

Chapter II

Slice of Life from Women's Oven

I, WOMAN, am that wonder-breathing rose
That blossoms in the garden of the King.
In all the world there is no lovelier thing,
And the learned stars no secret can disclose
Deeper than mine--that almost no one knows.

(Barker)

A woman perhaps a delicate and enchanting rose, is laden with responsibilities to bloom, to perfume, to embellish, to gratify, to please and so on. Most importantly, she is cut out to be the most vital social pulse, rendering life in both literal and metaphorical sense. For this reason, analysing the role and responsibilities of women in society becomes necessary.

Women have been an integral part of every social order irrespective of the position they have been privileged with or deprived of. There are legends and histories about women cutting a stereotypical image of the 'fair sex.' Sometimes, it becomes obvious that women represent the most common and typical problems of a society and then life at large level. No matter what the crisis may be, it eventually affects women either at personal or at community level. Therefore, it can be supposed that one can study a society through the women living in it.

Women are fundamentally homemakers in different parts of the world. It is obvious that women always bear the roles of procreators and nurturers and men the breadwinners. In every society women have been objects in men's lives to provide physical enjoyment, social companionship and domestic comfort. In primeval times both the roles have been evenly significant. According to the partition of labour, women have to work hard for their continued

existence. However, in the case of modern women, the duties are multiplied and they have to work hard both in the house and outside. During festive seasons or important occasions in the family, women become more responsible for all the works while men take care of their own works. Accomplishing the household duties with diligent care is regarded as the prime responsibility of women in almost all Indian societies.

Literature, being the mirror of society, has been changing in its reflection following the social changes. From the work of Edmund Spenser's "Epithalamion" to Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, literary works illustrate how women were beautiful, naive, fragile and weak figures that were thought to be inferior to men. On the other hand, there are strong and emancipated women like, Rosalind of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Elizabeth of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*. Over the last 150 years, novelists, whether male or female, have explored the psychology and social roles of women with increasing depth.

Acceptance, withdrawal, accommodation and submissiveness on one hand, resentment, objection, resistance and revolution on the other hand are the qualities associated with the two archetypal images of women portrayed in Indian literature. The world's two of the greatest prehistoric epics, *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata* written by two sages Valmiki and Ved Vyas respectively, have been composed pivoting around the two central characters of Sita and Draupadi. The former represents the first archetypal characteristic, whereas, the latter, the second archetypal image. Shubha Tripathi in her article entitled "Voice of Protest and Assertion: A Comparative Study of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" talks about the conditions of women in India:

When feminism was in its infancy in India, women were viewed as two stereotypes: the one docile, domesticated, draped in gold and gaudiness, devoted

to household, selfless and servile; the other, bare and brazen, straying and sensual.

Today she is no larger [longer] caught in old clichés: wife or whore, virgin or vamp, moral or moll. Various shades of womanhood are portrayed in literature.

(146)

Stereotypes take place when persons are classified by others as having something in common because they are members of a particular group. Parents are the most important socialising agents for children in determining values, beliefs and behaviour connected to gender. The sex of the baby conjures up all kinds of personality, uniqueness and physical feature even when these factors are not present in the child. Parents converse their stereotypes to children in several ways. For example boys are given construction blocks, sports equipment and means of transportation, and girls, on the other hand, are expected to play with dolls, doll houses and tiny household or domestic articles.

These stereotypes have been rendered through various media like cinema, literature, advertisement etc. Advertising has been the most important objective of attack and scrutiny. The portrayal of sex role in advertising lies in the close affiliation which exists between marketing and the consumer goods industry. In advertisement, a woman's goal in life seems to draw a man's attention and win his favour. Women are often depicted as sexual substances.

The stereotypical image of women has been portrayed through literature and other modes of creativity and at times, these female characters are used to depict more than stereotypes. They represent human conditions and social scenarios which involve them. Githa Hariharan has employed characters pulsating with life in all its aspects. The characters represent different sets of problems, solutions, values and circumstances.

All the five novels of Githa Hariharan depict the assertion of women of three generations. They vary from the traditional uneducated to the educated abroad; working, or serving in house, to serving, or working abroad. This chapter discusses the important characters like Devi, Sita, Mayamma and Parvatamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Mangala, Mangala's friend Jameela, Vasu Master's mother Lakshmi in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Shahrzad and Dunyazad in *When Dreams Travel*, Rekha and Meena in *In Times of Siege*, and Mala, Sara, Nina and Yasmin in *Fugitive Histories*.

These women characters represent more than just lives. They encounter problems, challenges and face critical situations. Although they represent different generations, the sufferings and distresses are almost the same. Many other minor women characters are also portrayed to explore the same idea of the novelist. They not only project women's problems, but also, the different and problematic aspects of life at large.

The status of women has been diverse in different societies all over the world. Women occupy an exclusive position be it a developed or developing or under developed society, and they are discriminated and given a biased treatment. Women are under the control of men in almost all parts of the world.

The predicament of women as inferior and incarcerated individuals seems predominant and hence, causes several other calamities. Monica Chawla in her preface to the book titled *Gender Justice: Women and Law in India* refers to the words of Justice K. Rama Swamy, "Half of the Indian population . . . are women. Women have always been discriminated against and have suffered and are suffering discrimination in silence. Self-sacrifice and self-denial are their nobility and fortitude and yet they have been subjected to all equities, indignities, inequality and discrimination" (ix).

Nowadays women are parading tall in their own field, equalling men. In spite of this, they have to give the best effort to break down the long-standing patriarchy. Kalyani, Aru, and Sumi in Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* are representatives of the three different generations who regain their identity through their deeds of confrontation. Likewise Devi, Sita and Mayamma in Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* reclaim their individuality by resisting their stifling situations.

In Indian society women like to have male heirs because of the benefits and other privileges offered by the community. The birth of a male child gives high position to the mother in the family. There are also some cultural considerations that decide the position of women in society. The first reason is that some rituals are done only by the son. Even though it is not legally accepted that women cannot inherit certain property, parents require a male heir to pass on their property and family belongings.

According to the beliefs of Indians a female child is considered other's property. Sushila Singh quotes Simone de Beauvoir, "The situation of woman is that she—a free and autonomous being like all creatures—nevertheless finds herself living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of the Other" (22). Indian parents generally consider that bringing up a female child in terms of education, marriage and so on is more expensive than a male child and hence, daughters are considered as liability. To prolong a legacy and honour in the society, parents give more importance to a male child.

As a result, the number of female infanticide is increasing alarmingly. Women are regarded as weaker section in society with regard to their health, education, career and so on. They are browbeaten and subjugated, being unable to share their views. Even in the modern

times, women's position is still disagreeable. India has social issues like dowry, female foeticide, hostility against women, unawareness, illiteracy, gender bias within families and in society etc.

The emotional hostility towards a female child is illustrated in the case of Vasu Master's mother in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. When his mother was born, his grandparents were unhappy because a girl child was born to them. They refused to name the child as a gesture of their disappointment. Unfortunately, the child did not have a name for almost a year. They thought it extravagant to spend money on the naming ceremony of another daughter. The parents also feared that relatives and friends would laugh at them for not producing a male child.

The eccentricity in this case is that the female child is not named by her parents but by the old sweeper woman in their house. The sweeper woman comforts her mistress saying that life would have been easier for the child if it had been born with "a little extra bit of flesh, just a few inches" (*GVM* 31). But, she also says that, still the child could be the goddess Lakshmi of her husband's house; and this is how the child gets the name Lakshmi. However, till the end of her life, she is not able to overcome her inferiority complex:

Her ambitions were on a lower scale—escaping her husband's unpredictable explosions of temper, surviving her mother-in-law's jealous rule of the household, and above all, keeping the house, and everyone in it, clean, pure and unpolluted. . . . It was not very surprising then that Lakshmi had melted away into the shadows of this loud tyrannical household. She lived just about long enough to give my father his heir, and obviously even that was a shoddy job. (*GVM* 32)

Githa Hariharan demonstrates the immediate constraints on woman's individual development – the constraints of domestic life and dominating patriarchy. Lakshmi is unable to compensate her feeling of inferiority. She accepts to succumb to the pressures of the

environment. Women in general, are considered less important individuals when they are apparently under the influence of men. In this society a woman is watched by others, especially when she is not willing to follow the rules of patriarchy. What Jeyaprakash A. Shinde says about Adler's view in the article entitled "The 'Feminine Ghosts' in Githa Hariharan's *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*" is quoted here:

. . . the sense of helplessness in child is exaggerated in two ways: (1) Unsuitable treatment and unfortunate environment and (2) Organ inferiority. In the case of Vasu Master's mother it is the unfortunate environment – 'the sixth daughter' and also the unsuitable treatment by the parents, the husband and his kin that leads to the aggravated sense of inferiority. Adler spoke of three responses: (1) Successful compensation, (2) Defeat or some form of retreat and (3) Compromise. (123)

This is evident in the case of Mangala from *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* as she represents all these three responses.

Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (1999) is a story of re-writing *The Arabian Nights* or *The Thousand and One Nights*. The novel renders a patriarchal framework at the outset, "Do you not know that a feast cannot be merry with fewer than four companions, and that women cannot be truly happy without men?" (*WDT* 4). This novel is about a woman's search for her identity. It looks as if this novel has undergone a considerable change in the author's dealing of the subject. Rama Kundu in his article entitled "Githa Hariharan: Intertext, Metafiction and 'Her Story'" points out how ". . . the author attempts to write a metafiction through an elaborate intertext that is made to foreground the feminist issue from a fresh perspective. Indeed, the author seems to have set herself a challenging task. Whether she

succeeds or not in achieving the goal may be debated; but to follow the way she grapples with the challenge could itself be an exciting experience” (179).

In the novel *When Dreams Travel* the heroine is virtuous and she becomes a victim as she tries to safeguard the virgins from an unfair, sadistic killer. Githa Hariharan portrays Shahrzad as a woman warrior, striving hard to get deliverance. She is an excellent fighter, intrepid, astute, clever, and audacious. Even though, Sultan Shahryar is a malicious tyrant, she continues to narrate her story in order to make him a human. She tries to make him realise by understanding the loyalty and conviction in woman and her chastity and thereby saves the city and the people. Githa Hariharan narrates:

The thousand and one nights are done. At the end of the play, a bloodthirsty drama in which swords pierce soft, yielding flesh, a happy conclusion is announced. The sultan, powerful, noble, deluded, has seen the light. He has been brought to his senses by a woman; and with, of all things, her stories; her ready tongue, her cleverness. In this abnormal climate where imagination – through the medium of the word – asserts its power over the bloodshedding sword, everyone forgives everyone. (*WDT* 21)

Dunyazad remembers her elder sister Shahrzad after 1001 nights, “she sees that it was always Shahrzad who was its central magnetic figure” (*WDT* 105). Shahrzad’s question makes every woman to think and fight for her freedom. She says ““I fought for myself and yes, for you as well. And you – what will you do when your turn comes?”” (*WDT* 276). Dunyazad’s life is an answer to this question. She begins her voyage towards Shahabad, her sister’s home town. She sets out on a journey, in order to find out what has happened to her sister, which is the forerunner of fresh journeys and new nights. Nirmal Therese explains:

The power to utter the world into existence, to speak the words that create legends, history, fantasy, religion, poetry and all else is the basic element of *When Dreams Travel*. Shahrzad's speaking made her a saviour and martyr; Duniyazad's and Dilshad's sharing creates the other script, the text that women write when there is no Sultan to chop off their heads. Satyasama, the poet women's tongue was ripped out and burnt for speaking a truth no one wished to hear. Shahrzad's tongue saved her. In 1001 Nights the apparent fight is between the word and the sword, but the inherent issue is that which concerns sexuality and freedom. Female reading of the text naturally subverts the patriarchally conditioned values imposed on women. (9-10)

Githa Hariharan has carefully mingled the text of Arabian Nights with her imagination. She has tried to explain the happy tale to make the listener understand the agony of the teller. Shahrzad talks with a sword hanging over her head. She explicates her imagination in terms of this terror. “. . . only those locked up in hovels and dungeons and palaces can see and hear dreams. Only those whose necks are naked and at risk can understand them” (*WDT* 20).

Githa Hariharan predicts Shahrzad as the helpless woman in an orthodox male-controlled system. She must survive with her flawless skill. She is forced to make a story telling at sword point. In an uninviting nuptial bed the previous brides are raped in the night and killed at dawn. In order to save all other virgins she undergoes this dangerous situation. She saves herself and an entire world of virgins around her by her overwhelming skill of words. Thus she is able to question the patriarchal system against women.

Shahrzad represents the spiteful clutches of patriarchal framework: demanding all that a woman has. Shahryar is the symbol of patriarchy who is illusioned and pretends 'god' by taking

the lives of the girls he chooses to. Shahrzad does not surrender to the patriarchal tyrant who believes in the power of man. She resists and in fact, fights back not with sword but with her ability to tell stories.

Githa Hariharan has brought out the crudest version of male domination where a woman is literally and purely an object of sexual desires; further, an easy victim of man's cruel power and his ever-growing, insatiable thirst for flesh. Here, a woman is not only deprived of her rights as an individual but, also the fundamental right of living itself. Even if such a thing does not happen in reality, there is a very blurred line separating fiction from reality. As Prithvi Nath Tikoo in the book *Indian Women (A Brief Socio-Cultural Survey)* says about the role of power in patriarchy:

The behaviour of man towards women is an instance to prove the point of animal traits in . . . [his] character. He has always grudged woman a place in society on par with him. Out of selfish arrogance and physical strength man has all along looked down upon her and allowed her a lower position in every walk of life. At best his attitude towards her has been that of ambivalence. Here man has seldom felt like exercising his freewill, muster courage of self-criticism, see through his selfishness and laugh at himself. Seldom has he objectively pondered over the fact that woman also was, like him, a human being with all human aspirations and a keen sense of self-respect, who had to be recognized and honoured. Here always his head has ruled his heart. (88-89)

Sara in *Fugitive Histories* is always busy with something or other and will not waste her time. When Sara leaves Mumbai, it is raining. Once she gets down from a train, she has to catch another local train or bus. The impatient Sara is unable to wait for the bus or train and gets into a

taxi. The taxi moves slowly because of heavy traffic. “When this happens, the driver looks at Sara in the rear-view mirror. It’s a bitter look, his way of saying, ‘If it’s not your fault, I’d like to know whose it is!’ Sara outstares him once, then pretends not to notice when he looks again” (FH 36). So wherever the woman goes she cannot escape from men’s stare.

Githa Hariharan’s young heroines try to rebel against male domination. Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night* comes out of Mahesh’s life, to start afresh with Gopal. Finally she emerges as an individual, gives meaning to her relationship and life, and comes to her mother’s house. Of all the women, Sita in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Rekha and Meena from *In Times of Siege*, have been successful in managing their life. Nina, Mala, and Sara in *Fugitive Histories* are reluctant in the beginning but in the end they understand their life.

Women have to struggle a lot to gain their freedom and to assert their individuality. What Jill Johnston says about the writing of Kamala Das can be applied to Githa Hariharan also.

‘Passivity is the dragon that every woman has to murder in her quest for independence.’ It is this dragon that Kamala Das attempted to kill by writing her autobiography. Kamala Das writes in her ‘My story’ although it was matriarchal society yet women were conditioned to believe that men ought to be superior. This traditional concept existing in the mind of Indian women disgusted her so much so that she wanted to dismantle the past to rebuild a new world based on justice and equality between the sexes. (qtd. in Misra 52)

Githa Hariharan wants her women characters to be unique, assertive and courageous enough to take decisions. Like Kamala Das, Githa Hariharan also wants to awaken the society through her writing. This is endorsed through the character of Vasu Master’s grandmother.

Vasu Master's grandfather is the first guru for his grandmother and she respects him very much. Vasu Master says, "As a good wife, a respectable woman, he should have also been the last" (*GVM* 174) – she knows his shortcomings. He is a good clerk who has been serving for many years with some difficulties. He has been called and dismissed by his authorities – through "bells, memos, peons' files" (*GVM* 175). She speaks to him with a mocking amusement "as if he had been a rather stupid and unimaginative child she had briefly known" (*GVM* 174). Once she asks Vasu Master: "What is a husband, Vasu? Just a hungry stomach and a few other things, never mind what. But all equally greedy, swallowing like a big red swollen mouth, then chewing and belching" (*GVM* 174). She does not wear bangles. She tells Vasu Master that she has given her bangles to Gandhi, a new prophet. She remains an exemplary woman. Her fearlessness and patriotism come through her husband's services.

Vasu Master's grandmother is much different from his wife Mangala and his mother. Though she is uneducated, she does not allow herself to be timid, passive and obedient. She does not believe her husband blindly. She respects her husband when he does something good to others. She even mocks at him for his failings. She plays her role as a wife and mother using some tactics. As a wife she has individual identity which she has attained through independent thinking and acting. Likewise, she has been an independent mother who is brave and rational. Nalini G. Kapoor's views on women expressed in her article entitled "Family – The Site of Story-Telling in Aboriginal Woman's Writing" can be considered in this context: "Women were considered to be the backbone of the family or focused household economy. They were more family-oriented, focused completely towards their own families rather than towards outward community. They did have areas of authority, not only in the domestic sphere, but also in a more limited way of in the spheres of ordinary ceremony and sacred rituals" (179). Vasu Master's

grandmother remains the backbone of the family. She is very clever, and bold enough to tackle any situation. In spite of her illiteracy, she knows when to be submissive and when to be rebellious.

There is a tradition of violence in India, where women are preserved like an object. Men have the power to rule and that is called to be their right, whereas women are to accept and to obey. Woman, especially if she is a daughter in-law in a joint family, is treated as a slave. Mayamma from *The Thousand Faces of Night* has been treated as a slave by her mother-in-law. She says:

I took into my hands the iron skillet and blew the fire into the stove even before my mother-in-law woke up. I cooked for so many hungry mouths. Twenty, thirty? The house was full of brothers, nephews and nieces. I drew water from the well. I scooped handfuls of fresh, wet cowdung and patted the nauseous mess into identical round cakes. With the best of the dung, I swept the floors clean. See, see, the fine grains of filth live on in my fingernails. (TFN 116)

Education is the foremost important key for inspiring and implementing positive reinforcements in the society. It effects social changes by working at the individual level and the output is shown at the collective level. Whether it is the institution of marriage, family unit or social attitude towards something – education makes a perceptible difference. In fact, it is the only territory based on democracy, where equality prevails. Above all, it demarcates the parameters of tradition and modernity.

Tradition is the combination of knowledge and form of actions respected by the ancestors. It is based on beliefs, values and customs which are rooted in the past. Tradition is disparaged rarely when it is seen to approve or support intuitive and illogical behaviour and way

of life. At times it is sturdy or invisible or insensible. Such influence is seen at its most in rites related to birth, death and marriage.

Modernity refers to a viewpoint that is usually prospect-oriented and advanced. It is the outcome of new and revolutionary views and thoughts. Modernity is associated with the marvelous changes that occurred in the Western society in all fields including family relations and official organisation. It involves adopting and appreciating changes and adaptations.

The Thousand Faces of Night is the story of Devi, the protagonist of the novel. After completing her M.A in America, Devi comes to live with her widowed mother Sita. Initially she confronts some difficulties in making adjustment with the tradition bound life of her mother. Devi says “There was the initial awkwardness of seeing Amma—unchanged, every hair in place, cool and poised in a silk sari in spite of the sweltering heat. But she was also different; not changed, but less distant, more vulnerable, than the image of her I had carried about with me in America” (*TFN* 13).

Devi remembers the mother-daughter relationship of her friends. She wonders how they keep cushy relationships with their mother. They chatter about boyfriends in an informal way and at times they make quarrels. Nevertheless, they join with the same love by kissing each other. She recalls an incident which takes place in New Jersey. On one of her weekends, she goes to her friend Julie’s house. After spending a happy weekend, Devi and her friend plan to come back to their campus by Sunday evening. The most striking things happened when they are about to leave. Devi curiously looks when, “Julie hugged her mother and said casually, ‘I love you, Mom!’ I remember my deep embarrassment, as if I had seen an embrace between lovers” (*TFN* 13).

Devi observes that, Julie and her mother are emotionally involved with a special relationship called 'friends' rather than a mother-daughter relationship. Devi and her mother do not touch each other and they indeed do not have a discussion about love for each other or anyone else. After her return, they are extremely aware of each other. After one month of her return, Devi begins to tell her mother about her life in America. Her mother smiles and gently says, "All that is over now. The important thing is that you are back, you are now in Madras. Why go over old story again?" (*TFN* 13). Devi understands that she cannot change anything in the traditional family system. She and her mother are "pulled together" like "a one celled unit." They become "not a family, but mother and daughter" (*TFN* 13). Sita becomes her "anchor rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self-evident fact of . . . [her] existence" (*TFN* 16).

Modernity is very difficult to explain in Indian traditional context. Modernity might change and replace people's attitude towards tradition. Mahesh assumes that modernity makes Devi forget the role of a traditional wife. When Devi says, "I want to learn Sanskrit 'So I can understand Baba's quotations better'" (*TFN* 52) he quips, "The English translations are good enough" (*TFN* 52). Again she tells him, "I could look for kind of a job" he replies, "There is so much for you to do at home" (*TFN* 56). He asks her to help Mayamma, the maid servant. He also suggests that if she wants to go out of the house, she might join Tara's painting classes.

The modern women envision a bright future for themselves with their individual ability and assertion. Literate women can tackle critical situations and can guide men as well. The modern women can lead a normal life due to their awareness, confidence and courage gained through education. Nothing can deter them once they are determined to do certain things. As Renu Kumari Singh observes in her article entitled "Empowerment of Women," "Education is the key to human advancement" (12).

Sita, though traditional by nature is modern in her thoughts. When Sita's husband dies, she erases his memories quickly in a modern crematorium before returning to India. "She burnt them before they burnt the body, quickly, efficiently, in a modern, sanitized crematorium. She poured both bags of ashes into one jar and booked herself a seat on the first plane to Madras" (*TFN* 106). After coming back to India, she devotes her talents and energy to work on Devi. After calling her back from America, Sita makes Devi marry Mahesh. She becomes an expert at managing things, and even more important, she moulds her daughter according to her own wishes.

Unlike, Devi and Sita, Mayamma is illiterate and is deprived of formal education. She accepts things with stoic silence and never shows her pain, or annoyance. Without saying a word, or raising a question, she suffers the tortures given by her mother-in-law and husband. The women of her generation knew only to accept their fate without reasoning out or looking for an alternative. Devi, comments on the plight of Mayamma: "Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, firsthand . . . She snarls and sulks, thought Devi with wonder, but she has no bitterness" (*TFN* 135-36).

While talking about modern women Sathyavathi Manuel quotes Bharathi's poem in her book entitled *Gender for Transformatory Potential*. "To walk erect; to see straight and not fear any one in the world constitute the norms for the modern women. Their pride in themselves, born out of wisdom keeps them on the path of virtue" (23). Bharathi states publicly that the power and knowledge inherent in women should be utilised properly. However, women are keeping themselves within the four walls and are deprived of opportunities for growth. He emphasises on equality and asks the society to wake from injustice meted out to women. He says: "The world

will be rid of ignorance/If women be educated and enlightened” (23). Some women characters of Githa Hariharan have proper education, through which they change their life, and come forward to help others. They also find their identity in the world.

In Githa Hariharan’s *Fugitive Histories*, Sara understands the importance of education and takes personal care of Yasmin who is affected by the communal violence even after Nina has left the place. She wants to support and help Yasmin in her studies. She asks her friend ““Can I come back tomorrow? It’s nothing to do with the film. I’d like to spend some time with Yasmin. Maybe I can help her to study for the exams?”” (*TFN* 167). Sara wants to help Yasmin and so she writes a letter to Yasmin’s family asking about Yasmin’s college plans. If the parents are willing, Sara and her friends would help pay fees for Yasmin’s admission to study in Bombay staying in a hostel.

There are two women characters in the novel *In Times of Siege*, who are assertive by nature and their education makes them perceive and look at things differently. They represent modern Indian women, who can manage things by themselves without any other’s help. “Meena is a sociology student; she is writing a thesis on what she calls women’s stories” (*TS* 28). She is self-possessed and sure about herself. “And Meena, from what Shiv has seen of her for a day, certainly seems to know her own mind” (*TS* 22). She does things clearly according to the terms dictated by her mind. The energetic, assertive, self-assured, independent, and competent Meena knows what she talks and thus renders her support and help to Shiv when he is in trouble.

Meena is an undergraduate at Kamala Nehru University and her mother has asked Shiv to keep an eye on her while she is in Delhi. So she is invited by Shiv’s wife Rekha, for lunch a couple of times. Shiv “does remember that the girl seemed self-sufficient. She was always too busy to visit them on Sundays . . .” (*TS* 5). After that she does not meet Shiv, but one day

Meena's friend informs Shiv that Meena has broken her leg and that he has been asked to fetch her as she has no other choice.

Shiv is very uneasy at first but as time proceeds he finds that he is quite taken up by her. Meena is not concerned about Shiv's expediency. Though Rekha is not in the house, she feels free as if it is her own house. As time goes, Meena and Shiv become friends, sharing their thoughts and spending enjoyable moments. At the time of Shiv's crisis and muddled circumstance, Meena takes charge of the situation. She stands by Shiv and helps him by giving him moral courage and support.

Despite the fact that Meena does not know much about Shiv's focus on history or about the way it should be taught in a university, her assumption suits him. Meena's role becomes more important as the novel proceeds. Shiv is happy because Meena and Shiv think alike. Meena tells Shiv "It's a battle for minds" (*TS* 135). During their parting moment, Meena feels a little weak but soon she recognises herself and becomes self-assured: "Don't come with me," she whispers. "I can manage" (*TS* 203-204). Evidently, all the situations prove that she is a modern, autonomous woman.

Shiv's wife Rekha also belongs to the class of self-contained women. Despite the fact that she is not physically present in the novel, she makes herself close to the situation throughout the novel with the phone calls she makes to Shiv. She also has the eminence of authority, aptitude, proficiency and adeptness. This is clearly apparent when Meena comes to Shiv's house. Shiv is restless because Rekha is not with him and he does not know how to handle the situation. Though Rekha is not there in the house, she manages it by remote control. For whatever happens, Shiv finds the answer from his wife Rekha, because soon after their marriage, Rekha

has taken over the control of their lives. “His wife Rekha, with the efficiency that makes her an administrative asset in her office, took over” (*TS* 4).

There are other female characters like Sara, Mala and Nina of *Fugitive Histories* who have a mind of their own. Mala is an educated woman and despite the odds she faces, she is able to manipulate them in her favour. She is able to live with an impoverished artist and bring up her two children.

Likewise, Sara is the most independent woman who channelises her feelings in a constructive way. She is able to think for herself and knows what she wants from life. Moreover, education makes her courageous enough to venture out in search of a career. Nina and Sara are interested in social work and media. They aspire to make documentary on the Post-Godhra Kand. They are self-contained and ambitious about what they want in life.

Nina is Sara’s friend; they travel to and fro their NGO office together. They are together unless one of them needs to go out of town for some work. However, Nina leaves her job once she has completed her film, ‘City Skyline.’ Nina remains a good friend to Sara, encouraging and giving ideas to her in everything. Both these young women support and encourage each other and move along.

Unlike women who go for conservative career, Sara and Nina venture to do something different. Sara wants to write a film projecting anti-Muslim mayhem and Nina encourages and invites her to come with her. ““You’re my first choice, you know that. But you can’t just read and hear about these people, Sara. You’ve to come with me on my next trip if you’re writing the film”” (*FH* 45).

A woman does not always essentially have to rely on a man who is considered strong for emotional and physical support. She could help and be helped by a good understanding friend

from her own sex as well. When Sara comes to Nina's house, Nina understands her feelings and does things accordingly. "Sara has to dash to the bathroom first 'I'm starving,' she says plaintively before she shuts the door. Nina doesn't fail her. By the time Sara emerges, Nina has two bowls of instant masala noodles ready" (FH 39). As a friend Nina helps her by giving money. "Make up your mind soon. I've got some money lined up already, so if you can take a week off for a start . . ." (FH 46).

Culture also undergoes change as a result of modern ideas and ways. Nonetheless, education enables an individual to analyse the available choices, and choose the relevant one and respect values. Even though Devi comes back from a foreign country, she does not smoke or drink. In the U.S.A., she meets Dan, an Afro-American and develops a good relationship with him. Githa Hariharan says, "approach romance . . . Promises had been half-made in the dark shadows of the parking lot outside the grimy, friendly diner they often met at" (TFN 3). When she completes her studies, she decides to move back to India and Dan stays as "an experiment for a young woman eager for experience" (TFN 6). Regarding her relationship with Dan, Shubha Tripathi in the article entitled "Voice of Protest and Assertion: A Comparative Study of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" comments:

Dan is disappointed. He feels that her refusal is due to her fear of taking risks. The truth is that Devi can clearly see that the culmination of their relationship could be catastrophic. Perhaps, she also believes in the proverbial picture of a perfect marriage, that her grandmother had painted to her. At this stage, she represents the Indian woman who has become aware of her 'self' and her aspirations. (141)

Devi's life with Gopal proves to be a short one. It is only an act of penance, a revolt against male domination. Her initial fascination for Gopal seems to dissipate, once she realises

that Gopal is dedicated only to music just as Mahesh is to his work. She repents for what she has done and makes up her mind to come out of Gopal's life. Now, she is no longer on the run, but she feels like a fugitive escaping from captivity to a state of self-recognition.

Indira Nityanandam in her article entitled "A Search for Identity: Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" describes the change that comes in the life of Devi in the following manner:

However, it is Devi who is the modern feminist. Though she lacks the will to choose and her early decisions are faltering, we note a development in her character. Initially she is easily influenced by societal role expectations; she quits the U.S. and leaves behind Dan because of a sense of filial piety, marries Mahesh as a good daughter should, attempts to be a full-time wife and housemaker as an Indian *Pativrata* should. Gradually she shows her resolve in walking out with Gopal and even greater determination in walking out on Gopal. (191)

Devi expects to get affection and concern from Gopal; but again she finds herself in the same patriarchal society. Gopal draws her with his music and concern. But after some time he reveals his true nature, his male domination. Men exceedingly believe that women are the weaker sex, so they amuse themselves in the company of women. There is no one to fight against men or confront them. They use women for sexual pleasures. Subsequently they try to dominate women, suppressing women psychologically, physiologically denying their equality.

Reena Kothari in her article entitled "Female Bonding: Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" comments on Devi's last verdict, "Devi's final assertion of her autonomy is thus the celebration of the power of the divine Devi as well as that of the entire community of

women. Women are no longer vehicles towards somebody else's ends, nor are their adventures other people's quests but instead they are questers seeking their own salvation" (46).

According to D.H. Lawrence, "The great relationship for humanity will always be the relationship between man and woman" (qtd. in Waheed 17). Marriage is based on the universal truth that men and women are complementary, and the biological fact that reproduction depends on a man and a woman, and that the children need a mother and a father. Above all, it is one of the most important institutions which keeps the society intact and together. Martin Luther says, "There is no more lovely, friendly and charming relationship, communion or company than a good marriage." However, due to complications in relationship and other external problems, preserving marriage has become very challenging.

A good and healthy marriage requires both emotional and practical building blocks. For instance, love and understanding are emotional building blocks of a marriage and likewise, responsibility and duties comprise the practical building blocks of a marriage. Evidently, a good marriage calls for more than love and understanding. The pendulum of 'rendering' and 'receiving' is to be kept afloat in both the directions in order to have a sound mechanism.

A traditional and yet essential role of a woman as a wife is that of tending and nurturing. According to *The Holy Bible*, "An excellent wife is the crown of her husband, but she who causes shame is like rottenness in his bones" (Pro.12: 4). An excellent wife is much concerned about her male partner. She is a man's best companion in wealth and his best friend in hardship. A wife should be the most careful preserver of man's health, kind attendant at man's illness and a faithful counsellor in misery. A woman consoles man in all his hardships and cautiously directs all his affairs.

Sita of *The Thousand Faces of Night* carefully plans the lives of her husband and her daughter. She leads her husband from promotion to promotion. With Sita's support and assistance, her husband Mahadevan climbs the ladder of success. When Devi is born, Sita finds a new 'veena' to play on. She wants Devi to have the best education and sends her to America. She also sends her husband to Africa on a prestigious assignment.

. . . [He] became a full-fledged sahib, a Brahmin among Brahmins (pure blood and a healthy bank balance), who could list among his achievements a new car, a chauffeur, three full time servants and a gardener, the best of schools for his daughter, a pension for that senile fabulist, his old storytelling mother in the village, and a large, renovated old house, chosen . . . for its distinctive character.
(TFN 104)

Sita represents a good and uninterrupted marriage. She gives importance to her family and thinks and acts accordingly. Similarly, Asad and Mala of *Fugitive Histories* stand for a loving marital relationship. Despite the social hostility, they stick together and stand their ground. The primary reason for their successful marriage is their mutual care and support. Vasu Master and Mangala, despite their emotional and intellectual differences make an ideal couple and it becomes more evident when the former misses the latter.

A good marriage helps in the better rearing up of children. Mala and Asad are able to bring up their children with utmost care and values. Devi is also a product of a good marriage; nonetheless, she is unable to save her own. However, she emerges as a resolute and determined woman in the end. Her steps falter but she steadies herself before it is too late.

A good marriage also depends on the upbringing and nurturing of children or vice versa. In Indian society, woman's primary role is to be considered as a wife and mother. Mangala has

been doing her routine work as wife and mother with her womanly delicateness. This is clearly shown in her daily lifestyle. She serves her husband in all things like putting on his clothes as he gets ready for school. She takes special care of her husband or sons when they fall sick. When Vasu Master lay groaning with fever, she sits on his bed with strips of cloth dipped in cold water. She knows some little handiwork through which she mends the boys' shorts and his vests. She does this mending while Vasu Master marked the home work books for the next day. She is always concerned about her children. Once they go to the seashore outside Madras and Mangala does not go into the water while her sons and husband play in the water. She walks along the seashore and tries to collect things like shells and other odd things to add on to the boys' collection.

Sita, Devi's mother is a self-confident and practical woman who believes only in reality. She plays every move with skillfulness like a 'veteran chess player'; answers every question with 'expert counter attacks.' Her life resembles that of Gandhari. She is thoroughly 'exorcised' by the words of her father-in-law and believes in "order, reason, progress" (*TFN* 26). She never likes illusion and she is an example of a decent survival. She achieves her wifehood and motherhood with a single-minded devotion. She has to give up her first love, the veena and her dreams of outstanding ability and celebrity. In order to achieve the pride of a housekeeper and a blameless wife she has to cut herself off from her childhood love – veena for which, she has been pouring all her energies. "She practised for at least five to six hours every day" (*TFN* 101).

Sita knows the art of home-making efficiently, so she is a backbone or pillar to develop the financial status. She manages her family in such a beautiful manner that others begin to praise her. The males in her family never consider her desire to become a veena player. From the beginning she gives importance to family relationships. So she sacrifices her life and desires for

the sake of her family. After her marriage Sita, “. . . missed rice: all her life, she had eaten three square meals of rice. Marriage had meant that Sita would have to learn to eat dry chapatis, which refused to go down the throat like sticky, wet balls of mashed rice” (*TFN* 103).

Generally couples should have a holistic visualisation of marriage and life which would enable them to have a sensible approach towards life. They must put forth some efforts to remove the hurdles and troubles in their life so that they can live a happy life. Nowadays quite a number of divorce cases are seen among Indian families also. This might be because of the influence of Western culture, economic independence of the partners, stressful working conditions, misunderstanding that arises due to complexes between a couple, and many other reasons. This might result in adverse health effects upon their children.

A mother can provide everything for the child and she has all the responsibility. In *Fugitive Histories*, when Sara informs about her departure from Ahmedabad, Mala begins to worry all day about the train being late. Mala makes up her mind not to ask too many questions about Sara’s day-to-day affairs or her safety because she does not want to annoy Sara. During Sara’s last trip she has been worrying so much. Even when they are in the same city, she does feel responsible for her daughter. Though she knows that Sara might have switched off her phone, she tries Sara’s number. She prepares dinner for Sara. On Sara’s arrival Mala asks Sara, “‘Have you been torturing Railway Enquiries?’ . . . giving her a hug. She looks around the living room. ‘My god, look at this place! What’ve you been doing, cleaning it day and night?’ Mala smiles guiltily, but it doesn’t stop her from pulling out the dirty clothes in Sara’s bag” and asking her “‘Are you hungry?’” (*FH* 183).

As a mother Mala does her job very devotedly. Sara wants to eat pizza from outside hotel, but before she could order for it Mala has prepared her meal. Mala’s food is much worse than

what Sara ate in the train. Nevertheless, Mala tells her, “I thought you’d like some food after all the rubbish you usually eat” (FH 183). Mala is always concerned about Sara and her life. When Sara goes by a car she says “‘Drive carefully’ ‘You have no idea how people drive in Delhi’” (FH 194).

Marriage brings together two people with the bond of love. Devi’s marital life lacks the delight and pleasure that she has anticipated. Mahesh is a matter of fact, unromantic “regional manager in a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste” (TFN 22). He tours frequently and expects nothing special or exciting from marriage. From the beginning itself Devi is doubtful if her life with Mahesh might provide the happiness that she expected. It is clear from her statement after a month of their marriage. Devi opines:

A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling. What about us? What kind of a life will we make together? It seems too foolish, too intense a question to ask of this reasonable stranger who has already carefully examined, experienced, dissected, and is now ready to file away as settled, something as fragile and newborn as our marriage. (TFN 49)

Devi’s life with Mahesh as she says is fragile. Mahesh is unable to provide love and security to her. In the house, Devi spends her time alone by wandering around the house, talking to Baba and hearing Mayamma’s stories. The idea of womanhood as far as Mahesh is concerned is wrong. Devi is treated like an object. His routine tour and the tight schedule of his job disturbs the family life of Devi.

In Ruth Praver Jhabvala’s *Heat and Dust*, Douglas and Olivia are husband and wife. There Olivia is materially sound like Devi. Olivia like Devi, does not bring forth a child, and

diverts her mind towards the Nawab, whereas Devi turns towards Gopal for love and understanding. Waheed's comment about Douglas and Olivia's life is true of Devi's life with Mahesh also:

Douglas thinks that the closed bungalow without heat and dust, the servants to carry out the orders of his wife, food to eat, book to read and piano to play on are enough to stay at home and live happily. But Olivia thinks that there are certain situations when she needs her husband; he should sit without hurried programmes, talk to her without administrative worries, and move together keeping the wife and administration separately. (89)

The function of marriage is to reproduce and maintain relationships. Whenever this function fails, Githa Hariharan's women characters begin to suffer and fight back against the male-dominated society. This social institution of marriage triggers off several problems and conditions at times. It is a sacred as well as a delicate relationship between a man and a woman. It is believed to be an absolute revered indenture involving commitment and understanding between the partners. The outcome varies according to the adaptability and mental make-up of the husband and wife. Sometimes it turns out to be a successful marriage and at othertimes it ends up as a broken relationship with a divorce.

Barrenness is a very serious problem affecting marital relationship. A barren woman is ill-treated by everyone in the family. It is not any different in modern times. Mahesh in *The Thousand Faces of Night* thinks that marriage is only "a necessity, a milestone like any other. It is a gamble" (TFN 49). He is a complete businessman and so, even after many days of marriage, Devi finds him a 'stranger.' He is a good business man, so he measures his family life as a business.

The only motive of marriage for Mahesh is to get a baby. He wants Devi to fulfill his desire. His intention is quite common, but he forgets that along with that he must also show love and care which are the foundation stones for building families. “Let’s have a baby,’ Mahesh said. ‘There’s no reason to wait. I want you to have my baby,’ he said, and after a night of purposeful love-making, he left the next morning on a month-long tour” (*TFN* 74), and when she is unable to bring forth a child, he prepares her to see the gynecologist.

Moreover, barrenness is associated with women and not with men. This is considered to be a defect in women regardless of medical opinion or proofs. Mahesh holds Devi responsible for childlessness, “‘I’ve been to the doctor,’ Mahesh said, his eyes not meeting mine. ‘He says I’m—I’m fine. I’ll fix an appointment for you to see the gynecologist’” (*TFN* 89).

Devi goes to the doctor as per Mahesh’s instruction. The hospital looks like an office. She has to stand in a queue for a long time and is allowed to see the doctor’s senior assistant first. Then the doctor explains to her about the fertility course. To her, sexual life is full of feelings and emotions, whereas it is treated like an official matter in the hospital. The doctors bristling with impatience makes her feel that she is a stupid woman who could not even get pregnant. They also seem to say that the dutiful wives around her do not need others to regulate the function and coax them to grow in the right direction. The doctor’s description, in a way, hurts her very much and further the nurse gives her more pain. “‘You have to get up now,’ said the nurse devoted to garlic. ‘We have a long waiting-list’ . . . ‘Have the assistant doctors explained the fertility course to you? Have you understood what you must do?’” (*TFN* 92).

The bitter experience in the hospital makes a scar on Devi. She feels frustrated and disappointed at the official reference made to her sexual life. “‘Now you must pay attention, Devi. We will mark the right days for you with dots, so, so. Soon you can mark them yourself,

join the dots and make a graph. We'll take a smear now, and give you an injection tomorrow. Then don't do anything for a few days. After that you can have . . .” (TFN 91). Devi is irritated by the words of the doctors who are interfering in her private life. She considers it as an ultimate insult upon her and realises that she has lost many things in her marital life.

The sense of childlessness disturbs Devi very much. She perceives herself getting blurred in the eyes of Mahesh. She feels that his love for her is getting diminished every day. So she wants to adopt a child. When she informs this to Mahesh, he rejects the idea as if he does not understand her feelings or sorrows. Devi tells him: “‘Let's adopt a child,’ I said. ‘I don't know,’ Mahesh said. ‘I'm not sure I would feel the same way about someone else's child. But what does the doctor say? She assured me that these new hormones work wonders’” (TFN 92).

Mahesh always thinks about himself as a traditional husband who wants children as his legacy. Consequently, he fails to understand Devi's depressed feelings of barrenness in connection with her motherhood. It is clear from the conversation between Mahesh and Devi. When he returns from his long tours, he asks Mayamma to shuffle out of the room with his bags. Then “Any news, he asks. His eyes quickly appraise my body, all bones and flat stomach. No news, I say” (TFN 86).

Men expect women to raise their family. “Tara's husband, Ashok, works for Mahesh. We see them often and Mahesh admires Tara's boundless energy, her bubbling, infectious enthusiasm. ‘She keeps herself busy but has enough time for her children,’ he says. ‘I have never seen such well-behaved children before. Lucky Ashok!’” (TFN 56). When she says “‘I must look for a job’” (TFN 64), he snubs her, “‘And what will you do when the baby comes?’” (TFN 65). Devi who is educated, has awareness and wants to stand on her own leg, so that she can modify her life. Unlike the traditional woman who is confined within the four walls of the house, she

wants to utilise her education; she wants to do something new in her life. But Mahesh fails to understand her; nor does he respect her wishes and hence, keeps on rejecting whatever she asks.

Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* incurs the wrath of her mother-in-law when she does not bring forth a child. She has waited ten long years for a son. The astrologers whom the mother-in-law consulted said that Mayamma is destined to have a son to take care of her in her old age. Mayamma narrates: “I scared destiny away with my over-eager pleas, my weekly fasts, my silent and humble apology to an impatient mother-in-law. She tore my new saris and gave me yesterday’s rice to eat” (TFN 112). She is forced to undergo ten years of penance by her mother-in-law to get a son:

She prayed, made vows, dipped herself again and again in the pure coldness. She starved every other day, she gave up salt and tamarind. She tied little wicker baskets with crimson strips of cloth on the tree dedicated to Jaganmata. She meditated for hours before a pan of clear water, representative of the golden-complexioned Shashti, giver of children. She fed the snakes her rice and curds . . . chanting mantras without stopping for a breath. She invoked every day the goddess’ thousand names; five hundred times she prostrated herself at the feet of the ever-fertile mother. Every six months she renewed her vows; every six months she invited six Brahmins to a feast, and sent them away with the richest gifts she could lay her hands on. (TFN 80-81)

Thus, a woman’s barrenness labels her ‘guilty’ and ‘faulty’ in the society. Relatives, friends and others look down on women who are incapable of begetting children.

A woman is able to understand the problems of another woman, because their experience is indistinguishable. In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Mayamma is not able to fight

back against the dominating society. However, she feels sympathy for the women who are undergoing the same situation. So when Devi and Parvatamma go out of the house she approves of their acts and wishes them well.

Child marriage is another form of fragile and unwholesome marriage prevalent in society. In fact, it seems that it has been validated by Hindu laws. Shailaja B. Wadikar in the article entitled “Tarabai Shinde’s Stri Purush Tulana: A Treatise on women’s Suffering” quotes Manu, “According to Manu, eight years is the minimum, and twelve years the maximum marriageable age for a high caste girl. Manu says: ‘A man aged thirty years shall marry a maiden of twelve who pleases him, or a man of twenty four a girl of eight years of age’” (31).

Today, the rising importance of education and technological advancement have submerged such customs and beliefs. However, this age-old practice is still prevalent in rural and other backward areas. Women must be aware of such practices and counteract against these.

Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* has undergone child marriage. “A maid . . . must be wed, before her womanhood develops; no loving parents in fact need wait, beyond the early age of eight” (*TFN* 116). Children are the prime responsibility of their parents. The mothers being their primary guardians should safeguard the welfare of their children and even fight against the society when the occasion demands it. The above examples represent the first generation of women characters portrayed in the novel. Githa Hariharan by portraying the different generations brings out the subtle differences.

Sita is born after fifteen years of Mayamma of the first generation. She has married late at the age of twenty. In Sita’s case, her mother has been instrumental in preventing her daughter from being married at a young age. Likewise, Sita protects her daughter Devi from the practice of child marriage. Moreover, as a modern woman, Sita sends her daughter to U.S.A. for her

higher studies. It is evident that the cultural crisis can be precluded and prevented by the assiduous efforts of loving parents.

In the novel *Fugitive Histories*, Bala is Mala's grandmother. "She was married to the house even more than she was married to Mala's grandfather" (FH 15). She is married at the age of twelve, just like Mayamma of *The Thousand Faces Night*. Her husband is five years older than Bala. Already "he had firm ideas on who fit where in his household and his life. It didn't take long for him to decide that this childish, flat-chested, chattering girl was not the bride he deserved" (FH 15).

In Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories*, she delineates the circumstances of a young girl who is compelled to succumb to the system of child marriage. Mala, the mother of Sara and Samar accompanies her mother-in-law to a wedding of one of their relatives. At the wedding, she is taken aback to discover an innocent and childlike face behind the bride's veil. A small girl dressed in a woman's attire is the bride. Mala and others see the young bride's face edged with sadness and tears trickling down her face. No matter what she feels, Mala is helpless like the child bride and takes in the situation like an observer. She feels sorry for the young girl. Her daughter Sara starts sobbing observing the distressed bride and this stirs up Mala emotionally and she sheds her unshed tears.

Githa Hariharan's portrayal of this instance represents many other such cases happening in reality which appear to be out of one's reach. This wedding of the small girl could have been prevented by any woman, like, her mother, or would be mother-in-law; for the reason that, they too are women. They would have endured all such trials and tribulations which constituted part of their domestic situation. However, nobody has the courage to stop such marriages. The parents should take the responsibility as they know that a woman supports the family. They should know

that a small girl cannot be burdened with such arduous liability. Therefore, it is the elders' and parents' duty to prevent child marriage; otherwise they will prove to be the primary oppressors of their own daughter.

Mala confides in her husband Asad and asks his opinion on the subject of child marriage. She asks him that why the small girl was forced to be married. Asad is furious; he does not give any good or valid reason for his anger. Instead he says ““You shouldn't have gone,”” (*FH* 79). This demonstrates that men's attitude on the subject of such social practices is different from that of women. Women are unable to accept a small girl being married and begin to shed tears. Therefore, women, capable of empathising and identifying themselves with such victims, should take a step forward to prevent this child marriage.

Devi concludes that marriage is a 'sacrificial knife' (*TFN* 54). Even though she tries her level best to adjust with Mahesh, she is unable to do so. All her efforts seem to be unnoticed and slowly she moves away from Mahesh and towards Gopal. Being a modern Indian girl, Devi expects her husband to be sturdy, protective, caring and affectionate who would treat her as his equal. However, everything is denied to her. She realises that he is not up to these ethics and standards, so she feels much aggravated and the sweetness of their mutual relations is lost. Hence, she loses interest in the pleasures of life. As a result, she is attracted towards Gopal who gives all those pleasures in her life in the beginning. Devi is fascinated by the arrival of Gopal. However, she is vexed and oscillates between the thoughts of Mahesh and Gopal, and finally, she decides to elope with Gopal. Mahesh's offensive and self-centered attitude makes her fall a prey to the attractions offered by Gopal. Had she been provided with such affection, care and love from Mahesh, she might not have chosen elopement.

Devi, despite her best education and modern thinking is still in confusion and unable to realise her predicament. She is disappointed with Gopal's treatment also. Hence, Devi proceeds towards her mother's house to begin her life afresh. She hears the "faint sounds of a veena, hesitant and child-like" (*TFN* 139) offering a welcoming note to Devi. If Devi is not educated, she may not have known about the society. Through her education, she can interpret things and she tries to overcome the traditional beliefs and finds remedies for her problems. She returns to her mother's place, to prove that women are not inferior to men and that even if they are neglected by men, they have the capacity to live their lives without the support of them.

Sara of *Fugitive Histories* writes the film script on the survivors of the anti-Muslim mayhem that took place in 2002. She takes some photos from the envelope.

She knows what they are, she's seen these photos from Nina's research visits to Gujarat before. But she can't resist looking at them again. The faces have such a stark black-and-white look, as if they're waiting for some passer-by to hear their mute appeal. Or as if they're waiting for Sara, for her to discover their silent thoughts and sufferings and give words to them. (*FH* 44-45)

Sara looks at the faces with concern because she is so compassionate and could not bear their trouble. Now she wants to write the script for this film. For this she has gone through all the material while she was away and has made notes, with good stuff.

Sara can sense Asad's love through his painting. Though she cannot see her father in real life she can look at him through his painting. Sara remembers her childhood days, especially during the great occasion of the carnival. Her father would be cleaning the fish tank messing about in his studio. When his children do not get the seats together on a crowded bus, Asad "didn't care what the other passengers thought of his booming cheerfully over seats and heads

across the length of the bus: ‘Sara and Samar! Are you near the window? Are you happy?’” (FH 47). Sara and Samar could feel the laughter of the other passengers, but Asad would not mind that. He cares about his children’s happiness only.

Sara understands and feels her mother’s love through her phone calls. When she is in Ahmedabad, Mala feels very restless and anxious. Sara gives assurance to her mother that she is safe. The place which Nina and Sara stay is in a safe area. Sara says that her friend Nina will be departing before she leaves. However, she has to stay for a couple of days alone in Ahmedabad and will come to Delhi later. Realising her mother’s concern, she says ““Okay, Amma, I’ll be extra careful once Nina leaves”” (FH 108).

Disability is another important grave scenario which cannot be overlooked. Approximately, ten percent of the world’s total population is disabled. The term ‘disability’ is an umbrella term encapsulating various aspects of disability: visual impairment, hearing impairment, speech impairment, mental retardation, physical impairment and learning disability. This might not affect every one individually; nevertheless, it is a social component which requires awareness and acceptance.

Bala from Githa Hariharan’s novel *Fugitive Histories* represents disability in the life of women. Bala is mentally retarded. Due to the emotional and mental immaturity, she is treated like an object by her family. Her husband neglects her and imprisons her in order to save their marriage. She is unable to communicate whatever she wants and is not understood by anybody except Mala. Mala seeks a friend in her grandmother but others look down at her as an ailing and defective part of their family which should be concealed or patched up.

A woman being disabled or physically handicapped is a twofold affliction and hence, utterly miserable. Firstly, a woman endures the ordeal of belonging to the weaker section of society and secondly, the inability and vulnerability makes her life more painful.

Satyasama from Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* is another woman representative who is different from the rest of her kind. She is partially blind and has a deformed physique. She lives like animals and beasts in a forest and not among human beings. She adopts the skills of monkeys and other tree inhabitants to live on branches of trees. However, she requires food to survive which she earns by her singing skills. She begs for charity from the passersby and sometimes she also becomes the butt of their ridicule.

Certain bestial instincts have come to stay with man in spite of his striving hard to soar high. This bestial aspect of man is visible inside the four walls of a household, or on the street or almost everywhere. Mayamma confronts bestiality at the hands of her own husband and other relatives. Traditionally, women are trained to submit to their husband's will. Sometimes it is not feasible to do without bitterness. Mayamma submits herself without murmuring anything and she does everything as her penance. She gives her selfless love and concern to her husband, son and mother-in-law without receiving their love.

Mayamma, the old caretaker in Devi's father-in-law's house has spent all her life trying to satisfy others. She tells Devi that the secret of successful marital life is in the ability of enduring pain. She gets married at the age of twelve to a useless gambler who came to her only at night with, "his large, hairy thighs rough and heavy on her . . ." (*TFN* 80). She does not know any happiness in marriage. Her innocent childhood is nipped in the bud. She said, "I put away the shells, the smooth, round pebbles I had played with in my parent's home. I took into my hands

the iron skillet and blew the fire into the stove even before my mother-in-law woke up” (*TFN* 116).

Mayamma undergoes the cruellest treatment at the hands of her mother-in-law who keeps hurting her physically and mentally for her state of being barren. Her mother-in-law shouts at her, “You have been admiring your fine new sari, have you, continued the mocking voice. What has your beauty done for you, you barren witch?” (*TFN* 113). Violent punishment has been given to her because she is a futile, barren woman. Mayamma narrates: “She pulled up my sari roughly, just as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly-ground spices into my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails” (*TFN* 113).

As a result of her barrenness, she has to eat the previous day’s rice. Her mother-in-law makes her observe certain religious penance in order to get a grandchild. Her mother-in-law tortures her sexual organs, and gives her cruel punishments. As a part of it she asks Mayamma to cut her breast open and take a silver cup with the blood from her breast to bathe the lingam.

Poverty is a pressing phenomena. Jameela in *The Ghost of Vasu Master* represents such scarcity. She is a widow and lives on her own skills of embroidering and other needle works; Jameela’s husband died some months ago and she could not stay in the same village, Elipettai. Vasu Master says “that she could no longer manage on her own in Elipettai; that she saw no other way out but to return to the village where she and Mangala had shared their childhood” (*GVM* 68-69). Somehow Jameela slipped from Vasu’s life, but she has remained in his memory as “an image—and a ghostly one at that” (*GVM* 70).

On the other hand, the victims of riots and bloodshed undergo the ordeal of poverty as well. Yasmin’s family from Githa Hariharan’s *Fugitive Histories* is a standing example for

poverty being a bitter offshoot of riots. Yasmin's parents agreed to let Yasmin go to school; but she has to pass the final exams in history and geography which she had failed. Yasmin recognises the reason why she has to pass. She thinks of her mother's hard work, of her age, of her brother Akbar-bhai who never comes. She feels that she has to do her brother's duty and to be their daughter and son forever.

Yasmin's mother is a hard worker. She has to work hard to meet all the needs of the family. She needs her energy to comfort her husband, and daughter Yasmin. She needs her energy to work, so that she could send her daughter to school. Ammi has to finish the work as soon as possible, because that machine is not her own property. "Ammi is bent over the machine now, *her* prayer is rushing straight down the hemline. She's willing the narrow band of cloth to stay in place so the needle can race over it like an express train" (FH 118).

Yasmin also helps her mother to finish her work by bringing food when she was at the machine so that Ammi need not get up. Yasmin's family became poor and this poverty is a manmade crisis. Their poverty is revealed when Ammi gives three coins, two fat ones and one thin coin. "'You'll be careful?' she asks, as if Yasmin has to guard something precious, say ten thousand rupees in her schoolbag. 'You'll come home directly? Don't talk to anyone once you've left Sultana at her class'" (FH 119).

Poverty comes along with its companions. Water, a natural resource also becomes scarce when poverty strikes. Yasmin prays every day and believes that her prayer will be heard and answered by God. Her morning prayer is that, "Allah, your grace can do anything. You know better than anyone that *anything* can happen. Let your grace melt to become water, corporation water. . . . Allah, only you can teach this tap what it means to be a water tap" (FH 117). After

prayer when Yasmin opens the tap it makes a spluttering noise to announce that water is going to flow. She senses Allah's grace and mercy which come through prayer.

Asad and Mala represent the lower-middle economic class. Their married life is challenging in many ways and financial paucity is one of those. Asad who is an artist lives an impoverished life. Being an artist, he is unable to record commercial success and consequently finds it difficult to make both ends meet. He is unable to provide proper house for his family and as a result his wife feels the dearth of space.

Mala suffers the pangs of scarcity in her marriage after a sophisticated childhood. Even though Mala stays with Asad in a dirty rented room, she wants to enjoy her life with Asad. She feels miserable, because of Asad's friend – they have been there all day. As a young woman she feels or wants them to leave so that Asad and she can be together.

Mayamma is another woman character inhaling the stale air of poverty. Her life punctuated with poverty, wretchedness, and illiteracy, cuts a sharp contrast with Devi's deluxe life. She is born in a poor family, married to a pauper and as a result she chooses to be a maid servant. Likewise, Gauri is another maid servant from Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* who makes her living by scrubbing, sweeping and polishing. Her life is also an account of poverty and vulnerability. She works in the Brahmin houses as long as she could. "she had been working to build a little pile of dowry-gold, chain by chain, bangle by bangle" (TFN 31).

India is a land of diverse cultures and religions. Unlike other countries this diversity is not a recent phenomenon of globalisation. It has been deep-seated in our cultural heritage since time immemorial. This diversity has always been an advantage rather than a cause for adversity. Emperors like Ashoka and Akbar have been great symbols of broad-mindedness and religious

tolerance. Throughout medieval ages, one barely finds occurrences of inter-communal clashes though among religious clergy there was prejudice and sectarianism.

However, in the recent past, due to political reasons, a breach has been created between people of different faiths. Differences between Indian Hindus and Indian Muslims have caused far-reaching and devastating damages. India-Pakistan partition is definitely both, the outcome and source for further communal differences when people forget that the basic principle of every religion is love and truth, they allow such differences to take hold of them. Then comes the erosion of values. What Jyoti Mishra in the article entitled “Crisis in Values as Reflected in Jhumpa Lahiri’s *Interpreter of Maladies*” says in this regard is worth notice here:

Since the beginning of the civilization, every society had lived by certain human values and beliefs. These human values had gone into making the society more firm and solid. In older times, people generally abided by these values at any cost. They had the fear of god. They believed in heaven and hell. But with the advent of science and technology, human mentality changed. The existence of Almighty was put to question and people now stopped looking to a life beyond the present one. So there developed a common tendency that, whatever is to be achieved, it is to be achieved only in this very life. ‘Dharma’ and ‘Moksha’ became futile and on the other hand ‘Kama’ and ‘Artha’ acquired prominence in human life. (117)

Gruesome riots and ‘happily ever after’ marriages are by-products of inter-religious exchanges. Githa Hariharan has prolifically transferred this harsh reality of inter-communal and inter-religious riots to her fictional canvas. She relates the incident of Godhra Kand in her *Fugitive Histories* and postmortems the corpse of harmony once prevailed in the state of Gujarat. She also presents the advantages of an inter-religious marriage in the same novel.

Mala and Asad's marriage is an example of inter-religious marriage. Mala from a conservative Hindu family and Asad from a Muslim family, fall in love and sanctify their relationship in wedlock. The striking aspect of this marriage is that it is good and does not end. However, Githa Hariharan is being realistic about it and shows the negative aspects as well.

Mala becomes famous because of her marriage, having eloped with a Muslim. Some of the cousins pretend as if they do not know Mala. Her parents summon her to Madras to show that the rest of the family is not affected by her inter-religious marriage. When Mala is invited by her parents to come to their house, "Asad is not invited; but if they haven't disowned their daughter, things can't be as bad as they seem. They assure their sudden influx of visitors that Asad's family is not religious, they are *quite* modern. Mala's father even adds that Asad is secular" (FH 72). When she comes to her parents' house, Mala's mother angrily says "I hope you're happy" (FH 72). Her mother throws a silk sari at Mala instead of giving it to her and says "I hope you're satisfied everyone is talking about us" (FH 73).

Mala's grandaunt comes and advises her to leave Asad because both their cultures are different. They cannot adapt themselves to the Muslim culture of eating meat and namaz five times a day. The grandaunt pulls her closely and says "Don't they do it differently? And more often?" Her eyes glitter as if on the verge of discovering how to live another twenty years. 'How many times a night?'" (FH 73). This question affects Mala deeply.

Inter-religious marriage was not accepted in India and such times have changed. Everybody wants to keep to their faith and maintain it throughout life. If somebody dares to break this custom through their marriage, then the parents might not even hesitate to kill or punish their child. Mala's grandfather, who wants to show his power, sends Mala to Madras and not to Bombay where Asad is working. He thinks that Madras will give them some hope of

respectability if Mala is able to forget Asad. Mala is summoned to answer why she wants to bring shame on her parents. Her father says “‘How can you want to marry him?’ . . . ‘Think of the difference!’ he says. ‘It’ll always be a problem, the difference between us and them. It won’t go away just because you’re married’” (*FH* 69).

Some days pass in silence. Mala and her parents do not even look at each other. They split the eardrums with long and piously loud pujas to various gods to bring back the house to normalcy. The “high-pitched quarrels . . . usually end with ‘You’re killing us!’” (*FH* 69). They hesitate to send Mala to Bombay, fearing that she may end up marrying the Muslim boy Asad. All of them think only about such differences forgetting the fact Asad is also a human being and an artist, apart from all the other facts.

Even after Mala and Asad marry, the inter-religious problem comes during the naming ceremony of the baby. Asad has overruled by saying that the boy will be called Ahmed or some other good name that begins with A. It is decided earlier that if the baby was a boy it may be called Samar. But now Mala’s mother insists that the new baby should be named Rama or Krishna, or Ramakrishana. When Mala’s mother finds that Mala is not interested in the naming ceremony, she scolds her. “‘First you come up with a strange name we’ve never heard before,’ . . . ‘Then you don’t want a naming ceremony. What do you think, this boy is going to live in a world all by himself?’” (*FH* 32).

Spiritual or identity crisis can also be an ‘Achilles’ heel’ of inter-religious marriage. Sara could not realise her identity through her religion because as she says, “‘I have Muslim relatives and Hindu relatives. I ‘m neither. Sometimes I think I’m Indian. But most of the time I’m just Sara’” (*FH* 167). A couple travelling along with Sara in the train, insists that she share their breakfast. The man asks Sara about her native. But Sara is unable to answer that simple

question. Sara is not proud to be a hybrid. Nor could she be confident to say like her friend's husband Rajat. "I can *make* what I am, I'm not just some inheritance" (FH 178).

Although his family lives in Lucknow, he easily says that his place is Mumbai. Unlike him, Sara says "I don't really know . . . 'I live in Mumbai, but I've lived in other Indian cities. I was born in Chennai, and my parents are from different parts of India. And my father's family is Muslim, my mother's family is Hindu'" (FH 179). Her school going friend Tripti, though quieter, knows who she is. ". . . she was always confident. Perhaps she was born knowing exactly who she was and what sort of life she would live. She was never surprised by anything, simply because she didn't expect surprises, so she refused to believe in them when they happened" (FH 179). One day Tripti asked Sara "So what are you then?' Sara couldn't answer her" (FH 179).

Sara, though confused at times, is happy about her secularism. On the way to the train, she keeps on thinking about who she is and what would Asad or Samar or Mala or Asad's grandfather say of her condition. Asad's grandfather used to say that he is a 'Muslim Indian. Or Indian Muslim' (FH 180). Somehow she acknowledges by saying "she's her parents' daughter, she's secular" (FH 180). Sara could be like her mother, "she is clearer about what she is not rather than about what she is. Sara could be both Hindu and Muslim" (FH 180). Finally Sara understands that being a woman is more important than anything else like her name or religion or social standing. She is not anything but a young woman with a body. When she arrives at her house in Delhi her mother gives a gentle kiss. She recognises her mother's pure affection and she feels that she is lucky. Sara says to her mother, "Good thing Asad and you married when you did'. . . 'How lucky I am'" (FH 184). Mala could not understand why she is saying lucky, Mala asks "Lucky?' 'Yes, I'm beginning to realize how lucky I am. How glad I am that I'm a hybrid.' Sara drops her gaze, and adds almost shyly, 'I wish I could tell Asad that.' When her eyes go

back to her mother, she sees that Mala's look has not wavered. In fact, there's glow on Mala's face as if a lamp has been lit in her heart. 'Maybe he knew it anyway,' she tells Sara" (FH 184).

Githa Hariharan talks about the impact of inter-religious riots on the society and on an individual by citing the gloomy aura in post-Godhra Gujarat. This instance recorded in the recent history has changed the lives of many for generations to come.

Anjum Khan in her article entitled "Theocracy Surrogating Secular Democracy: Vassanji's *The Assassin's Song* And Rushdie's *Shalimar The Clown*" enunciates the fundamental value of love: "Love is the underlying ideal of all religions; however, sometimes followers of a few religions instrumentalise violent forms of passion thus paving way for shedding blood and extreme forms of sadism" (70). The novel provides the readers with a complete version of the actions which followed the Godhra incident. She further declares:

Godra Kand has been a dreadful episode oppugning the secularism of India and like sweltering coal contusing and bruising all around. The real facts follows as- the Godra incident took place 27th February year 2002. The Sabarmathi Express arriving from Ayodhya – a consecrated place for Hindus – with Hindu pilgrims was set to fire by a Muslim mob at Godra station. As a result, 59 Hindu passengers – mostly women, children and seniors returning from the holy city of Ayodhya – were burned alive and the resultant riots and massacres killed 794 Muslims and an additional 254 Hindus. The post-Godra Kand also exerted adverse impact all over the country. (70)

Sara and Nina visit the victims of post Godhra Kand to document the impact of it on their lives. They intend to bring on screen the faces behind shrouds and muffled reality. They act as agents, conveying the reality in a fictional way to the readers. They interview families and

individuals who lived through the brutal catastrophe. Along with Sara, Nina – all the women, girls and little boys also gathered in the room in order to say what has happened to them.

Nasreen begins by describing the situation:

‘The previous night we heard there may be trouble,’ . . . ‘Nothing happened, so we thought it was only a rumour. But in the morning it happened. We heard a crowd was gathering in our area. Then we heard them. Then we saw them. First there were a hundred people, then there were more. There were so many more. There were so many they seemed countless. They had swords, pipes, hockey sticks, soda-lemon bottles, saffron flags, all kinds of sharp weapons. They had petrol bombs and gas cylinders. They broke the dargah down the street and put an idol there. They came to our houses, they were shouting ‘Kill them, cut them, burn them alive!’ Then they blasted apart our lives.’ (*FH* 158)

Sexual assault on women and young girls is the most brutal part of such kinds of communal riots. Zulekha from Ahmedabad talks to Sara and explains about their troubles during the mayhem, ““Those girls were screaming, they were begging us to remove the stumps of wood that had been pushed into them. Each one was crying, ‘Me first, remove mine first’” (*FH* 160). Zulekha feels her blood boils even now when she recollects their screams. Sara does not want to hear this; she wishes to get up and leave the room. Gajan’s opinion regarding the issues of women is quoted in this context:

In the first decade of the 21st century India seems one India but many Indians are within this democratic India. Diversity, sometimes, divides the citizens. Due to that women suffer more. Here, women are not getting the fruits of republic nation because of socio-cultural and political environment. Women’s issues are different

at different level. Women in Metro-cities have different issues, women in towns have also different issues. Women in villages have still worst condition. Caste, community, cultural/financial class have also created peculiar quest for women and they have to face differently. (216-17)

The rioters did not show any concern for the minority people. They worked on people like butchers work on meat. They knew clearly which shops, godowns, restaurants and hotels were owned by Muslims. Consequently, they burnt Muslim's properties. They did many horrible things, like pouring petrol in a little boy's mouth and put a lit matchstick into his mouth. When people asked help from police, they were rejected outright, "The better policeman simply said we can't help you'. . . 'They said we have no orders to help you, you better learn to protect yourselves if you want to live in Hindustan" (FH 160). People spent weeks together in graveyard. "The relief camp we went to was in a graveyard. We were still living but we had to sleep where the dead sleep. We had to sleep between the graves" (FH 161). Noorjehan, another interviewee of Sara and Nina wails:

'They burnt my husband, they burnt my father, they burnt my son. His name was Shafiq, he was just fifteen years old. If only I could have buried them properly, with some dignity . . . if only I could have given them the respect everyone should have in death . . . 'Now give us our men back, give us our children back. All those they took away with made-up charges. Give us our missing ones, our lost ones.'

(FH 162)

Religious fundamentalism is disparaging and it brings forth hostility and misery. Bloodshed and ever shedding tears is the only visible impact of violence in the name of religion. *Fugitive Histories* narrates personal and communal histories of victims and witnesses who

happen to see and suffer the unthinkable. There are blood thirsty cries of rioters which keep echoing. They continue to shout ““Kill them, kill all the Mian! Burn them alive!”” (FH 162). Noorjehan further says about how the people try to hide themselves among the blood thirsty riots:

It’s strange to be hated. It’s strange to be hunted.

‘The police was with them. When we ran, the police began firing.’

‘We had nothing but stones to pelt them with.’

‘We could do nothing but hide.’

‘We hid in the toilets.’

‘We hid on the roof.’

‘We hid in our neighbour’s house.’

‘We hid in the fields.’

‘We hid in the well.’

‘We hid underground, in the water tank.’

There’s no end to the number of places in the world to hide.

There’s no end to the number of unsafe hiding places. (FH 163)

The way the rioters behaved is described by the author: ““They cut him across the forehead, they cut her stomach. They cut his legs, they cut her breasts. They cut his foot off, they cut her arms off. They cut and slashed, cut and slashed. Then they burnt”” (FH 163). Only because of their religion, they were asked to get out of India. Hindu people keep on calling them as Pakistanis, terrorists. They ask the Muslims to go to Pakistan. Now all is over. Sara hears a loud voice saying: ““People don’t want revenge, they want to *live* again”” (FH 165). People begin to lead a new life through their children waiting to live a peaceful life.

The atrocities unnerve the others who did not even happen to witness it. When Sara calls Mala over phone, she explains all things like the desperate road – the burnt ruin, the mounds of garbage, the assault of smells, the buildings' ugly, closed faces, not as good as colonies, park and societies. She is unable to express people's problem through phone. However, she takes charge of her nerves and proceeds with her work.

The plight of Yasmin's family occupies relatively larger space in *Fugitive Histories*. Yasmin lives with her parents in a riot-beaten state. She has lost her brother Akbar and she is emotionally wounded by the ruthless rioters. Everything changes for Yasmin and her family and nothing remains the same: there is death, hurt, poverty, fear, doubt and helplessness in the place of a normal life.

These riots bring nothing but destruction and death and snatch away every good thing from human lives. People stop believing in the future and in anything for that matter. Yasmin's mother always warns her with the same words, “‘*careful, alert, guarding against, taking care, anything can happen*’” (FH 123). Sometimes people even tell her to watch out for good people. Though Yasmin knows Sara and Nina well, she is unable to believe them and hence, refuses the oranges they brought for her even though she likes oranges.

Yasmin begins to believe that they are lucky because they have two rooms, lives in a safe area, with tap in the bathroom, goes to school, and gets money for old house. She feels lucky, for she has not seen her brother and believes that he will come one day or the other.

These riots are manmade plagues which affect innocence, purity and everything good. Yasmin is an innocent, blameless girl who believes that 'Shabana Azmi' can come and free her from the tormenting situation. When she asks Nina about Shabana Azmi, Sara says “‘I like her too,’ ‘And if I ever do, I'll tell her how much you like her’” (FH 112). Yasmin wants to help

her mother. She has brought Nina and Sara to visit other families in the building. They meet 'Feroza-Khala's family. Feroza-Khala's daughter Sultana is Yasmin's friend. Sultana does not go to school, but to tailoring class. Sara writes:

Yasmin, seventeen years old. Yasmin's father had a shop downstairs in the house where they used to live. Yasmin's mother used to be a housewife, now an NGO helps her and other women in the area sell the skirts they stitch and embroider. Yasmin's brother was in college when the trouble started, he did not come back home. He's still missing. Her father was forced to sell their house for whatever he could get and move to a safe area. He's trying to set up a small business, but is often sick. Yasmin is in the last year of school. She wants to go to college, but she failed her boards last year. (FH 114)

Yasmin's mother is extremely worried about the safety of her daughter. According to Khushwant Singh in his novel *Delhi* writes, "Girls are more easy to seduce when they are sixteen than when they are a year or two older. At sixteen they are unsure of themselves and grateful for any reassurance you can give them about their looks or brains—either will do" (FH114). When Yasmin meets Sara under the neem tree, a man stares at them. Yasmin feels that anything can happen. So she prays and that small prayer makes her to walk faster, "*Allah, never let me dream again. Never let me forget that I am alone*" (FH 136). When she sees Sara's face, she feels happy. "Sara's face takes Yasmin out of herself, just for a split second. It makes Yasmin like her Ammi, forgetting herself, forgetting she's alone, at least long enough to give Sara a quick and awkward hug" (FH 136). Yasmin needs a safe and good life. Githa Hariharan writes that her past "makes her sad only for a while when she remembers. But Akbar, the house, the shop, their lives—these can't be memories because they are with her, with them, all the time. They are part of

them, they have become Ammi's tight heart and Abba's coughing lungs. And the long curving scar on Yasmin's thigh that no one can see though she knows it's there" (FH 144).

When Yasmin comes out of the school, she expects Sara to wait for her. But no one waits for her there. So she feels lonely again. Yasmin walks along the straight road. The man selling peanuts looks at her. She hurries, but he keeps on watching. She prays "*Allah, I'm not greedy, you know I never ask you for big things. Only small things*" (FH 148). The prayer is answered, she can no longer see the man. When Yasmin reaches her house she thinks that someone has died, but she does not hear any wailing sound. But the room is full of people. Ammi's sewing machine is there in its usual place. When Ammi sees Yasmin, "she gives her a relieved smile, her way of saying, 'Thank god, you came home safe, you were careful'" (FH 153). They share their memories from 2002. Nina and Sara record the real stories.

Yasmin also represents a helpless young girl who wants to set everything right. She is a dreamer who wishes to pursue her higher studies and take up a career to support her family and herself. However, the shadows made by the inter-religious riots make her vision and mission blur and slower. She sews alongside her mother and tries to make money for their food and her education, "She spends more time doing the finishing work now, hemming or embroidery. "But this is just while you prepare for your exams,' Ammi tells Yasmin. 'Once your exams are over, I'll have to stitch more skirts than before. You can help me. We'll make as many as we can, we'll make up a college scholarship for you all by ourselves'" (FH 222).

Yasmin believes in the power of prayers and seeks refuge in her prayers. Her simple prayer changes her life like "*Teach me to be patient, Allah. The wall is getting higher, it's getting harder and harder to see what's on the other side*" (FH 224). Yasmin's family receives a letter from Sara. Sara has written "If her parents are willing to let Yasmin live in a hostel in Mumbai,

Sara and her friends will help with the admission and fees” (FH 226). Then she prays “*Allah, let me go. Let me get a seat in a college, any college anywhere*” (FH 226). Yasmin’s parents discuss about Yasmin’s higher education and her life in Mumbai. Finally Yasmin decides to be with her family because her parents have already lost one son; so they do not want to lose another daughter by sending her to Mumbai. Her father says, “‘How can we let you go alone?’ . . . ‘I don’t have to go to Mumbai, Abba. I just want to go to college.’ *Teach me to be brave, Allah. The wall has cracks, it may break any minute. But it’s still high. It’s still hard to see what’s on the other side*” (FH 228).

Old age and aging are not only social issues but aspects of human life which require contemplation and dissertated discourse. Anjum Khan in her article entitled “Aging or Old Age: A Mechanism of Disintegration in Anita Desai’s *In Custody* and *Fasting, Feasting*” states “Living is a composite prowess postulating all deformities and virtues of life. Depression, social or domestic estrangement and old age or aging are few of the deformities that are essentially present in an individual’s life” (159). She further says:

Old age or aging is a critical juncture in one’s life demanding special attention and requiring extraordinary needs. Senile dementia and other physical disorders are few ailments disconcerting the tranquil temperament of aging. Besides, there are other maladies related to old age sense of insecurity, incertitude, grievances against their younger counterparts, dearth of gusto, apprehension of unknown and death - commonly pervading in every elderly individual’s life. (159-60)

Mala in Githa Hariharan’s *Fugitive Histories* represents old age and loneliness. She is a widower, who lives on the memories of past and whose happiness is comprised by less frequent phone calls from her children. She lives alone in her apartment and keeps fidgeting with relics

from her past. She tries arranging and rearranging them as one does with a puzzle in order to bring out the right dimension or right answer. She keeps mulling over her past and tries shaping and reshaping it every now and then. She finds solace in the old trunk and such other unused yet very important tokens of the past as they represent life itself to her.

Mala is a self-confident woman. She tries to prove herself what she has told her children. “Go back to your work. I can manage. Get on with your lives” (*FH 3*). She opens the tin trunk of Asad and tries to recognise it and sort out all things like cleaning the cupboard. Mala is alone; in order to get away from her loneliness she does things like cleaning and re-structuring the house. Once the cupboard is over she begins to clean the trunk. She finds out only sketch books, which tell her that they are alive. “Maybe it’s something as simple and indescribable as that secret that can sometimes reveal itself, become an open secret for a brief and piercing moment: I am *alive!* We are alive!” (*FH 7*). It indirectly says that Asad is still alive through his sketch books.

When Mala is in Delhi, she is waiting for her dead husband. She has to do the things like washing dishes, putting them away, watching TV and checking her e-mail. However, in the midst of all works “She can feel the air of anticipation in the empty rooms, the sense that someone is waiting for her. She has to finish what she’s doing so she can get back to him” (*FH 11*). Asad is waiting for her, or at least his diaries. While thinking about Asad’s presence, she feels that her presence is real only with his possessions. To calm down herself she smokes a cigarette.

Mala also tries to put on her dream identity. She aspires to change herself and become someone she wanted to be as a small girl. Mala wants to climb a tree and wants to ride a cycle fast. However, she could not and when others do this she feels jealous, and is filled with rage.

“Being her seemed to mean being inept, her fear of failure making her taste failure even before she had actually failed. Failure tasted like a chalky peanut, or an overripe orange that spurted rotten- sour juice into her mouth” (FH 14). Like a small child her ambition centres around trees and bicycles. She wants to go to the library. “What she wanted was to find a place to be in or a thing to do that would set her free from her family, her home and school in the city, and her annual summer home in the village. What she wanted was to be set free from herself. What she *really* wanted was to be someone else” (FH 14-15). Though Mala wants to be someone else, she knows that she can never be someone else. She has to be herself till her death. However she thinks “Maybe she’ll be reborn as someone who can climb taller trees and ride faster bicycles than anyone she knows” (FH 17). She also knows that if she’s born as someone else she will have another mother.

Being alone in the house, Mala constantly remembers Asad. She begins the night in her bed, but is careful to sleep with her back to the side where Asad should be. She has a wandering mind and she thinks that she hears the telephone ring from Sara or Samar. She has forgotten to turn off the gas and imagines she has not set the alarm. Asad always comes wherever expected, especially in her dreams. To remember Asad, she begins to open the same sketch book.

Mala needs some security to wipe out her loneliness. Once Asad brought soapstone standing Ganesh which was moved to Delhi to Asad’s studio. He put Ganesh into drawing, though the final effect of the drawing was ugly and misshapen, she gets comfort from the image. She believes that the divinely keepsake will be her bodyguard and stay with her and watch over her. Even though Asad is not near, his drawings make her feel comfortable because she has loved, admired and has been drawn towards her husband like a magnet.

Whenever Mala is in the flat, she feels lonely and cooks meal for one and eats. However, she feels safe in her bedroom, because of the cupboard and the sketch books. She visits her college friend Nasreen in Dilkush Mansion. Mala is an old woman, who enjoyed her life with her husband, and her children. She spends her time by visiting the neighbours or waiting for her children's phone call. However, in the case of Devi in *The Thousand faces of Night*, it is different as a young woman's distractions; she has chosen her life with Gopal.

Mayamma from *The Thousand faces of Night* is yet another old woman who has no retirement from work due to her poverty and she keeps struggling along in order to keep alive herself. She has no family to go back to and she has not fond memories to dwell upon. She just goes on living and doing her chores. Parvatiamma is absent from the scene but lives through others. Spiritual attainment becomes her sole quest in her old age. She leaves her family and her material life behind to look for God.

The maladies of human life are many and they multiply in the lives of women. Several of these can be dealt at the social level itself as these are collective. When human beings realise that they are social beings who are created to be the crown of beings and that they need to uphold human dignity and values, these maladies can be cured.