

**Mythico-Patriarchal Construction of a Woman in Githa
Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta
Devi's Stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver"**

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BY

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Declaration

I declare that the dissertation titled “Mythico-Patriarchal Construction of a Woman in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi’s stories “Draupadi” and “Breast-giver”” has been prepared by me under the Supervision of Dr. Alpna Saini, Assistant Professor, Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab. No part of this dissertation has formed the basis for the award of any degree or fellowship previously.

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CERTIFICATE

I certify that Vandana has prepared her dissertation titled “MYTHICO-PATRIARCHAL CONSTRUCTION OF A WOMAN IN GITHA HARIHARAN’S THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT AND MAHASWETA DEVI’S STORIES “DRAUPADI” AND “BREAST-GIVER””, for the award of M.Phil. degree of the Central University of Punjab, under my guidance. She has carried out this work at the Centre for Comparative Literature, School of Languages, Literature and Culture, Central University of Punjab.

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ABSTRACT

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The present research offers a comparative study of Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi's stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver". The focus of the analysis will be on the interpretative use of mythology from feministic perspective underlining women's oppression and predicament in a patriarchal society. Both the writers take mythological tales as patriarchal discourses with implied patriarchal stance and tend to revise these tales with altered ends to give voice to the silenced female perspective. The study explores how by reinterpreting mythical tales from feministic perspective, both writers Githa Hariharan and Mahasweta Devi inclusively expose and question women's suppression in a male-dominated set up.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The present study offers a comparative study of Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi's stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver". The focus of the analysis will be on the interpretative use of mythology from a feminist perspective underlining women's oppression and predicament in a patriarchal society. This research explores how both the writers make use of mythical tales in their works to expose the domination and subjugation of women in a male-centered set up. Both of the writers take mythological tales as patriarchal discourses with implied political stance and tend to revise these tales with altered ends to give voice to the silenced female perspective. Githa Hariharan, in *The Thousand Faces of Night* makes use of various mythological tales from the *Mahabharata* and folktales in fragmented form by blending them with the main narrative. Instead of using these tales in their culturally accepted form, Hariharan retells the stories from a feminist perspective and exposes women's struggle, even in contemporary society, to achieve their identity as an individual in a male-privileged society. Mahasweta Devi, in the story "Draupadi" appropriates the famous assembly episode of the great epic the *Mahabharata* and exposes the violence that a woman's body is subjected to in a patriarchal set up. "Breast-giver" also exposes the objectification and exploitation of a woman in a male-dominated society. The story, by invoking the mythical character Yashoda, surrogate mother of Krishna in the epic the *Mahabharata*, raises questions regarding the exploitation of women in a male-privileged set up.

In order to analyse the use of mythology in the texts, the present study also undertakes an investigation of the various theories regarding the subject, origin and function of mythology in various societies and from various perspectives. The retelling of mythology and the classical texts from a feminist perspective has been claimed by second wave feminists as a strategy to question the stereotypical representation of women in literature. Since the present research also undertakes the feminist interpretation and assessment of the use of myth in literature, such a study would be

incomplete without taking into account the feminist movement and its implications across the globe.

1.1 Myth in the Eyes of Western Theorists

Myths are usually regarded as culture-specific narratives or tales, dealing with Gods and supernatural events, which are preserved through the oral tradition. The word myth is derived from the Greek word *mythos* which has varied meanings like “word”, “saying” and “story”. Mythology is referred as study of myth and the body of myths belonging to a particular religious tradition. These narratives, in broad terms, could also be intended at explaining the origin of the world and life.

These narratives have cultural validity and significance. Myth is of no significance outside the culture to which it belongs. Every cultural group has its own particular mythology. In the modern times, mythology is also associated with religious beliefs. George Thomson, a Marxist thinker, is of the view that mythology is the creation of the imagination of primitive man in a classless society which is either replaced by scientific thinking or associated with religious beliefs when the society is divided on the basis of class (64).

In the modern world, the word myth is also used in derogatory sense as referring to something false, untrue or removed from reality. Although mythical stories do not represent the objective reality or the factual events, they can't be called untrue. Myth is, in the words of Karen Armstrong, a make believe (8). Myth is something, which is consciously believed to be true within a particular cultural group. The twenty first century psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott like Armstrong, also considers myth as a kind of constructed reality with some significant purpose (Segal 138).

It has been the prerogative of various myth theories to define the origin of myth. Myth is considered to be the product of the imagination of primitive man. George Thomson also comments, “Mythology operates in and through the imagination” (65). As man is a meaning-seeking and curious creature, the primitive man tried to interpret the mysteries of human existence and the natural phenomenon by creating these stories which became ingrained in the psyche of human civilization through oral tradition.

Myth began to be studied scientifically in the second half of 19th century. Various disciplines like anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy, literature etc. have tried to analyse myth from different perspectives to explore the origin, function and subject matter of myth. Pioneering anthropologist E. B. Tylor reads myth literally and considers myth as a primitive counter-part to modern science. According to him, myth has served its function and its time is over (Segal 18). By considering myth just an unscientific explanation of physical phenomenon, Tylor epitomises the 19th century view of modern science replacing the function of myth.

Myth is also associated with ritual. Armstrong is of the view that myth is usually inseparable from ritual (3). William Robertson Smith, who pioneered myth ritualist theory, considers myth as an explanation of ritual which simply describes the circumstances under which the rite first came to be established (Segal 62). This theory upholds the idea that ritual is obligatory or compulsory to primitive religion, whereas myth as an explanation of ritual is something ancillary which can fluctuate. "Where ritual was obligatory, myth was optional. Where ritual was set, any myth would do" (Segal 62).

J. G. Frazer (1854-1941), a Scottish born anthropologist, author of *The Golden Bough*, also associates myth with ritual and considers myth as elaborations of rituals. But, for him, contrary to Smith, myth comes prior to ritual (Segal 66). Frazer, in his seminal work *The Golden Bough*, argued that human beings progressed from the stage of magic through religious belief to scientific thought. According to him, in the intermediate stage between religion and science, myths and rituals work together. For him, it is the myth that gives ritual its original and sole meaning (Segal 67).

Frazer gives two distinct versions of myth ritualist theory associated with the myth of the God of vegetation. In his first version of myth ritualist theory, myth is about the life, death and rebirth of God of vegetation and ritual is just an enactment of myth. The ritual is enacted with the belief that imitation of an action causes it to happen. The ritual is performed when new vegetation is required. In the ritual, a human being, most probably the king performs the role of god of vegetation and does what he wants the God to do. In Frazer's second version of myth ritualism, the king is central. The king is considered as a divine being on whose health depends upon the life of vegetation. So

the king is killed in his prime to ensure the good supply of vegetation and to transfer the divine soul to his successor (Segal 66).

The function a myth serves or the purpose underlying the creation of myth has also been a fascinating question for all the theories. According to a Polish born anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), the primitive man created myth to reconcile themselves to the aspects of world that cannot be controlled such as natural catastrophes, illness, ageing and death (Segal 28). Frazer is of the view that myth as an explanation of ritual serves as a means to control the physical world. Myth, like science, can be interpreted as primitive man's efforts to understand the mysteries of human existence as well as to cope up with the baffling physical phenomenon. It can be considered man's efforts to reconcile with the world.

Contrary to this view, some theorists consider myth as an effort to experience the divine rather than an effort to cope with the human predicament. Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), a Rumanian philosopher, is of the view that the purpose of re-enacting myth is to fulfill man's desire to encounter divinity in corroboration of the perennial philosophy that imagines the physical world as an imperfect copy of a divine realm (Armstrong 5).

Claude Levi Strauss, the French structural anthropologist holds the view that all human beings think in the form of binary oppositions and takes myth as primitive man's effort to balance the binary oppositions or to make them less contradictory. As Segal remarks,

Myth resolves or more precisely, tempers a contradiction 'dialectically', by providing either a mediating middle term or an analogous, but more easily resolved contradiction. (114)

Various psychoanalysts have tried to interpret myth in the context of its relation to human mind. Sigmund Freud (1856-1938), is of the view that myths, like dreams, provide an ideal fulfillment of the unconscious and serve to gratify those latent desires that cannot be realized otherwise as Robert E. Segal remarks

Myth thus constitutes a compromise between the side of oneself that wants the desires satisfied outright and the side that does not even want

to know that they exist. For Freud, myth functions through its meaning: myth vents oedipal desires by presenting a story in which, symbolically they are enacted. (94)

Contrary to Freud, the Swiss psychiatrist, C. G. Jung considers mythology as a projection of the collective unconscious rather than the individual unconscious.

Although the nineteenth century scholars like Tylor and Frazer rejected the social significance of myth by considering it just an unscientific explanation of physical world, the twentieth century scholars focused on the social significance of myth. The extent of investigation and enquiry that myth invites even in the twenty first century validates its social significance. A contemporary American psychoanalyst Jacob Arlow is of the view that myth also serves the function of Ego as well as Super-ego. For him, myth enables a man to adapt himself to the ways of his particular cultural group. In this way, myth performs a social function of the psychological integration of members of the cultural group to which it belongs. The purpose of myth is to promote certain social patterns among the members of a particular cultural community. Malinowski considers myth as an ideology that serves to justify established hierarchies. As Robert E. Segal remarks, "Myth persuades denizens to defer to, say, ranks in society, by pronouncing those ranks long standing and in that sense deserved" (126). As an ideology myth serves to promote certain discourses. George Sorel rejects the view point of Malinowski that myth legitimises society, but asserts that it is an ideology to reject society-

By myth he means a guiding ideology, one that preaches an imminent end to present society, advocates a fight to the death with ruling class. (qtd. in Segal 129)

Mythology, whether used to justify the established power hierarchies or to challenge them, is a discourse with a political position. As a cultural construction, it serves to promote certain ideologies.

Myth is also significant in its relation to art and literature. The literary myth-ritualist Jane Harrison upholds the idea that literature is derived from myth as myth becomes literature when it is separated from ritual. "Myth tied to ritual is religious literature; myth cut-off from ritual is secular literature or plain literature" (Segal 74).

Francis Fergusson, a prominent American theatre critic, in *The Idea of a Theatre* argues that genre of tragedy as a story dealing with the suffering and redemption of a tragic hero derives from Frazer's scenario of the killing and replacement of the king (Segal 81).

The Canadian critic, Northrop Frye, in his *Anatomy of Criticism* argues that all genres of literature originated from myth. According to him, there are four stages in the myth of the life of hero as birth, triumph, isolation and defeat of the hero. Each main genre of literature parallels a stage in the heroic myth. Romance parallels the birth of the hero, Comedy parallels the triumph of the hero, Tragedy parallels the isolation of the hero and Satire parallels the defeat of the hero (Segal 82).

Another significant and the most obvious relationship between art and mythology is that mythology provides an inspiration for art and literature. Myths are used in all kind of arts like music, films, painting, literature etc. In literature, mythology has always served as a theme since ancient times. As Segal remarks, "A standard theme in literature courses has been the tracing of classical figures, events or themes" (79).

Mythology is used in literature in various ways. Mythical stories as cultural products are taken as a discourse carrying certain political positions and are re-visioned, reinterpreted or retold from the perspective of marginalised or silenced to deconstruct the implicit political ideologies. The retelling of a narrative from the marginalised perspective is known as the appropriation of the story. Generally the terms adaptation and appropriation are loosely used in the same sense. But whereas the appropriation of a text is essentially marked by the re-vision or re-interpretation, adaptation may be aimed to make texts accessible or easily intelligible to new audiences or it may offer a revised version of the source text by re-interpreting it from the perspective of marginalised. Appropriation of a text or story implies the re-telling of the story from that of the perspective of marginalised or silenced in the original text. In the words of Julie Sanders

In appropriations, the inter-textual relationship may be less explicit, more embedded, but what is often inescapable is the fact that a political or

ethical commitment shapes a writer's, director's or performer's decision to re-interpret a source text (2).

Adaptation is a process where the genre of a text is transformed and the adaptation indicates direct relationship to the source or original text. Julie Sanders opines that adaptation and appropriation of classical and canonical texts are fundamental to the practice of literature (1). In literature, mythical and canonical texts are adapted and appropriated. The feminist critics take mythology as a construction of patriarchy and favour re-vision or retelling of mythology from the feministic perspective to question the inherent patriarchal ideologies. They argue that mythical tales depicting women as meek, submissive, emotional, irrational, subservient serve as a tool in hands of patriarchy to make women play male-scripted secondary roles.

The appropriation of mythological tales from feministic perspective has also been advocated by Adrienne Rich, the twentieth century American poet and feminist critic. In her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision", she argues that re-vision of the past writing from a feministic perspective is essential to question the age long stereotype representation of women as a dream, luxury or threat in literature. She remarks

Re-vision - the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from new critical direction - is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival . . . and this drive to self knowledge, is for woman, more than a search for identity. (18)

So, re-telling or re-inventing the age old accepted stories that confine the role of a woman to an object or subservient creature from feministic perspective will help to redefine the role of women in literature as well as culture. Re-visiting or re-telling of the mythological tales from feministic angle by voicing the marginalised women characters has been a device of many feministic authors to question the marginalised role of woman.

Alicia Ostriker, the American feminist poet of twentieth century, in her essay "The Thieves of Language: Women Poets and Revisionist Mythmaking" also holds the view

that revision of mythology by women poets may offer a new definition of women's identity and consequently may redefine the cultural role of women. She defines re-visioning of mythology as

Whenever a poet employs a figure or story previously accepted and defined by a culture, the poet is using a myth, and the potential is always present that the use will be re-visionist; that is, the figure or tale will be appropriated for altered ends, the old vessel filled with new wine, initially satisfying the thrust of individual poet but ultimately making the cultural change possible. (72)

So it can be said that appropriation of culturally accepted mythical tales from a feminist perspective facilitates women's struggle to question the unjust power relations between man and woman. The appropriation of mythical stories from the feminist perspective has been claimed by second wave feminism as a strategy to question the age long subjugation of women.

1.2 Feminism and Allied Disciplines

Feminism as a political movement as well as a distinct literary theory seeks to question a woman's secondary position in man-woman hierarchy and demands political, economic and social equality of the sexes. The central argument of Feminism is that the gender roles where a woman is subordinate to man are not natural but culturally constructed and it is through the process of socialisation that an individual is made to fit into these pre-determined roles. The cultural productions like literature, religion, mythology always carry ideological implications and feminists argue that the representation of a woman in cultural artifacts like literature and mythology as passive, timid, emotional, irrational, dependent, self-pitying, self sacrificing is a construction of patriarchal psyche. Reinterpretation of classic works of literature as well as mythology from the feminist perspective has been a strategy of Feminist critics to question the patriarchal mode of writing.

As a theory, there are various stances of Feminism like Liberal Feminism, Marxist feminism, Socialist Feminism, psychoanalysis Feminism and Radical Feminism upholding different assumptions regarding basis of patriarchy and different approaches

to question the man-woman hierarchy. Although it is difficult to draw a precise line of difference among all stances of feminism as there may be overlapping yet they have significant difference in their focus.

Liberal Feminism seeks to bring reforms in patriarchy rather than subverting it. The prime focus of liberal feminism is to ensure women's access to education, work opportunities, equal legal rights and public life. Liberal Feminism doesn't question a woman's secondary position in the structure of family and is least concerned with the outer mode of production. As Deborah L. Madsen in her work *Feminist Theory and Literary Practice* says, "The efforts of liberal feminism are directed towards the reform of patriarchy rather than the structural change of a male-dominated society" (36).

Radical Feminism began as a political movement that seeks to abolish male supremacy. The fundamental belief that underlies Radical feminism is that Gender hierarchy is a basic hierarchy and all other social, economic and cultural hierarchies originate from this hierarchy. A woman is dominated primarily by the control of sexuality which is obtained through the strategies like ideology of compulsory heterosexuality, restrictions upon reproductive rights and technologies and male sexual violence. Various social and economic institutions like marriage, family, heterosexual relations and capitalism are mere tools of patriarchy. Some of the radical feminists argue that subversion of the male supremacy requires the revolutionary movement of women characterized by rejection of marriage, family and heterosexuality. In the words of Ellen Willis, as a radical feminist,

Our overriding priority was to argue, against pervasive resistance, that male female relations were indeed a valid political issue, and to begin describing, analysing and challenging those relations. (93)

Marxist Feminism includes class with an analysis of gender. Marxist Feminism holds the views that gender is a basic cause of oppression and gender oppression pervades all our social relationship and existed even in pre-capitalist period. But it focuses on the analysis of capitalist mode of production as sexually and economically oppressive. Capitalism is patriarchal as it trivialises the labor of woman as the wages of a woman's labor are lower to male labor and female labor within the domestic sphere goes unpaid. As Sheila Rowbotham in her essay "Woman's Consciousness, Man's

World” opines, “The inequality of women at work is built into the structure of capitalist production and division of labor in industry and in the family” (3). Capitalism creates ideology of women’s secondary role by representing how a woman is portrayed as an object in movies as well as commercial ads.

Socialist Feminism focuses upon the intersection of patriarchy, capitalism and racism. It holds the view that all the three factors race, class and patriarchy define one’s identity as a gendered individual. Socialist Feminism analyses how female identity is ideologically constructed as subordinated to male. Madsen remarks, “Feminism within a socialist framework offers the analysis of ideological construction of femininity under patriarchal white supremacist capitalism” (184). It is concerned with women’s oppression in private as well as public sphere. It is concerned with the issues like violence, pornography, working conditions and the public dimension of private life - the family, reproduction and sexuality. Collectivity of oppression that is the oppression on the basis of gender, class and race is the basic assumption of Socialist Feminism. To ensure a change in gender relations, a change in society is required.

Feminism has a long history. First Wave of Feminism was basically concerned with securing equality in terms of legal rights including right over property and children, right to vote, right to divorce. Another fundamental concern of first wave feminism was to ensure equal opportunities for education and work for women. Mary Wollstonecraft’s work *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) is one of the foundation stones of contemporary feminism (Walter 35). This work made a plea for equal opportunities of education for women and exposed how women are socialised to occupy a secondary position in man-woman hierarchy. She also holds the view that women should articulate their feelings and experience. The other two prominent works of this period that made a call for the reform of women’s social and legal position include William Thompson’s *Appeal of One Half of Human Race, Women, Against the Pretensions of the Other Half, Man* (1825) and J. S. Mill’s *The Subjection of Women* (1869).

In America, the first wave of Feminism began in 1840s and is marked by Seneca Falls Convention of 1848. This was the first Women’s Rights Convention that demanded an end to all discrimination based on the sex and gave rise to the suffrage movement. The major figures associated with this Convention were Elizabeth Lady Stanton, Susan

B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. In 1869, Stanton, together with Susan B. Anthony, founded the National Woman's Suffrage Association, which later became the League of Women Voters. Along with the enfranchisement of women, this organization demanded the reform of divorce laws and improved working conditions for women. This organization, along with Women's Party founded by Alice Paul, aimed to remove all legal distinctions on the basis of sex. But legislative change was slow. There was some progress in the reform of property laws and educational opportunities became available (Sanders 23).

In America, the most influential feminist work of this period is the journalist, critic and women's rights advocate Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century*. Fuller's feminist ideas are based on transcendentalism. She includes both men and women in her category of "Man" and depicts how preconceptions about the gender roles create obstacles in woman's way of self-reliance. Fuller argued that woman should not be confined to domesticity and should have an access to education and work. So the first wave feminists were liberal in their approach as they demanded reforms in patriarchy rather than any structural change.

In the twentieth century, British novelist and thinker, Virginia Woolf in her work, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), explored the problems faced by women writers. She was one of the first writers to argue that the language which is available to a woman is patriarchal and sexist and the woman author is forced to practise this restricted notion of language (Walters 96).

The second wave of Feminism emerged in America in 1960s with Women's Liberation Movement. It focused on sexual discrimination in the work place, child care, and legalisation of abortion, reproductive rights and violence against women. The objectification of women as well as stereotypical representation of women in art and culture was also a major concern of second wave Feminism. During this period, feminism shares concerns with Marxism as well as shows radical tendencies.

One of the most significant writers of second wave Feminism is Betty Friedan, an American writer and Feminist. She, in her well-acclaimed work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) challenged the belief that a woman's fulfillment lies in marriage and domesticity and strongly advocated women's access to education and work opportunities. Her

central argument is that rather than being confined her life according to the patriarchal standards a woman should ask what she wants. As she remarks, “Neither her husband nor her children nor the things in her house, nor sex, nor being like all the other women, can give her a self” (qtd. in Walters 102). This work is rooted in a liberal feminist tradition as it basically demands an access to public life for women.

The French Existential philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) is one of the most influential and widely read feminist works. Her central argument is “One is not born a woman, rather becomes, a woman (qtd. in Walter 98). She exposes how the woman is culturally constructed, defined and represented as the “Other of man” whereas the category of self or subject is acclaimed by man (Thornham 34). She argued that all the cultural artifacts including mythology, literature and religion are primarily constructed by men and carry the patriarchal notion of women and a woman is socialized to accept herself as subordinate to man. She says,

No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature . . . which is described as feminine (qtd. in Gamble 47).

She opines that instead of confining themselves to the roles and identities imposed by patriarchy, women must assert themselves as agents. She argues that an independent woman wants

. . . to be active, a taker, and refuses the passivity man means to impose on her. The modern woman accepts masculine values; she prides herself on thinking, taking action, working, creating on the same terms as man (qtd. in Walter 98).

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1970) argued that “patriarchy is a political institution and sex a status category with political implication” (qtd. in Thornham, 36). So there is a relationship between power and sex which manifests in private as well as public sphere of life. She also opined that patriarchy as the primary form of oppression maintains its

domination through ideological control. She offers an analysis of the patriarchal attitudes of writers like D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller and Norman Mailer and concludes that all writing is dominated by gender.

The radical tendencies within the Feminism emerged during the second wave of feminism. Shulamith Firestone, one of the founders of the early radical feminist group, the *New York Redstockings*, in her influential work *The Dialectic of Sex* (1970) argued that reproductive difference between the sexes led to the first division of labour and consequently to all divisions into economic and cultural classes. So women's emancipation requires radical revolution and the seizure of control of reproduction (Thornham 37). It will ultimately lead to the collapse of other social and cultural structures like family, marriage and motherhood that intensify women's suppression.

Sexual violence also became a major concern of second wave feminism. The American feminist and journalist Susan Brownmiller in her work *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) offers a ground breaking study of rape and argues that rape has always been defined from the patriarchal perspective. Susan Griffin attacked pornography in her work *Pornography and Silence* (1981) by claiming that pornography victimizes all women by objectifying them.

French Feminists Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous and Julia Kristeva focused on language and the way it constructs sexual identity. Their ideas are based on the French psychoanalyst Lacan's view that sexual difference is constructed in and by the language. Hélène Cixous in her essay "The Laugh of Medusa" (1975) uses the term *écriture féminine* for female writing that will escape the restrictions imposed by 'the phallogratic system' (Bertens 166). Hans Bertens suggests, "Cixous chooses to call the subversive writing that she has in mind feminine or female because the forces of repression are so clearly male" (167). Cixous proposes a kind of writing that questions the patriarchal fixity of language characterised by the free play of meaning within the framework of loosened grammatical structure. She suggests this kind of writing is uniquely the product of woman physiology and women should celebrate their bodies through their writing.

The Third Wave of Feminism emerged in the 1990s. One of the most prominent feminist writers is Judith Butler who in her work *Gender Trouble* explores the process of the construction of gender identity. She argues that gender is not a fixed or stable category, rather a performance that is the playing out of roles that have to be repeated within social and cultural contexts. She suggests that gender identity is acquired through the repetitive performance as she says. "Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time - an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 519). So gender identity is not what one is, rather what one acts. She asserts that gender identities are not imposed, rather a process of constructing the self.

Instability of gender implies that the subject who is female by sex can display masculine traits or vice-versa. The subject is free to choose gender roles from the alternatives available within a cultural context. Sex and gender, in Butler's view are construction of discourses. She also holds the view that gender identities are constructed in and through the language so there is no identity that precedes language. In her view, there are certain performative acts that deconstruct the fixity of gender identity such as cross dressing. According to Hans Bertens:

Cross-dressing undermines the claim to naturalness of standard heterosexual identities and emphasises a theatrical, performance-like dimension of gender and sexual orientation that our discourses seek to suppress. (230)

Butler asserts that gender identity is the effect of certain discourses and the pre-existing gender norms can be subverted. So feminism that began as a fight for equal rights for women now focuses on how the gender is constructed and how this construction can be subverted.

1.3 Appropriation of Myth in Indian Literature

In literature, the adaptation as well as appropriation of mythology has always been in vogue. The sources of Indian mythology are the four *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the two great epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*. Most of the

women represented in the epics the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* like Sita, Gandhari and Draupadi occupy a secondary position within the male-female hierarchy. They are represented as self-sacrificing, submissive and subservient creatures. There are many Indian writers who have attempted the appropriation of the mythical texts for feminist cause. The novel *Yajnesini* written by Pratibha Ray retells the story of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective. The novel peeps into the consciousness of Draupadi and throws light on her dilemmas as a daughter and a wife in a male dominated society. Chitra Benarjee Divakaruni's famous novel *The Palace of Illusions* is also a re-telling of Mahabharata from Draupadi's point of view. The narrative is a depiction of Draupadi's desires, dreams and sufferings. The novel is a powerful comment on the patriarchal notion of society which does not assign a woman freedom or liberty to take her decisions. Mallika Sarabhai, a social activist, in her one act play *Sita's Daughters*, gives voice to Sita, who was marginalised in the epic, the *Ramayana*. In the play, she represents Sita as an assertive and self-assured woman who refuses to be exploited in the name of duty. The play while re-conceiving mythological characters also throws light on their sufferings which have continued even in the contemporary society.

A prominent contemporary Punjabi playwright Swarajbir in his play *Krishna* demythicises the culturally accepted figure of Lord Krishna to comment on the politics of power. Contrary to the culturally accepted image of Krishna as a cow herder and innocent lover, Krishna is portrayed as a tyrant ruler who is more concerned with his ambition to save his throne. Swarajbir's Krishna is indulged in endless intrigues to maintain his kingly powers. Girish Karnad, one of the most acclaimed contemporary Indian playwrights also infuses mythology in his plays. He is a playwright who has used Indian mythology and history in contemporary contexts. His plays like *Hayavadna*, *Yayati*, *Nagamandala*, *The Fire and the Rain* are some very famous artistic creations which are woven around some lesser known Indian myths. Along with the contemporary concerns, his plays also have the fragrance of cultural fabrics of India.

Githa Hariharan in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* reinterprets the mythological tales to give voice to the silenced female perspective. Mahasweta Devi

also invokes mythology in her stories “Draupadi” and “Breast-giver” to depict women’s powerless position in a patriarchal set up.

1.4 Critical Studies on Githa Hariharan and Mahasweta Devi; Survey of work done

Both Mahasweta Devi and Githa Hariharan enjoy distinguished position among the contemporary Indian English writers. All the works under study including Hariharan’s novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi’s stories “Draupadi” and “Breast-giver” have been studied from various perspectives. *The Thousand Faces of Night* has been primarily studied from feministic perspective. “Draupadi” and “Breast-giver” has often been studied as feminist writings depicting women’s plight in a patriarchal society. Some of the works previously done on both texts are discussed here:

The article “Ripping Apart a woman’s heart: Sacrifice, abjection and marriage in *The Thousand Faces of Night*” written by Maria Sofia Pimentel Biscaia offers a feministic study of the novel. It focuses on how the meaning of a woman’s life is determined on the basis of her bodily functions and her role is confined to domesticity and child care in a patriarchal set up. These meanings of life are passed on and maintained through the stories where sacrifice imposed on a woman is represented as self-sacrifice. She also explores how marriage in a patriarchal system demands a sacrifice of individuality on the part of woman and reduces her value to her womb as the maternity becomes a definite determinant of her feminine role.

Eiko Ohira, in the article “*The Thousand Faces of Night*: A Counter Narrative of Bleeding Womanhood” offers a feministic analysis of the novel by focusing on the various discourses regarding notion of motherhood that reduce female body to womb in a male-centered society. Ohira explores that woman is made to internalise these discourses to accept the subservient position in man-woman hierarchy. Ohira also focuses on the spirit of sisterhood displayed in the novel as all women characters in the novel help each other. He also focuses on the patriarchy’s defiled attitude regarding menstruation.

Arpita Chattaraj Mukhopadhyay’s article “*The Thousand Faces of Night*: A story of Storytelling” explores the appropriation and reworking of mythology and folktales in

the novel to unveil the oppression and subjugation of women across the time and space. She focuses how the mythical tales as a discourse contribute to the construction of a woman's identity. She explores the secondary or subservient position of women in marriage, in a patriarchal setup.

K. Ragini in her article "Thwarted Dreams of Women in their Constant Life: *The Thousand Faces of Night*" while exploring the struggles and predicaments of three female characters Sita, Devi and Mayamma throws light on the gender roles that women are supposed to occupy in a patriarchal set up. She also argues that all the female characters in the novel struggle to resist the oppression and to achieve their identity as an individual.

"Re-Visioning of Myths from a Woman's Point of View in Githa Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*" by Divyarajan Bahuguna focuses on how different mythical stories have been reinterpreted from feministic perspective by Hariharan to expose the oppression of women since ages. He also lays bare the identity crisis faced by the female characters in the novel as in a patriarchal set up there are the conflicts between the identity imposed by traditional patriarchal ideologies and the individual experiences.

Shirish More's article "Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*: A Silent Quest for Identity" demonstrates the obstacles that patriarchal ideologies lay in the path of women's quest for identity. He focuses on the restrictions that are imposed on the women in terms of choosing a career and life-partner. In his view the novel symbolises women's struggle to achieve identity as an individual.

"Marriage: A Boon Or Bane? A Study of Bharti Mukherjee's *Wife* and Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" by T. Sarda offers to analyse the marriage institution as represented in the novels *Wife* and *The Thousand Faces of Night*. He explores how marriage within a patriarchal system rather than providing support and satisfaction, creates alienation for the protagonists in both of the novels.

The article 'Voices of Protest and Assertion: A Comparative Study of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *In Times of Siege*' written by Shubha Tripathi explores the feministic and assertive temperament of all the female characters portrayed in both of the novels. Shubha Tripathi suggests that all the female characters

of the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* grandmother, Sita, Devi, Mayamma, Parvatiamma protest against the oppressive forces of patriarchy silently or overtly.

Sarita Parbhaker in her book *Fiction and Society: Narrativisation of realities in the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan* offers the comparative study of the novels of Shashi Deshpande and Githa Hariharan. The author tries to explore how both writers have used the story telling techniques to comment on the contemporary reality.

V. Bhavani in his article "Writing-Off Male Scripts by Making Female Choices- a Study of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*" makes a point that Hariharan has revised the mythological tales from feministic perspective in the novel to question the secondary position of woman. He also explores the struggles of all the three women in the novel and suggests that all these characters are assertive and subversive.

Saumitra Chakravarty in her essay "*Marad Tu? A Journey towards Female Empowerment in Mahasweta Devi's Draupadi and Rudali*" focuses on the depiction of women from the marginalized sections of society in the stories "Draupadi" and "Rudali". She argues that the women in these stories belonging to lower class face sexual exploitation along with the class and caste subjugation. She explores the revolutionary spirit of the characters Dopdi and Sanichari. She makes a point that these women struggle against the oppressive forces and emerge as a symbol of female empowerment as Sanichari is ultimately able to manipulate the system for her survival and Draupadi although brutally gang raped, yet through her fearlessness renders her oppressor powerless.

Dr M. Umar in his essay "Mahasweta Devi's Victim Consciousness: A Perspective" proposes that Devi's work is basically characterised by a consciousness of exploitation and oppression of the poor and marginalised. By focusing on the representation of the struggles of marginalised sections of society, the essay offers a thematic analysis of Devi's various works like *Aajir*, *Choti Munda and His Arrow*, *Mother of 1084* and "Draupadi".

Radha Chakravarty in her essay "Mahasweta Devi: A Luminous Anger" offers an analysis of Mahasweta Devi's four works "Bayen", "Jamunabati's Mother", *Hazar Churashir Ma* and "Stanadayni". She focuses on the idea of motherhood depicted in all these works. She explores how the notion of motherhood represents values of care and

love and simultaneously is used as a means by patriarchy to subjugate woman in all these works.

Deepti Misri in her essay “Are You a Man: Performing Naked Protest in India” by analysing “Draupadi” focuses on how nakedness is used to question the patriarchal violence and discourses regarding the male violence in a patriarchal society. The essay focuses on Draupadi’s symbolic protest against the exploitation through the use of naked body. By referring to some naked protests in India, the essay explores how nakedness can be used as a tool to resist the patriarchal violence of state.

Prasita Mukherjee in her essay “Revolutionizing Agency: Sameness and Difference in the Representation of Woman by Rokeya Sakhawat Hossain and Mahasweta Devi” explores the similarities and differences in both writers depiction of gender biasness. The essay proposes that both of writers primarily deal with oppression and marginalisation of woman by blending fact and fiction. But whereas Sakhawat is basically concerned with women’s empowerment that can be acquired through education, in Mahasweta Devi’s fiction the marginalisation and oppression of women is determined by forces of race, class and gender together.

The essay “The Discourse of Liberal Feminism and Third World Women’s Texts: Some Issues of Pedagogy” by Indrani Mitra and Madhu Mitras offers a comparative analysis of Mahasweta Devi’s story “Breast- giver” and the Egyptian writer Nawal El Saadawi’s novel *God Dies Alone by the Nile*. The essay focuses on the role of both class and gender in the oppression and marginalisation of the woman in both of the writings. The author, by analysing the oppression of the female characters in both of the writings, proposes that Liberal Feminism discourse overlooks the difference of class and race and considers women as a homogeneous group, whereas in third world women’s experience of gender oppression, race and class plays a significant role.

P. Shahanaz in his essay “Mahasweta Devi’s Social Activism and the Marginalised: A Study” offers an analysis of *The Anthology of the plays of Mahasweta Devi: Five Plays*. The essay focuses on the representation of marginalised and downtrodden sections of society in Mahasweta Devi’s plays *Mother of 1084*, *Aajir*, *Urvashi and Johnny*, *Bayen* and *Water*. *Aajir* represents the plight of slaves, who are ruthlessly exploited through generations by their masters for petty amount of money.

Water mirrors the suffering of poor landless peasants. Usha A. in her article "Feminism in Mahasweta Devi's Selected Stories" offers a feminist analysis of Mahasweta Devi's stories "Draupadi", "Breast-giver", "Rudali", "The Hunt" and "Dolouti". The essay focuses on Devi's representation of the sufferings and struggle of women from the marginalised sections of society.

Much research has been done on Devi's works as well as Hariharan's works. But Mahasweta Devi and Hariharan have not been comparatively studied yet. Despite depicting lives of different classes, both Githa Hariharan and Mahasweta Devi have many comparable features. Both of them make extensive use of myths in their writings. Another common thread that unites their work is the depiction of the oppression and subjugation of women in a patriarchal society. Both writers are comparable on the basis of their use of mythology for bringing into light the dilemmas, conflicts and struggles of women in a patriarchal society. The purpose of the present comparative study of Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi's stories "Draupadi" and "Breast- giver" is to analyse the interpretative use of mythology for giving insight into the suffering and struggles of women in a patriarchal society. The study will be significant as it tends to expose the marginalisation of women. It can contribute in questioning the secondary position of women in gender hierarchy. The study as an exposition of women's struggles in a patriarchal society raises question regarding women's age long suppression and exploitation in a male-dominated society.

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CHAPTER 2

Adaptation and Appropriation of Mythology from Feministic Perspective in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Githa Hariharan (b. 1954) is a prominent and prolific post-colonial Indian writer. Born in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu, she grew up in the cities of Mumbai and Manila. She got her education in these two cities and later in the United States. Hariharan came to writing after a career in editing and publishing. As a writer, she has attempted novels, short stories and essays. Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1993. After the incredible success of first novel, her highly acclaimed short story collection *The Art of Dying* got published in 1993. Her other novels include *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003) and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). She has edited *A Southern Harvest* (1993), a volume of short stories in English translation from four major south Indian languages. With Shama Futehally, she is also the co-editor of a collection of stories for children entitled *Sorry, Best Friend!* (1997). Hariharan's another remarkable work is children's book entitled *The Winning Team* (2004). Her fiction has been translated into many languages like French, Spanish, Italian, German, Dutch, Greek and Urdu. Her essays and fiction have also been included in anthologies such as Salman Rushdie's *Mirrorwork: 50 Years of Indian Writing 1947-1997*. Hariharan wrote for several years a regular column "Second Thoughts" for the major Indian newspaper *The Telegraph*. Hariharan has worked as a visiting professor as well as a writer-in-residence in various universities.

A very prominent feature of Hariharan's writing is its association with mythology. Hariharan makes extensive use of myth, fable and fantasy in her fiction. Hariharan takes mythology as a discourse with a political stance and reinterprets the mythical tales from the marginalised perspective. Her very first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is replete with mythical stories of Gandhari, Amba, Damyanti etc. In this novel, mythical stories are blended with the main narrative and are reinterpreted in the modern contexts

to expose the trials and tribulations of a woman's life in a patriarchal society. *When Dreams Travel* is a reworking of the famous *The Thousand and One Nights* or *The Arabian Nights*. The novel gives voice and body to Dunyazad, Shaharзад's sister, who has been marginalised in *The Arabian Nights*. In this novel, Hariharan has tried to explore what would have been happened to Shaharзад during and after the thousand and one nights of storytelling. In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, which deals with the self-discovery of a retired teacher, Hariharan has made use of the *Panchtantra* tales. Regarding Hariharan's use of mythology in her works, Vemuri Rupa opines, "The central theme of all her novels is the re-writing of given narratives be it myth, history or fables" (4).

Another remarkable feature of Hariharan's writing is the variation and social relevance of its thematic concerns. Githa Hariharan in an interview talks about her thematic concerns, "All my novels and stories look at power politics in some way or the other. Fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations" (qtd. in Kumar 225). *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* tend to project the unequal power relations between man and woman in a patriarchal society. In *In Times of Siege*, she raises the question of a writer's freedom in a society seized by fundamentalism and censorship. *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* deals with the theme of teacher-pupil relationship as well as a quest for identity. Vemuri Rupa opines about Hariharan's thematic concerns, "Githa Hariharan is one of the Indian English Women Writers who have been producing a body of Indian literature that is committed to feminist and social issues" (3).

A significant thematic feature of Hariharan's writing is its exposition of women's struggle and survival in a male-privileged set-up. Undoubtedly Hariharan is one of the eminent feminist Indian writers. Regarding Hariharan as a feminist writer, Saloni Kumar is of the opinion,

She is quite conscious of her responsibility towards her vision and is undoubtedly a feminist voice articulating the hopes, the oppressions, the concerns and tensions of womankind . . . she uses her novels as vehicles of protest against male dominance over woman. (225)

Hariharan, in an interview, on being asked, whether she considers herself a feminist writer, says,

Am I a Writer particularly concerned with “women’s issues”? And am I a feminist? The answer to both questions is yes. I want to make it quite clear that in my life my choices have been dictated by what I perceive as a feminist voice . . . And anyway however you define yourself all our work is informed by some way or the other by feminism, along with the ideas of Freud and Marx. And this goes for both men and women. So the answer to your question would be that I am a writer (opposed to woman writer) who is a feminist with several other things! (qtd in Rupa 3)

Githa Hariharan has always been concerned with women’s desires and voices. In 1999, Githa Hariharan challenged the constitutional validity of Hindu Minority and Guardianship act (1956). The section 6 of this act says that only father is a natural guardian of her minor son and minor unmarried daughter. Mother is considered as a natural guardian only in the case when father dies or if court finds him unfit for guardianship. In response to Hariharan’s petition, on Feb 17, 1999, the High court gave a landmark judgment, according to which a woman is also considered the natural guardian of her child.

In her fiction also, she exposes and questions women’s secondary position in the gender hierarchy. Her first two novels *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* explicitly deal with the question of gender bias in a male-dominated society. Whereas in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan exposes and deconstructs the dominant patriarchal ideologies by blending myth and reality; in *When Dreams Travel* she does the same by re-inventing the mythical narrative from feminist perspective. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, she challenges the dominant patriarchal ideologies by telling the age old mythic tales from feministic perspective. She gives voice to the female characters that were marginalised and silenced in the original narrative. By appropriating the mythical tales or by providing the alternative ends to the mythical stories, she unveils the patriarchal ideologies underlying these tales.

The present research focuses on Hariharan's adaptation and appropriation of mythic tales in *The Thousand Faces of Night* to expose women's trials, struggles, oppressions and survival in a male-privileged society. The novel while dealing with the lives of three women belonging to different generations, Devi, the narrator, Sita, Devi's mother and Mayamma, Devi's husband's caretaker is an explicit record of women's sufferings and survival in a male-dominated society. The study focuses on Hariharan's adaptation and appropriation of mythical tales from feministic perspectives with an objective to question the implied patriarchal ideologies within these tales as well as to give insight into the age long struggles, oppression and survival of women in a patriarchal society.

Githa Hariharan makes extensive use of myths in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. A distinguished feature of her use of mythology in this novel is the use of various mythical stories and figures within a single narrative. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, the mythical stories are blended with the main narrative. The mythical stories originally told by grandmother to Devi during her childhood, are retold by her in the main narrative. Even the name of the characters like Devi, Sita, Parvatamma, Uma carry mythical connotations.

Instead of using the stories of main-stream mythical heroines like Sita, Savitri, Draupadi etc, Hariharan makes use of the stories of the forgotten or marginalised mythical characters like Gandhari, Damyanti, Amba, Ganga etc. Some of the tales are even appropriated as told from the female perspective. Hariharan has attempted to revise these tales from feministic perspective to expose the struggles of women and question the stereotype roles of women as embedded in mythical tales. Regarding Hariharan's use of mythology, Sarita Parbhakar is of the view that she has used mythology for the subversion of the accepted tales to evolve an alternative or oppositional point as against the dominant one (41).

The sources, upon which Hariharan relies for mythical stories used in *The Thousand Faces of Night* include the *Mahabharata* and the *Panchatantra* tales. The stories that have been used in the novel include those of Gandhari, Damyanti, Amba, Ganga and a girl who married a snake. These stories of Gandhari, Amba, Damyanti and

Ganga are inter-linked and originally found in the different episodes of the great epic, the *Mahabharata*. The story of a girl, who marries a snake, comes from the *Panchatantra* tales.

Hariharan has used these stories in fragmented form. Nowhere in the novel, has she made use of the full-length stories. The different episodes of the stories have been used. As in the case of Damyanti's story, it is the *swayamvara* episode that has been used. For the depiction of different phases of women's life in a male-dominated society, a different story is narrated. For the process of marriage, story of Damyanti's *swayamvara* is narrated. To depict the tribulations women undergo while performing the role of a wife and a mother in a traditional patriarchal society, the respective stories of Gandhari and Ganga have been narrated.

The story of Damyanti and Nala, as stated in *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, forms one of the episodes of the *Mahabharata*. In the epic story, Damyanti, a woman of extreme beauty, is the only daughter of Bhima, the king of Vidharbha. Nala is a brave, virtuous and learned king of Nishadha kingdom. Both Nala and Damyanti fall in love with each other when they hear about their respective virtues. Damyanti's father holds a *swayamvara* for Damyanti to choose her husband. Various kings including Nala come to attend Damyanti's *swayamvara*. Four gods Indra, Agni, Yama and Varuna also attend Damyanti's *swayamvara*. As the Gods come to know about Damyanti's resolution of choosing Nala as her husband, they all adopt the appearance of Nala in the *swayamvara* but Damyanti succeeds in identifying and choosing Nala for her husband. So they get married and live happily for some time. Then, in a game of dice, Nala loses his kingdom. Both Nala and Damyanti undergo hard times and get separated. Ultimately Nala is able to get his kingdom back and both of them get united again.

In the novel, it is only the *swayamvara* episode that has been used. The story of Damyanti's *swayamvara* is remembered by Devi when she herself gets involved in the process of choosing a husband. This story is connected to Devi in the sense that it depicts a contradiction between the representation of the status of women in mythical texts and in the real life. Whereas Damyanti, despite of many obstacles, succeeds in

choosing the desired husband, Devi is unable to choose Dan. Whereas Damyanti is given the opportunity to marry the man she desires, Devi, like the other female characters in the novel *Gauri, Sita, Mayamma*, is denied the opportunity to choose her own partner. Sarita Prabhakar, who has compared Githa Hariharan and Shashi Deshpande in her book *Fiction and Society* also associates Damyanti's story to Devi's life as it represents a reversal of Damyanti's story (52). Devi's dreams of pre-destined husbands, *swayamvara* and idyllic marriage nurtured by grandmother's stories get shattered when she herself gets involved in the process of marriage. Devi, in fact, feels happy that her grandmother is no longer alive, "I m glad she is not here to see me at my *swayamvara*, the princess's robe she lovingly stitched for me" (20).

Hariharan's use of *swayamvara* episode can be taken as an effort to expose the patriarchal ideologies inherent in the process of *swayamvara*. *Swayamvara* is a form of marriage prevalent in Vedic India, where a girl of marriageable age chooses a husband from among the suitors. Chandra Bali Tripathi has divided *swayamvara* into three types (111). Viryashulka *Swayamvara* is a kind of *swayamvara* where suitors have to pass the test of strength, bravery and skill as in the *swayamvara* of Draupadi and Sita. In Saundryashulka *swayamvara*, the bride is free to choose any of the handsome youth arrived at *swayamvara* without any test of bravery. In third kind of *swayamvara*, bride is given absolute freedom to choose any man from all over the world. Generally *swayamvara* is considered to be symbolic of women's emancipation in ancient India. Subodh Kapoor in *A Dictionary of Hinduism. Its Mythology, Religion, History, and Literature and Pantheon* defines *swayamvara* as the self- choice or public choice of husband (392). But the question arises whether *swayamvara* really provides women with the utmost freedom to choose her mate or it is just a hypocritical practice where a woman's choice is limited to the suitors who fulfill her father's conditions involving the criterion of social status, caste, wealth, strength, bravery and skill. In Saundryashulka *swayamvara* as well as Viryashulka *swayamvara*, if the desired man doesn't be a part of the *swayamvara* or fulfill all the conditions of *swayamvara* determined by the bride's father, she is not given the freedom to choose her partner outside the *swayamvara*. Also it is the father who decides the grooms to be invited in the *swayamvara*. In that case, *swayamvara*, in fact, symbolises male power to restrict women's choice. Tripathi

also considers *swayamvara* as a practice where a woman is free to choose her husband within the condition and limitation prescribed by her father (111). Instead of giving the absolute freedom, *swayamvara*, just contradictory to its literal meaning self-choice, restricts a woman's freedom. In the novel, the reference to *swayamvara* can be interpreted as an exposition of the control of a woman's choice within a patriarchal society.

Gandhari, a prominent character in the epic the *Mahabharata*, is the daughter of Subala, king of Gandhara. She is a devotee of Lord Shiva and blessed with a boon of hundred sons. Having heard of her boon, Bhishma, the eighth son of Kuru king of Shantanu, asks for her hand in marriage with prince Dhritarashtra of Hastinapur, who is blind by birth. Gandhari, on knowing about her husband-to-be's blindness blindfolds herself and takes a pledge to remain in darkness for the rest of her life.

In the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself on knowing about her husband's blindness has been narrated with a little variation. It is a kind of inversion of the mythical story. In the story narrated in the novel, it is only after the marriage; Gandhari comes to know about Dhritrastra's blindness. In the epic, Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself has been glorified by considering it as a sacrifice on the part of a wife who does not want to be superior to her husband in any way. John Dowson, in *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, is also of the view that Gandhari is a devoted wife, who blindfolds herself just to be like her husband (104).

Hariharan has given voice to Gandhari's perspective, silenced in the epic. Hariharan takes Gandhari's vow to remain in darkness not as a projection of her devotion or sacrifice for her husband rather as an expression of her anger or fury on being deceived. It is a kind of protest against the forces of patriarchy. Deprived of any power, in Hariharan's narrative, she chooses self-denial as the only mean to express her anger, as is clear in the expression,

In her pride, her anger, Gandhari said nothing. But she tore off a piece of her thick red skirt and tied it tightly over her own eyes. She groped towards her unseeing husband, her lips straight and thin with fury. (29)

In the novel, the mythical story of Gandhari is associated with Sita's predicament. Sita, Devi's mother, is an ambitious, efficient, self-assured and hard-working woman. Since her childhood, she dreams to be a *veena* player. Her parents have provided her with the best teachers and training in accordance to their approach. She spends five to six hours every day in practicing *veena*. In fact, she is chosen as a bride by Mahadevan's family for her skills in playing *veena*.

Her interview with Mahadevan's family was, in fact, a mini concert. By the time she played an *ashtapadi* about the sweet poignancy of love, *nindatichandana*, her examiners had forgotten about her dark skin and the severe face that met theirs without a smile; they were overwhelmed by her talent and their good fortune. (102)

She brings her *veena* along with her after her marriage. She continues to play *veena* after completing her household works. One day when she is engrossed in playing *veena*, her father-in-law calls her, to which she cannot respond because of her engrossment. Her father-in-law furiously scolds her and says "Put that *veena* away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?" (30). Sita feels so disheartened that she pulls the strings of her *veena* out and says in a whisper, "Yes. I am a wife, a daughter-in-law" (30).

After this, she never plays *veena* again and leads a life of self denial. Sita's self-denial, like Gandhari's as portrayed in the novel, doesn't symbolise sacrifice on the part of a woman to be a great wife, rather a silent protest against the code of patriarchy. In the words of Arpita Mukhopadhyaya, "For both Gandhari and Sita, protest takes the form of self denial, a sacrifice of their identity and acceptance of identities thrust upon them" (156). The name Sita itself carries mythical connotations. But contrary to the self sacrificing and subservient character of mythical Sita, she is an assertive woman who controls her husband's life. She is made to abandon her age long dreams, but ultimately she realizes her identity as an individual. In the end of the novel, she starts playing *veena* again.

The story of a girl who marries a snake comes from the *Panchatantra*, which is a famous collection of tales and fables with moral teaching, in five books. Vishnu Sharma

is credited with the authorship of the *Panchatantra* tales. The story is about a girl who is given into marriage to a snake. The girl whole heartedly accepts her snake husband who at last turns out to be a human being. Although Hariharan's version is not an appropriation of the tale, still it carries variations. Whereas in the original story, it is the father of the snake who burns the snake skin, in the novel it is the girl or the snake's wife who burns the snake-skin to ashes. This difference can be interpreted as depiction of the responsibility that women have carried since ages. It is always considered to be a wife's responsibility to transform her husband into an ideal human being. Devi's father-in-law also upholds the same view, "Women have always been instruments of the saint's initiation into *bhakti*" (65).

Another variation from the original story occurs in the depiction of the mother of the snake. Whereas in the original story, the mother cries helplessly to convince her husband to find a bride for her son, in grandmother's version, the mother is an angry and furious woman who forces her husband to find a suitable bride for her son: "He railed at her foolishness, but she stood before him, her hands on her hips, eyes blazing with a mother's righteous wrath" (33).

This mythical story is narrated by grandmother by associating it with Gauri's life. Whereas the girl in the mythical story upholds the patriarchal idea of "a girl is given only once in marriage" (33), Gauri rejects this idea by deserting her husband and eloping with his brother-in-law. Hariharan has reinterpreted the story in the present contexts where a woman takes the liberty to reject her married life.

The story of Ganga that Hariharan has used in the novel, originally frames an episode of the *Mahabharata*. This story occurs in the Adi-Parva of the *Mahabharata*. But Hariharan has used this story in a deviated way. In the original story, Ganga is a beautiful girl, married to King Shantanu. But before marrying him, she has imposed a condition that he would not stop her from doing whatever she wants to do. After their marriage, Ganga gives birth to seven sons, one every year, but throws every child into the river Ganga just after the birth. Shantanu feels helpless and grief-stricken as he is bound by his promise of not stopping her from doing anything. But when Ganga gives birth to eighth son, she leaves Shantanu taking with her newly born son. When

Shantanu appeals her to stay back, she narrates the story of their previous birth. In the previous birth, Ganga, who belongs to heaven, was cursed by Gods for being in love with an earthly king Mahabhisakh, Who is King Shantanu in this birth. Gods cursed Ganga to be born on earth and to become wife of Shantanu. The sons of Ganga are Vasus cursed by Gods to be sent on earth. Now they have become free of their curse as Ganga has freed them from their earthly life. The eighth son is also a cursed Vasu who has to be on earth for a long period. After saying this, Ganga leaves Shantanu taking with her their newly born son. After sixteen years, Shantanu is restored to his son, who later on came to be known as Bhishma.

But the story has been re-interpreted in the novel. The story articulates Ganga's perspective. Ganga is represented as a woman who challenges the patriarchal discourse that upholds the belief that woman's fulfillment lies in the motherhood. Whereas in the original story, Ganga's act of throwing her sons into water has been associated with the curse of her previous birth, grandmother interprets it as an action of a woman who doesn't want to undergo tribulations of motherhood. On Shantanu's appeal of not throwing the eighth son into water, Ganga replies, "Take him and be father and mother to him. I shall not free him from life" (88). The grandmother tells this story by saying

But Devi, motherhood is more than a pretty picture you see of a tender woman bent over the baby she is feeding at her breast. A mother has to walk a strange and tortuous path. (88)

Devi remembers this story when she is made to feel worthless as she can't get pregnant. In a patriarchal set up, discourses associated with motherhood relegate woman's significance to her womb. This story can be taken as a comment on patriarchal discourses of considering procreation as the prime objective of a woman's life. A woman is exploited and oppressed in the name of motherhood. In the novel, Devi and Mayamma, belonging to entirely different generation and class, are made to feel worthless because of their inability to produce a child. The whole body of woman is reduced to the womb as is clear in Devi's expression,

I feel myself getting blurred in Mahesh's eyes. The focus gets softer and softer, till everything dissolves into nothingness, everything but my stubborn, unrelenting womb. (93)

Devi, an educated girl, is made to feel like a hollow creature as her expression suggests "What was I to them but a stupid woman who cannot even get pregnant, the easiest of accidents?" (91). Mayamma is made to believe that "a woman without a child, say the sages, goes to hell" (81). Mayamma's whole life is reduced to her craving to be a mother.

Another mythical story used in the novel is that of Amba's revenge which also originally occurs in the *Mahabharata*. As stated by Dowson in *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, Amba the eldest daughter of king of Kasi, along with her two sisters Ambika and Ambalika, is carried off by Bhishma from their swayamvara to be the wives of Vichitra-virya. Amba is already betrothed to king of Salwa and Bhishma, on knowing this, sends her back to him. The king of Salwa rejects Amba because she has been won by another man. Then Amba requests Bhishma to accept her as his wife but he is bound by his vow of celibacy. She becomes enraged and retires to the forest to get absorbed in devotion to have revenge of Bhishma. Lord Siva favours her and promises her the desired revenge in the next birth. In the next birth, born as king Drupad's daughter and raised as a son, Amba fulfills her revenge by killing Bhishma in the battle of Kurukshetra.

This story was narrated by grandmother in context of Uma's story, who is Devi's cousin. Uma gets married in a prosperous family, but on one occasion she becomes a victim of the lusty advances of her father-in-law. She leaves her in-laws house and stays with the grandmother. Uma is not like Amba, as she is not revengeful. Amba fulfills her revenge when she is raised as a son. This can be interpreted that a woman can question the injustices subjected upon her only when she comes out of her gendered role described by patriarchy. A woman can resist the patriarchal forces when she deconstructs the ideal image of woman as determined by patriarchy. Arpita Mukhopdhyay considers de-sexing of Amba as a warning; power for woman comes with de-gendering of woman's identity (156). Contrary to Amba, Uma fails to question her

gendered role. The stories of Gandhari, Amba and the girl who marries a snake are also united by their exposition of the injustice against women. Whereas Gandhari is given into marriage to a blind man, the girl in the story is married to a snake. Amba is made to suffer a lot because of her abduction from her swayamvara.

All the mythical stories have been adapted and appropriated to expose and question the age long subordination of women in a male-centered set up. The appropriation of the stories of Gandhari and Ganga can be taken as Hariharan's effort to voice the female perspective silenced in the original narrative. Hariharan has reinterpreted these tales from a female perspective to question the patriarchal ideologies embedded in these tales. In the Hariharan's version, Gandhari and Ganga are given the voice to articulate their dilemmas and aspirations. The stories depict the difference in narrative. Whereas in the original narrative that is constructed from a male perspective, Gandhari and Ganga are interpreted as subservient and sacrificing women, in the novel they are interpreted as furious and assertive women. So it can be taken as, in Adrienne Rich's words, a "re-vision" of the narrative. Kaustav Chakraborty opines about the reinterpretation of the mythical tales in *The Thousand Faces of Night*:

In order to break the pressure of cultural politics in the form of the dominance of gender ideology, Githa Hariharan has taken it upon herself to deconstruct the past and thereby reconstruct a more meaningful present. (57)

The novel tends to depict the plight and struggles of women in a patriarchal society through the depiction of the life of the three women of different generations. The novel demonstrates how in a patriarchal society, women are exploited, marginalised and oppressed in the private spheres of their lives. In a patriarchal set up, marriage demands a lot of sacrifices and compromises on the part of women. Women are always supposed to be subservient to their husbands, in a male-privileged set up. In a society dominated by patriarchal discourses, women are denied their individual liberty and power to take decisions lie with their parents or husbands. The novel exposes how women are denied the freedom to work and are forced to lead a domestic life, in a male-centered set up. In the novel, all the major as well as minor women characters suffer in

their marriage. All the three women Sita, Mayamma and Devi, although belonging to different generations are made to suffer in marriage. The novel also gives insight into the sufferings that women are made to undergo in the name of motherhood in a patriarchal society.

Sita's life epitomises the silent sufferings of women, who are forced to abandon their desires, dreams and aspirations. She represents the women, who are forced to lead a domestic life. In the novel, Sita is a wonderful *veena* player, but she is denied the opportunity to pursue her career as a *veena* player. In fact she is restricted to play *veena* in her house also. She is deprived of her individual liberty, just because she is a wife and a daughter-in-law in a setting where patriarchy dominates. Just to fit in the frame of an ideal daughter-in-law as determined by patriarchy, she is made to sacrifice her cherished dreams and desires. She channelises all her energies to be a good wife and daughter-in-law. "Good housekeeping, good taste, hard work. These were Sita's guiding mottoes as she had taken charge as a young bride" (101). Sita is denied the option of carrying her duties of household and her love of playing *veena* together. Her life depicts how women are made to confine themselves to domesticity and all their dreams are shattered.

After that, it was one straight path to a single goal, wifedom. The *veena* was a singularly jealous lover. Then one morning, abruptly...Sita gave up her love. She tore the strings off the wooden base, and let the blood dry on her fingers, to remind herself of her chosen path on the first difficult days of abstinence. (103)

On the surface level, Sita is denied the opportunity to pursue her love of playing *veena*. But it influences her psyche a lot and results in a kind of emotional aridity. The bitterness born of suppression of her feelings in her youth made her lead life in a prosaic manner, without tenderness (Tripathi 140). Even Devi sometimes feels her to be a stranger. She leads a detached and mechanical life.

When she cut herself off from the clandestine link with the past, a foolish young girl's dreams of genius and fame, she made a neat and surgical

cut. She seemed to forget, along with the stringless *veena* condemned to dumbness, her own mother, father, the gurus of her childhood. (103)

Sita becomes so cold that she doesn't cry even at the death of her husband. Devi realizes towards the end of the novel that in her resolution to be a perfect wife and daughter-in-law, "Sita had built a wall of reticence around herself . . . it distanced her from the ambiguous, and anchored her firmly to the worldly indices she had adopted in the place of *veena*" (136). Devi sums up the pain of her mother in words,

Her survival, a generation away from Mayamma's, had been far more efficient, but its pain for all its subtlety, had been just as deep, and perhaps less relenting, because she now looked back on an emptiness unfamiliar from Mayamma. (136)

Sita's life represents the lives of the women whose dreams, desires and aspirations are shattered within the walls of domesticity. The predicament of women, who are made to abandon their dreams and are expected to fulfill the duties of an ideal wife and daughter-in-law as determined by patriarchy, is also suggested in a song from the play *Manglam*:

Women die many kind of deaths;
Men do not know this.
For them, when a woman cooks
And arranges flower in her hair
And makes place in the bed
She is alive
But a woman can smile,
She can pin flowers in her hair
And arrange a red dot on her forehead

And make place in the bed

Because her husband is alive.

She

May be dead. (102)

Mayamma's story is another tale of oppression that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. Mayamma gets married at the tender age of twelve with a drunken brute. Her life represents the suffering of the women of lower class within the private spheres of the life. Whereas the upper class women like Sita and Devi are subjected to the denial of individual liberty and are supposed to be virtuous, the lower class women are subjected to physical violence as well. The violence her body is subjected to is clear in the expression, "Her husband woke her up every night, his large, hairy thighs rough and heavy on her, pushing, pushing" (80). Mayamma's life also depicts how women's significance is reduced to her ability to reproduce. As Mayamma cannot bear a child for ten long years, she is subjected to great tortures at the hands of her mother-in-law as well as her husband.

She pulled up my sari roughly, just as her son did every night, and smeared the burning red, freshly- ground spices into my barrenness. I burned, my thighs clamped together as I felt the devouring fire cling to my entrails. (113)

Mayamma is made to do all kind of penance. She is made to feel worthless.

No, no Maya. No rice for you today. It's Friday. No rice today, no vegetables tomorrow, no tamarind the day after. Stop thinking of food, daughter-in-law, think of your womb. Think of your empty, rotting womb and pray. (114)

Her mother-in-law, who is a woman with typical patriarchal notions, also holds her responsible for the death of her grandson.

She slapped my cheeks hard, first this then the other. Her fists pummeled my breasts and my still swollen stomach till they had to pull her off my cowering, bleeding body. She shouted, in a rage mixed with fear, “do you need any more proof that this is not a woman? The barren witch has killed my grandson and she is asking us why!” (Prelude)

After ten years of penance and suffering, Mayamma gives birth to a son. After eight years, her husband abandons her taking with him all the money in the house. Mayamma feeds her son and mother-in-law by doing jobs like cleaning and cooking. But her suffering doesn't end here. Her son, when grows up, just like his father, threatens her and beats her. He also abandons her and comes back only to die. After his death, Mayamma comes to Parvitaama, who gives shelter to her. Towards the end of the novel Devi sums up Mayamma's life in the words:

Mayamma had been thrown into the waters of her womanhood well before she had learnt to swim. She had learnt about lust, the potential of unhidden bestial cruelty, first hand. She had had no choice really. She had coveted birth, endured life, nursed death. (136)

Devi, the protagonist, although belonging to modern generation and being educated abroad, also becomes the victim of the unjust power structures of patriarchy. She is also subjected to subjugation in the private spheres of her life. She enters into an arranged marriage with Mahesh who is chosen by her mother. Her marriage proves hollow and futile. Mahesh, who is every inch a patriarch, doesn't consider Devi as an individual. He spends most of the time on his business tours. For him, marriage is not about any kind of emotional attachment, rather a necessity. He even doesn't want Devi to work. When Devi wishes to take up a job, Mahesh refuses by saying that women have enough work to do at home. Devi's life also depicts how women are denied the space to achieve their identity as an individual. Devi realises the hollowness of their relationship and feels, “I am a wooden puppet in his hands. I stand by him a silent wife, my wet sari clinging to me like a parasite, my hairs streaming wetly down my back” (83). At Tara's home, a stuffed eagle made up of wood symbolises Devi's confined space after being married to Mahesh as is clear in Devi's expression, “I looked in the mirror

and saw a pale, drooping figure, almost as lifeless as the stuffed bird, a grotesque study of still-life" (97). Devi describes her married life in the words,

This, then is marriage, the end of ends, two or three brief encounters a month when bodies stutter together in lazy, inarticulate lust. Two weeks a month when the shadowy stranger who casually strips me of my name, snaps his fingers and demand a smiling handmaiden. And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for life to begin, or to end the begin again. (54)

Devi shares the plight of infertility with Mayamma. Like Mayamma, she is made to feel worthless and reduced to womb only. She also starts praying for the child. She feels humiliated in the fertility clinic. "I saw a woman across the room, pale, drawn, her hands nervously idle on her lap. Her stomach was flat, she would not meet anyone's eye. She could have been me" (90). Devi feels cheated and finds solace in the company of Gopal, a classical singer. She rejects her married life and elopes with Gopal. She accompanies Gopal's troop, but as the time passes, she loses interest in Gopal's concerts. She becomes restless with her life when she discovers that he is a flirt. Ultimately she deserts Gopal and returns to her mother's home. Devi's cousin Uma also becomes a victim of an unfortunate marriage. Married to a drunkard belonging to a wealthy family, Uma suffers the lusty advances of her father-in-law. Devi's mother-in-law Parvatiammais also suggested to be a victim of some kind of injustice that resulted in her rejection of her married life.

Almost all the female characters portrayed by Hariharan in the novel turn out to be assertive and feministic. All the female characters of this novel refuse to accept the oppression silently and protest against the mechanism of patriarchy, silently or overtly. The female characters struggle hard for their survival. Sita, one of the prominent characters, protests in a subtle way by silencing her craving for playing *veena* and by leading a life of self denial.

Sita hung her head over the *veena* for a minute that seemed to stretch for ages, enveloping us in an unbearable silence. Then she reached for the

strings of her precious *veena* and pulled them out of the wooden base. They came apart with a discordant twang of protest. (30)

Although she does not protest overtly against patriarchy, yet she is conscious of the injustice she has been subjected to. That's why ultimately she receives Devi and identifies herself with Devi. She has the realisation that Devi is also seized by the same forces that she herself has encountered. She realises her identity as an individual. Finally she takes out her *veena* and plays it and waits for Devi to come. Sita's act of controlling the garden is symbolic of the discipline that she has imposed upon herself. At last when Devi comes back to her house, she finds the garden "wild and overgrown" (139), which symbolises Sita's rejection of the restrictions.

Of all the female characters portrayed in the novel, It is Mayamma who is most exploited by patriarchy. Although she submits herself silently to the forces of patriarchy and fails to resist the injustices subjected upon her by her husband, mother-in-law and son, yet she survives. After long years of suffering and the death of her only son, Mayamma endures many hardships:

The day he dies, Mayamma wept as she had not done for years. She wept for her youth, her husband, the culmination of a life's handiwork: now all these had been snatched from her . . . she found the horoscopes with all the signs of luck on it, whole and intact. She burnt it along with body of her son, and left the village by the first bus, next morning. (82)

Mayamma even supports Devi's decision of walking out of Mahesh's life by saying, "Go for my sake, for Parvatamma who waited till only Kashi could be her escape" (118). Devi, the protagonist, protests outwardly against the set conventions of patriarchy first by eloping with Gopal and then by leaving Gopal to find her identity independent of male companionship: "To stay and fight, to make sense of it all, she would have to start from the very beginning" (139).

The oldest of all female characters portrayed in the novel is Devi's grandmother, who makes her presence felt through her mythical stories. For every question she used to tell a story but her stories were not simple stories as Devi says:

My grandmother's stories were no ordinary bedtime stories. She chose each for a particular occasion, a story in reply to each of my childish questions. She had an answer for each question. But her answers were not simple: they had to be decoded. A comparison had to be made, an illustration discovered and a moral drawn out. (27)

Her feministic interpretation of the already existing stories can be taken as her way of asserting her individuality. The grandmother represents that generation of Indian women who were supposed to be confined to household duties and were denied any voice. Deprived of any power, the grandmother tries to find her space in a patriarchal society by retelling the stories from a woman's perspective. Her choice of stories depicts her feministic nature. Unlike Baba who tells the stories centered on the ideal conduct of women determined by patriarchy, she tells the stories of the furious and assertive women who questioned the patriarchy. Dr. V. Bhavani considers grandmother's story telling as a purposeful re-visioning of myth making (33). Contrary to the conventional belief, her interpretation of Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself as a depiction of her anger at being cheated, depicts her feministic nature. She upholds the idea that a woman subjected to injustice should take revenge. She appreciates Amba by calling her "a truly courageous woman who finds the means to transform her hatred, the fate that overtakes her, into a triumph" (36).

Even the minor characters, which are just referred to, also tend to be feministic. Parvatiamma, Mahesh's mother, also protests assertively by leaving her home in search of God. Gauri, the grandmother's maid servant, also rejects the code of patriarchy by falling in love with her brother-in-law. Uma, Devi's cousin, refuses to be exploited in the name of marriage and returns to her parent's home. Regarding the feministic nature of Hariharan's women characters, Vemuri Rupa is of the view,

Githa Hariharan's women characters stand as an epitome of the changing image of Indian women moving away of the traditional portrayals of enduring, self-sacrificing women to self assured, assertive and ambitious women forcing the society aware of their demands. (6)

Every woman portrayed in this novel tries to resist the forces of patriarchy and to find their own spaces according to her circumstances. Regarding the assertive nature of all the characters V. Bhavani is of the view,

All of them each in her own way have been both a victim and a survivor- their lives scarred by suffering, sacrifice, injustice and disappointment meted out by the patriarchal society. Yet in the end they emerged undefeated and strong by using their own survival strategies. (32)

In the novel, we get two narrative voices. Devi's grandmother's stories give us the feministic version of the stories and Baba, Devi's father-in-law, gives a patriarchal version of the stories. Whereas grandmother's stories are about the furious and revengeful women, Baba's stories depict women as virtuous and sacrificing. Contrary to grandmother's stories,

His stories are never flabby with ambiguity, or even fantasy; a little magic perhaps, but nothing beyond the strictly functional. They always have for their center-point an exacting touchstone for a woman, a wife. (51)

Baba's stories are about the chaste, virtuous, self-sacrificing and subservient women characters. He tells the story of Muthuswamy Dikshitar who intends to show how a woman suppresses her desires for the sake of her husband. His stories are about the women who subdue their aspirations and desires for the sake of their husbands. Another story about Jayadeva's wife Padmavati also depicts women as self sacrificing. His stories are about the ideal conduct of women determined by patriarchy.

The novel also exposes how mythical tales contribute to the construction of the psyche of women. These mythical stories influence the women's life as the grandmother tells stories for Devi's every question but does not tell anything out of her own experience. Devi, at every incident recalls the mythical stories of her childhood. The grandmother tells the story of Gandhari with a purpose. As she says: "Listen, listen and you will learn what it is to be a real woman" (28). It is the grandmother's feministic

version of the stories that have inculcated in Devi a sense of protest: "Her stories were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into its subterranean possibilities" (81). Even in her imagination, she doesn't envision herself as a timid and feminine girl, rather as an avenger or a warrior fighting against men. "I lived a secret life of my own: I became a woman warrior, a heroine. I was Devi. I rode a tiger, and cut off evil, magical demons' heads" (41).

The title of the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* can be taken as suggesting the thousand ways women are oppressed and exploited in a patriarchal society. The night can be taken as a symbol of darkness prevailing in women's life in the form of exploitation and subjugation that women are subjected to in a patriarchal society. There are the numerous ways women are exploited and suppressed in a society dominated by patriarchal discourses. Women are suppressed by denying them the freedom to fulfill their dreams. In the novel, Sita's life apparently suggests the plight of the women, who are forced to confine their life to domesticity. Women are subjugated by reducing their worth to their ability to reproduce as suggested by Mayamma and Devi's predicament. Women are oppressed by attacking their modesty as Uma's suffering suggests. The novel throws light on the numerous ways of subjugation that women are subjected to in a male-dominated society.

So it can be said that the novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a story about women's suffering, struggle and survival in a male-privileged society. By recording the dilemmas and tribulations of the three women belonging to different generations and different contexts, the novel exposes the injustice and exploitation women are subjected to in the private spheres of their life, in a patriarchal society. It unveils the oppression and violence that women face within the walls of domesticity. The novel exposes how in a patriarchal set up marriage as an institution curtails women's freedom and allows them no space to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. Sita's suffering shows how women are forced to confine their life to the domesticity. Her life apparently demonstrates the plight of women, who are denied the individual liberty and are expected to play the feminine role scripted by patriarchy.

Hariharan, in the novel, also represents women's suffering caused by the patriarchal discourse of motherhood which upholds the belief that a woman's fulfillment lies in motherhood. The novel raises questions regarding the patriarchal attitude of reducing women's worth in their ability to reproduce. Mayamma and Devi's suffering clearly demonstrates how women are made to feel worthless because of their inability to reproduce. In the novel, there is also a reference to the sexual assault women are subjected to within their own homes.

For the depiction of the sufferings of women, Hariharan has used the feminist writers' strategy of retelling the past narrative from the female perspective. Hariharan takes mythology as a discourse constructed by patriarchy to justify and perpetuate women's secondary and subservient position in gender hierarchy and in the novel she retells the mythical tales from the female perspective. The novel is replete with the mythical stories of Gandhari, Amba, Ganga, Damyanti etc. The stories of Gandhari and Ganga have been appropriated and are retold from their perspectives. Both Gandhari and Ganga are given the voice that was denied to them in the original narrative. Instead of being self-sacrificing and subservient as depicted in the original narrative, Hariharan has portrayed these characters as assertive and furious. By reinterpreting the stories from female perspective, Hariharan challenges the patriarchal ideologies implied in these tales. The novel, through the character of Devi exposes how mythical tales go into the construction of women. So it can be said that by reinterpreting these mythical tales, Hariharan successfully portrays women's sufferings in a patriarchal society.

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Chapter 3

Feminist Reworking of Mythology in Mahasweta Devi's stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver"

Mahasweta Devi (b. 1926) is a distinguished Indian social activist as well as a prolific Bengali writer. In Dhaka, Devi was born to a family with literary background. Her father Manish Chandra Ghatak was a renowned Bengali poet and prose writer and her mother Dharitri Devi was also a writer and social worker. As a child, she got education at Shantiniketan, a school founded by Rabindranath Tagore, which influenced her a lot. Mahasweta Devi began her career as a teacher and journalist. She has contributed to various literary magazines. She has also been the editor of a Bengali quarterly *Bortika*, a journal where marginalised sections of society find a voice. As a writer, her first book *The Queen of Jhansi* got published in 1956. In her extensive literary career, Devi attempted various genres successfully. She has written almost fifty novels, short stories, plays, essays, children's fiction and even biographies, primarily in her native language Bengali.

Although she writes in Bengali, she acclaims international reputation as a writer. As a writer, Devi has been the recipient of several literary awards. She was awarded Sahitya Akademi Award in 1979 for her novel *Aranyer Adhikar*. In 1986, she was honoured with Padma Shri for her activist work among tribal communities. In 1995, she has received Jnanpith, India's most prestigious literary award. In 1996, she received Magsaysay award, which is considered to be Asian equal of Nobel Prize. She is also the recipient of Padma Vibhushan, 2006. In 2011, she received Bangabibhushan, the highest civilian award from the government of West Bengal. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, one of the most prominent postcolonial critics, in "Foreword to Draupadi" says, "Mahasweta is certainly one of the most important writers writing in India today" (6).

The most prominent feature of Mahasweta Devi's writing is its commitment to social cause. In most of her works, she exposes the injustice, agony, oppression and victimisation that tribal communities are subjected to within India. The Naxalite

movements of India of 1960s and 1970s strongly influenced her writing. Since 1976, she has been involved in the struggles of tribal communities. She is an extraordinary blend of an activist and a writer. Her writing is a tool to bring change in the oppressive social system where people are marginalised on the basis of class, caste, gender etc. In the introduction to *Agnigarbha* (1978), Devi herself asserts,

Life is not mathematics and the human being is not made for the sake of politics. I want a change in the present social system and do not believe in mere party politics. (qtd. in Spivak "Translator's Note" 4)

Regarding Mahasweta Devi's representation of tribal communities' marginalisation, Radha Chakravarty, a critic opines, "Mahasweta's current reputation as a writer rests largely on her self-projection as champion of tribal cause and decrier of class prejudice" (94). The oppression, marginalisation as well as revolution of tribal communities serve as a prominent theme in many of Mahasweta Devi's works. Her work is a powerful representation of the struggles of marginalised classes in India. In the words of Umar,

Mahasweta Devi has groomed her writing with the social consciousness to change the tribal world of agony to a world of happiness. Her purpose is to arouse social awareness in the minds of the people and bring a change in the social and human values. (122)

The novel *Aranyer Adhikar* is based on the life and struggles of Birsa Munda, a tribal freedom fighter. *Chotti Munda* is a record of the history of one of the tribes of eastern India in the first seventy years of 20th century. Set up in Bengal, *Sidhu Kanhur* deals with the heroes of Santhal tribal rebellion in 1855-56. One of her most widely read novels, *Hazar Churashir Ma* (Mother of 1084, 1974) deals with the Naxalite movement (Umar, 120).

Mahasweta Devi rejects the idea of being acknowledged as a feminist writer. She asserts, "When I write I never think of myself as a woman. I look at the class, not at the gender problem" (qtd. in Chakravarty 94). Although she refuses to call herself a writer

peculiarly dealing with women's issues and broadly deals with the class prejudice, many of her works demonstrate the centrality of gender issue. Many of her works depict how women from these tribal communities face gender discrimination and sexual exploitation in addition to the class suppression. Prasita Mukherjee, a critic opines "Mahasweta Devi through the subaltern voices considers deep rooted prejudices of race class and gender and envisages a more inclusivist realm" (127).

Mahasweta Devi's widely acclaimed story "Rudali" represents the condition of women who struggle against the forces of class and caste oppression as well as patriarchy. The story is about the life of Sanichari, who belongs to lower caste and works as a bonded labour in the landlord's field. Sanichari's daily struggle to earn her bread leaves her so emotionally dry that she is bereft of her tears. She doesn't cry over the death of her family members. Sanichari has been portrayed as a victim as well as an agent of subversion of the power-structure. When along with her friend Bikhni, she becomes a rudali, a professional mourner; she symbolises female empowerment as she becomes assertive. She fixes the rate for shedding tears, beating breasts and rolling in the mud and acquires money and status as a lead mourner. The story also exposes how landlords use female bonded labourers as mistresses and detest them, leaving them no other means of livelihood other than prostitution (Chakravarty 148).

Another story "Bayen" also depicts the predicament of a woman who rejects the typical feminine role constructed by patriarchy. The story revolves around the life of Chandidasi Gangadasi who belongs to the race of cremation attendants on the bank of Ganga. After the death of her father, she inherits his profession of burying dead children. She gets married to Malindar, an employee in the government morgue. She has a son named Bhagirath. Her husband takes pride in her lineage as well as in his new hut and two bighas of land. Gradually the distinction of Chandi's family arouses the envy of the rest of the community. This envy gives birth to the rumours that Chandi is a *bayen*, a supernatural witch who raises the dead children from their graves and nurtures them. She is ostracized from her community and made to live alone for the rest of her life. Chandi's expulsion from her community is caused by the society's rejection of her individuality and distinctiveness as Chandi is empowered by her faith in her dreadful

profession and takes pride in her married life and motherhood without being restrained by the traditional feminine role. The image of *Bayen* as a source of fear and hatred is a product of community's unacknowledged fear of female empowerment (Chakravarty, 99). Because Chandi doesn't fit into the stereotypical image of woman as meek and submissive, she is considered as Bayen. Chandi's rejection of the stereotypical role leads to her expulsion from society.

Another important characteristic of Mahasweta Devi's work is her frequent use of myth in her works. Regarding Mahasweta Devi's use of mythology Radha Chakravarty suggests, "Mahasweta deploys myth as a way of envisioning alternatives to the social ills that her fiction addresses" (96). Mahasweta Devi makes reference to mythical characters in the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver".

The present research focuses on Mahasweta Devi's exposition of the trials and tribulations of the women belonging to marginalised sections of the society in the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver". Originally written in Bengali, both stories are translated in English by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and are compiled in the story collection *Breast Stories*. Both of the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" primarily focus on women's objectification as well as violence against women. The study explores how both of the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" depict women's struggle and oppression on the basis of class as well as gender by invoking and appropriating the mythical characters Draupadi and Yashoda.

3.1 Draupadi

"Draupadi" is one of the most famous as well as critically acclaimed stories of Mahasweta Devi. The story is a vigorous depiction of the violence that a woman's body is subjected to in a patriarchal society. The awful ending of the story questions discourses regarding the female victims of male violence in a male-centered society. The story is also a powerful comment on the custodial rape facilitated by the exercise of state power. Another important aspect of the story is that it is a feminist rewriting of the famous assembly episode of the epic the *Mahabharata* as the title "Draupadi" bears mythical connotations.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, in "Foreword to Draupadi" analyses the story from a postcolonial perspective and proposes that Senanayak who identifies with the victims in theory but in practice participates in their degradation resembles the First World who in theory identifies with the Third World countries but in practice contribute in the construction of an exploitative set up (1).

The story is set against the Naxalbari movements of 60s and 70s in the tribal areas of West Bengal. Draupadi or Dopdi, a 27 years old tribal woman, along with her husband Dulna, is an alleged member of a group of tribals who have participated in a militant peasant revolt against landowners. In 1971, during the Bakuli operation, when the police attacked three villages and killed many rebellions, Dopdi and Dulna escaped by pretending as dead. After that they went underground for a long time in a Neanderthal darkness (20).

It was Captain Arjun Singh who was dealing with the revolutionary tribals but he was so frightened that he took a premature and forced retirement (21). Senanayak, an army officer, who has been described as a specialist in combat and extreme-Left politics, is given the charge of dealing with the notorious activities of the rebellious group (21). Now Dopdi and Dulna are in the wanted list of police authorities. Ultimately Dulna gets killed by the police and the search for Dopdi continues. Finally the police forces succeed in apprehending Dopdi. She is interrogated for an hour but she doesn't utter a word. After an hour of futile interrogation, Senanayak orders his soldiers to subject Dopdi to sexual torture in order to make her confess the identities and hideouts of her fellow revolutionaries, by saying, "Make her. Do the needful" (35).

Like many of Mahasweta Devi's other stories, "Draupadi" also explicitly depicts the violence against women in a patriarchal society. Dopdi is brutally raped and mutilated by infinite lustful men throughout that endless night. This act is so terrifying that even Senanayak himself does not dare to say the words for the act he has ordered (Misri 606). Dopdi's appalling condition is clear in the expression;

Shaming her, a tear tickles out of the corner of her eye. In the muddy moonlight she lowers her lightless eye, sees her

breasts, and understands that, indeed, she's made up right. Her breasts are bitten raw, the nipples torn. How many? Four-five-six-seven-then Draupadi had passed out. (35)

In a patriarchal society, a woman's body is used as an instrument to control and exploit her. C. S. Lakshmi, a Tamil Feminist writer, in "Introduction" asserts that in a patriarchal set up the violence has become an inevitable part of a woman's life (vii). Violence in one or the other form like domestic violence, sexual abuse has been accepted as a natural part of a woman's life in a patriarchal set up. The use, objectification and exploitation of a woman's body is exposed in Mahasweta Devi's stories "Breast -giver" and "Draupadi". Whereas "Breast -giver" exposes how a woman's body is objectified and exploited in a patriarchal society "Draupadi" depicts how a woman's body is attacked to assert power over her.

The story "Draupadi", along with the depiction of violence against women also suggests that the violence against women also produces a counter discourse available to women for the questioning of power structures through subtle gestures as suggested by Dopdi's resistance. Dopdi, like Sanichari of "Rudali", is portrayed in a feminist light. Although she is an illiterate tribal woman, she is committed to her community's social cause. She along with her husband Dulna rejects the domestic life to work for the community's cause. When she gets arrested, she ululates to make her companions conscious about police arrival. When she is questioned, she doesn't utter a word. Even after being brutally gang raped, Dopdi is not terrified. She, in fact, frightens Senanayak by her strange and bold reactions. Dopdi makes her rapists feel terrified and ashamed by refusing to put on clothes. She tears her clothes with her own teeth and walks naked with her breasts and genitals wounded and bleeding, towards Senanayak in the bright sunlight with her head high and says,

. What's the use of clothes? You can strip me, but how can you cloth me again? Are you a man? ...I will not let you put my clothes on me. What more can you do? Come on, kounter me-come on, kounter me-? (37)

She deconstructs patriarchal discourse of a woman being ashamed and terrified, after being raped. In the words of Deepti Misri, “Draupadi refuses the hegemonic script of shame that wounds of sexual violence are meant to evoke” (608). In a patriarchal society, it is the rape victims rather than the rapists, who is expected to feel ashamed, helpless and terrified. But Dopdi rejects all such notions and shocks the rapists by her unabashed reactions. It is her rejection of the notion of shame and fear scripted by patriarchy for rape victims that strips Senanayak of all power of his manhood. In the words of Deepti Misri, “Draupadi looks like a victim but acts like an agent. Indeed the binary of victim and agent falls apart as Draupadi effectively separates violation from victimhood” (608). As Dopdi refuses to fit into the frame of a victim, she subverts the power relations. She threatens and perplexes Senanayak with her bold and valiant reaction.

Saumitra Chakravarty opines that the weapon used by Dopdi in struggle against the oppressors is the same as used by the oppressor to subjugate her (147). As it is the body, meek and vulnerable to rape, that is used by Senanayak to suppress Dopdi and it is the same wounded body that she uses to threaten her victimiser Senanayak as is clear in the expression, “Draupadi pushes Senanayak with her two mangled breasts, and for the first time, Senanayak is afraid to stand before an unarmed target, terribly afraid” (37).

The story also throws light on how state participates in the perpetuation of the violence against marginalised sections of society. Here Dopdi hails from the marginalised section of the society. Within that marginalised section, she is also marginalised on the basis of gender. Dopdi is not raped out of lust. It is Senanayak’s official position that gives him the power to exhibit the extreme violence against Dopdi, a tribal revolutionary woman. In the story “Rudali”, it is the landlords’ economic and social position that gives them power to exercise the use and objectification of women from the lower strata of society. Here Senanayak’s official position as a police officer assigns him the power to rape a woman, who belongs to a tribal revolutionary group. As Devi comments, “Arjun Singh’s power also explodes out of the male organ of a gun”(21). In

this sense the story can be taken as a direct comment on the custodial rape that are sanctioned and legitimised by the use of state power.

Custodial rape is a bitter reality within India. According to Asian Centre for Human Rights (ACHR)'s report there have been 45 custodial rapes during the period of 2002 to 2010 in India and justice has not been delivered in any of the cases (Ali 1). These were the cases that were reported, the real number of such heinous crime would be a lot more. In the words of Suhas Chakma, the director of ACHR "These cases are just the tip of the iceberg and the law enforcement personnel enjoy virtual immunity" (qtd. in Ali). Custodial rape is an apparent assertion of power by the use of official position. In such cases there is a little hope for any kind of investigation or justice as the victims belong to lower classes. In 2010, the Greyhounds police, an elite commando force of Andhra Pradesh, raped four tribal women and even after five days, no cases were registered and no investigation was conducted (Ali 1). Although the story "Draupadi" ends with Dopdi's symbolic retaliation, yet it exposes the practical impunity to custodial rapists in India. It explicitly exposes how the lower class women are subjected to sexual exploitation.

Deepti Misri is of the view that the story asserts that power of state is dependent on the passivity of the subjects and this power can be questioned (606). As Dopdi questions this state power by refusing to act as a victim and forces Senanayak to face the violence her body has been subjected to by saying, "You asked them to make me up, don't you want to see how they made me?" (37). Dopdi's fearless challenge and attitude of irreverence poses a threat to Senanayak's power derived from his official position.

"Draupadi" as the title suggests also bears mythical implication. Draupadi is the central female character of the great epic the *Mahabharata*. In contrast to another most famous Indian mythical figure Sita from the epic the *Ramayana*, Draupadi is an aggressive and outspoken figure. The conduct and character of Sita, not Draupadi serves as an ideal model in Hindu society (Sutherland 63). Draupadi has been one of the most interesting Indian mythical figures and has been appropriated by many Indian writers.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's famous novel *The Palace of Illusions* is a re-telling of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's point of view. The narrative is a depiction of Draupadi's desires, dreams and sufferings. In her introduction to the novel, Divakaruni herself says that women have always been denied their deserved place in history. The novel becomes the powerful comment on the patriarchal notion of society which does not assign a woman freedom or liberty to take her decisions (Nair 152).

The novel *Yajnesini* written by Pratibha Ray also offers similar kind of appropriation of Draupadi's character and retells the story of the *Mahabharata* from Draupadi's perspective. The novel peeps into the consciousness of Draupadi and throws light on her dilemmas as a daughter and a wife in a male dominated society. The novel also critiques the tradition of swayamvara or the so called "self-choice" that has actually nothing to do with bride's own choice. It also raises question about a woman's objectification in a patriarchal society (Thakor 4).

The story "Draupadi" is a feministic retelling of the assembly scene of the *Mahabharata*. The final scene of the story is a feminist appropriation of the assembly scene from the epic the *Mahabharata*. The event that took place in the assembly scene serves as one of the main reasons of the great war of the *Mahabharata*. In this scene, in a game of dice with his enemy cousins the Kauravas, Yudhishtra, the eldest of Pandavas, after losing all his possessions and then himself, puts Draupadi at stake and loses the game. Now the Kaurav prince Dushasan drags Draupadi by her hair to the assembly. In order to humiliate Pandavas, Dushasan begins to pull at Draupadi's sari to strip her publically. Draupadi prays to Lord Krishna to protect her honour. By Krishna's miracle, Draupadi is infinitely clothed as her sari extends to never ending length and she is saved from public disgrace (Sutherland 64). This scene is appropriated within the story "Draupadi" where Draupadi is gang raped. In the story, as stated above, Dopdi is a tribal revolutionary woman. She is given this name at birth by her mistress. Her name appears in two versions Draupadi and Dopdi. Spivak, in "Foreword to Draupadi" opines that it is either that Draupadi, as a tribal, cannot pronounce her name or the name Dopdi is the actual name of mythical Draupadi (10).

The predicament of Dopdi in the story and Draupadi in the epic bears significant similarities and exposes the marginalised position of women in man-woman hierarchy. Both Draupadi and Dopdi depict the powerless position of women in a patriarchal society. The situation of both the women suggests the marginalised position of woman within the patriarchy. In both of the cases, women are not just the victim of male lust, but their victimisation bears far wider significance. Dushasan doesn't try to disrobe Draupadi out of any sexual desire or lust. Dopdi is also not raped for the satisfaction of sexual instinct. It is their marginalised position within the power structure that leads to their oppression. In the epic, Draupadi's position suggests that woman in a patriarchal society is taken as a property or as a symbol of honour. Her husband puts her at stake like his other possessions. Dushasan tries to disrobe her with an intention to humiliate her husband. In Dopdi's case, as stated above, it is her position as a tribal revolutionary woman that leads to her rape. Senanayak exercises power upon Dopdi by attacking her modesty.

Both of the women are assertive. Draupadi doesn't silently accept her victimisation. She is intelligent, witty, rational and outspoken. During the assembly scene, she argues that her husband has already staked and lost himself in the game so how can he put her at stake. She also addresses all the kings assembled and wants to know how they could allow her public humiliation as they are allegedly learned in the ways of proper conduct. After being humiliated, Draupadi vows that her hair would remain uncombed until Bheema ties it with his hands dripping with the blood of Dushasan. In Devi's story, Dopdi becomes a symbol of feminist subversion as she frightens Senanayak with her startling resistance.

The analysis of the story also highlights the role and the perspective of a narrative which would determine the sympathies of the reader. Whereas the scene from the epic glorifies male power, the story is characterized by the subversion of power. In the epic, the assembly scene glorifies male-power as Draupadi acts in accordance with the role scripted by patriarchy for the victim of male violence. Although she aggressively tries to resist the victimisation but there is no sign of subversion of the power. She doesn't question the male power and prays silently to be rescued. Also she is saved by

a male-God so the power resides within the male. It seems to suggest that it is the man who can attack a woman's modesty and again it is the man who can protect her. Woman is denied any power of resistance. In the story, Dopdi is stripped and raped without any divine intervention. The story questions male-power and depicts female empowerment as Dopdi remains naked at her own insistence and refuses to act in the stereotypical way. The power ultimately lies within Dopdi and Senanayak is so terrified that he is unable to question Dopdi's conduct. Spivak says, "Rather than saved her modesty through the implicit intervention of a benign and divine comrade, the story suggests that this is the place where male leadership stops" (Translator's Note 12). So the story suggests that to resist the supremacy of male, the power structures need to be questioned.

The mythical Draupadi belongs to upper class. Draupadi is described as the most beautiful woman of the earth as is clear in the expression,

She was beautiful and enchanting; she had a lovely body and a waist the shape of a sacrificial altar. She was dark and had eyes, like lotus leaves and dark wavy hair . . . She possessed the most beautiful figure; none was her equal on earth. (qtd in Sutherland 64)

Dopdi, on the other hand, belongs to the unprivileged section of the society. Mahasweta Devi has not romanticized Dopdi as when she first appears in the story, she is thinking about lice in her hair. This difference suggests the double marginalisation of the lower class women. Whereas the upper class women like Draupadi become the victim of gender discrimination, the lower class women like Dopdi are subject to the forces of gender as well as class hierarchy. The marginalisation and oppression of lower class women also becomes the subject of a Tamil writer Bama's novel *Sangati*. Bama, who herself belongs to a Dalit Christian family, in her novel *Sangati* exposes Dalit women's marginalisation in the gender hierarchy, class hierarchy and caste hierarchy. The novel is a powerful record of the trials, struggles, oppressions, frustration and survival of Dalit women who are subject to the forces of gender, class and caste. It exposes the discrimination and violence that Dalit women are made to face within the

private spheres of their life. It also depicts the sexual harassment of Dalit women at their work places which they are bound to accept due to their marginalised position in class hierarchy.

There are differences between the ways mythical Draupadi and Dopdi came to be the victims of male violence. Draupadi is used by her husband to win the game and by her victimiser to humiliate her husbands. It is essentially a war between men. On the other hand, Dopdi is a revolutionary woman who is conscious of her political position and works with her husband for her community's welfare. It is her own participation in a war against upper classes that leads to her victimisation. She is apprehended by the police officers who rape her to make her confess about the places and activities of her revolutionary group.

Another notable difference is that Draupadi as a mythical character is married to five Pandavas. In the story, Dopdi has one husband. Spivak, in "Foreword to Draupadi" opines that Draupadi is singular as being a wife of 'legitimately pluralized' husbands (11) and Mahasweta's reworking of scene of Draupadi's disrobing puts into question Draupadi's singularity as she says, "Mahasweta's story questions this singularity by placing Dopdi first in a comradely, activist, monogamous marriage and then in a situation of multiple rape" (Foreword 11). This way story can also be taken as a comment on Draupadi's polygamous marriage. Her marriage to five husbands has been justified in the epic as some predestined decision. Draupadi is actually won by Arjun, but he shares her with his brothers on his mother's insistence. This clearly symbolises the objectification of women. In the epic, there is no description how Draupadi feels about being a wife of five husbands. Mahasweta Devi seems to question the objectification of Draupadi by putting Dopdi into a monogamous marriage. Mahasweta Devi has appropriated the narrative from the epic by providing it alternative ends with an objective to voice the marginalised silenced perspective of Draupadi. Although Dopdi and Draupadi bear significant differences, both become the victim of male violence. Both represent a woman's degrading status in a patriarchal society.

So it can be said that the story "Draupadi" while commenting directly on the custodial rape exercised by the use of state power, tends to expose the patriarchal

tendency to exhibit violence against women. The story exposes how the women from the marginalised sections of society are oppressed on the basis of class as well as gender. Dopdi's symbolised questioning of the power at the end of the story suggests the hope for the subversion of power structures. As an appropriation of the assembly scene from the epic the *Mahabharata*, the story can also be taken as writer's attempt to articulate the silenced perspective of Draupadi as well as to expose the degrading status of women in the epic era as well as contemporary society.

3.2 Breast-giver

"Breast-giver", is a well-acclaimed story by Mahasweta Devi, compiled in her story collection *Breast Stories*, along with the two other stories, "Draupadi" and "Behind the Bodice". Set in 1960s India, it depicts the life of a woman who becomes a professional wet nurse to support her family and ultimately, detested by all dies of breast cancer. Jashoda, the protagonist, is a representative typical Indian woman as constructed by patriarchal discourses. Her life epitomises the exploitation and objectification of women in a patriarchal society. In the name Jashoda, there is a reference to mythical character Yashoda, Krishna's mother. The present study focuses on the Mahasweta's depiction of the trials and tribulations of women's life in a patriarchal society by invoking the mythical character, Yashoda, the surrogate mother of Lord Krishna.

"Breast-giver" is the story of Jashoda, a wet-nurse. After Jashoda's husband Kangalicharan gets crippled in an accident by the careless son of the affluent Haldar family, Jashoda is compelled to become wet-nurse for the infants of the Haldar family to earn her livelihood. To keep her breasts lactating all the time, she has to bear children in her womb all the time. For 25 years, she works as a professional nurse and also bears and rears 20 children of her own. In Haldar family, she suckles almost 30 children. But when the new generation of daughter-in-laws of Haldar family refuses to bear so many children and leaves the family house to accompany their husbands to their work places, Jashoda is thrown out from her profession. At the same time she is also rejected by her husband as well as sons. She survives by serving as a servant in the Haldar family, until detected breast cancer she is admitted to the hospital. She dies in the hospital alone without being attended either by her own or her milk sons.

The story is a powerful critique of the patriarchal set up, where a woman's significance is reduced to her body that can be used either for sexual pleasure or for procreation. A woman is considered no more than a body with peculiar functions serving patriarchy's interests. The story explicitly demonstrates how a woman's body is used to exploit and control her. The story opens with the description of the exploitation that Jashoda's body, due to continuous lactation and gestation, is subjected to;

Jashoda doesn't remember at all when there was no child in her womb, when she didn't feel faint in the morning, when Kangali's body didn't drill her body like a geologist in a darkness lit by an oil lamp.
(38)

In the Haldar house, Jashoda's importance lies purely in her ability of breast feeding. It is her productive milk-laden breasts that become the root cause of her exploitation. Jashoda suckles Haldar family's 30 children in the 25 years of her life. She is given the status of goddess. But as soon as their dependence on Jashoda's body ceases, she is denied all the privileges. She is made to live like a servant where she used to enjoy the status of mother goddess. Even when Jashoda is admitted to the hospital, no one from the Haldar family comes to see her. Even her own sons don't care for her. Her appalling condition is clear in her expression, "If you suckle you're a mother, all lies! Nepal and Gopal don't look at me, and the master's boys don't spare a peek to ask how I'm doing" (66).

Jashoda's comparison with the cow also refers to patriarchal tendency to consider a woman no more than a procreating body. The mistress' words "The good lord sent you down as the legendary cow of fulfillment. Pull the teat and milk flows!" (48) and Devi's comment "Jashoda's place in the house is now above the Mother Cows" (51) apparently reflect the patriarchal attitude of considering a woman as a procreative and nursing machine.

In Kangali's life, Jashoda's importance lies in her body's ability to provide sexual pleasure: "When he puts food in his belly in the afternoon he feels a filial inclination towards Jashoda, and he goes to sleep after handling her capacious bosom" (40).

When he finds another woman Golapi, he rejects Jashoda as Nabin comments: “Kangali is a man in his prime, how can he be pleased with you any more” (60). The women from the Haldar family are also taken as procreating machines whom their husbands impregnate every year and a half after consulting the almanac for the most auspicious moment.

The story brings to light various patriarchal discourses that go into the exploitation of women as well as make women participate in their own exploitation. The story exposes the patriarchal ideology of giving woman a divine status to justify the sacrifices she is expected to make in a male-privileged society. Woman is assigned the status of a goddess or Devi who makes sacrifices for others. When Kangalicharan expects Jashoda to sacrifice her domestic life and to bear the pain of giving birth to child every year, he says,

You will have milk in your breasts only if you have a child in your belly. Now you will have to think of that and suffer. You are a faithful wife a goddess. (50)

The mistress of Haldar house also gives Jashoda the status of a goddess. “You come like a God! Give her some milk, dear, I beg you” (48).

By giving a divine status to women, they are made to accept their exploitation and oppression silently. This is a patriarchal strategy to make women participate in their own exploitation. By glorifying the sacrifices of women, they are made to take pleasure or pride in their own exploitation and sacrifices. In the story, Jashoda’s exploitation is glorified by giving her a status of mother goddess: “Everyone’s devotion to Jashoda became so strong that at weddings, showers, naming and sacred threading they invited her and gave her the position of a chief fruitful woman” (52). Jashoda doesn’t question her exploitation and in fact takes pride in her own exploitation. She is unable to sense the exploitation her body is subjected to as is clear in her expression “Look at me! I have become a year breeder! So is my body falling, or is my milk drying?” (53).

The story also exposes the use of religion by patriarchy to justify the exploitation of women. Women are made to accept their oppression in the name of religion. In story

the oppression of Jashoda is also justified by considering it the will of the God. Throughout the story, there is constant reference to the Lionseated. Jashoda's profession is considered as will of Lionseated, who came into her dream as a midwife:

One day as the youngest son was squatting to watch Jashoda's milking, she said, there dear, my lucky. All this because you swiped him in the leg. Whose wish was it then? The Lionseated's, said Haldar junior. (53)

The patriarchy is always strengthened by using religious discourses. Nabin justifies Kangalicharan's involvement with Golapi by considering it something divine although it was an apparent betrayal on the part of Kangali as the expression suggests:

That was divine play. Golapi used to throw herself in the temple. Little by little Kangali came to understand that he was the God's companion incarnate and she his companion. (61)

The story also explores the patriarchal discourse of sexuality that privileges male sexual desire. In a patriarchal set up, male sexual desire is considered as something natural or obvious whereas the woman is portrayed as an object of male desire. There is no question of a woman's sexual desire in a male privileged society. All the women in the story whether Jashoda or the women from Haldar family are portrayed as the object of their husband's sexual desire. There is no consideration for their desires and longings. In the story, the mistress of the Haldar family feels it right if her sons dissatisfied by their wives' body gratify their sexual desires by harassing the maid servants as is clear in the expression "Then if the sons look outside, or harass the maidservants, she won't have a voice to object. Going out because they can't get it at home-this is just" (50).

The story also lays bare the discourses attached to motherhood. In a patriarchal set up, motherhood is considered to be the prime purpose of a woman's life. Jashoda remains trapped in the notions of motherhood. Indrani Mitra opines, "Jashoda's conviction about the naturalness of her reproductive function enables her participation in

the exploitative cycle of gestation and lactation” (62). Jashoda’s patriarchal belief that procreation is the prime natural purpose of a woman’s life makes her participate in her own exploitation: “Does it hurt a tree to bear fruit?”(50). Jashoda also accuses grand daughters-in-law for causing mistress’s death by refusing to bear children: “When the tree says I won’t bear, alas it’s a sin! Could you bear so much sin, mother!?” (55). Also the motherhood is always associated with sacrifice. Mahasweta Devi comments that in a patriarchal society, whereas a woman is always trained to be selfless mother a man have the privilege to be a child devoid of any responsibility:

Her mother love wells up for Kangali as much as for the children. She wants to become the earth and feed her crippled husband and helpless children with a fulsome harvest . . . Such is the power of Indian soil that all women turn into mothers here and all men remained immersed in the spirit of holy childhood. Each man the holy child and each woman the Divine mother. (46)

Undoubtedly Jashoda becomes wet nurse out of economic compulsion, yet later, detested by all, she misses the privileges, and veneration that she is accorded as the prevailing discourses accord a mother. As Devi’s comment suggests, “Motherhood is a great addiction. The addiction doesn’t break even when the milk is dry” (60).

Through the character of Jashoda, Devi exposes how a woman as constructed by patriarchal discourses participates in her own exploitation. Jashoda is the typical construction of patriarchal discourses. Jashoda is an example of a woman who internalises the patriarchal notion of the secondary position of women. In Spivak’s words “Mahasweta presents Jashoda as constituted by patriarchal ideology” (Breast-giver: For Author 126). Mahasweta Devi comments:

Jashoda is fully an Indian woman, whose unreasonable, unreasoning and unintelligent devotion to her husband and love for her children, whose unnatural renunciation and forgiveness has been kept alive in the popular consciousness by all Indian women. . . (45)

When Kangalicharan tells Jashoda that she will have to bear the pain of giving birth to a child every year, she says, “You are husband, you are guru. If I forget and say no, correct me. Where after all is the pain?” (50). Jashoda believes in the patriarchal notion of the God like status of a husband. As discussed above, she is made to take pride in her own exploitation. Jashoda’s negligent attitude towards her disease reflects the typical female tendency to ignore her own sufferings.

The story explicitly demonstrates that class significantly contributes in women's oppression and exploitation. Women from the different strata of society are subjected to different kind of oppression. Indrani Mitra and Madhu Mitra comment, “Mahasweta Devi’s “Stanadayini” shows the structure of patriarchal oppression to be overwhelmingly determined by the subject’s class position” (60). A woman’s gender oppression in a patriarchal society is largely determined by her class. In the story the category of class makes significant differences as the women from Haldar family and Jashoda experience the oppression. Like Jashoda women from Haldar family also occupy the secondary position in gender hierarchy. They are also treated like procreating machine. They tend to serve as a mean to fulfill Haldars’ dream of “filling half of Calcutta with Haldars” (54). They are made to breed every year. But still their position as belonging to upper class is better than Jashoda. They are treated as commodity only in their private spheres. Jashoda, on the other hand, is treated like a commodity by her husband due to her secondary position in gender hierarchy as well as in Haldar family due to her secondary position in class.

Also, it was due to their position in class hierarchy that women from the Haldar family take the privilege of liberating themselves from one stage in the endless cycle of pregnancy, birthing and suckling (Mitra 61). They can now “keep their bodies” and wear “blouses and bras of European cut” (52). It is the Haldar family’s class position that the grand daughters-in-law from the family are able to emancipate themselves from the role of procreating machine:

In the matter of motherhood, the old lady’s grand daughters-in-law had breathed a completely different air before they crossed her threshold . . . The old man had dreamed of filling half of Calcutta

with Haldars. The granddaughters-in-law were unwilling. Defying the old lady's tongue, they took off to their husbands' places of work. (54)

In contrast to women from the Haldar family, Jashoda is marginalised on the basis of gender as well as class. She becomes the object of oppression in the private as well as public sphere. Gayatri Chakravarty Spivak, in "Introduction" comments, "Breast- Giver is the story that builds itself on the cruel ironies of caste, class, patriarchy" (viii).

The exploitation and repression on the basis of class is also suggested in the incidence when the youngest son of Haldars gets sexually involved with the cook of the family. But later he regrets his act. The cook chooses not to react over this matter saying, "what's there to tell?" when he implores her not to tell anybody about the act(39). But the boy fears that cook might tell it to his parents. In order to get rid of his fear, he manages to accuse her of stealing his mother's ring and gets her dismissed from her job. Here the cook's marginalised position in the class hierarchy leads to her humiliation and ultimately, she is thrown out of her job.

Factually there is no scientific basis of breast cancer being caused by breast feeding. Rather there are several claims that it actually reduces the risk of breast cancer. According to a study conducted at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, breast feeding has been found to reduce the risk for breast cancer (Sinha 1). Here In the story, breast cancer has been associated with the breast feeding. It is represented as one of the probable causes of breast cancer: "One can't say why someone gets breast cancer; one can't say. But when people breast-feed too much- didn't you realize earlier?" (67). Jashoda's continuous suckling leads to breast cancer. Jashoda's constant breast-feeding justified by constructing various religious discourses symbolises women's consistent exploitation in a male-privileged set up. The breast cancer can also be taken as the suggestion of the dreadful conditions of women exploited by the patriarchal discourses as instruments of reproduction. As Spivak also suggests that the cancer here has become the signifier of the oppression of gendered subaltern (Breast-giver: For Author 130).

Along with the exposition of various patriarchal discourses, the story also comments upon the religious hypocrisy and caste system. It exposes the religious hypocrisy through the character of Nabin. Nabin is the representative of the hypocrite religious leaders who use innocent people's religious beliefs for their own materialistic gains. Nabin is the pilgrim guide who proposes Kangali of making money by executing a Hare Krishna racket (44):

I tell you, get a Gopal in your dream. My aunt brought a stony Gopal from Puri. I give it to you. You announce that you got it in a dream. You'll see there'll be to-do in no time, money will role in. Start for money, later you'll get devoted to Gopal. (44)

Also Nabin's act of turning Lionseated's head over a conflict with the other pilgrim guides and again turning it after settling the dispute shows the treachery prevalent in the name of religion. Nabin is able to convince the people as per his own convenience first that Lionseated has turned the head from the people and then that mother's glory is back (59). Mahasweta Devi appropriately comments on this tendency of hypocrisy in the name of religion, "Nabin is the proof of all the miracles that can happen if, even in this decade, one stays under the temple's power" (58). The mistress of the Haldar house depicts how the common man's life is controlled by religious discourses:

The Mistress's heart broke at the thought that the mother had turned her back. In pain she ate an unreasonable quantity of jackfruit in full summer and died shitting and vomiting. (55)

The story is also a comment on the cast system prevalent in India. When Kangali's legs are crushed by Haldar's son, he is sufficiently helped by Haldar. But Haldar is not compassionate and generous towards the people from all the castes. His discriminatory attitude towards the people from other regions and caste is suggested by Mahasweta Devi's following words:

Therefore he doesn't trust anyone- not a Punjabi-Oriya-Bihari-Gujrati-Marathi-Muslim. At the sight of an unfortunate Bihari child or a starvation-

ridden Oriya beggar his flab protected heart, located under a 42-inch Gopal brand vest, does not itch with the rash of kindness. (43)

Haldar Babu helps Kangali because of his origin from an upper caste. He does not help Kangali on human grounds rather out of the feeling that he should do penance for the sin committed by his son against a Brahmin.

The title of the story bears mythical implication as the name Jashoda is a reference to mythical Yashoda, Krishna's surrogate mother. As stated in *A Classical Dictionary of Hindu Mythology and Religion*, Yashoda, as a mythical figure, is the wife of Nanda, who became the foster mother of Krishna. Krishna's biological mother is Devaki, wife of Vasudeva. King Kamsa, in order to avoid the prophecy that he would be killed by the first son of Devaki and Vasudeva, is determined to kill Krishna. When Devaki gives birth to Krishna, by divine intervention, all the guards who are keeping watch over the couple fall asleep and Krishna is delivered to Yashoda, who raises him.

The basic similarity between both of the characters is that both Jashoda and Yashoda are surrogate mothers and are ultimately detested by their sons. Yashoda is left by Krishna when on knowing about his biological parents, he leaves for Mathura. Here, in the story, Jashoda is left alone by her own sons as well as her milk sons. Both Yashoda and Jashoda suffer in the name of motherhood. Both devote their lives in nurturing their sons but are left alone in the end. In the epic, there is no reference to how Yashoda feels when deserted by Krishna. Devi's story is an apparent description of Jashoda's degrading condition, when detested by her sons. It can be taken as an attempt to give voice to the silenced perspective of Yashoda in the epic.

Another difference between the mythical Yashoda and Devi's Jashoda lies in the fact that Jashoda becomes a surrogate mother out of economic compulsion. Deprived of any other income source, to earn her livelihood, she becomes wet nurse of Haldar family. It is her marginalised class position that she has to choose this as a profession. On the other hand, in the epic, Yashoda, belonging to upper class, is represented as ignorant of the fact of Krishna as the biological son of Devaki and Vasudeva. She nurtures Krishna by thinking him to be her own son. By placing Jashoda in a lower

class, the story can be taken as an exposition of the role of class position in women's oppression, in a male-centered society.

Although emerging from different classes, both Yashoda and Jashoda, represent the sacrifices implied in the notion of motherhood determined by patriarchy. So it can be said that the story "Breast- giver" by invoking the mythical character Yashoda is an explicit exposition of women's exploitation in a patriarchal society. It depicts how in a patriarchal society, a woman is exploited by reducing her significance to a procreating machine. By placing Jashoda in lower strata, Mahasweta Devi exposes the double marginalisation that women from the lower strata are subjected to on the basis of gender and class. The story demonstrates various discourses that are constructed by patriarchy to justify the subjugation, exploitation and suppression that women are subjected to in a patriarchal set up. It also suggests how women are made to internalize the patriarchal discourses which consequently lead to their participation in their own exploitation.

Both the stories "Breast -giver" and "Draupadi" are powerful depictions of the marginalisation, exploitation and oppression of women in a male privileged set up. In both the stories, Mahasweta Devi depicts the lower class women's double marginalisation on the basis of class and gender by placing the women characters in the unprivileged section of the society. Dopdi and Jashoda are the characters in contrast as Dopdi symbolises the subversion of the power and Jashoda symbolises the silent acceptance of power. Dopdi's resistance suggests that power structures can be challenged even by the marginalised as Dopdi although marginalised on the basis of class and gender defies Senanayak's power derived from his upper position in class and gender hierarchy. Jashoda's character suggests how a woman is constructed by mythical and patriarchal discourses and accepts her exploitation and subjugation silently.

Both stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" depict patriarchal tendency to use a woman's body as an instrument to control and exploit her. "Draupadi" is a clear depiction of patriarchal inclination to exhibit violence over a woman's body as it is Dopdi's body that is attacked by Senanayak to assert power over her. On the other

hand, “Breast-giver” depicts how a woman’s life is controlled by exploiting her body. It apparently exposes the patriarchal inclination of considering women as procreating machines. Both stories although dealing with different issues (“Draupadi” with state power and violence against women and “Breast-giver” with the exploitation and objectification of women) inclusively raise questions regarding women’s marginalised position in a patriarchal set up.

In both the stories, there are references to mythical characters from the epic the *Mahabharata*: Draupadi in “Draupadi” and Yashoda in “Breast-giver”. By providing parallels to tribulations of mythical characters, both the stories expose women’s tribulations, sufferings, exploitation and marginalization in the present scenario. “Draupadi” is a reworking of the scene of public disrobing of Draupadi from the epic the *Mahabharata*. As an appropriation, it raises the question regarding Draupadi’s objectification in the epic as well as unveils the woman’s degradation in a society dominated by patriarchal discourses in the epic era as well as present condition. “Breast-giver” as making reference to Yashoda, Krishna’s surrogate mother from the epic the *Mahabharata* gives voice to Yashoda’s suffering that has been silenced in the epic. Mythical characters are appropriated within both the stories to articulate the silenced female perspective. So it can be said that Mahasweta Devi, in the stories “Draupadi” and “Breast-giver” gives an insight into the sufferings of women from the marginalised sections of society by invoking and appropriating the mythical characters.

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Chapter 4

Comparative Analysis and Conclusion

Myths, a construction of human imagination are usually regarded as culture-specific narratives or tales, dealing with Gods and supernatural events, which are preserved through the oral tradition. As a cultural product, the purpose of mythology is to promote certain social patterns among the members of a particular cultural community. Like all the cultural artifacts, mythology has a political position as Bronislaw Malinowski considers myth as an ideology that serves to justify established hierarchies. As an ideology, mythology legitimatises and justifies certain power structures in a social system. Mythology is associated to literature as myths have always served as a dominant theme in literature. Myths have always reappeared and been reinterpreted from new and different perspectives. Feminist critics consider mythology as a patriarchal discourse which by portraying women as submissive, subservient, irrational, self sacrificing serves as an instrument in the hands of patriarchy to perpetuate and justify the secondary role of women. Women are trained to play the feminine role scripted by patriarchy by making them internalise their cultural image through these myths. Adrienne Rich, the twentieth century American poet and feminist critic, in her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision", argues that re-vision of the past writing from a feministic perspective is essential to question the age long stereotype representation of women as a dream, luxury or threat in literature. The re-vision, retelling or reinterpretation of mythical tales from the marginalised feministic perspective has been a strategy of feminist writers to expose and question the implied political ideologies within these tales.

Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi in her stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" use and re-visit mythological tales from the marginalised female perspective. Both Mahasweta Devi and Hariharan have used the feminist writers' strategy of retelling the past narrative from the female perspective. The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* is replete with the mythical stories of Gandhari, Amba, Ganga, Damyanti etc that were originally found in the epic the *Mahabharata*. The stories have been blended with the main narrative. The stories of Gandhari and Ganga

have been appropriated and are retold from silenced feministic perspectives. Instead of being self-sacrificing and subservient as depicted in the original narrative, Ganga and Gandhari have been portrayed as assertive and furious in the novel. Hariharan takes Gandhari's act of blindfolding herself not as a projection of her devotion or sacrifice for her husband rather as an expression of her anger or fury on being deceived as it is after her marriage that she comes to know about her husband's blindness. Hariharan represents Ganga as an assertive woman who challenges the patriarchal discourse that upholds the belief that woman's fulfillment lies in the motherhood. Whereas in the original story, Ganga's act of throwing her sons into water has been associated with the curse of her previous birth, Hariharan interprets it as an action of a woman who doesn't want to undergo tribulations of motherhood. By reinterpreting the stories from the female perspective, Hariharan challenges the patriarchal ideologies implied in these tales.

In Mahasweta's stories, there are references to mythical characters from the epic the *Mahabharata*: Draupadi in "Draupadi" and Yashoda in "Breast-giver". "Draupadi" is a reworking of the scene of public disrobing of Draupadi from the epic the *Mahabharata*. The story is a feminist reworking as the assembly scene in the epic glorifies male-power as Draupadi acts in accordance with the role scripted by patriarchy for the victim of male violence and is saved by a male God. On the other hand, the story "Draupadi" is characterised by the subversion of power as Draupadi although being stripped and raped without any divine intervention, remains naked at her own insistence and refuses to in the stereotypical way. The story questions male power and depicts female empowerment as Draupadi terrifies her victimisers with her unabashed reactions. By placing Draupadi in a monogamous marriage, the story also raises question regarding the justification of Draupadi's polygamous marriage as something predestined. The story, "Breast-giver" as making reference to Yashoda, Krishna's surrogate mother from the epic the *Mahabharata* gives voice to Yashoda's suffering that has been silenced in the epic. The apparent description of Yashoda's degrading condition when detested by her sons can be taken as an attempt to give voice to the suffering of Yashoda in the epic when detested by Krishna. Both Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* and Mahasweta Devi in the story "Breast-giver" depict the role of mythology in the

construction of women. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi is told the stories by her grandmother to make her internalise the virtues depicted by the mythical figures and Devi, at every incidence recalls the mythical stories listened in the childhood. The grandmother tells stories for Devi's every question but does not tell anything out of her own experience.

Both of the writers, Mahasweta Devi in her stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" and Githa Harihran in her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, by making use of mythology, raise questions regarding women's marginalisation and age long subjugation in a society where patriarchy dominates. The novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* by depicting the suffering, dilemmas, struggle and survival of the three women belonging to different generations and different contexts, exposes the injustice and oppression women are subjected to in the private spheres of their life, in a patriarchal society. The novel exposes how in a patriarchal set up marriage restricts women's freedom and allows them no space to fulfill their dreams and aspirations. Sita's suffering apparently demonstrates the plight of women, who are denied the individual liberty and are expected to play the feminine role scripted by patriarchy. The novel also raises questions regarding the patriarchal discourse of motherhood which reduces women's worth in their ability to reproduce. Mayamma and Devi's suffering clearly depicts how women are made to feel worthless because of their inability to reproduce. In the novel, there is also a reference to the sexual assault women are subjected to within their own homes.

The stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" are vigorous depictions of the exploitation and oppression of women in a male privileged set up. Both stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" unveil the patriarchal tendency to use a woman's body as an instrument to control and exploit her. In the story "Draupadi", Draupadi's gang rape is a clear depiction of patriarchal inclination to exhibit violence over a woman's body as it is her body that is attacked by Senanayak to assert power over her. On the other hand, "Breast-giver" depicts how a woman's life is controlled by exploiting her body. The story apparently exposes the patriarchal inclination of considering women as procreating machines.

The difference in both writers' depiction of predicament of women lies in portraying the lives of women from different classes. Mahasweta Devi, in both the stories, depicts the lower class women's double marginalisation on the basis of class and gender by placing the women characters in the unprivileged sections of the society. Mahasweta Devi's women characters, in the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver", are from the unprivileged sections of society. Their predicament is caused by their marginalised position in gender hierarchy as well as class hierarchy. Dopdi in the story "Draupadi" becomes a victim of extreme violence because of her emergence from a powerless section of society. Senanayak's upper position in class hierarchy as a police officer assigns him the power to exhibit the extreme violence against Dopdi, who belongs to a tribal revolutionary group. The kind of violence asserted on Dopdi: gang rape is peculiarly because of her gender. It is her body's vulnerability to rape, that is used by Senanayak to assert power over her. In the story "Breast-giver" Jashoda is exploited because of her class-position. It is out of the economic compulsion that she becomes wet-nurse. Haldars are able to exploit Jashoda due to their upper position in class-hierarchy. Jashoda's oppression is also caused by her gender position as it is her ability to procreate that becomes the cause of her exploitation. So both Dopdi and Jashoda become victim of the exploitation and violence due to their marginalised position in class hierarchy as well as gender hierarchy.

On the other hand, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Hariharan's characters belong to the privileged sections of society. Their suffering is peculiarly caused by their marginalised gender position. They are oppressed within the private spheres of their life. In contrast to Dopdi and Jashoda who are double marginalised as women belonging to unprivileged class, Sita and Devi are subjected to injustice primarily because of their marginalised position in gender hierarchy. Mayamma, although belongs to lower class, is also suppressed in the name of patriarchal discourse of motherhood. So the women characters of *The Thousand Faces of Night* are not marginalised on the basis of their class. So whereas Mahasweta Devi's characters become the victim of the forces of both class and gender, Hariharan's characters are subjected to the force of gender alone. It can be said that depicting the different

problems of the women from different strata, both works inclusively questions women's suppression in a male-centered society.

Both of the writers have constructed contrasting characters. In both works; *The Thousand Faces of Night* and the stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver", some of the women characters submit silently to the forces of patriarchy whereas some assertively question the discourses of patriarchy. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, whereas Mayamma silently accepts all the injustice and suppression, Devi protests assertively against the forces of patriarchy. In Devi's stories whereas Jashoda doesn't question her exploitation and in fact participates in her own exploitation, Dopdi becomes a symbol of feminist subversion as she frightens her oppressors with her startling resistance

So it can be said that both of the writers Mahasweta Devi in her stories "Draupadi" and "Breast-giver" and Githa Hariharan in *The Thousand Faces of Night* gives insight into the women's suffering in a male dominated set up by adapting and appropriating the mythical tales.

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