Review

Identity, culture, and sexuality in Githa Hariharan's '*The Thousand Faces of Night*'

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Human beings have a complex network of power relations and there are various models of submission and domination in this power struggle. Dualistic thinking based on the binary oppositions such as 'culture/nature', 'head/ heart', 'form/ matter' is related to the opposition between man and woman. Inequality between women and men can appear in many different forms- it has many faces and sometimes the different asymmetries are quite unrelated to each other. In recent times, feminist theories have paid attention to the narrative texts based on culturally constructed gender. While analyzing a narrative text culture, identity, sexuality and power tend to form the major part. This work looks closely at *The Thousand Faces of Night* published by Githa Hariharan which takes a gender centered platform. In this analysis, the author tends to look primarily for ways in which Hariharan's narrative deconstructs binary oppositions underlying mainstream assumptions about identity, culture and sexuality. Some feminist critics advice to keep the Indian social structure in mind when attempting feminist criticism in India. While studying Indian women novelists we have to understand the difference between east and west. The model should not be rigid. The 'female' body can be made docile, submissive, erotic, usable and productive .*The Thousand Faces of Night* represents a variety of female characters, mythological (ideal) and real, with varied wishes and frustrations, desires and agony, searching for self-identity or self liberation. Hariharan's female characters revolt against considering marriage and motherhood as ultimate goals of an 'ideal woman.' They truly represent contemporary Indian women who are bringing about a silent revolution. Here, they stand with the third wave of feminism strongly advocating individual liberation. Through the study of women characters, Githa provides us with a peek into the Indian tradition and culture and the position of women in the Indian society. It is about the journey of Indian women through tradition to modernity in search of self-identity. It also discusses the ways out. It tells us how the characters, mythological and modern cope with passive victimhood. Issues raised by Hariharan are social, cultural and ethical. The vision Hariharan has for womankind is of empowerment. The protagonist finally disowns her status of 'other' finally to return to her mother or her roots to rediscover her true identity.

Key words: Identity, culture, sexuality, liberation, myth, ideal woman, feminist theories.

INTRODUCTION

Ramchandra Guha feels that 'Economic growth in contemporary India is marked by considerable disparities of region and class.' (2007:711). He quotes noble prize winning economist Amratya Sen who 'worries that as these inequalities intensify, one half of India will come to look and live like California, the other half like sub-saharan Africa.' Gender disparity in India is a 'multitude of problems.' There are 'many faces of gender inequality'

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(Sen, 2005: 220). The plight of women is similar through-out irrespective of religion and class. Economically, women might not be equal to men, socially they are deprived of power and culturally they are not given similar treatment. In a recent interview, Honorable judge of Supreme Court of India, Ms Gyansudha Mishra herself accepted that the respect of women in modern days has declined. Society has a very deep command of male dominated ideology. She said when she was Judge in division bench of Supreme Court and High court then advocates used to communicate directly to male judges with a thought that 'she cannot understand' as she is a female (Dainik and Bhopal, March 2013, pp13). This is an empowered woman stating her own condition as a judge in India. This is a major indicator of social pressure on women to neglect their own identity as an independent, educated mind and perhaps a verdict to limit their po-tential to contribute to national progress. Although more women in India are entering into various professions than ever before, it is not possible to see a drastic change in their condition. Perhaps, the socio-economic conditions and cultural over-bearings have to be reconsidered and restructured. The mindset of the patriarchal society will need still more time to transform. Sen feels that 'Inequality between women and men can appear in many different forms- it has many faces and 'sometimes the different asymmetries are quite unrelated to each other… However, gender inequality of one type tends to encourage and sustain gender inequality of other kinds. Consequential analysis can be critically important even within the large corpus of gender relations in general, in order to examine and scrutinize how the different aspects of gender inequality relate to each other. For, while gender inequality has many faces, these are not indepen-dent. Rather, they speak to each other and sometimes strongly encourage each other. For example, when women lack decisional power within the family, which amounts to a deprivation of women's effective agency, this can also adversely affect their own well-being. The two kinds of deprivation may not only move together- be 'covariant'-but they may be linked with each other through casual connections' (2005:220).

In recent times feminist theories have paid attention to the narrative texts based on culturally constructed gender. While analyzing a narrative text culture, identity, sexuality and power tend to form the major part. The author looks closely at The Thousand Faces of Night published by Githa Hariharan in 1992 (TFN from now onwards) which takes a gender centered platform. The author will try to follow a methodology so as to find out the questions being raised by 'a self-conscious' narrative feminism (term used by James, 2012) and how will we go about answering them. In the analysis of TFN, the author tends to look primarily for ways in which Hariharan's narrative deconstructs binary oppositions underlying mainstream assumptions about gender, identity and sexuality. He is interested in reading and examining the images of women portrayed in the novel and to create characters that move outside expected sex roles. He would also analyze how these female characters match or strike a balance with the stereotypical mythological 'ideal woman' and how they contradict the conceived image of the 'ideal woman'. He seeks to keep the com-plexities of narrative technologies for endowing a literary character with interiority and a persona on the thematic level. He would be watchful for the signs of feminism in Githa Hariharan's text (TFN). In the patriarchal third world Hindu society, Hariharan is fiercely feminist in her outlook, and critiques the patriarchal power structure of the Hindu society. She questions the deciphering of myths (borrowing words from Spivak, Draupadi: tran-slator's foreword in Mahashweta Devi's Breast Stories, Spivak 1997) 'written into the patriarchal and authoritative sacred text as proof of male power'. Although her novel seems to be engaged with inner recesses of a woman's mindset, it tends to maintain freedom that is to be found in romantic transcendence, perhaps a product of the melancholic tradition of Indian women writers like Nayantara Sehgal (Rich Like Us, 1985), Shashi Deshpande (That Long Silence, 1989), Gita Mehta (The River Sutra, 1993), Anita Desai (Feasting, fasting, 1992), Arundhati Roy (The God of Small Things, 1997) and Meena Alexander (Manhattan Music, 1997).

'Masculinity and femininity are not essential qualities of embodied subjects but matters of representations. Barker (2000: 316) in Cultural Studies notes further, 'A good deal of feminist writing in the field of culture has been concerned with the representation of gender, and of women in particular. As Evans (1997) comments, first there was a concern to demonstrate that women had played a part in culture, and in literature in particular, in the face of their omission from the canon of good works. This was coterminous with a concern for the kinds of representations of women which had been constructed; that is 'the thesis that gender politics were absolutely central to the very project of representation' (Evans, 1997:72). Most of sociological, cultural and feminist writing, including MacKinnon's, have considered gender to be 'malleable' as it is a cultural construct. Barker (2000: 300) further notes that early feminist studies made the realist epistemological assumption that representation was a direct expression of social reality and/or a potential and actual distortion of that reality. That is, represen-tations of women reflected male attitudes and constituted misrepresentations of 'real' women (Tuchman et al., 1978). This is known as the 'images of women perspec-tive'. However, later studies informed by post structura-lism regard all representations as cultural constructions and not as reflections of a real world. Consequently, concern centers on how representations signify in the context of social power with what consequences for gender relations. This exploration of 'women as a sign'

(Cowie, 1978) we may call the politics the 'politics of representation'. The concept of the stereotype occupies a prominent place within the 'images of women' perspective. A stereotype involves the reduction of persons to a set of exaggerated, usually negative, character traits. Through the operation of power, a stereotype marks the boundaries between the 'normal' and the 'abjected', 'us' and 'them'. An early example of the 'images of women' approach is Meehan's (1983) analysis of women on US television. Her study combined with a quantitative analysis, which counted the number and kind of representations of women, with a qualitative interpretation of women's roles and power (lessness) within those representations. She suggested that representations on television cast 'good' women as submissive, sensitive and domesticated while 'bad' women are rebellious, independent and selfish. She concludes that 'American viewers have spent more than three decades watching male heroes and their adventures, muddied visions of boyhood adolescence replete with illusions of women as witches, bitches, mothers and imps' (Meehan, 1983:131). Globally, women in media are considered as 'commodified' and 'stereotyped into the binary images' of 'good' and 'bad' (Gallagher, 1983:110). 'Bad' probably referring to what Mahasweta Devi calls 'liberated anti-bra girls' (Behind the Bodice, 1997:135). Menon (2005: 212-213) notes that 'commodification and alienation of the self, particularly of the female body, which is typical of modernity' and 'autonomy, equality, and freedom are archetypically modern values' whereas 'nurturing and caring' are traditional values. She further explains that 'womanhood,' especially 'Indian womanhood,' is 'represented as a perfect mix of tradition and modernity.' Partha (1997) refers to this conscientious mix as 'our' modernity.

The structure of TFN is rather traditional. Githa plays with the binary images of 'good' and 'bad' women. She shows struggle between tradition and modernity. Githa tells us the story of five women- Devi, Sita, Pati, Parvatiamma and Mayamma. Patterns of women's life in a Hindu cultural society can very well be observed in TFN. There are other narratives of women linked with these women. Mythological female characters, like Sita, Amba, Gandhari, Ganga, Gauri are strongly reflected in the characters of the novel although there is a vast difference in the time zones of the two. Plus all these, women are connected by their quest for identity, unhappy marriages and disgruntled ambitions. These stories of middle and working class women are juxtaposed with the mythological stories of ideal women. And instead of suggesting a way out of the complex situation the mythological stories tend to cross-examine them. The protagonist refuses to follow the preaching from mythologies blindly. She challenges the 'moral' of these stories and tries to decipher these 'morals' in a new light.

Devi, the protagonist, undergoes an identity crisis even after following the norms set by the society. She constantly faces the dilemma of tradition versus modernity, dilemma of cultures western versus eastern, dilemma of mind (knowledge) versus heart (true knowledge) and dilemma of being a 'good girl' versus 'bad girl', The crisis 'to be or not to be a good girl' haunts her and the agony of identity crisis attains the desired intensity through the use of myths. Devi plays the role of (objectified) suave young charmer in Dan's life, host and home-maker waiting for her husband, Mahesh who comes home as a guest, and a muse for Gopal, the musician. She is unable to see herself completely in any of these roles. She realizes that all the three men in her life- Dan, Mahesh and Gopal had their own identities and she was expected to fuse herself in their identities. The Hindu society in which she grew up demanded her to be a virtuous woman and a 'good girl' to merge herself with the identity of the man in her life. She has a problem when she becomes aware that men rule the world, in a patriarchal society like India. She also finds that here, in India, females are raised in the world with different expectations. As soon as Devi realizes this, she promptly comes out of it, to find her own identity individuality.

Structurally, the novel is divided into three parts. The first part introduces the protagonist and her inner conflict of becoming a 'good girl' (as her mother wants following the norms of a traditional society) or a 'bad girl' (shedding the traditional norms and leading her life on her own terms). It introduces Devi (the protagonist), trying to shed her traditional Indian self (trying to be a 'bad girl), in a North-American university campus and her life in India after coming back to India (the overpowering of the 'good girl' who accepts its cultural heritage). Devi belongs to a traditional Hindu Brahmin family that believes that marriage is the ultimate goal of a woman's life. Devi exhibits enough control compromising with her individuality agreeing for an arranged marriage. The narrative also takes us to, Devi's childhood, Devi's grandmother's house where the seeds of such a conflict were sown. It was here that Devi learns the rules of being a good girl. She does not pursue a career after her graduation from USA. In US, she is with Dan but Dan's culture was totally different from Devi's and she felt like a stranger, different and unfit for Dan. She hears her 'culture calling'. The 'good girl' in Devi wins. She leaves her past life in U.S and comes back to India to marry. Devi is tamed by 'memories' of all the stories told by Grandma. A victim of her own imagination of herself as a 'Devi', she is trapped easily into a traditional marriage forgetting her past.

The second part explores Devi's life after an arranged marriage. Mahesh, Devi's husband takes her for granted. Devi is unable to adjust in the new atmosphere. She is unhappy, dissatisfied and lonely. Devi says, 'This then is marriage, the end of ends; two or three brief encounters a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger

who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demands a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood (TFN: 54). Lonely Devi feels protected in presence of her father –in –law, who again nurtures the 'good girl syndrome' in her and through this books of philosophy shows her the path of becoming a virtuous wife. After he leaves for US, Devi observes and listens to the stories of Mayamma-the housekeeper. She also observes and feels frustrated with the repression of women surrounding her. The 'bad girl' in her starts overpowering.

The third part of the novel explores the other women characters of the narrative like Sita (her mother, who leaves her musical career to become an ideal daughter-in –law), Mayamma (her housemaid, who is unable to bear children and suffers cruelty and even after bearing a male child suffers exploitation until her son dies), and Gauri (her maid-servant who collects money for her marriage and then falls in love with her brother-in-law). Devi explores the myths and questions their relevance. She explores her own self. Her decision of not having children, by not trying continuously and 'hysterically' to conceive, symbolizes her search for self. Inspired by her mother-in –law who left her husband's house to lead a religious life, she also leaves her husband's house with Gopal. However, soon enough, she begins to see her role (search for identity) in Gopal's life and finds it a little more than an object. Towards the end of the narrative, Devi realizes that all this while she was trying to be a 'good' girl and was trying to please society. Devi plays a role of the 'other' in lives of three different men. She is frustrated in these roles that she was playing. She realizes that she, like all other women around her, has spent her life in becoming the 'virtuous women' or playing the role of the 'good girl' or 'ideal woman' who never existed or who has grown obsolete with the passage of time. She realizes that she will not be able to do justice with herself if she continues to behave like a 'good girl' from the mythologies. She rebels. She decides that she will not fight with her own self anymore and would resolve the conflict in her. She decides to satisfy nobody but herself and then onwards does not have any qualms in quashing all myths and becoming a 'bad girl'. And finally comes back to her mother to re-define her individuality.

Simone de Beauvoir (the second sex, 1949) explained subjectivity- our sense of self- through existence philosophy. Existentialism proposes that one exists first, and through one's acts, one becomes something. 'One is not born a female; one becomes this' (The Second Sex, 1997: 301). She reasoned that an individual has absolute control over their fate, and neither society nor organized religion should limit our freedom to live authentically. But since men have claimed the category of self, of subject, for themselves, women are relegated to the status of

other. Consequently, the category of women has no substance as an extension of male fantasy and fears. And since all cultural representations of the world around us have been produced by men, women must 'dream through the dream of men' (The Second Sex, 1997: 48). Thus a woman is required to accept her status of other, 'make herself object' and 'renounce her autonomy' (The Second Sex, 1997: 280). Hariharan works in synchronization with Beauvoir. Devi's decision not to have children is also feminist. When she asks Mahesh why he wants children, Mahesh answers because everyone has them. Devi does not want to produce children because everyone is doing so. This is a condition where she tries to overcome the pressure of the society or expectations of femininity by her independent decision. Here, Hariharan's perspective matches with Shulamith Firestone (the dialectic of sex, 1970) who believed that women's capacity for reproduction was the source of their oppression. This distinction allowed her to examine reproduction as the driving force in history. Women should seize control over the means of reproduction in order to eliminate sex class discrimination. This can be achieved through wider access to contraception, sterilization and abortion.

Githa, in TFN, has revisited the women from the Myths. Mukherjee (1985: 39) quotes Mircea Eliade and remarks that, 'mythic time of a pre-modern culture is cyclic, in which the same primordial drama is continually re-enacted.' Githa looks at these myths from the eyes of a modern, educated woman. She challenges the patriarchal archetypes of these myths in TFN. There have been many women characters in Mahabharata and Ramayana. These epics have laid down the principles of social power structure. In Hindu Mythology, the women are treated as sacrificing, dependent, anxious to please, subordinate and submissive. This depiction of woman stands true in the present time as well and these are still the popular themes in a study of television serials as quoted by Chris Barker as 'Attributes of masculinity and femininity on Indian television' (Krishnan and Dhinge, 1990). Since ages, the Indian culture has been operating on the basis of the norms laid down by these epics. The women characters may have been powerful enough but the society has been modeled on 'Sita' in Ramayana. In the Hindu Mythology ideal women is 'Sita'.

Wendy Doniger calls Sita the 'official role model' for Indian women and laments, 'How different the lives of the actual women in India would have been had Draupadi, instead of Sita, been their official role model! Many Hindus name their daughters Sita, but few name them Draupadi' (1990:298). According to Doniger 'the women of Mahabharata are extremely prominent, feisty, and individualistic, in part as a result of changes that were taking place in the social structures at the time of the recension of the text.' (1999:292). 'There are some women in Ramayana who behave badly, like Kaikeyi,

Manthara- the hunchback women or Ahalya- the archety-pal adulteress … the polarized images of women in the Ramayana led to another major split in Hinduism, for though the Brahmin imaginary made Sita the role model for the Hindu women from this time onward, other Sanskrit texts as well as many vernacular versions of Ramayana picked up on the shadow aspect of Sita, the passionate, sexual Sita, an aspect that is also embedded in this first text, only partially displaced on to other, explicitly demonic women. Yet the later Brahmin imaginary greatly played down Sita's dark, deadly aspect and edited out her weaknesses to make her the perfect wife, totally subservient to her husband. How different the lives of the actual women in India would have been had Sita as she is actually portrayed in Valmiki's Ramayan (and in some other retellings) been their official role model. The Valmiki Ramayan thus sowed the seeds both for the oppression of women in the dharma- shastric tradition and for the resistance against that oppression in other Hindu traditions' (Doniger,1999:232). The twentieth century women authors are trying to challenge the traditionally represented 'ideal woman' model of female representation or the oppressed. They represent a conflict between the ideal woman and the real woman.

TFN explores many facets of womanhood. Strangely enough all women characters are unhappy in marriage, unhappy with motherhood- if attained-is forceful and unwanted, Devi and others including Parvatiamma or mayamama who even after attaining it reject it. Kakkar and Katherina (2007: 56), talking about marriage while discussing 'Indian women- traditional and modern, asks, 'is love necessary? Devi has no desire to have children but Mahesh believes that she should have children not out of love but because everyone has them. Mahesh is practical enough to understand that children are the logical outcome of a marriage. He is one of those members of traditional society who consider motherhood as the final goal for attaining womanhood or becoming a complete woman. He pressurizes Devi to visit gyneco-logists. She visits the hospital regularly so that her ovaries can be 'mended, an efficient receptacle for motherhood' (TFN: 89). Mahesh begins to neglect her more when she is unable to conceive despite prolonged efforts. She can sense this alienation. She says, 'I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh's eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothing-ness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb' (TFN: 93). Mayamma suggests other ways out, through pleasing gods- her room is full of gods and goddesses, as she herself had undergone similar circumstances. Kakkar and Katherina (2007: 109-110) studies the nature of health and illness in the Indian setting and finds it rather complicated. 'To use western categories an indivi-dual exists equally in a soma, a psyche, and a polis; a person is simultaneously a body, the self and a social being.' In the Indian concept, 'Gods and spirits, community and family, food and drink, personal habits and character, all seem to be involved in the maintenance of health. Yet these and other factors such as biological infection, social pollution, and cosmic displeasure, all of which Indians would also acknowledge as causes of ill health, only point to the recognition of a person's simultaneous existence in many different orders of being…for most traditional Indians, the polis consists not only of living members, but of ancestral spirits, other spirit helpers, and –for the Hindus-the familiar gods and goddesses who populate the Indian cosmos. Sub-jectively, then an Indian is inclined to believe that his or her illness can reflect a disturbance in any one of the orders of being, whereas the symptoms may be manifested in the other orders. If a treatment, say in the bodily orders, fails, on is quite prepared to reassign the cause of illness to a different order and undergo its particular curing regimen- without losing regard for the other methods of treatment.' Mayamma opts for many alternative treatments like lighting lamp under a tree, observing fasts and her room was covered with photos of gods and goddesses and ultimately she delivered a son. She suggests these ways to Devi who follows hem half heartedly. However, Devi herself wants to explore her own self and is not prepared for any responsibilities of motherhood. She is able to liberate herself from the desire of attaining motherhood. The desire to conquer herself is the strongest in her. She is educated and knows that she needs to find her own identity before motherhood. She is marginalized and alienated to such an extent that she loses faith in herself. She is completely drained out by 'giving'. Now, she wants to stop and think and again generate her inner strength. She wants to revolt against Mahesh, who has brought her in this condition and her body helps her in her silent revolt against Mahesh by not conceiving. Devi remarks, 'In my waking hours I am still no conqueror. My petty fears, and that accursed desire to please which I learnt too well in girlhood, blur the bold strokes, black and white, of revenge. I write elaborate scenarios in my mind for the last act -humiliating Mahesh, saying all the things we have left unsaid. I do something bloody, final, a mark of protest worthy of the heroines I grew up with' (TFN: 95). She interrogates the social pressure of attaining complete womanhood and says, 'Am I a 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 a spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight?' (TFN: 74).

These women in Hariharan's narrative are perhaps happy to be single, widowed or divorced. In The Art of Dying (1993), Hariharan again narrates a short story, 'The Remains of a Feast' with similar implications. It tells

us about the explosion of the suppressed desires of a Brahmin widow. She is unable to control her secret desires beyond a limit. The ninety year old cancer struck Brahmin widow, who has practiced austerity since a very young age, suddenly revolts and desires everything that has been prohibited for her - bhel-puri from the fly infested bazaar, perhaps touched by untouchables, cakes with eggs in them, from the Christian shop with a Muslim cook, Coca-cola laced with the delicious delight that it might be alcoholic. Finally, when she dies the granddaughter, a medical student who was her partner in crime, covers her body with a bridal red sari, as her grandmother must have desired. 'The remains of a feast' have greater connotations and give us a look into Hariharan's point of view. 'Single' in Hariharan's point of view does not mean isolated or lonely but empowered and in control of one's time, space, solitude and freedom.

Hariharan looks at the condition of being single, widowed or divorced as liberation. In TFN Devi finds liberation in adultery, the only escape from her lifeless confinement. She flees from 'unconcerned' husband Mahesh and elopes with the 'concerned' lover Gopal. She says, 'I will gather together the fragments which pass for my life, however laughably empty and insignificant, and embark on my first real journey. I would like to do better than sneak out, a common little adulteress... so that I can learn to be a woman at last. I will soar high on the crest of Gopal's wave of ragas, and what if I fall with a thud, alone, the morning after? I will walk on, seeking a goddess who is not yet made' (TFN: 95). She becomes a muse for Gopal and stays with him for some time but still feels trapped. She finds herself to be a reflection of her partner's self image. One fine day she 'throws her sari over the mirror to blot out her reflection: She stood in front of the ornate, teak-bordered, full-length mirror that she and Gopal shared,... she looked into the mirror, but it was as if she was still looking at Gopal's sleeping face. It threw back at her myriad reflections of herself. Devi undraped the sari and folded it carefully, lovingly, till it was one long, multi-layered curtain. 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' (TFN: 138).

The history of feminism talks of the first wave of feminism in the nineteenth century when it was concerned with economic equality and women's health care. The second wave of feminism in early eighties was a little longer and dealt with the 'burning the bra' and existential concerns. The third wave of feminism that coexisted with the second wave of feminism for a long time in nineties, advocates more freedom and power over one's own body and reproduction therefore freed the women over the burden of mothering children they did not want. Hariharan in TFN advocates for both the second and the third wave of feminism. She supports existentialism strongly and even quotes and refers to existentialist connotations in the mythological stories of women. She also supports women in their choice of bearing children. However, the next or the fourth wave of feminism seems to develop on the lines of social justice and spirituality and the 'subaltern' would have a strong role to play in future feminist developments. Gandhi points out that 'The feminist movement has constantly demanded equal access to the means of knowledge and also equal participation in the making of knowledge on the grounds that inherited knowledge are hopelessly constrained by the preoccupations of the predominantly male institutions within which they have been developed and validated. The feminist intervention into the humanities academy has thus posed a challenge to the normative and univer-salist assumptions of gender-based or 'phallogocentric' knowledge systems, and attempted, in turn, to make both the ways of knowing and the things known more representative. Its aim has been to enable women to become the active participating subjects rather than the passive and reified objects of knowledge'. (Gandhi, 1998:44). Feminism argues that there should be no gender inequalities in representation of women in society. Feminists argue that it is high time that the power structure of the Indian society must undergo a makeover. They support neutralization of gender in the society.

Feminist critics like Madhu Kishwar and Chandra Talpade Mohenty advice to keep the Indian social structure in mind when attempting feminist criticism in India. While studying Indian women novelists we have to understand the difference between east and west. The model should not be rigid and we must keep in mind the silent revolution that is being brought about by the women in India. However, their silence and speech are designed by their historical or contemporary experiences. These women in India may not have participated in a great feministic movement but silently and strongly are changing their behavior, dressing, distribution of power, values and mindset without any organized appeal. In fact during the author's visit to Rajasthan in 2012, his family observed that the adolescent tribal girls wear modern attire jeans and tee shirts under the traditional ghagra and dupatta. Duncan (2004) argues that silence is not merely a sign of absence of voice or power. Finding a voice may not be a matter. While that might be the case, it is also crucial to recognize the ways silence can signify resistance and the ways of speaking can be used in the service of dominance and subjugation. Mix (2005) quotes Duncan in her analysis of Patti's book in Modern Fiction Studies (volume 51, number 1, spring 2005) and remarks that early in her study of contemporary Asian American women's writing, Duncan notes that too many critics have read silence as 'antithetical to the liberation of oppressed groups of people' and have 'fail[ed] to recognize . . . the ways in which speech acts, too, are limited and con-strained' (13). Not all silences are equivalent; nor are all

speech acts equal in their implications and effects. Githa in TFN agrees completely with feministic ideologies and supports and suggests a changed system where women have greater control of their lives. She advocates individual rights and freedom over their body. However, questions have been asked and alternatives have been suggested. The silent revolution has begun. Within a few years the quest for self will become the quest of the nation where the myths would be re-written and the rules of the power-game will be changed. The world rests on hope. As Victor Hugo says 'Our life dreams the Utopia. Our death achieves the ideal.'

Conclusion

TFN represents a variety of female characters, with varied wishes and frustrations, desires and agony, searching for self-identity or self liberation. Hariharans female characters revolt against considering marriage and motherhood as ultimate goals of an 'ideal woman.' Here, they stand with the third wave of feminism strongly advocating individual liberation. Through the study of women characters, Githa provides us a peek into the Indian tradition and culture and the position of women in the Indian society. TFN is about the journey of Indian women through tradition to modernity in search of self-identity. It also discusses the ways out. It tells us how the characters, mythological and modern (from TFN) cope with passive victimhood. Issues raised by Hariharan are social, cultural and ethical. The vision Hariharan has for womankind is of empowerment. However, the attainment of the end of the narrative as depicted by the novelist is suggestive. Sita, protagonist's mother has revitalized her capabilities as a violin player. We assume that Devi will also find herself by going back to her roots. Devi finally realizes her mistake that she was looking at herself from the opposite end. All she was doing till now was to be 'an obedient puppet' (TFN: 137) to please others. She says, 'I was too well-prepared and not prepared at all; America, Jacaranda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from my trials, my tail between my legs…, she was, for the first time, no longer on the run' (TFN: 137-38). Devi is at a juncture where she has to decide whether she wants to remain frustrated throughout her life or she wants to be free and liberated. She decides to be bold and face the world with conviction. She recalls that she has never taken her own decisions, 'I have made very few choices, but once or twice, when a hand wavered, when a string was cut loose, I have stumbled on-stage alone, greedy for a story of my own'(TFN: 137). She again leaves Gopal finally to return to her mother or her roots to rediscover her true identity. Like the mythological Sita, Devi finally returns back to her mother as, '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'

(TFN: 139).

In this regard, it would be interesting to know what Kakkar and Katherine (2007: 132-133) note about Hinduism where coming back to the mother is regarded as death and rebirth. They remark, 'Hinduism does not hold out the consolation of St Paul's promise that at the moment of death we come close to god and that then 'shall we know even as we are known.' Instead, it seeks to mitigate the universal dread of death by viewing it as an interval between lives, not as an end to the often painful, sometimes happy, but always engrossing and, above all, familiar life-in-the-world. In the words of an old Panjabi woman, as reported by the anthropologist Veena Das, death is 'like being shifted from one breast to the other breast of the mother. The child feels lost in that one instant, but not for long.'

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