

## The Plight of Indian Women in Githa Hariharan's Select Novel

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### Abstract

Githa Hariharan is one among the most distinguished writers, who explores on the theme of woman's need to change with time. She is interested in the inner life of woman, who is dissatisfied with man-made values. They are in search of freedom and liberty. They are victims either of man or of authority or of a particular social order. Her women characters though they do not achieve anything great, yet at the end of the novel, assert their individuality. They are not solitary weepers, but are strong in their decisions and are ready to face the challenges of life. This paper proposes to examine the major women character of the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, of how they overcome the state of victimization and emerged as a victor.

**KEYWORDS:**Victims, freedom, liberty, decision and strong.

### Introduction

A novel in English written by Indian writer has its lasting value as it represents culture, history, problems and issues of the Indian people. The world before feminism has offered ample evidence that men had more power than women. They are depicted as silent sufferers. They always need to depend for their survival upon man. Now women in India have started questioning the age old patriarchal domination. They are no longer puppets in the hands of men. Women's life; attitude and status are now rapidly changing with the passage of time. Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Dehpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of the books. For instance, some of the novels of Anita Desai 'Voices in the City' and 'Where Shall We Go This Summer?'. She portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision. In India, the women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense.

Feminism themes have also been used by authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta. Regional fiction theme has been aptly used by Kamala Das, Anikta Nair and Susan Viswanathan. Novelists like Kamala Markandaya and Anita Desai captured the spirit of Indian cultures and its traditional values. During the 1990's India became a popular literary nation as a number of women authors made their debut in this era. Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi and Anuradha Marwah Roy used realism as main theme of their novels. The list of Indian women novelists also comprises popular names such as Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalal, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth Jhabvala, Shobha De,

Arundhati Roy, Jhumpa Lahiri and many more. They are known for the contemporary approach in their novels. The novels of authors like Namita Gokhale or Shobha are really out-spoken. Most of these female novelists are known for their bold views that are reflected in their novels. Basically, these are the novels of protest and an outburst of reservations and contaminations. Unlike the past, where the works of women novelists were given less priority and were actually undervalued, classification of feministic or male writings hardly makes any sense today. Majority of the readers comprising both male and female read the novels of the women authors with certain expectations. They look for some “Indian-ness” in the write-ups the women novelists of India are capable of conveying the message of feminism in an Indian way.

### **Critical Analysis of the Novel**

In “The Thousand Faces of Night” is about separate yet linked stories of three Indian women Devi, Sita, and Mayamma and other female characters. These stories explore the various hues of darkness engulfing the married lives of Devi, Sita, and Mayamma. They belong to three different levels of education but the sufferings are almost the same. There are many other minor female characters with their stories, Infact, it seems that all the major and minor female characters are there only to tell that the female life is nothing but a tragic story of sorrow because of male dominance. The greatest degree of chaos is in the development of the characters of Devi, her mother Sita and servant Mayamma. When the book starts Devi is in the U.S.A she has developed a relationship with Dan, a fellow black student then it is not talked about. The justification given for this relationship which was never meant to be anything but a temporary one is that “Dan was Devi’s answer to the white claustrophobia of an all-clean all American campus”! Well, Devi returns home to Madras to her mother Sita. Devi one meets after her journey back to India is not even a shadow of the Devi Whom one comes across at the beginning. This Devi is one of the most boring most colorless characters ever created by Hariharan she has no initiative, no urges to do anything and waits passively for others to arrange her life well. There are many people like her in the world. The question is then what was the necessity of sending her to US when that experience left no trace at all on her personality? Hariharan hints that Devi’s character developed as it did as a consequence of the many mythological stories told to her childhood by her grandmother. So stories after stories are told in this novel. At the beginning it is very interesting to read them. But soon they lose their meaning.

Devi’s mother arranges her meetings with suitable boys, Devi marries Mahesh why? Who knows? There is nothing to sustain the marriage. Neither the husband nor the wife has any interest in making the marriage work. Mahesh is one of examples of what a husband should not be Devi lives like a stranger in her own home, with a stranger whom she has married, her father-in-law of tea quotes for her saying, from Sanskrit books. Mayamma is the second important female characters in this book. She turns out to be nothing but a victim of a heatless husband and mother-in-law and whose life became worth living only after she come as a servant to parvatiamma Mahesh’s mother. Even Mayamma’s philosophical outlooks cannot and do not influence Devi. Mayamma does not stop Judge Devi. She does not stop her when Devi decides to elope with Gopal, a musician next door Mayamma could not have stopped as all she was the servant and Devi

was the lady of the house. Though she does not understand what that role implies. Her joys and sorrows, emotions and feelings do not happen in her marriage, as Mayamma failed to conceive. It brought a bundle of sorrows and sufferings for her. She had to undergo several critical penances and fasts. She got up early in the morning and performed all her duties related to religion, in-laws and husband. She was even denied to wear good clothes and to eat good food. One day her mother-in-law berated her.

Hariharan's portrayal of the relation clearly reflects her notion about the plight of wives in India. The primary thing that strikes is the insensitivity of Indian husbands to psychology of their wives. Even the educated husbands fail miserably in this respect. Through this Hariharan has tried to make the readers, especially males, vigilant to widen their thoughts for paying a significant place to the partner's desires, emotions and feeling otherwise the result will be like Devi's or Uma's or Gauri's marriage. Among so many couples, there is only one couple, Sita and Mahadevan who perfectly pass all the scaling of a matured couple. There are so many couples but only one matured couple has been presented in the novel. This cannot purely be incidental on the part of the novelist. It seems as if he has to present the percentage of matured couples in real life also. If fifty couples are studied in day-to-day's life, hardly five couples will be found who provide perfect understanding and affection to each other in true sense of this relation. Hariharan is a talented writer. Her presentation is really praise worthy.

### **Conclusion**

In 'The Thousand Faces of Night', she asserts that she rejects the entry into a male world and refuses to be what a man sees and desires her to be. A woman's identity cannot be conceived of in terms dictated by man. Devi abandons three men: Dan who lives in a materialistic world, Mahesh in the male ordered world, and Gopal in the materialistic but sensually artistic world. Her action frees her to confront her future.

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