

CHAPTER IV

MYTH AND HISTORY IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S FICTIONS

“The History of the Housewife”, the first version of which was written in 1973, has the hallmarks of this early attempt to link with new language of feminism with a reworked marxism. It was concerned to recover a lost history, value and meaning to the activities of women which has not been legitimated in the traditional historical writing (Hall 05).

Contemporary feminist revisionary writing engages itself with the politics of revisionist writing of myth, history and classical text. It is a process of recasting woman, history and text. Indeed, revisiting mythological materials and history has been a recurrent trend of present Indian feminist writing and interpretation. It aims to deconstruct hegemonic ideological constructs of the past. Myth as the idealised presentation of history with gender-bias perspective is subject to revisioning and reinterpretation because it is to adapt itself in the new social environment and thereby suits the demand of the new generation. Many feminist thinkers challenge the self-annihilating images and ideas created by male classical writers. For instance, Aristotle said, “The female is female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities; we should regard the female naive as afflicted with a natural defectiveness (Quoted in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, p-16). Beauvoir alleges masculinised definition of woman, “Theus humanity is male and man defines woman not in her self as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Benda’s comment in his *Rapport d’Uriel*, “Man can think of him without a woman. She cannot think it herself without man”” (Beauvoir 16). A revisionist narration of myth is a continuous process for its extension to ages. A notable point is that except in her one novel *When Dreams Travel*, myth/ history is neither context/ background nor the technique of Hariharan’s fictional writing; rather history is a vision/ target of the texts to be revisited/

recast/reinterpreted. Hariharan has revisited myth and history to “recover a lost history, value and meaning” (ibid) of females, their lived experiences and self, and thereby she endeavours to examine woman’s relation to man and society. Her revisionist writing shows not only the significance and role of women in the family and society but unfolds the underworld of female subordination and alienation.

Myth, tale and legend created in the past seem to involve with Kate Millett’s idea of “sexual politics” (Millett 51) of narrative under the strong regime of patriarchy to perpetuate “the cultural mind-set” (Barry 122). Myths seem to propagate propaganda of patriarchal ethics and morality, values and meanings. These ideological discourses need to be revisited to reinvestigate the gender-bias tradition. Moreover, revisiting reconstructs the past through new interpretation and revaluation, and thus, it will help to redefine the present existence and to transcend it. This orally descended cultural practice has been sharpened and shaped, in course of time, by phallogocentric ideologies of the power structure. And this tradition has become a tool of socialisation of both male and female towards patriarchal polity. Coady and Miller observe, “Literary texts, traditionally viewed as repositories of moral and aesthetic insight or challenge, tend now to be seen as predominantly ideological constructions, or site of power struggles between social forces of a various kind” (Coady and Miller 201). Today’s feminist revisionist writing rereads this body of knowledge for re-examination, revaluation and re-imagination of the past and thereby it challenges the complicit epistemology patronised by patriarchy. It can also be said that the revisioning is a re-reasoning of the past or seeing with new logic and perspective. Application of new liberal hermeneutic shall be helpful and beneficial for analysing genres of literature.

Githa Hariharan, one of the contemporary Indian woman English novelists, writes with a strong feminist undertone. Her works make an engagement with feminist ethics of writing what is defined by Adrienne Rich, “Writing as Revisioning, the act of looking back with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction” (Rich 35). Indeed, her fictional writings have been brilliant feminist revisionist writings of phallogocentric texts. She has grounded the ‘sexual politics’ of retelling and rewriting the past. For the purpose, she has adopted a metafictional mode of narrative. Metafictional writing is self-conscious and self-reflexive in nature. Rahul Chaturvedi rightly comments, “*When Dreams Travel* is also

fiction on fiction, a representation of a representation. Hariharan has reworked on the medieval legend of the Shahryar and Shahrzad and has presented it in a metafictional mode” (Chaturvedi 161). Some of her major works are characterised by intertextuality. Her fictional works hold an open challenge to create a hypertext or re-narrate and recast the myths, tales (fables) and legends from a feminist perspective. Infact, her works are reworking and reconstruction of some highly canonical texts. Indeed, her writing is an intelligent reworking on old texts, revisiting the past, reinterpretation of myth, tale and history. Hariharan’s works are characterised by a subtle blend of past and present, dream and reality, myth and history. The objective of her narrative is to discern gender operation and power structure in those texts. For example, Chitra Sankaran observes in her work, “Whereas in the original *Arabian Nights* the focus of the text was on the wit of Shahrzad and in the entertainment value of the stories she related, Hariharan’s recast text draws our attention to the fact that it is across the gender divide that fault lines are very often visible” (Sankaran 69). So, her artistic production is based on her close observation of feminine subjectivity, feminine aesthetic and traditional gender relation of dominance and subordination. Her auto-ethnographic writing explores female lived experiences, female self and body, and her struggle for liberty and choice. Her writing is not only what Helene Cixous calls female ‘insurgent writing’ to re-proclaim the lost empire of writing, self and body but also her fiction recreates female Utopian world, an alternative world of patriarchy where enduring and reciprocal female-female bond/ relation always exists, liberty of choice can be availed or a place where female self-determination is always possible. Her writing can be defined by Indu Swami’s argument, “In feminist literature, women’s experience has become a central concern. This type of revisionist literature demythologizes the myth that man is the universal representative of humanity, and woman is the unnamed and invisible” (Swami 7). She narrates how female life is still at Hamlet’s situation of “to be and not to be”. She shows how today’s ‘New Woman’ (Cixous) is dragged between old and new order of things in Indian social milieu. Her works appear to be the serious observation of female role, temperament and status in Indian culture and society. Covertly and overtly, her writing mostly concerns with ideas of power and human relationship, female rebellion against the patriarchal polity.

Her fiction articulates the female predicaments in patriarchy and demonstrates women’s protests against the traditional value system; stereotypical attitude, patriarchal authority. There is a strong tendency

to escape from different socially defined/ prescribed roles of woman as an ideal woman, virtuous wife, mother, daughter-in-law; she wants to get individual identity. Her characters are struggling against the norms and rigidities of traditional society for their self-determination. This is why modern young women desire to escape from the present norms of life or the normative world. Her writing enforces a challenge against misogyny and self-annihilating image of women in phallogocentric texts. There is a decolonising tendency in her texts. By this high authoritative and subversive writing, Hariharan is eliminating the passive, the angel of house, and always victimised female characters as found in conventional writings of both the males and females. This is how Hariharan has created some subversive works refuting all traditional values and old order of things. In her writing, she has created an open debate over the past. It has been a project to relook the past, to critique and rectify it, and thereby to present a new interpretation. Moreover, her fictions show multiplicity in terms of narrative and its voice. Her writing has been a collective female voice of various categories of Indian women which unfold the repressed underworld or repressed self of women of south-west Asian countries especially India and Arab. Thus, her writing focuses on the borders of gender difference and repression of self in all aspects of life.

Hariharan's revisionist works have created some self defining female characters who are observed to be active or rebellious in their nature. Her artistic production shows the woman as an agent of change who has resigned from the status of "the Angel of the House" (Showalter 217). Devi wants to refrain from the role of childbearing and housewife at husband's house. She disbelieves in traditional values of wifedom and motherhood. Hariharan's female protagonists have made a bold effort to come out of "masquerade femininity" (Irigaray 84). Hariharan has also created some indeterminate female figures trapped/ alienated in "patriarchal mechanism" who are trying to escape from it. Her vision of fictional writing is found to be similar to 19th-century British woman novelists. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar define the vision of Charlotte Bronte's writing in a feminist classic *The Madwoman in the Attic*,

Nevertheless, we would argue that this is the vision she worked out in most of her novels, a vision of indeterminate, usually female figure (who has often come "from the kitchen or some such place") trapped- even buried- in the architecture of a patriarchal society, and imagining, dreaming, or actually devising escape routes, roads past walls, lawns, antlers,

to the glittering town outside. In this respect, Bronte's career provides a paradigm of the ways in which, as we have suggested, many nineteenth-century women wrote obsessively, often in what could be (metaphorically) called a state of "trance", about their feelings of enclosure in "feminine" roles and patriarchal houses, and wrote too about their passionate desire to flee such roles or houses (Gilbert and Gubar 313).

Hariharan's major works written with revisionist ideology explore Indian cultural and social milieu. She is very critical about Indian conservative culture and patriarchal tradition. Her writing has been a strong critique of a rigid social order where women have limited choice and space. This virtual interest makes her revisit Indian myths and history from a feminist perspective. Poonam Dwivedi rightly observes, "*The Thousand Faces of The Night* is not just a womanist novel but it is definite feminist writing in which myths are revisioned, rewrote and retold from a female point of view. The main focus of this novel is on inner lines of women, the inner spaces are reflected" (Dwivedi 103). Some of her works reinterpret those myths, tales, legends and personal history. They are re-examination of the cultural concept of woman and her mythical images. India has a very complex idea of women. In myth and scriptures, she is defined as an enigmatic figure: half-human, half-deity; she is always recognised as the goddess (Devi), symbol of power (Shakti Devi), nurturer of life, mother earth etc. She is offered the status of the goddess (Devi). But Indian feminists are not happy with this godly status for some reasons. To them, this revered status denies a woman her distinct individual status. Her godly status disrecognises her physical self. It means this concept of idealisation makes her hide her individuality, her real love and passion. It gives her an image of a silent statue, a mythical idea of a human figure with flesh and blood. This patriarchal morality becomes a burden for them. Nonetheless, there exists a vast difference between the idealized image and the real situation of the Indian woman. A mother or highly placed woman is looked with the regardful image of mythical figures- Sita-Savitri, Ganga-Parvati, Durga-Lakshmi, Mahamaya-Kamakhya, but as an ordinary wife/ woman she is treated merely as an object of desire, often, being raped, tortured and butchered. She is still looked as worthy to be owned, protected as property, and simply considered as husband's shadow. She is deemed to be kept always under the stern watch of the father, brother, mother, husband, brother-in-law and father-in-law. An earning mother is rarely considered as guardian, bread earner/ heir of the family. Her

personal income is not yet acknowledged. Even women of the matrilineal society of India have complaints of getting lower status because man plays a major role in the family as a maternal uncle in a matrilineal society. It is he who not only decides everything in the family domain but also enjoys a higher status in all domains of society. In a normal patriarchal society, it is usual practice that a female child is simply prepared for a dutiful daughter or daughter-in-law with the virtues of womanhood, chastity and motherhood. If a woman cannot perform her expected roles and fail to fulfil to attain required values, she is alienated and thus, she is conditioned to feel self-annihilating guilt or sin. This idea is reflected in Hariharan's fiction. In Hindu tradition one of the most condemned texts of law is *Manusmriti*. It is the first book on Hindu law which sets gender-specific strong laws and principles. It is deemed to be written by *Manu*. This religion-based legal text prescribes many self-damaging laws for women. In India today it is held responsible for the present condition of Indian women. High-caste Hindu Brahmins consider women as low, impure, dirty and weaker sex and she is prevented from entering many holy Shrines and religious institutions till today. As a mother, she is still given divine status but as a woman or wife, she possesses very low status. However, no religion of the world has done justice to women. Even the *Bible* has offered a secondary status to women. The belief that Eve is created by God with a rib taken out of Adam to accompany him is marked with an ideology of female inferiority. The *Koran* defines women in a derogatory manner as the weaker sex, subservient to men; she is merely an object of man's gratification. As the door of the mosque is still closed to her, it is a fact that in Islamic society religious space is still not equally shared with women. Muslims say that it is necessary for the maintenance of purity at the holy place. It means in religious term woman is impure and secondary. Indu Swami rightly observes,

In scriptures and myths, woman is depicted either as Goddess or sub-human creator, never as a complete human being. Where on the one hand, she has been described as an object of reverence or worship; on the other hand, she is treated as an object of sexual gratification and considered to be man's property. There is a great discrepancy between idealized concept of woman in Indian myths and scriptures and her actual situation in life. On the surface she enjoys a very high status and is known as Devi (Goddess of power), but in real life she is harassed, oppressed and tortured in various ways (Swami 3-4).

Githa Hariharan's writing is concerned with both revisiting personal history or history of domestic life and public history. Moreover, her fiction talks about the history of fundamentalism and communalism in the country. It investigates the Indian history of power and politics. Revisit of individual history helps the writer to re-explore the socio-cultural condition, female self and perspective because Hariharan is trying to rediscover and redefine female self and identity. Like Rushdie does in his *Midnight's Children*, Hariharan makes her meticulous effort in her fictional works to re-explore personal history which delves into several generations. Personal history sometimes becomes the mirror of the community history or of a nation. This type of history is surrounded by memories, memoirs, anecdotes, dreams and fantasy. Diaries, photographs, sketchbook, memories, trunk have been the finest sources of this history. In response to my research questionnaire Hariharan argues that her fiction is made of her ideas that past is unforgettable, an indispensable part of life, whether it is adequate to tell about future or not, life is always dependent on past. It is looked as an adequate basis for the present.

Hariharan as a feminist revisionist retells the past to reconstruct women's history, to re-evaluate their lived experience in order to re-establish women's self and identity. She has endeavoured to demythologise the passive and self-accusing female characters in literature. It leads to rediscover female self and to know the real choice. This makes her revisit family history, ancient myths and tales through her fiction. In her writings, the past concerns the present life of individuals, community and nation. Hariharan has observed that myths, tales, fables and legends and history have been playing a great role in constructing a gendered society. In her first and foremost novel *The Thousand Faces of Night (TFN)* it is found the character of grandmother repeats old tale-telling practice. Traditionally our elders tell various stories- tales, fables, fantasies in order to shape the moral character of young children and make them aware of the social norms and values of the society. Today this traditional practice is found to be very much a gendered act because it is formed as an essential part of patriarchal socialisation and moralisation. Gender synchronisation starts with this process. Children or young people find model figures in those stories. Consequently, they try to identify themselves with ancient mythical figures like Rama/ Sita, Gandhari, Bheeshma, Krishnan/Radha, Yudisthira/Draupadi, Bheema etc. Storytelling is intended to give social

orientation to children about certain gender-specific roles and values in society. In her *TFN* Grandmother, a figure with internalised patriarchy, tells her granddaughter, Devi, the main protagonist of the novel, with the same objective of teaching her the role as a daughter, woman, wife and daughter-in-law; values of womanhood and chastity in Indian society. Devi challenges this lesson of tradition at her maturity.

Revisiting past for a new meaning has been one of the dominant themes of Githa Hariharan's fictional writing. It can be termed as retrospective narrative. Most of the narrators of Hariharan's fictions play the role of revisiting agent. Dunyazad in *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* traces her past relationship with her sister, her lesbian partner Dilshad either to renew it or reinterpret their lived experiences. She also searches for the visibility of the role played by women in the royal court and the significance of the harem in it. In the text, she has been an agent of a new link between two kingdoms, Shahabad and Samarkand, largely divided kingdoms once ruled by two powerful royal brothers, Shahryar and Shahzaman. Her *TFN*, as it is already said, is a revision in many aspects. Devi's coming back to India is a kind of revisit of her past life, cultural past, and it is a re-acquaintance with the old order of things. After personal experimentation of Indian patriarchy, Devi relives her grandmother's mythical world and re-reads her old mythical tales which reconnects with her spirit. And finally, she returns to her mother for her final resort and she retains her early relationship with her beloved mother, her fellow sex. The same idea can be found in her *In Time of Siege* as Shiv, the main character, often revisits his dead father's dream as he often reappears before him. Shiv revisits the past of Hampi city, Vijaynagar to check his historical sense and his knowledge on Vasava. In the novel *Ghosts of Vasu Master (GVM)*, Vasu Master revisits his past for self-examination and his reunion with his father has been a revisit of ancient Indian tradition. Moreover, Mala in *Fugitive History (FH)* revisits her childhood dreams and her lunatic grandmother's world of desire and alienation.

Githa Hariharan writes back to the world wide a popular legendary tale, the frame story, *Arabian Nights* or *One Thousand and One Nights*¹⁵. Hariharan's metafictional text, *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* is one of her major revisionary works. It is retelling the famous Arabian frame tale of legendary hero and heroine, Shahryar and Shahrzad. It has drawn different perspective speculating on women's struggle

against patriarchal authority, its ideology and ethics. The novel has its focus on woman-woman relation, woman's talent and heroism. The text presents a serious dramatic conflict between male sexuality and female virginity, sword and tales, patriarchal hegemony and female voices. Chitra Sankaran views, "*When Dreams Travel* seems to be her most forceful statement on two of the issues that are perennially relevant to humans, 'gender politics' and 'abuse of power'" (Sankaran 66). Hariharan has changed the narrative pattern, motif, outlook, vision and politics of the source text seeking for re-exploration of the off-scene and marginalized background and characters, especially female characters. The hypertext is concerned with new vision and politics which have given a new pattern and direction to it for its extensive movement and examination. It demonstrates a challenge against patriarchal power and sexuality. The first section "In the Embrace of Darkness" of Part I of the novel presents the drama of fatal fight; in one side two brothers with inherited powerful swords and two talented sisters with brilliant tales at the other to blunt the swords. The battle is deemed to be indispensable to safeguard thousands of virgins in the kingdom. Two daring sisters, Shahrzad and Dunyazad come to battle with two powerful royal brothers, Shahryar and Shahzaman. The two brothers being cheated by their deceitful wives take hellish decision to marry a virgin every night and kill her the next morning. Their only instruments to fight against mighty swords are the series of tales emerged from perennial memory and invention. The text shows an interesting symbolic implication. Here sword symbolises phallus, patriarchal authority and tales become the tools of the subaltern voice of the two marginalized women. It persistently challenges *One Thousand and One Night (OTON)* or *Arabian Nights (AR)*, a canonical text of misogyny and woman untrustworthiness.

WDT is a reconstruction of Arabian misogynist text, *OTON*. It is rewritten with feminist ethics of recasting and revisioning, revisiting and reconstructing the past. It is more than a pure parody of the hypertext (*OTON*) as it reconstructs its complete marginalised background and characters. It presents a modified version of the original narrative. It is entirely a revisit of the past of the royal palace of Shahabad where the famous event of one thousand and one nights' entertainment occurs. The first introductory section is followed by a second revisionary section of renarrating stories of their lived experiences. Undermined characters in the original text are brought into prominence. The narrative pattern is changed. The suppressed experiences in the original frame tale of *OTON*, the real adventure of the two brave sisters,

Shahzad and her accomplice and sister, Dunyazad and her talent of telling wonderful stories, their sacrifice and martyrdom, are focussed in *WDT*. In true sense, it is an excavation of hidden treasure of female experiences and it recognises the female talent and bravery. Wazir's adventures are recounted. Hariharan takes her readers beyond the world of the original frame of the tale of the *Arabian Night* or *One Thousand and One Night*. Part I of the narrative titled "Travellers" is a parody which has reversed the projection and changed the narrative tone. Consequently masculinised text *OTON* has been opposed and a women-centred narrative is produced in *WDT*. The main plot of the original frame tale *OTON* is narrated in the subsection "In The Embrace of Darkness". Even in this section focus is not on Shahryar and Shahzaman or on their powerful swords as it is in the original text, but on two sisters' struggle, their talent, brilliant tales and martyrdom. Its second section "On The way to Paradise", a recreation by the author, is about the happy celebration after the end of one thousand and one nights' deadly struggle. Part II (Virgins, Martyrs and Others) of the novel consisting of two subsections of "A Mirror, A Dream" and "Seven Nights and Days" is an extension of the original frame tale of *OTON*.

In the present recast text, *WDT* Hariharan has given the role of revisit not to Shahzad but to Dunyazad and Dilshad. For it is an extension of the time frame of *One Thousand and One Night*. Subordinate characters narrate the stories. Dunyazad, Shahzad's sister and Dilshad, her lesbian partner alternately tell their stories to each other. Dunyazad is the witness of on-stage and off-stage affairs of the melodrama of the harem in Shahabad. The author has intelligently chosen the right person to narrate the whole affairs of the kingdom. Instead of *OTON's* on-stage experience, Githa Hariharan's *WDT* is more concerned with the off-stage scenes, throws light on the miserable plight of marginalised women. She has created a different world of a woman with a strong female-female bond, lesbian undertone to challenge the repressive and domineering world of men in the *The Arabian Night (AR)*. Dunyazad is the best spectator of the whole affairs of on-stage and off-stage life of her sister because she is a performer as well as spectator. It is she who asks her sister for the next tale to continue the tale-telling session. After the end of the war, the over left story is narrated by Dunyazad. She traces her sister's lived experiences. It is she who reconstructs the lived experience of Shahzad, revisions her history and reinterprets it to reconstruct the

female self and reinstate her lost status. Dilshad, a poor slave, is chosen from the slaves with large experiences of the harem of the palace who is also technically suitable narrator.

History of the lived experiences of females is reconstructed in *WDT*. In the original *OTON* female experience is obliterated. Woman-woman relationship in the *harem* is highlighted in Hariharan's modern *Arabian Night, WDT*. Female lived experience has got more importance here. In the Part II, storytelling resumes when two passionate lesbian partners, Dunyazad and Dilshad, come in contact and they share their past experiences in the *harem*. This session of retelling of stories has a great significance in the novel which reveals the real purpose of the text. It is not only a complete reconstruction of the masculinised world found in the plot of the original text but reinventing different versions of ideological narrative that suits feminine language. It has got a new pattern and atmosphere in the revisionist version of the narrative. In this new tale-telling session there are neither men listeners nor fear of chopping off their heads. Only two lesbian partners are telling each other's stories for seven days instead of thousand and one days. Its period is scraped to seven days only. And brave storyteller Shahrzad is no longer present here but her inspiring ghost is hovering in the room as an unseen accomplice. These two storytellers invent fairy tales which are marked by transtextuality of *OTON*'s hypotext. They are actually a reconstruction of repressed stories of marginalised people or speculation of the tormented souls in the kingdom. Dunyazad revisits the royal palace of Shahabad 15/16 years after the last ceremony of one thousand and one nights' entertainment. Her inquisitiveness or desire to relink with her dearest sister, Shahrzad brings her to explore the cause and effect of her sister's death. She anxiously asks sultan Shahryar about the reason for the sudden demise of her beloved sister. She reimagines their past. In the harem, she meets Dilshad, her previous partner. They tell stories to each other. Through her dream and fancy Dunyazad is revisiting their past lived experiences, her sister's off-scene struggle as wife, mother, her heroism and martyrdom. She tells Dilshad about Shahrzad's tragic story of her dread at first night with the cruel sultan. Untold stories of her physical pain and mental anxiety are narrated. Shahrzad makes double struggle, in one side she is to entertain sultan to beguile his cruel heart to save young virgins and, on the other side, she fights against her physical pain of tedious pregnancy and breastfeeding. Her sister recollects her (Shahrzad's) wit, talent and heroism. The memory of the past is crawling in her head that how they challenge powerful sultan and how finally two

unarmed sisters become triumphant to save thousands of young virgins. She revisits Shahrzad, her martyrdom and heroism, a real heroine who risks her life to mutates cruel Sultan, rescue him and thereby saves thousand of virgins in the kingdom. Relation of these two lesbian partners symbolises making a new homosexual society, as an alternative of dominant patriarchy. Dunyazad brings the power of two cities, Sahabad and Samarkan, under her control after the death of her husband, Shahzaman and sister, Shahrzad. She joins Umar, rebellious prince of Shahabad and keeps old king as captive, and thereby seizes the power of the kingdom. She repeatedly asks the sultan about the reason for the sudden demise of her valorous sister. When she apprehends the importance of her heroic sister in the kingdom, Shahryar affirms his will, "I will show the world how much a man can love a woman. I am building a memorial that will do justice to my love for Shahrzad. And it must do more- it must teach generations to come what a chaste woman is" (Hariharan, *WDT* 59). Dilshad revisits a significant female figure, Satyasama, who is a lesbian poet that sings in search of spirituality and liberty.

Tale-telling a session for "Seven Nights and Days" is a mysterious blend of legend and myths, past and present, memory and re-imagination. This is the most significant part of historical reconstruction or mythification of history. The first story told by Dunyazad is "Rowing a Floating Island" is nothing but about Shahrzad's mental and physical struggle during the Arabian entertainment. It mirrors the whole grim images of the darkness during thousand and one nights. In the second part of the book, the most important sections are "Three Scenes and a Father" and "Rupavati's Breast". The former story tells about a traumatic father's hallucination and mental anxiety of a loving father of two young daughters in the virgin scanty kingdom. He is also a faithful and obedient minister to serve his lord. As a Wazir to the sultan, he is one of the seekers of a new virgin in the kingdom. He is wondering when his master's thirst for virginity would fulfil. He feels that he has been the part of committing a heinous crime at the lingering sacrifice of virgins to the insatiable hungry lord/ god. Now he is in dilemma. There are two great responsibilities in front of him. As a dutiful worshiper of lord sultan, he has to take care to satisfy his hunger. On the other hand, as a father he has to save his two young daughters whom he is hiding at present. But finally, he cannot but has to offer his own elder daughter as bride to king Shahryar. It is extreme on his part to offer his own daughter to his hungry lord. He feels it is the most heinous crime ever committed by a loving father. Magically this

last sacrifice of dearest one changes the whole situation. It brings a mutation in the fate of the virgins. A new society without virgins' sacrifice is heralded. Man's misogynism is immediately erased. This legendary story is retold in mythical form by alluding Saiva Siddhantic myth, a popular Shiva myth that exists in Tamil culture. According to this myth lord Shiva intending to take a test on an ardent devotee to evaluate his faith and devotion stoops to a mad Saivait and demands to serve Him by killing the most favourite thing in the world. As a faithful devotee, he kills his own son and serves the guest. Wazir's task of offering his own daughter in the form of innocent goat resembles this act of ardent devotee. The heretic rescue sits and asks the ardent host to call his son to join them. He can't but goes inside and calls his son. To his amazement, his son reappears before him. Both of them come to see their guest who reveals His original shape. Lord Shiva praises faithfulness of his ardent devotee and leaves the place. Dunyazad's fairy tale is also reminiscent of the parable of "Abraham and Isaac" in the *Old Testament*.

The revisionist narrative technique used by Hariharan is a parody. Her novel *WDT* consists of two parts; the first chapter of part I is a parody of the original text telling the visible scene of the frame tale, while the rest of the novel is a metafiction as it explores the marginalized background and characters; it tells untold stories and critiques the prejudiced text, *Arabian Nights*¹⁵ that is about one thousand and one night's entertainment by Shahryar, an Arabian emperor, a pharaoh and his brother Shahzaman, and on the other hand it is about the one thousand and one nights' struggle of two poor sisters, Shahrzada and Dunyazad, wonderful storytellers, who risked their lives to save the lives of other women in the kingdom, who were indeed real heroines without history. Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* has been a strong feminist critique of the traditional concept of women as a mere lustful traitor or cuckold, a childbearing machine, an object of male desire, an idea established by *Arabian Nights*, that leads the patriarchal society to disrespect and underestimate them in society. Myth making politics of the patriarchal society for constructing self-centred ideologies has been observed here as *One Thousand and One Nights* tells only about the men's adventures and history, their hopes and frustration and thus, it hides half of the truth showing two strong figures of heroines as mere shadows or inactive figures behind the screen of the stage. To challenge this established ideological text Hariharan uses her innovative, revisionary and imaginary

power to give a new vibrant life, hopes and aspiration to the marginalized female characters and bring their talent and creativity to the limelight.

WDT is a revisit of the ancient relation between sex and power and how this ideology moves from the east to the west. As Michel Foucault says sex was not systematised as such in ancient time. Sex was enjoyed naturally. *WDT* explores how natural sex comes under the strict order of power. Monarchy becomes the highest authority of putting an order on sex or regulating sexuality. The heinous decision of two royal brothers, Shahryar and Shahzaman can be read as aggressive order of the authority to stop adulterous behaviour in the kingdom. Juridical concept of licit and illicit starts penetrating into the sex. It is an attempt to put censorship on it. It shows the existence of society's repression on sex in ancient time. Perhaps, the idea of social repression on sex moves from the east to the west because such sexual repression, as Foucault says in his *The History of Sexuality* occurs in the west in the seventeenth century that is accelerated by the 18th century as a result of Bourgeoisie intellectual. It was open and as natural as it is observed in other animals. Monarchy as an authority appears to be prejudice. In this sexual morphology, women are put in the object's position. *OTON*, a misogynist text moves from the east to the west. Here it makes a point that the idea of moralisation on female sexuality defuses in the east.

In a revisionist text presence of intertextuality, transtextuality and transcreation are a common feature. For instance, an echo of Genette's "transtextuality" is sensed in *TFN*. Thematic link with Indian epic narrative *Ramayana* is noticed in the text. *Uttarakhand Ramayana* is about Sita's rejection of royal court, her exiled life in the forest, her struggle and anxiety. Her reunion with her mother, the Earth retains her past relation. The present text concerns with Devi's struggle to reject her husband's house, her move to lover and her coming back to her mother for her final resort and re-establishing friendship with her mother. It involves a new scheme of interpretation/ hermeneutics. Indian epic *Ramayana* is usually read for its idealised values of sacrifice, chastity and loyalty, chivalry and duty of a king. Mata Sita is considered as an ideal mother figure of India, sources of all-female virtues. Such kind of interpretation based upon gender-bias is made to glorify and idealize the image of 'sacrificing mother'. Readers and interpreters always undermine its other edge of meaning. Indu Swami rightly points out in her introductory note, "The Women

Question: Perspectives and Challenges”, to the book *The Women Question in the Contemporary Writings in English*,

In the Ramayana, Sita’s role is solely seen or estimated in relation to her husband, Ram. Her sole purpose in life is to follow the footsteps of her husband. Sita’s image as mother is glorified and she is repeatedly referred to as Mata-Sita, but as wife she is subject to the whims of her husband, who abandons her only because of the derogatory remarks of a commoner (Swami 3).

Sita’s established ‘image’ can be deconstructed. The *Ramayana* can be read as one of the earliest texts in the world to speak about injustice against women and female choice. We can consider Valmiki as a strong advocate of the rights of woman. As an insider of the text, he raises the question on the female voice. It speaks about Surpanaka’s expression of her love by courting Rama for which she loses her nose. Manthara, maid to Kaikei, wife of king Dasaratha asks her mistress to claim her right to possess the throne in the name of her son, Bharatha. Bhagabat Nayak says, “In Indian context, Manthara appears to be the first feminist who reminded Kaikei about her rights and interest in the *Ramayana*” (Nayak 39). Even Rama too initially encourages Sita to raise her voice against the prejudiced society. This Indian classic text, basically the *Uttara Kanda Ramayana*, is about Sita’s predicament, her anxiety and pain and, of course, it raises her silent protest. The reader feels her pain immensely. First, she is a victim of Ravana’s violence, second, she is forced to leave the palace by the royal authority only for blind comments made by the commoners. This act of the royal authority appears to be the biased judgment in terms of gender. For the sake of giving justice to common masses, as he considers it a supreme responsibility of a king, Rama deserts Sita despite his knowledge of her honesty, chastity and purity. Sita who does not want to hold sword and rebel against it promises to fight it with her sacrifice of status and pleasure of her royal life. She believes her suffering would bring realisation to people. The author seems to be very much conscious about her anxiety and silent voice. Her exiled life itself stands as her indignant protest. Valmiki, the author of *Ramayana* and internal narrator of the epic sends Luv and Kush, Sita’s twin sons to change the mindset of the common people and bring justice to their mother. It is he who encourages Sita to go back to the royal court. Sita’s desperate rejection of the patriarchal world and her reunion with mother, Mother Earth stands for a protest of the

highest order, a self demolition or immolation. Her death becomes a language of protest that can be raised by a subaltern in a helpless situation. Spivak's idea of subaltern protest by silent language, the language of action as committed by Bhuvanewari Bhaduri through her suicide ("Can the Subaltern Speak?") as a mark of protest against the higher authority. It is acted against the patriarchal authority of the court. The text has created anatomy of resistance against the patriarchal system where a woman is desired only for her chastity and virginity, obedience and sacrifice. Like Mata Sita, Devi struggles against patriarchal institution and norms, and finally, she subverts all the traditional institutions, values and roles, and she reunites with her mother, her lesbian friend and lover. Thus, *TFN* can be read as a modern fictional form of *Ramayana* refantatising Mata Sita's life and rereading Indian mythology. Devi seems to be an extension of her mother Sita because she has to sacrifice her talent and choice for her marriage with Mahadevan, Devi's father. She has to live on leftover food. Sita, Devi's mother in the novel first sacrifices her beloved veena and then her daughter, another beloved partner to betray her life. Sita moves her daughter as per her wish, perhaps, to aggravate her revenge on patriarchy. She holds the string of her movement. But finally, she realises the futility of patriarchy and her silly role in it, and she welcomes back her daughter, her beloved partner and provides her real safe heaven, reoffers her womb, real love and care. Hence, both the texts can be read as critiques of rigidities of patriarchy. As it is already said that it is a rereading of the myths of Amba, Ganga and Gandhari of *Mahabharata*, not for their sacrifice but for their rebellion and heroism. Looking at the traditional attitude and objective of telling mythical tales and anecdotes by grandmother it can be deduced that young girls are simply prepared to play the role of the ideal wife, daughter-in-law, mother and widow. The same motive is observed in Baba's Sanskrit *slokas*, chants and *Sutras*. Baba, Devi's father-in-law, teaches her how to be a worthy wife and woman, and how can a woman reach heaven through the service to her husband (Lord). But his disciple finds it difficult to accept the ideology that woman does not have a direct way to reach to heaven. His wisdom does not work on her. By neglecting his lesson she leaves her husband and husband's house, and she elopes with her new lover, Gopal.

While her two novels *TFN* and *WDT* are revisit of mythical/ legendary worlds, her retrospective novels *FH* and *GVM* are revisit of family history, past memory and experiences. However, there cannot be such distinct divisions of her writing because there is a fluctuation among them. *In Time of Siege (ITS)* is a

political allegory which leads to the medieval history of Bijaynagar, ancient Hindu kingdom. In *TFN* Devi, the main protagonist of the novel revisits not only her past but of all the characters that surround her. She is being entangled in the old orders of life is compelled to revisit her grandmother's mythical world, her mother and mother-in-law. As a generation of ideologically conflicting age, Devi is dragged between tradition and modernity. The conflict arises between Mahesh's desire and Devi's unrecognised self. Devi who has attained American liberal education and individualistic experiences has easily confronted Indian conservative life regulated by patriarchal norms. She is dragged between America and India, Dan, her American lover and Mahesh, her Indian husband, Gopal, her Indian lover and her mother. Now, the question arises, "Why she revisits grandmother's mythical tales?" The simple answer to this question is to relearn her childhood morality and values taught by her grandmother. Actually, she traces certain new meanings from them. Just before her departure from America she says to Dan that to her "going back is a bigger risk" (Hariharan, *TFN* 6). She has to face more struggles in India. She has to take the risk of shouldering "her burden of Indianness" (Hariharan, *TFN* 4). Her mother whom some critics consider jealous of Devi and rival of grandmother seems to have internalised cultural mind-set because it is, she who holds the string of Devi's movement. When she starts relooking her past, she realises that her mother snatches her from her grandmother for her envy of their intimacy and releases her for her freedom leading to her reach in America. But later when she is influenced by the surroundings of the conventional society, Sita, her mother, calls her back to India and intelligently puts her into the old order of things. It is a forced marriage even though she chooses her husband for his frankness.

Hariharan has created some characters that have retired either from the jobs or scheduled lifestyle or household works. They have no longer any serious works to do; neither person around to talk nor anything to study carefully. Usually, these types of people always seemed to relive their past. There is a fluctuation of past and present in their everyday life. Memory and fantasy become their sole companions. Normally it happens at the last moment of everyone's life. Once again past becomes a significant part of life. They have a retrospective life. Hariharan has taken up this project of revisiting the past life either to re-evaluate one's life or to look back to the past to differentiate the present to bring a certain mutation in the present. One more fundamental objective is to see the gender operation/ gender-bias practice in domestic life. Family is

the smallest domain having many contributions in the construction of larger society. Hariharan has explored the situation of female marginalisation and subordination and thereby unfolds how the society disapproves of women's self-determination; self-choice and identity. Besides, her writing also focuses on religious minorities and lower caste people in India.

Like Devi in *TFN*, Mala is posited in between the past and present, Bala and Asad, her grandfather and Asad. Their ghosts always appear in her dreams. The protagonist of the novel Mala rereads the text of art drawn by her husband, Asad. This art piece appears like history telling the stories of the past, narrative holding artist's perspective of life. Sketches of the art album of her husband which she has never seen when Asad is alive, suddenly become utmost important to her. She relooks at her remote past through this sketchbook. It is indeed a rethinking of her life and choice. Asad's art album contains sketches of her lunatic grandmother, Bala, her lovely friend who comes back to her. Through this relooking of the past, she discovers her lost relationship with her 'beloved lunatic' grandmother. She always identifies herself with her grandmother. Like Devi her grandmother is a great dreamer and visionary. She has so many unfulfilled dreams in her life. In her old aged Mala is recollecting her past friendship with her grandmother and she is rethinking of her own life and vision. Her grandmother's dream and vision get smouldered in the storeroom where she chooses to live a reclusive life. She is a victim of patriarchal socialisation and moralisation through marriage for she is married to her husband before her knowledge of puberty and marriage. Society does not approve of women's self-determination; self-choice and identity. A social institution always seems to alienate their self. Bala suffers from the feminine disease of hysteria and madness for her anxiety of repression of her self and desire under the strict surveillance of patriarchal authority, her husband whom she considers 'Bastard-Boss', 'undisputed warden' of the house. Her choice of reclusive life is an escape from her existing society and people; her condition is like insane Bertha Mason in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* who spends her invisible life in the attic. Grandmother's renunciation of normal life seems to be against the patriarchal authority. Devi's grandmother has a similar life of loneliness and desolation at the village, she is crazy to meet her grand-daughter and she cries like a baby when she meets her (Devi). Mala says,

Bala was subjected to a mysterious woman's ailment called hysteria. She was a strange; she ignored everyone most of the time except, perhaps, Mala, and unlike the Mala knew Bala also ignored the running of the household as if it had nothing to do with her. She was married to the house even more than she was married to Mala's grandfather (Hariharan, *FH* 15).

Mala's speculation on the art of her husband has been a rediscovery of her self. It can also be read as reanalysis of the perspective of life designed in the form of art by her husband, Asad. Here Mala is ideologically conditioned to submit herself to her husband. She is a victim of "discursive practice" of patriarchy. She never realizes it before her husband's death. On seeing a young girl and young man confronting each other but not one looking at other reminds her about her youth, her will and desire. They are none but Mala and Asad at their youth. Asad's painting shows that Mala is waiting for somebody, and interestingly even today she is waiting to reach to somebody. Simply waiting for and the following somebody has been her unavoidable part of life. As if it is a permanent feminine aesthetics of life. As a young girl, she wanted to climb a treetop and ride a bicycle and fly high. The narrator says, "For some years, her ambitions centred on trees and bicycles. But anything could have done..... What she wanted was to set free from herself. What she wanted was to be somebody else" (Hariharan, *FH* 15). One point is to be made here that for the perpetuation of patriarchal morality Mala fails to see her dream and choice. She has a vague idea about her vision as the narrator says, "Mala has some vague idea that she is supposed to live and die and be born as someone else. Maybe she'll be reborn as someone else who can climb taller trees and ride faster bicycles than anyone she knows" (Hariharan, *FH* 17). Her situation can best be explained with Althusserian "interpellation of the subject" (Spivak 1838). Thus, *FH* is a story about an old widow, Mala, suffering from old-age loneliness. Her son and daughter are away from her and she leads a solitary life in a desolate flat in Delhi. Her only work except for her cleaning dust from old materials is sitting in the rooms and staring at cobwebs, house lizard or other things, to gossip to recollect her memory or talk with the ghost of her husband. She simply sits and stares at her surroundings. She is tired of technical communication because they cannot give a real sense of belongingness or attachment. She is suffering from dreams and nightmare, sleeplessness and restlessness. She starts living with incidents and ideas from the

past. Memory, family photographs and past have become her friends. Now, her lone companion with whom she eats and sleeps and talks is the ghost of her husband. She ruminates over her past, remote memory, goes back to the beginning of life and recollects the life that she walks and meets people she came across. A trunk which is always lying under the bed unchecked during their lifetime haunts her mind. Now it has been her new world to live in. Every day she visits this trunk and loses in it because it contains the different sketches, art album painted by her husband, Asad, a dead artist. The novel *FH* is a reflection of the recurrent situation of aged people in India. In the present individualistic urban and industrial society, individuals are suffering from loneliness and isolation. This problem is more serious for old people who are leading a lonely life and about to die. They are helpless and in a pathetic condition. At this stage of life, memory and past become companions to these people. They have to relive their past. *FH* has given hints to this sort of crucial life. It is apparent that modern communication technology is not enough for her to connect with her distant family members and friends. Thousands of such old men and women are spending a desolate life in towns and cities at their last moment. Speculation on this matter tells that it might be the adverse effect of the nuclear family.

FH is the story of three generations recorded by Asad's sketchbook. First-generation consists of grandparents, second of parents and third is about sons and daughters. It is concerned with the past memory, dream and fantasy of the protagonist, Mala. She relooks at her past through the sketchbook, works of visual art, created by her husband Asad. Being alone in her old age she finds enough time to see the uncared materials of the house. She discovers secret diaries and sketchbooks left in a trunk by her husband. She peruses them meticulously and she discovers a new way to relook into the past. It leads her to examine her real self, her relation with grandmother and mother. The narrator says,

She could go back even further, renew her belief that her own journey, then theirs, covered an immeasurable number of miles. She could retrace her step all the way to the old house in the village waiting with stale secrets. To the girl perched on a stool in that house, waiting for life to begin—or end and begin again (Hariharan, *FH* 11).

Revisit of her (Mala) grandfather's house unfolds a stern reality of Indian family under dictatorial patriarchy. It is discerned that grandfather or father is the undisputed warden of the family. Other members were considered simply subordinates. In this household female self is always alienated. Their circumscribed world was confined to four walls of the house. The outside world is always closed to women. As a result, they can neither develop all aspects of life nor keep their pace with time. Thus, women experience in their own house a "prisoner's condition". Mala's grandfather was a dominant guardian of the family whom Bala, her grandmother called 'Bastard- Boss', 'undisputed warden' of the family. He is an unquestioned leader in the house. Asad's grandfather is also a dominant Islamic Mulla who gives strict orders to the people. Living in this conditioned life, women cannot have a clear vision of their life. They are confused with their own choice. Compared to Shahryar and Shahzaman, they are far less in their use of power and brutality. Devi's father-in-law is a representative of patriarchal ideology. He is a Sanskrit teacher and philosopher. He starts teaching Devi to instil in her values based on masculine desire. He says,

The path a woman walks to reach heaven, says Baba, '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. On the death of husband the chaste wife, established in continence, reaches heaven, even if childless, like students who have practiced self control' (Hariharan, *TFN* 55).

Devi's grandfather is also a dominant patriarchal figure who controls the entire household management. He subordinates her mother, Sita whom he strictly orders to stop playing music and throws out her veena, "Put that veena away, are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" (Hariharan, *TFN* 30). Now the question is from where they get power to dominate women. It is obviously society which authorises them to perform as social actors.

Like Mala, Vasu Master in the *Ghosts of Vasu Master (GVM)*, a lonely retired teacher being away from his circumscribed worlds of school, classrooms, principal, colleagues, students starts living incidents from the past. Again, his rethinking of his father has been a revisit of ancient India and its great *ayurved*

tradition. Vasu Master's self-examination of his professional life becomes a reanalysis of educational philosophies and methods of teaching and management of educational institutions. A unique feature of this novel is that the author has chosen a male narrator instead of females usually found in her other novels. A similar condition of aged life is noticed between Mala and Vasu Master. Except sitting and staring at tiny creatures around his house and talking with his few tuition students, no serious things are left to be done. No routine works and no serious study. His two sons are settled in other towns. Ruminating the past and chewing stale memories have been his sole aim of life. Untouched and uncared trunk for a long time becomes suddenly important in his life too. Mirror once used by his wife Mangala, incidentally discovered in the trunk, has been the mirror of looking at their past. It has reminded him about his remote past. Several ghosts are reappearing before him. His childhood memories are crawling back to his head. He revisits his childhood life, his father, grandmother and dead wife, his life at school and his chronic constipation. Rethinking of his father has been like revisiting India's past, ancient Indian *Ayurveda* and principle of life. To Indians, *Ayurved* is not only a science of healing body but is a science of life. It teaches how to live a human life. India had a great *ayurvedic* tradition. His father told them, "The ancients in their great wisdom called *Ayurveda* the science of life; not merely science of health" (Hariharan, *GVM* 22). *Ayurveda* was taught in ancient Indian universities-Nalanda and Takshshila. Many people of the distant world used to come to those universities to study *Ayurveda*. His father was a great *ayurvedic* practitioner. *Ayurveda* was based on two basic principles- purity of food and cleanliness. It was believed that one's body and spirit depend on what kind of food s/he eats or what kind of life s/he lives. The great mission of Acharya Kumaraswamy was to teach people the wisdom of salvation through cleanliness. His famous book *A Manual of Mental and Physical Hygiene* teaches this moral lesson. Vasu Master's father used to tell them that to build a strong nation strong body should be built first. And to build strong body good food is essential for every young person. His wisdom of *Ayurveda* makes a connection between good food and a healthy nation. His father used to say,

Start with your body..... If you want to cure the wound of our motherland and treat her festering sores, start with your body. What are you? A creature full of vata, pitha and kapha. Each of these has temperament of its own. Blood is hot and moist; phlegm is cold and moist. Yellow bile is hot

and dry; and black bile is cold and dry. Where do these come from? From digested food (Hariharan, *GVM* 21).

Relooking the life of Vasu Master's father, his way of life, his belief and practice of *Ayurveda*, appears to be rethinking of the ancient Indian world and its principles of life; ancient Indian philosophy of food, health and nation. The great idea of health and hygiene leading to progressive nation or community was in the consciousness of ancient Indian people. It is very much true that a strong nation cannot be built without strong people in the country. It is the impact of colonialism and entry of western medical science which superseded Indian *ayurvedic* tradition. Hariharan's novel has been a prophecy of the revival of *Ayurveda* and yoga. Today in twenty-first-century India is revisiting its great tradition of *Ayurveda* and yoga which remain always as essential parts of Indian civilisation. Swami Ramdevji, founder of Patanjali Yoga Trust, Haridwar has created a global wave of yoga and *Ayurveda* practice. With his massive mobilisation, he has taken Indian yoga to the global arena to build a healthy and harmonious global society. Yoga is linked to *ayurvedic* treatment which is a kind of holistic healing. It is a great contribution of India to the entire world to maintain a healthy body and a healthy society. Like Vasu Master's father still, Ramdevji firmly believes that yoga will help Indian people to build a strong body, mind and spirit to make a healthiest and richest nation in the world. He is giving this important message to the people of the nation through his proliferation of yoga. Vasu Master says, "My father then was no ordinary healer. His processes were directed at the food that made the mind; the mind that made unique, whole individual, the carrier of the spirit. These spirit bearing minds made the pyramid, Indian Brahmins at the tip—healer, custodians and guardians of the masses below" (Hariharan, *GVM* 21). These lines reflect the idea of Brahminical hegemony; Brahmins are considered to be superior rulers of the nation.

Revisioning has been used as a way of self-examination in her *GVM*. Vasu Master relooks his professional life of teaching with critical eyes to make a self-analysis; as a teacher how much he has been successful, how much he has failed. Though he is away from the ordinary circumscribed world of school, principal, colleagues, students, and classrooms, he relives incidents from the past. He often wonders himself, "Who is this creature called teacher? And how this custodian delivers a child to an adult?" (Hariharan, *GVM* 29). The author wants to make a point of view in the novel which is observed in her

citations of Charaka, Shakespeare and Gandhi at the beginning of the narrative, “The entire world is a teacher to the intelligent and foe to the unintelligent” (Charaka), “We cannot all be masters/ nor all masters cannot be truly followed” (Shakespeare) and “I have nothing new to teach the world. Truth and non-violence are as old as hills” (Gandhi). He rediscovers various clues to his own halting but imaginative way of teaching. This process of self-analysis as a teacher continues with his tutoring of a unique student, Mani. Actually, there are some particular people who cannot learn anything from texts or classrooms. They have different interest in life and they can learn from the world itself. As the world itself is a great teacher, many things can be learnt from the open world. Mani is a boy of such peculiar category who refuses to learn anything from anybody or any text. All effort of his parents to educate him at school is proved to be futile. Finally, he is brought to Vasu Master for tutoring and counselling. With Mani, he starts a new phase of the teaching profession. He gets a new experience by teaching a unique child with a different world. He begins with moral counselling by telling him imaginative fables, fantasies and anecdotes. This method works on Mani. Gradually they develop an intimacy, they become inseparable friends. His contact with Mani’s brother Gopu contributes to the better understanding of educating children in the schools and colleges, how the teaching should keep pace with time to feed the need and demand of the generations. This self-analytical narrative of Vasu Master shows how a teacher attains maturity through the process of teaching and self-speculation at different stages and by teaching different types of students. Here teaching becomes a process of relearning to learn and teaching. His parting words in the last class are notable here which suggest the ultimate wisdom of his professional experience. He says, “...all of us are pupils and teachers. While there is life in each of us, we learn and teach” (Hariharan 28). Finally, he seems to realize the limitation of conventional teaching as he observes, “In PG in fact, we devoted most of our energies to the exercises of memorisation, who had strayed into an ‘English Medium School’, reading English literature, hinged on memory and its process of duplication” (Hariharan, *GVM* 26).

A contrastive feminist perspective is observed in the text because it points out how man has sympathy towards marginalised female life. Her *GVM* shows a unique feature as unlike other novels Githa Hariharan has used male narrator and male protagonist, Vasu Master here instead of a female narrator. It might be her strategy to appeal male sympathy towards female anxiety and her miserable condition.

Usually, woman novelists refrain from such a mode of writing. In fact, it is true that some men feel the pain and suffering of women. Some of them have even raised the issues of female conditioning. History of feminism tells about man's contribution at critical analysis of female marginality. For instance, John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Woman* and *The Origin of the Family* by Friedrich Engels have outlined the gendered system of patriarchy. In India, Mahatma Gandhi advocated for women's social and political upliftment; their health and hygiene. He brought Indian women into politics; he encouraged their participation in the Indian freedom movement and worked for the improvement of living conditions of women. Aspects of gender operation can be observed in the text. In the novel, Vasu Master, maybe it is late, makes introspection about the lives of his wife, Mangala, his mother and grandmother. He seems to realise to what extreme level gender discrimination takes place in Indian society; a female child is discriminated by her parents at an early stage of life and even after marriage she is not properly cared or adored or recognised. Vasu's mother dies at the early stage of her married life after giving birth to her first son Vasu when he is a little boy. He has little idea about his mother. Whatever he remembers is what he has heard. Discrimination is such extreme that even her parents do not want to spend money for her naming ceremony. As a result, his mother gets her name a year later. Incidentally, instead of her parents, it is a maidservant gives her a name Lakshmi when she finds her nameless. Again, she is conditioned to mother-in-law's jealous rule of the household. She has a subordinate position of a maid to keep the house, "... and above all, keeping the house, and everyone in it, clean, pure and unpolluted" (Hariharan, *GVM* 32). Her health is not taken care of. He relooks at the life of his wife and confesses his own fault of ignorance and negligence. He regrets it. His wife meets a similar destiny of early death. She also dies at an early stage after the birth of her second son. In his dream, his wife reappears. He rediscovers his wife's real self. She led a reclusive life as his mother. He has never realised her self before as he always sees her backside only. There exists a large gap between the figures. Vasu Master confesses,

Although Mangala and I had two sons Vishnu and Venu, I knew her more a cloudy memory than as a person. I found myself speculating about her real self, a woman who had remained as obscure as my forgotten mother. At this distance, the Mangala that I recalled was 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 (Hariharan, *GVM* 40).

The text infers a high mortality rate of the mother from these examples. Now he studies the consequence of how he and his children have grown up as an orphan, motherless children with misery and pain. He has realized that parenting without a mother is an incomplete process. Sita in *The Thousand Faces of Night (TFN)* has similar experience of the strict and authoritative rule of father-in-law. Mahadevan, her husband who discovers it very late feels guilty. Devi reports about her mother,

Marriage had meant that Sita would have to learn to eat dry chapatis, which refuse to go down the throat like sticky, wet balls of mashed rice. This was the sort of detail which overwhelmed Mahadevan. A woman who did not complain, a woman who knew how to sacrifice without fanfare: Sita was such a woman, he thought, and she had earned his unswerving loyalty (Hariharan, *TFN* 103).

The text seems to explore the miserable, neglected, prison-like condition of females in Indian society and thereby make a re-estimation of female's lived experiences. They make a critical review of the subaltern state of females. The reader is induced to feel Vasu Master's sympathetic attitude for his mother and wife. In *GVM* the writer has intelligently made males feel the pain of females and rethink her miserable condition. What is observed in the text is that patriarchal society has conditioned to shorten the life span of women; they survive a short span of time just to give few progenies to in-laws or husbands or to fulfil the sexual needs of her husband. Vasu says, "It was very surprising then that Lakshmi had melted away into the shadows of this lord, tyrannical household. She lived just about as long enough to my father his heir, and obviously that was a shoddy job" (Hariharan, *GVM* 32). This is how the female body is commodified to simply gratify masculine greed.

The revisionary tools used by the authors have rhetoric significances in the texts. Hariharan's writing trunk is a vivid metaphor of the past, history, fantasy, memory; repository of the old life, materials and memories. It symbolises the uncared and most neglected history of housewives, an unrecognised story

of marginalised people. In her *Fugitive History* and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, she has used trunk as an image of the past. It is through this monument Mala in *FH* and Vasu Master in *GVM* get a mirror to relook into their past life, memory, and fantasy. Vasu Master says, "I opened Mangala's trunk which had remained locked all these years since it had moved to the house. The dust got encrusted in the rusty surface so that the box seemed covered with a metallic fur. When I opened it, a musty smell filled my small room. I sneezed violently and had to open the window as wide as possible" (Hariharan, *GVM* 38). In the trunk, he discovers all the small paraphernalia left by his wife Mangala which reminds him of all his past. He finds himself meditating on his memories and dreams. Vasu Master discovers a mirror once used by Mangala which has been the open window to see their circumscribed world of the past; all those ghostly figures-grandmother, mother, father, friends, colleagues reappear before him. He says,

I looked into the mirror several times a day now. It was this stranger that I had to make an effort to befriend, not the elusive one in the sepia photograph whom I had left behind unknowingly. Look in thy glass, my father's ghost wheeled in my ear, "and tell the face that viewest. Now in the time that face should form another. Whose fresh repair if now thou not renewest, thou dost beguile the world"..... (Hariharan, *GVM* 40).

There are metaphorical narratives as well. These narratives are self-reflexive. Story of "Grey Mouse and Blue Bottle" told by Vasu Master to his disciple Mani has allegorical significance. This fable is about themselves. Grey Mouse seems to be Vasu Master himself and Blue Bottle, a large blue fly different to other flies, refers to Mani, a unique and indifferent one who refuses to learn anything. The story is concerned with these two individuals, master and pupil, their attempt to find a new world to live but finally, it is discovered that the world in their dream is similar to the mundane world of day to day life shared by ordinary people. Asad's art in *FH* is represented as history, a record of a life of the families. His art has become a symbolic form of history of the family members. And Bala's long hair is a symbol of her long hope which leads her alienation and frustration. Her long hair touching her knees which could be allowed for building sparrows' nest finally is a waste. Her head turns bald. It indicates her unrecognised self that is spoiled at devaluation. On the other hand, her *ITS* has a significant metaphor. Shiv's missing father becomes a metaphor of the suppressed fact of history in the text. As a hidden historical fact which often

tries to find out an outlet, the ghost of the lost father often reappears before Shiv and asks him to challenge the truth.

Hariharan as a feminist novelist, in her novels, revisits, revisions and reinterprets Indian as well as Arabian myths, history and legends to reconstruct women's lived experiences and reinstate female status and martyrdom of their adventure, sacrifice and chivalry which are traditionally considered to be based on masculine values. In her *TFN* and *WDT* she has subverted the traditional value systems and deconstructed many Indian cultural myths and beliefs. She explores the masculine world, checks it and rejects it, and creates an alternative world for women. This is how Githa Hariharan through her fictional narratives holds a different world view and provides space for women's dreams and emancipation. *TFN* rereads some mundane used Indian social texts and provides scope for re-interpretation and re-analysis. Enriched usage of proverbs in the text serves the textual vision and meaning. These proverbs help the author to create a cultural context where women have different well-defined roles and thousands of faces. Proverbs are normally defined as myths or ideology. Plenty of proverbs are used in the text for its contextualisation. These proverbs seem to work as strategies of patriarchal mechanism for socialisation which can be termed as patriarchal axiomatics that support the discursive practice of society. Devi is a sceptic of her grandmother's situational proverbs and didactic proverbs by her father-in-law. She wonders how so easily her grandmother accepts those proverbs or what she means by telling them to her. By rereading these tiny social texts *TFN* raises many questions on the beliefs and practices of these proverbs. Some examples are cited here,

A woman meets her fate alone (Hariharan, *TFN* 28).

All husbands are nobles" (Hariharan, *TFN* 29).

A woman without a husband has no home (Hariharan, *TFN* 38).

A woman has no direct path to reach heaven (The path a woman must walk to heaven..... is by serving husband, she is honoured in the heaven) (Hariharan, *TFN* 55))

A woman without a child, say the sages, goes to hell. (Hariharan, *TFN* 81)

Pratyagira myth: A woman without a child, say the sages, goes to to hell. (Hariharan, *TFN* 81)

Moreover, her revisionist art makes a comment on the bias and authoritarian historiography. It shows how the patronizing power or authority plays role in exploring, accounting and analysing the history of a community or a people. This agency of historiography might lead to suppress the fact of the phenomena and change the orientation of the interpretations. Her fiction highlights some of the significant features and problems of historiography and its challenges and objectives. The text advocates the pluralistic history, multilayer narrative, timelessness of history and conflicting nature of history. Hariharan seems to argue in her *In Time of Siege*,

It is the right of a people to a complex, pluralistic history. It is true that history is not the indisputable body of knowledge. But history itself shows us that attempts to 'rectify' it have all too often been camouflage for the doctoring history (170).

Here Hariharan has pointed out that history has been a strong ground for social unrest and communal conflict in India. She revisits the communal history of India. She opens the lingering communal debates of the two communities, Hindus and Muslims, of India in her artistic world and thereby she shows the hardship and devastation of communalism and its absurdity and meaninglessness for the nation. It is a highly active volcanic force that shatters the peaceful state of the country. The pervasive internal conflict between Hindu fundamentalists and Muslim fundamentalists is reflected in the text. The novel reads, "What has happened to history, the history his uncle thought was a dull, safe choice of subject? It has become alive, fiery thing, as capable of the explosion as a time bomb" (Hariharan, *ITS* 134). The conflict of a research paper on History finally turns to communal tension. Hariharan says,

The world and its multitudinous mysteries are reduced to precarious survival on a crude seesaw: saint versus leader, saint versus man. Golden age versus Dark ages. Hindu versus Muslim, Hindu versus Christian, anti-Hindu, pro-Hindu. Secularist, pseudo-secularist, soft Hindu, rabid Hindu (Hariharan, *ITS* 150).

In her *Fugitive History (FH)* Hariharan has revisited Gandhi Ashram and Gandhian ideologies. She has given a critical opinion of Gandhi and his ideologies. The text serves as a connecting link with Gandhibad in the present context. Her narrative of Gandhi, Gandhibad and his Ashram is characterised by the ironical tune. While Raja Rao glorifies about Gandhian ideology in *Kanthapura* but Hariharan is sceptic about its existence in postcolonial India. Her *FH* talks about Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad. Gandhi's India and his ideologies, though they belong to the recent past, seem to be remoter past; they have appeared as an ancient myth or just an illusion. His ghostly presence in India is felt at the Ashram. His ideologies do not have an impact on present Indian society. His mission and vision of India have not been truly visible. He is the prophet of non-violence and truthfulness but ironically his country is flooded with blood and violence and surrounded by deceitful activities today. The text raises a question on the existence of Gandhi, his ideologies and secular nation. Indian secularism is under a great threat. Gandhi's own state bears unerasable bloodstain of communal and sexual violence. It may be a hint of Gandhi's defeat at the last stage of his leadership at keeping the subcontinent united. People of these countries are still paying the price of this failure. When Sara, Mala's daughter, an NGO activist visits Gandhi's Sabarmati Ashram at Ahmedabad and communal affected areas of Gujarat, she explores the horrible condition of poor women, their ill-health. She notices that they are suffering from a shortage of nutrition and lack of proper job facilities. She hears horror stories how women are worst victims of communal violence; they are not only violently raped but broken glass, sand and gravels and burning irons are inserted in their vaginas. In this context, *FH* appears to be a political allegory giving a direct hinge to the communal violence and its hellish effects on common people during the demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992. Its communal reaction was visible across the country. India's religious intolerance of 2015-16 is a sign of rejuvenation of the Hindu fundamentalism and force of challenging communalism in India.

Githa Hariharan's fictional revisionary writing is a serious manifestation of conventional female life, marriage and relationship in Indian society. Her characters carry a lingering struggle to overcome the stern plight and social predicament. Devi, the protagonist in one of her major novels *TFN*, is disappointed with her marriage. In her works, marriage is looked very critically. To Hariharan marriage in the patriarchal system is one-sided sacrificing social bond. It has been a kind of bondage for married women. As she says,

“The sacrificial knife, marriage, hung a few inches above my neck for years.....this then is marriage the end of ends, two or three encounters in a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust” (Hariharan, *TFN* 54). It is observed that for her marriage becomes a kind of sacrifice of a woman’s talent, happiness, freedom and self-determination. She has to sacrifice for others’ happiness. She has to accept loneliness and lifelong anxiety. What happens to Sita, Devi, Parbatiamma, Mayamma, Gauri in *TFN* happens to Anamika, Uma’s cousin in *Fasting, Feasting*. Her works show how traditional binary relationship is challenged in gender-conscious society. Traditional heterosexual life is found to be hegemonic and it has been a curse to female life. Her works posit many questions on traditional patriarchal institutions -- marriage, family and religion. Thus, Hariharan’s revisionary texts raise some fundamental questions- What is marriage meant for women? What is life for a woman? What is a husband for a woman? What is the father/father-in-law? Simple answers to these questions, if one speculates, would be- sacrifice, loss of liberty, loss of happiness, loneliness, torture, lack of history, lack of space, struggle, master-slave relation, bondage, prison, etc. In *TFN* there are many instances of female subordination, exploitation, torture and butcher. For instance, Parbatiamma, Devi’s vanished, mother-in-law withdraws her status of faithful Angel of the House. Being the victim of alienated and frustrated, the life she finally decides to leave in search of her own god or destination. Mayamma, a barren woman, having tortured and butchered by her husband and mother-in-law leaves her husband’s house for good, and Devi, as she is disappointed with alienated and loveless married life, elopes with her new lover, Gopal and is dissatisfied with his mindset and finally, being sceptic of the patriarchal normative world with closed boundaries, she leaves for her mother’s home, the last safe shelter for her. Devi ponders over, “She thought of the three of them, Mayamma, Sita and herself. Three of the women who walked a tightrope and struggled for some balance; for some means of survival they could fashion for themselves (Hariharan, *TFN* 135). Issues of marriage and sexuality are focused in *WDT*. This Arabic text is a grim example of women’s silent struggle to risk their life after entering into the marriage trap as their life becomes full of challenges: risk, violence, tolerance etc. Hence, in her early fiction, Hariharan uses myth and history as fields of feminist warfare, for debate and renegotiation. As Chitra Sankaran states,

When Dreams Travel, which is Hariharan’s recasting of the famous *One Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights Entertainment*, as it came to be known and celebrated in

the West, via the first French translation by Antoine Galland, deconstructs and in the process re-examines some deeply embedded misogynist ideologies in cherished patriarchal texts (Sankaran 66).

Mala's grandmother in *FH* and Mangala and her mother-in-law in *GVM* have similar fate and destiny. Many such questions arise in Hariharan's other novels *When Dreams Travel* and *Fugitive History* and *The Ghost of Vasu Master*. *Fugitive History* is a strong critique of female child marriage. It shows how a woman is used as an object of masculine gratification. Bala, Mala's grandmother is married to her husband at her early life when she even does not have a sense of life, puberty and marriage. Her childhood happiness is spoiled by early marriage. Thus, the scope for her growth and development and proper realization of life is denied to her.

Thus, in all these revisionist texts Hariharan is relooking at the traditional relationship of this duality- husband-wife, father-daughter, mother-daughter, sister-sister, sister-brother, and she is trying to redefine their relationship. Marriage, as Spivak calls a patriarchal economy of emotional investment for "childbearing and soul-making", has been a social predicament for women. Family is constituted for the socialisation of both the sexes to cooperate patriarchal polity. It is shown as a trap, prison or bondage. Female life is smouldered in the kitchen, a feminine office at domestic household. It is experienced that husband, family and her body have been great hurdle at achieving success, climbing the high ladder, reaching the goal and making self-determination. Her fictional writing has rejected a temporary binary relationship and it shows a beam of new light to guide to an alternative path. Her fictional world has shown life beyond this conventional way of life. Her works are found to be a subtle blend of tradition and modernity. In her works, there is a forceful tendency to break away from the myth-laden world and find an alternative. In some of her novels, she is presenting different categories of Indian women who constitute one common group of victims, and some of them are rebellious in spirit struggling against patriarchal order of life. Some characters are disappointed with the traditional way of life, monotonous married life, and they try to move away from such closed life maintained by heteronormativity and they revoke early relationship with grandmother, mother, sister and female friends. Her fictional world has become a platform for a

reunion with old partners or true friends. She has raised many fundamental questions against the traditional norms of life. So, her writing appears to be a strong feminine voice in India. Indeed, her characters raise a voice that 'this is time to live a life with a woman's perspective'. Once Devi's grandmother warns her, "But woman fights her battle alone" (Hariharan, *TFN* 36).

To conclude it can be said that Hariharan's main purpose of revisiting and rewriting the past is not the only reconstruction but also to re-examine and reinterpret it, and thereby to redirect the present or determine the future. She speaks about female self-determination. Her revisionist fiction aims at digging out the lost relation. Modern feminist literature disapproves of the image of females presented by classical literature. Female image in classical literature seems to be a mere myth. As Luce Irigaray disconcerts representation of women in phallogocentric discourses according to masculine parameters. She alleges that femininity, a set of values, an image, and a role are imposed on women. She observes, "In this masquerade femininity, the woman loses her self, and she loses her self playing on femininity" (Irigaray 84). In her book *The Feminine Mystique*, Betty Friedan tries to say that conditioned femininity is the main cause of recurrent problems of post-war American women. A conflict occurs between forced femininity and the real self of women. She wants to say that femininity is a set of false values acquired by women to satisfy masculine demands. As a result, the real self of "New American women" is denied to them. In her dominant novels, *TFN* Githa Hariharan goes back to far off mythical world to unfold the real situation of female life how they have been victimised for ages. This sort of inner conflict is discerned in Devi, her mother-in-law, Parbatamma; in Mala and her grandmother. In their life, they want something more than the husband, children and home. Hariharan has presented some self-defining and rebellious female characters like Devi, her mother, mother-in-law and Mala, and thereby she mythifies/ falsifies the presentation of women as fragile, meek, submissive, obedient, calm, domestic, homesick, and nostalgic in classical literature. Meenakshi Mukherjee argues in her "The Sita-Savitri Tradition in Indian Literature" that society usually celebrates/ accepts masculine aesthetics. She says, "The Draupadi image has been overshadowed by the Sita image. Though the complex epic like the *Mahabharata* uninhibitedly presents a spirited woman like Draupadi, it is the Sita image as a wife which is pervasive in the consciousness of the race" (Mukherjee 15). *One Thousand and One Nights* or *Arabian Nights*, highly androcentric/ the

ideological text has presented women as unfaithful, untrustworthy and lustful. So, *When Dreams Travel* holds a strong challenge against these self-annihilating images of women. What would be seen is that oppression and suppression have been a perennial practice in Indian society. Many mythical women like Ganga, Amba, Gandhari, Sita, deity or human, have been deprived of liberty, choice and self. Sacrifice, suffering and loneliness have been their part and parcel of life. Ganga, a heavenly deity who marries Shantunu, father of Bheesma, with certain conditions has to desert him because Shantunu violates the norms of marriage agreement as he refuses later to accept her condition. Amba's freedom of choosing her husband is violated by Bheesma when his craving hands snatch her away from her *swayamvara* and later her offer is deliberately rejected by him. It has been a great humiliation and annihilation of her life for which she prefers to an exile life to avenge on him. Gandhari's is an instance of great sacrifice and bold protest against systemic deceit. Gandhari's marriage negotiation with Dhritrashtra, prince of Hastinapur, is arranged without telling her anything about his blindness. And her marriage is justified by citing old proverb, a woman is given only once for her marriage. She does/ will not have a second choice or option. As per the norms of tradition, she is bound to accept her socially conditioned destiny. No one can question the reason behind it. It is a matter of tradition. It is a social faithfulness to its illogical tradition. When Gandhari comes to know that her would-be husband is totally blind, out of anger she tears her cloth and ties it around her eyes not to see the deceitful world again. It can be read as a mark of silent protest against the system. Moreover, sati Sita, wife of Rama, well known mythical figure is a model of Indian sacrificing wife, ideal mother, and chaste woman. Nobody reads Sita's life from her perspective. Her rebellious spirit, her protest of the traditional system is never analysed. She is a great victim of patriarchal desired values and prejudices. Society puts repeated questions on her chastity. To satisfy blind commoners Rama removes her from the royal court. After marriage, she cannot live happily with her husband. She joins Rama's exiled life in the forest, and then she becomes a scapegoat of enmity between Rama and Ravana. She is accused of being the cause of the dreaded war between two warriors. She spends her whole life in anxiety, frustration and loneliness. Similarly, Devi holds a revisionist overview of life on her grandmother, mother, mother-in-law, and Mayamma. She sees the myth and reality of their life. Hariharan seems to observe the feminist principle of writing set by Elaine Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own*, "..... a woman writer must

kill the Angel of the House” (Showalter 217). Because she has shown in the novel, most of the faithful and ideal housewives leave their husbands.

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