



REIMAGINING MYTHS AND FEMALE IDENTITY IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S
THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) is a pivotal work that revisits traditional Indian myths and explores the nuanced dynamics of female identity within the cultural and social constructs of contemporary India. By intertwining mythological frameworks, historical contexts, and personal experiences, the novel interrogates the tension between tradition and modernity, highlighting how women navigate patriarchal systems and define their own identities. This paper examines how *The Thousand Faces of Night* challenges conventional representations of women by reimagining ancient myths and offering a complex portrayal of female subjectivity. Through its central characters, particularly Sita, the novel engages in a critical rethinking of gender roles, self-representation, and women's agency, showing how female identity can be reconstructed and empowered. Through this analysis, the paper underscores the novel's role as a feminist critique that repositions women not as passive subjects but as active agents who both challenge and reinterpret their inherited mythic and cultural narratives.

Keywords: Female Identity, Gita, Myth, Githa Hariharan, Devi, Tradition, Ramayana, Gender Roles, and Reimagining Myth

Introduction

Though India has made much progress in all fields, the role of Indian women in society remains only marginal.

Gender discrimination has been a universal phenomenon since the beginning of human history. Many women writers have started to voice for the

voiceless. In the name of tradition, women everywhere are not given proper recognition by male chauvinists. Among those Indian English women novelists who made their debut in the 1990s, Gittha Hariharan occupies a very important place. Like Jhumpa Lahiri, Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, and others, she has produced novels that reveal the deeply ingrained gender biases prevailing in Indian society. Patricia Waugh's observation is worth noting here: "Much of women's writing can, in fact, be seen not as an attempt to define an isolated individual ego but to discover a collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity in relationship" (Waugh 10).

Hariharan's novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) is the winner of the Commonwealth Writer's Prize for Best First Work. This was followed by *The Ghost of Vasu Master* (1994), *In Times of Siege* (2003), and *Fugitive Histories* (2009). She has also authored a collection of short stories- *The Art of Dying* (1993), *The Winning Team* (2004), *A Southern Harvest* (1993), and *Sorry Best Friend!* (2004). *The Winning Team* and *Sorry Best Friend* are collections of short stories for children. Her mastery in dealing with style, structure, and theme differentiates her from other writers. The quest for identity and self is an important theme in Gittha Hariharan's novels. This theme becomes

more important in the present scenario. In her own words: "I see myself as a complex of fluctuating identities. I would not be able to separate my life as a writer, citizen, and feminist. Identity is something we re-invent on a daily basis." (Hariharan, interview with Bageshree S).

The Thousand Faces of Night is the sensitive story of women struggling to survive in a world of shattered dreams. The protagonist Devi, her mother Sita, her grandma, and Mayamma, the retainer in Devi's father-in-law's house, are all protesters of sorts; often, their protest is silent and subtle after being subdued and subjected to torture and neglect. Sometimes, it is expressed too, but after a long period of patience and endurance. From the illiterate and oppressed Mayamma to the educated and self-radiant Devi, Hariharan shows that the Indian woman has come a long way in her search for self. Myth is an important component of any privileged tradition. So, Indian myths reach worldwide acclaim. Myth is "a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group, and which served to explain (in terms of the inventions and actions of deities and other supernatural beings) why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances, and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people



conduct their lives” (Abrams 178). The present study on ‘Reimagining Myth and Female Identity in Githa Hariharan’s *The Thousand Faces of Night*’ will argue the importance of gender roles, especially the role of women in society, by reimagining myths.

Methodology

This research follows a qualitative literary analysis methodology, which is focused on close reading and interpretation of the primary text, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, through a feminist and mythical lens. The methodology involves a careful examination of the novel’s characters, themes, and narrative structure to identify how the myth is critiqued to insist on the female role.

Discussion

The lives of the three women in *The Thousand Faces of Night*—Devi, Sita, and Mayamma expose the different dimensions of women’s oppression. The reworking, revisioning, and retelling of the myths as allusions to the character’s story is the highlight of the novel. Hariharan employs ‘the story within a story’ technique in the novel. For any Indian woman, the institution of marriage ensures protection, love, compatibility, and happiness. However, in reality, marital life in India has a lot of restrictions and constraints. They suffer disappointment and disillusionment in the

face of reality. As a young girl, Devi inquisitively tried to know the mystery of life, and during her childhood, her grandmother told her several stories about the life of Gandhari, Amba, and Damayanthi. As an old lady, her grandmother is well-versed in mythical stories. Grandmother tells the story of Damayanthi which is taken from *Mahabharata*. Damayanthi’s father decides to arrange for her *swayamvara*. “Damayanthi entered the hall with an escort and the garland of sweet-smelling jasmines and roses she held” (19). However, her marriage with Mahesh is too far apart from this kind of expectation from Damayanthi’s marriage. On hearing Gandhari’s story, Devi intervenes, “If he [Dhritrashtra] was not so noble, why did he agree to marry her? Grandmother replies, “All husbands are noble, Devi. Even the blind and deaf ones” (29). Thus, Devi is subjugated in mythological interpretations.

In the same way, Sita discards the *veena* as an act of denial and sacrifice to retaliate to the father-in-law’s harsh remarks, “Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (30). Gandhari’s anger wrapped tightly around her head in a lifelong blindfold,

Divine anger provides the twists and turns in mortal destinies that make heroism possible. The lesson that was more difficult to digest was human anger,

which could step into every pore of a woman's body and become the very of her life (29).

In a moment of anger and frustration, Sita pulls out the strings of *veena* and takes an oath not to play *veena* hereafter. Through the stories of Gandhari and Sita, the grandmother teaches the way of living and the quality of sacrifice for others.

The grandmother's stories become sharper, more precautionous tones of dangerous possibilities. For each character's problems, the grandmother indirectly narrates a story. The stories are solutions to their problems, but they "were not simple: they had to be decoded" (27). This time, grandmother dwells upon Mahabharata for a story, and she talks about Amba. Prince Bheeshma goes to a *swayamwara* of three beautiful princesses- Amba, Ambika, and Ambalika. Amba, the eldest, chose King Salwa and garlanded him. However, suddenly, Bheeshma kidnapped all three princesses. When he came to know that Amba had already married, he let her go to King Salwa. Unfortunately, Salwa refused to accept her and insulted her by saying: "Do you think I feast on over's? I am a king. I do not touch what another man has won in battle. Go to Bheeshma. He is your husband. What have you to do with me?" (37).

Insulted, Amba goes back to Bheeshma, who also refuses to accept her. Thereby, she changes her attitude toward life and vows to avenge Bheeshma. Amba, in a dejected mood, went to the forest and did penance towards Lord Shiva. Lord gives one garland to Amba with the promise that whoever wears that garland will get the power to kill Bheeshma. She throws the garland to the court of king Drupada. Amba, in her rebirth, is born as a daughter to King Drupada and grows up like a son. After learning many skills, she waits to kill King Bheeshma.

Uma's disastrous marriage was linked with how even Amba, a born prince becomes 'a victim of disastrous'. Uma fails in her married life as her husband is a drunkard, and her father-in-law misbehaves with her. So, with a broken heart, Uma comes to Devi's grandmother's house and weeps about her miserable life. Devi tells the Amba story to Uma. Women should have some courage and should express their anger in an appropriate place, and then only they can lead a life in a male-dominated society. Thus, Devi advises Uma to be brave. From this story, Devi, too, learns to fight her battles alone, especially her battles with men. Devi, who lives a lonely life, not able to bear the solitary life frees herself from the bond and rejoins her mother.



Devi's father-in-law, Baba, is a typical illustration of a male-dominated patriarchal world. His character is revealed through his stories which he elaborates to Devi. He was a Sanskrit professor and an intellectual man. His stories are elucidations of the codes laid down by Manu, which explicitly the virtuous and chaste women who inspire their husbands along the path of Dharma by their sacrificial nature, self-abnegation, and subservience. The emotional and mental incompatibility with Mahesh brings her close to Baba. In Devi's opinion,

"Baba is an attractive old man. His aquiline nose, long narrow eyes, wide forehead with deep creases, and full lips surrounded by a soft, white bush give him the appearance of a dignified patriarch, a gentle pharaoh in retirement." (50-51).

Baba's stories are different from Grandmother's stories. While grandmother's stories "were a prelude to my womanhood, an initiation into the subterranean possibilities. His define the limits" (51). Baba's stories were not ambiguous, and their center-point was "an enacting touchstone for a woman, a wife" (51). Baba's stories set the criteria for a good housewife, which reflects that women should be devoted to their husbands. He explains the means of reaching Heaven by serving their husbands with devotion and care. In Baba's view, "The housewife should

always be joyous, adept at domestic work, neat in her domestic wares and restrained in expenses. Controlled in mind, word and body, she who does not transgress her lord, attains heaven even as her lord does" (70-71).

The narrative also offers a critical rethinking of well-known female characters from Hindu mythology, such as Sita, Draupadi, and Ahalya. In Hariharan's retelling, these figures are not confined to their traditional roles as passive victims of fate or as embodiments of virtue and sacrifice. Instead, they are given new layers of meaning, with alternative interpretations that allow them to emerge as more complex, dynamic, and empowered individuals. By reimagining these mythological women, Hariharan creates a space where their stories can challenge and subvert the patriarchal frameworks that have historically confined them. In this sense, the novel engages with the potential of cultural myths to not only reinforce patriarchal structures but also to transform them, empowering women to redefine their agency.

Through this reimagining of myth and history, *The Thousand Faces of Night* becomes more than just a story about one woman's journey. It serves as a powerful metaphor for how women, in both the mythological past and the contemporary world, can reclaim their voices and assert their agency against the constraints of

history and culture. The novel's exploration of these themes provides a nuanced and profound commentary on the complexities of gender, identity, and power, making it an important work in the conversation about women's roles in both traditional and modern societies.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Gittha Hariharan skillfully intertwines myths with the narrative structure to explore the complexities of female identity. One of the most striking ways she does this is by reinterpreting the classical myth of Sita from the *Ramayana*, a story that has long been revered as a symbol of idealized wifely virtues like loyalty, patience, and self-sacrifice. In the traditional myth, Sita is celebrated for her devotion to her husband, Rama, enduring the trials of exile and the injustice of being abandoned by him, only to return to him once again, proving her purity. However, Hariharan's portrayal of Sita in her novel challenges this traditional portrayal, providing a new perspective on her character. The modern Sita in Hariharan's narrative is a woman caught in the tension between her duty to her family and her desires for freedom and self-assertion. Hariharan's Sita is not a passive figure defined solely by her loyalty and suffering; instead, she is a woman grappling with the complexity of her identity in the face of overwhelming societal expectations. In Hariharan's point of view, Sita is a woman caught between

the contradictions of the life she was born into and the life she wants to live. This reinterpretation serves to highlight the ways in which Sita's traditional image as the ideal wife limits her personal growth and self-expression, offering a critique of the rigid societal norms that confine women. Through this, Hariharan opens up a conversation about the possibility of reimagining traditional roles and gives voice to the internal conflicts that women face in trying to reconcile their desires with familial and societal pressures.

By naming her protagonist Sita, Hariharan creates a direct link between the ancient myth and the contemporary experience of women, using myth as a lens through which to examine the evolving nature of female identity. In choosing this name, Hariharan acknowledges the weight and cultural significance of the myth while also suggesting that the challenges women face today are deeply rooted in these ancient stories. As she explores the emotional and psychological struggles of her protagonist, Hariharan stresses that myth, rather than being a static relic of the past, is a dynamic framework that continues to shape women's lives and identities in modern society. The modern Sita is torn between her family's expectations and her yearning for personal agency, reflecting the broader social and psychological conflicts that



many women face. As Hariharan expressively utters, Myth becomes not a set of moral directives, but a mirror in which we see ourselves reflected. In this way, Hariharan redefines the myth of Sita not as a symbol of passive acceptance but as a complex representation of a woman's struggle to assert her individuality within the confines of cultural traditions.

Moreover, in reinterpreting the myth, Hariharan brings attention to the fluid and evolving nature of female identity. The protagonist's struggle to define herself outside the traditional roles imposed on her underscores the idea that identity is not a fixed construct but rather something that is constantly shifting, shaped by both internal desires and external influences. The modern Sita's journey to assert herself, despite the pressures to conform to societal expectations, becomes a broader commentary on the nature of female identity in post-colonial societies. In these contexts, where traditional myths continue to dominate cultural narratives, the quest for self-definition is often fraught with tension and contradiction. Hariharan emphasizes that the process of self-discovery is ongoing and is influenced by the intersection of individual desires and societal forces. This struggle for self-determination is central to the novel, as the protagonist's journey reflects the

universal challenge many women face in the face of traditional cultural narratives that define their roles. The mythic Sita is an ideal woman who suffers to prove her worth. The modern Sita must confront her desires and the cost of asserting them. Through this exploration, Hariharan reveals the ongoing relevance of myth in shaping women's identities while also emphasizing that female identity must be viewed as a dynamic and ever-evolving process rather than a fixed or predetermined state.

Thus, in reimagining the myth of Sita, Hariharan challenges the traditional portrayal of women as passive recipients of cultural norms and highlights the tensions that arise when personal agency and societal expectations collide. Through this reinterpretation, Hariharan not only critiques the cultural narratives that have shaped women's roles but also provides a framework for understanding the complexities of female identity in the modern world.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan revisits and reinterprets several key female archetypes found in Hindu mythology, using them as a means of critiquing the restrictive roles these figures symbolize in both ancient myth and contemporary society. One such figure is Devi, Sita's mother-in-law, who embodies the traditional ideal of feminine devotion and familial loyalty. In Hindu

mythology, women like Devi are often idealized for their unwavering commitment to marriage, motherhood, and self-sacrifice. However, through Hariharan's portrayal, Devi is not merely a symbol of idealized womanhood; her life is shown to be fraught with personal pain and emotional repression. Devi's adherence to these traditional roles comes at great personal cost, and her outward devotion hides deep emotional scars. As Hariharan notes, Devi's life is a tragedy full of a series of sacrifices in the name of tradition. Despite her public image as a devoted wife and mother, Devi is a woman who has lived through personal loss and unspoken sorrow. Her sacrifice, while celebrated as virtuous, also leaves her emotionally depleted, revealing the hidden costs of adhering to cultural ideals of womanhood. Devi's experience emphasizes the complex emotional terrain that women navigate when they are confined to these roles, forced to maintain appearances of selflessness even when their internal desires and struggles are left unacknowledged. Hariharan's treatment of Devi complicates the archetype of the ideal woman by showing how such ideals can lead to profound personal isolation and psychological suffering. Thus, in Hariharan's retelling, women are not mere embodiments of mythic ideals but are instead depicted as complex individuals

who wrestle with the limitations and struggles of these roles.

Similarly, Hariharan reimagines the myth of Ahalya, a figure traditionally known in Hindu mythology as the woman cursed for her infidelity. In the original myth, Ahalya is punished by being turned to stone after being seduced by the god Indra, and her story is often used to reinforce the idea of women as vessels of virtue and vice, punished for their perceived moral failings. However, in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Ahalya's story is given a fresh interpretation that emphasizes her strength, resilience, and the injustice of her fate. Hariharan retells Ahalya's myth, framing her as a victim of a patriarchal society that uses women's bodies and choices as scapegoats for the failings of men. In this version, Ahalya's narrative challenges the societal tendency to place blame on women for the actions of men: The reimagining of Ahalya not only critiques the way in which women's actions are often seen through a lens of moral judgment, but it also highlights the broader societal tendency to reduce women to mere symbols of virtue or vice, overlooking the complexities of their lives and experiences. Rather than presenting Ahalya as a passive figure punished for her perceived sins, Hariharan's version underscores her strength in the face of injustice and the resilience required to survive in a world that continuously



blames women for the transgressions of men.

By reinterpreting these mythic figures, Hariharan transforms them from passive symbols of feminine ideals into powerful representations of female subjectivity, resistance, and agency. The retelling of Devi and Ahalya offers a critique of the ways in which traditional narratives have confined women to predefined roles, limiting their opportunities for personal expression and agency. Hariharan's focus on these female characters reveals how such myths, while deeply ingrained in cultural consciousness, can also be sites of subversion and transformation. By reclaiming and reimagining these stories, Hariharan not only challenges the traditional portrayals of women in mythology but also gives voice to the complexities and contradictions of their lives. In this way, *The Thousand Faces of Night* serves as a powerful commentary on the limitations of mythic archetypes and the potential for women to redefine their identities and reclaim their voices within both the realm of mythology and society at large. Through these retellings, Hariharan not only critiques the roles women are forced to play but also offers a space for reimagining these archetypes as symbols of resistance, resilience, and self-determination.

One of the central thematic concerns of *The Thousand Faces of Night* is the negotiation between tradition and modernity, particularly as it relates to female identity. This struggle is embodied most poignantly in the character of Sita, who faces the complex task of reconciling her desires with the expectations imposed upon her by society. Sita's internal conflict between her desires for autonomy and the obligations of tradition reflects the broader tensions experienced by many contemporary women in post-independence India. Her journey is one of grappling with her identity in the face of societal pressure to conform to established roles while simultaneously navigating the shifting cultural landscapes brought on by modernization. Hariharan vividly portrays Sita's struggle, noting that Sita lives in a world where the personal is always mingled with the political, where women's desires are weighed against centuries of tradition. This tension is not merely psychological; it is cultural, as Sita finds herself caught between the conservative values of her family and the more liberal, modern influences of urban life. The expectations of traditional womanhood—centered on familial duty, obedience, and sacrifice—often conflict with the freedom, individualism, and self-expression offered by the modern world. Through Sita's journey, Hariharan highlights how contemporary women are

expected to negotiate the pressures of modernity while still adhering to the roles assigned to them by tradition. Sita's efforts to carve out space for her voice and identity in the face of such forces illustrate the complexities many women face when navigating the space between the personal and the social, between individual autonomy and collective identity.

Sita's dilemma is mirrored and compounded in her relationship with her mother, where the generational divide deepens the complexities of negotiating tradition and modernity. Sita's mother, although deeply rooted in the traditions of her time, holds a vision for her daughter's life that includes greater freedom and the possibility of choice. However, this vision is not entirely free from the constraints of their cultural context. Sita's mother hopes for her to experience a life of independence but remains cautious and aware of the limitations imposed by their social setting. As Hariharan observes, "Her mother wants her to fly but is afraid to let her spread her wings, knowing the storm that might follow" (145). This generational tension reveals the broader societal shifts occurring in post-colonial India, where women were beginning to demand more agency and autonomy. However, the older generation remains tied to the traditional values that have shaped their identities, and this is

particularly evident in the way they view women's roles in the family and society. The conflict between Sita and her mother reflects the broader cultural struggle between maintaining traditional values and adapting to modern realities, especially when it comes to gender roles. The older generation's caution is a response to the social changes they perceive, which threaten the stability and order of the systems they have long adhered to. Through this generational conflict, Hariharan critiques the static nature of traditional gender norms and the challenges involved in negotiating modernity within a conservative cultural framework. As the relationship between Sita and her mother evolves, it becomes evident that the tension between tradition and modernity is not easily reconciled, and each generation must navigate its way forward within the confines of their respective cultural contexts.

Thus, *The Thousand Faces of Night* uses the evolving dynamic between Sita and her mother to illuminate the challenges of negotiating gender roles in a changing society. The mother, bound by the past, represents the endurance of tradition and the hesitation to embrace change, while Sita, standing on the threshold of modernity, represents the potential for transformation and self-determination. Through this intergenerational struggle, Hariharan



underscores the difficulty of moving beyond the boundaries of tradition without erasing the legacies that have shaped personal and collective identity. The novel ultimately calls attention to the resilience required to reconcile competing forces—the weight of tradition and the pull of modernity—while simultaneously questioning whether true freedom for women can ever be fully realized within the constraints of a conservative cultural framework.

Another critical aspect of *The Thousand Faces of Night* is the novel's exploration of memory and narrative as essential components in the construction of female identity. The fragmented structure of the novel, with its shifting perspectives and non-linear timeframes, mirrors the complexity of identity formation, which, as Hariharan suggests, is never fixed or singular. Instead, identity is constructed through a series of fragmented recollections, stories, and lived experiences that intersect and influence one another over time. The shifting timeframes in the novel allow the reader to witness the complexity of memory and its power to reshape identity as new revelations and experiences continually alter Sita's recollections. This narrative strategy underscores the idea that women's identities are never fully formed but always in a state of flux,

evolving through the stories they tell and the memories they reclaim.

Sita's journey of self-exploration is deeply tied to her revisiting the histories of the women in her family. As she uncovers the untold stories of pain, resistance, and resilience that have shaped the lives of the women before her, she comes to realize that her identity is not only her own but also a continuation of the struggles and triumphs of her foremothers. Through the act of retelling these stories, Sita reclaims the agency that has been denied to these women, whose experiences were often silenced by the weight of tradition and societal expectations. By rediscovering these histories, Sita not only uncovers the truth about her ancestors' lives but also uncovers new possibilities for her existence. This process of reclamation is empowering, as it allows Sita to reframe her own identity within a broader narrative of female strength and endurance. Through this act of storytelling, Sita defies the erasure of women's experiences in both personal and historical narratives. She reclaims the power to shape her own identity and the identities of the women who came before her, and in doing so, she begins to question the patriarchal structures that have kept their voices unheard. By focusing on how these women tell their own stories, Hariharan emphasizes the significance of narrative as a means of

asserting female subjectivity and reclaiming agency. Storytelling, for Sita and the women in her family, becomes an act of resistance—a way to rewrite the terms of their existence in a society that has long silenced them.

The novel suggests that the act of memory itself is a form of resistance—resisting the erasure of women’s experiences from the official historical and cultural records. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, memory is not just a private or personal act but a collective one, binding women across generations in their shared experiences. Through the act of storytelling, the women in the novel, especially Sita, become the architects of their own identities, refusing to accept the roles that have been imposed upon them. This narrative agency, where women claim the power to tell their own stories, becomes essential to the broader critique of the societal structures that limit their freedom and subjectivity. As the novel unfolds, the importance of these reclaimed histories becomes evident—not only for Sita’s self-realization but also as a broader commentary on the need to hear women’s voices in the larger cultural conversation. By giving voice to the often-silenced narratives of women, Hariharan underscores the transformative potential of memory and storytelling, showing how these acts are central to the process of self-definition and resistance to the

patriarchal forces that seek to suppress women’s experiences and identities. Through Sita’s journey of self-discovery, *The Thousand Faces of Night* ultimately emphasizes the power of narrative to reclaim women’s agency, rewrite history, and construct identities that are no longer bound by the constraints of traditional gender roles.

Conclusion

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Githa Hariharan offers a profound reimagining of myth and a compelling critique of traditional representations of women’s roles, particularly within the context of Indian society. Through her retelling of mythic figures like Sita, Draupadi, Gandhari, and Ahalya, Hariharan not only reinterprets these iconic characters but also challenges the stereotypical portrayals of women as either passive victims or idealized heroines. Traditionally, these figures have been defined by rigid and reductive archetypes—Sita as the devoted wife, Draupadi as the wronged queen, and Ahalya as the seduced woman—each confined to narratives that leave little room for complexity, individuality, or agency. Hariharan, however, transforms these myths into vehicles for exploring the multifaceted nature of female identity, presenting women who are full of contradictions, resilience, and the potential for self-reinvention. As she



reimagines these mythic figures, Hariharan reshapes the way female identity is constructed, offering a vision that is dynamic and fluid rather than fixed and predetermined. This shift invites readers to see women not just as subjects of myth but as active participants in the creation of their own identities, capable of navigating the tensions between tradition and modernity.

Thus, Githa Hariharan tells many mythical stories, each one preaching a moral to society, especially to Devi, the protagonist. She talks about Indian myths which are forgotten by many of us in the era of globalization. Our sophisticated life made us forget our heritage. On the whole, this novel is the retelling of the past heritage. She selects the less prominent figures from the Indian epics and Puranas to present her story as an engaging one. She makes use of myth and folktale to enlarge the space of the lives of 'real' people, especially women.

Through the character of Sita, in particular, Hariharan reveals the difficulties women face when attempting to reconcile personal desires with societal demands. Sita's struggle to define herself outside of the traditional roles of wife and daughter is not just a personal journey but also a broader reflection of the societal tensions that women face in post-independence India, where the forces of modernity conflict with entrenched cultural

values. Hariharan's retelling of these myths also serves to question the very cultural narratives that have historically defined women's lives, showing how these myths, though rooted in the past, continue to shape contemporary gender roles and expectations. In this way, Hariharan offers a vision of female identity that is not merely defined by conformity but is instead open to negotiation, reinterpretation, and transformation.

Through the act of retelling the stories of the women in her family, Sita is able to reclaim and redefine her own identity. The fragmented structure of the novel, with its interwoven perspectives and nonlinear timelines, reflects the idea that identity is formed not through a singular, cohesive narrative but through the layering of different stories and experiences. By giving space to these suppressed histories, Hariharan demonstrates how women can resist and adapt to the cultural frameworks imposed upon them, asserting their subjectivity and reclaiming control over their own stories. As such, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is not merely a feminist critique of traditional gender roles but also a celebration of the transformative power of memory and narrative, showing how women can assert their identities through the act of storytelling.

Ultimately, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a feminist critique that offers a

vision of female identity as fluid, multifaceted, and empowering. Hariharan's portrayal of women as dynamic and complex individuals challenges the reductionist narratives that have long dominated cultural representations of women. The novel encourages readers to rethink not only the myths that shape culture but also the stories that define women's lives, suggesting that the true power of women lies not in conforming to these myths but in the ability to rewrite them. By confronting the limitations of tradition and embracing the possibilities of modernity, *The Thousand Faces of Night* calls for a re-evaluation of the ways in which women's experiences and identities are constructed, offering a powerful vision of female agency and self-determination. In this reimagined space, women can reclaim their voices, reshape their histories, and, in doing so, forge a path toward a future where the constraints of tradition no longer define their identities but are free to evolve according to their desires and aspirations.

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