

## **CHAPTER V**

### **IDENTITY POLITICS**

#### **(SUBJECT/SUBJECTIVITY, BODY AND HISTORY ON GITHA**

#### **HARIHARAN)**

There is certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of any one else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of life; I miss what being human is for me (Taylor, *Politics of Recognition* 30).

So far as the essentialist view of identity is concerned, the trace and retrace of essence or looking for self-image in literature and history become a significant matter for reclaiming one's self and identity. The past is revisited for exploration of the shifting subjectivity and reanalysing self-image. It helps one for self-examination and negotiating with oneself or inner self. Since context foregrounds the constitution of subjectivity, various micro contextual elements like power, discourses and institutions are to be re-examined to reach the certain regime of truth.

The term identity means a person's self-identical or self-consciousness. It is closely associated with recognition or representation of that consciousness. Subjective consciousness has a close link with variable context. Again, identity politics is construed as a representation of the subject in politics and language. The modern notion of the subject is what Taylor terms as "a human agent, a person or self" (Taylor, *The Making of Modern Identity* 3). Human identity is derived from various forms of ontological subjects: cultural, political, essential and juridical subjects. Undoubtedly, feminism has been a

representational politics that seeks equal recognition or it is the politics of resistance whereby the political subject is constructed. It aims to reverse the position of subject and predicate in masculine discourses. It tries to overlap the idea of using femininity as a predicate to define man as a subject or to define masculinity in such discourses. That kind of politics may be personal or public. As de Lauretis views, “it (feminism) splits between the personal and the political, the social and subjective, the internal and the external” (qtd. in *Beyond Identity Politics* 5). However, this study concerns simply with personal politics. As radical feminists propose it through a slogan: “the personal is political” (qtd. in Lloyd’s *Beyond Identity Politics* 4). Moreover, identity may also mean respect and recognition of one’s core self, a relational subject or “subject-in-process” (Lloyd’s *Beyond Identity Politics* 1). Taylor too concerns with the aspect of harmony with innerself; one being true to oneself. It also implies universal respect for individual self or subjectivity, a way of being. A self conscious being cannot live a life without proper identity and dignity. Charles Taylor has observed that identity is usually shaped by either recognition or misrecognition of subject or self. Taylor says, “ The thesis is that our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by misrecognition of others, and so a person can suffer a real damage, real distortion if the people or society around them mirror back them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves” (Taylor, *Politics of Recognition* 25). My idea of identity is obviously concerned with the poststructuralist and postfeminist idea of non-stable female subject or subject-in-process. But it is not exactly relating to Judith Butler’s proposal for subjectless identity politics or feminist politics without identity. However, it would follow what she hints in her *Gender Trouble* while asking, “If gender is constructed, could it be constructed differently .... ? Can ‘construction’ in such a case be reduced to a form of choice ” (Butler 10-11). Answer to this question is affirmative. Hence, the concept of gender constructedness produces the idea that gender can be a ‘choice’. Since gender and sex are equally constructed, the body can be an open field for various subjective experiences. It could be an experiment differently. To modern radical women, homosexuality/lesbianism/by-sexuality has been a politics of gender choice. As Moya Lloyd critically observes radical feminist policy, “..... refusing sexual service to male partners and taking up lesbianism as a political stance. Radical feminism not only re-envisioned the sphere of politics (extending it to the private realm). Equally significantly ..... It politicised sexual relation... sexual orientation, the body and, abortion, and reproduction” (Lloyd, *Beyond*

*Identity Politics* 4). This issue of shifting subject and politics of gender transformation can be traced in Githa Hariharan's fictional world. Her two major revisionist fictional works *The Thousand Faces of Night* (TFN) and *When Dreams Travel* (WDT) articulate the politics of subversion of heterosexuality and formation of new sexual identity through lesbianism. The idea of revisiting and re-examining variable subjects can be traced in her works.

The poststructuralist feminist notion of the female subject is fluid, undecidable and fictional. It means female as the subject is undecidable and fictive. This idea of constructedness aims to destabilise the fictionally constructed subject and to subvert any kind of definitive construct. Thus, poststructuralist feminism tries to escape from rigid social determinism and thereby it challenges misogynist discourses and social practices. There is a strong tendency to scrape any gender binary or asymmetrical relation. It has been a trend to transcend existing norms and values in search of a new value system. Anti-essentialist or poststructuralist feminists reject the idea of the stable female subject. To them, the subject is ahistorical because they reject the historically specific material and materiality. They argue that there is no fixed subject, rather a person in a totality of multiple subjects, the result of many differences. They oppose the fixed definition of woman as they claim that there is no such universal human category called woman. As Simone de Beauvoir alleges, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 295). The main objective of this second category of feminist theorists is to oppose any difference between male and female and they go on deconstructing any fixity while conceptualising woman. Julia Kristeva says, "a woman cannot be; it is something which does not even belong in the order of being" (qtd. in Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminism* 418). Judith Butler argues in the same line, "... there is no abiding substance' called 'man' or 'woman', but, rather, these identities are produced through the compulsory ordering of attributes into coherent gender sequences" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 10). She has even challenged the preconceived fixity of sex. She proclaims, "If immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as 'gender; indeed, perhaps it was already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between the sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all" (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 9-10). Indeed Butler's question and critique of foundationalist or essentialist concept of feminism would suggest for the possibility of new gender

orientation. In her *Gender Trouble*, she opposes any binary structure of gender/ sex, man/ woman, subject/ other, nature/culture. Susan Hekman observes, “at the centre of Butler’s work is the replacement of the notion of a fixed, essential identity with that of an identity constituted by fluctuating and fluid discursive forces (Hekman, “Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics” 289-90). Thus, her basic argument leads to the possibility of new gender orientation and multiple identities, and genderless identities. Moreover, this idea of subjective dynamism would challenge fixed femininity that is the cause of female subordination. Sedimented result of the poststructuralist feminist critique of subjectivity is “‘free play’ of a plurality of differences” and transcend of “cultural and liberal feminism” (Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 418). Of course, a split has been observed within feminism over the issue of identity politics on the subject. As a constructionist Butler not only talks about shifting subject but her line of argument suggests for subjectless identity.

Judith Butler’s idea of subjectless identity is rejected by both the proponents of essentialism and post-constructivism. Butler says, “The identity of the feminist subject ought not to be the foundation of feminist politics if the formation of the subject takes place within a field of power regularly buried through the assertion of that foundation. Perhaps paradoxically, ‘representation’ will be shown to make sense for feminism only when the subject ‘women’ is nowhere presumed” (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 8). Thus, she has snapped the connection between identity and subject. But she is accused of putting feminism at jeopardy because subjectless feminist movement would lead nowhere. Subjectless feminism is not only self-contradictory but also deleterious because it will be a targetless political/philosophical movement. Hekman says, “In my critique of Butler, my intention is to show that the concept of gender identity that she proposes as an alternative to ‘woman’ is just as flawed as the original concept and, consequently, that the concept of resistance that she advocates as a counter to identity politics is similarly flawed” (Hekman, *Feminism, Identity and Identity Politics* 291). Again, Diane Bell and Renate Duelli Klein claim, “identity of woman’ must be ‘the basis of political action’, for they inquire, how else ‘can we speak if we are fragmented into so many partial and shifting identities?’” (qtd. in *Beyond Identity Politics* 5). This group of postfeminist critics seems to be revisionary in their approach for they are revisiting the essentialist concept of identity where the stable subject must exist. Cultural or essential

feminism is the ideology concerning female subject or essence, female self-image which need the right recognition and representation. Cultural feminists try to revalidate stable femininity or woman as a fixed subject. According to them, woman as a marginalised category should get a separate identity as other marginalised categories based on race, class, caste and religion. Oppression is a commonality for this liberal feminist subject. Lloyd too views, “Feminist politics cannot exist it seems, without a stable subject” (*Beyond Identity Politics* 5). Lloyd has re-imagined feminist subject in her *Beyond Identity Politics*. The ideology concerning to fictionality of subjectivity that deconstructs female subject is called nominalism by Alcoff. She alleges, “Nominalism threatens to wipe out feminism itself” (Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 419). Thus, anti-postmodernists and essentialists traceback for a stable female subject, historical specialities, material essence or they are revisioning subject. This is why talking about feminist identity politics is a little bit of risky business today. There are two distinct groups of feminist theorists who are antagonistic to each other on the issue. Cultural feminists or essentialists search for femininity or female subjectivity, fixed subject while anti-essentialists go for unstable essence, multiple and deferred subjects. The notion of cultural feminism is critiqued by Butler on the ground that it might lead to the reification of traditional gender relation. This female subjectivity is critiqued on the ground that it might re-invoke the cause of subordination. On the other hand, female constructivists assert that subject is fluid, constructed and fictional, and thereby reject the idea of ‘universal subject’. This idea of the unstable subject might also bring hazard to feminist identity politics. As it is already said that subjectless feminist identity politics would be futile. By supporting a single argument, no final solution to identity politics can be brought because the problem lies with both the arguments. So, there must be a balance of these two theories of feminist identity politics to continue the project of feminism. Both the theoretical ideas can be used depending on time and context of feminist activism because none of them disagrees over the need of identity or feminists cannot eschew completely the idea of identity politics. Gayatri Chakravorty might have called this dual tactic a “strategic essentialism” (qtd. in Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics* 59). This ideological consensus would comply with how gender is operational to class, caste, race, religion and context. Hence, some new liberal feminist theorists are trying to gulf the gap between these two oppositional groups. Moya Lloyd says, “Deploying the idea of ‘strategic essentialism’, I argue that the feminism cannot and should not avoid essentialism. Instead, it needs to

interrogate what political effects essentialism enables. This does not, as my earlier comments indicated, mean abandoning the turn to the subject-in-process” (ibid). To evade this dilemma Linda Alcoff proposes the concept of positionality which, according to her, would remove the existing conflict between essentialists and anti-essentialists. In this case, a female subject is completely determined by her shifting position that is caused by external situations. Alcoff construes, “The positional definition, on the other hand, makes her identity relative to constantly shifting context, to a situation that includes a network of elements involving others, the objective economic conditions, cultural and political situations and ideologies, and so on” (Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 433). This final concept of identity is what Teresa de Lauretis claims “that an individual’s identity is constituted with a historical process of consciousness....” (ibid 425). To avoid the conflicting ideas of subject and identity, Moya Lloyd proposes for an alternative version of the subject, subject-in-process. She says, “It needs to embrace an alternative subject, understood as ambivalent, in-process, indeterminate, and terminally open to reinscription” (*Beyond Identity Politics* 27). Hence, my focus is to show how cultural practitioners have to strike a balance of these two ontological arguments while creating something or representing social reality. I want to show here how Githa Hariharan as a cultural practitioner charts this problem of feminist subject and identity. Her revisionary narrative retrace for both historical subject and subjectivity and their difference of plurality.

Githa Hariharan, a feminist revisionist writer seems to concern with a tactic what Spivak calls ‘strategic essentialism’ (qtd. in Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics* 59) while dealing with identity politics in her fiction. As a cultural practitioner, she has to strike a balance while dealing with social realities. Fictionality of subject or subject-in-process is mapped in her writings. No doubt, her fiction shows shifting and deferred subject and subjectivity but it focuses on the certain specificity constituted in the past. It explores the past relation between man and woman, power and sex for reanalysis of subjectivity and self. Her characters are observed moving and inculcating variable subjectivity or subject position, yet they are in trace of their own fixity of the past. They are looked as if they are victims of fragmented subjectivity or plurality. Her main characters often shift their context. The characters seem to behave as per the demand of their situational “positionality” (Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 433) from

where they are speaking. She seems to present the mobile subject or deferred subject, subject-in-process or processual subject as proposed by constructivists. In one sense human being as a sexual subject is a historical construct because the present concept of sex and sexuality is the result of long human experiences. Sex has entered numerous discursive discourses and practices, and finally, it has become what Foucault calls a “regulatory ideal” (Foucault). It is linked with power, politics, economy, law and morality. To him, a relation of sex with power is negative, juridical, prohibitory, regulatory and censorial. So, the ordered sexuality is the product of “censorship mechanism” (Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 84). This is why what we call fixed essence is also, either culturally or socially, constructed in relation to the context and situation. Hariharan’s fiction explores this historical subject. She posits it, we are bodies, “totally imprinted by history” (qtd. in *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 416). *When Dreams Travel* explores the relationship between power and sex; it shows how a holder of power sets the rules on sex. It is a revisit of sexual repression of the authority in the east. It gives the idea of the subjection of female to the masculine authority or power of the state. Objectification of female and female body is challenged here. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* Hariharan focuses on how society becomes the authority of power to regulate marriage and sex. Moreover, here morality becomes an ideological mechanism of controlling sex.

In her, *Alice Doesn't* Teresa de Lauretis defines subjectivity as “a complex habit resulting from the semiotic reaction between of ‘outer world and inner world’”. It is the consequence of “continuous engagement of a self, subject in social reality” (qtd. in Alcoff, *Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory* 424). She further argues that subjectivity is neither determined by biology nor by ‘free or rational intentionality’ but by experience. To Alcoff subjectivity is the consequence of some macro forces including social discourses and social practices. He says, “Thus, subjective experiences are determined in some sense by macro forces” (*Identity Crisis in Feminist theory* 416). Another prominent gender theorist Judith Butler proposes for de-gendered subject and subjectivity (to evade hierarchical heterosexuality). On the other hand, Moya Lloyd’s performative theory of subject brings the idea of processual subject or subject-in-process. A female does not have an identity but a set of identities or she is a subject of multiple identities. In other words, a subject is constructed by social discourses and social practices. This

study of Hariharan's fiction tries to show that despite the outside constructedness there is something inner constructedness or inner self. In other words, externally constructed subject entails conditioned subjectivity and inner constructedness results in authentic subjectivity. It means subjectivity is not only the result of external factors that influence the construction of a subject but it is an outcome of the process of inner framework or inner self (unconscious). It is sometimes, called self-image. That inner being can be construed in Herder's terms "an original way of being human" (qtd in Taylor, *The Politics of Recognition* 30). Such self-image is usually reflected in art and literature. Foucault has also defined subjectivity or self as the historical product which is determined by the shifting ideas of time and space. To him, discourse, power and institutions shape the subjectivity.

The idea of female as a transient subject or constructedness is visible in Githa Hariharan's fiction. Some of her novels chart the idea of dynamism of identity and subjectivity. In other words, Githa Hariharan's fiction focuses on the dynamic attributes of woman, woman as a undecidable subject. Especially her two novels *The Thousand Faces of Night (TFN)* and *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* focus on power and identity politics. She seems to chart the issue of multiple subjects and subjectivities. The title *The Thousand Faces of Night* itself symbolises changing self-images of Devi, the main protagonist of the novel. She seems to be the metaphor of shifting subject or multiple subjects. An example of what Lloyd calls "subject-in-process" (*Beyond Identity Politics* 1). How Devi's subjectivity constructed? Her subjectivity is constantly shifting from time to time, place to place. Her varied experiences gathered from different corners of her life shape her subjectivity. It is definitely a composite product of her external and internal factors. Her inner inquisitiveness encounters with her immediate surroundings. Basically, her subjectivity is constructed under the grounds of three contexts- her childhood, young life in America and adulthood in India. It is also constructed by the subject's performative position in different contexts. Normally, subjectivity is a consequence of experiences. It means subjectivity is the result of one's encounter with immediate surroundings or social reality. Hence, it is very much historical. Her childhood experience in association with her grandmother is quite different. At that moment she has a different understanding of her life. As a child, her nature and movement were quite different. Her encounter with her father's secretive love, her grandmother's stories and fables of heroes and heroines, gods and



goddesses, her stern mother's strict mottoes of life and her exposure to the western liberal education have much to do with her subjectivity. Her father teaches her a secretive love and fancy. He gives a different world to her to live. But she is snatched by her mother, Sita who does not allow her to dream. She has her own planning to construct Devi as a rational being. To construct Devi as a rational being, Sita uses her regulative mottoes of life: order, reason and progress. It is she who holds the rope of main control of her daughter. She keeps Devi under her strict order and norms. But her best promises to her packed with many reasonable hopes, and her decisions to provide her with the best opportunities and best life seem to futile. This is observed in her planning of Devi's life. She sends her for higher education to America, brings her back home and arranges her marriage with Mahesh. On the other hand, her true friend and lover, grandmother gives her quite a different world of myth and fantasy which has enough space for a dream. Devi's grandmother feeds her with hundreds of stories and fables to initiate the growth of womanhood in her. Thus, her grandmother's stories and fables work as a prelude to her womanhood. But inquisitive Devi always decodes different meanings from her stories and fables. Through this process of listening mythical stories and fables, it is not only she senses the womanhood but also she develops a rebellious self or subject, an avenger. She avenges against the institution of wifehood and womanhood. She is largely influenced by the mythical character of rebelling Amba and by her cousin, Uma. Amba, a muted subject, born as a daughter but raised as a son has a great impact on Devi's construction of her self and subjectivity. She is also influenced by the concept of a nymph, an unmarried woman, ever beautiful woman. She desires to be an *apsara* (heavenly angel) like Menaka. Devi dreams about power, rebellion and war as a man dreams for. As a revenge of disrespect of her self and systemic alienation, she fights against the existing order, norms and values of the society. She says, "I lived a secret life of my own. I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi, I rode a tiger, and out of evil, magical demon's head" (Hariharan, *TFN* 41).

Devi's American subjectivity is actually quite different which is constructed through her association with the new environment and her friends in college and her boyfriend in America. She enjoys quite a unique life in America where she feels free to live and choose her American lover and merge with the American dream. In America her Indianness (her Indian subjectivity) seems to be a great

burden which she gradually shrugs off. Devi says, “She would shed her inhibition, her burden of Indianness, merge with these oases of colour and spontaneity which relieve the monotony of an anaesthetised suberbia” (Hariharan, *TFN* 4). Devi is always seen in jeans trouser which is unthinkable in her India during her time. She finds in America nothing is private and secret. Love is not a matter of secrecy. A young girl openly shares with her parents about her love and boyfriend. She hugs her mother easily and kisses as if two lovers hug and kiss each other. All this is very much private and secret in the Indian context. She starts to adapt to the new environment and context. Naturally, she starts growing as a new subject in America which is seen in her behaviour with her mother after arrival at home. When her mother extends her hands she easily responds to her and they hug each other. Again, before returning to her own land, she has to shed her American experiences. Her nightmare episode of killing her lover, Dan at her last night in America is nothing but symbolic demolition of her American self or subjectivity to free herself from the American dream and rethink about Indian femininity. Coming back to Indian home and Indian mother is a different experience for her as a marriageable daughter. Homecoming is like retaining the passivity of femininity which seems to be riskier. For her, it is like “an Indian rebirth in the myth-laden world (of India)” (Hariharan, *TFN* 6). She has become a responsibility or liability of her mother, a marriageable barbie doll. Devi is once again ornamentalised by her mother through Indian dresscoat, jewellery, sari and horoscope. Her life is seen re-entangled in magician’s horoscope and the old order of things. Actually, she comes to India for her feeling for her mother. She is, reluctantly, prepared and put herself into her non-formal *swayambar*. She has a great fear of adulthood and womanhood and she has been trying to evade them. Thus, unwittingly she enters into the marriage system.

Change of Devi’s subjectivity is observed again after her marriage when her experience increases at her encountering with two men; they are husband and father-in-law. Even though two men belong to the two different worlds, one is practical and another is idealist, but both of them are determined by patriarchal norms. Her subjectivity meets an observable change as it is always reshaped by her new experiences. In association with her husband and father-in-law, she develops a new subjectivity. Obviously, they want to insert values based on masculine-desires in her body and mind. She has to

underscore new cultural values of womanhood, wifedom and motherhood as necessary conditions demanded by patriarchy. Baba, Devi's father-in-law is concerned with the shaping of wifedom and motherhood in her. Old man's wisdom and his friendliness attract Devi. He feeds her with Sanskrit *slokas* and chants and female spirituality. He teaches her how a woman can reach heaven through her penance of austere life, self-control, worship of husband and faithful service to the family and children. She starts playing the role of sacrificing woman. She develops a tendency to learn Sanskrit and read her father-in-law's Sanskrit texts. But suddenly he leaves her with his incomplete lesson as he sets out for America where he takes his last breath. Like his father, Mahesh, her husband expects Devi to be a faithful housewife (good angel of the house), an ideal mother and sacrificing woman. He wants to impose his desires on her. She tries to comply with his way of life for many days but finally, she starts to maintain a silent protest against his desires and expectation when her own proposals are deliberately rejected by Mahesh. She never likes to be an ordinary housewife and a biological mother leading to smoulder her dreams in the kitchen. So, she proposes for doing a job and adopting a child instead of bearing their own child. Mahesh pays no attention to it. Rather he is forcing her to be the mother of his own child. When her self and choice are not recognised Devi determines to take revenge on Mahesh. She would leave him for her own destiny. She elopes with Gopal and then when she discovers that he is also selfish, indifferent, more concerned with his *raga* (music), she affirms herself to go back the onus of her life and replan it. At Mahesh's house, she finds another storyteller of real life. Mayamma, the permanent maidservant of Baba's house tells her about her painful stories of her life, how she spends a difficult life as a barren woman. She has to incur hard penance to prove her motherhood. The stories of her hard struggle of life and about Parbatamma's real-life give maturity to Devi's idea of womanhood, motherhood and widowhood. These women's experiences become a part of Devi's subjectivity. When we observe the movement of Devi's life from her childhood to youth, India to America; mother to husband/ father-in-law, we will see how her subject formation occurs at changing time and context. Her living entails her subjectivity. Devi appears as an undecidable female subject. It means she is not fixed as the subject or not complete at the particular context. Devi as a processual subject can be defined in Lloyd's terms, "the subject of lack or deferred subject" (Lloyd, *Beyond Identity Politics* 20). She defines it, "Where the idea of the multiple subjects concentrates on the complex nature of identity, the

account of the subject of lack on the inherent instability of all subject positions, the idea of deferred subject exposes how subject productions are always susceptible to dissolution” (ibid). Devi has to constitute numerous subjects as situation demands through what is called ‘subject-in-process’. She is a deferred subject in the sense her subject position dissolves at a different context. Her subject position in America in association with Dan, in India with Mahesh and her father-in-law marks instant dissolution. Devi’s ultimate degendered subjectivity is the result of her diverse experiences and her active engagement with her shifting domains and social position. She does not want to accept the existing norms and values. She has been an inquisitive and rebelling subject. Her heuristic subjectivity directs her life to her destiny. Finally, she applies her own logic to see life and the world. Devi seems to realize the futility of liberal demand for equality and rights in patriarchy. So, she takes a radical decision to evade the heteronormativity. Her line of thinking is Beauvoirian radicalism. Beauvoir says, “If we are to gain understanding, we must get out of these reefs; we must discard the vague notion of inferiority, superiority, equality which have hitherto corrupted every discussion of the subject and start afresh” (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 27).

A female is expected to bear a marked body with different cultural meanings who has to play different roles at different times. Not only that she needs to wear different masks at different domains, but act differently. As it is already observed that as a wife and daughter-in-law Devi develops different subjectivity. Her meeting with Mayamma and her stories about Parbatamma has some contribution at shaping her experience. Her father-in-law’s wisdom and his ideological texts have added something to know about a piece of life or self in the female body and its connection to supreme Spirit through penance. His wisdom is concerned with a maturity of womanhood and wifhood. This long history of Devi’s life has constructed her as an often shifting subject. In other words, she is historically constructed subject or material. So, she is, in Foucault’s terms, ‘historically imprinted’ substance. There is no such “abiding substance” (Butler, *Gender Trouble*) in Devi which has constructed her subjectivity. It means her behaviour or act is not initiated by her inner essence or nature of her body. At last, she has been quite a different subject, a rebelling subject. She is apt to challenge the oppressive heterosexual norms and masculinity. She is conscious of her rebellious self. Actually, Devi wants to free herself from the

burden of marriage, husband and children. The everyday gossip of ordinary women pesters her mind as she says, “I sat with them, listened to their news bulletins of births, miscarriages, illness and deaths, and answer their probing questions with evasive monosyllables (Hariharan, *TFN* 14). The symbolic idea of subject transformation is presented in the text through the image of shifting sex of a couple of trees, neem and peepal. The text reads, “centuries ago, the peepal was associated with the mother goddess; it later changed its sex and became a representative of Bishnu” (Hariharan, *TFN* 59).

Sita, Devi’s mother also experiences multiple subjects and subjectivities in course of her varied life. But ultimately, she moves back in search of her past, subjectivity constructed in the past. She readorns her broken *veena* that is thrown away for many years after getting a severe reprimand from her father-in-law as she fails to response his call and revalidates her talent in music. She welcomes back her daughter, Devi in her woven cocoon. *Veena* works as a trope of lost subjectivity or lost essence which Sita retains later. Her parents allowed her to dream and grow in her own way. As a young woman, she constitutes different subjectivity. She loves music. She has a great talent in music. It is only her choice of life. She starts looking at life and the world from that perspective. She does not know that her life ahead is quite different. Her choice of life seems to be completely useless at in-law’s home. It is neither honoured nor respected. After her marriage, she has to lead quite a different life. She is not expected to engage in music rather than household works, merely as a daughter-in-law and wife, ideal housewife and ideal mother; sacrificing mother like *Mata* Sita. So, she shatters her real self, evades her subjectivity and starts acting completely as merely a housewife and a daughter-in-law as per the strict order of father-in-law. She starts disbelieving in illusion and dream and starts living an ordered life. Her femininity becomes the sole object of her identity. She develops mottoes in life: order, reason and progress. Multiplicitous subject construction occurs in Sita when she becomes the lone guardian of the family after the death of her husband. She returns India and constructs a house in the coast of Bay-of-Bangal. She has been both father and mother of her daughter. As a sole guardian, she plays both the roles of male and female. Thus, she acquires an experience of dual subjects. She plans her daughter’s life according to her wishes applying her mottoes. However, when Devi betrays unexpectedly Sita reconciliations with her authentic self, her desire for her daughter and her love. Devi comes back and reunites with her mother at

home. It is like two distorted selves are joining for unitary self and beginning a new life with a new hope. Devi's reunion with her mother, Sita symbolises self realisation. Githa Hariharan has shown that women are compelled to live with repeatedly constructed self or conditioned subjectivity. Many characters are victims of such conditioning. With the changes in domains, women need to change their subjectivity and role. Their own individual desire, aspiration and choice are always suppressed, repressed and neglected. This contextual shift of subjectivity also makes a woman undecidable subject. In *TFN* Sita, Devi's mother misses her only choice in life. Music is the only choice which she has to sacrifice after her marriage. Gauri, grandmother's maid, has spent her entire childhood earning money and sovereigns of gold to fulfil the required conditions for marriage demanded by grooms as if she does not have anything else to do in her life. Obviously, this is not her individual longing to satisfy her self. Rather, it is a social demand from a girl child. As if she is not born for anything else. And finally, what rewards she gets, a husband, a rough beast, a drunkard. She has to break her marriage bond and comes back home where she has to stay her rest of life. Thus, a strong challenge against the conditioned subjectivity is demonstrated in the text.

Parbatamma, Mahesh's mother, has experiences of diverse subjectivities. She has degendered subjective experience for she manages the family and household activities single-handedly till her departure from the house. Hence, she is both male and female guardian, father and mother of the family. Her husband is almost away from home as he spends his entire service life at the university campus. Thus, she develops a sense of several subjects. It results from her lingering pain of loneliness and alienation. Finally, she affirms her self and she chooses her own path to escape the conditioned subjectivity and find a new experience of life. Departure from home and domestic bondage denote a free will to go in search of her own destiny or her own God. She might have left for Gaya or Kashi or Brindaban where she will get other female friends and inspiration of life from them or her Lord. Her pestering loneliness teaches her a lesson to bring a change in her role of life. It is her ultimate discovery of her real self. Finally, her changing role definitely will mutate her as an agent. Her departure from her husband's home also implies her retrace for her mother or locus of her life or certain specificity. Mayamma is another remarkable character in the novel who seems to be a static subject. But she too has

a certain transition in her subjectivity. Before the knowledge of her position of subject, femininity and puberty, she is pushed into marriage. She struggles for ten years to prove her femininity, womanhood and motherhood. This is her conditioned choice and self. It means this is not what exactly she wants. This is desired by her mother-in-law and husband. When she leaves her husband's house and takes shelter under Parbatamma she becomes completely a new individual without previously conditioned subjectivity. The difference is that as a poor woman her bondage in the society never leaves her. Her dependency continues from the house of in-law to master's house, (Baba's to Mahesh's).

In *TFN*, there is an aspect of the natural tendency for homosexuality. It has been a textual strategy for challenging compulsory heterosexuality, hegemonic relation. Heteronormativity prevents the possibility of multiple subjects or subject-in-process. Hierarchical heterosexuality always tries to adhere to the fixed gender relation. As Butler says, "sexual hierarchy produces and consolidates gender" (*Gender Trouble* xii). The idea of natural homosexuality which is observed in the female relationship in the text has been a politics to subvert the compulsory and hierarchical heterosexuality. Grandmother's terrific emotion for young Devi shows this tendency. Her childlike cries at meeting Devi when they go to the village to visit her during summer vacation hints that idea. She takes her (Devi) on her laps as if she is a baby. Devi's mother is always jealous of her relationship with her father and grandmother, even her cousin, Annapurna. When Devi is born Sita feels that she has got Devi as an alternative of her of *veena*. When Devi runs away from her and goes to her father and grandmother, she feels anger in her mind. She cannot tolerate it. As revenge, Sita snatches her from them and sends her to boarding school and then to America in the name of providing the best education to her. Again when she feels that Devi is far away from her she calls her back to India and pushes her into the old world for which she (Devi) is not prepared at all. When Devi deserts her husband Sita again welcomes her back to home and readorns her. Before her arrival, she recollects her broken *veena*, repairs it and starts playing homecoming music for her daughter. It is relinking with one's authentic self repressed in unconsciousness. It is what Taylor says one being true to oneself. Revisiting her old dilapidated *veena* and re-accepting her daughter at her home indicate the rediscovery of her inner self. It is she who controls the rope of Devi's life. In other words, Devi is a flying kite run by her mother.

The writer tactfully has used strong mythical evidence of subject mutation in her fiction. She goes back to ancient India to highlight the issue of shifting the subject. The idea of subject transformation prevails in Indian myths and tradition. Myths of Amba and Buddha show the prevailing tradition of the degendered subject, desire genderless subject. *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* refers to a tale told by Satyasama, “Rupavati’s Breasts”. It is about the previous life of Buddha who is born as a woman. Amba takes revenge on Bheesma first for violating her rights to choose her husband at her *swayamvar* and then for rejecting her offer of love. She transforms herself into a man. By virtue of her hard struggle and heavy penance to Lord Shiva, Amba reborn as the daughter of king Draupad and is raised as a man. It is reborn Amba who kills Bheesma in the war of *Kurukshetra*. Amba’s rebirth symbolises the death of female subject or femininity or female self. Grandmother says, “Amba was reborn as Draupad’s daughter, a daughter raised as a son” (Hariharan, *TFN* 39). The text further reads,

The young princess had lived several lifetimes in a week or two. She cast aside her finery, the trappings of life denied to her, and set out for the forest, a new hardness in her heart. She no longer thoughts of silks, thrones, flowers, children; she had thrown away her women’s lot when Bheesma scorned her offering. Now she was a woman only in name” (Hariharan, *TFN* 38).

A change of subject, femininity to masculinity is observed here. Hariharan’s fiction covertly gives the idea of a homosexual society in ancient India. Some evidence can be traced in myth. In the *Ramayana*, Sita’s exile in forest and departure from this world to reunite with mother Earth is a good instance of lesbian tendency. Ganga, *Santanus’* wife and Bheesma’s mother, in the *Mahabharata* deserts her husband when her condition of negotiation is broken by him and she seems to join the mother Earth.

Feminist revisionist writing uses representational politics in language. It makes me aware of the correlation between language and power. It sometimes challenges linguistic monism or phallogocentrism. Virginia Woolf’s a liberal feminist text *A Room of One’s Own* questions about the authenticity of representation in androgynous writings. She encounters hurdles with existing language for her expression



and articulation. Peter Barry says, “.. Virginia Woolf suggests that language use is gendered, so when a woman turns to novel writing she finds that ‘no common sentence ready for her use’” (Barry 126). She proposes the need for creating a separate feminine language for the suitable articulation of women’s life in fiction. In her, *WDT* Hariharan uses similar narrative politics. She has shown an instant of the degendered subject in the text. The two heroic sisters, Shahrzad and Duniyazad, demonstrate such valour and power which is not even produced by the heroes of Shahabad. This demonstration of power and talent is beyond the femininity. A female is normally considered weak, timid, inactive and lack of heroism against which masculinity is defined. She is always defined by negative qualities or absent. Shahrzad comes out of the feminine comfort zone and participates in the great warfare, state politics, risk her life not only to save thousands of young virgins in the kingdom but to rescue the souls of two royal brothers from their sin and cruelty. Shahrzad defeated her womanhood because she overcomes difficulties of bearing and caring several babies during the period of her struggle while she has been telling stories and entertaining sultans to escape from death. She has not shed womanhood like Amba to attain masculinity in her body. And the politics of the writer can be seen in the portrait of the scene. In the storytelling act, none but Shahrzad is playing an active role and she is followed by her accomplice, Duniyazad. And the rest is silent and inactive. Two brothers are ornamentalised as their passive swords received from their father as a symbol of hereditary power. They are shown as overpowered by the two sisters. Duniyazad says, “Together she and Shahrzad womaned that puppet creature in its fabulous rope that went so very near the sultan’s sword; that touched its tip and survived to vanquish him (Hariharan, *WDT* 37). Two sisters appropriate power of language and interpretation to challenge misogynist discourse and social practices. By their intelligence and talent, they transform the mindset of the two brothers. Finally, they become changed men. Heroism which is always looked as masculine attribute is falsified here. So, if masculinity is concerned with power, strength and heroism, then it is not gender-specific as these attributes are possessed by the two brave sisters who perform a valorous action to risk their lives to save thousands of young virgins and transform the wretched minds. In other words, the two brave sisters attain the power of masculinity in them. Shahrzad, as her sister considers, is the saviour of life.

This whole idea denies the traditional difference between feminine subject and masculine subject and thereby disapproves the misogynist discrete discourses. For this purpose writer or storytellers use politics of re-appropriation and reinterpretation. Chitra Sankaran sees ethics of re-possession in Hariharan's choice of *Arabian Night* or *One Thousand and One Night (OTON)* for her revisioning. This is the text that moves from the east to the west through middle-east and is always reshaped by the contextual demands and perspective of interpretation is repeatedly changed. *OTON* is nothing but Indian *Panchatantra* moved to and reshaped in the west. *When Dreams Travel* is a rewritten text of *OTON* in the fictional form to articulate modern women's struggle against the oppressive power structure and compulsory heterosexuality. It also aims to overcome the misogynist discourses and practice. Revisit of this text shows the flow of knowledge from the east to the west that falsifies the colonial notion of the knowledge centre. To her, it is an ethical act of proclamation and reappropriation. Sankaran comments, "Therefore, the choice of text becomes in itself a polemical and an ethical act- an act of retrieval and re-possession" (Sankaran 67). Indeed, it is a re-possession of the text and representation of feminine subject and subjectivity in language. *WDT* presents the concept of fluidity and fictionality of the subject. It also speaks about how that unstable subject is represented in narrative language. In her chain story within the text "Rupavati's Breast" Hariharan intelligently places the idea of identity politics of the subject. In the first two stories, there is a tendency for gender transmutation, but interestingly the third one told by Satyasama avoids the idea of gender in subject construction. Narrations show the movement of the subject itself and how finally it moves out of what Butler calls "policing gender" (*Gender Trouble* xii).

The old couple's two different versions of Buddha's story indicate the conflict of subjectivity in the narrative process. Old woman's version tells that Rupavati, a beautiful woman, would-be-Buddha, receives lord Indra's blessing by offering her breast to a hungry beggar to be reborn as a man, Buddha. But old man's version disagrees the fact that Buddha is ever born as a woman. He insists that even in his previous birth Buddha is born not as a woman but as a man. He tells that Rupavati is a wife of Rupavata, would-be-Buddha, whom he discovers at a street at her starving state with her son; Rupavata prevents Rupavati while she tears her breasts with enrage to throw her unfaithful son towards his stepfather and asks her to keep one for their own child. The third version which Satyasama tells the couple as her turn omits the question of gender. In the last version, the genderless subject is intended. It can be taken as an

example of representational politics of degendered subject in language. It denotes that subject construction and subjectivity have nothing to do with gender. It is observed that the original *One Thousand and One Night (OTON)* is reappropriated by a female writer to oppose phallogocentrism. *WDT* is a good example of repossession of discursive discourses. It aims to protest the discrete system of patriarchy.

The second story by Satyasama, “The Woman Under the Deadly Skin” has several versions by different narrators. Her stories reveal the nature of folk tales and myths handed down traditionally through different tongues. Every narrator seems to twist the version in his/her own way because every narrator has their own perspective. In the first story Rupavati’s Breast three narrators tell the same version in different ways. Each time of revisioning the old version is recast and reinterpreted. Satyasama’s story also tells about historical facts of women how they participated in the battles and wars at ancient time. In the battles, women were used as ransom and secret assassins and spies. She is a historical subject. In the latter, Nanni is used by the shrewd minister for his political benefit. This story too has two versions. While the first version shows a woman as honest, the second version shows the woman as a traitor. The latter has positive and negative attributes of a female. Undoubtedly, it brings the evilness of woman but it also shows change, how artificial gem and jewellery, poison-skin are metamorphosed to reach her original state of life where she can celebrate her own body and make the love of it.

In *When Dreams Travel (WDT)*, Dunyazad, the narrator of present *One Thousand and One Night (OTON)*, accomplice of her brave sister, Shahrzad possesses multiple subjectivities. Her conditioned subjectivity makes her repress her inner desire and personal choice. She has to desert her lesbian partner to comply with the order of the sultan Shahrzad and marries Shahzaman, his brother. Situation compels her to dream for throne and power. She becomes powerful Begum (Queen) of Samarkand after her husband’s death. Re-organisation of a new story telling session by Dunyazad consisting of four female figures in the second part of the novel involves politics. It excludes male figures of original frame tale of the *OTON*. The session consists of Dunyazad herself and Dilshad

(visible figures), and her sister Shahrzad and Satyasama, a mystic poet (invisible figures). It excludes male figures which shows a politics of restructuring of new power relationship among females without any hierarchy or hegemony. It is completely a strategy of politics of identity. There is a tendency of new sexual orientation. The text shows the possibility of a new sexual orientation in society. It seems to raise a number of question. Why there should be always a tendency for singular heterosexuality? Why not multiple sexualities? Or multiple sexual identities?

Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* tactfully shows the idea of gender split and new sexual orientation through the structure of this recast text. The textual structure corresponds to a thematic interpretation of the text. This tacit idea is also visible in the division of male and female characters in the first chapter "In The Embrace of the Darkness" of part one. Presentation of two brothers' passionate desire to meet each other gives the idea of homosexuality. It is observed that his desire to meet his younger brother, Shahzaman, is so intensive that suddenly, Shahryar sends his wazir to invite him. His desire is the onus of the entire tragedy of *Arabian Night (AN)*. On the other hand, the relation of two sisters, Shahrzad and Dunyazad tells a similar idea. Story telling for one thousand and one nights is nothing but a symbolic war between these two groups, two brothers in one side, and two sisters in another side. It presents a fight between the oppressor and oppressed. The main challenge takes place in the first part of the narrative. Two sisters are in the battle fighting against the two royal brothers who stand as symbols of misogynist power and authority of hegemonic heterosexuality. The second and third chapters of the first part are reconciliation between the two parties. It plays a structural mediating role. The second part of the novel is a new world resulting from women's emancipation. Here is a new story telling session for seven days and seven nights. The group consists of four figures telling stories to each other. This new entertaining scene does not consist of the male figure. It is a new society without gender, conflict and danger. The textual structure itself marks the meaning of the text. It is an example of a strategical subversion of heterosexuality. This subversive idea is notable in Dunyazad's return to Shahabad. After the death of her husband, she leaves Samarkand palace and comes back to Shahabad in search of her lesbian partners and friends, Shahrzad, Dilshad, a slave girl and Satyasama, a mystic poet in the royal palace. Chitra Sankaran rightly comments, "Shahrzad's victimhood is replaced by a version in

part two, where two women, Dunyazad, Shahrzad's sister, and Dilshad, a slave girl in Shahryar's palace, who are lesbian lovers, tell each other's stories, one tale answering other's for seven days and seven nights" (Sankaran 69). A glimpse of this idea can be traced in her other novel, *Fugitive History (FH)* where Bala rejects her normal life and maintains a reclusive life in a storeroom. She has secretive love for granddaughter, Mala, her only friend of life. Similarly, Mala's revisiting her past and her friendship with her grandmother after the death of her husband, Asad shows her longing for her past friend. She relives her past through her memory and fantasy.

Hariharan's use of intertextuality and transtextuality in *When Dreams Travel (WDT)* becomes a part of representational politics of identity. The term 'intertextuality' refers to the explicit relation between the two texts, hypertext and hypotext. It means it is concerned with the actual presence of a text in another and 'transtextuality' means all kinds of relations and echoes, in an explicit or implicit way, between the texts. Originally these terms are used by Gerard Genette in his *Pelimpsests*. Chitra Sankaran construes these terms in one of her critical essays, "Genette uses the term 'transtextuality' to refer to all types of relations and echoes between texts; he employs 'intertextuality' to refer to the actual presence of a text in another, say in the form of quotation or allusion; by the term, 'hypertextuality' refers to the relationship of a given text (the hypertext) to a previous text (the hypotext), the latter grafted on to the former as Hariharan's text (*WDT*) is clearly to *One Thousand and One Nights*" (Sankaran, *Narrating to Survive...* 69). It is politics which recasts and reinterprets the phallogocentric texts and discourses. Feminist ethics and aesthetic have been followed here to recast highly canonical text, *One Thousand and One Night (OTON)* or *Arabian Night (AN)*. The central focus of the original text is changed in the subtext (hypertext). The first part of *WDT* is a parody of *OTON* which reverses the focus of the text from royal brothers' supremacy and their entertainment to the borders of gender and two sisters' heroism. The hypertext is dominated by female characters. It is more concerned with female heroism and talent. The phallogocentric idea of misogyny is effaced here. The text has disestablished self-debasing image of women in *AR*. The second part is not the recast of the whole text, it is rather the reconstruction of the entire off-scene background of the *Arabian Night* or an extension of it. This revisionary text rightens the wrong representation of women as unfaithful or untrustworthiness in misogynist discourse and practice. It gives voices to the marginalised figures like Dunyazad, Dilshad and Satyasama. Subordinate characters

are brought into a prominent position. Instead of Shahrzad, the narrator of one thousand and one stories, Dunyazad and Dilshad is the new narrators. The whole perspective of the original text is changed. As Chitra Sankaran says, “It is no longer an *Arabian Entertainment* but a narrative with the ethical commitment to centre women’s concerns and to unravel the pattern of misogyny and classism that mar the original tale” (Sankaran 67).

Essentialist trace for self essence or unity can be interpreted in Hariharan’s fiction. Her revisionist writing and revisiting the past clearly tell this idea. Her characters are obviously obsessed with their past: memoirs, memory and reminiscence. The prelude of the Part II of novel *WDT* entitled “A Dream, A Mirror” invokes the dream to mirror the remoter past of royal palace Shahabad where the entertainment of one thousand and one night of sultan Shahryar and begum Shahrzad occur. Dunyazad’s return to Shahabad aims at retracing her past relationship with her sister, Shahrzad and Dilshad, a slave girl in the palace. Actually, she revisits Shahabad to rediscover her real self and to trace her beloved sister, Shahrzad and her lesbian friend, Dilshad. She is obsessed with her past. The text reads, “Dunyazad is trying to re-explore her sister’s heroism and talent. She has noticed that Shahrzad has been reduced to invisibility. Her historicity is still waiting for proper recognition. Reduced to invisibility, she is waiting for Dunyazad, her follower and accomplice, to catch up with her and restore her to life” (Hariharan 113).

Hariharan’s *TFN* presents an aspect of essentialist feminism. There are many textual pieces of evidence of relooking for self or essence and tracing back the beginning or source of life. The revisiting of her childhood stories, myths, tales, fantasies and legends told by her grandmother, has been a trace for her subjectivity. It is an effort to understand her self. She revisits those powerful and challenging figures to redefine her rebellious self and spirit for demonstrating her power and identity. Devi identifies herself with *Shaktimata*- Durga Devi, powerful goddess, destroyer of evil forces. Again, Devi’s departure from her husband and lover is concerned with her search for reunion with her mother, the centre of her life. Sita’s trace for her broken *veena* symbolises her search for her real self. Home returned Devi becomes Sita’s self whom she readorns. Devi’s case is more complicated because she has a rebelling spirit. The reunion between mother and daughter is shown as a union of two passionate lovers. She says, “I grope

towards her, and she weaves a cocoon, a secure womb that sucks me in and holds me fast to its thick, sticky walls” (Hariharan, *TFN* 13). In the text, a number of female characters have u-turn from husband’s house and rejoin either mother or other woman or god/goddess. It starts from Gauri, Uma, Mayamma, Parbatiamma to Devi herself. Gauri, grandmother’s servant has got beast-like husband whom she deserts and comes to her mother; Uma, Devi’s cousin leaves her bestial husband and rejoins her grandmother who lives with her till death. Parbatiamma, at the end of her life, traces for her real self. She determines to leave her desolate house in search of her own god, destiny as her marriage with Baba has been boring and meaningless because she has spent her entire life alone at home without husband and children. She finds herself as a desolate goddess, a good angel of the house.

Mayamma’s revisit of past life is a way of understanding her self and understanding her subjectivity formed by her twelve-year-experience of her barren body and her surroundings. She is also conscious about her self, but as she is aware that the type of society or world she is living does not acknowledge it or recognize it; at least she knows it clearly that life cannot be lived according to her own way or will. This is why she wraps her self, buries her past into her mind and never wants to unfold it before anybody. She reluctantly confesses before Devi while she incidentally asks her (Mayamma). Hariharan’s fiction revisits repressed subjectivity of the past. It may be termed as a reunion with one’s real self. A self which has been lying at dormant state. In *Fugitive History*, Mala after the death of her husband reborn as a young girl, and starts thinking about her youthful dream and desire for adventurous riding and climbing tall trees. She revisits her grandmother and her secretive love and desire. She finds many similarities between herself and her grandmother. Her numerous unfulfilled dreams and desires get smouldered with her in the storeroom where she lives alienated. Revisit of her grandmother and her dream refreshes Mala’s own youthful passion and desire. She wants to relive that life. Consequently, she comes out of home and moves freely entire Delhi in the car and celebrates her free life. She was completely at oblivion after her marriage. It is the stage of repression of her real self or subjectivity. Her link with her grandmother was totally snapped. Now only she revives that connection with her spirit. Her real self was repressed for many years.

Another aspect of cultural feminism is the claim for the collective identity of shared experiences. Githa Hariharan shows a tendency to claim identity with group experiences. Organised force becomes politics here. It is concerned with the search for femininity or female as a category. As it is already said that there is a tendency for homosexual groups in her fiction. Female characters in *TFN* who belong to different caste and class constitute into a group based on their femininity and marginality. Devi and her mother, Sita, Parbatiamma and Mayamma form a group who share a common experience of subordination/marginalisation and alienation; that group is extended to (Mahesh's) manager's wife. Their subaltern experience has been a subject of their identity. In *WDT*, the four figures, Dunyazad, Shahrzad, Dilshad and Satyasama form a distinct group, a lesbian society. Dunyazad organises a new storytelling session consisting of these figures which exclude males. They tell stories to each other without any hierarchy and maintain a reciprocal relationship among them. The motive of this social restructuring is to claim a separate identity for femininity. But constructivists or poststructuralist feminists are against this fixity. Hariharan's idea of lesbianism in her text challenges against Benda's humiliating comment in his *Rapport d'Uriel*, "Man can think of him without a woman. She cannot think it herself without man" (qtd. in Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* 16).

In *The Ghost of Vasu Master*, subjective experiences of Lakshmi(mother) and Mangala(wife) are traced by Vasu Master. Vasu Master relooks at the past through his wife's mirror. Mangala's mirror reminds him of her image and miserable life whose dignity was not maintained at all. He realises now the significance of his wife and her unrecognised self. It also recollects him about his marginalised mother. He tells about his wife, "She was, what shall I say, unnoticeable; inconspicuous; like my mother, memorable only as an absence. I knew my wife and my affection for her only when I live with her ghost. This ghost had a frail, vapoury body; made more insubstantial by my lapses of memory about what she actually was" (Hariharan 123). Moreover, he explores his subjective experiences as a son, a father and a teacher. With this purpose, he revisits his herbalist father and his wisdom. Sometimes, he thinks about his role to his children as a father and he has learnt that single parenting without a mother is incomplete. He goes back to his professional life for a self-analysis. He asks himself, "Who is this creature called teacher? And how this custodian delivers a child to adult?" (Hariharan, *GVM* 29). His halting lecture in



the class is caused by his inner confusion about his real task as a teacher. Ultimately, he seems to realize that nobody can teach all students nor everyone can learn from all teachers. Wisdom to learn is that what Shakespeare says, “We cannot all be masters/ nor all masters cannot be truly followed” (qtd. in Hariharan, *GVM* ix).

Body politics can be traced in Hariharan’s fiction. The body which is subjected to ideological and cultural construct is politicised here. In dealing with body Hariharan shows two different sides. To negate the old gender relation and to disestablish gender immutability, the essence of body is rejected. The materiality of the body is neglected to create an alternative gender identity. On the other hand, the untold suppressed body is exposed to the world to remove the myth of mystery and incomprehensibility over the female body or to oppose constructedness. Narrating about the body is an observable feature in Githa Hariharan’s fiction. Character portrayal is marked by the nude. She seems to follow Helene Cixous’s idea of *écriture féminine*- to write with the female body, to explore about the dark continent and expose to the world about the naked reality of female body and sexuality. Cixous gives a clarion call, “Women must write through their bodies, they must invent an impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reverse-discourse, .....” (*Norton Anthology*, *The Laugh of the Medusa* 1952). Writing, a conquered realm of patriarchy from which women are violently driven out must be reclaimed. So, Cixous suggests for creating female sexed text, “sexts” (ibid 1951). She argues that female sexed body is always victimised by misogynist discourse, power and politics. This unexplored dark continent should be exposed to the world to refute the prevailing myth of incomprehensibility. Cixous says, “The dark continent is neither dark nor unexplorable” (ibid). Hariharan’s narrating about bodies is a strategy either to create the female nude or politicise over the body. A conflict of body politics is observed in her two texts. Women want to shed her breast and womb but it is men who want these parts in her body. They argue that their body causes the othering and marginalisation in society. Devi’s description of her grandmother’s body and Mayamma’s brutal game with her blood and pain at childbirth creates a scene of naturism. It can be a method of insurgent feminist writing which can be defined as feminist naturalism.

Hariharan unfolds the trouble of victimised female bodies and women's struggle against those bodies for liberation.

In *TFN* Mayamma seems to reject heteronormativity by her barren body. It is a challenge to remove the misogynist masks or envelopes violently attached to the female body. A woman cannot be defined by the same substance. To her mother-in-law, Mayamma is not a woman. Devi's desire to glue her uterus can be looked as personal politics to subvert reproduction as a revenge on her husband for disapproval of her self and choice. She wants her choice of degendered subject by refuting functionality or materiality of her body. She wants to disconnect herself from her body to challenge the motherhood as an institution. She negates her husband by her cool body. It is an attempt to alter her gender identity and get the status of what Cixous calls "woman is bisexual (neuter)" (ibid 1950). Devi says, "A teasing bitch because I refuse him my body when his hand reaches out; dream instead, in the spare room, of bodies tearing away their shadows and melting, like liquid wax burn by moonlight?" (Hariharan, *TFN* 74). By this act of refusal, she demands modification of regulatory norms of body. To Foucault and Butler, sex is "regulatory ideal" (qtd. in Butler, *Bodies That Matter* xi). *WDT* too shows an instance of body politics. In Satyasama's own version of the old couple's story, Chandraprava, a patriarchal Brahmin, who creates norms on the female body is punished. His ears are plucked by Rupavati and sown in the ground as crops and she feeds Chandraprabha's wife and son. Amba, a woman avenger who attained manhood through her penance once depicts about bareness of her body before Bheesma when he refuses her offer of love. Apparently, it is teasing of masculine desired values. She says, "Look at me, Bheesma. See my face, trembling with eagerness. See my breast, full and ready. See my arms, my legs, gentle and soft as the most tender and clinging of creepers. See my womanhood that longs to be fulfilled. Will you look away?" (Hariharan, *TFN* 38).

Satyasama's the second story "The Woman Under the Deadly Skin" is concerned with the exploration of Nanni's heroism in the ruins of Vijaya, a ruined city. Nanni's beautiful 'Poison-Skin' was a tactic to attract lovers from the city who are supposed to be enemies and cunning strategy to kill them. The very idea of poison-skin tells about body politics. Well, polished poison-skin is attributed to her by

society. It is neither her inborn quality nor for her own benefit. She is trained for a certain purpose by the two female trainers. She is used by the minister as bait to destroy his city's enemies. It also suggests misogynist idea how woman body is conceptualised as evil and dirt which brings death and decay to man. On the other hand, it also denotes how a mask of beauty, surface apparel, is attributed to the female body to preserve the chastity, value based on masculine-desires. It can also be looked as the commodification of the female body by man.

This textual analysis shows that new forms of gender orientation, homosexuality or monosexuality, has been instrumentalised to refute oppressive patriarchy and hierarchical heterosexuality. Trace for homosexuality or female-female bond and the undecidable female subject has been the main challenge in these texts. Githa Hariharan's these revisionary novels focus on the struggle against the hierarchical and hegemonic heterosexuality and oppressive power structure of patriarchy. It is argued that hegemonic heterosexuality consolidates gender relations or norms. It is shown that hierarchical heterosexuality is purely monopoly business maintained for masculine benefit. Undoubtedly, it is a discrete system. Hence, heteronormativity is largely challenged and subverted in her fiction. In Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* lesbianism has been an option for female characters who have been victims of hegemonic heterosexuality. Implicit or explicit search for self and choice appears to be the main spirit of these texts. Constructed subject and subjectivity are evaded. The idea of forming genderless subject is suggested in the texts as constructivist feminist theorists suggest for a plurality of sexuality. There is the possibility of going beyond the old order of sexuality. By following Beauvoir and Irigaray, Butler views that if gender is a cultural construct, then sex is an ideal construct. It is an iterative process to produce the effect of a certain condition or role. As she argues, "In other words 'sex' is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialised through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of those norms" (*Bodies That Matter* xii). To Irigaray woman sexuality is plural. She argues, "Her sexuality, is at least always double, goes even further: it is plural" (Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* 28). Butler also says that sex which is assumed pre-gender existence is "construction of construction" (*Bodies That Matter* xv). The idea of

constructedness suggests that gender and sex are subject of choice. Since stable female subjectivity or gendered subject is creating trouble for existence women are struggling to deviate from fixed femininity or gendered subject and experiment new subjective experience. Homosexuality has been a means of experimenting with a new subject or degendered subject. Hariharan has taken a step ahead in presenting women's relation. She has not only shown the conflict usually presented in feminist writings, conflicting relation between the oppressor and oppressed, women's struggle against powerful mechanism but also the relation between women. She has explored the relationship between women and she has shown a new way of relating what Cixous calls "woman for women" (*The Norton Anthology*, The Laugh of the Medusa 1948). In her fiction female characters have chosen two different routes for their own destiny. Some of them want to shed off femininity, disconnect with the essence of body and join the lesbian society for social emancipation, and others try to become invisible self by losing all physicality. Characters like Amba, Ganga, Devi, Mayamma in *TFN*, Dunyazad and Dilshad in *WDT*, Mala in *GVM* can be put into the first group, and Shahrzad and Satyasama in *WDT*, Parbatiamma in *TFN*, Mala's grandmother in *FH* and Eliamma in *GVM* fall in the second group. Both Parbatiamma and Eliamma become invisible and go in search of their own destination. Shahrzad and Satyasama have ghostly existence in the text. Thus, self conscious women are struggling against the hegemonic tradition and trying to escape from such kind of social determinism. They have made an effort to establish different subject and identity through homosexuality. Movement of characters in Hariharan's fiction gives an interesting hint of writing as revisioning; relooking into the past. Two different directions, to the past in search of self and subjectivity or root/ source of life and towards the new path, are observed in her texts. Going back has been a kind of social emancipation or an escape from the hegemonic mechanism.

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