

Chapter III

Fictional Men: Decrypting Living Reality

His fair large Front and Eye sublime declar'd

Absolute rule; and Hyacinthine Locks

Round from his parted forelock manly hung

Clust'ring, but not beneath his shoulders broad:

(Milton, PL. IV 300-303)

Men are tough by nature. However, there are a few among them who are gentle. They are associated with external or outside world and have little to do inside the four walls of their house.

It is evident that from the very time of genesis, man has been given more responsibility than his female counterpart. These responsibilities have been appended with conclusive authority and supremacy.

Moreover, man has relatively more freedom; this freedom without constraint comes with authority, power and autonomy. In the history of mankind, men have been enslaved by their own male counterparts who have gained grounds in some or other aspects. If not, women were made slaves and had to endure unstipulated feudalism.

The natural role of men has been to earn bread, wage war, protect women and children and take up other duties requiring gallantry and power. To be precise, he has been an 'Alpha male' protecting and providing for the family. Further, masculinity is a symbol rather than an adjective of many attributes. It stands for all qualities related to a sovereign: rule, lead, protect, command, implement and judge, whereas domesticity is defined as the female space.

Men and women have equal rights in the society. However, this equivalence should not be with an identity of functions. Men and women are created to be different physically and mentally and they are endowed with certain innate talents and calibre which would help them dispose different tasks effectively. Although these changes should not be exaggerated, they are a real part of a person's physical and mental make-up. However, society has imposed all the secondary qualities to women. In particular, men seem by nature to be better prepared for hard tasks and women for simple and easier ones. Man's body is much better adapted to hard work,

and hence he projects an image of strength. Woman, on the other hand, possesses a body that is structured for motherhood and is considered to be flexible and weak. Therefore the society assigns different social roles for men and women.

Men representing stronger sex claim the stereotypical characteristics like power, valour and earning. Fiction and literature have often delineated the formulaic sketch of manliness. There are also other sides of the stereotypical image like that of a super hero. Man is often presented as a super hero and no female figure has ever been represented as a super hero icon. Whether it is children's comics, television programmes, movies or classic literature, man has always claimed the position of a super hero. X Man, Spider man, Troy, Arthur or Hiawatha have always amused and inspired the reader or audience for their incredible intrepidity.

In the history of literature, men characters have been portrayed both as valiant warriors and infatuated romantic heroes. Shakespeare sketched Othello, a brave soldier and from the same pen, he delineated Romeo as a devotee of Cupid, God of love. However, there are also men characters who possess both qualities, for instance, Orlando from *As You Like it* and Mark Antony from *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Similarly, there have been warriors from novels by Walter Scott and from a few Victorian poems, like, "Ulysses" and so on. Further, in modern and contemporary literature, men have also been carrying the roles of typical husbands and lovers. There are all kinds of husbands: worrying, flirtatious, disloyal, distrustful, dominating and so on. Ahmed from Monica Ali's *The Bricklane*; Ahmed Sinai from Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*; Appanna from Girish Karnad's *Naga Mandala*; Deven and Nur from Anita Desai's *In Custody* and many others represent the above mentioned set of characters. Few of these are powerless and trapped characters unlike their stereotypical image.

At present, there is a superfluity of gynocentric writing in literature. Nonetheless, there is a degree of neutrality in the portrayal of men in gynocentricism. Githa Hariharan is one such

writer, delineating her male cast with practical and neutral perspective. She masterfully places the male characters in her fictional world representing different facets of life. The characters placed in different scenarios render a plethora of aspects to ruminate on.

Patriarchy is a social and domestic scaffold pervading in India. It is also closely interconnected with some tribulations. Patriarchy literally means ‘rule of fathers,’ ‘father’ or ‘chief of a race.’ Historically, this term is used to refer to a male who is the head of a family. However, in modern times, it refers to social systems in which power is primarily held by men. Patriarchy is a social system in which the male acts as a dominant figure.

In the patriarchal set up, fathers hold authority over women, children and property. It implies male rule and privilege and female subservience. The property and title are inherited by the male ancestry. Patriarchy has established itself in the social, legal, political, and economic organisation of a range of different cultures. It also has a strong impact on modern civilisation, although many cultures have moved towards a more democratic social system over the past century. Renu Kumari Singh in her article entitled “Empowerment of Women” observes:

A large number of gender issues continue to determine the nature and shape of Indian society, like most traditional societies where women are treated unequally and do not [and] can not enjoy; on average equality of life equal to that of men in terms of life expectancy, health, morality, access to education, access to employment, access to lawful freedoms, and the meaningful exercise of civil and political rights. (13)

Devi’s father -in-law Baba in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, is a Sanskrit Professor. This good-natured and intellectual shows his patriarchal nature to Devi through his stories. In the absence of Mahesh, Devi begins to spend her time with Baba, who tells her stories which “have for their center-point an exacting touchstone for a woman, a wife” (*TFN* 51). He is a religious man and tells the lesson of Brahminhood, ““wherever you are, remember you are a Brahmin

“A Brahmin,’ . . . ‘shrinks from honours as from poison; humility he covets as if it is nectar”

(*TFN* 52). The indifferent attitude of Mahesh makes Devi to look for some sort of consolation in the presence and stories of her father-in-law. He tries to offer words of wisdom that are steeped in tradition which includes a woman’s place in a household.

Baba is one of the patriarchal figures representing the typical patriarchal world.

“All men,’ . . . are enjoined to cherish women, and look after them as their most precious wards . . . ‘Fathers, brothers, husbands and brothers-in-law should honour brides, if they desire welfare” (*TFN* 65). His mother suggests him to marry and says, “A man needs a wife to help him with the business of living” (*TFN* 61).

Baba enjoys freedom of choice even in the event of choosing his matrimonial prospect.

He is allowed to make a pick among three young girls - Parvatiamma, Hema and Mohana.

However, he settles on Parvatiamma merely for the sake of her name which strikes him as traditional and divine. This indicates not only his freedom to choose but also his patronage for women who are traditional and homely.

Similarly, Bala’s husband in *Fugitive Histories* is also a patriarchal figure. Bala is married at a very early age to a much older person. Her husband knows that she is unsuitably younger to him; however, he presumes her as his property. The author says, “he had to make the rules, she had to follow them. Bala was never allowed to step out of his house, not even to visit her parents. She *belonged* to the house” (*FH* 15).

Bala’s granddaughter Mala refers to her grandfather’s rules and regulations as ““prison conditions”” (*FH* 15). One day Bala goes to the roof top in order to dry her hair. She prefers to go there because her husband will not follow her as he is frightened of heights. From the rooftop Bala is able to see the unfamiliar street and houses, filled with strangers. It seems to her as if a new cheerful life is waiting to be lived. However, this blissful moment does not last long and she

is found by her furious husband who handles her harshly with rage. “Even before it happened she could feel the rough arms pulling her away from the roof, protecting her from the hungry eyes of strange men, eyes that may slide down the length of her wet, naked hair” (FH 21-22).

Bala’s husband chastises his wife for her deeds which do not meet his approval no matter how trivial and unimportant those may be. He punishes her by imprisoning her inside the storeroom. He sentences her to the storeroom in order to show her how small and restricted her world is. “. . . the storeroom was the best place for her to learn how to be a respectable woman” (FH 22). Besides yelling at her and treating her badly, he does not seem to be content or appeased with her.

Mahesh, Devi’s husband in *The Thousand Faces of Night* like a modern man reveals everything to Devi even before marriage; but he is steeped in tradition. He is a regional manager in a multinational company. He has everything one can desire like an executive job, big house in Bangalore and massive riches. He does not conceal anything from his bride. He says, ““I travel a great deal. . . . I will be in Bangalore only ten days of the month,” Mahesh says. ‘Are you ready to accept that? My father is there, of course, and our old maidservant, but you will be lonely sometimes. Have you thought of that?’” (22).

Mahesh conforms to the patriarchal structure in India. In the Indian context, once a girl gets married to a man, the husband begins to dominate her completely. If the wife does not conform to the norms and ideals set by the husband, then there is disharmony and tension in the marital life. The patriarchal norms need that sort of a sacrifice, or compromise only from women. If there is some deviation, there comes a rift between husband and wife and it builds tension between them.

Mahesh gives the impression of fine, cultured and honest man. Devi, expecting a happy and comfortable life with him agrees for the marriage. However, what follows in post marital life disillusion her and she finds herself just another woman in a male-dominated social order. Devi is similar to Indu of Shashi Deshpande's *Roots and Shadows*, who is a learned and confident woman. She gets married to a spouse whom she herself has selected. After this occasion, her life is filled with dualities and trickery.

Mahesh who belongs to a traditional Brahmin family wants his wife to follow his footsteps. Even though he is educated and works as a manager in a company, he is quite traditional. In a traditional family the role of a wife is to confine herself to the house. She is not supposed to interfere with the attitudes, actions or authority of the males. On the contrary, Devi who is more modern than traditional cannot tolerate the indifferent attitude of her husband, because she has not been prepared for such kind of treatment from her husband. After her higher studies in the U.S.A., Devi considers this kind of a treatment as an ultimate insult to her. Mahesh, who goes on long tours for weeks together on account of his business does not understand the feelings or emotions of Devi.

Mahesh is under the impression that the big mansion and his lovable job will provide the required comforts to Devi and will satisfy her. He thinks that a woman's life is easy and he sardonically says to her once thus: "Why don't I pray to be born a woman in my birth 'Then I won't have to make a living at all'" (*TFN* 54). He does not allow his wife to attend Sanskrit classes or go for a job. He asks her to stay in the house and do the household chores.

Gopal is a classical singer and Devi's life is changed by him. He shows concern to Devi and makes her believe him. Devi is moved by the sweet music of Gopal and waits for his love. He gives his love and affection to Devi in the beginning. She goes with Gopal's multitude to a lot of concerts. The first few concerts give her delight and joy. She is fascinated and hypnotised by

his music: “ I am no one, she thought, as she was swept along in the rich current of Gopal’s voice, I have no husband or lover, only this blissful anonymity in the darkness, filled with a rage that reaches higher and higher, beyond the earth-bound demands of passion” (*TFN* 128-29). She hopes to find an emotional voice through music. She believes to be high on the peak of Gopal’s music but the flight seems to be that of a kite “snapped free of its string” (*TFN* 129).

As time goes on, Devi begins to feel disgusted and tired of the music concerts. She finally discovers that Gopal is devoted to his music and concerts like Mahesh to his job. He is no better than Mahesh and he dedicates his life to his music. “She now found herself thinking often of the peacocks she had seen wandering around the park near Gopal’s house. Crying for attention, the peacock invariably chose a dry, muddy stretch for its performance, the setting a perfect foil to its spectacular dance” (*TFN* 129). Devi has realised that at this point of her life, she should make a new choice, a decision: “Devi knew the time was right; if she did not act now, she would be forever condemned to drift between worlds, a floating island detached from the solidity of the mainland” (*TFN* 138). So she leaves the house and goes back to her mother “To stay and fight, to make sense of it all” (*TFN* 139).

Gopal’s views on women are like that of any male’s. According to them, though women have everything like education, money and job they need a man to provide and protect them and give a meaning to their lives. In the patriarchal system the only identity that a woman possesses is that – which defines her in relation to a male; she is either his wife or his child’s mother. Gopal also demonstrates his patriarchal domination. He also fails to recognise Devi as an individual.

Baba has much confidence in women and pinpoints the responsibility of a woman. A woman is an active device and sacred slave of a man. “...it takes the wife’s flame of dharma, to light within a man, the divine lamp that is rusting with neglect” (*TFN* 66). Parvatiamma, his wife goes on to search God. The self-absorbed spiritual quest makes her to escape from household activities. Baba is perplexed by Parvatiamma’s quest for God. This non-conformist

act makes Baba's theory upside-down. "The path a woman must walk to reach heaven . . . 'is a clear, well-lit one. The woman has no independent sacrifice to perform, no vow, no fasting; by serving her husband, she is honoured in the heavens" (TFN 55). Whereas Parvatiamma seeks independence and salvation.

Baba tries to understand his wife's desire for searching God, but he could not understand her. He says, "For a woman who leaves her home in search of god, only death is a home-coming" (TFN 64). His views about women are given like this: "A virtuous wife is so devoted to her husband that she dies before him, a *sumangali*, her forehead unwidowed and whole with vermillion, her arms and neck still ornamented with bangles and gold chains" (TFN 66-67). Baba's hypnotic voice tells Devi that, "The housewife should always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares, and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word, and body, she who does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does" (TFN 70-71).

Vasu Master in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* also belongs to a Brahmin family who wants his wife Mangala to follow his ways. His wife has been dead for twenty years, his children and grandchildren have dwindled into secondary figures. He remembers Mangala as a shadowy figure. He knows her as 'a cloudy memory than a person.' Vasu Master boasts of his grandmother because she is a self-sufficient woman. However, his wife Mangala and his mother Lakshmi are not self-sufficient but only mute sufferers. They do not raise their voice and so they do not get proper respect and place in their respective families.

Githa Hariharan explains that in the patriarchal society, man struggles all the time to make woman part of himself, the extension of his will. When she proves to be more than him, he is afflicted. He never tries to unravel the mystery that she is and to know the reality of her and this consequently leads to the distance in the relationship. However, Vasu Master continuously thinks of Mangala as an awful unknown. He dismisses her as an insignificant person: "She

was . . . unnoticeable; inconspicuous; like my mother, memorable only as an absence. I knew my wife and my affection for her only when I lived with her ghost. This ghost had a frail, vapoury body; made more insubstantial by my lapses of memory about what she actually was” (*GVM* 123).

Vasu Master, his father and his grandfather are as ‘self-contained’ as Mahesh in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. These male characters do as they wish and want their wives to follow their footprints. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Devi rebels against Mahesh because of “the vast, yawning middle chapters of my [her] womanhood” (*TFN* 54) and tries to replace him by eloping with Gopal. Mangala and Vasu Master’s mother are quite different from Devi, and they are too weak to rebel. Vasu Master comments about his mother, “She would have been a timid, worrying little thing, nagging, pestering like a high-pitched mosquito. She did not learn how to bite though” (*GVM* 32).

Most of the men treat their wives as their shadow without even rendering a backward glance. Vasu Master treats his wife as his shadow and does not bother to stop and ask if she wants to take a different path. Mangala is not able to fight against the male-dominated society. She, like Monisha in Anita Desai’s *Voices in the City*, chooses to remain ‘alone,’ or ‘apart’ and ‘enclosed’ within herself.

The novel *When Dreams Travel* shows an association between sexuality and power. The link between male sexuality and violence is unceasingly echoed in the novel. At the beginning of the novel there are two males and two females. The two men who are brothers named Shahryar and Shahzaman hold a sword in their hands. Shahryar has a “mere ornament . . . a grand, showy thing of gem-encrusted gold . . .” (*WDT* 5). What is implied here is that masculinity comes along with violence. The violence is in their arms. When Shahrzad, one of the females holds the scene together Shahryar is seated before Shahrzad listening to him.

Shahryar is cheated by his wife. So, to thwart these goings-on Sultan Shahryar decides to marry a virgin every night, seduce her and then behead her in the morning. This is continuously practised by Shahryar. It is stopped by the arrival of Wazir's daughter Shahrzad, who keeps death at bay by telling him stories for a thousand and one nights. All the characters in the novel have a dreamlike quality as though they exist in a daydream.

Shahryar is another representative of patriarchal hierarchy where man has unquestionable power which he exercises with violence. He possesses qualities of a tyrant rather than a dominating husband. His power to torment along with his freedom to do what he pleases is also a consequence of his kingship. His throne and kingly crown enable him to pick any girl from his kingdom to seduce, satisfy, and sacrifice.

Githa Hariharan includes the past with the present by using the tale of *The Thousand and One Nights*. It disproves the natural or rational methods which differentiate between historical fact and fiction. This Shahryar's act of killing shows that a man can do anything; it also shows his patriarchal domination over matriarchy. He is a murderous king who punishes all the meek and humble virgins, because of his ex-wife who deceived him and made love to his own slaves. Kottiswari in her article entitled "Postmodernism in the Indian Context-Githa Hariharan and Shashi Deshpande as Postmodernists" enunciates:

Hariharan . . . resurrects Shahrzad and gives her a voice. In the initial text she was silenced by patriarchy. Art was suppressed and there was no way out for a woman to come out of patriarchal norms. . . . The technique used by Hariharan to dismantle patriarchal structures is similar to what Rushdie does in all his novels. Rushdie reads the Indian political scene from a poststructuralist perspective adapting certain strategies of the post-modernist novel and fashioning a new technique for his fiction. . . . Writing of tradition and destabilizing it, turning it on

its head and installing an alternative has given a new freedom to her technique and style. (96-97)

Education opens the mind, encourages one to look for reality and broadens the mind that can connect seriously with many other ideas. Education enables one not only to get a certificate but also to understand others and be a citizen of the world. In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* Mahesh always mixes his business with life, and never gives importance to his wife. He goes on tours frequently and does not expect anything from marriage. His vision of marriage is entirely different from other youths. He does not understand his wife who aches to get emotional comforts rather than wealth from her husband. Mahesh does not take any effort to gratify her emotional needs, because he does not realise that Devi wants a man in her life more than a house. When Mahesh goes on tours she feels “like a child whose summer holiday had slipped away from her when she was not looking” (TFN 50).

Educated men at times show their attitude through their actions and words, and control their wives not allowing them to have their individuality. When their wives are also educated, they want to establish their supremacy over them. When they try to achieve this in their life a gap comes between them. However, if the wife is uneducated, man controls her by all means.

Most of the time women do not raise their voice against men even if men ill treat them. Sometimes women try to question their action. Mahesh seems to be dominating and wants to control his wife in all situations. He wishes to shape his wife according to his will. However, Devi has a different kind of vision according to which she wants to lead her life. Being a manager, he tries to rule over Devi. His concern is to see that his commodities are delivered to his patrons. His wife Devi is no better than his consumers. He is like, “the company directors [who] prefer their pawns clean-shaven so that they can read and move them more efficiently” (TFN 60).

Accusations and complaints also constitute part of typical chauvinistic husbands. Tired of Mahesh's allegations and attitude, Devi walks out on Mahesh's life and joins Gopal, her lover and neighbour. Mahesh represents the whole educated male chauvinists who try to make others live their life especially their female other halves. Sita's father-in-law makes accusations and questions Sita's role as daughter-in-law and wife.

There are some gentlemen who are educated and give complete freedom to their wives. They have understanding and confidence in their wives. In the novel *In Times of Siege* Shiv allows his daughter to go to the U.S.A., for her job, and he sends his wife to help their daughter. In this novel, the power is mostly in the hands of his wife. So whatever situation comes in Shiv's life, he looks up to his wife for her suggestions. As an educated woman, she knows how to balance between her husband's needs and her daughter's. She is always concerned about her husband even when she is in the U.S.A.

Illiteracy is equal to any other social evil prevalent in the society. It gives way to other unnecessary afflictions and helplessness. Illiteracy can affect human individuality through strange mental growth and progress of harmful characteristics. Mayamma's husband in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is an illiterate man. He tortures his wife very much through beating. Since she is also uneducated, she is unable to muster her courage to complain against her husband. There are a number of women who enter their married life to begin a stressful and disturbed existence. Most of the men hit their wives which seem to be deep-rooted in several men's mentalities. Consequently, the wife and children lead an unhappy life. This concept of domestic disputes comes under the notion of patriarchy. There is also sexual exploitation. Forcing a person to involve in bodily activity against her will also is an act of hostility and violence.

Asad of *Fugitive Histories* is revealed through his art. Education is also given through creativity and all artists through their art realise their own selves and educate others. The

sketchbooks of Asad reveal much about him. The last ones tell what really happened to Asad. He is much disturbed before the collisions. One of his sketchbooks reveals the “*Broken Home, February 2002*” (FH 198). It is the year when Gujarat burnt, and the month it burst into fires. An image from his sketch book speaks more boldly than words can. The last few months Asad works with more energy. He works very hard as if his painting is going to change everything in India bringing about a transformation. For the reason of his inconvenience Asad sits up in bed in the night and does something. “Some nights he gets out of bed and goes back to the studio, drawing and discarding. But most nights, like this one, he sits in bed, as if sleep–sleep without the interruption of nightmare or waking up–will come to him more easily if he waits up for it” (FH 202).

The sketchbook of Asad makes Mala see other persons’ suffering as they become victims of power. As an artist, he walks every step with a careful, measured way. Though Asad is not involved in any religious riots, his normal life is affected. Similarly so many people are affected due to the Gujarat riots. Mala teases him and says; “‘You’d better start a new painting if this one’s making you physically sick!’ But she’s already learnt that that is not going to help, that the loss of laughter is only the first of the changes. The changes grow, they make a messy pile of secrets between them; and neither is allowed to share them with anyone else–not even Sara, and especially not Samar” (FH 210). Even in his deathbed, he believes that he would recover and paint again. He always thinks positively. His condition worsens still when he hears the inner voice telling in a critical way. “‘We’ve marched all our lives and nothing has changed. Or it’s changed for the worse’” (FH 215).

Asad, in his deathbed is bad-tempered, argumentative, and unshaven. So he looks like someone else. Sara comes to see him and she does not upset him. Without recognising her he looks at her spitefully as if she is not his daughter. At that time also he thinks only about his

nation. ““You had nothing to fight for, now you do. There’s a battle going on. A war. The enemy wants to tell people whether they are Muslim or Hindu or Christian or something else, as if people no longer know themselves. Let’s see how *you* do in this new war”” (FH 100).

Asad as an artist is sometimes difficult to fathom even by his family. Nonetheless, they believe that there is always something constructive and creative behind his motives. They agree and come to a consensus. He is a wonderful person by nature though little complicated at times. As Charles Dickens observes in his novel *A Tale of Two Cities*, “A WONDERFUL FACT to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other” (17).

Samar, Sara’s brother is another educated man who supports his sister for her social work. He shows more interest in NGO and Nina’s film. It is because, Sara involves herself to go with Nina to Ahmedabad. ““Nina said I could try my hand at the script. But I don’t know about leave”” (FH 98). He encourages her to go by giving money. He says gently, ‘Don’t worry about it, Sara. I’ll give you the money, I’m feeling really rich right now”” (FH 98). Samar gets two taxis – one for him, and one for Sara. When he departs he says ‘treat yourself.’ He slips a wallet in her hand, and hugs her. She also hugs him. “The hug reminds her how difficult it is to have a brother, a person you can’t help loving and hating at the same time” (FH 100-101).

Samar plans to go to U.S.A., and he wants to be one among the Muslims, ““If I get a visa, that is,’ Samar adds with a trace of bitterness. ‘Asad may have told us we’re not Muslim or Hindu, but the rest of the world only has to hear our last name. Anyway, I’m happy to be seen as a Muslim. I *want* to be one”” (FH 99). Samar does not care about what his parents – Mala and Asad say about his plan. His mother does not object or say anything against his wishes. He says about his mother, ““She always says do what you want to even if she is dead against it. Not like Asad”” (FH 99). When he says about his wish to go to the U.S.A., Asad begins to lecture on the ‘Anti-Vietnam War movement.’ He always thinks about the nation. Samar is willing to go to

U.S.A., he would like to get a better posting in the Dubai office. Asad is not willing to send his son. He says – ““go, go to America and become a jihadi if that’s what you think the world needs.’

The world’s needs” (FH 99).

Samar is caring, and most of the time he calls his mother and asks her to do her works properly and take good care of herself. One day Samar is moody and unapproachable in the house. Mala asks ““What’s the matter?’ . . . ‘aren’t you hungry?’ ‘I’ m okay,’ mumbles Samar, ‘leave me alone’” (FH 19). He remains expressionless. Asad tries to bring him to normalcy and says ““That’s hard to do, isn’t it,’ . . . ‘We’d need at least a bigger table to leave you alone’” (FH 19-20). He purposely ignores Mala and Sara and says to his father ““I’ m going to try out for cricket team,’” (FH 20). He notices the non-verbal exchange that has been passed between the parents. They want to help their son. However, he does not want to lengthen the problem, and comes to the conclusion that “I don’t want to eat with Prakash anyway” (FH 20). For the reason that, Prakash said that Samar’s tiffin box always smells of egg. He believes that if he tells what Prakash said to his parents, that will create a big problem in his school, and hence he wants to leave the matter. He does not want to fight with his friends.

Vasu Master from *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* is the iconic figure of education in Githa Hariharan’s fictional world. He is a teacher most of his life and he finds his identity only as a teacher. Moreover, the best thing about him is that his flair for teaching and open-mindedness enable him to take up a challenging yet noble task of giving tuition to Mani, a mentally retarded young boy. It is the real education which enables one to look beyond and believe in something as Vasu Master does in his ability to teach even a person like Mani.

Vasu Master keenly remembers the qualities that are listed out during his send-off party. On his retirement day, Veera Naidu, the headmaster of P.G. Boys’ school, makes a short speech in which he says that Vasu is “patient, mild and soft-spoken” (GVM 3). He then says “It depends

on whether you use these qualities as tools or shields” (*GVM* 4). He also advised Vasu Master that as a retired teacher he should learn some new tricks for survival.

Happiness in life comes from within. The complications and the situations are almost the same for everybody. The difference lies in how each person tries to approach life. So Vasu Master commences his retired life with new happiness. A small happiness comes when he begins to see the album. “In the photograph, the boys (now grown men) were frozen, as if they had not been fidgeting non-stop while the photographer dived under his black tent, fiddling endlessly with the buttons and knobs of his camera” (*GVM* 5). In order to check his remembrance, he placed his thumb on each face, saying the boy’s name. “At the end of it, I felt a small triumph if I remembered most of the names” (*GVM* 5).

Vasu Master begins his life with new excitement. He does not wish to go back to the past ailing body; his mind is invaded by “memories, mice, crows, spiders, even the hosts of flies that droned their way in through the window on warm afternoons” (*GVM* 7). Besides all these, he begins to work before Mani comes. He is not threatened by both physical and emotional sickness and he prepares himself for his new student.

Vasu Master takes the responsibility of teaching Mani when everyone else refuses. Veera Naidu, the headmaster of the school insists that, Vasu Master has enough time to teach Mani. He further says that Vasu Master is the right kind of man to deal with Mani. Hearing his inner voice Vasu Master says “Of course I will teach him” (*GVM* 10). He takes this new charge as a challenge. When Mani first comes to Vasu Master, he is unable to know what is wrong with Mani, whether he is retarded, mad, or neither.

In his new task of teaching Mani, Vasu Master tries all his PG tricks to halt Mani in his tracks and grab his concentration. When his tricks fail, he begins to use new techniques and in the process he himself learns new things. – “all of us are pupils and teachers. While there is life in each of us, we learn and we teach” (*GVM* 28). In this regard Shinde in the article entitled “The

‘Feminine Ghosts’ in Githa Hariharan’s *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*” says that, “Vasu Master in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* believes, as does Jyoti in Jai Nimbkar’s *A Joint Venture*: Life should be led with conscious intention, not simply allowed to happen” (120). After his retirement, he plans to expand scribbles in his notebooks into an essay called ‘Four Decades in a classroom.’ It will prove to be a guide to younger teachers. This essay will describe the relationship between the teacher and the pupil and his reflections on the nature of teaching. In fact, this is Githa Hariharan’s major concern as it is given in the epigraph of the novel. She hopes that major changes can be brought about through proper education.

Veera Naidu from the same novel is another educator. Unlike Vasu Master who is devoted to his profession, Veera Naidu, ravenous for materialistic wealth runs a school in order to educate children. Vasu Master thinks high of Veera Naidu and appreciates his abilities to take care of such a huge responsibility. He contemplates:

. . . [Veera Naidu] who sat in his office, doing a nine-to-five job. He owned the place to begin with; more important, his touch was evident everywhere: in the textbooks chosen, the pupils who managed to get admission, the pupils who passed or won prizes, the methods the teachers used to reward or punish. His presence followed us about from class to class, an assertive, ever-watchful shadow. PG without Veera Naidu would be PG with a sunless sky. (GVM

151)

An educator is assumed to be a role model for the entire society. Venkatesan another teacher in the same novel has eight children, seven of them are daughters. His wife has never visited PG Boys’ school. When Vasu Master visits Venkatesan’s wife, she is pregnant. In spite of his education, he has given importance to physical pleasures and never bothered about the health of his wife. Many children in the same house is one of the reasons for population explosion in

the Indian society. Being a teacher, he should know how to plan his family and create awareness among people.

Venkatesan's complaint against Vasu Master is that he is very patient while dealing with the students. He feels that the students can get kindness or patience from the world outside. They need to get trained for coping with all sorts of circumstances. They have to do things they may not like, or they may be pushed to do certain things by others.

However, Vasu Master does not take Venkatesan's complaint seriously. He asks, "are you saying our job is to teach them misery? Prepare them for slavery?" (*GVM* 207). Venkatesan and many other teachers believe in torturing their students. Unlike Vasu Master, they run out of patience with their students. Githa Hariharan has portrayed many aspects of teachers which include both compassion and severity.

Vasu Master says, "money is no qualification for an educator" (*GVM* 150). However, Venkatesan has never agreed with Vasu Master and says, ". . . can you set up a P.G. Boys' school? It takes money, Vasu! The rest just follows" (*GVM* 150). Vasu Master says "Money is all very well to put up a building, buy some books and a few desks and chairs. But can you buy a teacher or a pupil?" (*GVM* 150). Money can change even a good person's mind. Although Veera Naidu has much wealth, he is also influenced by the bribe and his mentality eventually changes.

Education can bring about a positive change in society and every educator should try to bring in this change. Shiv from *In Times of Siege* is another of Githa Hariharan's representative figure of education. He is a professor of History at Open University in Delhi. He is an educationist and also a thinker. He does not stop with thinking but translates his thoughts into words and attempts to extend it to learners. One of such attempts becomes the reason for public criticism and opposition.

Families are the basic units of a social system and hence significant and inevitable in the all-inclusive growth of humanity. Nonetheless, there are broken and disintegrated families

pervading ubiquitously. Families are broken because individual members in the family do not accept personal responsibility. When people do not understand their charge, whatsoever the circumstances may be, they place the liability on other people in the relationship, which makes things problematic. When things are problematic, people in the family become unhappy. Ultimately, this leads to a broken family.

Lack of communication between a married couple and other family members also leads to a break up. Communication involves more than talking. So when communication fails in a family life, it automatically leads to several fissures and immeasurable remoteness in an interpersonal relationship. Bad or broken marriage leads to the ruin of the family. Basavaraj Naikar in the book *Critical Response to Indian English Literature* remarks: “One of the difficult problems of human life is living together and in the most intimate and complete of these, marriage, the coming together of man and woman, the challenges are even greater. This involves a continuous, dynamic adjustment, an acclimatization, occurring on many places - physical, psychological, moral, emotional and philosophical” (32).

Today, people are prone to muddle up their work with their family life. They fail to understand that job is different from family life. When they try to apply their triumphant business formula in marital life, they end up as miserable failures. Mahesh who is in the grip of a hasty and profitable business world, expects that whatever he does in life should also bring him positive results. He uses his wife only as an object to please his organised sexual feelings. He could not provide protection and consultancy for both physical and verbal interaction.

There are a few unconventional yet natural ways of life which affect marriages. Anita Nair asks in her novel *Ladies Coupe*, “What is it about marriage that makes it possible for a man and a woman to mesh their lives, dreams and even their thoughts in such a complete fashion?” (13). Men admire and look for something new in their life. In the world everybody is an

opportunist, and if chances prevail, individuals tend to fall and fail. In this case there is no distinction between men and women. Women do not show deliberately their wishes in these cases. Men can show all these things because they live in a patriarchal society and have manly power.

In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Mahesh admires and praises other women but fails to recognise the good things in his wife. For instance, he esteems his colleague Ashok's wife Tara's infinite energy. He also praises his wife's mother Sita. Through all these he shows his weakness – his failure to find out the good in her. He does not encourage her reading and says “did your mother need books to tell her how to be a wife? I have never met a woman more efficient than your mother” (*TFN* 70). Vasu Master in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* thinks highly of his wife's friend Jameela. He feels very sad when Jameela leaves his house finally. He admires her language and style. Shiv in *In Times of Siege* also has a high regard for Meena's boldness and independent nature. Thus men give more respect to other women but miss out the virtuous qualities of their wives.

Asad from *Fugitive Histories* is fortunate to have a loving and caring wife who nurses him throughout his sickness. She not only nurses his physical ailment but also tends to his emotional needs as he feels disheartened and upset. Their marriage is a success because of their love and mutual devotion. He has loved and cared for his family all his life and when he becomes old, he is taken care of. Everyone in the family loves him so much that all are disturbed by his sickness. Feeling discomfort in his chest he says “it feels like a rock is sitting on me” (*FH* 208). Asad also gets attention from his children during his sickness. Although Asad and Samar argue about the Anti-Vietnam War Movement, when Asad was on his death bed, Samar comes and shows his affection to his father.

Mahesh in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a self-absorbed man who does not fulfill the role of a husband. He is so self-absorbed that he fails to understand his wife's needs and as a

result becomes the instigator of his fallen marriage. His wife Devi, when unable to get love and care from him looks to another person and eventually abandons him. As John MacArthur in the book *Successful Christian Parenting: Raising Your Child with Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* reflects, “Certainly the normal attitude of a husband toward his wife ought to include a loving care for her. Something is seriously wrong and unhealthy if the husband doesn’t nourish and cherish his wife the way he would his own body” (176).

Mahesh feels that marriage is a necessity, like a landmark in life. After he settles in a good job, all he wants is a wife to fulfill his social existence. The famous opening sentence from *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen runs thus, “It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife” (1). He wants it like a degree which one requires for a job. He does not have the exhilaration which usually young boys eagerly await in marriage. He is unable to pull himself out from addiction to his work. He is a pitiable manager of emotions; his unnoticeable nature could never make him a reliable husband. He is completely immersed in his work. Generally, men prefer success in their work life which gratifies them more than their domestic happiness. As James Dobson in his book *Prescription for a Tired Housewife* observes:

A man derives his sense of worth primarily from the reputation he earns in his job or profession. He draws emotional satisfaction from achieving in business, becoming financially independent, developing a highly respected craft or skill; supervising others, becoming ‘boss,’ or by being loved and appreciated by his patients or clients or fellow businessmen. The man who is successful in these areas does not depend on his wife as his *primary* shield against inferiority. Of course, she plays an important role as his companion and lover, but she isn’t essential to his self-respect day by day. (26)

As a gentleman, Mahesh shows indifference to his own spouse, Devi. Devi wants to come out of her loneliness. She is not permitted to play cards with Mahesh's friends, only because she is a woman. He says that, "This is what comes of educating a woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman than you are? What is it you want?" (FH 74). As a manager, he provides her with everything and expects her to be content. Arguing upon the same topic, R.K. Gupta in his book *The Novels of Anita Desai: A Feminist Perspective* says:

“. . . a marriage is nothing but a convenience. When two souls come together through their marriage some kinds of difference is bound to be there. But the wedlocks are used to be settled blindly and without considering the attitudes, feelings and outlooks of the brides and bridegrooms, which are compelled to fail in every spheres of their conjugal lives. Proper understanding of each other, a sense of wisdom and love for each other can make their conjugal life successful.

But in Indian male dominated society only women have to adjust. Adverse

attitudes of the family members make the marital lives, a great menace. (98-100)

Mayamma's husband is self-destructive and he inflicts on himself the pain of a bad marriage. He physically harms his wife which does not bring its immediate effect but leaves indelible and incurable scars on her mental health. She hates him and in a marriage, hatred is the last quality anyone would desire. Likewise, Baba, Devi's father-in-law is also responsible for his wife's desertion of his family. He is very demanding and wants everything in his way. His wife Parvatiamma, unable to cope with his demands channelises her love towards spiritual needs.

Shiv from *In Times of Siege* also encounters some post-marital crisis in his life. Although, he is not divorced or estranged from his wife, his attraction towards Meena shows the cracks in his marriage. He is very easily drawn towards Meena, his ward who is very younger to him. He does not reproach his wife but seems to have been trapped in his marriage with her. He is completely reliant on others, be it his wife Rekha or his ward Meena.

Shahryar from *When Dreams Travel* might seem to be a despot and womaniser but he is also a victim of cuckolding from his first marriage. He is deceived by his first wife who developed affairs with her own male slaves. This hurts Shahryar so much so that he becomes very distrustful of women. He is overwhelmed with deception and bitterness which transform him forever.

A victorious marital life depends on the mutual understanding of the couple. Asad in *Fugitive Histories* caters to the needs of Mala and stands as a firm support to her at all times. Vasu Master showers his care on Mani who is only his student and a special child who requires special attention. Shiv from *In Times of Siege* is another example of such a nursing and caring male figure though he does not attend to his wife but to a female ward.

Men sometimes, act under intense and jagged working conditions. As a family runner they are under pressure for survival in the viable world. When wives fail to understand the adversity of man that leads to mental depression and finally it ends up in divorce. In the traditional society of India, only men could get a divorce. A husband could give divorce to his spouse due to her barrenness and a man has a right to take a second wife. However, in modern times, both man and woman have equal rights to apply for divorce.

The scenario of disability and education shape up the facet of special education. Children undergo stress at school, because of the workload, peer pressure and the teachers who are disciplinarians. If persons are disabled, then the stress they undergo will be still more. Mani in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* goes to school; however, at the beginning, he faces many problems. He suffers cruelty at the hands of his school mates who mocked at him and treated him like a living caricature. His head has “grown into a long ripe papaya, much faster than the rest of him, so that he began to look as stupid” (*GVM* 9).

Mani's appearance makes others laugh at him. He speaks only a few words which worsen into groans. Sometimes a line of saliva also dribbles out of his mouth. He appears very unattractive to look at. The children, teachers and even Vasu Master make fun of him. "Mani's head still looked like a papaya but no longer felt like one. Now that it was not tender or vulnerable, he used his big hard head like a charging bull and butted anyone who spoke to him or came near him" (*GVM 9*). As a result of insults and fun poked at him, he becomes a little violent at school.

The character of Mani from this novel also brings forth the anxiety of parents who try to normalise the world for their children despite all odds. Mani's father changes him from school to school, and then he gives up on his son's education. At the age of eight, Mani stops attending school. In the house he becomes more agitated and more violent.

Disability is more than a challenge for both the person with disability and his family. Mani suffers at the hands of his family sometimes as they are unable to cope up with his fits. "He continued to be beaten when he hit people or broke things; during intervals of peace he was forgotten for days together. Caned, shouted at, ignored, tied up, he grew into a restless, untrusting boy. He was wary of everyone, and almost never opened his mouth except to eat" (*GVM 9*).

Mani is a very quiet and contented child. Imperceptibly, Mani becomes quieter, and his head begins to grow a little longer and faster. No one accepts Mani as a student. After changing four schools, his father tries again in P.G. Boys' School. All the efforts taken by his family to bring him to normalcy proved futile. The consultation with several doctors also does not help. When Mani's mother's tears are dried up, his father's attention turns towards his other two children.

Teachers are held primarily responsible for each and every student as they are able to mould the students. The schools where Mani studies frankly and curtly opine that "We don't know what's wrong with him and we can't give him special attention. . . It's not our job. Mani

disturbs the class. Do you expect us to put him before the rest? We must maintain standards. And discipline” (*GVM* 11).

The example of Mani brings out the differences and difficulties a special student might come across in a mainstream school. Teachers come across different students in different situations, with strange behaviours, peculiarities and individualities. They cannot give much attention to each and every child. In the case of Mani, a special school seems to be the best option. There are benefits like special education teachers who would have received training to work among the children with special requirements. Due to the lack of adequate attention and diverse problems, most of the disabled people suffer a lot.

The society also is equally responsible for not playing its role to alleviate the sufferings of the disabled. A single individual cannot bring about a big change in the society or make a marked difference. Hence, the individuals as a society should be aware of their social responsibility and should give them their due place.

Through Vasu Master’s life everyone can understand how to be a good teacher and be able to teach an abnormal child. Students may be of various kinds and so according to each type and the requirements and needs, the teacher has to adopt different methods. Vasu Master teaches Mani, a mentally retarded child with his new and innovative tricks and helps him understand the lessons. His charge as a tutor makes him overcome many difficulties.

When Mani comes to Vasu Master’s house for tuition, Vasu Master pays attention to him like a mother. Mani does not open his mouth for four months together; nor is he co-operative. Mani “could not sit in a place for more than a few minutes at a time. He wandered around the small room, a strange captive animal” (*GVM* 13). Vasu Master goes to the library every week without fail in order to get wisdom. After his retirement, life seems to be very different. He acquires a strange new routine. He says, “. . . solitary walks to the town library and back;

cooking for myself and reflecting obsessively on food and stomach and the link between the two; and setting things in order—unravelling knots of ideas, dreams, wishes and memories” (*GVM* 27).

Vasu Master works hard and makes efforts to teach Mani. He tries to give meaning to the word ‘teach’; he is as much a psychologist as a pedagogue, and tries to help Mani free himself from whatever demons and burdens he carries within. Seeing his corrupted body in the mirror of his eyes, he says “if I see with my impaired vision my own divided self, can I free Mani’s mind? Or will I bind him even more tightly on a torture rack?” (*GVM* 25).

Although Vasu Master has not got instantaneous success with Mani, he gradually begins to see a little development. He seems to keep him amused by telling fascinating stories. He himself has not heard proper stories, but he begins to tell stories to Mani. Though Vasu Master has not done anything special throughout his forty years of teaching career, he undertakes the challenge of teaching Mani and works hard for it.

Vasu Master tries to go closer to Mani’s heart through his stories particularly of animals. Mani is a “twelve years old, with, it seemed the brain of a six or a seven-year - old” (*GVM* 10-11). So as a child Mani is closer to the animal world rather than to the world of humans. Vasu Master chooses the story-telling method, because he believes that this method is one of the best methods to instruct Mani. The retired teacher is able to cure Mani, though not completely. This is clearly understood when Mani begins to start drawing the marks and the pictures of stories that he has heard from Vasu Master.

As a result of Vasu Master’s teaching, Mani is able to sit in one place for more than an hour at a time and listen. If he wants to move, he articulates it through his looks and he would even try to smile. Vasu Master says:

Mani was better; improved since he came to me. He was no longer violent, either at home or with strangers. His father and I never met after that first interview; but he continued to send Mani to me. I could think of no reason for this except that I

had quietened the child somehow; not made him less wary perhaps, but taken the spontaneous, unjudging fight out of him. (*GVM* 115)

In the beginning of Vasu Master's teaching, Mani does not open his mouth. But as time goes, he begins to say, "a distant, deep-throated stretching of his vocal chords, Aaaah!" (*GVM* 117). This improvement makes Vasu Master believe that he will be able to do something with Mani with the potential he has. Vasu Master wants to look deep into Mani's matter for which he has to explore himself further. "My power to describe had to be revived, along with that of Mani's" (*GVM* 212).

Poverty overrides many personal and social problems and in fact paves way for many others. For instance, poverty leads to larceny, violence, and fatality. Vasu Master's father, who is an Ayurvedic teacher is not a very wealthy person and always has an aversion to English medicine. His aversion is partially due to his inability to afford the English cure which is relatively expensive.

Mayamma's husband in *The Thousand Faces of Night* represents the ill effects of poverty. He is a jobless drunkard, living on his wife's toil. His joblessness not only causes him to be poor but also extremely cruel and cold-blooded to his wife. He beats his wife in order to quench his rage which is the outcome of poverty and also to get her earnings. This shows how a man can be driven to an extreme extent by acute poverty.

Occasionally, poverty is an accidental thing which comes out of nowhere unpredicted and transforms one's life forever. Yasmin's father from *Fugitive Histories* represents poverty which is the outcome of violence unlike Mayamma's husband from *The Thousand Faces of Night* for whom violence is the outcome of poverty. He has his own flourishing business until the riots which followed Godhra Kand in Ahmedabad. He, like many other middle-class Indians, has been living a happy and contented life till the riots which turns everything upside down.

Yasmin's father is a victim of religious riots and he pays a high price for something of which he is the least responsible. Apart from physical harm and the loss of his son, he suffers a

great deal due to poverty. He loses his business, his house and everything. He is unable to support his family in anyway due to the terrorism which the riots emanate. He is forced to live on scrapes which his wife manages to earn by doing some stitching and sewing work at home.

Asad is an 'on the breadline' artist who lives on his ideas and thoughts rather than on bread. He is not a very successful artist and unable to make a flourishing market for his paintings. However, he is happy with his profession and loves it so much so that even poverty does not stimulate him to switch jobs. Besides being a Muslim, he also gets rejection from Mala's family on account of his poor financial status.

Corruption is a form of moral degeneration both at personal and social level. It is usually associated with politics and large scale issues. However, it can be detected even in smallest acts and happenings of life. Typically, corruption is a material aspect where bribe in terms of money or wealth is involved. It is very important that the immorality pervading in the society requires reflection and termination.

The rampant growth of materialistic needs and desires is evident at every level of life and society. Veera Naidu in *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* stands for corruption and materialistic attitude. People seem to measure a person's reputation and value his worth in terms of his wealth. He is the headmaster of P.G. Boys' School. He is the owner of the school, and praises Vasu Master on his retirement day. He only suggests to Mani's father to contact Vasu Master, because he is the only patient and soft spoken man who can solve Mani's problem. Veera Naidu's family owns two big sari shops in the town but still he needs money. Venkatesan says "If I had all that money rolling in . . . I wouldn't care if I didn't have a B.A. or a B.Ed. to my name" (*GVM* 150).

Veera Naidu's son who is an engineer lives in America. Veera Naidu always boasts of his son and seems to insult Vasu Master's son. "He is a brilliant fellow, you know, though his own father should not say it. He has got another promotion. A thousand dollars more per month. That's not just a thousand rupees, Vasu, he would chuckle" (*GVM* 151).

When Raman a student fails in the examination, his father comes to see Veera Naidu. He is a film producer; a well-built, perfumed man. A simple transaction takes place between the two men. Raman's father casually draws out a white envelope from his pocket and passes it to Veera Naidu. Veera Naidu does not notice and frowns at Raman's mark sheet. "He had shaken his head dolefully. You're a man of the world, sir, he had said. PG is not a charity school" (*GVM* 152).

However, Veera Naidu yields and gives in for money. He accepts what Raman's father offers for the promotion of his son. The same man who feeds the charms of ethical science – "honesty is a pearl, simplicity an uncut diamond—had no trouble understanding Raman's father" (*GVM* 152). He converses with the film producer over a cup of tea and it comes to mutual benefit. "They had spent a useful half hour together over cups of coffee; another envelope had been passed across the table; and Raman (and his failed examination) had been entirely forgotten" (*GVM* 152). One has to have integrity of character which is very scarce these days. As Alice Walker declares in her *Color Purple*, "A Good Man Is Hard to Find" (69).

Violence is the crudest form of manmade trouble. It is a bestial attribute that destroys and hurts physically. Violence at the domestic level is as worse as bloodshed at the national level. There are husbands who have no scruples about beating their wives to death in a fit of rage. This is so very common that it has become a routine in some households.

Violence comes out not only when a person hits or wounds another, but also when one sexually harasses the other. Mayamma in *The Thousand Faces of Night* endures both physical and sexual harassment at the hands of her pitiless husband. Sexual intercourse forced on a woman is as brutal as strangling her with a wire. Mayamma's husband tortures her very much. She says, "He snorted like an angry bull. He pushed my sari aside even before my head touched the pillow. I was a silly little girl then, his grunting frightened me. If I turned away to sleep, he held my hair tightly with one hand and hit me with the other" (*TFN* 118).

Mayamma is blessed with a son after years of penance and prayers. “Eight years later, her husband, worn into middle age with dissipated excess, disappeared, taking with him all the money in the house” (*TFN* 81). Although Mayamma has not seen him again, she finds her husband’s activities replicated in her son.

Mayamma’s son grows into a squanderer who is no better than his father. Her mother-in-law thinks that Mayamma is solely responsible for her son’s disappearance. So she begins to curse Mayamma till her death . At the age of fourteen, the son harasses and beats his mother to give him a diamond ear ring. As a result of the son’s attitude, Mayamma loses her finer sensibility and tenderness. “When he fell ill with a high fever, there was no tenderness left in Mayamma’s hands. They were efficient, cool but they withheld reassurance” (*TFN* 82). This is the result of the torture she has undergone at the hands of her domineering husband and son.

Bestial elements are evident in the characters of Shahryar and Shahzaman in the novel *When Dreams Travel*. They represent the crudest form of bestiality by raping and murdering all young virgins in their kingdom. Shahryar undertakes the task of marrying a new bride everyday and after satiating his lust all night, orders the deflowered bride to be hanged till death. He is unmovable and inconsiderate. He seeks gratification both in forceful intercourse and killing.

Fundamentalism is a tag which binds anything and almost tugs along chaos and turmoil. There are public riots and protests in India as normal as a marked calendar holiday. One can summon demonstration and riots with the slightest provocation. Sometimes, the riots or protests are on a lighter scale and sometimes those are no lesser than terrorism.

Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege* mainly glamorises the life of an ordinary man named Shiv Murthy. In this novel Githa Hariharan shows the problems faced by a common man in this society. The story proves that an ordinary and average gentleman can yet be a superman. Shiv Murthy is a professor of history, fifty years old, does things as the head of the department

instructs him. He is a polite man, fine husband and loving father. His wife Rekha is on a visit to their daughter Tara in the U.S.A., Meena is the daughter of Sumati, who is a childhood neighbour to Shiv. When Sumati asks him to be a guardian to her daughter Meena who studies in Kamala Nehru University at Delhi, he agrees with the consent of his wife. He does everything according to his wife's instructions. As he is alone at home, his maidservant Kamala handles all the household work.

Shiv leads his life peacefully for some time. One day, he is accused of distorting history and historical figures. He has been charged for exaggerating the problem of caste and for writing in a biased way about the Brahmins and temple priests. It sounds stupid to him when the Head says: "It seems you have implied that Basavanna's city, Kalyana was not a model Hindu kingdom And also you have not made it clear enough that Basavanna was much more than an ordinary human being. There are people who consider him divine you know" (*TS 53-54*).

Shiv loses his peace by a phone call, when a reporter asks whether professor Shiv is taking a 'forced' leave. He is a simple, uncomplicated man who does not like war of words.

With the help of Meena, Shiv understands the gravity of the situation. Meena and her college friends come forward to help Shiv. He is inspired to protest against the fundamentalists.

Shiv writes a module for the Medieval History course of B.A. History. After five years, a group called "The Itihas Suraksha Manch" makes allegations at Shiv that he has hurt the sentiments and emotions of the Hindu people. An extremist from 'Ithias Suraksha Manch' gives out their impatient opinions about Shiv's 'academic rape' of a religious subject. These fundamentalists are "Fascist, Observanist, Terrorists. And made-in- India brand, the communalist—a deceptively innocuous-sounding name for professional other-community haters" (*TS 57*).

Shiv's mind oscillates from the memory of his dead father and Basava. Now he does not know whether he should stand up for his writing or apologise. Finally he decides to follow non-

violence as against a violent reaction. For this, he receives moral support from Meena and her friends. Shiv feels agitated because Rekha is not with him, he does not know how to cope with the situation. Though Rekha controls the house from distance, Shiv shares his problem with Meena and not with Rekha.

Shiv is a good professor, but not a hero; he wants to defend himself against the violation of his character. He expects his authorities to support him. In spite of this, some teachers are rigid in their thinking. His colleagues are fundamentalists and so he does not receive the desired support and the Dean also is not willing to submit the material prepared by Shiv for approval. "That's outrageous and they know it. My hunch is that they are testing the waters to see how far they can go?" (*TS* 69). Shiv's head says that he will not take part in any kind of controversy, because he is very near to retirement.

Meena is a student activist who supports Shiv and tells him to face things boldly, whereas Shiv wants to avoid confrontation. Lack of knowledge involves the 'fundoo's' to reject the assignment of Shiv, on which he works day and night. Through his deep research, he finds out that Basava is a lovable human being rather than a spirit. Now he is scared because people think differently. He converses with his father in his mind. He asks himself the question as to what makes the communities that have been living together hate each other. "As if in answer, Shiv hears a distant rumble, then the parking lot fills with people. Even at a distance he can sense the tension in them, bodies like clenched fists, voices angry and shrill" (*TS* 129).

Shiv believes that he has not done any blunder. Shiv and his students follow the Gandhian method and retort in a peaceful manner. Like Gandhiji, Shiv follows ahimsa, and tries to protest against the unjust accusation of the protestors in a passive way. He is not like a 'fundoo' who follows only violence. The fundamentalist himself is the biggest threat to the spirit of the religion he claims to protect because he fails to do things in a calm or meaningful way. As the Manch

asks, ““What can even a thousand policemen do when we emotionally charged people, take to the streets?”” (TS 133).

It is ironical that people in the name of their beliefs, charge like wild animals. The demonstrators from *In Times of Siege* are such kinds of hollow men who do not understand but stand to put a fight no matter what it is about. The protesters believe that violence is the best reaction to deal with a mild person like Shiv. Shiv’s condition is described thus:

In the middle of the dizzying circle, in the lone of the storm, Shiv waits with clammy hands and a weak heart. The beast is preparing to charge him, the beast with many heads, many masks, many voices. Is there no escape? Shiv could extend his leave, resign, then slip out of sight. His supporters, grateful as he is to them, unsettle him. The others, the fanatical revisionists, terrify him, bewilder him. What has happened to history, the history his uncle thought was a dull, safe choice of subject? It has become a live, fiery thing, as capable of explosion as a time bomb. (TS 134)

Githa Hariharan uses Meena as a mouthpiece, when she says, “The link between fascism and the ugly faces of Hindutva unveiling themselves around us is the regimentation of thought and the brutal repression of culture” (TS 101). Meena teaches Shiv how to cope with the situation. She acts like a girl matriarch and goes on proposing leaflets, posters, and arranging a board front rally in a bid to rescue Shiv. She does not flinch at the prospect of violence. She drums up support for Shiv, and they put up a sea of placards: “TALIBANIZATION OF INDIA to HISTORY DESTROYED! to WHO’S AFRAID OF THE MANCH?” (TS 145).

The plight of Shiv reveals how such pointless protests and demonstrations can affect an individual at the emotional level. Shiv, trapped in a strange quandary feels that “he is in a play, a miscast” (TS 142). He wishes to go back to an uncomplicated professor. He does not like all these interviews, meetings, telephone calls and mails. He feels like a “body in a lawless country,

a body that has somewhat unlearned the law of gravity” (TS 131). His books and places are violated; he loses his place of safety. Shiv asks his bewildered self: “What makes a fanatic? A fundamentalist? What makes communities that have lived together for years suddenly discover a hatred for each other?” (TS 129). However, Shiv does not give up but tries his best to find a way out. He tries to tackle the situation as Basava would have done. He finds himself in a ridiculous state. He sees two images side by side “condemned to be coupled forever. There, to the left, is Basava confronting his Manch, standing up to what he passionately believes in . . . To the right is the second image, inexorably tailing the first” (TS 136).

Githa Hariharan uses history to understand people as well as the present era. It is a contested area and is used for gaining present political ends all over the world. A history leads to different interpretations of the past, like a mosque exits under a temple or vice-versa for centuries. Regarding history Githa Hariharan says in an interview with Keshav Desraju, which is quoted by Monika Gupta in her article entitled “History Versus Politics or Politics Versus History: A Study of Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege*” “‘That’s why I used Basava to get the caste system in.’ At the same time she remarks, ‘It’s also important to remember that the same people who are willing to cede economic space, to give it away to MNC’s to make India a window display of products, also claim they are cultural nationalists’” (102).

Githa Hariharan has particularly brought out how religious fundamentalists creep into academic circles as well. Gandhiji is not liked by these people, because of his simple way of life and charismatic appeal to the masses without violence. She portrays the despicable politics of the manchies. Monika Gupta in her article entitled “Passive and Active Forms of Resistance in Githa Hariharan’s *In Times of Siege*” argues how “This low profile, ordinary style of functioning endeared Gandhiji to the masses but antagonized fundamentalisms whose whole mindset was ruled by Western status consciousness, clarification, difference and hierarchy” (104).

Meena begins to call Shiv an 'idealist.' Shiv resists prejudice and faces all kinds of oppression bravely. He comes to discern that history is not about past history but about the politicisation of academics. As soon as he receives a brown official epistle consecrated by the university emblem from the vice-chancellor, he feels:

It is like looking at an image where the photographer has made a deliberate choice of depth of field. History in the foreground—what happened recently in Shiv's university room, for example—is entirely out of focus. The letter does not contain a single word about what the 'unfortunate incident is.' The ransacking of Shiv's room is clearly footnote, minor by-product of divisive consequences.' What really matters—the unfortunate incident sharply in focus in the background—is still the original sin. That his lesson, his words invited an unwelcome spotlight, the lurid

colours of scandal and controversy and 'politics' into the university. (TS 185-186)

Shiv is unhappy for the discolored nationalistic fervour. Shiv has been influenced by his father's ideals but when, "Shiv is on the verge of living up to his father's ideals—though in a mock-heroic— way his father leaves with the storm, this time, it would seem, forever" (191). One day his father left the house without saying a word. His mother lived with the hope that he would come back one day. She kept praying continuously sitting in the puja room and she also died in the puja room holding the big brass puja bell. Shiv found it very difficult to come out of her death.

Communal and religious difference might be present everywhere; however, it seems to remain permanently in Indian society. There are many differences in practices and beliefs among the Indians. These differences are intensified when they are tried either to be erased or blended together. Githa Hariharan has prolifically put forth the aftermath of an inter-religious marriage in her novel, *Fugitive Histories*. This inter-religious marriage is quite a sharp contrast to the big picture of Godhra Kand which is also portrayed in the same novel.

Asad's sketchbook speaks throughout the novel. Asad's wife Mala lives her life through the memories of Asad through his diaries. Asad belongs to Muslim community whereas Mala is a Hindu and they end up in love marriage. They undergo so many struggles not only in the family but also in the outside world. Everyone in the house of Mala is against her getting married to a Muslim. Somehow, Mala is determined and she fulfills her wishes by opposing others. She builds her love castle with the ashes of the burnt dreams of her parents. However, the problem of identity comes when their children are born. Their children are not able to say that they belong either to Hinduism or Islam. "When Sara came home with questions about what she was, or what she was supposed to do with forms that asked her to fill in the blank next to *Religion*, Asad told her, 'Don't be ashamed of who you are. Don't be ashamed of who you're not'" (FH 180). Asad is an artist; he believes that his painting may awaken the society. "The last few months Asad has been working with exaggerated energy, as if his paintings can do what rallies and protests and talk can't" (FH 202). He does not like to show whether he is a Muslim or a Hindu, but wants to live like an Indian.

Religious differences are taught to children from their very tender age. No one teaches the children as to how to behave with people of different religions. However, they learn everything through their daily experience. Asad expresses:

. . . no one at home or in the village the children to hate Muslims or Christians or

Punjabis or lower castes—but already there were all those insidious descriptive

details are fed to her as she ate, combed her hair, or played jump with the skipping

rope.

Don't use your left hand like a bazaar Christian!

Don't show off like an uncultured Punjabi!

Don't part your hair on the side like a Muslim!

Push the fa-a-a-t slaving pa -a-r-e-aa-h out of the game!" You're the stupid

pariah this time, you're thrown out of the game! (FH 203).

Religious riots turn off the young children from school. Zainab Bano's son of *Fugitive Histories* leaves his school. His parents want him to study in the English-medium, so that he might become an engineer. The principal who is biased asks Nasir ahead of all, "Are n't you from Pakistan?" Or he'd say, 'You're not fit for an English-medium school' though Nasir did all his work" (156). He keeps on calling Nasir a terrorist, and unable to tolerate it, Nazir leaves the school.

Rights are only for the persons who are in high status in society. Nevertheless, the middle class people and people of minority groups suffer. The novel, *Fugitive Histories* delineates an instance that happens in the police station. Abba and Ammi of Yasmin go to the police station when they find their son missing. If a person is of higher status and is influenced by political parties, then the police-men would welcome them with a red carpet.

Since, they are poor, Yasmin's Ammi and Abba are treated very badly by two policemen in the police station. They have gone there to inform that Akbar is missing. When one police man inquires about Abba's family, and shop, the other policeman stares at Yasmin's Ammi as if she is naked. He lights a cigarette and blows it at Ammi's face. However, Ammi stands like a statue in front of him. Even though Appa and Ammi tell their son's name to the police men at least ten times, they do not respond properly. Atlast the second policeman takes out some sheets of paper from the file and says:

'There are twenty-three Ali here.' . . . 'Too many of you in college it seems.'

'A college student called Akbar Ali. What do you think happened? Has he eloped

with a Hindu girl? Or left home to join the terrorists?'

'He's just a boy,' Ammi says, pleading now. 'Just a student. He doesn't know

anything about politics.'

The policemen look at each other and burst into laughter.

'*Begum*', says the second policeman with mock respect, 'this is probably what Osama bin Laden's mother says of him.' (FH 134)

The policeman says that, it is a bad time for Akbar because many Muslim boys are found to be missing. So Akbar is just another one missing person, a missing Muslim boy. Finally the

policeman says that “‘Missing is not so bad,’ . . . sending Ammi and Abba away, ‘It’s better than dead’” (*FH* 135).

Aging is an inevitable phenomenon which can be avoided only by early death. It is not only a disappointing aspect in a woman’s life but also equally depressing in a man’s life. It is the twilight phase which cannot be eluded. However, it can be made more lively by the family. Vasu Master represents old age and the maladies related to it. He is a widower, a retiree and a loner who lives reflecting on his past.

Through the character of Vasu Master, Githa Hariharan ponders on the issue of aging parents and their losing grip over their children. Neglected parents, old age homes and nuclear families are found everywhere in the Indian society today. It is labeled as the generation gap sometimes, and at others as independent families; however, the result is that the elderly parents have to live in isolation as their children would like to live independently.

Vasu Master’s two sons named Vishnu and Venu converse with him only through letters; they feel duty-bound to write to him. There is a generation gap between the parents and the children. His sons do not understand the feelings of their father. Vishnu expresses his inability to attend the retirement function, because he has been busy in his work.

Vishnu asks Vasu Master to come over to Chennai. He asks about Vasu Master’s convenience so that he could be taken to Chennai. If Vasu Master needs his help to pack up things, then he would come taking leave on Saturday. He can take leave only if Vasu Master informs him beforehand. He also asks that if Vasu Master wants money for the ticket, so that he could send the money. Finally he mentions the most important thing – Vasu Master’s pension. It is evident that their children want to keep their old parents only for their pension. He writes, “But please don’t forget to check up on your pension and provident fund papers” (*GVM* 57).

Vasu Master's other son Venu also writes a formal letter, asking Vasu Master to settle down in Vishnu's house. He informs that his bachelor's flat would not be convenient for Vasu Master, and so asks Vasu Master to go to Chennai. After reading the letters from his sons, Vasu Master finds that his own children are strangers to him as they do not have filial love.

Vasu Master informs his sons that he is not willing to come to Chennai but intends taking tuition to Mani. He also informs that the mentally retarded Mani does not speak, but he has great hopes of curing him. Venu does not reply to this letter, but he gets immediate reply from Vishnu. Vishnu again informs that there is no need for him to work anymore, and says “. . . tuition fees can't be much anyway. Please think about it again and write to me. I will see to your pension and provident fund papers when I come” (*GVM* 88).

Although, Vishnu seems to be more interested in his father's welfare, he also shows his interest in his father's pension and provident fund. In the modern era, the children are too clever and calculative even while taking care of their parents. They use their parents as unpaid caretakers or guards till their own children grow up. If there is any income from parent's side or if they have properties, the grown-up children pretend to be loving children. But once they receive the property there is a drastic change in their attitude towards their parents. Eventually, they consider their parents as encumbrances.

Old age along with loneliness brings back Vasu Master's fond memories. His fondness for Jameela recalls his boyhood attraction for a young actress – her picture covering three fourth of a calendar. Now he could not remember the exact name of the starlet if it is – Rita or Mona. Yet the name of a girl is not necessary and what matters is that the girl is dressed up like an Apsara.

Rita-Mona wore an emerald-green sequinned cloth round her billowy breasts, and an equally dazzling purple garment round her hips. Both strips were tied so tightly that her torso was a series of little wavy bulges. Her neck, shoulders and stomach were a different colour from her face and arms. Their exotic pink veiled the bare skin beneath. . . . Her hypnotic, piercing look, and the breasts which swelled out of the calendar to smother me, were the only sights in the world which moved me to the point of constipation. (*GVM* 17)

This particular calendar displaying Rita-Mona's charms remains permanently in Vasu Master's mind. It brings back the memories of Vasu Master's boyhood. The pleasures of his boyhood visit him again and increase the pangs of his loneliness. He recollects his passion, his amusements and his leisure which seem far more important now than when he was young.

Old age tends to bring low self-esteem in one's life. Vasu Master is an excellent teacher and despite the testimonies from Veera Naidu, his Principal, he doubts his ability at times. He is uncertain about his remedial help to Mani. Many of his old age maladies could be healed by some extra self-confidence and high self-esteem. John MacArthur in his book *Successful Christian Parenting: Raising Your Child with Care, Compassion, and Common Sense* explains,

. . . if children and adolescents (not to mention adults) had a higher opinion of themselves, most of their psychological and emotional problems would be solved. The root of all such problems . . . is that people don't have enough self-respect. If they had more pride—if they saw themselves as good, noble, wonderful people—they would not only behave better, but they also would treat others better. (40)

The ego that plays a vital role in every body's life when they are young gets reduced in old age. However, it does not happen with all people. Sometimes, ego increases only after

retirement. When Vasu Master retires he looks back at his life. He realises that he has not achieved any good thing in his career. So he feels guilty and wants to accomplish something.

Subsequently, he decides to take tuition for children especially to Mani.

Vasu Master is a teacher in P.G. Boys' school, Elipettai. Venkatesan, his co-worker and friend calls him 'a free bird', but Vasu Master furiously retorts: "You will find that you remain a teacher all your life" (*GVM* 4). His son Venu writes a letter: "You must be relieved to have finally retired and seen the last of P.G." (*GVM* 57). His other son Vishnu invites him to stay with him and says, "After all, retirement is the ideal time to put an end to all work and turn your thoughts to God" (*GVM* 139). Though there are many views expressed regarding his retirement, to him, retirement means opening something or finishing something else. The first half of his life as a teacher comes to an end, but he intends to begin the second half "on a quieter but far more ambitious scale than the first" (*GVM* 13). The second half of his life begins with Mani, a sluggish beginner.

With the physical or mental maladies, also emotional maladies also affect the aging people. Memories and recollections are wholesome mental activities but they become an exhausting drill in old age. Elderly or lonely people tend to be more nostalgic than others. The retired teacher Vasu Master is overwhelmed by the ghostly twins – imagination and recollections. As ideas "... take a perverse kind of pleasure in distorting facts" (*GVM* 158) recollections refer to 'the exercise of memorization' of facts (*GVM* 26). Vasu Master has used up all the years to recollect and store his memory. As a result he finds some kind of retirement profit. Now he is in the grip of the newly – inflicted reminiscences of the past.

Vasu master's memories come back again and again and carry with them 'ghosts' – 'ghosts' of people lovingly kept in mind, now departed like his father, mother, grandfather, grandmother, and his wife Mangala and the still living, like the headmaster – Veera Naidu, the teachers – Venkatesan and Raghavan, Venkatesan's swami, Mani's brother Gopu, Mangala's

friend Jameela and his sons Vishnu and Venu. Mangala has once explained ghosts by saying that they “were not always like that: souls with no bodies, bodies with no matter, or life as we know it” (*GVM* 126). These ghosts as Jeyaprakash A. Shinde in the article entitled “The ‘Feminine Ghosts’ in Githa Hariharan’s *The Ghosts Vasu Master*.” says, “grow in visibility’, seeking attention not only of Vasu Master but also of the readers” (122).

Vasu Master recalls Mangala as a ‘shadowy’ figure. Vasu Master and Mangala have lived together for fifteen years with their two sons, Vishnu and Venu. Though they have lived together and understood each other, he knows her more as “a cloudy memory than a person” (41). He thinks of her as “a woman who had remained as obscure as my [his] forgotten mother” (41). He remembers her as “pale and insubstantial; a figure perennially on the retreat. I always saw her in my mind against a vast seashore in the background, the monotonous slosh and thud of waves against rock and sand drowning out all possibility of words (41)”. He sees her ghost by the seashore, ‘dressed in silence, offering him only a partial view’ with ‘the aura of silence and mystery hanging about her.

Unlike Vasu Master, Baba from *The Thousand Faces of Night* cuts a cheerful figure with company. He lives with his son and daughter-in-law in an ever bustling household. As a result, he does not dive inside his memories from past but recollects religious tales and narrates them to his daughter-in-law. His appetite for reading increases in his old age and he demonstrates abundant interest in reading books. He enthusiastically shares his readings with his daughter-in-law. Besides, he proves to be a wonderful company to Devi when her husband abandons her for the sake of his career.

There are variations in the degree of intensity of maladies or sufferings depending on the gender as well. In a few instances, men seem stronger than women and tackle their problems easily. Sometimes, the impact of these on both men and women may be equal but the way in which they approach the problem differs. However, whether it is a man or a woman, they will

have confrontations in a society. Therefore, everyone should be bold enough to face and overcome the problems as individuals and at the societal level people have to join together and fight against the social evils in unison.