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## WOMAN: AN IDOL OF SACRIFICE IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S "THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT"

PREETI

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### Abstract

Present paper is an attempt to highlight the hollowness of life and pitiable condition of woman after marriage. It also mirrors the various steps that a lonely, married and unhappy, unsatisfied woman takes to give vent to her rage and rebellious feelings. This paper closely discusses the situation of women in India after marriage. In this research paper Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* has been deeply studied and the situations presented in the novel are highlighted.

**Keywords:** patriarchy order, objectification of woman, expectations, unsatisfied hollow life, rebellious thoughts.

### INTRODUCTION

"In a dominant patriarchal society like India, it is not uncommon to see women, pitted against an oppressive system, trying to turn the aggression against themselves resulting in self-inflicted wounds and penance. This in itself is a resultant factor of the realization of the impossibility of turning their anger against those who are responsible for inflicting humiliations on them. This 'hostility against oneself' is best personified in the mythical figure of Gandhari in the Mahabharata." (Rao, 160)

These lines by K Damodar Rao correctly mirrors the status and position of women in India, where they always have to keep the family and its needs as their priority and in all this business, they forget to live life for themselves, they forget to dream about something they like and work for achieving it. In the present play *Thousand Faces of*

*Night* Githa Hariharan has successfully portrayed the image of an Indian woman who has to kill all her desires and dreams just for the sake of family and society. Bindu Jacob aptly comments, "The novel can be aptly defined as the several faces of thought presented by Githa Hariharan about the central theme – the struggle and predicaments of women in Indian society. The central theme is categorised as quest for identity, penance, female bonding, marriage, chaos and dilemma by the rebellious protagonist Devi." (81)

In the novel three women belonging to three different generations have been presented. Novel highlights their struggle and problems. They are presented as fighters, fighting for freedom, and search for self-identity, individuality and freedom. Devi is presented as a well-educated woman who returns to her country India after completing her

studies from abroad. Devi's mother Sita is a woman who is middle aged woman. She is presented as representative of a different phase of life which exists between the two extreme generations which are of Devi and other of Mayamma. Githa Hariharan has clearly mirrored the social framework of marriage in Indian society where it's just a social obligation which is a necessity and is inevitable. In this marriage bond a girl leaves her paternal home where she has spent all her childhood since her birth, a place where all her needs are fulfilled before asking and a place where she is free to dream about her life and gets full support to achieve her dreams. From this atmosphere she suddenly moves to her husband's house which is sometimes totally different. Where she has to think twice before saying something. The atmosphere in husband's house is new and where she is judged by her each and every activity. In India, a married lady is expected to do all her duties perfectly towards her husband and his family. She is just expected to serve the family and needs and desires of the members without thinking about her own desires. Githa Hariharan has presented various things in her novel where an Indian bride has to sacrifice her desires for family to be good in everyone's opinion. If she does not do so she is considered to be ill cultured. In the novel, Sita has a passion for music and she likes to play music on veena, but once when her father in law finds that the house is in a mismanaged condition he strictly orders in anger to put away her veena because according to him he was not giving proper time to manage the house and her duties as a housewife, as a wife and as a daughter in law. Being born and brought up in Indian family she was trained to obey elders and respect them. So her upbringing prevented and stopped her from rebellion in words, however she never touched her veena again. She was like a volcano about to erupt but her upbringing prevented her from doing it and she quietly surrendered and killed her desire and passion for music for the sake of family.

Nawale rightly observes as he says, "Philosophizing and thinking...outside and making possible, yet impossible to assimilate to male reason, matter is what makes women an identity

and an experience of their own, forever apart from male power and male concepts." (Nawale)

All the three women Devi, Sita and Mayamma presented in the novel clearly represent the condition of Indian women after getting married. After Devi's return to India, her mother Sita starts looking for a suitable groom for her daughter. Devi was made to enter into an arranged marriage with Mahesh, who is always busy in business making money. He fails to realise the loneliness of his wife Devi and just expects her to take care of his old father, to attend his office friends well and to look after the household matters. Devi used to spend lonely afternoons amidst of cupboards infected with cockroaches in dusty rooms. Finally Devi finds a solace in Gopal's company who is her neighbour. She enjoys his company and spends joyful happy moments with him. It's just a feeling of revolt that came out in form of relation with Gopal because she was unable to speak openly and revolt against patriarchic society. So her revolt came out quietly in this form. Moreover Devi is impressed by Gopal's music as well and loves to hear him singing. Devi finds that music so much relaxing as she observes, "The music wafts faintly from the house beyond the high wall. First a slow teasing of notes, suggestions of melody. A note is struck a pure a liquid circle glimmering in its completeness, and held for so long that it permeates the helplessly responsive pores of my skin. A warm glow begins to stretch its caress across my body, and the scales sway their way down a zigzag path, a curve here, a detour there, and a pattern forms itself flowing sensuously like the life giving waters of some ancient river." (75) Devi again remembers joyful time spent in Gopal's company as she says, " He knows every muscle on my face, he sees the shadow before it falls across my eyes. We talk, he sings. When he takes my hand and brushes the fingerprints with his moist mouth, the lush prison around me dissolves into a green blur." (78)

Mayamma too suffers in the hands of patriarchy. Mayamma could not bear a child for several years so her husband and mother in law used to torture her physically. Devi clearly views about Mayamma, "Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learn

to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, firsthand. She had no choice really...And she had won some small victory if you could call it by such a grand name." (95) Sita too paid the price of getting married. She had to give up on her passion for music. Sita sacrificed her happiness for the sake of family and it will not be wrong to say, "Sita too had paid the price for it, not a light one for someone who measured her self-worth so completely in terms of music." (136)

Githa Hariharan pens down Devi's views about her married life same as Manohar writes, "He is far too civilized to raise his hand and bring it down on my rebellious body. He snarls instead about women's neurosis and my faulty upbringing. Am I neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors everyday? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard earned education, bitter and indigestible, when he tied the thali round my neck? A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body when his hands reach out, and dreams instead, in the spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burnt by moonlight." (Manohar)

Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* chiefly revolves around the life of a woman after marriage, be it in a role of a mother, wife, daughter and a woman in social life. Paul rightly comments, "One of the important concern in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society." In the end it is presented that Devi returns to her mother after facing an unsatisfied and lonely marital life because her married life was not based on genuine love, mutual respect, trust, and sense of duty towards each other. Life of an Indian woman is just like an onion, covered with many skins just for the sake of family and society that follows patriarchal orders. Ron Matson aptly comments, "Society, in all of its complexity, has multiple layers. Much like an onion, what we see on the surface tells us little about what lies beneath." (Matson)

### Conclusion

The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Githa Hariharan presents her skill of excellent

craftsmanship where very clearly she has highlighted the dreams, desires and feelings of a woman after marriage. She has portrayed very well the idol of a woman in India where she is just expected to serve only without getting anything in return. She has to follow and obey all the orders and rules set by the male dominated chauvinistic society, where there is no place for the desires and dreams of a woman. Githa Hariharan minutely examines and throws light on the plight of women in India where she is objectified, used when needed and is discarded after her role is over.

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