a king. I do not touch what another man won in the battle. Go to Bheeshma. He won you when his arrow struck my eager hand on your luckless garland. He is your husband. What have you to do with me?” (37) Being humiliated Amba went back to Bheeshma but unfortunately, he also spurned her disdainfully. Then Amba took a vow to avenge Bheeshma. During her stay in a forest, she did penance to Lord Shiva. Being pleased to her Lord Shiva offered her a garland. He said to her: “Who so ever wears this garland will surely kill Bheeshma” (39). This mythological story from *The Mahabharata* casts a lasting impression on young Devi. She learns that a woman is not merely an object whom a man can easily accept or refuse. A woman can guide herself on the path of glory and self-identity on her own. Amba could not forget about the humiliation that she faced because of Bheeshma. This is the reason why she sought vengeance from Bheeshma and she was right in her way. In this context, Devi starts imagining herself to be Devi i.e., Mother Goddess who defeats all evil doers with her weapons. Hariharan depicts Devi’s feelings like this: “I lived a secret life of my own; I became a woman warrior, a heroine, I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons’ heads” (41). Devi asks her grandmother the reason why Amba did not go back home. She retorts: “A woman without a husband has no home” (38). A woman’s value is determined by her relationship with the men of her life viz., father, brother, husband and son. Most of the time a

woman is known by someone's daughter, someone's sister or someone's wife. This kind of situation still prevails in contemporary society. The mythical story of Ganga leaves an idea of motherhood in Devi's tender mind. While walking beside the bank of the river Ganges, King Shantanu came across the beautiful Ganga. Smitten by her beauty, Shantanu asked Ganga to marry him. She agreed to marry him but she put forward the condition that Shantanu could never question her in any of her actions. To his utter surprise, King Shantanu found that Ganga killed seven children by drowning. But when Ganga was about to kill her eighth child, King Shantanu prevented her from doing so. In reply to this, Ganga gave the child to the king and plunged herself into the Ganges to wash away all her sins.

As time progresses, Devi's grandmother's "stories reached a frenzied pitched of fantasy" (39). Her stories signify the idea of what it means to be a real woman. She learns to differentiate between right and wrong. Devi begins imagining herself as Goddess and sets out to avenge all demons. In the words of Hariharan: "They called me an incarnation of Durga, walking the earth to purge it of fat-jowled, slimy-tailed greed" (43). Further, it is stated: "I set out again, alone, my breasts held firmly by the old armour, now stretched tightly over my filled-out body. I met my enemy, no fat mass of lazy flesh this time, but an iron-like villain who flexed his muscles and bared his even, sharp teeth as he laughed in wild defiance" (44).

Devi feels disconnected from her mythical embellishments when her grandmother dies. Being separated from her parents, Devi moves to the United States for further studies. She tries to build a connection with her Black American friend Dan but here also she fails to find a haven of her own. So, Devi's attempt to alienate herself from alienation continues when she marries Mahesh in an arranged marriage system. After marriage, she comes to Mahesh's house on Jacaranda Road only to find that there are two members in the family. One is Mahesh's old father, a retired Sanskrit professor and the other one is old family retainer Mayamma. At the beginning of her married life, Devi tries to adjust in her in-law's house. Mahesh talks about his

work-related issues and his priorities leaving very little space for Devi to share things from her perspective. In her words: “A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling” (49). She expects that Mahesh would try to bridge the gap between the two because of their different cultural background. But Mahesh shows no such attempt and he is engrossed in his career prospects. He remains busy with his office tours and the distance between him and Devi grows bigger with each passing day. Devi’s expectations of a thrilling married life fail miserably owing to Mahesh’s indifference towards her. Mahesh considers marriage just another necessity to lead a healthy life. He does not understand the reason behind his getting married. Neither does he care about it. With time, Devi realises that she does not have much to do in the house. The whole house is run by Mayamma, their caretaker who does her job quite skilfully. Devi cannot engage her mind in anything constructive. Mahesh’s cold behaviour and aloof nature thrust her into the unending world of emptiness and loneliness. During the period of severe disappointment, Mahesh announces that he will have to undertake another business tour. Devi states: “Why don’t you postpone the trip?” (54). In reply to this question, Mahesh utters: “Why don’t I pray to be born a woman in my next birth? Then I won’t have to make a living at all” (54).

Devi’s expectations and emotions receive a terrible blow when Mahesh utters this kind of word for her. She begins to feel more detached from her husband. A fundamental question arises in light of this statement. Is it very easy to be just a woman who does not work outside? Can a man taunt a woman like this? Doesn’t a woman deserve respect and love if she chooses to take care of the home only? These questions automatically come to the reader’s mind when he/she comes across these sentences. Not only female readers but male readers who have a little bit of feminist concern would feel the same way. Despite having good educational background, Devi chooses to be a homemaker as Mahesh’s wife. Having a lovely home and healthy relationship seem to be equally important to her as any professionally established career. Devi

becomes the Indian housewife in search of her roots otherwise she would have accepted Dan's marriage proposal. Devi begins to feel "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" (54).

With time, Devi realises she is not just a housewife. She wants more from life. She is unable to fit into the traditional role of a homemaker. Devi's education and a strong sense of self-identity make hindrance in her acceptance of being a submissive and subjugated woman. In her words: "My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood" (54). According to Mahesh, marriage is just another event like any other incident in life which holds no special significance in his life. He is completely unable to comprehend Devi's self-assertion which she wants to assert in every way possible. Mahesh thinks: "Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love" (55). He does not regard love as one of the fundamental basics of a successful marriage. He never understands that Devi needs a true companion with whom she can share her feelings. Mahesh thinks she has everything a woman yearns for. Material comforts like enormous riches, big houses and luxurious things cannot quench the thirst of Devi who is always on the lookout for establishing her self-worth. Mahesh expects that Devi should remain within the boundaries of his house and look after it. Devi feels suffocated in the house in the name of tradition.

Devi tries to mould herself completely into the role of a simple housewife but fails. Mahesh suggests Devi learn knitting and some other domestic skills from his colleague's wife Tara. He advises her to join Tara's painting classes also. She reluctantly joins but cannot relate to other housewives. She feels a strong sense of alienation as she finds it hard to communicate properly with traditional housewives. Devi can feel the difference between her and other women in the group. Despite her frantic efforts, she fails to adjust to her married life. She asks herself:

Am I neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day?
 An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education, bitter and indigestible
 when he tied the thali round my neck? A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body
 when his hand reaches out; and dream instead, in the spare room, of bodies tearing away
 their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight? (74)

Devi gets to know about her mother-in-law Parvatiamma who leaves her home in search of God. Mahesh feels he has been deprived of his mother's affection right from his childhood. Parvatiamma sacrifices her familial duties for the sake of her service to God. She entrusts Mayamma with the responsibility of her home and leaves in search of her spiritual enlightenment. In this context, the difference between the choices of Sita and Parvati has to be taken into consideration. While Parvati leaves her home on her own for her eternal quest for salvation, Sita prioritises her home over her passion. This concept is elaborated by Premila Paul:

... Parvati is a real presence, a guardian angel and an unseen mother. Devi sees the power of choice in her mother-in-law, very different from that of her own mother. While Sita's choice is one of self-denial, Parvati's is affirmation of the self. Sita asserts herself through her role as wife and mother, Parvati asserts herself by shuffling aside her familial role. (109)

Baba, Devi's father-in-law shares an interesting story with her. When he was to get married, he was supposed to choose among three girls named Hema, Parvati and Mohana. Baba selected Parvati because her name had been sounded like an out-and-out traditional girl. This attitude needs to be analysed. A girl is selected based on her name which reflects her submissive and docile nature. A man wants a wife who would be traditional in every way possible. This incident is unequivocal in understanding the fact that societal norms have been prevalent in seeing women as subalterns since time immemorial. Baba's harsh opinion about Parvatiamma's

departure has to be noted: “She has made her choice. For a woman who loves her home in search of a God, only death is home-coming” (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 64). Now, the narrative shifts its focus to Devi. She loses her identity as an individual which compels her to feel subjugated all the time. She wants some relief from her terrible married life. Unfortunately, her depression and mental agony yield no difference in Mahesh’s mind. According to him, a woman’s life is limited only to household chores. She cannot have any individuality on her own. Devi expresses her desire to work: “I must look for a job. I have so little to do” (64). She further adds: “I saw a post for a research assistant advertised in the paper” (64). This desire to find her own identity is brutally snubbed by Mahesh. He opines: “You need at least one more degree for that” (65). His typical male chauvinistic attitude is evident when he says: “And what will you do when the baby comes?” (65). Devi’s grandmother deviates from the conventional method at a time when women are supposed to be silent and obedient to the fullest. She had her way to protest against patriarchy. On the other hand, the stories of Devi’s father-in-law deal with the preconceived notion of ideal women who remain under patriarchal domination. Therefore, it can be said that the first set of stories by Devi’s grandmother highlights feminist viewpoints and Baba’s stories upholds the patriarchal version. These stories not only entertain the readers but also educate them about their responsibilities and obligations.

It is very unfortunate to note that a certain section of society thinks that a woman cannot think of her own identity except being a housewife and a mother. Mahesh also asserts that Devi’s mother Sita is the epitome of the ideal wife and daughter-in-law. He thinks that education is solely responsible for making a woman unhappy. Higher education teaches a woman to be self-dependent and it teaches to question her individuality. It is still believed that it is more commendable for a woman to be a perfect housewife than a career-oriented woman. In these times of distress, Devi finds some relief in the companionship of Baba, her father-in-law. His philosophical notes from Manusmriti provide knowledge about many ancient tales of Indian

history. Unfortunately, this shelter is also taken away from Devi when Baba's daughter Lalita calls him to visit her in New York. Anxiety fills her mind just thinking about how she would manage her loneliness. In her own words: "What I wanted to say was No, don't go, what will I do, what will we all do? Who will tell me the stories that hold back this yawning emptiness?" (68).

After Baba's departure, Devi's loneliness knows no bounds. Mahesh remains absent on his business commitments like before. She tries to look for new ways for revenge on Mahesh. She states: "I read about Kritya, a 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 shelters a Kritya" (70). As time progresses, it becomes difficult for Devi to spend time in her house on Jacaranda Road all alone. Her excruciating pain can be felt when she says: "That I felt an awesome loneliness, a wave of uselessness begins to engulf me the moment I woke up" (72). She lets him know that she has had a serious relationship with Dan in America to hurt his male chauvinistic attitude. In addition to this, she wants to see a difference in Mahesh's behavioural pattern by informing him that she had met five men in the course of her matrimonial process. Little does she know that this would make no difference in Mahesh's mind. On the contrary, he says, "You should stop looking over your shoulder all the time" (77).

Mahesh proposes that they should have a child only to be snubbed by Devi. With time, Devi realises that she is not able to conceive which makes Mahesh even more restless and desperate. He even fixes Devi's appointment with a gynaecologist. Surprisingly, Devi is not at all disheartened about not being able to become a mother. She takes it as a form of penance for her meaningless marriage with Mahesh. She feels that she can take her long-awaited revenge on Mahesh for neglecting her severely. She vindicates the fact that she is not just a woman who can produce children without having her entity. Devi's refusal to be a reproductive tool for a

man asserts her subversive power and challenges the traditional representation of women. In Devi's words: "I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh's eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb" (93). It is a preconceived notion in Indian traditional society that a woman's first and foremost duty is to produce children. Because of women's secondary role in the smooth running of the house, they are said to be the second sex or weaker sex. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir remarks:

Thus humanity is male and man defines women not in herself but as relative to him: she is not regarded as an autonomous being ...The body of man makes sense in itself quite apart from that of woman, whereas the latter seems waiting in significance by itself ... Man can think of himself without woman. She cannot think of herself without man. And she is simply what man decrees: thus she is called 'the sex', by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex, absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the absolute- she is the other. (116)

Ironically, an educated and US-returned woman, Devi suffers the same humiliation that Mayamma, an illiterate and underprivileged woman faced years ago. So where is the difference? The position of women is just the same irrespective of their generation, age, education and social status. Everyone expects a woman to be a perfect wife and an ideal mother who would endure every pain without a murmur just to survive happily within the conventional social family system.

Hariharan underpins the exploitation of women when she introduces the character of Mayamma who is an old family retainer in the household of Mahesh. In the second half of the

novel, Mayamma's story runs parallel to the main course of the novel. To escape from extreme loneliness Devi finds solace in Mayamma, a mother-like figure. Mayamma depicts her story with Devi which sets another example of women's exploitation across the ages. She is married off at the tender age of twelve. Mayamma's subjugation under the wheel of patriarchy begins immediately after marriage. Her husband is a gambler whose only aim is to torment Mayamma and use her for his physical pleasure. After one year only, Mayamma's mother-in-law becomes restless for her grandchild or more specifically for her grandson. With each passing day, she becomes anxious that Mayamma is not giving them the much-awaited good news. She blames her: "What kind of a girl is this, she said. She eats as much as anybody else but is barren. Her horoscope is a lie, she will have to do penance to change its course" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 80). It was not possible to examine Mayamma's inner organs. So, her mother-in-law had no choice but to believe in the horoscope. "Unable to check Mayamma's insides herself, she had contented herself with the astrologer's promise that Mayamma would bear her many strong grandsons" (80). Mayamma receives a terrible blow when she sees that her husband is silent even after his mother beats her. Now the question arises what is the significance of the oaths that he had taken at the time of their marriage. Mayamma remembers: "Having taken seven steps with me, be my friend; be my inseparable companion. On the darkest nights, let our common path be lit by our lustrous love. Come, let us walk together, with this guiding lamp between us" (79).

Mayamma's mother-in-law's torture knows no limits when she realises that Mayamma is unable to produce children. She even stops giving rice to her. She comments: "What is the use of feeding a barren woman?" (113). In this context, the opinion of Urmila Varma has to be mentioned:

Mayamma, an old family retainer, tells her that the secret of successful married life is the capacity to endure pain. Somehow Devi is not convinced. Through her perspective,

we see the life of her mother Sita, the mother-in-law Parvatiamma, Mayamma, Uma and the grandmother, interwoven with several myths of Gandhari, Amba and others.

(100)

After several years of waiting, Mayamma gives birth to a son. Little does she know that her oppression would reach another height with the arrival of her son. Eight years pass. Suddenly, Mayamma's husband escapes with all the money with him from the house. Mayamma's ordeal of suffering continues even after so many years. She comments: "At fourteen he threatened to beat his mother and sold her last pair of gold bangles" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 81). It is disheartening to find that Mayamma has been subjected to exploitation since she was a child. Only the torturer in her life gets changed. Her son hits her with an iron frying pan when she refuses to give him her diamond earrings. It becomes inexplicable for Mayamma to put her miserable condition in words. Yet she describes: "Through the cloud of pain, wet, sticky about her head on the hard floor, she felt his rough hands at her ears, grasping, tearing away" (82). Her son proves to be just the replica of his father and the torment for Mayamma continues till the death of her son in fever. Hariharan remarks: "The day he died, Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life's handiwork: now all these had been snatched from her" (82). Mayamma shows immense fortitude towards life and takes shelter in Parvatiamma's house. From that day, Parvati becomes her only relative in life.

Mayamma's mother-in-law despite being a woman is unjust towards another woman. She portrays the ignorance and superstition of a typical village set-up. She believes in a horoscope which foretells Mayamma's future motherhood. Her conscience does not even prick her when she keeps on inflicting more and more torture on Mayamma with each passing day in the hope of getting her grandson. This incident denotes the cruel fact that women themselves are forced into believing age-old traditions. Eventually, women end up trusting the traditions

and abiding by them vehemently. Most of the rituals and customs do not allow women to question their identity and they become unable to lead their life in the path of self-actualisation. Mayamma becomes indifferent to any other suffering as she has already had her share of emotional pain. After tolerating tremendous physical and mental pain, Mayamma finds a place of comfort in Parvati's house. Unfortunately, she leaves too. The situation of Mayamma is elaborated:

Mayamma is a typical Indian female who accepts her fate, curses it but never questions it and lives her life exactly as was expected of her. She bore the brunt of cruelty that society had ordained for a woman as a daughter, a wife, a daughter-in-law, a deserted woman and a mother. (Yelliah and Pratima 192)

Mayamma never protests against the cruelty that has been forced on her. She accepts her fate without retaliation. According to Devi: "Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, first hand. She snarls and sulks but she has no bitterness" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 135-136).

The character of Mayamma draws its sustenance from the real-life occurrence of Githa Hariharan. While she was enjoying the early days of pregnancy, she was surrounded by a lot of elderly women. From these kinds of people, she developed the idea of creating a woman like Mayamma who would represent traditional Indian women who are left with no option but to accept their fate silently. Hariharan says in her interview to Arnab Chakladar:

... And so I started writing the section on Mayamma, the old woman, first, and that just sort emerged intact-- because I had got to know so many old women like that so well. Probably for the first and last time as a writer I had that experience some writers talk about, "it wrote itself". I know it's possible and I also now know that it doesn't happen

too often. After I had that little fragment I knew that there was something I could work on, but I had to figure out how to make a novel of it! (“A Conversation with” 7)

All the mythical stories embedded in the novel have been used deftly to highlight different aspects of Devi’s life. All these fictional and real-life stories have something to do with Devi’s decision-making process. It can be analysed how Damayanti’s story serves as a precursor of Devi’s impending swayamvara during the novel. In addition to this, Uma and Gauri’s stories are given to prepare the readers to understand Devi’s problematic married life. Emotion can vary according to the situation as shown in the novel. Githa Hariharan deserves much accolade for creating emotions which are rather ordinary but have been given an extraordinary status by articulating a web of human relationships which sets a paradigm of ideal human bonding. Devi has been presented as a daughter, wife, daughter-in-law and lover in the novel. She tries her best to ameliorate herself in every way possible in the prescribed role that had been assigned to her either by choice or by compulsion. In this context, a few lines by Dr. Ajay Kumar in the book *The Heroine in Githa Hariharan’s The Thousand Faces of Night* need to be mentioned: “Like T.S. Eliot, Hariharan also believes the business of the writer is not to find new emotions but to use ordinary ones to make them into a work of art” (69).

At the beginning of the novel, it is seen that she comes home immediately when she receives the letter from her mother. Had it been any other girl, it is possible that she would have stayed back in the US and would have led her life the way she wanted. When she is married off to Mahesh, she tries to utilise her education by joining as a research assistant. But this attempt is snubbed by her husband. She even expresses her desire to have the companionship of Mahesh while playing cards but this desire is also disapproved by him. Her wish to learn Sanskrit for a better understanding of Baba’s stories is also turned down. It is disheartening to find that a woman cannot have anything according to her choice. She has to seek permission from the male member of her family viz., father, husband and son. In this novel, male characters do not

succeed in their relationships with the women in their lives. Baba, Devi's father-in-law is a successful professor but he fails to take proper care of his son when Parvatiamma leaves. Similarly, Devi's husband Mahesh is successful in his professional life but he is miserable in supporting his wife mentally. Devi's physical imprisonment doesn't confine her psychological status and she finds a way through which she can vent her pent-up frustration and explore her overweening self-actualisation. Devi becomes extremely lonely in her in-law's house. Mahesh's long absence from home due to office tours makes her feel alienated and completely companionless. Moreover, Baba's sudden departure to the US makes her feel dejected even more. Subsequently, she finds a way out of her pent-up suppression in the companionship of Gopal, her neighbour and a renowned Hindustani classical singer. As time progresses, Devi develops a relationship with Gopal which begins to soothe her ailing and neglected soul. She feels she has a subtle role to play in this relationship with Gopal. Gopal's musical chord can build the much-required connection between him and Devi. She breaks the traditional barriers that prevent a woman from finding her happiness and she leaves in search of her real self. In Gopal, Devi feels that she would find her unsatiated womanly desires. She starts living with Gopal. S. Indira remarks:

Condemning Mahesh to a lonely life without wife or child for tramping on the marital vows, Devi went away with Gopal hoping to find her own emotional voice through music, which in itself was 'a non-conformist mode of spiritual expression'. The fascination of the new relationship lasts until Devi understands her place in his life. She realises that the time has come to leave Gopal otherwise she would be drifting between worlds. (68)

Devi feels that the time has come for her to stop the struggle for adjusting to the traditional family structure and she should live with all dignity. But Devi's fascination with the relationship with Gopal does not last long. Soon, she can fathom her place in Gopal's life.

Earlier, she decides to leave Mahesh for Gopal because she finds Gopal to be the perfect companion for her. Her world of illusions gets crumbled down when she discovers Gopal is no better than Mahesh. Devi begins to accompany Gopal in his musical concerts only to understand her position in his extremely busy life. Gopal's world is replete with things which are connected to his musical career. Devi has absolutely no role to play in Gopal's musical space. It seems Devi acts as an object used for physical pleasure only. Amid this chaos: "She looked around her, eyes sharpened by the unforgiving burning inside" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 134). This ordeal goes on for a few months. Finally, the day comes when she finally decides to leave. Hariharan opines: "Devi knew the time was right, if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned to drift between worlds, a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland" (138). While leaving: "She covered the mirror with the silk so that the room suddenly became darker, and everything, the beds, the table, the sleeping body of Gopal, were themselves again, no longer reflections" (138). The fact that Devi covers the mirror with the silk implies that she does not want to carry her past along with her. She wants to start afresh with new enthusiasm. After so many incidents in life, she can find her self-identity which is further exaggerated by Sita's playing the Veena at that very moment when she returns. Devi is determined to search for herself from the place where she had started long ago. Her house is free from social constraints that become a fetter which prevents a woman from thinking from a liberal point of view. She is about to rediscover her relationship with her mother. Hariharan writes: "She straightened her back as she saw the house come into view. She rehearsed in her mind the words, the unflinching look she had to meet Sita with to offer her love. To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning" (139). In such a baffling situation, women often face a dilemma between establishing their identity and a sense of loss as a non-entity which is elaborated by Luce Irigaray:

On the outside, you attempt to conform to an order which is alien to you. Exiled from yourself, you fuse with everything that you encounter. You mime whatever comes near you. In your hunger to find yourself, you move indefinitely far from yourself, from me. Assuming one model after another one master after another, changing your face, form and language according to the power that dominates you. Sundered by letting yourself be abused, you become an impassive travesty. You no longer return as the indifferent one. You return closed and impenetrable. (38)

Devi wins her battle against her destiny despite all the obstacles that come her way. At the time of separation from Dan, Mahesh and Gopal, Devi becomes hopeful about her future. She feels that her life will flourish with new energy and enthusiasm. Devi reprobates the path shown by all the mythical characters and existing role models. She can make her way which leads her to self-liberation. She becomes the embodiment of women who create, protect and perpetrate their predicament by dint of their sheer perseverance and determination. Devi's comeback to her mother at the end signifies her mere victory against all odds which is eventually perceived as the ultimate celebration of the Goddess Devi and women as a whole. She is projected as a role model for all oppressed women. Through her characterisation, Hariharan questions the boundaries of Indian traditional discourse which restricts women from asserting their individuality. All the mythical stories, real-life stories of Sita and Mayamma and her father-in-law's stories do not teach her to be submissive but to choose the alternative towards the path of self-assertion. The common story of marital disharmony and women's identity crisis leads to a collective struggle of women in general for emancipation. The author weaves the narrative through intertextuality and the dexterous portrayal of overlapping the texts in interesting ways. The mythical characters are intertwined in the main narrative which strikes a chord in the vibrating dynamics of contemporary literature. This fictional discourse amounts to an immense mythic time-space continuum. Devi's grandmother's stories, drawn from the ancient epics, are

replete with tales regarding women's individuality and dignity. It is important to note that Hariharan does not only dwell on well-known figures like Sita, and Savitri but also brings into focus the lesser-known characters like Gandhari, Ganga and Amba. Simone de Beauvoir asserts:

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 nonetheless to exist for him also: mutually recognising each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other another. The reciprocity of their relations will not do away with the miracles- desire, possession, love, dream, adventure- worked by the division of human beings into two separate categories; and the words that move us- giving, conquering, uniting- will not lose their meaning. (351)

Devi comes back home in the hope that her mother, Sita would surely understand her hankering for establishing her self-identity which cannot be compromised at any cost. It is high time to understand that women can attain salvation without the presence of men in their lives. Devi's coming back celebrates this notion not only for herself but for the whole community of women. Devi comes out of her shell and opposes the hegemonic patriarchal social system. In this way, she paved the way for common women to speak up for their rights and act accordingly. It has been perceived for a long time that a happy marriage does not depend only on the woman's ability to endure all pain and enough fortitude to adjust. Hitherto, Devi's search for self-ignites common women's passion for freedom and independence from all the shackles of traditional society. This novel aptly delineates women who have a thousand faces and can portray their image whenever it is needed. One of the dominant themes of this novel is penance which has been manifested in its various forms concerning the physical and mental exploitation of women. Penance changes its course from self-implemented torment to the path of accomplishment of resistance. Amba, the mythical character in the Hindu epic *The Mahabharata*, does her share of penance to take revenge on Bheeshma. Similarly, Mayamma does penance to be a mother

after ten long years. Hearing all these stories, Devi thinks penance is an essential part of a woman's life. In her words: "That which is hard to get over, hard to get, hard to reach, hard to do, all that can be accomplished by penance: it is difficult to overcome penance" (Hariharan, *The Thousand* 67).

The Thousand Faces of Night is a novel of three main women characters whose lives portray a thousand faces of women in their non-existent lives. Sita sacrifices her passion for playing the veena to be an ideal wife and daughter-in-law. Eventually, she becomes the embodiment of a dedicated wife and devoted housewife. But she feels utter feelings of absolute futility and frustration. Mayamma, the oldest of the three, does not fight for her rights and succumbs to her situation. But Devi does not accept what comes her way. She is not ready to abide by what societal norms have prescribed for her. All the stories by her grandmother, father-in-law and Mayamma complete her mental composure and she becomes a courageous lady who can take her life's decisions according to her heart's desire. Each woman from the three successive generations suffers the same traumatic humiliation in their respective family life either for being barren or rebellious. Hence, the eternal question of the subjugation of women arises. What is the role of education if Devi, a modern and highly educated woman suffers the same fate as Mayamma's who faced the same torment years ago? Does marriage mean only physical pleasure which a wife is supposed to provide her husband? Is it only the societal conformed notion of motherhood that everyone expects out of a woman after marriage? All the men in Devi's life viz., Dan, Mahesh and Gopal fail miserably in understanding her expectations from life.

The influence of mythology on fiction indicates an indelible mark in terms of its rereading, rewriting, and re-creating. Hariharan, with her sheer brilliance and skilful acumen, exerts her narrativity to dissect the past and redefine the present. The fictional discourse evokes

multiple layers of self-perception and self-expression that bind her within the familial structure. Hariharan dismantles the myth of how women are expected to act as per the traditional norms. The novel can be termed as a myth-making programme that functions through mythical representation to ameliorate the condition of women in contemporary times. Myths of ancient texts need to be retold and reinterpreted as this particular work of fiction achieves the status of mythopoeia and mythography. Both mythopoeia and mythography serve to vitiate male supremacy. The impact of myth can be both life-changing and destructive. In *Managing Monsters: Six Myths of our Time*, Marina Warner observes:

Myths offer a lens which can be used to see human identity in its social and cultural context- they can lock us up in stock reaction, bigotry and fear, but they're not immutable, and by unpicking them, the stories can lead to others. Myths convey values and expectations which are always evolving, in the process of being formed, but – and this is fortunate – never set so hard they cannot be changed again. (14)

Hariharan creates a strong sense of sisterhood among the women characters of the novel. They provide emotional support to each other when it is needed. Devi's mother-in-law gives shelter to an impoverished and helpless Mayamma. Again, Mayamma stands as a support system for Devi whenever she feels humiliated by her doctor or her husband's gaze. In the last scene of the novel, Devi comes back home with a strong desire to live her life on her terms. Devi's strength can be measured in the lines of Simone de Beauvoir: "All oppression creates a state of war; this is no exception" (251). In this context, the mother-daughter relationship theory of Luce Irigaray, the famous French feminist needs to be analysed. Irigaray says that the bonding between mother and daughter needs to be stronger by doing everyday household chores together and by sharing their feelings. Inter-subjectivity should be formed by creating personal space for both mother and daughter. Irigaray thinks that women's voices in terms of

their political and social situation need to be heard at the global level and relationship at the base level i.e., the mother-daughter has to be exceptionally good. At the end of the novel, Devi comes back to her mother in the hope that both of them will empower each other. Devi is so captivated by the mythical stories that she thinks of herself as an embodiment of the deities.

Though the women characters of three successive generations are pitted against the torment of a patriarchal society, it is important to focus on the variation of their class, race and culture in different women. The reaction of subjugation in a male-dominated social structure is not the same in three women i.e., Devi, Sita and Mayamma. The different approach by the main female characters forms the essence of the novel and in this way, it becomes apparent how patriarchal oppression takes its toll upon women of various age, socio-economic background and financial status. According to Gayatri Chakraborty Spivak, basic fundamental principles of each individual should be analysed individually. Spivak elaborates on the concept of “subject” and “other” in her much-celebrated essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* While the term “subject” defines the dominant force which is responsible for the progression of society, the term “other” outlines those who are oppressed in society like third-world women, marginalised and homosexual people. In short, it can be said that “other” specifies those who do not fit well in mainstream society. In this novel, the male chauvinistic attitude of men characters can be put under “subject” and the woman who tries to get her voice heard is definitely “other.” As a matter of fact, “other” is seen as a mere parasite to “subject” and it is obvious that “other” does not have any individual entity of her own. Spivak asserts: “As an object of colonialist historiography and as a subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (18). Though Spivak emphasises the fact that the subaltern cannot speak, Devi establishes how she can speak and she can make people listen to her with attention. Being caught between tradition and modernity, Devi

enlightens rays of hope for modern women in search of liberation on their terms. Most importantly, Devi comes back home by shunning her identity as “other” and becomes “subject”. According to Spivak, an ennobling situation should be created for the subaltern to realise their position in society and speak for themselves otherwise if the elites, intellectuals and academicians take it upon themselves to speak for the subaltern they would talk about their interests, their goals and aspirations. In this novel, the marginalised characters speak and make the decisions of their lives as per their ennobling situations. In *Under the Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses*, Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticises Western feminist texts where general categorisations of third-world women are demonstrated. She opines that mere labelling of third-world women as victims, uneducated, sexually assaulted and tradition-bound does not serve the purpose of analysing post-colonial feminism, rather one should critically examine third-world women under multiple complexities, diversity and other aspects. In this novel too, the three principal women characters can be put under the scanner given the diversity and different discursive practices that they are subjected to endure. In the opinion of Barthes, myth is represented by humans’ history and it occurs through communicative intentions. Since it is completely created out of imaginative powers, it can be transformed at varying degrees or destroyed. The outcome of mythical scriptures changes with the changing socio-cultural scenario. An ideology is formed by the dexterous implementation of myths at some point in time. The most important function of myth is to naturalise a social belief which is universal across time and space. The mythical archetypes elucidate human emotion and human subconscious and it indicates the similarity in people’s thought process. Freud opines that myth, the wish dreams of people, does not depend on Historical facts rather it is based on a personal biological conception of man. His notion of the Oedipus complex and Electra complex are reflected in myths, folktales and fairy tales. In Barthe’s words: “Myth does not deny thing, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply, it purifies them, it makes

them innocent, it gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that of an explanation but of a statement of fact” (215). Levi-Strauss argues that myths are structured in binary opposition like good vs. bad. While the mother of Krishna embodies the good mother, Kaikeyee of *The Ramayana* remains the exemplar of a bad mother. The Binary opposition is universal in terms of mythical folktales. In his words: “By dividing the myth into sequences not always clearly indicated by the plot, and by relating each sequence to paradigmatic sets capable of giving them a meaning. We eventually found ourselves in a position to define the fundamental characteristics of a myth” (Strauss 199).

In Indian traditional society, goddesses are worshipped in many cultures but in reality, women are treated not with much respect that they deserve. Women’s collective struggle for self-emancipation is reflected through the multiple voices of different characters in the novel. While dealing with discrimination, they dream of a better future. The unique narrative structure of narrating a text within a text enunciates the hope in their minds. Urmila Varma opines:

Githa Hariharan is a new voice which cannot remain stifled or silent any more. It has to resound to be heard. It is a prophetic voice announcing the emergence of a new identity. Her pen, which is mightier than the sword, attempts to establish a new order. She has adopted satire as a mode of expression to give voice to her anger. It pierces quite deeply, destroying age-old wisdom, dismantling old myths and heralding a new dawn. Compared to other modes adopted by writers, satire has proved to be a more effective and powerful style of expression. (104)

Women are portrayed as real subalterns whose voices remain unheard and often silenced by cultural prejudices and social oppression. Like the colonisation theory, women are colonised by their coloniser i.e., the men. While the men secure the position of central force in the patriarchal social structure, the women sustain the role of marginalised and inferior through hegemonic discourse. To make the men achieve their identity, women are made to believe that their success

lies in their men's success. Postcolonial feminist writing has been a matter of great enthusiasm since the development of feminism as a concept. Indian male authors' focus on serious issues has had a negligible impact on women as a whole. Indian nationalists were concerned about the colonisers rather than the female subjects. Therefore, the literature of Indian women writers comprises the domestic sphere and women's experiences in the familial structure. These new breeds of writers demonstrate how women become the preservers of traditional values. The notion of Indian women conjures up an image wherein women compromise or rebel against the existing order of socio-cultural ethos. Despite the rift in communalism and religious fundamentalism, gender and class function in varying degrees. Relating to women's role in society. The interspersing relation of religion and mythology is evident in various conceptual and cultural spaces. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a mythic narrative where Indian myths are reconstructed from a feminist angle. Mythological echoes are found in contemporary literary works and thus provide impetus in distinguishing literature of specific areas. Hariharan's protagonists look up to the characters from ancient mythologies and in this way, they become capable of asserting their worth. Therefore, it can be said that mythologies of the cultural discourse gain greater credence as myth shapes modern-day literature. A. G. Khan compares *The Thousand Faces of Night* to *The Mahabharata* and thinks of it as *The Mahabharata* of feminism. According to her, there are two preconceived slots for women to fit in - one is for women who sacrifice all comforts of mainstream society and leads the life of a nun and the other is for devoted housewives. While Mayamma and Parvatiamma fall into the former group, Sita willingly chooses the latter. Devi is a clear exception. She selects her path which would take her to her own desired space. Contrary to this, Makarand Paranjape cannot differentiate between the condition of women of various generations, social classes and educational backgrounds. He observes: "All these women have trouble adjusting to a constricting and dehumanising environment into which they find themselves trapped. They are unstable people,

unable to cope and survive in a world which seems to deface their identities. They are slowly, but inexorably driven to the brink of extreme mental distress or suicide” (19).

Rajeswari Sunder Rajan outlines the oppressive nature of the women characters when she writes:

In the chain of causality, we see how the family first distorts and represses women's desire, and then co-opts or browbeats them into submission to its structures by turning them into either stoic sufferers (Mayamma), or the grim agents of domination (Sita), or confused conformists (Devi), who perpetuate patriarchy's dominion. (230)

It is a harsh reality of conventional society that when a woman gives priority to her passion over her familial duties, she is termed as “selfish.” From this point onwards, the real journey of a woman begins. A woman should try to centre themselves from the position of marginalised and assert their subjectivity over her being “normative” in the socio-cultural sphere that she is in. By incorporating cultural myths into contemporary social fabric, Hariharan enables her protagonist Devi to recreate her own story of womanhood where she no longer plays the role of a “subaltern” but actively takes the gear of her life into her own hands. The dominant myth of Indian womanhood is needed to subvert the patriarchal notion. Revisionism of myth is a method of women's liberation wherein they learn to question their stance in a male-dominated set-up. By framing texts within texts, Hariharan moulds the old myth into a revised form and makes it relevant even in current socio-cultural conditions. Myth when placed and shaped in a different time and space becomes a new myth. With a rapidly changing social paradigm, Hariharan deconstructs and reinvigorates the myth and her writings pave the way for an improvised myth. As the title of the novel suggests, *The Thousand Faces of Night* underscores how women are demoralised in a thousand ways and how they adopt a thousand ways to subvert patriarchal domination. The word “Night” denotes a dark phase in the women's section that

seems to have a never-ending connotation. Hence, the role of mythology in highlighting the destiny of women foregrounds many relevant critical questions whose endings remain unanswered. In an attempt to create an alternative female identity, Hariharan's women locate a new space that is secluded and marginalised. Women are not only victimised at the hands of chauvinistic dominance but also it is their unawareness about their rights which makes them weaker within the patriarchal authority. Present-day challenges are moulded in the characters and this paves the way for the demystification of myths in the multidimensional socio-cultural fabric of the nation. The novel vociferously advocates the fact that freedom lies where one can exercise his/her choice and the tenacity to sustain that. *The Thousand Faces of Night* signals a gradual change where everyone should put some effort into bringing about the desired gender equality. The usage of mythology in this particular novel makes space for transformative gender politics. Personal has been merged into the mythical and the collective and this makes the narrative questioning. The fictional discourse is an exemplar of its kind where the protagonist internalises the lessons of ancient texts in which she is taught: "Be careful Devi when you next ask a question" (Hariharan Prelude). Finally, it can be said that *The Thousand Faces of Night* foregrounds women's multiple voices that are centred on the theme of mythical scriptures colliding with real and mythical characters.

Chapter II

The Ghosts of Vasu Master: Myth as a Means of Healing

Githa Hariharan's second novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, is exemplary in portraying the rediscovery of a retired schoolmaster Vasu's life as an individual and as a teacher as well. The dexterous portrayal of Vasu at the end of his life and career defines his whole life in front of him in a form of nostalgia. Although the 48 chapters of the novel lack interconnectedness, these chapters can be treated as an independent one that works like an interior monologue. The narrative craft examines the human psychology and its underlying aspects of it. The entire persona of Vasu Master is presented through his thoughts, and the reminiscences of his past life plunge him into an eternal quest for his self-assertion. In uncovering the layers of Vasu's multitudinous psyche, Hariharan explores the untold sufferings faced by a schoolteacher in his four-decade-long teaching career. Almost all the characters in the novel engage themselves in narrating tales to another person. In this fictional discourse, storytelling plays a dominant role in conditioning and shaping the central characters' lives in a better and balanced way. In this novel, Myths and fables play a decisive role in the transition from being a dismantled person to a more confident and fulfilling person. Hariharan has always been a voracious reader of education of the east and west, ancient healing system and this novel is a culmination of these kinds of interests. *The Charaka Samhita*, *Buddhist Jataka Tales* and *The Panchatantra* feature extensively in this fictional discourse and this underscores the fact that these have not lost charm in the flux of time. Like her contemporary writer Shashi Deshpande, Hariharan too has a fascination for the Indian age-old tradition of story-telling. This method enables the writers to oscillate India's timeless storytelling tradition in a time-space continuum as a particular story adheres to a specific time or space zone. Therefore, the stories achieve the stature of the

universality of past, present and future. Since one of the two principal characters does not speak, the author faces the tremendous challenge of holding the interests of the readers. Vasu begins to tell mythical scriptures with the sole objective of healing the boy but he is confronted with the eternal quest of his life i.e., can he teach or heal the reticent Mani? The perfect blending of imaginary myths and fantasy creates a body of work which questions different human predicaments. The mystery underlying the succession of magnificent stories reveals dimensions of human conditions. Storytelling is *primaeval* and one of the most important human activities. It is an integral part of communication wherein we assess experiences from the past. Madhu Jain's observation is quite pertinent to note:

A marvellously written book with wit as corrosive as dry ice and sharpness which can pin down vague niceties like a needle through a butterfly, and the ability to anthropomorphize animate and inanimate life... Hariharan takes in her large fabulist sweep most of the problems of India: from post-colonial hang-ups or blues, clerk mentalities and, allegorically India's perennially troublesome unity-in-diversity and lots more ... Big issues of life. (2)

Centred in an imaginary South Indian village of Tamil Nādu, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* permeates the different facets of Vasu's life. Vasu Master, a lonely widower, derives pleasure while reliving his past. In his sojourn within his imaginary world, he is accompanied by his father, wife, and wife's friend Jameela's ghosts. Hariharan has opined in one of her interviews that "*The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is the most autobiographical of all my books. But as a matter of fact, a lot of the questions which preoccupy this retired schoolteacher are precisely those questions which preoccupy me and certainly preoccupied me quite obsessively then, being involved in my little children's education and of course with healing ..." ("The Double Burden" 10). While planning to write about his experiences of being a teacher, Vasu is continuously plagued by his painful memories. The memories of past life seem like the shadow of ghost life

to him because he often gets into reverie: “I found that I was dreaming often; daydreams and night-dreaming” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 40). While teaching Mani, Vasu relives his own life right from his childhood. The intermingling of past and present constitutes well-being on the levels of mind, body and soul. The predominance of women empowerment finds expression in all of Hariharan’s novels. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, too presents the psychological aspects of women wherein they are not given their due place. The women who are empowered in this novel are Jameela, Mangala’s friend and Vasu’s grandmother. Surprisingly, it is widowhood and old age respectively that provide the required impetus for individual worth. Although this novel of Hariharan does not demonstrate feminist overtones dominantly, it bears the imprints of feminism. Mani, a somewhat intellectually disabled boy, comes to him after leaving school. The observations of teaching the intellectually challenged boy transform Vasu and land him in a place where he digs up his past to enlighten the child. He moulds himself to every possible extent just for the sake of Mani’s improvement in a positive light. Interestingly, while trying to diagnose Mani’s problems, Vasu seems to forget his own physical ailments. This indicates that his problems are more psychological than physical. In Vasu’s words: “I accepted my new charge immediately because I knew Mani was not like the other three tuition boys. They seemed bored and lazy, and I often thought that they richly deserved the two doses they got of the same lessons, once in school and then again in my room” (10). In this context, it is extremely important to discern that the past and the present are entwined together for an understanding of Vasu’s present predicament. He embarks on a new journey as a pedagogue to Mani and thus he shrugs off his inhibitions on taking a fresh challenge after his retirement. During the teaching-learning process between Vasu and Mani, the former dives into contemplation and seems to figure out his way of salvation. Vasu’s engagement with his last pupil resuscitates ghosts from his past and the way these ghosts make their presence felt is quite noteworthy. As a matter of fact, Vasu’s teachings remind us of gurukul’s system of the ancient country in sharp contrast to declining moral and

aesthetic values. However, Vasu's struggle with Mani continues when the following lines of Hariharan's text are read: "Did he really need a teacher? Or did he really need someone who could demolish the wall of silence around him, brick by brick, someone my father would have called a truly pragmatic healer?" (74). Actually, Mani needs a pragmatic healer much more than a teacher, and this void is fulfilled by Vasu. With the greatest empathy, Vasu deals with the child within the hackneyed teaching procedure in the current educational system. Vasu tries to break down the deep-layered wall of silence of Mani which he has built around him so long. The obstinate silence of Mani becomes the most intriguing part and often this takes the form of violence that needs to be resisted. At this point, Vasu is appalled at a twelve-year-old boy's behavioural pattern. It takes no time for him to understand that usual pedagogical skills are not enough, rather it triggers vehemence. The fantasy and fables serve dual motives; one is to heal the student and another is to heal the teacher. Both the characters are in acute need of growth in their mindsets. The independent chapters deal with narratives comprising digressive ideologies which stand apart from the main course of the novel. Vasu is thoroughly encompassed with memories of the ghosts of his kith and kin viz., his parents, grandparents, headmaster Veera Naidu, the teachers Venkatesan and Raghavan and his wife Mangala and so on. The presence of the ghosts is of utmost importance as these attempts of visibility by the ghosts not only bother the protagonist, Vasu but the readers as well. Bhutalia notes:

He is accosted by memories by memories (ghosts) of his dead wife Mangala, his father, his long-dead grandmother. Rubbing shoulders with these characters are Vasu's two sons who hover in the background, Veera Naidu, the headmaster of the school in which Vasu taught, Venkatesan, his onetime colleague and sort-of friend, and ever-present Mani, Vasu's last pupil, whose silent presence (he utters only one sound throughout the book, 'Aaaaah') permeates the entire narrative. (31)

Hariharan's fiction talks about the science of ayurveda in the characterisation of Vasu's father, an ayurvedic doctor. The need to focus on the well-being of body, mind and soul is emphasised by Vasu's attempts to keep himself fit. Moreover, Vasu's path of redemption and subsequent enlightenment is shown by his father: "My father then was no ordinary healer. His powers were directed at the food that made the body; the body that made the mind; the mind that made the unique, whole individual, the carrier of the spirit" (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 21). Vasu falls ill and visits the doctor but the physicians are unable to treat him completely. The memories and dreams of his past comprising several images of his personal and professional life affect him on a large scale. In his reminiscences, he comes across his mother, Lakshmi who fights a losing battle on all fronts. She struggles hard to raise her voice against the tyrannical household but is unable to do so. She is compelled to lead her life as a docile and submissive wife. Mangala's life revolves around her familial duties towards her husband and sons. Her unnoticeable and inconspicuous presence begins to haunt Vasu only in her physical absence i.e., after her death. On the contrary, Vasu's grandmother represents a woman of substance who dares to dissent from the prevalent norm of the patriarchal social fabric. Both Vasu's grandmother and wife possess a plethora of mythical anecdotes and fables which provide traditional essence in his life. Furthermore, it is also to be noted that Vasu's experimental teaching with Mani marks the gradual shift from the effects of colonialism. This innovative way of teaching includes a healing process that insinuates the special bond between the teacher and the pupil. While opting for new methods for teaching Mani, Vasu remembers how he had learnt slokas and Shakespeare together in his childhood. The mixed learning inculcates a sort of hybridity of culture in him. Anjali Roy opines: "These 'cultures of totality' become available to the protagonist Vasu Master when he owns up to the ghosts of his 'Tamil speaking subhuman' past after a lifetime's wrestle with colonial education" (105).

With the arrival of Mani in his life, Vasu takes up the challenge of healing a difficult student in the second innings of his career i.e., after retirement. As if he utters in soliloquy:

At the time I thought that remembering (too much and too often) was an illness that struck those with empty time on their hands; a kind of retirement benefit. Like the doctors who had examined Mani, I too found myself in the throes of a struggle to diagnose. The difference was that unlike them, I could not give up; because Mani brought with him another demanding patient: myself. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 23)

When doctors, schools, and many teachers have failed with Mani or rather better to say Mani failed with them, the entire responsibility falls on Vasu's shoulders to make him move in the real sense of the term. No one can locate what exactly Mani's problems are or what measures to be taken to cure him. While dealing with the mentally disabled boy, Vasu is often reminded of his dead father who was an Ayurvedic healer. Being an open-minded person, Vasu's father never forced him into joining his profession of medicine. People from faraway places used to visit him for taking ayurvedic medicines. Vasu fondly reminisces about his father's brilliance in manufacturing own medicines at his place. He still believes no ailment can create much damage to the human body if the digestive system works well with the body. Even the dream of having a strong nation can be fulfilled with powerful and healthy citizens. Poverty and disease should be eradicated to uplift a nation's progress. In this way, Vasu tries to imbibe the lessons which he has learnt from his father and attempts to transfer the same set of values to pupils, especially Mani. Vasu tries to inculcate the spirit of unity irrespective of religion, caste and creed. The emotional attachment of Vasu and his father is so strong that Vasu seeks guidance from his father's ghost in his plight. He wonders what his father would have done in that situation where he is placed to teach and transform Mani. As the title of the novel suggests, Vasu is encompassed with ghosts. His father's memories etched upon his psyche so much that he accepts the alternative method of teaching, Ayurveda, and believes in the perfect blending of

Shakespeare and Gandhian ideologies etc. in his life. He understands that Mani needs healing more than teaching and therefore he remarks: “Stories seemed to soothe Mani. It mattered very little what they were about, since he showed no sign of understanding them. But when I first filled up the silence between us with nonsense about animals and forests, his mask of defiant imperviousness slipped, and he sat, chin, cupped in both hands, elbows on the table watching my face” (76). The fables are carefully designed to make Mani react to some of them. It is far more important for him to comprehend the different aspects of reality rather traditional teaching-learning process. Hence, the parables and fables serve as a soothing element to wrap up Mani’s fragile and perturbed mind. The allegories are designed for Mani to meet the unexplored challenges of life. Along with mythical representations, Hariharan excels in underscoring the relevance of fables in contemporary fiction. Here Vasu takes the help of numerous fables for Mani to entertain and teach him. Interestingly, the myths are not retold but are created only for Mani’s sake. Vasu seems to invent new fables to communicate with the handicapped boy who is unable to speak. Since all the methods of traditional classroom teaching have failed with Mani, Vasu contrives stories about his own life to extricate some reactions from the boy. The author dexterously foregrounds how the fables not only heal the boy but these fables aid in healing Vasu’s tumultuous life. Vasu begins to interrogate his capabilities as an educator who does not succeed in making Mani responsive to the least. In an interview with Susheila Nasta, Hariharan asserts:

In the new novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1995), I think it becomes central in terms of ideas because I’m primarily interested in the question of what teaching is and what healing is, and whether teaching can heal. I’m looking at different healing systems, so tradition and modernity become terribly important because you’re looking at traditional systems of education and traditional systems of healing and modern situations and

seeing what would be worth keeping and what have we lost while rejecting what was clearly not working. (“Hariharan talks to” 25)

Mani’s entry into Vasu’s life provides much impetus in an attempt to search for his own identity. Mani’s presence, at the critical juncture of Vasu’s life, can be termed as a much-needed space required to fill in the emptiness of his life. While travelling through the past terrains of his life, Vasu finds solace in dealing with the boy who has been shunned by almost everyone. Mani, a mentally disabled boy, who has been denied by traditional schools and doctors, comes to Vasu in his insipid life with a hope to ameliorate the condition. Vasu begins to find an answer to the question, is it possible to teach Mani and transform him like any other normal boy? Surprisingly, Mani learns to respond by drawing the pictures of stories told by Vasu. Hence, sign language marks the beginning towards Mani’s development which is further aggravated by Vasu’s creative methods of teaching. Discarding traditional teaching tools like pens, pencils and exercise books, Vasu tries to impart love to the child. It is important to analyse that Vasu vents out his pent-up demons and burdens in the company of Mani. Being haunted by his problematic past, Vasu tries to live amicably in his present. The series of stories told by Vasu primarily uplifts Mani and his proclivity to become sensible gets initiated in a positive light. Vasu stands the test of time by accomplishing the challenging job of teaching Mani. It is apt to quote Anjali Roy’s observations in this context:

The Ghosts of Vasu Master makes it amply clear that to inherit the legacy of *Panchatantra* you have to be born a Tamil Brahmin... Because *Panchatantra* is not a style you can emulate by reading it. It is the way of life that runs in your blood. *Panchatantra*, as *nitishastra*, provides a clue to the pedagogy of Vasu Master. The emphasis on the way of *niti* is on the exercise of practical wisdom in affairs private and public, and all-round and harmonious development of human powers. (15)

The striking affinity to *The Panchatantra* and *The Buddhist Jataka Tales* reverberates the underlying moral purpose in the changing times. The animal characters along with humans entwined in the stories become multi-dimensional with the diverse narrative structure. Eventually, the story-telling method unlocks the closed doors of Mani's mind and he starts communicating with his master. The method in which Vasu shows the grim reality in the form of symbols and other images catches Mani's fancy. Despite being indecisive in the beginning, Vasu begins hopeful about the effectiveness of the stories. The fables enrich the lives of people with the visionary insight that they provide under the veneer of mere entertainment purposes. Storytelling functions as therapeutic use and connects people and surroundings. Mani gets inspired to get out of his shell and express his pent-up feelings which remained under wrapper for a long time. Storytelling is one of the most important parts of the human lifecycle and puts forth variegated human experiences to the next generation.

Hariharan minutely delineates the futile attempts of Vasu to teach Mani. It is necessary to mention an incident where Mani is seen slashing the books into an unending series of strips. At this point, Vasu feels numb and chastised. Vasu reminisces how the headmaster, Veera Naidu used to punish the boys for their mischievous activities. In this context, the failure of colonist education is critiqued by the author through the characterisation of Vasu. As if he asks few questions to himself: "But the questions that remained unanswered were: Should we punish? How severe should penalties be? And who makes the rules?" (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 47). It is interesting to note that the fiction begins at the end of the career of Vasu, rather than the beginning of his profession. Despite having an entire service life, Vasu is yet to attain a sense of complacency as an educator. As his world is replete with the absence and the apparent ghosts of his relatives, his world shuffles between remembrance and forgetting. When he finds out that he is not able to uncover the psyche of his students, he feels baffled. The profound existential crisis forces him to search for his true self. A new light is dawned upon him when he gets the

opportunity to teach a mentally disabled boy, Mani. Vasu's deep sense of alienation from his own self and his family intensifies after his retirement i.e., his separation from his workplace in the real sense of the term. While teaching Mani, Vasu introspects that "perhaps no school, no teacher can assume responsibility for the learning that should stretch across the entire lifetime of the pupil. But then how do you weave a web that links and transfigures each line of experience, every point, into one of learning?" (27). In these metafictional schemata, Hariharan weaves a couple of stories told by the various characters of the novel. Each tale and its subsequent effect are remembered by Vasu in his moments of isolation. Through the sheer help of these stories, Vasu tries to inculcate a response from his reticent pupil Mani. It is these fables that captivate Mani's mind rather than the traditional way of teaching. Therefore, Hariharan foregrounds the relevance of the Indian legacy of story-telling to catch the fancy of an otherwise different child, Mani. The linearity of narrative technique is challenged and cohesion in narrativity is loosened up by the form of story-telling. The novel has multiple fables and all the fables are stitched with the main narrative of the interaction between Vasu and Mani. The readers are introduced to embedded overlapping stories that manage to bind the main plot in one string. Although the same characters feature in other tales, they appear with their evolving perspectives with changing times. Sara Cone Bryant observes:

Story-telling is first of all an act of entertainment, its immediate purpose is the pleasure of the listener- his pleasure, not his instruction. Especially when you are dealing with children, unless you have their attention captured all attempts to derive results from best of the story will be futile. (5)

Vasu can initiate a response while telling stories about animals and insects and in this procedure, Mani learns to focus and concentrate. And that marks the first step towards growth in every possible way. It is important to note Vasu's observation when he notices a considerable change in Mani: "This look was my first reward, it told me that Mani was with me, and so part of my

story” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 77). Both the characters’ identity crises can be found in the delineation of the fables of Grey Mouse and Blue Bottle. While the grey mouse stands for Vasu, the blue bottle embodies the little boy. Actually, the colour “Grey” connotes the profession of teaching. The grey mouse does not socialise with the outer world around it, likewise, Vasu’s entire life encompasses his school and its surroundings. The story “Blue Bottle Finds a Friend” carries an allegorical significance with the main narrative of the novel. Whereas Blue Bottle is mocked by his fellow flies for his sluggishness, Mani too experiences tremendous backlash for his lack of normality. At this point, Grey Mouse extends his support and shelter to the Blue bottle. Being neglected, both Vasu and Mani find solace in each other’s company which creates a relationship of warmth between the two. Therefore, the importance of myths and fables has been highlighted to foreground various aspects of contemporary life. It is shown that myths and fables cannot be obsolete with the advance of technological progress, rather these are intertwined with the lives of people and their interrelation with each other. The symbolism of Blue Bottle and Grey Mouse to Mani and Vasu has been concluded by Urvashi Bhutalia:

Vasu’s and Mani’s story is retold in the story of the Blue Bottle fly and Grey Mouse. Rejected by his compatriots for being too large, not quick enough, perhaps not clever enough, blue bottle finds a home with a Grey Mouse, himself perceived as being slow and stupid. Grey Mouse gives Blue Bottle a home and they don’t emerge from it for a long time and Vasu tells us that in that ‘dark, cramped Mouse hole ... Grey Mouse grew to love Blue Bottle as somebody even more precious either pupil or son. And Blue Bottle in his own dumb, buzzing away, grew accustomed to the tenderness and the dusky, wandering dreams of Grey Mouse. (35)

The void of Vasu’s life is reflected through his relationships with his two sons, Vishnu and Venu. Surprisingly, both his sons do not turn up at their father’s retirement. Vasu’s elder son wants him to leave their native village without even knowing his father’s wish. Thus, Vasu’s alienation

from his family establishes the fact that he is circumscribed in his own emotional space wherein intrusion from anyone is not allowed. Vishnu is compared with the “Buck-tooth” as he cannot take his father’s equation with the mentally disabled boy. But it is Vasu who takes up the difficult job of dealing with a boy like Mani. While teaching Mani, Vasu is vehemently haunted by his own memories which he hitherto tried to escape. Through the help of fantasy, fables and imaginary characters, Vasu succeeds in holding Mani’s interest. The interesting turns of events in the parable not only move Mani for the betterment but also expose him to adverse circumstances. He learns how to deal with the unfavourable situation in life. Thus, a thorough understanding of the fables helps Mani to become a better person. It is shown how the weaker sections of society like the Grey Mouse and the Blue-Bottle crumble at the end. Mani starts to soften the impenetrable silence around him and responds accordingly. He observes:

Mani was not just a victim or martyr, in the strange tales I made up for him, he grew into something more, something closer to his silent reality. For me, he was not unlike a warrior in training: an almost hero.. In Mani’s increasing hunger for stories—his required doses of wisdom chutneys- I began to have a brief but vivid glimpse of his intense, simple world, undiluted by abstraction. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 120)

In the story “Can a Wingless Wasp Fly Again?”, a wasp is symbolised through the character portrayal of Gopu, Mani’s brother. As the wasp visits the Blue Bottle frequently, Gopu goes to Vasu’s house to check on his brother’s progress. Gopu does not like Vasu to be restricted to the mouse hole. Here Gopu is portrayed as an impatient person who keeps on fixing his own set of priorities. Gopu raises his concern against Veera Naidu, the principal who wants to assert power and authority by any means. His condemnation of the colonial method of teaching is apparent when he opines: “Corruption, policies, nepotism, caste, leaks, gherao, pressure, system: words like these flee about the air, rapacious crows in sight of a paralyzed, dying mouse” (102). The

schools and colleges have become the storehouse for earning more and more money by cheating, bribe and capitation fees. It can be said that Gopu works as the author's spokesperson to speak up for the need to protest against the practices of colonial education. This notion has been dexterously expressed through the fable "When the Python Wakes" where the forest and the tribes zero in on overthrowing the owners. This incident hints at the extraction of the unyielding, Veera Naidu. In this context, a parallel is drawn between the python and Gopu as the former wants to eliminate the foreigners and the latter underscores the need to get rid of the principal. He further opines: "Teachers are selling examination papers; teachers are being intimidated by other teachers and students into allowing any kind of cheating; and a few months back, a resident teacher beat up his wife so badly that the hostel students had to complain—they couldn't study with all that noise" (102). The fable critiques the power politics wherein dominance and resistance create much furore. As a matter of fact, Gopu attempts to articulate his visionary notion of establishing a new world free from any bias and prejudice. He is so engrossed in his ideology that ordinary human feelings receive little importance to him. Hence, he believes that myths and fables can have a lasting impression in shaping one's mind towards fulfilment. The traditional way of the Gurukul system has been highlighted in the novel. The Gurukul system wherein pupils stay with their gurus in their house is of utmost importance because this system imparted strict discipline and a more rigorous method of teaching. As Vasu himself observes: "I don't want to cheat you with half-truths or intermediate truths. If I am to teach, and you are to learn, both of us must use Gurukul for self-fulfillment" (195). According to Rigveda, love is important for the healing process and thus this notion aids in establishing an ideal form of teaching. "Is there anything else as hopeful as a healing love? What Mani and I face together is our common need to make more sense of the world around us; so that we can do more in it. Together, can we prove that learning to live and knowledge are not two separate things?" (221). Unlike other teachers of the institution, Vasu does not resort to corporal

punishments which might harm the students in the long run. Therefore, Vasu has been projected as an ideal teacher who believes in love and warmth between teacher-taught relationships. Despite being provoked by his colleagues to be strict and harsh with the students, Vasu is completely unperturbed by the instigation and carries on with his notion of teaching. In the case of Mani, Vasu incorporates fresh methods of teaching to improve his reticent pupil's predicament. Although Vasu begins with traditional methods of teaching with paper and pen, it takes no time for him to understand that Mani needs an innovative way for healing. Similarly, the story "Why are Grey Mouse and Black Crow Neighbours" lays stress on the need for survival of the fittest. Here too, Grey Mouse is helping the Blue Bottle to come out from his difficulties. Like the Grey Mouse is protecting the Blue Bottle from the grim reality of the outside world, Vasu attempts his best to shield Mani from the dangers of the real world. With time, he realises that Mani is like a riddle that can be solved with the appropriate method of dealing with it. Vasu remarks: "The kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part, if I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late" (99). The introduction of stories in Vasu's teaching marks the first step towards breaking the ice between them. Interestingly, Vasu leaves enough space for Mani to interpret after listening to the stories. Hence, Mani develops own perception regarding the stories. Similarly, the story "The Dreams of a Mouse" underscores the importance of dreaming to achieve the aim. The dream and the fight to make those dreams true make life sustainable and fulfilling. Vasu's frantic attempts to cure Mani and to lead him to a more normal and balanced life bring into light the purity of a teacher-taught relationship. Since every student is different, one needs to take a special approach and care for each individual. At this point, Vasu resolves to gain a grip on Mani's complex and somewhat different mindset. To succeed in that endeavour, animal fables are invented to provide much-required insight to the boy. It is important to analyse that *The*

Ghosts of Vasu Master deals with the innermost complexity of the human psyche under the facade of apparent animal fables. The undercurrent of haunting in the past and the psychological transformation of both the main characters are inconspicuous and need to be addressed accordingly. Interestingly, Hariharan concludes the novel with ten questions in the form of ten different stories. In an interview with Joel Kuortti, she replies: “Very often I have been asked, for example, with those ten questions, the ‘terminal examination,’ at the end of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, what are the correct answers. And I say: if I knew the correct answers, I wouldn’t have written the story. It is only because I don’t know the correct answers, which is true” (“The Double Burden” 23). Moreover, it is also known that Vasu remains ignorant of his pupil’s psyche for most of the time. Even he is unable to understand his sons’ growing thought process. As he notices: “It was an odd thing: I had spent every day of my adult life with growing boys, but the truth was that I had no idea what to do with the two who lived in my own house” (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 85). However, Vasu thinks that ideal teachers should possess qualities like patience, empathy, kindness and knowledge but with the changing times teaching has become a mere profession. Although Vasu has engaged himself in deploying these qualities to the fullest, a strong sense of bleakness hovers around his mental composure. He is unable to figure out what it is to become a real teacher. He is plagued when he does not figure out the answers to the questions that arise out of his perturbed mind. Being contemplative, he analyses the nobility of the teaching profession which is somewhat different from other professions. Teaching requires discipline, perseverance and strict adherence to morality to the fullest. To Vasu, the Gurukul system of education gains hierarchy over the modern approach of the teaching-learning process in terms of its healthy and pure atmosphere. Commercialisation of education has taken prominence in place of the sacredness between the teacher and the student. In the modern set-up, teachers do not mind making a profit out of tuition classes or distributing notes etc. As Vasu opines: “In this living relationship, the pupil imbibed the inward methods of

the teacher; the secrets of his mind and the spirit of his life and work: all too subtle to be taught. The pupil belonged to the teacher, not to an institution of stone and mud. Learning was a life-long task, not a brief sojourn in an exotic, artificial place” (199). However, we get a glimpse of Mani’s amelioration in the story “The Frayed Black Curtain,” where he draws a couple of pictures with black pencil. Mani’s drawing of a house with two men signals as if he wants to convey something. But on being asked by Vasu, he nods. Despite physical disabilities, he begins to respond to his teacher Vasu’s instructions. Again, the story “The Spider’s Pleasure,” demonstrates the technique of the stronger people to marginalise the weaker section of societal structure to occupy the centre of the centre-margin paradigm. The spider wants to dominate the Blue Bottle and wants him to be included in the cobweb. But the Grey Mouse has a strong presence to protect the Blue Bottle from any adversities that might come his way. Again, the story “The Mascot of Melting Pot,” narrates how a lion in a jungle is replaced by an old fox and peace is restored in the forest. The animals learn to live amicably with each other. As a result of this harmony, a beautiful creature is born and gains the status of mascot of the Melting Pot. The new creature is not well accepted by the other creatures and is killed by them. Peace and prosperity are again hampered and everyone engages in asserting his will above everything. This story has a remarkable resemblance to Mani’s perplexed mind which suffers the consequences of the modern education system.

Interestingly, female characters are crafted in such a way that they do not cast an impressive significance in Vasu’s life. His mother, Laxmi and wife, Mangala all seem shadows rather than actual persons. In the conventional scenario, a woman’s identity or existence entirely depends on the social relationship with the men of her life. Mangala has always receded in the dark and projected as a figure incessantly on the retreat. Her narrative of the story “Eliamma Goes Missing,” accentuates her plight as a woman who struggles for her existence in patriarchal hegemony. She finds similarity between her and Eliamma as “always intent as if straining to

see something at a great distance” (124-126). The story of Eliamma carries pivotal significance as the titular character is in desperate need to attain self-assertion. Subsequently, she is ostracised when she attempts to take hold of her life and establish her individuality. Despite spending a considerable portion of his life with Mangala, she does not feature in Vasu’s memory well. Surprisingly, he is somewhat drawn towards Jameela, Mangala’s childhood friend who used to visit his house to share moments of time-out sitting and stitching. On the contrary, Vasu recalls a picture of “Rita Mona,” an actress whose mere photograph used to excite and thrill him as a teenage boy. He describes her as “her hypnotic, piercing look, and the breasts which swelled out of the calendar to smother me, were the only sights in the world which moved me to the point of constipation” (17). It is quite astonishing to note that the attractive actress’s presence holds more importance in Vasu’s life than his female relatives. Like Hariharan’s other novels, this work of fiction too foregrounds the predominance of patriarchal hegemony where Vasu is brought up in the male set-up. The marginalisation of women, violence against their bodies and psyche, and female solidarity find expression in this work of Hariharan. Though *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is primarily a postmodern novel, the feminist issues need to be addressed. In the monolithic role of a teacher, Vasu is not able to perform his duties as husband or father.

“Begum Three-In-One,” a moving tale of three silkworms, narrates the saga of Ammukutty, Nanikutty and Ummikutty wherein three brothers try to captivate them for their precious silks. While Ammukutty is killed by the eldest brother, Nanikutty is captured by the other brother and is kept in a home and she dies after giving birth to young ones. Fortunately, Ummikutty succeeds in escaping from cocoon when she sees the third brother. She is capable of flying and writing the stories about her two sisters. Thus, female bonding and solidarity have been crafted very well with the help of this story:

Ummikutty ... is still in hiding somewhere in the forest, weaving on her old spinning loom. Year in and year out she designs a tapestry full of meaning; but whatever she

weaves is also ever-dissolving ... The stories she spins, you see, are not all her own; and not always easy to unravel; because all of them weave in, with the finest of silk threads, the ghosts of her lost sisters. (137)

The tale highlights the perturbed mind of the sisters and their fragmented psyche also comes to the surface. Their victimisation under the cruel wheel of patriarchy is demonstrated in this way. Whereas the other novels of Hariharan address gender issues vehemently, this fiction talks about empowerment under the facade of other postcolonial concerns.

In this novel, Hariharan critiques the failure of colonial education and its several methodologies, underlining the importance of Panchatantra and its effects on young minds. She has shown how the colonial mode of education completely collapses with a differently able child, Mani. Veera Naidu and Vasu's other colleagues all follow the same ancient procedure of teaching and usually succeed conventionally. Being perplexed between the colonised and coloniser's approach to the teaching process, Vasu is compelled to opt for the former one as Mani is completely indifferent to colonial education. He realises: "With Mani, however, everything was different. No well-worn assumption or strategy seemed to apply. By the end of the second week, I was beginning to wonder; did he need a teacher?" (14). As taught by his father, Vasu believes in being a healer as part of his teaching profession, making the notion of a teacher as a healer into reality. Vasu's father undergoes cultural dislocation as an inevitable outcome of the impact of colonialism, resulting in Vasu's displacement in his familiar ambience. The Ayurvedic practice of Vasu's father insinuates the fight against colonial rule in some way or the other. Being torn between the endeavour to preserve his culture and the hegemony of the colonisers, Vasu's father's mind is dismantled by the fear of getting lost in the turmoil. However, the acceptance of colonial education insinuates the rejection of his own self which ultimately leads to his estrangement and alienation. Vasu's inclination towards his native language

demonstrates his efforts to subvert colonial dominance. As he comments: “Like a little worm that refuses to grow butterfly’s wings, I would resist entry into the world of humanity. I was quite happy to be a Tamil-speaking sub-human” (20). Interestingly, with the sole aim of upholding anti-colonial perceptions, Hariharan highlights mantras, Vedas, rasayanams, and other forms of ancient traditional systems. Throughout his life, Vasu has tried to establish the ancient method of teaching but could not materialise because of the pressure of colonial practice. The ironic fact is that he fulfils his long-cherished notion of ancient teaching when gets the opportunity to teach Mani. As a matter of fact, it needs to be analysed whether Vasu helps Mani in his development or it is Mani who serves as an inspiration to derive aesthetic pleasure out of Vasu. His happiness is expressed in this way: “My real problem ... in the following weeks was the daily parting with Mani ... In other words, I found myself waiting for Gopu to be late again” (228). Finally, Vasu figures out that Mani stands out from others where he is grossly undervalued or unvalued. He is endowed with a new ray of hope wherein he rediscovers his identity as an individual and as an educator as well. Thus, Vasu gains empowerment by shunning the possibilities of alienation and the impact of colonialism. It is commendable on Vasu’s part that he does not crumble under the domineering system of colonial education, but rather becomes successful in imparting knowledge and wisdom to Mani through the ancient educational system. Hariharan poses some pertinent questions through this novel such as whether the formal education system can prepare students for future life, whether creativity can flourish with the existing cramming system and whether intelligence can be measured only through exams.

It can be said that *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is an exemplary novel wherein the acceptance of native tradition and rejection of the colonial approach runs parallel with the main narrative of the novel. By foregrounding the system of “Gurukul,” Hariharan brings forth a traditional system of education and establishes ancient culture. The pre-conceived notion of the

superiority of the colonial discourse is critiqued by the author and instead the emphasis on ancient system puts forth the indigenous alternatives of the native mostly in Ayurveda and Gurukul. At the beginning, the effects of double-consciousness and dissent in cultural differences loom large on Vasu's shoulders but eventually he is capable of resisting the dominance with Mani and Gopu. The excellence of unveiling storytelling as a way for education subverts the enforcements of the colonisers and thus this novel is remarkable in its delineation of the importance of *The Panchatantra*. The novel propounds the fact that corporal punishment, bribery from students' parents, and exploitation of the students can take a serious toll on their psyche. There are many characters such as school principal Veera Naidu, his colleagues, his father and his grandmother who believe in colonial education. Hariharan's observation is pertinent to note:

We have seen that a school or a teacher can fail to educate pupils. The words school and teaching have become elastic: they can be cut and stretched to fit almost anything. They are now available in a free size that fits any institution, any puppet or dummy who cares to wear them. Loving, sharing and caring are victims of a similar tortuous contortion; but that is an aside, though not to be forgotten. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 36)

Vasu dares to dissent in his own belief system and achieves success with the differently able child Mani. He has always been apprehensive about the harsh punishments which might harm children's creativity and overall wellbeing. Though Vasu receives a lot of flak from his colleagues for his ideologies, he is not demotivated to employ his techniques wherever and whenever needed. Hariharan remarks: "In this living relationship, the pupil imbibed the inward methods of the teacher, the secrets of his mind and the spirit of his life and work, all too subtle to be taught. The pupil belonged to the teacher, not to an institution of stone and mud. Learning

was a lifelong task, not a brief sojourn in an exotic, artificial place” (199). Like all other novels of Hariharan, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is inconclusive. The ending marks the beginning of new interpretations about Mani's situation and his future. The readers are left to conjecture the unseen and unknown fate of both the main characters. The novel is a stark reminder of the fact that the same teaching process may not work with each student and teachers need to reinvent to become more effective. It is important to reach out to each student and cater to their variegated needs. It is the teachers who should build the connection with the taught in order to understand their difficulties and other shortcomings. Vasu is an embodiment of an ideal teacher who is not at all bothered about pay parity or anything. Through the idealism of Vasu, the futility of the modern education system has been well crafted by the author. Like her other novels, *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel*, this novel too engages in the art of storytelling which is considered as a cultural heritage in Indian traditions. Hence, the revisionism and recasting of Panchatantra tales is the thematic concern of the novel that vehemently aids in the proper healing of a reticent child. Furthermore, Ayurveda medicines, vegetarianism, and Gandhian notion all find enough space in the novel. The ending of the novel is replete with Vasu's astounding perception which goes like this:

All healing approaches claim to be universal; all are bound by their relativity. We must use them as springboards from which we can make an imaginative leap into the silent, enigmatic heart of the mysteries that beset our world. And validity: no path that leads to recovery can be ignored. No law guides the traveller's journey down any of these paths, no law, that is, except trial, as gold is tried by fire. (266)

It is also important to discern that sometimes we need to unlearn things for a better understanding of reality and its consequences. Hariharan brilliantly shows how Vasu transforms

his viewpoints according to the ever-changing needs of his reticent pupil Mani. The fables are allegories that have profound similarities with Vasu and Mani's life. The parables work wonders on Mani and he learns to draw and paint, thus paving the way for his remarkable development. Eventually, his angst is reduced and his faith in people prevails. Through Mani, Vasu becomes a real teacher as he finds a part of himself in the child. Vasu eschews the system which is grossly responsible for hindering the spontaneous response of a differently able child. Therefore, in this new chapter of his life, Vasu learns many things and enriches his individuality. Finally, his visit to his ancestral village with Mani marks a new beginning in the path of self-discovery and self-fulfilment. They have created a new space for themselves and find their individuality in it. At his native place, Vasu recognises himself who can live with fear, inhibitions, preconceived notions, and prejudices. The inconclusive ending leaves the readers conjecture many possibilities that imply that the story insinuates the beginning of other tales. Lastly, it can be concluded that the novel is remarkable in its attempt to examine the education system from a new perspective and casts immense innovation towards the betterment of all students as a whole. Throughout his life, Vasu fantasises about his profession and gives importance to teaching. Hence, his notion of teaching can be perceived as a myth which is deconstructed in the course of the novel. Hence, his over-association with his profession leads to his loss of interest in the women of his life. Mythological tales always bring fantasy along with the main narrative, and this makes people believe in the far-from-reality contents. Though *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* delves deeper into issues on education system and its relevance on all kinds of pupils, gender concerns, identity crisis, and teacher-taught relationships, the power-relation shown in the novel indicates marginalisation of the weaker section for empowerment. The superannuation of a retired schoolteacher is the dominant concern here. His sense of complacency is broken when he comes across Mani and the demands to meet his special needs. In the path of healing of the boy, he rediscovers himself and he explores his unknown sphere

which he hitherto neglected so long. Since the epigraphs of the novel hint at the prevalent power relations, the morals articulate basic knowledge and the inner light of humanity. In the first one Charaka states: “The entire world is teacher to the intelligent and foe to the unintelligent” (VIII). Shakespeare opines in the second one: “We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly followed” (VIII). And the third one is from Gandhi who observes: “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as the hills” (IX). It is a matter of discernible fact that knowledge and wisdom persist on the earth, it depends on us how much to acquire and to what extent. It requires deep insight to contemplate moral values and work on them accordingly. Hariharan excoriates the contemporary system of education wherein students are forced to go through a few prescribed textbooks. Often these books have nothing to do with their real-life incidents. She interrogates the practicality of the Western books and education system. The challenge of teaching an intellectually disabled boy has been expressed by the following words of Vasu:

But Mani was a puzzle; the kind you suspect has been given to you without all the pieces you need. And here was a puzzle I had to put together if I was to understand Mani, even in part; if I was to know what I was to him and he to me; and if I were to find myself before it was too late. (Hariharan, *The Ghosts* 99)

Vasu begins to sort out his physical and psychological problems once he is freed from the garb of societal pressure. The moment he reinvents himself as a true educator, he finds his own self and engages more enthusiastically in Mani’s interest. When Mani begins to understand the underlying morality of the stories, fables and other anecdotes, he takes interest in drawing his newly gained perceptions on paper. As Vasu points out: “Come, Mani, let’s create a new world. A better one” (262). Consequently, the success in transforming Mani, not only touches Vasu,

but it strikes a chord of happiness with the readers as well. In a newly created world of imagination, both Vasu and Mani do not feel any compulsion to adhere to a particular set of instructions. Vasu's creativity finds expression when he exercises his choices and his intuitive capabilities become successful. The ability to assert his denied instincts finally liberates his mind. Thus, he comes out from his crippled state and experiences sheer pleasure and happiness. The sudden revelation cures the unsoundness of the mind and other physical ailment. Through this fictional canvass, Hariharan posits the fact that has degenerated with the growing modernisation and westernisation of education and can be ameliorated by the heritage of the Gurukul system. The narrative challenges the contemporary system of education and medicine. Hariharan propounds the system through Vasu which culminates in rejecting the orthodox method and accepting the fresh approach of incorporating myth. Therefore, Vasu's conscious and sub-conscious mind is explored from various aspects thus paving the way for enlightenment to his psyche. The ending of the novel portrays how an individual is placed in an ambiguous situation and how he responds according to his sensibilities and viewpoints. Thus, one learns to take decisions on his own and implement them to pursue his aspirations. In this context, Hariharan's observation is important to note: "I think at the end of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* I also say that the story is not quite over. It seems to be over, but it will continue. There is always this quality of the retold tale that is never quite finished. It is as if you are saying, I've done this and I've put here and somebody can come along and pick up and continue" ("The Double Burden" 22). *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* ends on a positive note where the readers are confronted with ten questions and they undertake a psychological journey to find the answers. Vasu's practice of living up to the oral tradition of story-telling foregrounds the fact that stories have the curative power to heal. Hariharan portrays that no text can be called a closed authority, rather leaves ample space to conjecture and speculate new things. It is remarkable how Hariharan challenges the existing system of education with the deft portrayal of mythical

folktales. It is a widely accepted notion that a formal method of teaching is the only way to impart quality education to young minds. Hence, Hariharan deconstructs the myth of traditional teaching by incorporating the alternative method of teaching i.e., the introduction of mythical tales.

Therefore, the myths, parables and allegories are demonstrated for an analysis of Vasu and to deconstruct the prevalent myth of the teaching-learning experience. The fact that Vasu does not take the help of textbooks but adopts open resources underscores the ability to rewrite the predestined way of teaching. The narrative strategy of using myth reveals the varied dimensions of reality.

Chapter III

When Dreams Travel: Myth as a Means of Survival

Githa Hariharan's third novel *When Dreams Travel* (1999) serves as a continuation of the revisionism of the ancient myth of the renowned Arabian tale *The Thousand and One Nights*. By working both as a reservoir and manipulator of history, the novel predominantly hovers on the theme of the power of storytelling. Written in the method of narrative within a narrative, *When Dreams Travel* highlights women's quest for identity through a never-ending battle. It portrays the exploitation of women under the cruel wheels of patriarchy and its inevitable repercussions of the subordination of women in medieval Arab anthologies. By depicting storytelling as the only means for survival, the narrative aims at achieving the outcome of powerplay, gender injustice and revisionism of myth in a modern context. Intending to bring the marginalised to the centre, Hariharan defies the age-old tradition of a male-dominated power structure. It is important to mention that *The Thousand and One Nights* have reached the status of world literature through its dexterous portrayal of the feminist concern with an unconventional perspective. Myths need to be retold with the necessary additions and modifications to bring forth the much-required narrative within multiple layers of consciousness. The revisionism of myths demonstrates new possibilities and signals for an unexplored arena of discussion. Since the Arabian myth has been transmitted verbally from generation to generation, this form of art plays a significant role in affecting the present and influencing the future. Marcia Landy's observation is pertinent here: "Re-vision is the act of looking back with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction. For women,

Re-vision is more than a chapter critical history, it is an act of survival” (18). Through the help of mythical representations, human identity can be viewed with its cultural contexts and can experience the evolving values and expectations within the time-space continuum.

Hariharan, among a few Indian feminist writers, has endeavoured to recreate the past and analyse the sexual difference of the term “male” and “female”. Therefore, the reaffirming of feminine identities has been exposed by the deconstruction of the past thus paving the way for shaping the future. In another interpretation, it has been discussed that postmodern feminist writers highlight “other” world by retelling the myths. While depicting female experience and consciousness, Hariharan engages in multiple narrative discourses along with alternative interpretations. This novel is remarkable in its portrayal of women’s position in medieval Arabs at a certain point in time. Having no individuality of own, women suffer from psychological damage under a repressive societal fabric. It is unfortunate to note that women across the globe suffer the same fate irrespective of time and space. By subverting the traditional misogynistic approach, Hariharan provides alternative women characters who dare to dissent from the conventional way of life. In *Signs and Wonders*, Marina Warner makes a thorough analysis on storytelling as a way of survival among women folks. She remarks: “Scheherazade, of course, was always in the back of my mind, because she’s also a storyteller identified as female who tells a lot of anti-female stories. There’s a parade in *The Arabian Nights* of sorceresses, adulteresses, ghouls, sirens, harridans” (Warner 138).

With a wonderful amalgamation of fantasy and magic realism, *When Dreams Travel* delineates the need for narrative skill through invention and imagination. By focusing on the theme of magic realism, Hariharan entwines fantasy with everyday empirical experiences resulting in somewhat illogical events. The world of Hariharan’s fiction provides artistic exchange between the East and the West and shifts the focus from the West to the East. Therefore, the game of love and power is projected through this imaginative and vibrant tale.

The novel brings forth an eternal dichotomy between the man-woman equation wherein powerplay exerts its control over the fair sex. *When Dreams Travel* deviates from the straightforward representation of socio-political issues, it chooses to throw light on the problems through language, symbols and other narrative devices. The author's attempt to highlight a feminine perspective in an age-old narrative is exemplary in viewing the novel from a postmodern angle.

The novel begins where the famous Arabian tale finishes. "The story ends on stage. Off-stage it has just begun" (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 16). This work of Hariharan is divided into two parts i.e., "Travellers" and Part Two is called "Virgins, Martyrs and others." While the first part revisions *The Arabian Nights* in a third person narrative, the second part is about a series of stories that are told by the characters Dunyazad, Shahrzad's sister and Dilshad, the slave girl. Interestingly, Hariharan makes Dunyazad a powerful character by giving her voice as opposed to her character in the original tale. The major difference between the original Arab collection and Hariharan's novel is that the latter deliberately works to unravel the dominant power structure of male hegemony. It is under the cruel clutches of death that Shahrzad tells her tales to Shahryar, the king of Shahabad. The fictional discourse is a critique of misogynous tradition and her meandering narrative dissipates the sexist impact. As narrated in *The Arabian Nights*, Shahrzad's continuous attempt to hold Shahryar's interest to hear her stories is the only means to delay her death. Though many writers and re-tellers have tried to reconstruct the tale by portraying Shahrzad as exotic and the most entertaining, it is Hariharan who believes that Shahrzad is not just "a beautiful woman who told innocuous bedtime stories in fabulous cloths" (25) but "like her own story, a survivor. And Shahrzad – she too has learnt the lessons of the tales she told. She is now a myth that must be sought in many places, fleshed in different bodies, before her dreams let go of Dunyazad or her descendants" (25). It is worthwhile to note that the stories of the second part vociferously embody moral and feminist issues about the

contemporary societal structure. In the original story, two brothers Shahryar and Shahzaman both emperors of two different cities, find their wives to be adulterous. This sudden revelation creates bitter feelings of resentment towards women as a whole. These acts of infidelity can be analysed as mere defiance against patriarchal structure. The gradual attenuation of self-assertion and individuality makes them to be involved with men of relatively lower social rank. Eventually, the sultans kill their wives, the wives' lovers and other slaves as a form of vengeance and this incident leads to marrying a virgin each night and killing her the next day. To put a stop to the barbarity of humanity in the name of revenge, the wazir's daughter, Shahrzad approaches to marry Shahryar solely on her narrative skills to survive. Her younger sister, Dunyazad accompanies her in her endeavour to save the city from further atrocities. Shahrzad begins her tales full of suspense and magic realism to sustain the sultan's attention. She intentionally ends her stories at dawn so that Shahryar becomes more restless to hear the next part of her tales. In this way, Shahrzad could hold the interest of the king for one thousand and one nights and after these nights Shahryar gives up the idea of killing innocent women. Dunyazad advises Shahrzad to kill the king to get rid of him and the cruelty imposed by him but the noblewoman responds by stating: "Here I am, talking for my life and yours, and you talk of more bloodshed? Look at this empty harem. Can't you hear its walls weep?" (131). It is evident that nothing is easy in life, especially in women's lives but they face the utmost challenge of dealing with life in crucial circumstances. Shahzaman, shahryar's brother, plays the role of antagonist who instigates the king's hatred against women. Shahrzad wins not only to hold the interest of the king but also to create authenticity and reliability in Shahryar's mind. Interestingly, the nature of the relationship between the two of them changes with the power of storytelling. Thus, Shahrzad takes him to a new world where he is thoroughly circumscribed by the imaginary stories of Shahrzad. This is the first time in his life that he is compelled to listen to a woman, although he has been in complete defiance of women and their subjectivity. Shahrzad's knowledge becomes

her power in fighting against the enormous physical prowess of the king. Duniyazad gets married to Shahzaman at the beginning of the novel. After a few years, she comes back to the palace to know the mystery behind her sister, Shahrzad's sudden disappearance. As Hariharan asserts: "Now she is back in Shahabad, in the palace where her sister proved her mettle as a warrior. She is back though the battle is over. She is back, perhaps, because the battle is not over" (37). Though Duniyazad tries to learn something about the mystery during her stay at the palace, she utterly fails. Her suspicion of Shahryar does not find any concrete evidence. Hariharan's work attempts to examine the otherwise inconspicuous illustration of misogynous doctrine. She feels no one knows the exact truth except one person. She realises: "Yet –yet – the nostalgia, the fear, the shrewd knowing look accompanying the stiff little speech – pile up like disconnected clues, though Duniyazad cannot see, or acknowledge, what the mystery is about" (41). The embedded stories of the second part serve as a way to unearth the puzzle of Shahrzad's disappearance rather than amusement. Hariharan brilliantly shifts the secondary narrative to another part rather than assimilating it to the main narrative. Although time holds little significance in this kind of narrative full of myth and fairy tales, the fiction foregrounds the necessity of putting an end to the prevalent patriarchal ideologies. Adrienne Rich remarks about the theme of the novel: "Revision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (Rich 23). The novel is exemplary in its delineation of the theme of East-West encounters wherein it is seen that the creation of Eastern architecture gets recognition in the West. Shahryar builds a mausoleum, built in pure, white marble and its exquisite interiors mark the Arabian edifice and precious stones. Shahryar proudly declares: "I will show the world how much a man can love a woman. I am building a memorial that will do justice to my love for Shahrzad. And it must do more – it must teach generations to come what a chaste woman is" (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 59). During Shahryar and Duniyazad's meeting, the latter is enraged by the sultan's false display of love for his wife Shahrzad. Duniyazad is yet to know the

exact reason of her sister's death. She dreams of visiting Shahrzad's tomb where she finds the dead person's epitaph: "Here lies Shahrzad, Beloved Consort of sultan Shahryar, Daughter of the Chief Wazir to the sultan of Shahabad, Mother of Prince Umar and the departed Prince Jaffer" (49). This implies the position of women in the contemporary Middle East scenario where the second sex is debarred from making any prominent place. Women's struggle to gain visibility has been a recurrent theme in postcolonial literature. Duniyazad assists her nephew Umar in taking over the throne over Shahryar and helps the city retain "a new order of things" (98). Moreover, she is helped by Dilshad, a slave girl who has been serving Shahryar and Shahrzad for years. She receives the transcripts of Shahrzad's stories in gold. At this juncture, the pretence of the sultan really angers her. Her utter fury is expressed in this word:

She wants to shake him till his bones rattle and say, Call it a tomb! You are talking about a dead body, not your love for her! Did Shahrzad escape the axe once only to die in ignominy? Did I assist the priestess at her rituals - did we together hold back the dagger that could have been used long ago, when you slept tamed, satiated, unaware – only for this mediocre epitaph? (64).

Another alternative to Shahrzad's sudden disappearance is given where it is found out that Shahrzad has grown old and has left the palace with a young companion of lower rank. Shahrzad's departure does not insinuate her infidelity but rather her immense courage and indomitable spirit to stand against patriarchy. Thus, Shahrzad frees herself from the subjugation of the sultan's oppression and goes ahead in her way of liberation. To suppress the news of his wife's departure, Shahryar makes up the story of her becoming ill and her subsequent death. Hence, it can be said that the institution of marriage has been used by the two brothers Shahryar and Shahzaman to fulfil their aim of having pleasure at the cost of the lives of young virgin

women. Moreover, it is important to analyse that Dunyazad breaks the prescribed norm of sexuality and builds a same-sex relationship with the slave girl, Dilshad. This amounts to saying that this deviation from heteronormativity is her own way of protesting against male hegemony prevalent for ages. Both the women refuse to become games of power politics and seek out a possible solution for their predicament. It is horrifying to note that Shahrzad is forced to create stories to survive and at the same time compelled to procreate with the blood of innocent virgins every night. Shahrzad emerges as a character who can write her own story in defiance of a chauvinistic and powerful patriarch.

In the novel, dreams based on imagination play a significant role for women to survive. Despite restrictions in mobility, women could make up stories and these pass from one generation to another through oral tradition. Shahrzad's dreams show that they can break walls to establish their power. Hariharan gives voice and agency to a coterie of women characters who were completely invisible in the source text. The characters like Dilshad, Dunyazad, Razia, the mother of Shahrzad and Dunyazad, and Sahiba, the nurse-maid at the palace of Shahryar all make their presence visible in the novel. For example, Razia was unable to express her opinion regarding her daughters' lives in the original text but here, she can portray herself as a sensitive and thoughtful human being. So, the women who were otherwise invisible and inaudible come to the surface that challenges the fabric of male superiority. Hence, justice is meted out to the female characters in the narrative of the author. While *The Thousand and One Nights* is more about wit and entertainment, *When Dreams Travel* focuses on a misogynist cosmos irrespective of culture and time. The stories are told not only with an aim of pleasing the audience but also with the objective to empower the storyteller in some way or the other. Unfortunately, Shahryar praises his wife's chastity rather than her narrative skill after her demise. His male ego prevents him from admiring Shahrzad's craft. As a result of this, women's voice carves a niche in the history of creativity as Dilshad tells Dunyazad: "You and I have a script on our own – a story

or two waiting to be told, our text of gold to be written, every page remembering us to posterity” (107). In her interview to Joel Kuortti, Hariharan comments:

.... I don't think storytelling is a kind of a direct subject in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, as it is, say, in *When Dreams Travel*, where I look very directly at the mutability of stories. So the shifting of the narratives is not only dependent on time but who's refashioning the narrative, for what purpose and so on. And also what's happening to somebody who is making a narrative when the same narrative exists in different forms and you have this heritage of narratives to reckon with. (“The Double Burden” 17)

The character of Satyasama, a wondering poet, is worth analysing in the context. She does not feature in the original text but is an invention of the author. Satyasama's stories serve as subtext where the author interprets from different perspectives and the never-ending tales keep coming back to make their presence felt. She possesses the strength vehemently to impugn the hypocrisy of male chauvinism that prevents them from praising a fellow female poet over a male counterpart. As a result of this, she was subjected to be punished and imprisoned in a dark room. Dilshad was the only companion who used to nurse her. She dies in Dilshad's arms after giving her a parting kiss which gradually creates a fur on Dilshad's face. In Hariharan's words: “The poet was gone; she became memory; memory turned into legend. But as long as a slave girl carries her kiss around like a tattoo on her face, the poet's soul – Satyasama's hardy beast of a soul – will manage to stay alive” (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 94). While Dunyazad's stories deal with the life in the palace, the stories of Dilshad relegate the palace-life to that of common places like cities and market. Transgressing the ideological battle between Shahryar “master of the city” and Shahrzad “born of the city,” *When Dreams Travel* propounds the need of gender equality across ages and cultures (102). In the first tale “Rowing a floating island,” it is found that Shahrzad is going through her pregnancy and later she gives birth to a male child. Despite

having a male heir to the kingdom, Shahrzad expresses her reluctance to kill Shahryar. Though she knows that her existence solely depends on her imagination and inventiveness, she is prepared to challenge her death each night. Duniyazad wonders: “Can danger be addictive? Are there women who come alive only when there is danger at their heels and their blood races with terror?” (158). This is how Shahrzad basks in the glory of the redeemer who saves the city from further destruction. Surprisingly, Shahrzad completes the procedure of childbirth during the daytime so that she can tell her tales to the sultan at night. Even at this juncture of life, she fulfils her responsibility of being a wife and her role of a saviour who has taken it upon herself to save the lives of young virgin girls.

“Nine Jewels for a Rani,” a short story narrated by Dilshad, can be examined from a postcolonial perspective. In the tale, a one-eyed monkey woman named Satyasama arrives at Eternal city aimlessly. She begins singing at the top of trees and people drop coins as a reward for her singing. Till this point, there are no differences between the monster and the Eternals. The sky above is divided into two parts i.e., Eastwallas and Westwallas. While the Easties love sunrise, the Westies are in awe of sunset. Both believe that songs can have a severe impact on the quality of sunrise and sunset. All of a sudden, the city experiences a heat-wave and the Eternals realise that they no longer can enjoy both sunrise and sunset. Instead, they concentrate more on the areas of fear, shame and loneliness. After this settlement, the one-eyed monster is entrusted with the responsibility of both the natural cycle as the sunrise and sunset must go on. The Eternals become cynical about Satyasama who is summoned by the authorities for clarification of her songs. Since her songs represent the amalgamation of both sides i.e., East and West, she is captivated for one year. Unfortunately, she is mutilated for violating the ordeal of remaining silent forever. In addition to this injustice, Hariharan has shown that the perpetrators of the one-eyed monster belong to different races and shapes. Thus, this fact insinuates that all races could be violent and cruel irrespective of their skin colour. Through the

allegory of the story of Satyasama, the author underscores the attempt of the power-crazy people to dominate the marginalised. In this context, the centre-margin conflict raises its head in the socio-political scenario. The colonisers have been trying to subvert the “others” to establish predominance over the weaker section of the cultural fabric of society. The horrific details of the cruelty inflicted on the monster are portrayed dexterously in the novel. Therefore, the world depicted in the novel is replete with magicians, jinns, ghosts, spirits and fairies. The supernatural world intertwines with the normal human world thus creating specific references accordingly. The losing of an eye predominantly hints at the importance of having “eye of the mind” that can see through appearances and other visible means. The wisdom songs of One-Eye aim at establishing the need for heterogeneity to exist. Hariharan states:

So the Eastwallas and the Westwallas muddled along somehow. Occasionally they even managed a few memorable celebrations together: there were some Easties and Westies who actually got together at midday or midnight. They made laws and music and paintings and buildings and babies and business. (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 141)

Hariharan articulates the story of the One-Eyed monster poet to the main narrative of the novel. Thus, the technique of delivering a separate story and integrating it into the main narrative creates meta-level coherence in the fiction. On being asked by Duniyazad about the fur on her face, Dilshad replies that it is a gift from Satyasama. Prince Umar hands over the written documents to Dilshad which inspires both Duniyazad and her to take up new roles of nomadic storytellers. There is a striking reference to a game called “Martyr’s game,” which both the sisters used to play in their childhood. The game is somewhat similar to what Shahrzad plays in her real life. Ironically, she walks the same Martyr’s walk as she approaches Shahryar’s bedchamber to prevent the rampant killing of virgins each night. It is quite pertinent to analyse

that Shahryar is more interested in the magnificent tomb rather than in indulging in Shahrzad's memories. The novel carries the imprints of postmodernism in more than one way. *When Dreams Travel* not only recasts a well-established tale but also reconstructs it without the adherence to the ideological impact of the Arab anthologies. "A Lover, a Tomb," a tale told by Dunyazad, depicts the eternal conflict between male superiority and female subjugation. In this tale, Shahryar is captivated by his son Umar and other accomplices such as Dunyazad and Dilshad. The slave girl shows that a woman can take revenge despite being confined to her limited sphere of social rank and class. Although Shahryar is habituated to inflicting torture on women, this is the first that he is locked inside a small and windowless room. Nevertheless, he does not repent for his sins, rather he is more concerned about his reputation, name and fame. In the end, Shahryar visualises Shahrzad fighting for her existence and identity thus, asserting her individuality over the conventional patriarchal structure. Next, Dilshad narrates the tale "A Well-Constructed Lie" which embodies female identity. Two brothers, Azhar and Manzaar, construct Bhai Minar to establish patriarchal hegemony over women. Dilshad comes to know about the story which delineates the victorious and joyous lives of the brothers. Subsequently, both of them face doom as a stern reality in this ephemeral world. The tendency to promote dominant male supremacy is once again refuted by Hariharan's prevailing voice. In the tale "Three scenes and a father," it is seen that the Wazir tries his best to save his virgin daughter from getting killed by Shahryar, the sultan. Being helpless, he buries his daughter in a hole only to find a plump goat in her place.

This unfortunate incident points out the subjugation of women that has been prevalent for ages. Shahrzad's father is torn between his role as the Wazir to the sultan and the father in himself. Though it is his responsibility to arrange for a virgin every night, he is unable to send his daughter to the sultan knowing her immediate fate. Hariharan's narration is pertinent here: "It is time for him to make his offering to his hungry god. He can feel the goat's heart beating

against his chest. It is a nervous erratic beat, but the creature does not attempt to escape. She is in fact snuggling up to him lovingly; their bodies are pressed together in a cocoon of trust” (174). Here, Shahrzad has been compared to a goat indicating the fact that women have no control over their lives. Hence, they can be offered to any male for physical gratification. The victimisation of women is once again portrayed where a woman’s role is restricted to the pleasure of men only. Dilshad responds to this by narrating the tale of Lord Buddha’s previous birth as a woman called Rupavati in “Rupavati’s Breast.” The story elaborates on how Buddha achieves ideal Buddhahood by birth and rebirth. Satyasama mouths this retelling of Sanskrit myth where Rupavati cuts off her breasts to feed a hungry mother and her child and loses her breasts. Her breasts are restored but she loses it again when she takes rebirth as a male. The birth of the male body is considered ideal and virtuous and the concept again attempts to define patriarchy. Whereas there are three different versions of the tale of Rupavati, a woman’s version is snubbed vehemently as a result of gender injustice. A woman’s voice is always choked when she tries to make a point over their male counterparts. Here, an old woman is rebuked at by her husband: “You have all your facts wrong. How dare you pollute this house with such unrealistic lies? Listen – and correct yourself before it’s too late” (181). It is evident how women are subverted and dictated to follow the footsteps of male companions. This is the reason why Satyasama and the woman’s version are not given due importance and misogynous attitude has always taken prominence in order to sustain patriarchal structure. The acceptance of the final version of a male insinuates the embedded patriarchy of the society. Likewise, the tale “The Adventures of a Sultan,” marks the individuality of Duniyazad who dethrones her tyrant husband Shahzaman with the help of her step-son. Her decision to have Shahzaman killed demonstrates her willpower to uplift the condition of the people. It is the victory of female subjectivity that Duniyazad is able to put an end to and bring justice to the innocent subjects of the state. As Hariharan observes:

Dunyazad has acted swiftly, in league, it is said, with a powerful and discontented general in the royal retinue. A boy on the throne, a ruler in the harem, a silent, inhibited army; and the city, limping back to life, remains surprisingly calm. Though an occasional whisper links Dunyazad to the sultan's disappearance, not one voice is raised; nor is there any sign of the agitation that usually accompanies a sudden transfer of power. Though no one says it in so many words, the city seems to have turned, briefly, into the queen's ally. (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 198-99)

In a story named "The Woman Under the Deadly Skin" there is a shift from male hegemony to female subjectivism. A woman who drinks poison every night kills her lovers as she is endowed with enormous power. Hariharan comments:

At first, she quite enjoyed this heady power- having forgotten all about goatherds and princesses- but then she began to feel a terrible fatigue seep through skin to bone. Would there be no end to this loving and killing? She began to feel a loathing for beds and bare bodies. She had never felt pity for her lover-victims, and now too she did not feel anything as strong as aversion to them. (211)

The Poison-Skin saves a goatherd who is bitten by a snake. By making physical union, she heals the man from getting killed. And this incident shows that women can utilise their sexual power to achieve dominance over male patriarchal structures. After that, she gains another name: Goat-Skin, lover of humble men. Hariharan draws a parallel between this story and Shahrzad's escape from the palace. Though Shahrzad is completely unable to exercise her choice in the place, it is difficult to assume whether she deliberately left the palace or was killed by Shahryar. Furthermore, it is worthwhile to note that *When Dreams Travel* encompasses tales which

vociferously promote the importance of chaste women in societal structure. Hariharan points out how women's chastity has been a recurring theme in medieval fantasy stories that undoubtedly insinuates the position of women's body in the patriarchal social set-up. In an incident, a chaste woman is needed to turn a rock into a man. Many women fail but a potter's wife changes the fate of the man. It turns out that the potter's wife is successful because she is the only chaste woman. One of the characters in the story opines: "A chaste woman – that rarest of creatures – is naturally the most powerful woman" (251). Therefore, the sanctity of a woman lies in her chastity as per the age-old tradition of society. Dilshad's tale "Four Lovers in the Wilderness" portrays the adventurous life of a woman in times of risk and danger. In her journey, Dilshad comes across a well-built axe man who reminds her of King Shahryar. The similarity is drawn because of their attempt to subvert the potential of women. She does her best to refute the dominant patriarchal convention and also her desire for physical pleasure comes to the forefront. Hence, it is established once again that women can utilise their sexuality in order to assert power over men. The reversal of power game from man to woman is vividly narrated by the author: "The king seizes a virgin girl, the courtesan seduces a virgin boy" (231). Subsequently, she overcomes all the obstacles of being a female and vindicates her power and stamina through her decision-making power. "The Chameleon on the Wall" is a powerful narrative of the society's hypocrisy about the chastity of women. A woman's modesty is always measured on a scale of her chastity which itself represents the pretentious nature of societal structure. Being locked by her brother, a girl named Lonely Voice seeks help from Dilshad to free her from the bondage. In order to hide her from her tyrant and jealous brother, the girls tell stories to a chameleon on the wall. In the course of the story, it is known that chastity is the biggest reward a woman can achieve in her lifetime. In this way, Lonely Voice comes out as the only chaste woman in a process of campaign. Eventually, she kills her brother to establish the fact that no man can decide the destiny of a woman based on her chastity. In "The Dreams of

the Good Women,” Dunyazad seems to take the place of Shahrzad and it has been narrated in this way: “Now the mirror presents her with another view, a hovering bird's view of a landscape. Far below is a lush, circular garden. At its very centre is its only eye, a place so tall that the clouds rest on its domes in venerable bushes of white hair” (254). Through the aid of the successive stories, it is seen that Prince Umar resolves to replace Shahryar and to take the sultan’s throne. Although Prince Umar is not a liberator in any sense, he is determined to establish a different sort of order in city. At the end, Dunyazad finds solace when she finds that Shahryar does not win. It is a kind of vengeance on Shahryar who used to captivate Shahrzad in the harem all day long out of jealousy and abhorrence towards women. Finally in the last tale “The Morning After,” Shahrzad has been projected as a precursor and inspiration to millions of women who dare to dream and write their own destiny. Dunyazad and Dilshad’s pair of tales marks a furtive bifurcation from Shahrzad’s narratives and in this way, these stories deviate from the framed narrative of the original text. The transformation from victimization to empowerment in untoward circumstances infuses a set of principles to the generations to come. Joana Filipa da Silva observes:

In the Arab collection, Scheherazade tells her tales to save her life (and other women’s lives) by entertaining her husband, the sultan. In Harihran’s version (Part-II) two women, who are lovers, tell each other stories, one tale answer the others’, for seven days and seven nights. The victim’s position of princess is replaced by companion love in the re written anthology, for Dilshad and Dunyazad are the active story-tellers in this version. (107)

It is important to note that Shahrzad not only uses her power of storytelling to survive but also her body helps her to gain her subjectivity. Hence, the sexed body is an embodiment to

construct power discourses and means of expression. The sexual activity coupled with narrative skills becomes the weapon for Shahrzad to combat the fight against Shahryar and his barbarity. The king's earnestness for the tales comes with his growing desire for Shahrzad's body with time. Shahrzad's tales are purely the outcome of memory and imagination. She entwines another narrative which she has hitherto heard from somewhere into her own inventive power to please the sultan of Shahabad. At the same time, she knows that "she is safe- no one looks at a nose or an eye out of the context of a face, or at a solitary balcony or pillar on an entire edifice. The synthesis will be hers and, in that sense, the authorship which gives her a sense of power" (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 133). Shahryar is surprised at the innovativeness of Shahrzad's tales and he asks her the source of these fascinating stories. In reply, she utters: "I don't have a sword, so it seems I cannot rule. I cannot rule, I cannot travel, I don't care to weep. But I can dream" (20). *When Dreams Travel* deconstructs colonial conventions from feminist angle to create a plethora of liberated feminine identities. Hariharan's narrative crafts unerringly undo the stereotypical ideology and prejudice of existing texts. Therefore, the rewriting and revisionism can be termed as postmodern technique that predominantly works to critique the prevalent socio-political scenario of the time. The author's condemnation of the hatred of women in the Arab collection finds expression in her method of brushing aside the sexist impact in her fiction. It is important to analyse that the women who are allowed a voice is usually old woman or a husband-less woman. A woman is deprived of her voice when she is subjected to play the role of wife about her husband and household. The fictional discourse challenges the age-old concept of patriarchy which compels women to endure all kinds of pain inflicted on them. As a matter of fact, Hariharan unearths the brutality of patriarchal infrastructure under the seemingly facade of the tales of adventure and fantasy.

Patriarchy literally means the rule of the father. It has been adopted by the majority of feminist theorists to refer to the way, in which societies are structured through male-domination

over, and oppression of, women. Patriarchy, therefore, refers to the ways in which material and symbolic resources (including income, wealth and power) are unequally distributed between men and women, through such social institutions as the family, sexuality, the state, the economy, culture and language. Though there is a lack of inter-connectedness of the imaginary tales, Hariharan's endeavour to make a logical connection is worth noticing. All three women characters viz., Shahrzad, Dunyazad, and Dilshad refuse to be mere puppets at the hands of patriarchal set-up and embody strength to oppose all the pseudo claims of gender justice. While Shahrzad succeeds in diverting the mindset of Shahryar, Dunyazad leaves no stone unturned in helping her sister in her mission of saving the state. Besides acting as a foil to the main protagonist, Dunyazad emerges as a powerful character in bringing a change in the preconceived notion of male domination. Hariharan remarks:

It is not a straight forward power-relationship of the Sultan oppressing the women and chopping off their heads. There is also Shahrzad's power play, you know, the power of words, the power of female sexuality, of the body ...here is a woman who saves her life through stories. Then to proceed from there, to examine it, I try to give the silent sister a voice. I try to give the servant girl a voice – she was not there in *The Arabian Nights*, I made her up. So when you start off with one woman's voice, Shahrzad's voice, to understand her voice you have to have this whole set of voices, an army of women's voices that needs to be articulated. ("The Double Burden" 21-22)

Through the mythical representation, it is shown that women's condition is the same regardless of the time-space continuum. These three women survive by duping and overpowering patriarchy and it's their fight against male-domination that establishes self-assertion. As Joana Filipa da Silva points out:

Modern myths, like Shahrzad's, are part of popular culture, of our collective cultural heritage, and can work as a powerful mechanism to understand the real or interpret experience. This is not to say that myths are, always, openly pedagogic. They are complex narratives, ambiguous and multi-layered, allowing diverse interpretations. Still, they transmit an objective model of behavior and promote certain values or attitudes. Shahrzad is an example of a positive reformulation of feminine/feminist identities, reversing the traditional victim status of women to a position of empowerment, even in the most adverse circumstances. The women characters created by Hariharan are serious candidates to think new forms of liberated feminist identity, long patterns of resistance, survival, imaginative choices and solidarity, leading to unexpected life stories. (121)

The novel can be studied as a celebration of womanhood and female solidarity over patriarchal notions and human morality. The narrative craft of Hariharan in the form of storytelling interrogates the prevailing misogynous attitude across the globe. The novel is exemplary in its delineation of sisterhood that triumphs over the prescribed authority of men. The way Hariharan fabricates the series of stories in the later part of the novel is surely indicative of her fancy to achieve the desired objective of establishing female subjugation. Hariharan deviates from the original narrative of adultery, rather than the focus on women's redeeming journey wherein she dares to leave the prevalent patriarchal hegemony. The burden of double colonisation is portrayed dexterously through the characterisation of the slave girl, Dilshad. Being a colonised woman, she is thoroughly oppressed by her coloniser and male dominated social fabric. Dilshad poses a cross question to Shahryar's query: "What colour is a dream?" (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 60). She interrogates: "How much does this dream weigh? Can it break a man's back?" (60). Despite being an ordinary and minority girl, Dilshad's quest to know the unknown

and explore the unexplored deserves mention in a commendable way. Interestingly, Shahrzad and Satyasama play a pivotal role in imparting knowledge to the poor soul, Dilshad.

The inclusion of myth in contemporary literature works within the text and beyond the text to generate new perspectives in an unexplored sphere. Hariharan's achievement can be traced in her reconstruction of a strong myth in order to foreground feminist concern. This early twentieth-century text amounts to the immortality of Shahrzad's story as the novelist continues to prioritise Shahrzad's overpowering dominance over her male counterpart. Even though the novel deals with a series of tales about magic, jinn, and supernatural elements, it lays bare a profound discourse about gender inequality, prejudice against women, and power-play between the sexes. This revisionism of myth helps the reader to analyse the canonical text from a new and different angle, often resulting in the amalgamation of past, present and future. In these meta-fictional schemata, the art of celebrating life and the ability to invent stories gains predominance over mundane and sordid realities of life. Under the veneer of magic and fantasy, the fictional discourse uncovers preconceived notions of gender injustice and the role of women in male-dominated societal structures. The understanding of myth concerning reality is conducive to understanding the ever-changing facets of the dynamics of myth in postcolonial literature. By rewriting this medieval Arab classic, Hariharan demonstrates that the dominance of patriarchy still raises its ugly head even in contemporary scenarios where privileged women too fight for their rights. Kate Millet contends: "The modern times patriarchy is held up chiefly by attitudes rather than political or economic structures. This patriarchy is so deeply ingrained into our thinking that the character structure it creates in both the sexes is more a habit of mind and a way of life than a political system" (60). *When Dreams Travel* can be termed as a modern myth that asserts women's fears, apprehensions, strength, and extreme vigour to come out of their shells. Like other novels of Hariharan, this novel too ends with multiple possibilities to interpret on the readers' end. The author leaves empty spaces to be filled in by the readers for a

deeper analysis and a profound feminist perspective under the facade of traditional structure. The novel is written in a time when cultural identity, East-West encounter, and empowerment of women were much discussed among the literary canon. Myths have been used as a powerful tool to inculcate not only the required set of values but to experience reality to the core. Therefore, myth-making works as a survival strategy in this feminist re-reading of the medieval classic. Since *When Dreams Travel* delineates the collective struggle of women for survival, the narrative technique of employing mythology holds extreme significance. This retelling of the *Arabian Nights* can be seen as Hariharan's vehement assertion of gender and power politics. The undercurrent of misogyny embedded in the text has been critiqued by the author in this fictional discourse. While the original text provides entertainment value, Hariharan's novel deals with feminine identity. Shahrzad is portrayed as a liberal feminist and this concept of liberal feminist is explained in this way:

... that is, since women are much the same as men, women should be able to do what men should be able to do. Given an assumed commonality between the sexes and the focus on access to what men have in society, liberal feminists do not perceive the sexes to be with war or dismiss that which has been associated with men. Not surprisingly, liberal feminism involves an emphasis upon reform of society rather than revolutionary change. (Beasley 52)

Defying the stereotypical victim status, Shahrzad emerges as a daring personage who fights with danger on behalf of entire women folk. Simone de Beauvoir remarks about the predicament of women in Arab:

Among the Arabs there was much infanticide; girls were thrown into ditches as soon as born. Its structure is feudal ... there is no power to check that of patriarchal chief. The

religion was created when the Arab people were warlike and the triumphant professed for women the utmost scorn ... the veiled and sequestered Moslem woman is still today in most strata a kind of slave. (115)

The irrationality of male chauvinism is coupled with lustful attitude towards women in the medieval era. Shahrzad's success in subverting the notion of women as "other" puts forth an attempt to equalise the relegation of women. The status of women as "other" needs to be eschewed and this ideology has been highlighted very well in this rewriting of the canonical classic. The overpowering of feminine power over masculinity predominantly finds place in the second part of the novel. The triumph of both the sisters reverberates when the whole city rejoices and regales with celebration. Furthermore, it is also important to analyse the importance of sisterhood and female bonding in the novel. For example, Duniyazad has been extending her never-ending moral support and assistance to her sister Shahrzad to prevent the rampant barbarity of the sultan. The overlapping episodes of the second part of the novel are permeated with the enigmatic bonding of Duniyazad and Dilshad. Hence, the notion of sisterhood is advocated in the novel which finds expression in the following words by Beasley: "The notion of shared oppression is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women ... there is a strange focus on women's similarities and the pleasures of forming political and other bonds between women in a world where such bonds are marginalised or dismissed" (Beasley 54). Therefore, the power of the relationship between the female characters is potent enough to overthrow the injustice meted out to the unfortunate women in the novel. The utmost need to create a non-misogynous universe is underscored by the wit and potential of the women characters in the novel. Moreover, Hariharan successfully negates the preconceived notion that women possess less intelligence and creativity than men. For a long time, it was considered that imagination and creativity is not women's thing and women were regarded as deviant and

abnormal if they wanted to write. As a matter of fact, writing was vehemently opposed because women's voices needed to be subdued for male dominance in various spheres of societal existence. Male supremacist ideology advocates that women gain importance only when they are related to their male partners. The prevalent practice of “common oppression” links women variegated and complex existence in a similar thread. The apparent division of class, race, religion and caste are eliminated for women bonding to flourish. In this novel, it is the power of female bonding that works against the male hegemony. All three women get enriched with exuberance in solidarity with each other. Shahrzad, the saviour of the city, embodies feminist prototype who can be emulated. In this context, liberal feminism comes into discussion wherein women are treated differently from men and they are prejudiced because of their sex. In this game of power and politics, Shahrzad goes through various adversities to save the womenfolk of her state. Her determination and confidence in her art of storytelling despite the time constraint is narrated: “She daringly embraced that night of ageing and the thousand that were to follow, she seemed to have subjugated age ... she could only grow more majestic year after year” (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 68). Along with the unfortunate women of the state, the fathers, the mothers and other relatives bear the mental agony and excruciating pain of losing their near and dear ones. Despite Shahrzad’s absence in the later part of the novel, she features in Dunyazad’s dreams. It is as if Dunyazad’s miserable state reminds the reader of Shahrzad’s indispensable role in her life. Dunyazad exclaims in her sleep: “Wait!- how can you leave me out” (72). Therefore, it can be said that Hariharan’s women proclaim alternatives for resistance and survival by embracing liberated feminist identity. Thus, Hariharan’s expertise exposes the inherent notions of patriarchal seeds that zero in on curbing women’s creativity and individuality. The author’s raising voice against the inferiority of women is well documented in this fictional discourse. Through this novel, the need to condemn male unjust chauvinism comes to the forefront. Shahrzad dismantles the stereotype where woman is transferred from

father to husband i.e., one man to another. On the contrary, she overcomes the obstacles and leaves her imprints behind by the dint of her wit and eloquence. Interestingly, it is the power of words that brings the king to his senses. Women's intelligence gets upper-hand by the projection of Shahrzad's illuminating presence in Shahabad's palace. The importance of story-telling is underscored to dislocate Shahrzad's rule with the help of narrative creativity. Women need to write their own stories with subjective overtones and eventually their writing would put them into the text and into the world.

It is quite noteworthy to note that the technique of story-telling not only saves the lives of Shahrzad and womenfolk of the state, but also the art helps the sultan to get rid of his stubbornness and unjust prejudice against women. Therefore, both undergo a transformation owing to the innovation and creativity of the power of speech. We are reminded of Michel Foucault's notion of knowledge where the barbarity of the sultan is put to an end by the sheer power of knowledge. Physical force does not affect the powerful king to deter from his evil intentions. The stories told by both Dunyazad and Dilshad provide a fresh impetus to Shahrzad's original stories that articulate a new rhythm to the already existing frame narrative. The Indian culture is delineated through the pair of tales. In this vacillation between prescribed norms and innovation, Shahrzad and Dunyazad interchange their roles by holding mirrors and changing mirrors. The mirror of Shahrzad reminds of Persian and Arabic literature that represents many medieval European texts. As a matter of fact, the stories actually teach submission to the almighty which is subversive and transformative in nature. Instead of being intimidated by the violence around, Shahrzad emerges as a true fighter who can defy her gender and establishes equipoise with her male counterparts. The following comment of Edward Said is pertinent about Shahrzad's projection of subversive nature of existing sultan's regime:

The Prophet is he who has completed a world-view; thus the world heresy in Arabic is synonymous with the verb “to innovate” or “to begin.” Islam views the world as a plenum, capable of neither diminishment nor amplification. Consequently, stories like those in *The Arabian Nights* are ornamental, variations on the world, not completions of it; neither are they lessons, structures, extensions, or totalities designed to illustrate either the author’s prowess in representation, the education of a character, or ways in which the world can be viewed and changed. (Hariharan, *When Dreams* 81)

While the original Arab classic focuses on the entertainment aspects, Hariharan’s novel hovers over the nuances of gender disparity. The novel begins with a misogynist ambience but gradually inclines towards women-centrism. Both the canonised text and the recasting underscore the fact that Shahrzad’s myth does not end, rather it lives on even after the texts finish. As myth inculcates a certain set of values, it functions as a collective mechanism to fathom real-life experiences. Although *When Dreams Travel* is replete with diverse narratives, Shahrzad and other women characters succeed in making a female identity with the aid of imagination, innovation and an utmost zeal to survive. It can be concluded that the inclusion of mythology in the novel brings out a spectrum of possibilities in the body of postcolonial literature. This fictional work of Hariharan is exemplary in generating further studies about the effects of folklore in contemporary literature. Being diverse and multi-layered in nature, myths leave enough space for multiple interpretations. After the thousand and one nights, the perils of the lives of young virgin women are ordered and stability is restored. At this point, readers become inquisitive about the future of Shahrzad who disappears in the harem after her successful manifestation of her narrative skills. Being an admirer of danger and power games,

Shahrazad's struggle to become contended with domestic felicity is questionable. Although Shahrazad does not live in the palace for the rest of her life, her voice reaches out to all women in distress. The way Shahrazad's image gains visibility amid the thorough invisibility of women is remarkable in the area of postcolonial feminist writing. It is worthwhile to note that Hariharan does not specify any particular place or timeframe, rather she prefers to pen down a remarkable fiction that transcends the barriers of time and space. Nevertheless, the novel cannot avoid social criticism at a deeper level. A striking parallel can be drawn between *When Dreams Travel* to Hariharan's maiden novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* as both the novels present storytelling as a traditional way to carry forward culture to the coming generations. Therefore, it can be said that Hariharan deconstructs the myth of patriarchal overtones. It is a myth that a woman needs a man to protect herself but it has been portrayed how Shahrazad plays an extremely crucial role in saving the lives of countless virgin women. Hence, the myth is deconstructed by the deft character portrayal of the author. With a brilliant amalgamation of the ancient Arabian tales and Hariharan's imaginary tales, *When Dreams Travel* remains a cult work of fiction in the arena of female subjectivity. The title of the novel itself insinuates how dreams travel and create such ennobling situations for gender justice to prevail.

Chapter IV

In Times of Siege: An Enquiry into the Supremacy of Myth

Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege* serves as an unequivocal critique of present-day India's secularism especially in the area of academic censorship. By presenting the novel in the backdrop of a university campus, Hariharan foregrounds the vicious effects of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism in academic life. The bigots' attempt to silence the multifarious identities have been vehemently condemned by Hariharan in this fictional discourse. The ambivalence between secularism and communalism stands pitted against each other in Indian polity. While secularism means the ability to tolerate multiple viewpoints, communalism rejects others' views altogether and bears an extreme grudge towards others' identities. With the dominant growth of religious intolerance, mistrust and hatred amongst the extremists, the field of academia receives contradictory ideologies regarding nationalism. The novel addresses the pertinent issues of our times and interrogates the basic freedom of whether a writer, historian or filmmaker should enjoy his basic rights of establishing unbiased and unprejudiced interpretations. It is important to note that the novel is a stark reminder of the horrific incidents of religious hatred such as the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits in 1990, Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, and Gujrat carnage in 2002. There has been a deliberate attempt to change the course of history just to prioritise the Hindu religion for long. It has been observed in many instances where historians and eminent authors of history textbooks have been subjected to immense repercussions for their portrayal of certain periods of history. Negating the power of the metanarratives, Hariharan gives voice to the subaltern and thus she puts forth the centre-margin battle of the political powerhouses, excessive adherence to certain religious beliefs and the active participation of the state machinery to curb individual rights in a democratic set-up. The

novel is exemplary in its delineation of the true meaning of practicing democratic rights. To achieve national consensus, it is important to respect the diversity in a pluralistic society. The fascist ideology looms large in the background of the novel and poses some pertinent questions viz., what are we? Can we practice our basic human rights after so many years of independence?

Indian English writers from the 1960s to 1980s have attempted to free literature from any colonial influence and incorporate Indian tradition, and myth cultural diversity into their area of writing. In this way, representing and recasting history is important for these writers to deconstruct the prescribed knowledge structure and interrogate the very notion of personal and national identity. The authors are significantly daring to dissent from all kinds of suppression and marginalisation in varying degrees. Their insights delineate entrance to the collective consciousness of ideological, aesthetic and spiritual perceptions which might lead to migration and globalisation. While talking about nationalism, Hariharan contends that untutored nationalism can have a severe impact on the divergent lives of people. Also, it can be used by some religious bigots to occupy the centre of the centre-margin paradigm. It is noteworthy to mention that this kind of overt nationalism needs to be abolished to not let orthodox ideologies flourish. Prejudice and intolerance have been shown as the inevitable outcome of colonialism that needs to be shunned to build a systemic order of societal structure. By depicting the battle between the ideologies of fundamentalists and liberals, Hariharan not only warns about the undesirable effect of fundamentalism but expresses apprehension of warping the fabric of multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-regional nations. The novel interrogates the notion of thought policing which is taken as a prerogative by the political groups to cast control over intellectual freedom. It is not wrong to say that the notion of secularism is circumscribed by the consternation directed by the authority and polity of state and religious groups. In the words of Hariharan: "But still, this is one world, our times, and the contemporary faces of violence, hatred and exclusion are unfortunately, unique to our times. There are wars against terrorism, there is

jihad, there is Hindutva. These are all the modern and pseudo-modern versions of medieval battle of good against evil” (Hariharan, *In Times* 94). However, consensus unity is required amongst the colonised people for organising a civil society. Hutcheon opines: “Knowing the past becomes a question of representing, that is, of constructing and interpreting, not of objective recording” (Hutcheon 70). Jean Francois Lyotard and other poststructuralist thinkers emphasise the need for small and local narratives instead of metanarratives. Due to the ignorance of the heterogeneity of variety in human existence, metanarratives have been replaced by singular events that celebrate the multiplicity of theoretical standpoints rather than grand narratives. As postmodernism encourages fluid and multiple perspectives, Hariharan establishes a polythitic version of an ideological mindset. It is ironic to note that the socialist and secular India of the 21st century is no better than the 12th century medieval feudalistic India. And Basava, Shiv’s father and Shiv himself are all victims of circumstances. The importance of rewriting history is thus put by Hutcheon:

The historian’s job is to tell plausible stories, made out of the mess of fragmentary and incomplete facts, facts which he or she processes and to which he or she thereby grants meaning through emplotment. Hayden White, of course, goes even further and points to hoe historians suppress, repeat, subordinate, highlight, and order those facts, but once again, the result is to endow the events of the past with a certain meaning. (64)

Shiv Murthy, the protagonist of the novel, is a fifty-two-year-old History professor at Kasturba Gandhi Open University. He is a mild-mannered professor whose daily life revolves around lesson modules, departmental meetings, and other daily normal activities. Meena, Shiv’s childhood friend Sumathi’s daughter, comes to stay with him to convalesce from a broken knee. Shiv being her local guardian has to take care of her till she recuperates completely. It can be said that Meena is the official spokesperson of Hariharan. Despite the cast in her leg, Meena is

fiercely independent and restrictions in mobility cannot curb her indomitable spirit and enthusiasm. Meena, a sociology student, is writing a thesis on the pathetic conditions of women during the anti-Sikh riots after Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Since Shiv's wife Rekha and daughter Tara are away in the US, it is up to Shiv to take complete care of Meena. For her well-being, Shiv takes leave at his university. As Shiv works at an open university, there few disadvantages pointed out by Hariharan: "The real danger they face is that they put their lectures down in print. Unlike regular teachers, they never get a chance to correct or qualify what has already been said in an earlier class. Shiv remembers all the indignant letters of protest they got some years ago when two little illustrations got past the course editor" (Hariharan, *In Times* 49). Meanwhile, Shiv's quiet life receives a terrible blow when his lesson or module on 12th century poet and social reformer Basava of medieval History irks the self-proclaimed preservers of history and culture named "Itihas Suraksha Manch." The right-wing fundamentalists claim that Shiv has distorted Indian medieval history by projecting Basava as an ordinary man rather than a divine figure. Here, Shiv suffers from an existential dilemma about how to get hold of the situation. Shiv has shown that Basava fought for an egalitarian society and opposed caste stratification. Basava attempted to bring about a change in society where women, poets, potters, reformers, washermen, philosophers, prostitutes, learned Brahmins, housewives, tanners and ferrymen all should be treated equally. His followers were called veerashaivas; warriors of Siva. Basava's movement reached an incredible height negating social conventions and traditional rituals which were prevalent in society for long. Things got worse when the marriage between a Brahmin bride and cobbler's son sparked violence in the city of Kalyana. The conservative people were already fuming against Basava's radical ideas. Now, the inter-faith marriage broke their patience which resulted in severe outrage between the opposing forces. Both the fathers of the bride and groom were subjected to death which culminated in retaliation between the moderators and the extremists. As a result, King Bijjala was assassinated, and the city was

burned to ashes. Basava left the city in utter dejection. It is important to analyse how the vision consisting of vigorous and modern thought and the radical perceptions remains significant even after eight hundred years later. Harihran's novel is an embodiment of Basava's narrative with imaginary reconstruction. Shiv is vehemently accused of deviating from the traditional version of history and underscoring a fresh version of medieval history. As a matter of fact, Shiv gets a call from the head of the department Dr. Sharma:

It seems that you have implied that Basavanna's city Kalyana, was not a model Hindu kingdom. It seems you have exaggerated the problem of caste and written in a very biased way about the Brahmins and temple priests. And also you have not made it clear enough that Basavanna was much more than an ordinary human being. There are people who consider him divine, you know. (Hariharan, *In Times* 53-54)

Moreover, Dr. Sharma makes it clear to Shiv that he has done wrong and there is a lack of clarity in his lesson module. He goes on to say that the university's policy is to steer clear of controversy. Indeed, the uproar over the lesson yields unpleasant consequences when the dean and the head of the department receive angry and abusive letters. It is not difficult to understand that Shiv's lesson incontrovertibly becomes a burning issue on religious and political levels.

Surprisingly, Shiv's colleagues fail to support him in times of crisis. The head does not feel embarrassed when he agrees to the demands of the Hindu watchdog group that Shiv has deliberately undermined Brahminism. To stop the menace at any cost, the head suggests Shiv "to act quickly to stop this from growing into a controversy" (55). He says to Shiv, A "full apology or retraction from you will be best- we can decide what to call it so that it is not too embarrassing for the department-or for you of course. And we may have to send instructions to all our study centres to discontinue use of the booklet that contains this module. Maybe we will have to decide to reprint without the lesson" (54). Amid this hue and cry, Shiv realises that "he

has not made the heroes heroic enough and that he has made the villains too villainous” (55). Shiv introspects: “It seems I have not sung enough of a paean to the glory of Hindu kingdoms; and that I make too much of caste divisions among Hindus” (55). History has often been presented as something that forbears the monolithic version of the past, as if there is no place for divergence. Hariharan interrogates the authenticity of the preconceived notion of India as a glorious and golden homogenous nation. On being asked the reason for choosing Basava story, she explains:

When I wanted to show that a history professor gets into trouble for a lesson he wrote years back, immediately my choices were Basava and Hampi. I first came across the vachanas of Basava and others when I was 17 years old. In case of Basava, there is a sharp questioning, rejection of caste, which is something we cannot simply forget today. This is a tortured soul who is trying to understand how he is part of this kind of society where there is such blatant injustice. Then the fact that the whole movement was absorbed – everything he stood for was completely forgotten. Even his alleged heirs today have no link with all the ideas he stood for. Basava’s ideas continue to challenge our society today. (“Hariharan talks to” 7)

At this juncture of the novel, twenty-four-year-old student activist Meena comes to Shiv’s aid as an official mouthpiece of the author. She condemns vociferously the religious fundamentalists’ perceptions of projecting a singular, monolithic and parochial version of history. It is important to quote her lines to understand the liberal viewpoints: “The group is called Itihas Suraksha Manch. The protection of history? Whoever heard of history having to be protected? ... it is true that whether people are talking about culture or history or women’s rights, protection has become a much-abused word. A cover-up for all kinds of bullying tactics” (Hariharan, *In Times* 55). It is Meena who induces Shiv to fight for his liberal views against the religious bigots. Meena, the spokesperson of the author, is a character who speaks for herself.

She represents the kind of young generation who have the potential to bring about a change in society by radical thinking. He becomes quite apprehensive at the thought of confronting the fundamentalists which requires a lot of courage and enthusiasm. Unfortunately, there is a certain vigilance over the creative work of authors, painters, filmmakers etc. Shiv asks himself: "Is it possible to write history or anything at all if you have to worry about your masters, objections, their venal sentiments?" (157). No matter how Meena tries to instill the spine to raise his voice against injustice, Shiv does not feel motivated enough to change the course of the controversy. In Meena's words: "What are you going to say tomorrow? You will have to chalk out a plan. Obviously, you can't apologize or take back a word of the lesson" (55). To break Shiv's ambivalence, Meena goes on to say: "Why pretend you are a professor if you can't stand up to someone telling you what to think? How to think? ... Shiv, do you imagine an ordinary man cannot be a hero?" (64). In this context, it can be remembered that Girish Karnad's play *Tale-Danda* (1993) was written on Basava and his movement which ended in violence and bloodshed. Karnad has shown how Basava's revolutionary ideologies about the caste system and democratic society wrought the wrath of the orthodox section of society. In his own words:

I wrote Tale-Danda in 1989 when the 'Mandir' and the 'Mandal' movement were beginning to show again how relevant the questions posed by these thinkers were for our age. The horror of subsequent events and the religious fanaticism has gripped our national life today have only proved how dangerous it is to ignore the solutions they offered. (Dutt)

Shiv makes an effort to penetrate the bubble that the fundamentalists have spun around him. The next day, he goes to the department to discuss the situation with the Head and the Dean of the university. The Dean too does not seem to acquiesce to Shiv's predicament. Then Shiv reads out the demands as foisted upon by "Itihas Suraksha Manch": "The Manch has three demands.

The first is an apology for hurting their sentiments. They want separate apologies from Dr. Murthy and from the department, by extension the university. Second, the lesson should be retracted and the material recalled from all students registered for the course, and from study centres and libraries. Third, the rewritten lesson should be submitted to the Manch before it is sent to our printing unit” (Hariharan, *In Times* 69). Now, it is the first time in the narrative that Shiv reacts strongly and declares: “the lesson does not distort history by any stretch of the imagination. And I will not apologize or explain myself to a group outside the university, a group of people we do not recognize as historians” (70). Despite the Head, Dr. Sharma’s repeated attempts to bow down before the extremists, Shiv resolves to stand for what he believes. This was followed by newspaper articles written against him and hate-mails pouring in venoms regarding his portrayal on Basava. He is severely attacked by anonymous people for distorting history and historical data. Shiv’s colleagues such as the Dean and the Head are only concerned about the controversy which might cause damage to the university’s reputation. They have nothing to do with the truth that Shiv has strived hard to reach. They are ready to compromise when an uncalled-for situation arises. Meena opines on the passivity of the Dean and the Head of the department: “These fence-sitters! One whiff of danger and they fall off the fence, over to the wrong side” (79).

Shiv’s colleague Dr. Arya is the epitome of moral degeneration wherein he has aligned himself with fundamentalist forces. He is a stern believer in fascist ideology that advocates intolerance, mistrust and subjugation of contrary ideas. There is absolutely no space for dissent and diverse opinions. These kinds of extremist perceptions often adopt the means of atrocities to occupy the centre of the societal paradigm. In the earlier part of the novel, Dr. Arya tries to promulgate that religious minorities are not Indian and they should be referred to as “invaders”. He speaks in one of the departmental meetings: “Our land has always been a temptation to greedy marauders, barbarous invaders and oppressive rulers. This invasion and resistance are

three thousand years old. Lakhs of foreigners found their way to India during these thousands of years, but they all suffered humiliating defeat” (19). Mrs. Khan, the Secretary of the department, immediately feels embarrassed at this kind of communal and insular statement. These views seem to have undermined people like Mrs. Khan’s continuous grappling regarding her social class disparity and gender obstacles. All of a sudden, Mrs. Khan becomes a Muslim and a foreigner, diminishing her other identities. Religious zealots believe that religious identity triumphs over all other identities at large. On the contrary, identity oscillates. The fascist ideology of ignoring other cultures, religions, class, gender, language, politics and morals needs to be shunned to form a unitary fabric of society. By connecting fascism with Hindu fundamentalists, Hariharan’s voices her concern over the issue, “The link between fascism and the ugly faces of Hinduism unveiling themselves around is the regimentation of thought and brutal repression of culture” (Hariharan, *In Times* 101). She goes on leave after the unpleasant remarks made by a highly educated person like Dr. Arya. In this context, it is apt to analyse Amartya Sen's ideologies on the multifarious identities of a person. In the essay, “The Indian Identity,” Amartya Sen articulates that shrinkage of space in terms of multiple identities might jeopardise peace and amity in a syncretic nation. Prioritising religious affiliations over polyethnic identities is obnoxious in forming a unified nation. He contends:

Any classification according to a singular identity polarizes people in a particular way, but if we take note of the fact that we have many different identities- related not just to religion but also to language, occupation and business, politics, class and poverty, and many others- we can see that the polarization of one can be resisted by a fuller picture. So knowledge and understanding are extremely important to fight against singular polarization. (Sen 23)

Meanwhile, fundamentalists' tirade against Shiv and his lesson continues posing him as anti-national altogether. The leaders of "Itihas Suraksha Manch" and retired History professor Shri A. A. Atre leaves no stone unturned to denounce and denigrate the potential of Shiv to attain their interests. The sheer attempt to marginalise the weak and vulnerable by the right-wing fundamentalists cast an influence on the creative areas like art, history, films etc. The coercive forces to foist one language, one religion and one culture to adhere to stereotypical perceptions can produce a threat in establishing secularism. In these challenging times, Shiv feels: "Only a sanitised Basava is allowed to remain, a 'saint-singer,' a singer with a saintly face. This toothless man is safe enough to be hung on walls, a bland calendar memory" (Hariharan, *In Times* 86). Surprisingly, Shiv does not succumb to the pressures of the Hindu fascist force's machinery as he is supported by Meena's activist friends Amar and Jyoti. The students of Kamala Nehru University organise TV interviews, protest rallies, and distribute leaflets to propagate Shiv's revisionism of history which obviously stands out from the preconceived notion of the monolithic version of history. The rally proves conducive to easing out the crisis of menace created by the self-proclaimed preservers of history.

Not only Meena and Meena's friends but also Shiv's other colleagues Amita and Menon offer their way of support to him in these trying times. Menon reveals that a similar kind of controversy was created in 1994 when a play on Basava's life history was included in the syllabi of various universities across the country. H. S. Shivaprakash's play *Mahachaitra* (1986) was accused of portraying Basava as a coward person who committed suicide. The religious fanatics protested by burning the copies and the effigy of the playwright. Subsequently, the book was withdrawn from the syllabus by government order. In the words of Hariharan:

Now in 2000, the distance between the imaginary lands of literature and the prosaic city of history has shrunk. All occupy the same beleaguered space, the same territory under indefinite siege. The horizon, the sky, all wide-open spaces are reduced to the size of a

pinpoint; the Manch and its cohorts are telling them all that there is only one way to remember the past. (Hariharan, *In Times* 110)

Shiv feels that it is high time that he shows his worth as a historian to the entire world by taking a strong stand against the religious and political parties who use History for their selfish gains. Meena instils much-required ardour and zeal by saying: “You can’t avoid a confrontation, you have to get the head to meet all of you. Even better, you have to confront this Arya. Ignoring him is not going to make him go away” (119). Any departmental meeting fails to yield positive solutions rather it concludes with an unpleasant turn of events. Dr. Arya pounces on Shiv’s neck over a heated discussion and highlights venom in public. Though everyone is aware of Dr. Arya’s proclivity towards the zealots, this kind of acrimonious behaviour is uncalled for and thoroughly unprofessional. His insistence to record each detail indicates his shrewd attitude towards the sensitive issue. He begins to put forth his fundamentalist stance even before the head, Dr. Sharma. He utters: “The Manch represents public sentiment. History and everything else should respect this. For years leftists and pseudo-secular historians have been filling committees with their agents. Now their monopoly is over and they are making a hue and cry” (126). As a result of this physical violence, the fundamentalists vandalised Shiv’s room at the university. In Hariharan’s words:

His room, his books, striped naked. A sullied place, no longer anyone’s refuge. His room has been pushed into no-man’s land. The table and chairs and bookshelves are broken, the walls defaced. There are torn books everywhere, cupboard and files open mouthed and in shambles. (Hariharan, *In Times* 130-131)

It is unfortunate to note that the hired protestors do not even know the real cause behind such mayhem. Their lives have nothing to do with history or historical facts. Hariharan has rightly pointed out that it takes a price of a meal to hire protestors. History has been used by religious

and political parties to attain their vendetta. In retaliation of the violence meted out to Shiv, Meena and her comrade friends prepare to raise their voices of condemnation. Students, academicians, intellectuals, and educated civilians come forward in Shiv's support and the entire programme was covered by media. This act obviously inspires Shiv to vent out his pent-up ideologies. The descriptions of the protestors have been narrated by Hariharan:

There is a sea of placards before him and the names of the organizations are often longer than the slogans on the placards. Secular Women Against Patriarchy (SWAP); Forum Against Hindu Terrorism (FAHT); People's Association of Secular Scientists (PASS) ... He sees placards saying everything from STOP TALIBANIZATION OF INDIA TO HISTORY DESTROYED! to WHO'S AFRAID OF THE MANCH? (Hariharan, *In Times* 144-145)

The mayhem unequivocally links present-day India to the far-fetched India of 1168. Basava's struggle to establish an egalitarian structure of society failed in 1168. Similarly, Shiv's portrayal of recasting History irrespective of bias and prejudice fails in 2000. Although the time frames are different, the shrinkage of space in terms of free thinking and free speech is still the same. Each age is compelled to think and act in a prescribed form that the religious and political fanatics guide them for long. Anita Nair writes about Shiv:

It is enough we know that Shiv has been forced to see, be free to be curious, to speculate; to debate, dissent, reaffirm the value of the only heirloom he needs from the past, the right to know a thing in all ways possible. Be it Meena or his mind. In Shiv, Hariharan has created a character who for his ordinariness is that much more potent. And among her cameos, it is Menon who with his penchant for staring at the ceiling that leaves an indelible impression. There is gentle humour and irony, sensitivity and enough flesh and

blood to make up for those times when the book meanders aimlessly or when the shrillness and a tendency to much ‘speechify-ing’ breaks the pace of the narrative’.

(“Nair, Anita”)

The seeds of communalism are so ingrained in people’s minds that they keep on associating themselves pertaining to their forefathers’ misdeeds. One such instance is narrated in the novel. As Shiv is assigned to write a module on the rise and fall of Vijayanagar empire, he visits Hampi, the setting of the Hindu Vijayanagar empire in 1996. It is appalling to find the scale of ruins of the glorious kingdom by the Muslim Sultanates of the Deccan. In Hariharan’s words: “A city planned to flaunt its glory, intimidate the subjects into subjection. And all the grandeur, like its kindred great cities, invariably built on the blood and sweat of hovels swallowed up by time” (Hariharan, *In Times* 158). While travelling with auto-driver Suban, Shiv discovers that Suban still bears the imprints of his religious identity. Because of his lower class and religious affiliation, he feels connected and responsible for the misdeeds of the Deccan Sultanates. It is a matter of great concern that Suban relates with his ancestors and feels the necessity of vehemently condemning the brutal act of violence on the glorious kingdom. Thus, the troubled past will continue to bedevil the present to a large extent. In this context, it is important to note that religion plays a decisive role on the human psyche and social interactions as well. With this incident, a realisation dawns upon Shiv that the ideal of liberal leaders of building a syncretic vision of society amid cultural diversities remains unaccomplished owing to rising intolerance and extreme fanaticism. Communal bigotry has gone on to an extent that fundamentalists refute the notion of having a multi-religious nation. It is evident “that the world and its multitudinous mysteries are reduced to precarious survival on a crude seesaw: saint versus leader, saint versus man, Golden Age versus Dark ages, Hindu versus Muslim, Hindu versus Christian, anti-Hindu, pro-Hindu. Secularist, pseudo-secularist, soft Hindu, rabid Hindu” (150). The constant dilemma on Shiv’s mind to exercise his choice of writing historical facts irrespective of any bias and

prejudice is apparent when Hariharan depicts: “Despite Shiv’s contempt for the head, his stomach contracts. Is it possible to write history-or anything else at all-if you have to worry about your masters’ objections, their venal sentiments? Shiv puts down his pen and waits” (157). The novel is remarkable in portraying how an ordinary man becomes a hero to signify his perceptions about the past and thus be true to himself. Hariharan comments about the heroism of middle-aged cautious professor Shiv in an interview to Luan Gaines:

One thing about being middle-aged, is this sense that this may be the last chance to act, to change, to experience something you have not before. Usually, in a cliché sense for a man at least, this means some little affair. But in the novel, Shiv is actually challenged on both personal and political fronts, and both aspects come together in the person of Meena. (“An Interview with”)

Shiv is not only preoccupied by Basava’s seeming disappearance from the pages of History but is also thoroughly haunted by his father’s memories which stand as an epitome of nationalistic and secular values. His father, a revolutionary in the pre-independence movement, suddenly disappeared after being disillusioned witnessing the religious sectarianism in independent India. Hariharan draws a parallel between Basava and Shiv’s dead father where both fought for secular ideologies to bring about a classless society. Whereas Basava raised concern over caste stratification, Shiv’s father strove for independence and later a non-discriminatory society. Being unable to find a balance between his own ideology and modern values, Shiv’s father left off with shattered aspirations and dreams. Shiv’s father was a victim of double consciousness and the polarity of culture that eventually had some adverse effects on him. Shiv remembers his father’s courage: “He was the bravest man I knew, but still couldn’t keep it up; it must have finally broken him” (Hariharan, *In Times* 36). Having suffered from the pangs of hybridity, Shiv’s father underwent transference and alienation that disintegrated his identity as a whole. History

should be free from any preconceived notion of religion and caste and it should not advocate for any particular culture. A true historian seeks the truth by the assimilation of free-thinking and secular values. Eschewing rigid and orthodox conventions is the need of the hour to establish a secular nation. Objectivity should be prioritised for the logical analysis of historical data that negates the irrational glorification of any specific culture. K Rajayyan opines:

The historical material is so vast and comprehensive it includes within its orbit a large mass of varied data regarding human actions and experiences, both individual as well as collective. Though it is not within the range of possibility to tell the entire the story, the historian is necessarily to select what is really representative for the purpose of interpretation and formulation of conclusions. If the historians are to allow themselves to be carried away by their weak points that are centred on bias and prejudices, there would be diverse and conflicting accounts on the same theme. It is therefore essential to avoid such a situation, so that usefulness of history can be guaranteed. (294)

In the conflict between history and contemporaneity, the latter demands objectivity and impartiality in the analysis of historical writings. Through the help of historical evidence and archaeological sources, history needs to be examined by keeping prevalent myths and notions at bay. The focus on knowing the truth insinuates objective analysis, rather than subjective one. It is of utmost necessity to note that rising intolerance has been transformed into a false notion of preserving our culture and this results in being hyper-sensitive to specific issues about showing muscle power and political power. Hariharan underscores the need for multiple voices to exist in a diverse cultural society in her fictional and non-fictional works as well. Free thinking and free expression should be encouraged without adherence to a particular religion, caste or creed in order to form a unified nation. There have been many instances where freethinking and free expression face the ire of extremists. Intellectuals such as writers, painters,

poets and filmmakers are forced to adhere to majoritarian notions and thus this gives a grave hindrance to creativity. The notion of a secular state faces an obstacle in some way or the other when the ideologies bear the imprints of certain political and religious agendas. Both History and literature come under the scanner of the strict vigilance of watchdog groups for their portrayal of the past and present. Since time immemorial, intellectuals such as authors, painters, and filmmakers often face the wrath of the fundamentalists when they delineate their own version of truth in their art form. It becomes impossible for the extremists to digest the ossified version of the truth, rather than attempt to silence the voice who dares to dissent. In the novel itself, we are reminded of writers like Salman Rushdie and Taslima Nasreen who were charged with distorting facts which is exemplary in the notion of academic censorship. Arundhati Roy laments that “heritage of hatred and mutual distrust has been exacerbated, toyed with, and never allowed to heal by politicians. Over the past 50 years, ordinary citizens’ modest hopes for lives of dignity, security and relief from abject poverty have been systematically snuffed out” (“Fascism alive”). In the essay “New Voices, New Challenges,” Hariharan foregrounds the importance of enhancing the vision of the learners at a university campus. Instead, the learners are compelled to see through the eyes of the religious bigots making them unable to think and analyse on their own. It won’t be wrong to say that the young generations’ imaginary powers become paralysed owing to this bias and prejudice. Fundamentalists often take the path of violence to establish their point of view. Hariharan contends: “How do you learn to think for yourself if you swallow all the answers someone (and someone ill-equipped) has cooked up for you?” (“New Voices” 32). In the name of preserving nationalism, communalists pose a serious threat to liberalism which is dangerous for the sake of societal foundation. Prabodh Joshi remarks:

In these difficult times when political correctness is the only discourse happening in the society and major’s hegemony is celebrated in one way or the other, Hariharan’s novel

comes as a huge warning, not only to society but also to creative artists, intellectuals, academics and cultural activists that we need to be critically aware of our times and should shed-off the reticence of being complacent fence-sitters. (25)

Though the main characters Shiv and Meena are not from the national capital, their collective cultural inheritance influences the locale “where education did not break but reinforced walls” (“New Voices” 33). With the advent of the controversy, Shiv is prohibited from entering the premises of the university. Thus, the space of movement for physical belongings is shrunk. Moreover, his sense of belonging in the neighbourhood also gets removed due to the unexpected turn of events. All he has is himself to make physical and emotional moves. It seems like he is in exile and the only room he can operate appears to be within himself. As a matter of fact, the notion of Shiv being still and dynamic is aggravated when Hariharan says: “Things standing shall fall, but the moving shall ever stay” (Hariharan, *In Times* 81). Shiv’s static imagery is ruptured when hate-mails and newspaper articles start pouring in for and against the revisionism of Shiv’s interpretation of Basava. Shiv’s lack of agency is intensified with the arrival of Meena who leaves no stone unturned to motivate Shiv to establish his version of truth. When Shiv is en route to the TV studio for an interview, he is on the verge of dismantling his comfort zone by presenting the diverse past into the present. By intermingling the individual with the collective consciousness, Hariharan articulates Shiv as the one who can take a stance against religious fundamentalists and recognise his place in society at large. Being able to play the agent of his ideologies, Shiv is confident in creating his metaphorical space. Shiv’s stillness begins to change right from his very private life such as cooking and other household activities. Gradually, he learns to act accordingly in his professional life as well. He could reach out to others through the aid of Meena and her comrade friends to propound his stance regarding the authenticity of historical data. Shiv realises that the transformation he has

gone through is “irreversible” and his old life has been “misplaced” (194). But in the end, his observations remain unheard when the media decides to shift to other news.

Shiv’s daughter, Tara embodies the diasporic subject voicing the Hindutva discourse, “It’s only after coming to the US that many of us have learnt to appreciate Indian traditions” (112). She finds it embarrassing that her father has gone to the extent of defying age-old beliefs of glorifying Hindutva. The characterisation of Tara is portrayed as the complete opposite of Meena, and this differentiation has been done to highlight different sets of ideologies amongst the young generation of the nation. Hariharan highlights two distinct features of Meena i.e., her appetite and eyes as scintillating to Shiv who becomes a person of action in the course of the novel. Meena’s appetite has been used as a symbol for activities and engagement in public demonstrations. It is Meena’s appetite that drives Shiv to interact with the city more which he deliberately used to avoid. His eagerness to satisfy Meena’s appetite eventually leads to his emancipation from his inertness of physical move. It is important to note that Shiv is drawn to Meena’s “fish eyes” (54) and gradually he feels physical attraction towards her. Meena too responds towards his lustful gesture. So, there is absolutely no question of being exploited by a middle-aged man’s lust. Shiv realises the sudden feeling: “The mind is the snake; the body is the basket. They live together, the snake and the basket. You don’t know, though, when it may kill you; you don’t know when it will bite!” (171). It is needless to say middle-aged lust plays a pivotal role in taking a strong stand for his values and becoming empowered to act befitting his stature as an academician. Though the relationship is not consummate completely, Shiv’s attitude and personality are transformed. As he remembers Basava’s poem on the unity between a man and a woman: “If a man and a woman really look at each other, a union is born; a union fit to unite with the lord of the meeting rivers” (179).

Haunting has been a recurring theme of Hariharan’s works just like her other novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* where haunting is used both as a context and a catalyst. When the past

refuses to be forgotten and is manifested through spectres, the present gets affected. As a sort of agency, haunting serves as an undeniable object that provokes us to look beyond the present. The thin lines between past, present and future get blurred by the presence of haunting which transcends the constraints of time. When Shiv reinterprets and re-evaluates the historical context of Basava, it casts an influence not only on the present but on the future as well. It won't be sufficient to analyse how the past haunts the present but the present haunts the past through revisionism. It has been seen that social injustices lead to these kinds of spectres appearing with the sole purpose of bringing out the truth and finding peace and amity in cultural diversity. Similarly, both Basava and Shiv's father's spectres seek to establish a classless and secular nation through the medium of Shiv's actions. Shiv participates in the remaking of the past wholeheartedly by his scientific observations and interpretations only to be thwarted by the right wing. The spectres function as interlocutors in Shiv's daily life, thus it becomes quite difficult for him to live in the present. In this context, a few lines by Dipesh Chakraborty are important to quote to understand the relevance of the national struggle of Basava and Shiv's father:

So many of the aspirations aroused in the course of the national struggle remained unfulfilled - the Gandhian dream of the peasant coming into his own in Ram-rajya [the rule of the legendary and the ideal god-king Ram], as much as the left ideals of social revolution. And as the history of independent India and Pakistan (and Bangladesh) was repeatedly to reveal, even the problems of a complete bourgeoisie transformation and successful capitalist development were not fully solved by the transfer of power of 1947. (Chakraborty 5)

Shiv's father's ghastly apparition and its demand for a liberal and secular nation recur through the narrative time and again and eventually it connects the past, the present and the future. Shiv still bears the haunting of his dead father because his father did not attain the much-needed

closure that he yearned for years. Thus, the allegorical figure has been asking for the founding principles to establish an egalitarian society. The direness to address the issue of sectarianism is reflected through the shadowy figure of Shiv's father. Likewise, the images of both his father and Basava mingle in Shiv's mind to foreground their set of beliefs. So, these unfulfilled dreams of social equality and liberalism plague the present to a large extent. Both fought for radical changes in society but unfortunately, their fights ended in mystery. Being caught up within a sectarian sphere, Shiv cannot identify with the prevailing societal paradigm and desperately seeking ways for something to be done. Shiv's metaphorical imprisonment of his own self propels him to bring back Basava's memories from hagiographies. It is commendable on Shiv's part that he can re-interpret and defy a well-accepted version of historical facts. In this connection, it can be said that Shiv accomplishes "identity foreclosure" stage wherein he recognises his innate power to stand up for his values. Shiv's haunting of the past can be analysed when we read Amartya Sen's remarks:

The recent attempt by Hindu activists to see it as just a 'Hindu country' ... clashes with the great diversity of Indian history. This includes a thousand years of Buddhist predominance ... a long history of Jain culture, conspicuous presence of Christians from the fourth century, and of parsees from the eighth, Muslim settlements of Arab traders in South India from about the same time, massive interactions between Muslims and Hindus all over the country ... and so on. The recollection of history can be a major ally in the cultivation of toleration and celebration of diversity ... (Sen 42)

Hariharan condemns the blind cohesion to the conventional way of perceiving facts vociferously. Instead, she raises her voice for the everyday common man's heroism, protesting against the thugs, and urges people to look beyond the binaries. While the right-wing calls for a hegemonic revision of historiography, Shiv opts for "this fragment from the medieval past and reconstructing an entire range of possibilities" (Hariharan, *In Times* 40). Forgetting and

remembrance both are used by fundamentalists as social and political acts which would serve their vested interests. Whereas Shiv wants to know a thing in all the possible ways, the fundamentalists want to obliterate unwanted aspects. The role of a historian is absolutely crucial in making a change to look at the past objectively. Sincere attempts should be made by the authors and historians to ensure that history must not be used as a political instrument to gain selfish ends. Moreover, adequate space should be provided for divergent values to coexist and different modes of narrative need to be incorporated to negate the hegemony of the past. In order to extend the existing boundaries, intellectuals might take the required initiative to make necessary changes in society. As a matter of fact, a unified nation is a utopian concept that cannot flourish in reality. Hence, an active learning to learn about the differences of multiple communities is conducive to accepting and celebrating the differences. A striking parallel has been drawn between the twelfth-century Kalyana and present-day Delhi as both are cities of ruins under ideological siege. In this respect, the years 1168 and 2000 are the same, no matter what their religious and political stances are. Another similarity can be noticed between Vijayanagar City and Shiv's room at the university as both have been vandalised by religious fanatics. History repeats itself, and this stark realisation makes Shiv engage with the past to look for ways to resolve it. It is also to be noted that Hariharan decided to place Shiv and fight against the two challenges i.e., taking care of Meena and speaking against religious fundamentalism on his own when his wife and daughter are away from him. This deliberate choice of the author emphasises Shiv's conversion to oneself to another. In an interview to Antonia Navarro-Tejero, Hariharan states her opinion regarding Hindu fundamentalism:

The word fundamentalism is also not just limited to pseudo-religion or ethnic identity. It is also linked with nuclear power, unilateral decision-making, and a global situation where there is only one power. My novel is set in India and I take on Hindu fundamentalism because as a writer engaged in Indian society, this is the prism through

which I view the world. But alas the siege metaphor applies to the rest of the world too. In fact, it is difficult to say siege is a metaphor when it has become so literal in our times! (Tejero 204)

A deep-rooted analysis of the reason for religious bigotry may be found in the impact of colonialism. During colonisation, the colonised wanted to uphold their religion to escape the effects of colonisation. The mere attempt to cling to their religion gives them enough impetus to survive under the clutches of the colonisers. Hence, it is extreme nativism that compels people to become rigid and orthodox to their own beliefs. The act of subversion of several religious and political parties can be substantiated in Ashish Nandy's words:

When such a cultured consensus grows, the main threat to the colonisers is bound to become the latent fear that the colonised will reject to consensus, and instead of trying to redeem their 'masculinity' by becoming the counter-players of the rulers according to the established rules, will discover an alternative frame of reference within which the opposed do not seem meek, degraded men trying to break the monopoly of the ruler on affixed quantity of machismo. (Nandy 94)

On being asked if the novel is a tale for imperturbable liberals, Hariharan responds in an interview to *The Hindu*:

Yes, to the extent that it is possible for many people to be 'liberal' because they are not directly painfully affected by the oppression of the authorities, they are critical of. Recent experiences- Gujarat, for example - show that the times of siege we are talking about have striped the cushioning of even this usually placid class. ("Plea for Pluralism")

The counter-protest by Meena and her activist friends serves as an antidote to the violence unleashed by the religious fanatics. In response to the protest, the extremists burnt some vehicles and broke the arm of one student. Their vindictiveness is evident from this kind of destructive nature. With each passing day, the intensity of the controversy diminishes and other news begins to take over the media houses. Towards the end, Shiv receives a letter from the Vice Chancellor asking him to be impartial to his academic assignments and be fair to public sentiments. According to him: "Above all, nothing we say or write should have divisive consequences" (Hariharan, *In Times* 185). What the VC wants to convey through his letter is that Shiv's secular ideas and his portrayal of Basava of Medieval India invited a lot of unsolicited attention from the general public and media networks, which should have some limit shortly. Now, it is the time when Shiv recognises a positive change in his attitude. Thus, the novel highlights the protagonist's psychic journey from darkness to illumination which hitherto was hidden completely under the garb of religious and political pressure. When Shiv decides to stand for his ideals, it does not make any difference to others but to himself. In Hariharan's words: "Once he throws away all safe crutches, he can truly walk in the present. Be free to be curious, to speculate; to debate, dissent. Reaffirm the value of the only heirloom he needs from the past, the right to know a thing in all the ways possible" (194).

The novel comes to an end with Meena leaving the house of Shiv after being recuperated from her broken knee. In this context, it is to be noted that the cast of Meena has been used as a metaphor. Though she is caught up with a broken leg that prevents her physical mobility, her indomitable spirit and never-say-die attitude cannot be restricted. The metaphorical cast i.e., the communal fascist forces compel people to not think or act rationally with particular predilection to certain religion, caste and creed. Shiv decides to hand over his father's walking stick to Meena, a representative of the young generation. This act of Shiv signifies his willingness to shrug off the memories of his dead father. He is confident enough to shun the dependency on

his father's haunting presence. He knows that the young generation will surely safeguard the secular ideologies and Gandhian principles. Thus, the young generation is entrusted with the responsibility of combating the comprehensive effects of communalism and insular nationalism. About the objective of Hariharan in writing such a fiction Monica Gupta comments: "Hariharan angst is over the betrayal of the secularist vision that gave shape to India, and the limited scope for debate in the nation and coexistence of all cultures. She makes an avid discovery and puts forward her views. It is a juxtaposition of three ages from the past to the present rise of the 'fundoos' fundamentalists" (Gupta 101). Despite being inconclusive, the novel aims at projecting the eternal clash between liberalism and sectarianism. It is not crucial to analyse which side loses or wins, rather the crux of the discourse highlights the need for secularism to reign to form a tolerant socio-cultural fabric. Hariharan delineates the theme of Shiv's transformation from an immobile person to an eloquent and enlightened professor as a subplot to the main narrative i.e., the centre-margin conflict between liberals and fundamentalists. Though Hariharan highlights only Hindu fundamentalism, it is important to remember that fundamentalism and fanaticism can be of any religion. Unfortunately, the circle of academia does not get rid of the deleterious outcome of religious bigotry. *In Times of Siege* portrays the leading characters under siege of different sorts viz., religious, political and ideological but it hints at the celebration of life through the apt representation of speaking up for the vulnerable. It is time to recognise that we all are living under psychological siege and it is also evident that if we do not get ourselves from the siege i.e., within minds we would be responsible for a univocal and monolithic version of society. Hariharan's fictional discourse serves as an appalling critique where secularism remains under threat but ends with an optimistic note for a more tolerant society. Hariharan's condemnation of the powerhouses who try their best to subdue the voice of the subaltern and the marginalised is evident here. So, it is the need of the hour to raise our voices against the homogenised version of truth and encapsulate

multiple voices to emerge to vindicate multiple versions of truth. It can be said that the novel is successful in casting an influence on the readers' minds to develop courageous ideas and implement them. As Sehgal once said: "Ideas have no life of their own; something has to be done about them or they languish for centuries with no impact on the living" (Sehgal 82). The novel is unflinching in its representation of ideological polarisation and the struggle for tolerance which has ramifications in every aspect of life. Through the novel, Hariharan espouses the individual power that poses resistance to religious and political pressure and endorses those who have the temerity to fight against the coercion of the fanatics. In order to build consensus about identity, the heterogenised vision of history must be established.

Therefore, it can be said that the novel poses a relevant question of whether the monotheism of Hindutva is conducive to building a socially equal infrastructure. Hariharan deconstructs the myth of the supremacy of a religion and thus, she challenges the established notion of mythic dissonance. Since myths talk about various human conditions, they have significant appeal to the masses augmenting their imagination. This work of Hariharan has shaken the basic foundation of the theme of Hindutva. The readers are encouraged to think in a different light while exploring the various aspects of religious overtones. In the current age of globalisation, it is not desirable to limit the thought process in a fixed way. People need to contemplate using their individuality on different parameters. With the help of the text, people would learn to think and analyse critically so that there is enough scope to identify the loopholes of the ideal societal fabric. Hence, the idea of a myth is not restricted rather, the fluidity of the nature of myth needs further exploration.

Chapter VI

Fugitive Histories: Crossing the Lines of Myths Burdened on Nation

Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* evocatively accentuates the eternal tension between nationalism and predominant sectarianism. By depicting the marginal voices of women from minority communities, Hariharan challenges the majoritarian voices of religious fanatics. Written in the backdrop of the 2002 Gujrat riots, the fictional discourse underscores the catastrophic effects of communal hatred and its subsequent skirmish. Indian English writers have attempted to portray the fundamentalism-liberalism conflict that undermines the popular notion of multiplicity embedded in Indian cultural norms. By dealing with serious issues like communal rivalry, Hariharan deconstructs female subjectivity that has been mercilessly smashed by patriarchy. Since time immemorial, it has often been found that women are always at the peril of facing egregious violence in times of crisis. Through the delineation of the severe impact of the 1947- partition, Hariharan points out the predicament of women from religious minorities. *Fugitive Histories* is a stark reminder of communal riots such as the Anti-Sikh riots in 1984, the Shah Bano case in 1985, the Babri Masjid demolition in 1992, and exodus of Kashmiri pandits in 1992 that have shaken the basic foundation of the notion of multicultural and multi-religious nation. The virulence of Hariharan's articulation of the repercussions of the Gujrat pogrom establishes the existing culture of violence which is prevalent even in the first century. Women's body has been used to take vengeance that unravels the multiple layers of regressive practices under the facade of a unified nation. The novel is an exemplar of showing the myriad shades of challenges that are faced by women across the ages. The infinitesimal chimera of having a consensus of a tolerant nation breaks down every time a communal rage hits hard across the country. Hariharan foregrounds the narrative of the riot-affected women of

minority communities who speak up about the indelible scars on their minds created by the violence perpetrated on them. Women's body has been taken as a viable means to take vengeance to demonstrate the hegemony over other's ideologies. The fiction aims to offer perspective as resistance with the sole purpose of unravelling the sheer politics of subversion for marginalised women. This is a moving narrative where the basic rights of humanity are denied and the compelling saga of the miseries of women puts forth the grim reality of a so-called secular nation. The dominant nationalism's assimilation of integrating preeminent ideologies makes other views inconspicuous. *Fugitive Histories* unequivocally brings forth the schism of centripetal and centrifugal forces through the dexterous presentation of the plight of minority women. In this poignant novel, Hariharan seems to make a plea for humanity to prevail in place of insular notions of bias and prejudices. This novel can be read as the author's warning; a warning about the impending doom trying to besiege the nation at the cost of vulnerable lives. Hariharan's fictional discourse is replete with some pertinent questions such as whether India can ever be free from the shackles of rigid fundamentalism, whether the country can stop creating massacres in the false name of protecting religion and whether India can ever practice tolerance in the true sense possible. The name of the fiction itself suggests the uncertainties and indeterminacy of the people in need of shelter. The gruesomeness of the past, ambiguity of the present and uncertainties of the future of the weaker and marginalised section have been questioned in this novel. Torn between the concepts of jingoistic nationalism and communal trouble, *Fugitive Histories* foregrounds Hariharan's pragmatic vision of life. Furthermore, the novel portrays how women and women's safety are vulnerable even after the riots are over. It is important to understand that the deleterious effects of crime against women directly or indirectly impact the overall infrastructure of the nation. Interestingly, a country cannot be called progressive unless the women are truly free from the shackles of oppression and subjugation. Defying the norms of conventional structure, the fictional discourse speaks up for

equality, liberty and justice to prevail in society. Dharmapal Fulzule's observation is quite pertinent here:

In *Fugitive Histories*, Githa Hariharan discusses the issues of religious divide and communal confrontation which lead to National tragedy. The demolition of Babri and the Godhra massacre create gulf between Hindus and Muslims as well as Hindu and other Minorities which breaks the thread of brotherhood and cooperation. The extreme Hindutva ideology took communal turn in Gujarat and Godhra carnage is its terrible aftermath in which many innocent men, women and children lost their lives. India has adapted Gandhian ideology which is embedded in the principles of truth, non-violence and compassion which Gandhi borrowed from Buddhism. He preached these doctrines and principles in Sabarmati, Gujarat but has been reverted in that land only by those who promoted violence and racial discrimination. (26)

Fugitive Histories critiques the vigilantism of the religious zealots which leads to severe repercussions on common people's lives. Religious bigots' attempts to subvert the liminal voice of the marginalised in order to accentuate a monolithic version of religious sentiments have been condemned by the author in this fictional discourse. Gujrat riot is regarded as the inevitable outcome of the burning of Hindu pilgrims in Sabarmati Express on 27th February 2002. In retaliation for this outrageous act, women of minority communities pay a heavy price as they become prey at the hands of irate mobs. In most cases, instances of violence unleashed on women have been unreported and underreported in the media. Sayeda Hameed reports:

There is compelling evidence of sexual violence against women. These crimes have been grossly underreported and the exact extent of these crimes- in rural and urban areas- demands further investigation. Among the women surviving in relief camps, are many who have suffered the most bestial forms of sexual violence - including rape,

gangrape, mass rape, stripping, insertion of objects into their body, molestations. A majority of rape victims have been burnt alive. (Hameed 4)

In the challenging narrative, women from three generations encompass a microcosmic sphere in the larger canvas of the macrocosmic landscape that results from the centre-margin paradigm between religious and political parties. The novel is divided into three sections titled “Missing Persons,” “Crossing Borders” and “Funeral Rites” which narrates the unfortunate tale of three principal characters i.e., Mala, her daughter Sara and Yasmin, a seventeen-year-old riot survivor. Hariharan unfurls Mala’s stories which can be peeled off as a chain of events. In a retrospective mode, Mala reconciles with her own self unravelling the events from the past. The readers are introduced to Mala who is left with her dead husband, Asad’s sketchbooks which serve as memorabilia in her lonely life; a life without Asad. The old trunk of Asad thrusts Mala into a new experience by expunging her restraint and plunges her into a vortex of fond memories. The irreparable loss of Asad creates a deep void that cannot be mended by devoting time to household chores and other usual activities. On the contrary, she is engulfed with a sense of guilt and fear for living life without Asad. It is narrated in this way: “She is afraid of what she’ll find in Asad’s sketchbooks, especially in the newer ones. She’s afraid of the stories she may find there, stories that may collide” (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 135). While reminiscing old memories, Mala is immediately drawn towards her childhood days. The subliminal desire to find herself amidst the patriarchal structure has illuminated Mala right from her formative years. In her own words: “From the time she was a child, she knew it wasn't enough just to be her. She needed to find someone else, someone who could enlarge the small space she occupied as Malathi, Mala for short” (14). The only other person who seems to understand Mala’s struggle to come out of the shell is her own grandmother, Bala who herself “was subject to a mysterious women's ailment called hysteria” (15). Bala is the epitome of subjugation wherein she is forced to confine herself within the four walls of her house. She was never allowed to cross the

boundaries set by her husband thus making her mentally tortured, spiritually immobile and physically inert. As a matter of fact, it is worth analysing that Bala's subdued voice finds expression when Mala exercises her choice of marrying Asad who belongs to another religious community. She tells Mala: "You and I beat them; you married him. I couldn't escape this place but I've lived longer than that old bastard boss. We've won" (76). The interfaith marriage of Asad and Mala insinuates their triumph over age-old conventions and religion-based prejudices that establish their identity and self-assertion. The oscillating notion of identities is mapped by their ability to take control of their lives in their own hands. As a matter of fact, this can be regarded as a means of accepting humanity and denying socially prescribed identities. Realising the predicament of her grandmother, the seeds of defiance from conventional rigidity are sown in Mala's tender mind culminating in the transgression of social limitations. Bala's subservient attitude inspires Mala to take the gear of her life into her own hands. With the coming of Asad into Mala's life, she bares her heart out in refuting the banal restrictions. The liberal space that she always looked for finds impetus in the radical ideologies of Asad. Mala realises that: "But all the time she has a guilty sense that she's doing the wrong thing. She can feel the air of anticipation in the empty rooms, the sense that someone is waiting for her. She has to finish what she's doing so she can get back to him" (11). However, Mala's life comes under vilification after her marriage to Asad wherein some family members' earnest attempt to prove Asad as less Muslim raises volatility. It is condemnable that general conjecture has transcended the rationality of people where it is believed that less than a Muslim propounds a true nationalist. In Hariharan's words: "Is a love story possible if the lovers don't believe that only they matter? And does what follows of real life have to tear this belief to shreds? She quickly turns the page before she can be waylaid by such questions, forced into thinking of years closer in time" (57). Asad has been portrayed as a secular who does not believe in the demarcation of religious trajectories. His dream of living in a unified national discourse gets shattered by the communal

hatred prevalent in every sphere of life. He undergoes drastic disillusionment with the fall of liberalism and ever-growing religious intolerance amongst diverse communities. While looking at the paintings of Asad, Mala realises that Asad was in dire need of individuality which could not be fulfilled in his lifetime. His troubled and psychological state of mind required eternal sleep to recuperate. Finally, he relished liberation through death refuting all the incongruities in societal structure. Being unable to endure the unfortunate religious animosity, Asad dies. Sara and Asad, Mala's children, experience a dilemma of identity because of their hybrid parentage. Right from their childhood, the inquisitiveness of other children creates a breach in their tender minds. The constant fear of being relegated snatches away normal childhood from their lives. The interfaith marriages and relationships as depicted by Hariharan render a strong message of harmonious existence. In an interview with *The Hindu*, Hariharan says: "Regardless of what we say, we all have at some point given reason to certain prejudices or experienced them" ("There is no one").

Since identity plays a major role in uniting and separating people, both Sara and Samar suffer disillusionment because of the polarisation of religious proliferation. Despite having multi-culturalism in Indian ethos, the narrative within a narrative challenge the ideal discourse of giving enough space to each culture and religion. Having failed to internalise his mixed parentage, Samar decides to embrace his comatose Muslim self. While Samar represents authoritarian homogeneity, Sara embodies hybridity resulting from complex differences. This mono-cultural and unitary existence gives him solace in times of crisis. The constant battle to seek acceptance embitters Samar which leads him to eschew the in-between-ness of self. To quote him: "Asad may have told us we're not Muslim or Hindu, but the rest of the world only has to hear our last name. Anyway, I'm happy to be seen as a Muslim. I want to be one" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 99). Despite Asad's repeated warnings to not fall prey to the false exposition of Islamic culture, Samar decides to be a hard-core believer of Islam. On the other

hand, Sara feels a great deal of ambivalence and scepticism regarding her parents' normative model of societal structure over insular prejudices that results in her psychic journey to find her true self. She realises that she needs a specific identification in terms of caste, creed and religion to find acceptance in society which has been denied to her for a long time. The rejection often puts Sara in an existential crisis that leads to her despondency arising out of the rigid thinking of society at large. Being a child of two opposite cultured people perplexes her right from her childhood. It is worth analysing the fact that her interaction with the riot-affected women in Ahmedabad changes her perspective about having a definite religious identity. In this context, James Marcia, an influential theorist in identity achievement theory, talks about four stages of the Identity development process i.e., Identity diffusion, Identity foreclosure, Identity moratorium, and Identity achievement. In *Fugitive Histories*, both Sara and Samar experience the stage of Identity diffusion where they are clueless about their identity because of their mixed parentage. Through the undercurrent of low-level exploration and commitment, they suffer from a lack of determination and establishment of self-assertion. Sara enters the stage of Identity foreclosure when she willingly accepts her father's ideologies and she does not question much about the beliefs and values that she is assigned to. On the other hand, Asad embodies the moratorium stage where he is confronted with various kinds of values and beliefs. Therefore, they cannot commit to any particular identity. In the end, Sara embraces the achievement stage where she chooses to be an independent woman. Being high on exploration and commitment, Sara overcomes her fear and anxiety. She instils courage and determination in Mala and Yasmin to lead a life on their own terms. She has a definite understanding of what ideologies should be prioritised for her in the first place. Hence, the transformation from a diffuse and undefined identity to a well-defined and specific identity is an important feature of the last stage of Marcia's theory wherein Sara's changing status fits in perfectly. Samar also attains Identity achievement when he chooses to be Muslim shunning his secular father's ideas.

By eschewing the ambiguity of the dilemma of identity, Samar opts for a particular identity which he thinks is best for him. Furthermore, Samar buries Asad much to the chagrin of both Mala and Sara. In this way, Samar ends the identity crisis by selecting one side of the religious predicament. On the contrary, it is also necessary to note that despite having a specific religious affiliation, the women were ill-treated mercilessly by society. Sara remembers Asad's last words:

You don't know what it is to fight for something. You've never had to fight for anything. Freedom struggle, the Emergency, all the old movements for rights, even the Cold War; they've all been fought. Whether we've won or lost, it's all over. It's finished. You had nothing to fight for, now you do. There's a battle going on. A war. The enemy wants to tell people whether they are Muslim or Hindu or Christian or something else, as if people no longer know themselves. Let's see how you do in this new war. (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 100)

While Mala seeks sustenance to live by digging into her memories, Sara explores her trajectories by involving herself in the path of self-realisation. In part two of the novel titled "Crossing Borders," Sara seizes the opportunity to travel to Ahmedabad to visit the riot-affected women of the 2002 Gujrat carnage. She still bears the imprints of the painful memory of Laila, her childhood friend, who was burnt to death in the 1992 Mumbai riots. The overview of the riot-torn city of Ahmedabad intrigues Sara and she faces the perplexity of what is real and what is unreal. She feels circumscribed by two significant things to ponder on i.e., right questions to ask and the ability to fathom the depth of the answers. A pervading sense of loneliness is reflected in Hariharan's words: "The city has shown Sara its showpieces: its everyday outfits, its torn and yellowing underwear. It's even shown her a flash of dirty bare skin. But it remains a stranger; it remains unfathomable, Sara looks and looks, a true daughter of her father, but she

simply can't do it" (110-11). In Ahmedabad, Nina and Sara feel that the place belongs to some violence-crazy mob who are driven by religious fanaticism and blind adherence to prescribed norms. *Fugitive Histories* articulates the most heinous crime of genocide through the help of chronicles, historical records, media resources, and real-life experiences of survivors and eyewitnesses. Intending to write a documentary on the women survivors of the communal outrage, Sara along with her roommate Nina, arrives at Ahmedabad to register the horrific details. It is worth analysing the fact that the narrative transcends the course of action from a safe place to a more vulnerable place i.e., from Mumbai to Ahmedabad. As soon as Sara crosses the borderline of the two states, it insinuates that she crosses the boundaries of nation, communities, ideologies and of course the people. Among the survivors of the mayhem, Sara comes across Yasmin, a seventeen-year-old girl who recounts the state of violence perpetrated on them. She has seen and experienced more than her physical age thus pushing her on the verge of adulthood by overlooking the innocence of childhood. Hariharan delves deep into the root-cause behind such intense hatred between the two religious communities. Partition is definitely the founding reason for crimes against humanity which cannot be eroded off easily. Critic Priya Kumar remarks: "Memories of partition of violence have inevitably seeped into their consciousness, shaping and informing their self-definitions and ways of being in the world, especially for the populations of those regions that were directly impacted by the event" (Kumar 94). While interacting with the women, Sara realises how marginalisation and migration push them from mainstream society and they are forced to earn livelihood putting aside their excruciating losses. The women have begun to sew skirts to make ends meet that are being sold by the help of the NGOs. Here, the readers are introduced to the third most important character in the novel, Yasmin. The communal pogrom has taken away the mere sustenance of survival but it has failed to snatch away the urge to live again. Yasmin's mother never stops to work to provide Yasmin's school fees and Yasmin's father's medicine. Unfortunately, a lot of other

children are barred from going to school instead they are sent to attend sewing classes and to learn to make kites. These are done to run the house even at the expense of dropping out of school. It is commendable on Yasmin's parents' side that they did not lose hope about Yasmin's leading a better life. Though Yasmin is allowed to go to school, she is warned time and again to be cautious all the time. Words like "careful, alert, guarding against, taking care, anything can happen" linger in her ears. In times of distress, Yasmin consoles herself:

We're lucky we have two rooms even if they are dark and small. We're lucky we have two rooms in a safe area. We're lucky we have a tap in the bathroom, we have to use the water tank outside only once a day. We're lucky we have electricity. You're lucky you go to school. You're lucky your father got some money at least for the old house. You're lucky you didn't have to see your brother's dead body or see him killed. You are lucky you can remember him as he was. You're lucky, we're lucky. They have to say it as often as possible because in their hearts they don't believe it. Now Yasmin has to believe it. She's lucky. (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 122)

The scale of devastation is so large that Yasmin considers herself lucky to have survived with the minimum facilities. She tries her best to be careful because being careful means being willing to live. Another grim aspect of Yasmin's struggle to survive includes her being unable to find her missing brother. With the pain of losing her only brother Akbar, Yasmin dreams of leading a life worth living. Akbar, a college-going student, disappears all of a sudden leaving the family utterly dismayed. Meanwhile, Yasmin's father attempts to register an FIR for his missing son only to be snubbed by them. Their identities as religious minorities come in the way of getting justice for their son. The police officers on duty humiliate them for being Muslim and accuse Akbar of eloping with a Hindu girl or becoming a terrorist. The continuous visit of Yasmin's parents to the police station in the hope of getting their only son back becomes a game

for the policemen. The parents are made to understand that “she’s just another mother, Akbar just another son. Akbar is just another missing person. Just another missing Muslim boy” (135). Yasmin and her family suffer from ambivalence between existence and nonexistence because of bereavement and a traumatic past. After such bitter experiences at the police station, Yasmin’s father started visiting the corpses of people dead from the heinous riot. As if he seems to satisfy himself that missing is better than dead. The Muslims were threatened for the sake of their lives. Almost everywhere they were given a message: “Do you value your life? Do you value your family? Then it’s time to leave the neighbourhood because anything can happen” (138). S. K. Ghosh comments about the cause of such religious hatred between communities:

There are several factors involved in Hindu-Muslim riots at a particular place and time, and their subsequent spread to other places. Causes of conflict undoubtedly have local variations but they are always a mixture of historical, religious, social, economic and political factors responsible for the animosity which often explodes into violence. These apart, urbanisation and overcrowding of towns and cities, ill-treatment of Hindus in the neighbouring Muslim countries and their tales of woes and sufferings, instigation from foreign powers and administrative failure can be added. Communal writings and speeches, and spreading of false and exaggerated rumours and irresponsible press reports incite communal violence. An important development that has taken place is the lumpenisation of politics. (27-28)

Hence, life is not the same for the Muslims after the communal riot. It is ironical to note that where mere survival is the only aim, question of female subjectivity, equality and gender justice take a backseat. Hariharan excoriates the infringement of religious minorities of their basic rights through her dexterous character portrayals.

In her teenage life, Yasmin has seen the embittered side of life. While running for safety and a way to survive, Sara merely escapes sexual assault which is no less than the crime itself. She is constantly haunted by the memory of the wound that intervenes her in sleep. It is not easy for a seventeen-year-old to bear the physical and mental wounds and still continue to dream of a better life. The agony of losing her parental house, her father's shop, and their past happy life conjures up vividly on her mind. Since the time of dislocation, anxiety, fear and uncertainty have been an inevitable part of their survival. The terrible feeling of being alone and insecure encompasses her all the time leaving little space for her to breathe. It is absolutely wrong to say that the scars of the formidable incident are gone forever, terrifying memories lurk in the darkness of the mind. Yasmin's physical assault makes her realise that the entire locality belongs to the Hindu community. Extreme nativism is to be blamed for this kind of obnoxious behaviour toward the other community. To add to this psychological upheaval, Yasmin's brother goes missing. It is not the darkness of the mind that they inhabit but the darkness of their psychic terrain that engulfs them. The pain of losing her brother, their old locality and a free and happy life bothers her and it has been narrated by the author in this way:

Memories are what she remembers now and then, what makes her sad only for a while when she remembers. But Akbar, the house, the shop, their lives- these can't be memories because they are there with her, with them, all the time. They are part of them, they have become Ammi's tight heart and Abba's coughing lungs. And the long curving scar on Yasmin's thigh that no one can see though she knows it's there. (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 144)

Hariharan questions the relevance of the initiative of the government to provide rehabilitation for the needy and the affected. It is praiseworthy that it is the NGOs that have endeavoured to extend their helping hands to the marginalised. Through compassionate characters like Sara and Nina, the women survivors are finally capable of being heard. The feeling of being heard

somewhat relieves them of the pain of losing almost everything. There is a preconceived notion about Muslims that they are terrorists and anti-national. Though there is no rationality behind such construction, a large number of people's proclivity revolves around this conception. Hindu fundamentalists deliberately attempt to stigmatise Muslims as Pakistanis and they even take the means of eradicating them from the country. Even though this general perception is completely detrimental to the secular nation's social fabric, little attempt has been made to alter the course of the thought process of this matter. During the 2002 Gujrat genocide, Muslims were forced to leave India for Pakistan. In *Fugitive Histories*, women survivors bare their hearts out to Sara and Nina. Nasreen, one of the riot survivors, questions why they have to go to Pakistan: "We were already scared because we kept hearing terrible things on the loudspeakers, Go to Pakistan! Go back to Pakistan! What do we have to do with it?" (157). Another survivor Razia's ordeal is vital in this regard: "The loudspeakers kept calling us Pakistanis, terrorists. And what happened to us, that's not terrorism?" (157) Again, Hariharan captures the gruesome violence in the following lines: "They had swords, pipes, hockey sticks, soda-lemon bottles, saffron flags, all kinds of sharp weapons. They had petrol bombs and gas cylinders. They broke the dargah down the street and put an idol there. They came to our houses, they were shouting 'kill them, cut them, burn them alive!' Then they blasted apart our lives" (158). In our country, essentialising an identity over other multifarious identities has been a predominant norm and this makes the nation more vulnerable to religious tensions. Gujrat violence bears testimony of this unification of identity. Thousands of innocent Muslims were targeted in retribution for the burning of Sabarmati express carrying Hindu pilgrims. Words fall short of articulating the scale of atrocities both on the bodies and memories of the victims in varying degrees. Mariam, one of the riot survivors, further explains: "It means our men were killed, it means our mothers and sisters and daughters were raped. It means we saw it happening. Our people were grilled like meat. I saw it with my own eyes. The bodies piled up. Everything was over in a flash" (159).

Salma, Zakia and Zulekha all the women take part in expressing their share of pain and anguish. The tale of individual and collective struggle to survive articulated in the method of narrative within a narrative uncovers the pain of lived experiences of the victims. Ethnic groups are compelled to inflict violence and humiliation due to the impact of colonisation and imperialism. Bill Ashcroft opines in this context:

Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. But its worst and most paradoxical gift was to allow people to believe that ..., white or black or western or oriental. Yet just as human beings make their own history, they also make their cultures and ethnic identities. (Ashcroft 98)

It is worth analysing how Zainat's son Nasir is forced to leave school as he comes from a Muslim family. Obviously, this unfair expulsion from school takes a heavy toll on his mind. Initially, Sara was quite uncomfortable that the appalling narrative was being told in front of the children. But with time, she understands that the grim reality has augmented their physical age. The inability to perform the last rites of the deceased does not provide the required closure to the family which forces them to suffer in unrelenting wailing and mourning. The narrative is so powerful that the readers are induced to feel the grief of the riot-affected people. Many theorists of trauma and memory opine that it is important to make a connection with the traumatic past and disown it while aiming at arriving at a new future. According to Pierre Janet, French psychologist and pioneer in the area of traumatic memory, vehement emotions can have varying effects on the mind. The capability of synthesising and integrating fresh ideas can cause dissociations. The memory helps to assimilate new ideas by establishing an analogy to stored experiences. Through linguistic operation of memory, Janet articulates narrative memory as a way of storing, counting, understanding and assimilation of experiences. Narrative memory is conducive to integrating our feelings of the past. *Fugitive Histories* serves as the exemplar of

narrative memory wherein trauma of horrible past plays an important role in penning down real-life experiences of three women from three generations. With Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma Narrative and History*, the study of traumatic explorations comes into prominence highlighting the psychological wounds and their delineation in the form of art. As a matter of fact, trauma is caused as an outcome of undesirable incidents that ruin the self and potential prospects. Being unable to get hold of the past, the survivors often take the recourse of severe repercussions. Though the reactions vary with the status of their socio-cultural conditions, Hariharan underscores the fight of the survivors on a collective level. Ruth Leys' book *Trauma: A Genealogy* talks about the impact of trauma and its subsequent disorder on the survivors. *On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies*, a book by Geoffrey Hartman, narrates the representation of trauma in literature. *Fugitive Histories* too explores the post-traumatic conditions amongst the women survivors.

Since the wound of the mind is way more vulnerable than the wound of the body, it takes years to heal the perturbed mind. In this novel, Hariharan enunciates the day-to-day struggle of survivors who are eventually known as double marginalised i.e., Muslim and women. Self and Identity have always been prioritised in Hariharan's works which stems from Indian women's subjugation under the terrible wheels of patriarchy. The literal meaning of "Fugitive" is a person who is running away to secure a safe place to live in, here the women are compelled to live as fugitives. Another word "Histories" signifies chronicles of horrific details of the Carnage that acted like a curse to the women. Erik Erikson, the famous developmental psychologist, remarks that "mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others" (Erikson 109). Therefore, the opposite words "sameness" and "difference," posit the complexity of self and other. In this context, it can be analysed that both Sara and Yasmin's sense of identity is shaped by the ramifications of socio-cultural relationships. Sara's restlessness and lack of

constancy about her identity result from her real-life experiences that she undergoes almost everywhere. In Yasmin's case, the constant battle to choose her separate identity from the religious fanatics makes her completely paranoid about her identity. It is to be noted that time and space cannot restrict the fluidity of identity. The core idea of Erikson's theory is that each human being experiences dilemmas in every stage of his life. The conflict shifts to the next stage if it is left unattended. So, the resolved issues can have a dominant impact on the later stages. The capability of exercising own choice is one of the key features of identity. Values, beliefs, and behavioural patterns all transform with the changing socio-cultural scenario. Acceptance of individuality is important to establish a true sense of self. The existence of cultural identity is manifested through the deconstruction of cultural relations. Moreover, the assimilation of cultural and literary identity does not yield in creating identity crisis. In fact, the significance of the minority culture should be taken into account and in this way principle of identity is related to the principle of otherness. Therefore, the essence of cultural identity lies in constant dialogue with other cultures. It is in this light of the context that *Fugitive Histories* can be related to. Hariharan propounds the need to accept the other culture to form a more tolerant nation. Cultural identity should be open and inconclusive in nature. Bakhtin opines about the study of literary and cultural identity:

There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture ... In the realm of culture, outsideness is most powerful factor in understanding. It is only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly ... A meaning only reveals its depth once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures. We raise new questions for a foreign

culture, ones that it did not raise itself ... Such a dialogic encounter of two cultures does not result in merging or mixing. Each retains its own unity and open totally, but they are mutually enriched. (Bakhtin 6-7)

Hariharan vividly interrogates the predicament of “doubly marginalised” third-world women who have been enforced and internalised as “others”. The novel brings forth the binary oppositions namely liberalism/sectarianism, tolerance/bigotry, savage/civilized and this conspicuousness insinuates the enforcement of the colonised in some way or the other. Therefore, the discrepancy between the coloniser and the colonised becomes more evident paving the way for racial discrimination. The impact of “otherness” has been one of the dominant features of *Fugitive Histories*. The principal characters such as Asad, Mala, Sara, Samar and Yasmin all are influenced by the intense nativism and colonialism at large. Hybridity, otherness, and double-consciousness exerted over unfavourable influence on Samar making him restless and aggressive right from his childhood. Due to the ambivalence of identity, Samar is forced to be a rebel who does not fit in the world of both colonisers and colonised. Consequently, his estrangement in the socio-cultural milieu makes him completely uprooted from his roots. And the frantic search for his identity continues. Since Asad stands for radical thinking, he is wrought by the “otherness” and “double consciousness”. Little did he know that he would have to pay the price for being too idealist. His dreams get to pieces with the collapse of secular ideologies. His psyche is shattered by the dissociation of mind which is further aggravated by his children’s repugnance. He feels all his values and beliefs have crumbled down. It is unfortunate to note that secular ideologies can be crushed under the tyrannical wheels of fanaticism. Homi J. Bhaba remarks about the ambivalence of the colonised:

It is this ambivalence that marks the boundaries of colonial positionality -the division itself/other and the question of colonial power, the differentiation of coloniser/colonised, different from both the Hegelian master-slave dialectic ...

projection of otherness. It is the difference produced within the act of enunciation as a specifically colonial articulation of those two disappropriate sites of colonial discourse and power: the colonial scene as the invention of historicity, mastery, mimesis or the "other scene" of ... displacement, fantasy, psychic defence, and an "open textuality". Such a display of difference produces a mode of authority that is agonistic. Its discriminatory effects are visible in those split-subjects of racist stereotype - the Simion negro, the effeminate Asiatic male-which ambivalently fix identity as the fantasy of difference ... (Bhabha 150)

By witnessing the undaunted spirit of the women, Sara transcends a prejudiced border and begins to fathom the hybrid nature of her parentage. The inseparable and irreconcilable fragments of Sara's state of mind get a new dimension with the harrowing narrative of the communal skirmish. Furthermore, she is finally able to figure out her transitional state of being and becoming who she really is. On being asked by Yasmin, Sara retorts: "I have Muslim relatives and Hindu relatives. I'm neither. Sometimes I think I'm Indian. But most of the time I'm just Sara" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 167). It is ironic to note that people have no role to play in selecting their names and religions but they are bound to carry the baggage throughout their lives. The mere categorisation of Hindu, Muslim, Christian so on and so forth mar the liberal thinking in the chiaroscuro of sectarian-liberal conflict. Hariharan takes recourse to Gandhiji's fundamental secularism to combat the spread of communal hatred. According to Gandhiji, it is important to rediscover the roots of the secular fabric of the nation that is religion as a whole. If everyone believes in one religion i.e., humanity peace can prevail. He asserts: "Religion is dear to me and my first complaint is that India is becoming irreligious. Here I am not thinking of the Hindu, the Mahomedan or the Zoroastrian religion but that religion which underlies all religions. We are turning away from God" (Gandhi 42).

Sara's visit to the Sabarmati Ashram changes the dynamics of Sara's founding principles where she finds the place as a pure abode of peace. She wonders why the place has become a battleground for religious fanatics despite Gandhiji's luminous presence. A pertinent question hovers on Sara's mind why the ghost of Gandhiji is not doing anything to stop the communal violence? She imagines Gandhi's ghost singing, "Ishwar Allah tere naam, sabko sanmati de Bhagwan" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 191) which needs to be understood vehemently. Ironically, the birds have not joined the song with the ghost of Gandhiji because the song seems to have lost its relevance in the present scenario. Gandhiji was assassinated in 1948 and the mob has turned up again to destroy the ghost of Gandhiji. Sara hears his voice: "In the dictionary of Sathyagraha, there is no enemy" (176). In Gandhiji's opinion, non-violence or passive resistance is the only way to fight against religious tensions. He further opines: "This is Sathyagraha, this is equity, even as, if I want my brother to redress a grievance, I must do so by taking upon my head a certain amount of sacrifice and not by inflicting injury on him. I may not demand it as of rights. My only right against my brother is that I can offer myself as a sacrifice" (Gandhi 260). The ghost assures Sara that he will continue to follow the path of non-violence, ahimsa and Sathyagraha. Likewise, Hariharan underscores the need to concentrate more on the power of non-violence to ascertain a peaceful coexistence of divergent societal structures. Both Nehru and Gandhi advocated for tolerance to exist for a secular fabric of nation which has been neglected so far. Actually, the word "tolerance" comes from the notion of inequality which is prevalent in society. The rift among various religious communities is the outcome of the demolition of Babri Masjid and Godhra carnage that culminated in communal tension across the nation. The adoption of Gandhian ideology seems to be a plausible solution for peace to prevail. Though the principles of violence have been preached initially in Sabarmati Ashram, Gujarat the very place turns out to be a place of sheer violence and racial

discrimination. Having experienced the catastrophic effects of the communal outrage from the direct victims, the ambivalence about her hybrid parentage is completely eradicated and she accepts her reality. Feeling intrigued about the predicament, Sara is shaken to the roots. She says: "I'm beginning to realise how lucky I am. How glad I am that I'm a hybrid" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 184). It is the acceptance of their hybridity which saves Mala and Sara from the cauldrons of suffering but Samar plunges himself into the darkness of his identity. A sense of self-assertion is the outcome of individuals and their interaction with the society wherein they inhabit. In this context, Amartya Sen contends: "The main hope of harmony in our troubled world lies in the plurality of our identities, which cut across every single hardened line of vehement division that allegedly cannot be resisted" (Sen 16). The acceptance of her new identity is conducive to evolving her as a person and developing her as a more compassionate person. This is evident in her bonding with Yasmin: "A new kind of friendship. A harder one in which there's more involvement than joy?" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 191). The profound empathy is reflected in these words: "There's something awful about having to speak for someone else, write a report or petition or, even worse, make a film or make up a novel about other people. It's like speaking on behalf of missing persons" (191). One needs to get into the skin of the lives of the victims to write their stories, their defeats, sufferings, victories, and finally their triumphs over the adversities of life. Not only Sara is perturbed by the misfortune of Yasmin, but her mind is equally plagued by the tragic fate of Laila, her childhood friend who was burnt to death along with her husband in the 1992-93 Mumbai riots. The following lines from the novel highlight Sara's shock and surprise: "All that's left of them is a phrase or two in some official document on the 92-93 riots. At most, a couple of sentences in non-governmental reports, bleeding heart details of yet another round of looting and hatred and violence" (152). The unfortunate incident of Laila haunts Sara's present to a large extent and she is yet to come to terms with the grim reality of Laila's tragic death. Hence, communal violence puts horrible

memories on Sara's mind. Sara discovers Yasmin in her enduring journey about attenuation to prove the significance of her life. The opportunity to help Yasmin in her further studies and other necessary procedures illuminates her otherwise equivocal life. She is tormented by her own self who questions her: "Can your voice ever be theirs? And who are you to speak for them?" (192). A new realisation dawns upon her and he refuses to write the script of the documentary on Gujarat pogrom but decides to extend her helping hand to Yasmin, a survivor of the riot. In Hariharan's words: "The difference she can make in Yasmin's life is nothing compared to the difference Yasmin can make in Sara's life. The thought comes to her whole and indisputable" (235).

Fugitive Histories unequivocally wins as a celebration of life after witnessing the death of humanity and the destruction of inter-religious dialogue at a large scale. The triumphant moment comes when Yasmin's mother allows Yasmin to study at a Mumbai college under Sara's supervision. She does not feel subdued even in the adverse circumstances. Her determination to survive and the utmost attempt to maintain her family is an inspiration to all those women who have suffered mercilessly as a result of communal animosity. Her aspirations for a bright future for her daughter do not get deterred even after the fatal impact of the riot. Muslim women's mobility is restricted not only by the Hindu fundamentalists but also by the conservative Muslims. Her explanation: "The angry ones on both sides want to put our daughters in burqas so that they can prove their point. Did their burqas keep our women safe five years ago?" (227). The ability to get over the feelings of pain, distress, anguish, loss and reparation is beneficial for the struggle to survive by celebrating the value of humanity. Putting aside the haunting memories of the past, Yasmin opens a fresh chapter in her life by passing her class 12th exams. Thus, Yasmin is empowered by combating ethnic violence. Finally, all three women characters Mala, Sara and Yasmin move ahead with a zeal to live by shrugging off the traumatised past and embittered experiences. Hariharan celebrates the victory of her characters:

“And so we came forth, and once again beheld the stars” (241). Unfortunately, the repulsive nature of religious zealots is exacerbated by the alarming silence and lack of proper action by the minorities. So, it is high time that people break the metaphorical walls around them and voice their concerns against growing intolerance. The novel does not end with poignancy rather purports to be an exemplary kind to glorify life as a whole. Mala, Sara and Yasmin all three characters win their battle by the dint of sheer credence in self and indefatigable willpower to survive. Mala seeks solace in Asad’s sketchbooks by bypassing the legacy of the secular nation through Sara. On the other hand, both Sara and Yasmin celebrate life with new hope and bubbling enthusiasm, determined to lead life and achieve their respective dreams. The plurality of the nation should be established notwithstanding the multicultural, multi-religious and multiregional fabric of society. Priya Kumar observes: “If Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs have to live together in peace and amity, it is important they leave behind these events as something most traumatic, something tragic but something most unfortunate which ought not to have happened” (Kumar 92). By exploring the novel through the multi-dimensional aspects of the fluidity of self, Hariharan foregrounds the necessity of lived realities without fear, prejudices and inevitable binaries between religions. In *Identity and Violence: The Illusion of Destiny*, Amartya Sen observes: “The prospects of peace in the contemporary world may well lie in the recognition of the plurality of our affiliations and in the use of reasoning as common inhabitants of a wide world, rather than making us into inmates rigidly incarcerated in little container” (Sen xvii). Soon, Sara and Nina comprehend that their documentary film may be unable to capture the unending tale of horror and pain. The interrelation between self-identity and national identity has been etched in the light of Sara and Yasmin’s unerringly delineated explorations. By the deft amalgamation of fact and fiction, Hariharan defines how human beings are connected. Nothing and none are just individualised but each action is reflected in the society at large. The idea is delineated in the following lines: “What happens to one also that happens

in some way, to the other. That's how all those fragments that pass for different lives forge a cunning chain. The interlocking links may not always be visible, but still they're made of iron. And the ending in a chain story can't be the end. To make sense of it all, you have to go back to the beginning" (Hariharan, *Fugitive Histories* 13). Hariharan brings forth the silence of the victims especially the women and children who are the worst affected in the sectarian conflict. Hariharan articulates the voice which should be based on individuality and communal righteousness. In her writings, Hariharan is vociferous in her condemnation of the relegation and subjugation of women for ages. Therefore, it has been attempted to examine Hariharan's approach of how she lays bare the myth of caste and religion and how she tries to underscore humanism which is the essence of multiple ideologies. Hariharan deconstructs the men-controlled institution like marriage to prevent the suppression of women. Marriage is overrated and this myth has been thoroughly delineated in the novel. The author highlights myth and reality as a part of a new social system which is built on the values of humanity. The characters show their mettle and oppose convention for an unfettered and liberal life. *Fugitive Histories* is remarkable in showing the author's delineation of the crucial manifestation of the need for communal harmony. In the period of segregation and estrangement, the novel lays stress on the proclivity of existential crisis that denies individuals the required constancy and sense of belonging. Each character in the novel seeks individuality and contentment intending to renounce their horrible past. Through this subtle novel, Hariharan pins her hope on unity in diversity by looking at the past with the notion of communal co-existence and instances of brotherhood. Hariharan deconstructs several myths about socio-political context and feminine consciousness. The myth that a veiled woman is safe from the evil clutches of opponents is devastated when women from minority communities face violence and racial discrimination. On the other hand, the myth of nationalism is also interrogated where it has been propagated that nationalism denotes blind adherence to particular religions and ideologies. The minority

women are expected to behave in a certain way and this myth is also questioned through this fictional discourse of Hariharan. The women in *Fugitive Histories* dare to dream of a better future and shrug off all the prejudices that are associated with them. By challenging the orthodox mythical notion of religion, this work of Hariharan represents the growth of a nation. The conventional idea of the myth of religion is held as an identifier of a nation. Thus, Hariharan attempts to reframe the established mythical identities that are threatened by orthodoxy. Hariharan also demonstrates that the path of violence and revenge cannot bring forth the desired social equality among the various communities. As a critique of fascism, *Fugitive Histories* foregrounds the pluralistic image of the world where each religion should have a proper space for the benefit of the entire range of human conditions. Hence, Hariharan deconstructs the myth of a secular state unerringly and highlights the need to look at age-old perceptions with ample rationalism.

Conclusion

Although the selected five novels of Hariharan resonate with the ideas of story-telling, narrative within a narrative, mythology, scriptures, folklore and so on, each novel carries an exceptional way of expressing the in-depth ideologies of the author. The problems of India and the subsequent predicaments of the Indians find a place in the novels. The plural forms of the titles of the novels viz., faces, ghosts, histories, and times indicate the fact that Hariharan has always been a firm believer in plurality and she espouses anything singular. Hariharan upholds the feminine consciousness and sensibility through the deft portrayal of the amalgamation of myth and reality. Hariharan, with her sheer brilliance and creativity, has penned variegated problems of a postcolonial nation. It is a matter of fact that Indian women writers' primary concern about women's complicated domestic roles eventually works as a wake-up call to subjugated women who refuse to be subjugated. Therefore, the subversion of the ideologies of patriarchy is the obvious outcome of the unjust treatment of the second sex. Interestingly, the method of storytelling is used as a form of resistance to stabilise the gender disparity. Hariharan's female characters prepare themselves for a change in order to fulfil their emotional needs. Mere realisation of their worth as an individual strives way for selfhood and self-fulfillments. The way Hariharan's women characters offer alternatives to liberated feminist ideology while adopting the means of resistance to survive sets an exemplary instance of a conventional way of thinking. Major findings of the selected Hariharan's novels have been analysed and the importance in bringing forth the feminine subjectivity has been underscored. The success of Hariharan lies in the fact that she amalgamates Western and Indian narrative forms and creates multi-dimensional stylistic virtuosity. Hariharan's work deals with changing

social and moral values, the relevance of ancient mythology, women's empowerment and other issues. She experiments with the modified return to old literary methods and her writing gives expression to the modern women's predicament. Hariharan makes a unique niche for herself through a variety of themes and narrative techniques. Her vast area of work comprises of subjugation of women, empowerment, the importance of storytelling, revisionism of myth, the rigidity of fundamentalism and social and cultural prejudices. As her works are replete with her views, she states: "All of us know that though we lead rather solitary lives when it actually comes to the writing, the raw material is from the world around us – and understanding this world, so as to ask the questions writers must, is perhaps the biggest challenge we face even before we put pen to paper" ("New Voices" 32). Myths, fairy tales, fables, and complicated plot structures- all constitute an exceptionally beautiful literary space. Postmodern techniques like irony, metafiction, intertextuality etc. feature in Hariharan's works. By blending mythology with fantasy, Hariharan modernises the myth.

The first chapter of my thesis analyses how Hariharan's maiden novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) reconstructs myth from a feminist perspective and critiques the subordination of "dominant" on the "other" while amalgamating the aspects of reality to mythology. The novel portrays through the characterisation of Devi how modern liberated women are not satisfied with the answers that they are provided with rather they keep on looking for ways to write their own stories with subjectivity. Cultural discourses have been used to suppress the voice of the subaltern for ages and this idea finds expression when Beauvoir asserts, "History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy's earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence; their codes were set up against her; she was thus concretely established as the Other" (163). Though the tales taken from the Indian mythology and scriptures attempt to subvert "the second sex," Hariharan makes it a point to delineate the viewpoint where gender justice should prevail.

The narrative strategy of drawing parallels between the mythological tales and contemporary discourse puts forth the individuality of women characters and thus, the technique prioritises gender equality. The authoritative voice of male hegemony is repudiated by negating the prescribed social hierarchy in the fictional discourse. This kind of literature is of immense importance where terms of sexual equality are attempted to articulate the man-woman disposition in society. As per the French feminists such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, the endeavour made by the female characters to establish their individuality through various forms can be narrated in the mode of semiotics. Kari Weil commented: “French feminists used *écriture* as a weapon not to represent the feminine but to create it through experimental poetics. By creating the feminine in their own work, they hoped to provoke women to participate in reimagining their lives and their world” (169). Therefore, the silence, the soliloquies, the imagination and the dream sequences of the women characters constitute in making the expressions of the female self under a nuanced poetic self. The aesthetic beauty of the novels lies in the dexterous portrayal female psyche and the utmost attempt to ameliorate the predicament of women. Rajeswari Sunder Rajan comments on the subjugation of the women characters in this way: “In the chain of causality we see how the family first distorts and represses women’s desire, and then co-opts or browbeats them into submission to its structures by turning them into either stoic sufferers (Mayamma), or the grim agents of domination (Sita), or confused conformists (Devi), who perpetuate patriarchy’s dominion” (230). The need to interrogate the pre-conceived demands of the socio-cultural norms has been thoroughly highlighted by the author. The mythical stories help in shaping and conditioning the protagonist, Devi’s decision-making process and she comes out not as someone who cannot speak. The tales of meek and submissive women like Gandhari, Parvati, Sita as well as the fierce women like Amba, Damayanti, Kritya cast relevant influence on Devi in her search for identity. Devi’s memories of the past comprising myths and fables worked as a standard model since the early

days of childhood. She makes a constant comparison between the actions of the mythical characters and the women who surround them. Thus, the importance of literary tradition across time and space is underscored by mythical stories. The inter-textual links used by Hariharan build the necessary concoction between modern times and ancient time-frame. Thus, it is established that literary heritage transcends the barriers of a particular commodified zone and it can easily create universal appeal. Old tales of myths, epics and legends inspire people to have a comprehensive idea about life and subsequently, they can make some crucial decisions in life based on the tales. Moreover, the ethics of culture embedded in the tales provide lessons for the future generations to come. While Devi gets to learn about the meek and submissive women characters like Parvati, Sita and Gandhari, she also gets acquainted with strong-headed women like Kritya and Amba. These characters' perceptions vehemently influence Devi's way of thinking and she begins to relate her life with those of the characters. Although women are not supposed to ask questions, the protagonist dares to ask questions and receives redeeming answers. Thus, Devi becomes what it means to be a modern woman who cannot be dominated in the name of tradition and patriarchy. In this novel, Devi prioritises her individuality over her meaningless marriage, thus shunning all ties of bonding with her husband. The true meaning of freedom is portrayed through the characterisation of Devi with her bold decision to elope with the man she loves and adores. The ability to fight the adversities of life is foregrounded through the female characters in Hariharan's fiction. While Mayamma is forced to compromise with the misfortune, Parvatiamma's radical decision to uphold her individuality marks the much-required shift from preconceived notions. In this context, Ibsen's Nora is to be remembered where she chooses her own path rejecting the traditional role prescribed for her. It can be said that the ideal of womanhood is a death trap for most of the women. If a woman gives endlessly and selflessly, she is considered a goddess. The mythological heroines are used as archetypes of ideal women and interestingly the women themselves are motivated by this notion. In a sole

motive to vindicate patriarchy, women have been neglected and their choices and desires have been crushed under the wheel for quite some time now. On the other hand, Hariharan weaves the concept of multiculturalism with the character portrayals of Asad, Samar, Mala and Yasmin. While Asad and Samar entangle themselves in a maze of hybridity, Sara and Yasmin accept hybridity as a part of their identity. The author's voice against the injustice meted out to the minority community raises awareness amongst other novelists of the postcolonial era. In the first chapter of the thesis, it has been shown how Hariharan deconstructs the prevalent myth of male hegemony. The myth of the superiority of men over women is dissected through the strong portrayal of Devi. Hariharan consistently advocates the ideology of femininity and articulates gender injustice in most of her fictional works. The novel is exceptional in its attempt to present women who fight to attain self-worth both against men and societal infrastructure. It is a breakthrough novel for the notion of subjugated women through the representations of myth that insinuates comparative equality among the sexes. Though the three principal characters suffer the same subjugation by the patriarchal structure, their response varies according to their socio-economic paradigm. In an interview Hariharan remarks:

The entire book is the Devi myth, the Devi figure, a goddess and you have all these various aspects, which fit in perfectly with that I was writing to do, and all the names I've used are in fact names of Devi. So you have Devi Sita, Lakshmi and the sort of face of the goddess, but also you have Kali, you also have Durka, and also you have all these different aspects of the goddess, and of course Devi has Thousand names, so I thought names, so I thought *The Thousand Faces of Night* would be perfect, because you also have the suggestion of masks, and the various masks that you are allowed to wear, that you could wear and that you have access to by day. ("Hariharan talks to" 23)

Hence, the progression in terms of feminine consciousness is one of the central features of Hariharan's novels. Hariharan has shown how women's dreams and aspirations are not restricted to being a daughter or wife. It is much more than that. *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a burning example of this motive. Having failed in dictating her role as a traditional housewife, Devi pins her hope in reuniting with her mother. Not only *The Thousand Faces of Night* but her other two novels *When Dreams Travel* and *Fugitive Histories* lay bare the shallowness of the overrated social institution which is marriage. Sita and Mayamma's passive acceptance in their respective marriages brings Devi into a new light and prompts her to take the course of her life in her own hands. *When Dreams Travel* articulates the miseries of married women through the deft portrayal of Shahrzad and Dunyazad. Both the sisters become captivated as soon as they are married and face imprisonment and isolation because of marriage. Unable to exercise their choice, they are forced to lead a passive life shunning their aspirations. In *Fugitive Histories* too, Bala is captivated after marriage. She is socially ostracised and never allowed to talk to anyone including her family members. Her loneliness reaches an extent where she is stigmatised as insane. It is conspicuous that marriage is not the ultimate settlement of life and one needs to look at marriage as a viable optional choice rather than a compulsion to assimilate in the mainstream society. A woman's true self is expressed when she is free to choose life. Although Hariharan's heroines are not given the opportunity in the beginning but they are capable of exercising their individuality with time. Devi, Sita, Mayamma, Shahrzad, Dunyazad, Sara and Yasmin all the female characters win by dint of their sheer courage and zeal to survive. Devi's inability to produce children insinuates her victory as a woman who can assert her potential both as a woman and as a human being. As motherhood is regarded as an integral part of womanhood, Devi's incapability underscores her feeling of fulfilment after being denied her due respect as a woman. Feminist reading of literary texts subverts the

stereotypical representations of women and gives primary importance to women in gender injustice.

The second chapter of the thesis portrays how *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* brings forth a teacher who unlearns what he has learnt throughout his life and begins a second innings with a mentally disabled child, Mani. This work of Hariharan unearths the loopholes of the colonial system of education while prioritising the importance of folklore and scriptures in the education system. Since storytelling has always been a recurring theme of most of Hariharan's novels, this fiction is no exception. The wonderful amalgamation of the tales from *The Panchatantra* and the real-life incidents has been brilliantly highlighted in the novel to capture Mani's restless mind. The pedagogic value of the tales is conducive to making effective communication with Mani. However, the last ten questions which have not been answered and the inconclusive ending marks new interpretations of the narrative. Vasu and Shiv, the protagonists of Hariharan's two novels are haunted by the memories of their father and their ideologies. The complexities of the amalgamation of past, present and future pose severe obstacles in their lives to lead a normal and balanced life. While Shiv comes out from the burden of past life with the secular ideologies of Meena and her friends, Vasu's transformation revolves around Mani and the healing process. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* marks a remarkable treatise where mythology and folklore play a decisive role in bringing about the transition in Vasu's attitude. Hariharan articulates the role of teachers in these two novels, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* and *In Times of Siege*. Vasu and Shiv both are helped by the illuminating presence of Mani and Meena, respectively. The blending of myth and reality aids in solving their identity crisis and eventually lands them more confidently. It is at the end of his career that Vasu establishes his worth as a teacher and that happens through the appropriate usage of mythology and folklore. Vasu makes use of the technique of storytelling to teach moral lessons to Mani. Thus, Mani gets to learn the grim realities of life and their possible solutions to deal with the problems. The animal fables

play a crucial role in Mani's development. Hence, Hariharan deconstructs the myth regarding the conventional method of teaching and employs innovative ways to cure Mani. The myth that the traditional method is a must for the proper upbringing of a child is shunned and instead unconventional teaching through storytelling is given importance.

The third chapter talks about the novel *When Dreams Travel* which reiterates the same technique of storytelling through which Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad either save their lives and other virgins or present other sides of their individuality. The reorientation of myth helps them to overcome patriarchy and establish feminine power over prevalent norms of societal structure. Shahrzad's stories eventually take the form of myths and transcend the time-space continuum. In this way, the significance of the tales still holds importance even in today's contemporary set-up. The role of dreams and imagination in making the characters realise their self-worth holds extreme importance. Therefore, the women characters' silence takes the required form of voice and thus the importance of mythology once again comes into prominence in contemporary discourse. The medieval Arab mythical tale propounds Shahrzad as someone who can elevate herself from victimisation to empowerment. The women in the novel create an ennobling position for themselves wherein they can speak for themselves. Along with myths, symbols play a decisive role in portraying the variegated dynamics of the characters' multi-layered consciousness. For example, the device of mirror has been used to delineate myriad shades of the character's emotions. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, towards the end of the novel, Devi sees her reflection the teak-bordered and full-length mirror which reminds her of her own various reflections. This mirror image insinuates that Devi is transforming from being subjugated to liberated. Likewise, Dunyazad's mirror reflects her innermost desire of flying, thus underscoring her zeal to overwrite patriarchy. Vasu, too, experiences a part of himself when he looks at the mirror. The mythical anecdotes serve as a representation of the reality, providing learning lessons to the mentally disabled Mani.

The fourth chapter of the thesis examines the deconstruction of myth as a false notion. Myth as a notion is devastated in the novel *In Times of Siege*. *In Times of Siege*, set against a backdrop of a university campus, promotes free thinking and free expression. Hariharan condemns the disparity based on caste, creed, gender and life choices. Therefore, Hariharan breaks off the myth of a monolithic version of glorifying a particular ideology. Hariharan propounds the fact that we should make enough space to celebrate diversity. Thus, the myth of a fixed identity is shaken through the radical ideologies of the author. On the other hand, Shiv finds his ground of reality when he begins to negate the unnecessary religio-political pressures to hover on his lesson modules. However, it can be interpreted that the myth created amongst people that nationalism signifies strict adherence to a particular religion needs to be called out for the sake of a real unified nation to exist. An insatiable thirst for power continues to exist in society which compels liberal-minded people under psychological siege. Tolerance for other religious identities is the need of the hour that Hariharan propagates through this novel. The importance of breaking the wall of pre-conceived ideologies has been articulated unerringly in *In Times of Siege*. The novel narrates the siege-like conditions of the nation. Hariharan's protagonists voice their concern about the demanding situations in their lives and fight endless battles to make a mark in society. Hariharan propounds heterogeneity as opposed to the popular belief of a particular identity being clubbed together with national identity. She condemns the fact that the nation is becoming more narrow-minded despite increasing globalisation. Her comments regarding the context are worth mentioning:

It's inevitable perhaps that with physical sites being paved over, with history itself becoming a contested site where memories are erased or retold or new memories invented, the ongoing, real target of the disputing exercise is that large and amorphous thing called culture. ("Plea for Pluralism")

Fugitive Histories speaks of the repercussions of one of the greatest tragedies of India, Gujrat mayhem which ripped off the secular notion of postcolonial India. The myth around the identity of Muslim women is questioned and its possible outcome is also demonstrated in the novel. The notion that veiling a woman protects her from evil eyes is broken off completely when many minority women face humiliation as an inevitable outcome of religious animosity. In the tussle between traditional myth and modernity, Hariharan underscores gender equality and the strengthening of secular ideas. Hariharan is shaken out of her complacency due to the large-scale atrocities on humanity and this compelled her to articulate her thoughts in this novel. The author believes that stories can be reinterpreted for the sake of current times. Hence, the reinterpretation of the pogrom leads to further analysis of the human condition down the ages. It is also noteworthy that Hariharan exudes optimism at the end of the novels. Hariharan has entrusted the responsibility of navigating and stirring man from the arena of darkness and ignorance with the women who employ their inner strength and power to subvert the prevalent notion of male hegemony. In *Times of Siege* and *Fugitive Histories* both works of the author highlight the alarming situation of shrinking of space as an independent thinker of the country. She expresses her concern about how people are forced to think in a certain way and act accordingly. Similar ideology reverberates in *Fugitive Histories* wherein excessive love for one's own religion leads to extremism. In *Fugitive Histories*, the monolithic version of conception that the Muslims are anti-nationals and must be sent back to Pakistan has been condemned severely. The psychological trauma of the riot survivors wriggles the religious atrocities, self-interests, and tolerance of the victims and paves the way for more damage and destruction. Again, in this novel, Hariharan deconstructs the myth of nationalism that promotes blind love for one's own country overlooking the pluralistic fabric of the nation. As a writer, she believes in making space for multiple identities to exist.

The deep-rooted discussion of Hariharan's fictional discourse lays bare the attempts to highlight the social realities with an assimilation of mythical folklore and scriptures. While the feminine perspective is the essence of the novels, the man-woman equation finds prominence. The fight against patriarchy looms large through the dexterous portrayal of the activities of the women characters. In this way, this thesis minutely observes the mythical aspects of the novels and studies how these myths are still relevant in the decision-making process and shaping characters. A thorough analysis is conducive to understanding several issues viz., female subjugation, sexual politics, ill-effects of fundamentalism etc. It can be said that Hariharan aims to reconstruct the past and revise the present through the deft usage of mythical tales and this is the reason why myths need to be reinterpreted. Myths have been shown from a new perspective to establish gender equality and empowerment of women. By challenging the preconceived notions of patriarchy, Hariharan foregrounds the need to reinforce women. Hariharan's narrative marks the transitions that were taking place in colonial India. Different facets of societal structure feature well in her fictional oeuvre. The attempt for a new social order over the age-old tradition has been projected through the various themes of her novels. Hariharan mirrors the reality of women across different social and cultural contexts which makes her one of the most realistic novelists of all time. The way Hariharan uncovers the psychological complexities of feminine subjectivities shows further insight towards gender struggle in societal structure since ages. The attempt to establish their identity marks the psychological explorations and an optimistic outlook towards life. The identity crisis is not only confined to being a woman but the worth as human being. As far as the narrative technique is concerned, Hariharan makes use of the method of withdrawal as an outcome of self-realisation for the protagonists. The characters are potent enough to withdraw themselves and transcend into a world away from their current predicament. Both the tales of Devi's grandmother's and Devi's father-in-law examine how the whole societal fabric works under the garb of myth as a whole. The ancient

myth predominantly asserts patriarchal dominance which has been addressed by Hariharan in her fictional oeuvre. Hariharan articulates a variety of themes behind the facade of ancient myth in her fiction. She makes her concept reachable through mythological explanations and this establishes herself as a true learner. With the help of ancient myths, Hariharan's women shrug off the burden of inhibitions of old belief systems. In "In Search of Our Other Selves," Hariharan opines:

So for a writer, for a reader, and for the literary work itself, it's best not to sanctify the compartmentalization of different tools of analysis, different aspects of resistance. It's an exercise in impoverishing oneself, I think, to produce literature that is only about gender to the exclusion of say caste, or vice-verse. ("In search of our"131)

The protagonists of the novels voice their concern about the demanding situations in their lives and fight endless battles to make a mark in society. Therefore, Hariharan presents the changing images of women through the apt portrayal of myth. The way Hariharan deconstructs both mythical tales and myth as a notion calls for further analysis. She challenges the stereotypical notion of ideal womanhood by demonstrating the unconventional take of her leading characters. It is also to be noted that the ideology of myth is smashed by the radical thinking of the author. This concluding chapter is an effort to sum up the previous chapters' attempt to highlight how Hariharan deconstructs the prevalent myth which has been a part of intangible heritage. It is a discernible fact that ancient myth comes pertinent in the current context and this myth in literature makes Indian literature more enriched globally. By reinventing myth in contemporary conditions, Hariharan provides ample opportunity to reexamine myth in a new light. It is important to note that the oral tradition of storytelling of several mythical tales has been reduced due to ever-increasing modernisation. In these

circumstances, the relatability of mythical characters to our daily lives calls for critical attention. The young generation is so attracted to modern ways of entertainment that they do not bother to delve deeper into mythical scriptures. I have attempted to contextualise myth that has a wider universal appeal. Hariharan's presentation of strong female characters who defy conventional norms and assert individual identity indicates the dissection of myth. Fictional works can be interpreted through various angles and this gives rise to multifaceted interpretation of reading a text. For ages, western literature has been given undue importance because of our innate desire to imitate. Little do we understand that Indian literature is enriched with traditional myths and several other contents. She contends about the narrative skill of an author:

I don't see my writing as an introduction to India and I am not self-conscious about being "Indian" in my writing. For some reason all of us like to imagine that a writer is a writer because she has a great deal to say (message!) or is a good egg (social concern!). Both these should be there, but really, in the ultimate analysis, a writer is a writer because she has a narrative skill – a balancing act she can perform. ("Discreet Thoughts" 214).

As a matter of fact, regional literature comprises of mythical folktales but Indian English literature carries little input of myth. Githa Hariharan is among the few novelists who employ myth in mainstream literature and her novels achieve the status of global trends. This research project of mine endeavours to create a literary space that serves as a narrative for the predominance of myth in literature. Needless to say, it is the primary duty of each researcher to make her area of work reflective of the process of globalisation. Therefore, my research project aims to examine the contribution of myth in literature and the myth as a notion is also interrogated through this work of mine. Hariharan subverts the traditional myth by her deft

craftsmanship in her literary works. Therefore, the emphasis on the history and myths of the land finds its due place in the fictional works of Hariharan. The myth is not only restricted to ancient myths but the idea of myth is also deconstructed through the novels. Undoubtedly, Hariharan prefers to be called a writer rather than a “woman” writer. Thus, Hariharan contributed largely to enlarging the horizon of Indian English Literature. The conventional method of handling myth has been questioned in the novels and a new approach of looking at the myths has been established in the fictional works of Hariharan. Therefore, Hariharan articulates a variety of themes under the garb of ancient myths in her fiction. She makes her concepts reachable through mythological explanations and this establishes herself as a true learner. With the help of ancient myths, Hariharan’s women shrug off the burden of inhibitions of old belief systems. Hence, Hariharan presents the changing images of women through the apt portrayal of myth. The way Hariharan deconstructs both mythical tales and myth as a notion calls for further analysis and discussion. Hariharan challenges the stereotypical notion of ideal womanhood by demonstrating conventional mythology through the storytelling process. Therefore, Hariharan’s novels stand as epitome of rejection of classical myth and cultural stereotypes.

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