



Quest for Identity in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Pavithra A

Rekha R

M.A- English

Assistant Professor

PG Department of English

PG Department of English

Don Bosco College (Co-Ed)

Don Bosco College (Co-Ed) Yelagiri Hills.
Yelagiri Hills

Abstract:

Githa Hariharan is an Indian author and editor based in New Delhi. Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, won the commonwealth writers prize in 1993. Githa Hariharan was born in Coimbatore and grew up in Bombay and Manila. She obtained her B.A (in English) from Bombay University and M.A (in Communication) from Fairfield University. Hariharan first worked in the public broadcasting system in New York and then with a publishing firm as an editor in India. In her personal life she along with her husband, won the right to have the children named after her (instead of caring the father's name); in this famous case argued by Indira Jaising, the Supreme Court agreed that the mother was also a natural guardian of the child. Githa Hariharan has spent her great time in Maharashtra and later in Manipur. For some time she worked as an editor in India but later moved to New York. She won a case in the Bombay High court that she is also a natural guardian and her son must use her initial rather than father's name.

Key words: Quest for identity, loneliness,

The Thousand Faces of Night traces the life and struggle of Devi, and Indian women of tradition. She was brought up in a traditional Brahmin family. Her mother, Sita and a widow lady sent Devi to America for her higher education, as she was doing her Higher Studies in an American University. She

developed connection with Dan a black American. But she suffered for a long time because Devi was called by her mother from Madras presently Chennai. Sita had called her doctor back, because her marriage needed to be settled down.

Devi- Dan affair was terminated and Devi reached back to fulfill her mother's desire of marriage. In ancient India, marriage was decided by an event called *suyamvaram* almost on identical level. The boy for Devi was fixed. The boy was Magesh, the regional manager on MNC. The marriage was over but problems in Devi's personal life were a bit bad. On the material level the marriage was successful but not at personal level. Devi became miserable because her inner ambition, desires, emotions were getting neglected both by Magesh and the Father-in-law. Both looked upon Devi only from personal expectation and social drives. Adrienne Rich states that,

Today's Women

Born yesterday

Dealing with tomorrow

Not yet where we're going

But not still where we were(47)

Mythological references are stories in *The Thousand faces of Night*. Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel that traces the life history of Devi. Her experiences with men are disappointing and frustrating. Her affair with Dan in the American campus was short-lived because Devi found him to be a drunkard. Her affair with Magesh to whom she was married by a *suyamvaram* is again the same story. Magesh, the regional manager of MNC Company is mostly away on and he forced Devi to have a baby for him because it was a social requirement and not because Devi wanted it. Gobal appealed to Devi but again Devi found him to be a vain person. But *the thousand Faces of Night* involve a great deal of anecdotes from Manusmiruthi, puranas and epics. Devi had deep knowledge of the aspects at the various stages of her life right from childhood to her life in her father-in-law's house. These stories come to her from different persons. Michel Foucault quotes that "The deployment of sexuality...established this notion of sex".

The Thousand Faces of Night contains a great load of mythological anecdotes. In fact, the mythological stories give the book a good frame work. These references are taken from Manusmiruthi, puranas, epics and many other similar stories such as puranthar Das, Thyakarajas devotional songs. These stories are delivered to Devi, the protagonist of this novel at various points in her life. Her grandmother had told her stories of Mahabharata and many anecdotes to Devi. Her grandmother had told these every summer in her childhood days. Stories such as Gandhary, the tragedy of Amba and Dhamayanthi and her massive struggle are told by her granny.

Gandhari was married to Dhriutharastra, but later she learns that her husband was blind. Gandhari was so angry with the system that she blinded herself for the rest of her life .sita, the mother of the protagonist, had a similar bitter experience. Sita identified her life with Veena but one day she was shouted at by her own father in law. Like Gandhari, she also cut the strings of Veena and the Veena is the symbol of male –documentation.

Devi herself had similar stories told to her by her grandmother during every ‘summer’. These stories are meant to prepare the child or in this case Devi for her later married life .one anecdote from Mahabharata provides a solid ground for Devi in her later married life with Mahesh. Amba’s story from Mahabharata helps her to solve her personal dilemma in her married life with Mahesh. Amba the eldest daughter was abducted by Bheesmar by mistakes. she had already been fixed by to the king of Salwa later Bheesmar declined to married this girl to his half-brother .Already she had been somebody’s wife .Again king of Salwa didn’t want her because she was abducted by Bheesmar for non of her mistake she was prosecuted by men just for her vanity .the same dilemma occurs in Devi’s life with Mahesh who was indifferent to her as his wife. As a Regional manager of MNC he was off 15 days .Event when he Returns she was not responded to by Mahesh for her emotion and her feelings. So like Amba she resolves to neglect Mahesh possibly drifting to Gopal. The same gopal is equally vain and Non-responsible to devi . So the final solution Available for Devi was returning back to her mother from where she started her journey.

Another puranic story is of sadu purndara das. Purandara das was a wealthy man but one day he was approached by a poor Brahmin for small money to perform the final rituals for the dead parents. purandara das was stingy and silly and turned the Brahmin away but the saraswati Bhai,purandara das’wife gave her nose ring away for the same man. Purandara das learned about this and sent for his wife to bring

the nose –ring as the ring was gone his wife was preparing to kill herself with poison. God appeared and gave her a similar ring. The normal of this story is that virtuous wives are amply rewarded by god himself.

In this work Githa Hariharan speaks out the struggle facing character through Devi one who buckskin her own individual identity as well as her wish to do list. Hariharan's novel is a dexterous conglomeration of numerous stories besides the story of the protagonist Devi. And the technique is passing –on narration from one character to the other .the narration passes from Grandmother's stories the Baba's stories and to Mayamma. Sita as a young daughter-in-law also equivalently protest in Gandhari's fashion. When the grandmother cannot find a precise of mythological equivalent for the experiences woman had she uses to correlate them with stories of the beautiful girl who married snake .indian families have a plethora of relationships to safeguard the system of marriage. But when there s a familial problem nobody supports her. She fights her battles alone her battles with men a woman fights her battles alone. Devi who lives a lonely life not able to bear the solitary life frees herself from the bond and rejoins her mother she fights her battle alone.

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