

Chapter IV

Life Told as a Tale

Stories serve the purpose of consolidating whatever gains people or their leaders have made or imagine they have made in their existing journey through the world.

(Achebe)

Myth plays a very significant role in human psychology and society. Myth has a close association with human history and has been in vogue from time immemorial. Regarding the themes of myth, Lillian Feder points out that they, “express man’s fear of and awe at the mysterious cycle of the death and rebirth of the year and his involvement in the mystery of his own birth, nature and death” (qtd. in Kumar 4).

Myths have been used for telling stories of animals and plants. Sometimes, they are considered equivalent to truth. The mythical characters are more or less like superhuman beings. Myths affect the spiritual and cultural life of people. Joseph Durairaj in his book *Myth and Literature* discourses:

Myths are uncanny phenomena. They are at once regional and yet universal; static and yet dynamic; stable and yet protean; archaic and yet contemporary; profligate and yet hallowed; fantastic and yet highly-structured; divine and yet human in that they are as much about gods and goddesses as about human beings. Though they belong to a pre-literate and pre-historical era, they keep recurring in all ages and are a part of our contemporary society. . . . In short, myths are endowed with flexibility, adaptability and resilience which help creative artists to transpose and transplant them in diverse cultures and media. (9)

Like myths, fables are also fiction. The most important purpose of a fable is to teach a lesson or a moral to the listeners or readers. The characters of the fable can be animals or humans. Folktales are also fictitious and they have human or non-human characters.

A legend is a story in the form of action made up by human beings and it possesses certain qualities which provide the tale its probability. It is a larger-than-life story which is unique by nature. It can be of a historical or individual event, nonetheless, unverifiable. Sometimes it is transformed over time to change the order or to keep it clean and fundamental and practical. However, the exclusivity of a legend is that no one can completely believe it, nor doubt it. It is an incredible reality or fictional reality.

Stories intend to say something and try to create the world in which people live. These are also created and recreated as a result of journey and travel around. Andrew Smith in the article "Migrancy, hybridity, and postcolonial literary studies" deems:

Human beings have presumably always traveled, and they have presumably always recounted and imagined tales on the basis of their traveling. . . . the tradition of telling stories has a historical link to social figures such as the journeyman apprentice, the pilgrim, the merchant sailor: all those who were able to leave their homes and return with narratives, straightforward and embellished, of the places and people they had seen in their wanderings. (242)

Most of the stories used by Githa Hariharan have a proper beginning, middle and end. There are open ended stories also and hence, are left to the interpretation of the readers. A good story makes the reader take an excursion into his own imagination or makes him feel real. Moreover, it will also make the readers feel that they are part of the society.

Das in his book *Twentieth Century Literary Criticism* quotes what Levi-Strauss says about myths, “Myths have no authors” (85). Myth reveals the belief or conviction of a particular group. Myth is a conventional unknown story and is different from other fables and legends. Das also quotes in the book what Murfin and Ray remark:

‘Myths are different from legends, which detail the adventures of a human cultural hero (such as Robin Hood or Annie Oakley) and tend to be less focused on the supernatural. Whereas a legend may exaggerate—perhaps even wildly—the exploits of its hero, it is likely to be grounded in historical fact. Myths also differ from fables, which have a moral, didactic purpose and usually feature animal characters.’ (85)

Religious myth has been elucidated along with mystical activities. Myth can be related to religion. It has been regarded as a universal necessity. It is the relationship between man and his creator. Religion is a product of faith and it gives birth to myths and dogmas. Writers of various countries have used these religions and myths to present their culture and social aspects. Indian writers also use Indian myths to present their forms with variety and richness.

The mythical and religious beliefs based on the Indian epics accept the values of Indian traditional life. What Iros Vaja in the book *Myths in Girish Karnad's Plays (A Critical Study)* says regarding myth is quoted extensively.

Today, myth need not be a blatant tale of some fictitious character belonging to fictitious past; however, it can be a memory of the past, told in a fictitious way. A myth is a legend of natural up growth embodying the conviction of people as to their gods or other divine personages, their own origin and early history and the heroes connected with it, the origin of the world, etc. (corresponding to Hindu

story as given in *Purana*.) It is the record of the experience of multitudes and generations of people. The myth expresses a general truth, acceptable to all. . . . Myths are deep rooted in the psyche of the whole society and they are created to serve some function or to explain the mysterious natural phenomenon. The divine myths explaining the natural divine powers are the reflections of human thoughts and superstitions. Myths were the symbolic presentation of primitive man's instinct (40-41)

All the writers in the world consider myths and religion very important aspects of literature through which they can present their respective countries. Indian writers have made an outstanding use of Indian myths in all their forms, variety and richness. A number of mythical or legendary women characters are found in Indian culture. There are many aspects of their lives which are compared to legendary scenarios. Anita Singh in her book *Indian English Novel in the Nineties and After: A Study of the Text and its Context* states:

Myths are to use T.S. Eliot's phrase in *Little Gidding* 'A pattern of timeless moments.' Elizabeth Barrett Browning refers to myths as the 'antique moulds' It is obvious that myths contain the basic ideas that govern the entire culture of a nation. The culture, which is governed and shaped by such fundamental ideas not only shapes the epistemology but also the works of art. These works consciously or unconsciously represent the ideas in an indirect way. (115)

There are plentiful writers who have shown their interest in writing and giving predilection for fables and folklores. Amongst the post independent Indian writers, Girish Karnard is considered as a very significant dramatist who deals with myths. In *Naga-Mandala*, *Yayati*, *Hayavadana* and *The Fire and the Rain*, he brings out the predominance of mythical

elements. Works like R.K. Narayan's *The Man-Eater* (1961), Anita Desai's *Where Shall We Go This Summer* (1982), Shashi Deshpande's *A Matter of Time* (1996), Shashi Tharoor's *The Great Indian Novel* (1989), Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1993) and Anjana Appachana's *Listening Now* (1998) represent the mythological characters from the Mahabharatha, Brahadaranyaka Upanishad and Katha Upanishad. Chitra Banerjee's *Mistress of Spices* (1997) and *Sister of My Heart* (1999) also deal with mythical characters. Vikram Chandra's *Red Earth and Pouring Rain* (1995) and Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (2004) reveal the tales from Arabian Nights and represent the parody of the Mahabharatha.

Githa Hariharan uses the technique of juxtaposing the traditional myths and stories with ordinary lives of her fictional characters. The stories of myths play a vital role in the Indian traditional family system. And it also passes from one generation to another generation.

The grandmothers play an essential role in every family, because they pass on mythical tales and legends from their generation to the next generations. Parents keep their mothers in their house to take care of their children and for some needful help. This does not happen in all houses, but in some cases they keep their elderly mothers to look after their children and nurture them with moral and traditional sustenance.

The grandmother's tales can be regarded as a ritual which takes place almost in every family. However, this practice is declining in the Indian society as a result of programmes on television. Moreover, television has grandmother surrogates by telecasting mythical stories. There are grandmothers and elders who pass on stories from myth and folklore. According to Indian setting, the stories are constantly related to the grandmother, who has an anecdote sack full of folk tales, legendary myths and supernatural stories, gathered from tradition and epics.

In addition to this, literature has contributed to the reawakening of myth and folklore by incorporating it inside the literary text in the form of allusions and embedded narratives. Retelling of myth and folklore is significant not only for preserving and immortalising traditions but also to highlight the contemporary realism.

Githa Hariharan's attempt to relate myth with contemporary reality is commendable in her fictional texts. The present-day scenarios are highlighted and analysed with ancient and long-established tales. Past ethics alongside resolutions for the present day is projected prolifically. Poverty, substandard condition of women, barrenness, parent-children relationship, caste discrimination, materialism and physical disability all such life scenarios are discussed in her works.

Patriarchy has been prevalent in the society and this is confirmed by the myths, legends and folklores. There are myths which illustrate how man has always been on the top of the domestic and social hierarchy. Such myths and tales are retold by Githa Hariharan's characters. The characters as story tellers are acquainted with several ideas which have been archetypal.

Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* delineates how women deal with the society. It may be read as revisionist myth-making programme in which the novelist attempts to renew the whole community of women through representation of myths. The novel traces the effects of patriarchy on women of different social classes and ages. The patriarchal domination is particularly explored in the restrictive union of marriage relating the mythological characters to the characters of the novel. Githa Hariharan shows that down the ages the society has sustained the same ideal of womanhood. Although some characters like Sita and Parvatiamma, are mostly involved in the Hindu value system, they begin to rebel against the institution of marriage. They turn their state of suppression and slavery as a powerful weapon against the patriarchal society.

This makes them feel that they have to fight for their comfort, space and power to change their destiny and also that of others. Through the tales, Githa Hariharan passes on important values for the future generations.

There are story tellers who relate ancient myths and popular tales in order to review and revive the existing condition of women. Grandmothers, elderly men, mothers and every one else who take charge of narrating these stories see that the message is also delivered to the listeners.

The story of *The Thousand Faces of Night* revolves around Sita, her only daughter Devi and Mayamma. The oldest among all the women in the novel is Devi's grandmother. Though she is not present in the novel, she makes her invisible presence felt throughout the novel with the help of her myths and stories, which Devi recollects throughout the fiction. Her grandmother belongs to the older generation, in which Indian women were expected to be ideal, virtuous and restricted only to household activities.

Although Devi's grandmother follows these things, she does not want her next generation to be like this. So she feeds Devi with fantasy and mythical stories. As Kenneth Burke emphasises, "Stories are equipment for living." For her grandmother Devi is as much a precious princess as any of the women in her myths. She is such a strong-willed woman, who wants to change women's role as laid by tradition and culture. Devi's grandmother wishes her granddaughter's generation to change and modify its life style.

As Devi's grandmother grows older, her stories also get a new shape and form. When Devi grows older she begins to draw a link between the stories of her grandmother and the real life around her. The mythical stories come alive before her eyes. She understands and sees things in a newer and brighter light. Devi's grandmother does her role in nurturing Devi with good values and teaches her moral and social aspects and shapes Devi.

Uma, a cousin of Devi, gets married to a wealthy man, but one day her father-in-law misbehaves with her. In a drunken state he kisses her on her lips. She comes out from her in-law's house and stays with Devi's grandmother, instead of having the courage to oppose or punish her father-in-law or inform her husband about this.

As Uma leaves her house in silence, she loses the joy and happiness of her marital life. Uma's father-in-law goes on living without any remorse or sense of guilt. Githa Hariharan brings out the traditional scenario from which a woman is unable to escape such a situation. To fight against such a circumstance, a woman must be audacious. She should have educational qualifications which will embolden her to ask questions against the oppressing patriarchal society.

Devi relates Uma's real life story to the story of Amba in the Mahabharata. Prince Bheeshma goes to the swayamvara and abducts three beautiful princesses. One of them is Amba who has already been engaged to king Salwa. The king and the princes could not stop Bheeshma from kidnapping. He takes them to his stepmother. There Amba pleads with the queen to allow her to go to king Salwa. The generous queen and Bheeshma consent to let Amba go to Salwa. Unfortunately, when she goes to Salwa, he insults her and says that he is not ready to marry her.

Salwa treats Amba as an object of possession or some edible thing and he compares her to leftover food. He angrily says, "Do you think I feast on leftovers? I am a king. I do not touch what another man has won in battle. Go to Bheeshma. He won you when his arrow struck my eager hands on your luckless garland. He is your husband. What have you to do with me?" (TFN 37).

Without knowing what to do, or where to go, Amba returns to Bheeshma. But he also refuses to accept her as his wife. Filled with thoughts of retribution, Amba proceeds towards a

forest. This incident changes Amba's life and makes her take vengeance on Bheeshma. The mythological truth reveals that Bheeshma is not killed by a man or a woman. He has got a boon from God that he would not be killed by anyone except a person who is neither a man nor a woman. Amba lives in the forest meditating on God Shiva, who blesses her and tells her, "Whoever wears this garland will surely kill Bheeshma" (*TFN* 39).

Amba travels to many courts of kings, who are already famous for their strength and power. She gives them her garland of destruction asking them to fight with Bheeshma. However, nobody is willing or courageous enough to fight with Bheeshma. Therefore she throws her garland at the court of King Drupada. Then she dies alone in the forest.

After Amba's death, she is reborn as a daughter to Drupada and she is raised as a son. She wears the garland which is thrown by her in the past and goes to the battle and defeats Bheeshma. Although, Uma is not like Amba, she comes back to her house and does not take revenge on her enemies. Bheeshma is held solely responsible for Amba's wasted life. It is his fault that he did not marry her. She wants to act against male domination when he refuses to take her as his wife. She snatches away her own right when it is denied in the patriarchal society.

As a ten year old girl Devi is not mature enough to understand the real purpose of the story. Whatever she understands from the story remains permanently with her and echoes throughout her life. Her grandmother is her first and foremost teacher; she extracts secret knowledge from her grandmother. All these mythical women characters like – Damayanthi, Gandhari, Amba and Ganga have great vehemence in them and staged their protest against exploitation in their own powerful ways.

As a young girl Devi assesses her womanhood and confesses to herself, "I lived a secret life of my own: I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger and cut off evil,

magical demons' heads" (*TFN* 41). In order to bring out the warrior woman in her, Gittha Hariharan uses the figures of Amba and Gandhari.

Woman protagonists like Gandhari, Sita and the snake's wife only follow their husband's footsteps and other women like Amba, and Devi take to their act of vengeance. There are two ways, either to act upon their husbands commands or to bring upheaval against them. Gittha Hariharan relates both sets of mythical women to her women characters.

When Dreams Travel narrates an instance which shows how even sages and wise men considered women susceptible to moral weaknesses lacking in integrity. Rupavata and Rupavati, a couple in their generosity to a Brahmin, confront a critical situation. They run out of alms and the Brahmin asks Rupavati to prove her chastity and perform a miracle. This shows how the men stereotyped women. Chastity is always associated with women and not with men.

Women's boldness to venture beyond the limits meets with censure. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Vishnu and Venu consider their mother Mangala as an adept in telling ghost stories. When a woman goes beyond her limits she has to face some danger. The story Mangala tells her children is about a woman who wishes like that without realising the dangers lurking behind.

Mangala says about Eliamma of the seashore who has been living in a fishing village. She has been brought up to be a fisherwoman like all other women. But one thing sets her apart from the rest of the women in the village. She is very beautiful, with long and thick hair and fish-shaped eyes. She has many admirers who want to marry her. But she prefers to live alone in her hut. During night time she wanders here and there "like an orphan looking for her home" (*GVM* 126). She looks at the sea with longing and she wishes to be at the centre of the sea. But no fishermen would allow her to go into the sea.

One night, Eliamma sits beside an old boat, where a man and a woman, who look like the guardians of the village, are already seated. She falls asleep, looking at both of them. When she wakes up from her sleep, she sees a stranger, who willingly offers to help her to travel across the ocean if she still wants to go. For that she must become invisible, so that the fishermen will not prevent her. He tells her that he would take care of her visible body. Eliamma becomes invisible and impatiently embarks on her sea-voyage. Sometimes the sea is good, and sometimes it is splendid. She does not want to go back to her hut. She is fascinated by the rock, water, boat and so she loses all sense of time. When Eliamma comes back to the seashore she does not find the stranger anywhere. Nor is she able to find her visible body and so cannot become a visible woman any longer.

Eliamma also represents a heroine who rebels against patriarchy. It is men who enjoy the freedom to choose and to do things as they desire, when women are restricted even from imagining. Mangala concludes her story, “to be completely invisible was to be lonely in a way the living did not know . . . Eliamma waits . . . She waits and waits, a patient ghost, for the day she will find someone who sees her briefly. Someone who will willingly accept her freakish gift” (*GVM* 130).

Mangala and Eliamma are mysterious and look longingly at the “watery landscape that deepened as it flowed toward the horizon” (*GVM* 131). Vasu Master remembers Mangala looking longingly at “some remote point in the distance where sea melted into sky” (*GVM* 124). She seems to be different, amenable and giving herself to more change. The last canvas Jameela has embroidered for Mangala is “a hazy secape in which all was ambiguous movement, suggestive of mysterious possibility” (*GVM* 131).

What D.H. Lawrence says about dream is worth notice here: “All people dream, but not equally. / Those who dream by night in the dusty recesses of their mind, / wake in the morning to find that it was vanity. / But the dreamers of the day are dangerous people, / For they dream their dreams with open eyes, / And make them come true.” Githa Hariharan brings in the concept that a woman of ambition has to face a lot of difficulties before she achieves it, whereas a man’s dreams are valued and pursued easily.

Women have an intense desire to rise above the fences which are built by their male counterparts and this passionate urge can lift them up high above every barrier. All these characters wait to change something, and wait for something. Woman, Githa Hariharan believes, is full of immense possibility which remains ‘mysterious’ to man, only because he never tries to realise it.

Myths, folktales and legends educate the listeners or readers in a way, and a few enlighten on the importance of education. Evidently, women have been the best story tellers. They feel at ease telling the stories passed on to them from others. This rich tradition of passing stories has educated and implanted various possibilities. Seemin Hasan in the article entitled “Humanism, Secularism and Tolerance in Indian Women’s Poetry in English” expresses his views regarding the role of women:

Women have always played an important role as first educators for their children in inculcating values in most societies and cultures. Traditionally, this has been behind the scene work, within the confines of the home and has not been treated as news worthy. Teaching spiritual, moral, social and cultural values that develop awareness and self-knowledge, teaching principles which distinguish right from wrong, encourage positive relationships, understanding of citizenship

responsibilities, cultural traditions, participation in communities have long been included in the forum of women's responsibilities. (2)

It is a well-known fact that the wisdom and culture of one generation is passed on to another by oral tradition. Similarly the values and beliefs are also passed on through storytelling. In the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, Githa Hariharan puts forth the idea that a mother can be a good teacher for her children. She portrays the mother as a teacher who instructs her children in the most meaningful way.

Vasu Master has been teaching cycling to Venu for a long time. Venu is unable to learn balancing in cycling, as long as Vasu Master teaches him. But the night Venu's mother Mangala dies, Venu and the cycle are not seen in the house. Later Vasu Master learns that his mother's sad memory enables him to ride the cycle, where the father has failed. A child can learn anything through the mother easily. It is because teaching requires kind-heartedness. The story told by Githa Hariharan is quite appropriate in this context.

Vasu Master writes in his notebook about who is called a teacher and how a guardian can give adult life to a small child. To explain the context he writes about a mouse who wants to be a teacher. He goes to a prudent snake who lives close to him. Then he asks the snake "how do I become a teacher? The snake looked at the gentle mouse doubtfully. Then he said, You have to first become a judge, an ideologue, a priest and a doctor" (*GVM* 29). The mouse thinks for a while and then determines to do things right away to gain the needed qualities for a teacher. He begins to discard his nervousness and learns to make rubrics and pass judgements and execute accordingly. He begins to communicate his sense of correctness and mistakes. He is trained to read into the minds and hearts, to free other animals from burden and give assistance to them to rise above their problems. After the mouse has mastered all these, the snake tells, "Now comes

the really difficult part. You must grow a womb that nurtures, then delivers. The mouse tottered home, bursting with knowledge” (*GVM* 30).

The mouse asks his old mother about how to be a teacher. “All set to be a teacher? One last lap, the mouse confessed sheepishly. Will you teach me to be a mother?” (*GVM* 30). If one wants to become a good teacher one must experience how to be a good mother. For the reason that, nobody in the world can be equal to a mother.

A teacher should be the nurturer and helper for students to attain their goals in life. A good teacher would be able to help even children with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. The teacher should have the holistic approach and should be exceedingly compassionate and enduring. The teachers should make the children feel that their life is worth living and that they are accepted and valued by everyone in the world. A teacher should be nurturing and tending the students as if they are new leaves on a plant, so that they can grow to be confident.

Education is sometimes contained and manifested differently. It does not necessarily mean a diploma or graduation. Passion to see, observe and learn also constitute education. Thinking and rationalising are the most important forms of education. Githa Hariharan draws a contrast between Mangala and Vasu Master’s grandmother in the novel *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*. Even though Mangala is the first educated woman in her family, she believes in ghosts.

Vasu Master’s grandmother is quite different from Mangala. Though she is illiterate, she does not believe in ghosts: “What is a ghost, Nuisance? Nothing but a part of you that’s no longer in control. A little pocket of garbage in your mind that rots and begins to stink. So—what do you do? Take a big broom and sweep it out, making sure you don’t leave anything behind”

(*GVM* 138). The lack of education does not lead her to believe superstitiously. On the contrary, she is a rationalist.

Vasu Master recalls his grandmother as “the first love of my life” (*GVM* 34). His father is a chief physician (the ayurved) of their household; but he has a rival in his own mother. His mother believes that, “the kitchen was the sole apothecary; and food a magic weapon” (*GVM* 34). She believes food can cure many diseases. “Food cures your body naturally . . . Anything, from constipation and insomnia to impotence” (34). Chilli is an indispensable component in her kitchen. She grows chilli plants and vegetables in the backyard. She classifies her concoctions into the everyday menu and her special chutneys which she calls wisdom chutneys. Vasu Master’s grandmother is a shrewd, powerful and courageous woman. She believes in chastisement. She calls him ‘Nuisance-Krishna’ with an extreme fondness.

Vasu Master recalls a story told by his grandmother. The story is about a foolish boy and a wise woman. A little boy and an old lady live in a forest. The old lady works very hard all her life. The boy imagines that the forest is a risky place. The old woman tells him that there are no wild animals and so there is no danger in the forest. But the boy does not believe her.

Later on, one night a cruel tiger comes to their hut. The boy is scared, runs near the river calling for the old woman. Seeing the tiger very close to him, he jumps into the river. As he could not swim he is drowned and dies. The fact is that there is no tiger, it is only his imagination. Vasu’s grandmother is a wise and brave woman like the old woman in the story whereas Vasu Master is afraid of ghosts like the foolish boy.

The story tells that one should overcome fear. Fear leads one to destruction. Sometimes, fear of individuals takes a form and manifests itself in various ways. Undoubtedly, fear is a

destructive and negative emotion. *The Holy Bible* says, “For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me” (Job. 3:25).

Marriage is considered to be a consecrated institution of society. It is a bond of love which binds more than just two individuals. Marriage has been an important theme of myths, legends and folklores. Mythical figures are resurrected to set role models of ideal husbands and wives. Githa Hariharan has employed such mythical and legendary accounts to focus on marriage.

Trust and unquestionable confidence is the strongest thread which binds a marriage. Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* incorporates one such mythical story to emphasise it. The most remarkable story told by Devi’s grandmother is about Shantanu, king of Bharata. One day he meets a woman who shimmers with beauty (Ganga in person). Shantanu wants to marry her and so proposes to her. She promises to marry him only if he will not interfere with her actions. They get married and she bears him seven sons, but after each child is born, she throws it into the water of the Ganga. Shantanu could not approve of such behaviour but he does not speak a word against her. When the eighth child is born, he desists and a dispute follows. As he has gone against the promise, Ganga goes back to her normal form. Their argument is as follows: “she held the eighth child high over the water, a tender smile about her lips, the king cried, “Stop! Enough, do not kill this one too!” “Then take him,’ she said, ‘take him and be father and mother to him. I shall not free him from life.’ ‘Then she plunged into her river that flowed down from heaven”” (*TFN* 88-89).

This story can be compared to Geoffrey Chaucer’s “Clerk of Oxford’s Tale” in *The Canterbury Tales*. It is about king Walter and his wife Griselda. He proposes to marry poor Janicola’s daughter Griselda for her beauty and goodness. He tells her that he would marry her if

she is ready to love and obey him in all things. She agrees to his proposal and marries him. Their life begins with happiness but her happiness does not last long.

After the birth of the first child, Walter tells Griselda that the child has been killed by him because that is not a male child. After four years she brings forth a baby boy. Then he says that people do not want poor Janicola's grandson to be the king. So he takes away the male child also from her. After a few years he wants to test his wife again. He says that he is going to marry a rich and noble lady; and so he will send Griselda away from the palace.

Walter does all sorts of things to test his wife's patience and love. Though these incidents make her feel sad, she does not lose her patience; nor does she become angry with him. She suffers all these things and continues to love her husband. Ganga wants to test her husband's trust in her, whereas, here, Walter tests his wife.

Honouring and respecting one's wife is a divine deed that glorifies a marriage. It fetches spiritual blessings for the entire family. Aravind Adiga in his novel *The White Tiger* says, "But without family, a man is nothing. Absolutely nothing" (189). Baba from *The Thousand Faces of Night* declares while telling the story of Jeyadeva that "Where women are honoured, there the gods delight; where they are not honoured, there all acts become fruitless." "Women," . . . "have always been the instruments of the saint's initiation into *bhakti*" (TFN 65).

When Jeyadeva sings his Gita Govinda, in all-embracing love, he writes on cudjan leaves with his sharp fingernail. "*samara garala khandanam mama sirasi mandanam/dehi pada pallava mudaram . . .*" (TFN 65). Jeyadeva writes his words into Krishna's sweet mouth "the poison of love has rushed up to my head. Only your tender, rose-coloured feet on my head will chase the poison down my body" (TFN 65). Then Jeyadeva comes out of his trance, he reads

those lines and shudders at the sacrilegious thoughts. After that he leaves his manuscript with his wife and goes to take oil bath.

Padmavati is the wife of Jeyadeva. Lord Krishna comes to her in the disguise of her husband and takes the manuscript. He returns the manuscript after adding a few lines. When Jeyadeva sees this miraculous thing he falls down at Padmavati's feet. Padmavati is a fortunate woman who has seen Lord Krishna whereas her husband has not seen him. So he keeps the lines in his song of Govinda, includes his wife's name and signs as the husband of Padmavati. Through her, the husband glorifies and understands God's presence. "A great man can see the spiritual greatness of his wife" (*TFN* 65).

Likewise, there is a folktale cited in the same novel which stresses on the virtues of a wife. Purandara Dasa is a wealthy businessman dealing with precious stones. When his wealth begins to grow his nature changes. He becomes more and more stingy and does not help anyone. Once a Brahmin comes to Purandara Dasa at his shop and asks him for money. Purandara Dasa refuses to give him money. The Brahmin after going to all houses asking for money, finally goes to Sarasvati Bai, Purandara's wife. Without realising that it is Purandara Dasa's house he tells about his condition to Purandara's wife. Purandara Dasa's wife takes pity on him and she gives away her nose-ring.

The Brahmin goes to Purandara Dasa's shop to sell the ring. Purandara Dasa recognises the ring to be his wife's, and asks her to bring the ring. Frightened of her husband she decides to drink poison to end her life. When she is about to drink it, the potion vanishes; instead she could see the exact ring she has given to the Brahmin. When Purandara Dasa learns all these things he feels ashamed of his deed. The transformed Purandara Dasa gives away all his property and decides to lead a simple life. "Non-violence, truthfulness, honesty, purity, control of the senses—

this in brief, is the dharma of all the four castes” (TFN 66). Purandara Dasa’s wife is a typical generous woman, who not only cares for her family but also is concerned about the welfare of others. The love of money brings only evil things. As Francis Bacon points out, “Money is a great servant but a bad master.”

Baba sums up his stories with a determined conclusion saying, ““By public confession, repentance, penance, repetition of holy mantras, and by gifts, the sinner is released from sin. That which is hard to get over, hard to get, hard to reach, hard to do, all that can be accomplished by penance: it is difficult to overcome penance”” (TFN 67). Women characters are portrayed as virtuous, good and respectable. When women follow such activities they will be glorified forever. The virtues of these characters like selflessness, sacrifice and generosity are rarely found in the women of the modern materialistic world.

The opportunity and ability to make a choice is intricately implanted in the myth and fictional tales of Devi. Devi recalls her grandmother’s narration of the story of Damayanti. The story of Nala and Damayanti is a popular legend in Indian mythology. All the kings wear expensive robes and jewels in order to impress the bride princess. Damayanti enters the hall, walks slowly, towards the row of crowned bridegrooms. Githa Hariharan says, ““Her heart, loyal and steadfast, never wavered from the path leading to Nala, the king of the Nishadas, and her feet, adorned with gold rings and henna, were sure of their destination. The honeyed words of Nala’s courier, the wild swan who had won her heart for him, sang in her ear as she sought out her destiny”” (TFN 20).

The story of Nala and Damayanti inspires and fascinates Devi’s seven year old mind. Her grandmother has sown in her the seed of self-choice – “the regal dignity and solemnity of a *swayamvara*” (TFN 18). Devi meets five or six potential bridegrooms, and among those, she

selects Mahesh, a regional manager in a multinational company. Like men, women also are eligible to select their partners of their taste and choice.

Devi's grandmother leads her to an ideal womanhood, prepares her to face the world and teaches her to be courageous. Her stories are not the normal ones like other grandmothers' stories told for whiling away the time. Devi says regarding the choice of her grandmother's stories, "My grandmother's stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for every question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered, and a moral drawn out" (TFN 27).

Devi, envisaging herself as a deity, compares herself with the deities like Durga and Kali, the destroyers of evil. At the same time, she is totally against certain other deities like Sita, Parvati, Himavati and Gauri who symbolise the humble nature. She sees a model in Kritya of whom she reads in Baba's book. "I read about a *kritya*, a ferocious woman who haunts and destroys the house in which women are insulted. She burns with anger, she spits fire. She sets the world ablaze like Kali shouting in hunger. Each age has its *kritya*. In the age of Kali, I read, each household shelters a *kritya*" (TFN 69-70).

Amba in Hindu mythology changes her fate through her abhorrence of Bheeshma, who has persecuted her and deprived her of feminine fulfillment. Though Devi understands that the stories of these women are far more squalid than legendary equal, she thinks that she must do something incredible as a mark of objection and ultimately it leads her to be a brave woman. Devi is ready to retaliate and through her act, Mahesh is going to lead a condemned lonely life without wife or child for crushing the marital vows.

A good marriage promotes and corroborates good parent-child relationship as well. This is well illustrated in Githa Hariharan's *Fugitive Histories* through the marriage of Mala and Asad. Undoubtedly, the good relationship between husband and wife affect the bringing up of children in a wholesome and positive way. This not only strengthens the bond between parents and children, but also, helps them grow progressively.

Mala in *Fugitive Histories* is an exceptional mother who nourishes her children Sara and Samar by giving them 'meagre dal-chawal or thayir' telling her stories. The story she tells her children is about an ant. The story is that, an ant's baby falls into water and is about to drown. The ant requests help from a frog, which is nearby. But the frog says, "'What do I care if your baby is drowning?'" (FH 12). Then the ant moves towards a snake but the snake also does not help. Thus the ant goes from one creature to another. No one is willing to help the ant. Finally the ant decides to bite one little boy, who has refused to offer help.

The bite is not the trap, but it works like a trick. The boy picks up the stick, which is used to hit the dog. So the dog runs after the cat, which pursues the rat. The rat gnaws a hole and opens up a way for the snake to escape from the charmer's basket. So the snake comes out to eat the frog. The frog jumps into the water and saves the ant's child. "That's how the ant not only shows what she can do, but also makes them all part of a living chain, so they change from creatures indifferent to other people's stories to creatures *changed* by other people's stories" (FH 13).

All God's children are linked in this world. Even the debris or litter will form a loop of this chain. The interlink is not visible, nevertheless, it is made of iron. Though the chain story does not have a proper ending, it makes sense and shows how much a starting point and every loop matter in a chain formation to make it strong.

Githa Hariharan brings out the contemporary theme of parent-child relationship. Eventhough the parents may exercise some restrictions over their children they need to be friendly at times. A parent can be a counsellor, nurturer, protector, regulator and also a friend. With the changes in the environment due to the advancement of science and technology, the gap between the older and younger generation increases. On account of life becoming more and more mechanical in the mundane world, children are at a loss.

In Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, there is an instance from one of the stories. Rupavata and Rupavati do not understand their son's feelings. They are unable to fathom their son; however, they bring him up with utmost affection and tenderness. The son does not realise his blessings and instead turns out to be a cruel, selfish, raucous and unappreciative young man. He hurts his father physically and does not hesitate to kill him.

The emotional negative aspect of Rupavati's son might be a psychological ailment. It might be an emotional disorder, however, it imbalances the natural order. Nowadays, there are children who do not reveal the complete truth to the parents and when complications arise the parents become helpless. Therefore the parents and children must have a proper relationship and understanding so that they can be close to each other.

Githa Hariharan brings in characters from the Arabian Nights to narrate fairy tales. But somehow, the tales retold and invented render glimpses of reality. Broken marriages and infidelity are the prominent issues cogitated. There are magic potions, evil curses and saintly miracles which relate quotidian aspects of modern life.

Githa Hariharan has incorporated the story of unfaithfulness and infidelity in her novel *When Dreams Travel*. One of the characters is a magician. When king Zaman is resting, Farid, a brilliant young man, new to the court comes and asks his permission to tell a story. "I heard a

wonderful tale today, your majesty,' he says. 'Like all good stories, it is witty, and it celebrates ingenuity. Will you permit me to entertain you with this trifle?'" (*WDT* 190). But Zaman says that he is not interested in fantasies. Then he gives permission, and Farid begins: "'We all know something of the clever devices of women, don't we? Think of the first lesson we learn as men; or the lesson we need to relearn every single day'" (*WDT* 190).

The story goes like this. A prosperous, respectable merchant lives in a distant land like India or China. He is dreadfully miserable, because through his mother the dignity of the family is lost. Since her husband's death, her thoughts have turned to other men. She indulges herself with many lovers and does not care about the disgrace and contempt she brings on her son and his family. So her son, the merchant is dismayed and he feels polluted. And he says "If the source of the fountain is dirty, can the water be pure? If a mother could be so brazen, what could be the hope of his wives and daughters?" (*WDT* 190). The merchant is not able to focus on his work and decides to go somewhere. While going away he leaves his business in charge of his friend. During his travel, he meets a magician. The magician begins to laugh after hearing the story of the merchant, "'You, a mere trader, hope for a chaste woman in your house!'" (*WDT* 191).

The magician narrates his own story. He has chosen his bride, a very beautiful woman and tender virgin. So he shrinks her down and makes her small like an ant and keeps her in an empty date seed. Then the merchant swallows the seed, and the girl remains safe and undigested in his stomach. Through his magic, he would take the girl out, and release her and take her to his bed in her normal size.

During the rainy season the magician needs his wife as the entire world is green and ready to love. He spits and brings her out in his usual way. But he does not notice that "she . . . was panting as if she had been running a race. A grain of rice hung on her ripe red lips" (*WDT*

191). When the magician is about to explode away, she rushes her tongue quickly and hides it from out of his sight. When the magician becomes suspicious, he comes out of his romantic mood.

However, the magician forces her to take the grain out before she swallows it. When she hesitates to do that, he begins to see through his magical eyes. There he could see a man, her lover hidden from his sight. “While she sat safe in my stomach, the wily woman had learnt my magic and used it to mock our love” (*WDT* 191). This shows the treachery and infidelity between husband and wife.

The merchant has patiently listened to the magician’s tale. Similarly sultan Zaman listens carefully. Farid does not say about the merchant’s fate. However, sultan Zaman becomes angry; and all others are shocked. “They are old-timers who have heard many strange and incomplete rumours about the last queen’s death” (*WDT* 191-192). Farid tries to convince them saying that, ““this was in China or India – a mere story in some place far away”” (*WDT* 191-192). Shah calms down and normalcy comes back into his life. ““Get rid of him,’ he roars, and Farid is dragged away by the guards” (*WDT* 192).

Disability has been a phenomenon of repugnance, social hostility and charity in the myths, folktales and fairytales. There are a couple of mythical characters which Githa Hariharan has used in her novels. Although, the persons representing disability in these intertextual narratives are not completely handicapped, they relate to many aspects of life.

Githa Hariharan incorporates Gandhari’s story through one of her characters. Gandhari is married to a rich prince who is totally sightless. His palace is bigger than Gandhari’s palace. When she meets her husband for the first time she saw ““the white eyes, the pupils glazed and

useless” (TFN 29). She is very furious and angry but in her pride, she says nothing.

Nevertheless, she tears a little piece of cloth from her skirt and ties it tightly over her own eyes.

At times, one has to harm oneself in order to hurt others. Likewise she makes herself blind, through which she indirectly takes revenge on her parents and makes them feel guilty. She does not give any chance to her parents to rectify their mistake. However, her protest is not a weak submission; it is more powerful than any other protest.

Gandhari’s story is reflected once again in Sita’s life, Devi’s mother. Sita is skillful and well trained in playing the veena. The veena is given to her as part of her dowry. All in her in-law’s house are inspired by the music of the veena. However, the same music infuriates her father-in-law. When he calls her one day and does not get a response he becomes angry. He finds that things are not properly done in the prayer room. He shouts at her, “Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (TFN 30).

Sita in her pride and anger pulls away the strings of her veena without saying a word. As a protest she never touches the instrument again. By way of their submission Sita and Gandhari make others feel guilty and responsible for their life. Sita could have tried to reach her highest ambition. However, she rejects it by choosing the Kali within her.

Gandhari’s story also demonstrates the problem of physical disability. Gandhari is not informed of the fact that her betrothed is sightless before her betrothal and her arranged marriage to a blind husband seems to her a punishment which she makes severe by blindfolding herself for the rest of her life. She does not want to support her husband and instead avenges everyone. She is narrow-minded and chooses to shut everything from her vision.

In the novel *When Dreams Travel* according to Dilshad’s story Satyasama is an orphan and there is a rumour that her parents thrive as eternal couple abandoning her. In this circulating

rumour the parents are not blamed but pitied. “When Satyasama’s downy baby face grew a mask of fur, the parents were sad and frightened. But when her forehead widened and receded and the sharp family nose was blunted so that her features grew suspiciously simian, they were furious; they just had to throw her out” (*WDT* 136).

Satyasama could climb the tallest tree, all her muscles straining with attention. She looks like a monkey and she has been separated from girls of her own age. One day she sleeps on a tree, where she is blessed with two natural gifts to live. The one is that, the whole world seems to be shifted onto the left side. So the right side is out of business. Consequently, she is called ‘One eyed Monkey-Face.’ She has been troubled by her form, because her fur is entirely ungroomed on the right side.

The second is regarding Satyasama’s career as a singer. At first, her songs are not liked by anybody but after some time a few stray monkeys are attracted. Though they are not like human beings like Satyasama, they become tame and quiet. Once a passer-by leaves a tin below the tree and the monkeys begin to give coins for her. After that, her songs become famous, the other monkeys silently begin to hear and sometimes dance around the peepal tree. When her song is over they would give her a few coins in the tin and go away. She represents disability and how the disabled survive merely by their skills of singing and narrating stories.

Man’s loss of human dignity and values brings out his bestiality. This has been reflected through war and manslaughter. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Devi’s grandmother tells her a story about a beautiful girl marrying a snake. The ten year old Devi does not understand the significance of the story. However, she understands it later and relates it to real life situation. God hears the prayer of a childless couple and blesses them; a snake is born to them and they rear it as they would a human child. When the snake comes of age the parents look for a marital

alliance. But no one is willing to give a girl to a snake. The father decides to go to a far-away land to find a girl. There he meets a man to whom he reveals all his worries. The host is ready to offer his own beautiful daughter. When the girl sees her husband she accepts her misfortune without saying anything. They spend a night together, the next morning, to her surprise the girl finds a handsome young man lying on her bed.

Devi relates the story of the girl to her maidservant Gauri. Gauri is married to a man who behaves like an animal and treats her very badly. So involuntarily she falls in love with her younger brother-in-law. They elope together from the house and Gauri requires her old job as a maidservant in Devi's grandmother's house. But Devi's grandmother does not give a job to her, instead gives a ten rupee-note and sends her away.

Nobody is willing to give Gauri any work after this act of immorality. The society has different measuring yards for men and women. Suman Singh in the article entitled "*The Thousand Faces of Night: A Study of Women Predicament in Indian Society*" says, "Society is more tolerant to immoral behaviour in a man than in a woman. Hence even a generous woman like Devi's grandmother sends Gauri away when she comes back to work in her house" (202-203). Gauri does not accept her animal like husband whereas the girl in the story accepted the animal husband as her destiny.

Githa Hariharan brings forth the concept that bestiality can be tamed with love and affection. Violence or animalism can be diluted with love and care. A woman can change the cruel behaviour of her husband through her love and care, even though his violent behaviour may make life precarious for her.

There is an old Tamil proverb which says that a woman either preserves or destroys life. So when she shows affection and care for her husband and her family she will be able to preserve

life. Here, Gauri involves herself with another man, and brings shame to her family and her father-in-law's house. She feels that through this act she can escape from her husband's animal behaviour. Githa Hariharan does not mention what happens after Gauri eloped with her younger brother-in-law. However, it is evident that she does not live happily in his house. As a result, she comes in search of her old job as a maid servant in Devi's grandmother's house. Escaping suffering cannot bring any solution.

Man cannot live a real life without material sustenance. However, these provisions are meant to meet the necessities of life and they cannot enrich a person in terms of reputation or position. V.S. Naipaul in his novel *In a Free State* says, "I work and work and save and save and the money grow and grow . . . It is ignorance, it is madness. It is the madness the money itself bring on. The money makes me feel strong. The money make me feel that money is easy" (82). These stories are narrated to imply the evil resulting from the fondness for money. Githa Hariharan draws a contrast between the rich and the poor through these stories.

Through the story of Muthuswamy Dikshitar, Githa Hariharan brings out the fact that materialistic attitude does not help one's growth. Mike Bickle in the book entitled *Passion for Jesus* comments:

A longing is not merely a need . . . Longing goes deeper than that. A longing is an ache of the heart. The idea of longing spans the gap between emotion and genuine need. It is a feeling that ebbs and flows, and yet it is a concrete reality. It cannot be reasoned with, negated, or dismissed. If not attended to, it will overtake us. A longing will be filled one way or the other. (38)

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Baba, Devi's father-in-law tells the story of Muthuswamy Dikshitar who composed a song on desire. He has two wives; the first one is a

good woman. However, she remains “as dark as the sky on a moonless night” (*TFN* 51). The parents who are worried about his worldly happiness, “found a beautiful, fair-complexioned girl, and presented her to the young *bhakta* who sat in deep meditation” (*TFN* 51). Dikshitar accepts his new wife and lives with both of them, “like the sun and moon on either side of” him (*TFN* 51). After some years, the fair wife develops a desire for jewels in order to add to her beauty. He consults his disciples regarding this:

Dikshitar’s disciples suggested an audience with the Maharaja of Thanjavur, a patron of the arts who was generous with his gifts of precious gems. Dikshitar looks at his wife, her eyes downcast, her supple womanly body lost in the folds of her coarse, hand woven sari. He sang, with the slow, regal air of sober righteousness, in the raga *lalitha* . . . When I have with me the golden Lakshmi, what do I care for unworthy mortals? (*TFN* 52)

The same night, the fair wife sees the deity Ambika resplendent in her glittering jewellery, blessing her in her dreams. After seeing Ambika, she feels satisfied and gives up her desire for ornaments.

The story implies that a young woman should restrain her wishes for the sake of her family. However, at the same time it indicates that human beings cannot be satisfied with material things. [John Ruskin](#) states that, “Every increased possession loads us with new weariness.” There are some differences between needs and desires. Human beings must have their needs like food, clothes and shelter fulfilled. These needs once met give some satisfaction; but craving for wealth, and desire for affluence will not let one lead a contented life. No one can live without the essential needs; at the same time one must learn to control his desires. Human beings have to attain something beyond materialism.

The desire for a big house, car, jewels and extravagances cannot be satisfied easily. Desire will drive one to accumulate more and more. When needs are to be met for all the human beings, desire cannot be satisfied always. Charles Dickens has treated the idea materialism Vs Christmas Spirit through his character Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. Ebenezer Scrooge does not have pleasurable comforts in his early life. It leads him to look upon money as the only source of life. He also begins to believe that money is the only security for life, something he could always trust. Through this attitude he loses his lady love and life's contentment. At the end, he leads his life in a lonely manner. Materialism leads to destruction and keeps a man away from relationships, learning, spiritual development and peace of mind.

Githa Hariharan includes tales which illustrate sheer poverty in her novel *When Dreams Travel*. Rupavata is married to a woman Rupavati. They are perfectly matched because both are righteous and good. They have a small portion of an infertile land where they work very hard day and night all their life. Once a hungry Brahmin named Chandraprapha comes to their house asking for alms. The couple call him in and feed him and ask him to rest for a while. They have only one carpet and they willingly give it to the Brahmin.

A shrunken woman with a child comes and disturbs Rupavata and Rupavati's sleep. The woman says that she is Chandraprapha's wife and that they are hungry. Meanwhile the Brahmin wakes up and is shocked by her appeal. "She's going mad with hunger," he gasped. "She's so hungry she is going to eat up our child" (*WDT* 186). Rupavata does not know what to do; but Rupavati says to Chandraprabha, "Don't be silly. I've never seen a mother eat her child, and I've seen many hungry mothers. What kind of a mother did *you* have?" (*WDT* 186).

Chandraprabha seems to be uncomfortable for a couple of minutes, but he remembers that he is a guest and by himself he cannot do anything about it. He says to the couple, "The

only way out . . . is for your beautiful and outspoken wife to practice her virtue. Rule 3112 of the written law says that a woman is the source of life. What that means is that Rupavati should pluck out her breasts and feed one each to my wife and child” (WDT 186).

Rupavata does not know what to do. He feels that it is too much, the guests are demanding his wife’s breasts to show her virtue. So he wonders what to do. At that time, Rupavati grabs Chandraprabha’s ears. Chandraprabha is unable to understand what has happened, standing like a ruined and crumbling statue. Rupavati plants his ears in the soil and waters the planted earth with her tears of fury. She says, “‘If no one has done this thing before,’ she stormed, ‘a thing which should have been done long ago – let his ears come back twofold. Let my twin breasts remain on my chest”” (WDT 187).

This story performs the history of a myth’s journey, with the reader witnessing its succeeding and imaginative and ideological metamorphoses from one teller or generation of tellers to the next – all in one sitting. This tale shares the idea of the previous tale, and, it gives the quest for forthcoming tales. It remains deep-rooted in the original narrative of the Arabian Nights.

Dilshad narrates her story in the course of seven nights and days. One of the stories of Dilshad titled “Rupavati’s Breast” contains a progression of birth and rebirth. In the tale, Buddha first appears in the form of a woman, named Rupavati. The story brings out the role of charity and kindness.

Once a beggar woman is about to eat her new born child. In a good deed of kindness Rupavati cuts off her breast and gives it to the beggar woman. Then she feeds a starving mother. Her husband is amazed and also frightened. He says, “‘If no one has ever done something so heroic before, let Rupavati’s breasts come back to her”” (WDT 180). Meanwhile god Indra who

has been watching that suspiciously asks her whether she needs a place in heaven. However, Rupavati wants herself to be turned into a man. So the breast disappears. Afterwards Rupavati is reborn as a Brahmin named Chandraprabha. Since he does not have any breasts to give away, he gives himself – “every inch of his flesh, every drop of blood, to a hungry tigress about to devour her own cub” (*WDT* 181).

Poverty is the main source of all crimes and it is unbearable. It is an omnipresent phenomenon. In India, there are people struggling for their food and other necessities. It is a grave problem which requires immediate and concrete remedial measures. The scarcity in India is prevalent, with the nation probably having a third of the world’s poor. Poverty and hunger are more terrible than any other issues, and so everyone in the society is required to contribute towards the abolition of poverty. The developed section of a society can offer assistance to the undeveloped area and make an effort to save them from poverty.

Githa Hariharan probes into the concept of poverty, how dreadful poverty and hunger are and how charity elevates and uplifts people. Poverty includes low profits and the incapacity to obtain the essential goods and services required for survival with self-respect. Poverty also includes slow levels of health, education, poor access to clean water and sanitation, inadequate physical security, lack of voice, and insufficient capacity.

Dilshad’s story undergoes a sequence of changes at the hand of the three storytellers. They are an old couple, whom Satyasama meets in her travels, the old woman’s husband and Satyasama. The old woman and her husband recount the story. The old man declares to Satyasama ““You have all your facts wrong. How dare you pollute this house with such unrealistic lies? Listen – and correct yourself before it’s too late”” (*WDT* 181). In the old man’s story Buddha is born as a beautiful, virtuous man called Rupavata. “Rupavata owned a large

farm which he cultivated with the help of many workers. He looked after them well, shared his produce with those who worked hard for him. In the protective shade of his umbrella they all grew and prospered” (*WDT* 182).

One day Rupavata walks along the path and sees one peasant woman who is about to eat her baby due to starvation. So he brings them to his house, gives them shelter. He names her as Rupavati and both get married. However, they do not name the child. She serves her husband with unwavering devotion, works harder than all the farm workers put together. However, her son grows into an unthankful hooligan. A youngman is easily drawn towards ways of destruction. As Dominique Lapierre in the novel *A Thousand Suns* says, “A young man who is drawn to violence is never put off by fear of the consequences, no matter how dreadful they might be” (69). Rupavati’s son embodies such a destructive youngster, “He was happiest wasting time with the laziest and most discontented lot among the farm workers” (*WDT* 183). He plans to rob with the help of other rogues. Fortunately, Rupavata wakes up due to his stomach pain. The son hits Rupavata with an iron rod. When Rupavata shouts for help, Rupavati rushes to the spot. “Silently she took in her husband’s bleeding forehead, the evil iron rod, and her son’s blazing eyes. Then she stood between them, the son of one life and the husband of another, and pushed aside her sari pallu. She plucked one breast and flung it at the son’s feet. ‘Here,’ she said, ‘take the breast which milked an ungrateful son’” (*WDT* 183). When Rupavati is about to pluck the other one, Rupavata stops her and asks her to keep it saying “‘One for our son-to-be.’ So she kept the right breast, but she called up to Indra in the skies: ‘If no one has ever been such a grateful servant before, let Rupavati remain one-breasted’” (*WDT* 184). She chooses to remain single-breasted for the sake of her husband and she saves her husband from her cruel and wicked son.

Even though women are considered meek and physically weak, they are strong mentally. Women are ready to sacrifice their life for their family and for their loved ones.

Fundamentalism is an eclipse which creeps into society in different forms. Sometimes, it comes in the form of religion and sometimes as casteism. People go fanatic on blind causes even without realising what it implies and such instances are drawn in Githa Hariharan's *In Times of Siege*. Amit Narula in the article entitled "Representing Dalit Identity and Politics in the Autobiographical Works of Om Prakash Valmiki, Laxman Gaikwad and Bama Faustina" remarks about Casteism, "Caste system in India is not only the age old and depth-oriented socio-cultural phenomenon but it has also been working, since remote period, as the symbol of Indian system specifically characterized by hierarchical categories, despite its diversified odds and anxieties. There is no denying the fact that India is still beset with archaic caste mentality" (44).

The novel *In Times of Siege* centres around the legend of Basava, a fourteenth century revolutionary poet. There is an eternal battle, when the children of two veerashiva couple get married. Basava is known for his non-violence, but "His charisma was no longer enough to keep the moderates and the extremists among his followers together" (TS 62).

Basava, the treasurer of Kalyana is a revolutionary who overhauls the caste system and overthrows it during the reign of Kalyana. Unlike other finance ministers, he has concern for the people and is broad-minded. Githa Hariharan includes the legend of Basava to emphasise the need for a casteless and equal society.

Basava gathered around him a unique congregation of mystics and social revolutionaries. Together they attempted a creative, courageous experiment: a community that sought to exclude no one—not women, not the lowest, most 'polluting' castes. Poets, potters, reformers, washermen, philosophers, prostitutes, learned brahmins, housewives, tanners, ferrymen—all were part of the brief burst

of Kalyana's glory. All were equal in that they were veershaivas; warriors of Siva.
(*TS* 60)

The warriors of Siva do their work in union. They prepare pots, mirrors, fishing nets and leather sandals and transport them to the customers across the river. They also recite poetry, called vachana which is spoken and sung in people's language. Basava and his supporters take on the caste system. It is the strong net that holds society so tightly in place. Thousands of normal people take part in the democratic dream. They act as the producers of mirrors, the skimmers of lifeless animals and the holders of children. The citizens turn into society; that society becomes enlarged and rushes forward to ingest the societal norms and spiritual ritual. "The king, Bijjala, an old friend of Basava's, was under tremendous pressure from the pillars of society. Not surprisingly, the relationship between the king and his finance minister soured" (*TS* 61).

The movement strikes when the offsprings of two veershaiva couples get married. The bride is from Brahmin background and the bridegroom from the cobbler. The marriage is considered to be a catalyst. The conservative group detests Basava's challenge to their control of god and authority and the after life. Basava disputes against the Brahminical domination in the name of religious conviction. King Bijjala is forced into joining denunciation. The King gives a verdict for the fathers of the bride and the bridegroom. Then he gives a death sentence to a young untouchable bridegroom, "Tied to horses, they were dragged through the streets of Kalayana; then what was left of them was beheaded" (*TS* 62).

There is a slaughter due to the marriage. Basava goes to the Sangam and is exceedingly disappointed. Githa Hariharan uses expressions which for fundamentalists are fairly appropriate. She writes, "Egalitarian ideas are bad enough, but a cobbler and Brahmin in the same bed? As

well bomb Kalyana (and its vigorous trade, its prosperous temple and palace) out of existence!” (TS 62).

Basava’s dream is not realised because his movement for equality for democracy is not remembered. ‘Itihas Suraksha Munch,’ does not understand the idea. Hence, the difficulty for Shiv. “How is Shiv to explain Basava—his ideas, his times—to some bunch of hate crazy goons? Or to Meena with her Said and Asterix, or even to Rekha with her sound instinct for the safe position?” (TS 63).

Shiv’s father in the novel *In Times of Siege* could give careful and meticulous answer for difficult questions. Shiv knows his father only for fifteen years. Now in his difficult situation, he draws strength from his father’s words: “Freedom. Values. The common good. ‘You must mind the truth,’ . . . ‘If you settle for safety, if you choose to go along with whatever makes your life comfortable, truth will escape you completely. Shiva: there is a kind of person who lives like this. He is called an opportunist” (TS 82).

History is not very different from legends and Shiv’s father brings in the importance of it. The memory of history should be embedded in each life. Shiv’s father is delighted because Shiv has inherited his memory. He insists on Shiv reading history books “‘You must study history,’ . . . ‘You must know the past with all its riches and terrors, draw on the lessons of both in equal measure’” (TS 82). Eventually Shiv’s father is no longer his ideal and he “leaves with the storm” (TS 191) and his father’s inheritance to Shiv is the “leap off the precipice” (TS 194).

Shiv accepts “. . . the value of the only heirloom he needs from the past, the right to know a thing in all the ways possible” (TS 194). Monika Gupta in the article entitled “History Versus Politics or Politics Versus History: A Study of Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege*”

opines, “Githa Hariharan’s subtle dissections of the eternal struggle between religious fundamentalist ideas and liberal dissent in modern day India begins and ends with history” (104).

Old age and aging is delineated with hidden meanings and implications. More particularly, the elderly characters are delineated as story-tellers who pass on the old age wisdom and values. Simone Schwarz-Bart is of the opinion that “. . . when an old person dies, a whole library disappears.” Githa Hariharan has used myths and has related fictional characters representing myths and legends.

Aging brings limitations and helplessness. It can shrink even the loftiest stature of a king to nothing. The story titled ‘The Mascot of Melting Pot’ deals with an old lion. The lion is old and unable to rule his subjects anymore and as a result surrenders his throne. He is reduced to a circus and zoo lion. It is adequately justified as even one of the strongest animals of forest becomes utterly defenseless. This lion can be compared with the tiger of R. K. Narayan’s *A Tiger for Malgudi*. In R. K. Narayan’s novel, the tiger is the protagonist and represents a rare and unnatural way of living for its kind. It is not ferocious, but, kind. It has shed its identity and presumed some one else’s.

In the same story, there is an old fox living in the forest. He is cleverer than the other animals, so he is able to rule the forest. He says that all the animals in the forest are brothers and sisters and so there is no need to kill each other. His shrewdness brings positive results, but only till his death. He brings together all the animals. However, after his death the forest becomes upside down.

A disfigured and abnormal animal is born in the forest. The old fox accepts the new born and asks other animals to accept it too. This becomes easier as everyone is treated equally. However, after the demise of the old fox, the other animals go back to their original and

instinctive life. The animal which is living in a communist aura finds itself lost and finally becomes the victim of anarchy.

Old age is related to weakness and feebleness. However, there are exceptionally, strong-willed elderly persons as well. Githa Hariharan portrays one such character through her grandmother's tale. The novel, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* presents an elderly character through a grandmother's tale. She lives through dire poverty as no one helps her. She works hard in the forest, gathering firewood for her livelihood. She lives along with her grandson. Although she is very poor, she does not lose her courage. She teaches valour to her grandson, but he never tries to learn or even believe. One day, he dies of his fright as he is unable to muster courage. However, the old woman remains powerful. She is able to live on because of her courage and boldness despite no support.

In *Thousand Faces of Night*, Baba narrates a story about an elderly couple. “Great men earn, through their spiritual power, the fortune of a virtuous wife” (*TFN* 67). The saint Shyama Shastri's wife dies five days before he dies. Another saint, Tyagaraja's second wife is greater than Shyama Shastri's wife. She knows before itself that she is going to die on that particular day. The day she is about to die, she holds a Prarthana of Sumanagli. For that she makes fulsome feast by her hands and she calls twelve married women. At the end of the prayer, she gives bangles, kumkum, turmeric, two betel leaves, betel nuts, mirror, comb and sandalwood box mixed with red kumkum and gold dust. After getting every one's blessing, she contentedly lies down and dies a fulfilled woman.

Old age brings forth qualities like, spiritual longing and stronger bondings between the couple. Tyagaraja is very much attached to his wife and finds himself lost after her demise. He is disconsolate. After his wife's death, Tyagaraja appeals to Lord Rama to help him leave this

mortal life so that he could rejoin his wife in eternity. Eventually, he dies after ten months of his wife's death.

In the novel *When Dreams Travel* Dilshad narrates a story of a young Satyasama who always dreams of becoming famous and wise. Like many youngsters, she too believes that name and fame will come to her without any struggle. Once she sees a woman, who is hurrying along the road, carrying a colossal bunch of firewood on her head. She has a firm neck, tight with the strain of complementing her load. Her face is full of sweat. On seeing her plight, Satyasama offers to help her with some water. Nevertheless, she refuses to accept the offer.

In the course of their journey on the road, Satyasama tells her a story. At one point of time, they reach a place where the road splits into two. After hearing the story the woman becomes solemn. She asks Satyasama to meet an old couple. Satyasama is confused and asks the reason. The woman says that, Satyasama has to begin her search somewhere. Being old, the couple has more knowledge in telling stories than Satyasama. She says, "I have heard that these old ones have memories like oceans – full of salty tidbits of wisdom. You might as well see what you can learn at their house" (*WDT* 178).

When Satyasama goes to their house, the old couple allows her to tell her stories. They do not speak to her, but listen to her stories without any grudge. The elderly couple know the stories very well and are richer than Satyasama's story of riches. However, they listen first and later request an audience with her. They give her their version and help her to set right her story.

Githa Hariharan has used some mythological names for her characters especially women characters, in order to show that women represent the nature of goddesses and have power to shape their own lives. For example, the character Devi is taken from the divine name. Devi is assimilated with Shakti, the feminine aspect of the divine, as conceptualised by

the Shakta tradition of Hinduism. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi is the protagonist who proves that she has the power to overcome the male domination in her life. She also represents the feminine equivalent without whom the male character will remain impotent and void.

Gandhari is a dedicated woman, who gives up her eyesight and her severe life makes her to get the religious power. Gandhari has hundred sons and one daughter. Her life is compared to Sita's life. Sita also dedicates her life for her family and her austere life makes her have control over her family. Like Gandhari, Sita also has only one daughter but not sons. According to Indian mythology Parvati is the mother of goddesses and she is the Sakthi of Siva. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Parvatiamma, mother of Mahesh, acts as a real goddess in his life and family. She has wealth and riches, but she fails to bring up her son Mahesh in a proper way. She goes out of the house in search of God.

Uma, the great goddess of Indian mythology recognised as Devi, is Siva's wife. She takes numerous forms, from the kind Parvati to the ferocious Durga to the demolisher [Kali](#). As he is meditating, her husband, god Siva fails to notice his wife. Likewise Uma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is ignored by her husband. She is also known for altruism and born of love. She sacrifices and leaves her life because of her father-in-law. Uma is supposed to be the light of the world, but here she remains in the darker side of life. As a proper name it means 'The Auspicious One' used as a name for [Rudra](#). He is considered to be a god who has no birth and death. He is one among the trinity gods named Brahma, Vishnu and Siva. These three chief gods respectively are the creator, preserver and destroyer. However, in the novel *In Times of Siege* Shiv is not a destroyer, but a weak individual who needs support and help from others.

Gopal and Govinda are other names for Krishna, implying the meaning of cow herd. It also implies Siva, the most significant god in Hinduism. He is one of the [Hindu trinities](#) and also

called Siva, Shankar, Mahesh, Shiv, Natraj, Natarajan and by many other names. He represents duality of nature as benefactor and destroyer. He has unbelievable and matchless strength.

Similarly Mahesh and Gopal in *The Thousand Faces of Night* fittingly represent the dual aspects as protectors and destroyers of Devi's life. Gauri is also known as an avatar of Parvati, the great goddess of purity. Unlike the goddess, Gauri in *The Thousand Faces of Night* loses her purity.

Goddess Lakshmi symbolises affluence, both material and spiritual, good fortune and beauty. She is said to fetch good fortune and is supposed to defend her disciples from all kinds of depression and money-related griefs. Prosperity, luck, bravery and fruitfulness are characteristics of her name. Lakshmiamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* does not have any kind of wealth and prosperity. Throughout her life, she is being hurt by her family members. Vasu Master's mother Lakshmi, in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* seems to be unlucky because her parents wanted only a male child.

The comment made by Nirmal Therese in her article about Githa Hariharan on "Writing Female Identity: Subversion and Re-Interpretation of Narratives" is quite relevant here: "Githa Hariharan's novels deconstruct well established notions of history, family, tradition, and patriarchy. Githa Hariharan, uses this storytelling narrative, which is unobtrusive, but in reality sharper and more powerful than Royal Sword. A silent crusader, she has proven the power of silence, and the old saying 'Pen is mightier than the sword!'" (14).

Githa Hariharan, in a very creative way has employed and interwoven mythical stories with her fiction in order to elevate her style and to emphasise the underlying themes. The mythical elements and folklores suggest a few contemporary scenarios and stimulate ruminations on them. Further, there are legendary tales which extend messages that would constitute the problem-solution framework for the present state of affairs as well.

