

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

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

the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy (Arts)

at Jadavpur University

By

Arpita Sardar

Supervised by

Professor Saswati Halder

Department of English

Faculty of Arts

Jadavpur University, Kolkata -700032

2023

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 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. It has been discussed how 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.

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 setup. 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 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 decodes "Myths" as delineated in five of her novels. It can be noted that mythical anecdotes in

contemporary literature carry forward the aesthetic and emotional experience to the reader. 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. 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 Kuorrti 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)

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 put 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. 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" (Frye 165).

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. 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 an intellectually 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., Gurukulam 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 in 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." (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. 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” (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 this novel too, the principal women characters’ eternal quest for individual identity is foregrounded under the façade of patriarchal domination. *When Dreams Travel* 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. 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, Dunyazad 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 *The 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 victimised to empowered by 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, *When Dreams* 25). The novel is a modern myth that serves as a symbolic projection of women's individuality and empowerment. 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. This fictional work of Hariharan 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 12<sup>th</sup>-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.

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 articulates the outcome of the catastrophic mayhem. It 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.

It is a discernible fact that Hariharan's fiction needs to have a comprehensive study and this research project of mine endeavours to explore the novels under the façade of mythical explorations. 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 decodes myth both in the context of classical myth and the cultural stereotype.

### **Works Cited**

- Bhardwaj, Vikash, and Surender Kumar. "The Ghost of Vasu Master: Exploring the Self through Teacher-Taught Relationship." *International Journal of English and Education*, 2013, pp. 68-71.
- Frye, Northrop. *Archetypal Criticism: Theory of myths*. Princeton University Press, 1957.

Bhardwaj, Vikash, and Surender Kumar. "The Ghost of Vasu Master: Exploring the Self through Teacher-Taught Relationship." *International Journal of English and Education*, 2013, pp. 68-71.

Frye, Northrop. *Archetypal Criticism: Theory of myths*. Princeton University Press, 1957.

Hariharan, Githa. "The Double Burden: The Continual Contesting of Tradition and Modernity." Interview by Joel Kuorrti. *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, Yale University Press, 2000, pp. 1-26.

———. "Discreet Thoughts." *Desert in Bloom: Contemporary Indian Women's Fiction in English*, edited by Meenakshi Bharat, Pencraft, 2004, pp. 214-15.

———. *Fugitive Histories*. Penguin Books, 2009.

———. *In Times of Siege*. Penguin Books, 2004.

———. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Penguin Books, 1994.

———. *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Penguin Books, 1992.

———. *When Dreams Travel*. Picador, 1999.

*Sasmiti Halder*  
Signature of Supervisor:

Date: 21.11.2023

Seal:

PROFESSOR  
Department of English  
Jadavpur University  
Kolkata-700 032

*Arpita Sardar*  
Signature of Candidate:

Date: 21.11.2023