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AMBIGUITY AND INIQUITY OF DEVI IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S
'THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT'

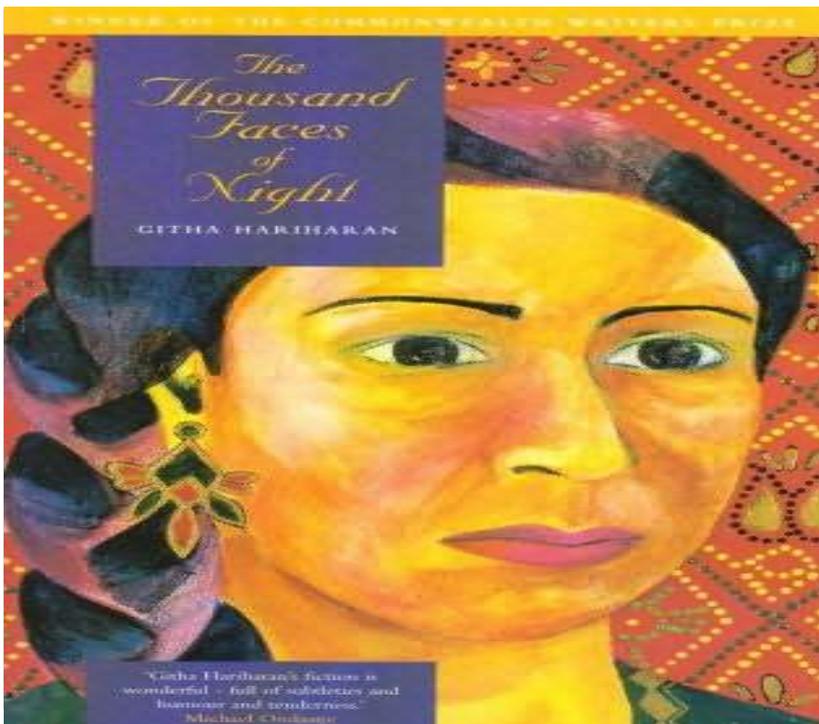


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Short Profile

Nirmala Kumari V. is a Research Scholar at KL University, Guntur. She has completed M.A., Ph.D. She has research experience of 1 year.



ABSTRACT:

Githa Hariharan is one of the most intensive woman writers of India. Her debut novel, "The Thousand Faces of Night" expresses the ideas of the problems of women. It expresses the different psychological feelings of women through the stories of mythology. It gives us a vivid picture of women, how they follow the rules of tradition. Githa Hariharan's "Thousand Faces of Night" is her first novel written in 1992 and was awarded "The common Wealth Writer's Prize" in the 1993. It is closely connected to the stories of several fable myths and legends of India. It explains the quest for

identity, freedom, desire of Indian woman. We cannot say that, the mythological sub- stories of this novel influenced Devi, the main protagonist or not. It shows how Devi's dissatisfaction in an arranged marriage drags and urges her to have relation with another man. But finally her search for identity ends her to be with her mother.

KEYWORDS

Human n relations, loneliness, quest for freedom, ambiguity, iniquity, Indian mythology.

INTRODUCTION :

"The Thousand Faces of Night" demonstrate the inner conflict of Devi, the main protagonist, who goes to America on scholarship to study master's degree. It also manifests her relationship with her husband Mahesh, and her lover Gopal. In America, she repudiates the proposal of her boy friend Dan, the black American by her fluctuation to American culture. She likes to have Indian tradition and culture. She likes Dan she dislike the culture of her lover. Menon quotes that "womanhood' especially 'Indian womanhood' is represented as perfect mix of 'tradition and modernity' (Menon, 2005, 212-213). She perceives mythological stories by her grandmother from her childhood. In some such way the stories might influence Devi, in her decision renounce Dan as a companion. Here she proves as good and traditional Indian girl by rejecting black American's proposal. Her inclination of mother land and her mother, heave her back to Madras, in India. In the words of Hariharan, "But Amma's letters brought with them an unspoken message of loneliness, poignant in its quite dignity...But the image of her alone by the sea teased me like a magnet...she might need me, my hesitant, self-doubting, presence, was intoxicating" (TFN 16, 1992). She returns to India to her mother's request, to convoy her mother. Until the death of her father she might not have seen the intense feeling with her mother. Even the never has touched each other and get into conversation about love. When her death occurs they come to close in converse. In that moment they are receded to the moments of her father's death day. They endure the loneliness and console themselves. Mother and daughter endure they live one for the other. In the words of Hariharan, "we were intensely conscious of each other; we were pulled together by a tender protectiveness that encircled our necks with its fine threads. Drawn together, my father's memory receding for the moment, we became a one-celled unit: (TFN 13, 1992). Here as far as one can see Devi's sensitive mind and have an inclination towards love. She arrives back to Madras by her mother's decision. She marries Mahesh, who is a regional manager in multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste. Somehow we can analyse the Mahesh's disposition by his discussion in the first conclave with Devi. He is so candid, frank, gentle, and honest. Devi, herself asserts this in her words, in the words of Hariharan, "I liked the Mahesh's frankness, his willingness to be fair, even if he did seem to be an unbending pillar of propriety and good sense. He is honest..." (TFN 22, 1992). Mahesh tells her, that we should not fiddle about like lovers. We need to be conscious of the state of affairs between us forthcoming. It implies the matured and responsible nature of Mahesh. His transparency of their future is seen here; her reaffirm that Devi has to reside alone without him in his absenteeism of his official business tours. He catechizes her about her loneliness. But Devi does conscious about his official business tours. He catechizes her about her loneliness. But Devi does conscious about his query. She accedes to marry him, though she grasp that Mahesh wants a woman at home who can do the epitome of a good wife and a mother. In the words of Hariharan, "I thought, he admits to wanting a woman at home who will be a wife and a mother" (TFN 22, 1992). But in explore of freedom and identity, she leaves her husband, with the reason of alienation, estrangement. She moves out from her husbands' house and stays for some time with her lover, Gopal. But the discontent with him also, and she arrives back to her maternal land to be with her mother Sita. Is a woman need to through her relations (husband) into misery by leaving him in search of self identity?

In "The Thousand Faces of Night" Devi from her childhood, she listens abundant sub-stories in mythology by her grandmother, who is wizened old woman, illiterate, and widowed. All the stories of her grandmother not of bedtime ordinary stories, they have some morals. In the words of Hariharan,

"A comparison had to be made, a illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out" (TFN 27, 1992). In days gone by her grandmother appraise picture of the story of Gandhari and how she sacrifice her life for her blind husband. Without any knowledge of her future husband Gandhari has to face her destiny with a blind husband. When Gandhari closes to her husband, she observes his white eyes, the pupils glazed and useless, without saying a word Gandhari tears off a piece of her dress and ties it to her eyes. What her grandmother wants to convey Devi is that, Gandhari is not a wilful, proud woman, but she soon accept her fate. In the words of Hatriharan, Devi's grandmother wants her granddaughter should pursue the ethical values and the decisions had taken by the women in her stories, and lead a life of real woman. Through the stories she conveys that, a woman needs to accept her fate at any cost. She needs to sacrifice for the sake of her husband and family. In the words of Haiharan, "Listen; listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman" (TFN 28, 1992), "She embraced her destiny – a blind husband – with a self – sacrifice worthy of her royal blood" (TFN 29, 1992). Devi's mother, Sita also an exemplars to her daughter Devi. Sita had done her role as a good daughter – in- law and a good mother. She had also managed her responsibility in her husband's professional success. She mesmerizes the people in the house with the sweet melody of her veena. Sita's husband praises her wife for his great talent of veena. In the words of Hariharan, "your father's eyes shone with pride as they settled on that head bent over the veena, lost in concentration" (TFN 30, 1992). At some time Sita's father – in – law could not find a thing which is needed for his morning prayers. Neither flowers nor the floor had not been swept. In his trembling anger voice, he calls Sita. After finished her house hold duties, Sita everyday practices veena. But she could not hear the voice of her father – in – law in the ecstatic sound of veena. Sita's father- in – law reprimands her for her disregard to his call. In the next moment Sita pulled the strings out of the wooden base. Then, she turned to her father- in- law and said in clear, that she is good wife and a daughter – in – law. After that Sita never touch the veena again. She proves that. she is a good daughter – in- law. In the words of Hariharan, "We never saw her touch the veena again. She became a dutiful daughter – in- law the neighbours praised, and out household never heard that heart- rending music again" (TFN 30, 1992). She perform as a responsible daughter- in – law, and every praised her. Her household never heard her attempting veena again. In the words of Hariharan, "She became a dutiful daughter – in-law the neighbours praised, and our household never heard that heart – rending music again" (TFN 30, 1992). Devi's mother brought to her mother – in- laws house veena as one of the things of dowry. She has very good talent in veena, and her parents taught her veena with a good teacher. Whenever she plays the veena beautifully, the tears streams down from the family member's faces. Sita also wants her daughter to be good enough in her mother – in- laws house. So, she always teaches her daughter how to be a good daughter – in- law. In the words of Hariharan, "I heard most often from her as I was growing up: order, reason, and progress" (TFN 26, 1992).

Devi need not to do any house holding works at father – in – laws house. She spends most of the time in listening stories of Baba, and Mayamma, the maidservant. Baba, Devi's father – in – law also tells stories about Hindu dharma, and tradition. How women done their role to be the role model to the next generation. He always teaches her that, how should be a house wife. In the words of Hariharan, "The house wife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind" (TFN 70, 71, 1992). When Baba needs to go to her daughter, Devi requests him not to go away from her. She wants him accompany in her loneliness. But Baba elucidate her that a woman should want her husband's company, and needs to satisfy him, not her father – in – law, or father. In the words of Hariharan, "But a wife needs her husband, not her

father – in – law. Or her father" (TFN 68, 1992). Baba also says the woman must walk in the path of heave, she need to serve her husband till the end of her life, if the woman performs like this she can reach the heaven, even if childless. Baba also asserts after death of her husband a wife must be live without any sexual life and should be self – restrain. He seems to be very wise through his preaching's. In the words of Hariharan, "by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens" (TFN 55, 1992). Devi marries Mahesh for the sake of her mother; she goes under the arranged marriage. Mahesh has a very palatial house in Bangalore and enough riches. He satisfies her with all earthly needs. He gives everything whatever she needs. She feels that, Mahesh is neglecting her. When he is busy with official business tours, for days she feels alone at home. She feels that, arranged marriage become torture to her. In the words of Hariharan, "I am still novice in the subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear, rip across, my neck, and let the blood gush, the games it plays with me. The heart I have prepared so well for its demands remains untouched, unsought for" (TFN 54, 1992). Before marriage Mahesh asks her whether can she resist or not the loneliness in his absence. But then Devi disregard about that. Now after marriage she feels that, she miss him a lot. Now she yearns to do some job. She requisite to understand Mahesh, because he is a business man; he has to go for long tours on official works. But Mahesh understand the loneliness of his wife and suggests her to do something at home, and Mayamma also in need of Devi, in her house holding works and also he suggest her to go painting classes at Tara's home. In the words of Hariharan, "If you need to get out of the house, why not join Tara's painting classes?" (TFN 56, 1992). But Devi always wants self freedom. Soon her marital bliss comes to an end. She thinks that she could not enjoy the matrimonial relations what she expects from marriage life. In habitual routine life she alienated from her near surrounding. Mahesh gives example of her grandmother, though she is illiterate she is happy than Devi. What Mahesh wants to convey is one can never get happy in doing job? Woman can find satisfaction and happy in their house holding works. In the words of Hariharan, "Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman that you are? What is it you want?" (TFN 74, 1992). Whenever Mahesh arrives back from long business tour, he rushes to Devi and eagerly asks her about the good news of her pregnancy. Though she heard lots of mythical stories, she might could not understand the value of marital relations, and she never performs as ideal wife as she seen in the legends. Mahesh can understand her loneliness and writes to her mother about Devi's feelings of depression and loneliness. Really Mahesh proves himself as responsible husband as far as Devi fails to understand the desires of Mahesh as a husband. In the words of Hariharan, "Mahesh writes that you are tired, depressed. Would you like me to take a holiday in Madras?" (TFN 86, 1992). In Indian society those women would look down who cannot bear children for long time. It is treated as to give birth to a baby is having place in heaven, and baby treated as gift of God. Devi's mother also writes a letter of the importance of the children. She also says that, woman's real content lies in the motherhood, and she expresses how she felt when Devi smiled at her first time. In the words of Hariharan, "My dear Devi, Amma wrote, women have sought the deep content that comes with motherhood. When I held you helpless in my protecting arms, when you first smiled at my face bent over yours, when you lisped that precious word of Amma, what vistas of joy opened up before me!" (TFN 86, 1992).

Mayamma, the maidservant of Mahesh's house had botheration from her mother – in- laws house. She is failed to conceive for a long time. She has to wait for years for a son. Her life has filled with her pleas to the gods and her weekly fasts, her silent and humble apology to her an impatient mother – in – law. She is suffered lot from her mother – in- law. In the words of Hariharan, "She tore my

new saris and gave me yesterday's rice to eat. What is the use of feeding a barren woman?" (TFN 112, 1992). Mayamma's mother – in- law calls her as infertile witch, she pulls up her sari roughly and streaked the burning red, freshly – ground spice on her impotence. Her thighs clench together as she feel devastating fire adhere to her intestines. In the words of Hariharan, "freshly – ground spices in to my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails" (TFN 113, 1992). At least does not allow her to eat, she always blames her rotting womb. "Stop thinking of food, daughter – in- law, thinks of your womb. Think of your empty, rotting womb and pray" (TFN 114, 1992). Mayamma has experienced torture physically by her drunken husband. Yet she never loses patience, finally she conceived. Though she never blame her mother – in- law and her husband. Her stories filled with ethical values than mythology. She is a role model to Devi. Devi remains a good listener than follower.

Devi's search for freedom becomes strong when she fails to conceive. Devi listens the stories of Gandhari, Sati Parvathi, and Snake Woman who were loyal to their husband, and also she listens the stories of Amba, Kritya who rebel against the tradition and their husband. The idleness in the stories never influences Devi, though she might hear the lots legends which consist of ethical values, she never tries to follow the ideal women in those stories. In the absence of her husband on his official long tours, she becomes alone, feels sleepless, lack of physical love and attraction. Slowly she alienated and she is attracted towards Gopal. For Gopal, music is his life; he can easily calculate every feeling of Devi. Both spend talking and Gopal sings for her in the garden. Slowly he grasps her attention and physically also she never avoid his chance to have her. She could not sleep well by her thoughts about Gopal. In the words of Hariharan, "I ache for that drug, that blissful numbness. Waiting for him...", "...I must learn to love" (TFN 78, 1992). I will walk on, seeking a goddess..." (TFN 95, 1992). Gopal's music disturbs her from the concentration of her husband. She feels she is neglected by her husband, so she wants pleasant accompany of others. At last she wants to elope with Gopal, who pleases her with is music. In the words of Hariharan, "I write elaborate scenarios in my mind for 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, 1992). Her elopement a reveals us that, she does not want to lead a life of sacrifice as a Indian traditional women. She wants to have freedom, identity. When she is in America she rejects high and immoral culture of American, by leaving Dan. But now as being a member of traditional Brahmin family she rejects the tradition by leaving Mahesh, her husband for silly reasons. By her alienation she drags to have relation with another man, like Ammu in "The god of Small Things'. Maya in "Second Thoughts", how they are attracted to other sex. But finally when Devi sees the other side of Gopal, she feels that, there is no difference between Mahesh and Gopal. She comes to a conclusion that Gopal is not better than her husband Mahesh. In the words of Hariharan, "I have made very few choices....But I wa too well- prepared, and not prepared at all. America, Jacaranda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from all my trial..." (TFN 137, 1992).

Devi knew her elopement with Gopal is mere adulteress. In the words of Hariharan, "...a common little adulteress" (TFN 95, 1992). Devi thinks that she would be very happy with Gopal, In the words of Hariharan, "I will soar high on the crest of Gopal's wave of ragas..." (TFN 95, 1992). For months she has to move one to another city with Gopal on his musical tours. She becomes one of the audiences before the Gopal. She does not find the change between the life with her husband and life with lover. But her bliss with Gopal ends very soon, she herself asserts that. In the words of Hariharan, "... a kite that had snapped free of its string", "...the images his music evoked in her were no longer so uplifting, or

even neutral" (TFN 129, 1992). Again she becomes alienated from Gopal, she cannot find happy with him. She has taken whisky, once her husband did not allow her to play cards with his friends, but now she is with whisky, she cannot cool her burning heart. She cannot tolerate Gopal's behaviour, and now also she has to wait for Goal for months by his musical tours. Again she becomes alone in her heart. In the words of Hariharan, "In her isolated corner, an outsider forever on the fringes of a less ambivalent identity" (TFN 135, 1992). She cannot find day difference between her husband, Mahesh, and her lover Gopal. Finally she comes to a conclusion that, In the words of Hariharan, "I was always greedy for good fortune. Foolish girl....But as I hung on to it with all my strength, it dragged me down into the muddy, violet swamp" (TFN 112, 1992). Her mother sought out her with hope and she encourages her in her disappointments. Devi thinks that, she is lucky to have a mother, like Sita. She accepts that, she only listened all the stories, but she never allow them into mind.

Devi treats herself as Goddess Durga, in the words of Hariharan, "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" (TFN 41, 1992). But she fails to attain such fantasy, at last she destroy her marital relations, tradition, by eloping with Gopal. She has no perspicuity of real. According to Doniger "the women of Mahabharata are extremely prominent, feisty and individualistic, in part of a result of changes that were taking place in the social structure at the time of the recession of text " (Doniger, 292). From childhood she listens many sub stories in mythology, finally her life becomes a story. She thinks that, she cannot mingle with American culture so she left Dan. She cannot bare the loneliness in the absence of her husband, so she left her husband. She cannot bare the emptiness from her lover, so she leaves him simply. Now her iniquity comes to an end. Meena concludes that "American viewers have spent more than three decades watching male heroes and their adventures, muddies visions of boyhood, adolescence replete with illusions women as witches, bitches, mothers andimps" (Meena, 131).That drags to be with her mother. In the words of Hariharan, "But I was too well- prepared, and not prepared at all. America, Jarcanda Road, Mahesh, Gopal. I have run away from all my trials, my tail between my legs....or my mother's lonely hand stretched out towards me" (TFN 137, 1992).

Devi can never get satisfaction with anything, or with any relation. She feels like she is going to begin a new life by leaving her husband. But this time when she leaves Gopal, she feels that there is nothing to get. In the words of Hariharan, "She had felt bold and care free when she left Mahesh' house, a little like a heroine. But she felt like a fugitive now, though she was, for the first time, no longer on the run" (TFN 138, 1992). A few months later, when Gopal is still sleeping on the bed, she throws' her peacock's neck, colour sari on the mirror, which can make the room dark, and nothing can seen in the room. That means, she wants to forget the past days those with whom she spent. She wants to go forward to be with her mother. Covering the mirror with sari means, she wants to forget the past which torture her, and she never wish to see her past in the future. Symbolically, she wants to throw her past life with Gopal, and her relationship with him. In the words of Hariharan, "She covered the mirror with the silk to that the room suddenly became darker....Devi left the silk sari behind, the sari which was the colour of the peacock's neck..."(TFN 138, 1992).

Kakkar and Katharine note that, "Hinduism where coming back to mother is regarded as death and rebirth. Hinduism does not hold out the consolation of St. Paul' promise that at the moment of death we come close the God and that then 'shall we know even as we are know'. Instead, it seeks to mitigate the universal dread of death by viewing it as interval between lives, not as an end to the often painful, sometimes happy, but always engrossing and, above all, familiar life in the world" Kakkar S,

Katherine K, 2007, 132-133). When Devi returns to her home, she observes the garden as wild and over-grown. That shows the heart of her mother, how she is in frustration about Devi's future. Sita performs as a good mother and successful wife, who sacrifice her desires and everything for the sake of her husband and his family. So, now she has to face another problem from the society by her daughter's foolishness. Now Devi continues thinking of her mother's encounter, she wants to start a new life with her. In the words of Hariharan, "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, 1992).

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