

Multiple Shades of Husband-Wife Relationship in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*

Dr. Sohan Lal

Department of English
Pt. C.L.S. Govt. (PG) College, Karnal

Abstract:

This brief study discusses myriad dimensions of husband-wife relationship in Githa Hariharan's very first penned novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. She has presented a huge variety of this relationship, like illiterate, well educate, talented Brahmin family background, lower caste, rich and poor etc. This study explores through these fictional husband-wife relationships the main reasons, loose points and gaps of break-up, divorce and destruction of this harmonious relationship. The sole aim of this study is to provide learning from the mistakes of the fictional characters so that we cannot repeat the same mistakes in our actual life because life is not so long that we learn by doing own mistakes so we must need to learn from these fictional characters and live with harmonious relationships.

Key Words: *Myriad, dimensions, relationships, husband, wife, harmonious, educated, illiterate, fictional, actual life etc.*

Githa Hariharan is a well known name in contemporary woman writers of Indian writing in English in and abroad. She has penned five novels short-stories collections and she has also contributed a number of research articles in national and international scholarly research journals and magazines. In her literary works she has presented myriad dimensions of personal relationships through rich and complex characters with full compassion, especially, her novels are full of man-woman, man-man and woman-woman relationships. Hariharan has presented these relationships with full care and sincerity. She has shown how man-made geographical, social, linguistic and cultural barriers come between harmonious relationships. Thus, her novels are complex web of personal relationships. Hariharan has depicted in her novels various ups and downs in man-woman relationships, prominently husband-wife relationship. Githa Hariharan in her very first prize winning novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* has presented personal relationships with special

attention. In personal relationships, it is man-woman relation which drew her attention most. Hariharan considered man-woman relation as the pivot for the existence of humanity.

Husband-wife relationship is the core and soul of human existence on this earth and the most important in personal relationships. Githa Hariharan in her novels presents various angles of this husband-wife relationship with their ups and downs. Githa Hariharan presents number of dimensions of this husband-wife relationship through a number of examples. Sushma Arya makes judicious and pert remark in this connection: “She analyzes interpersonal relationships, and also talks about how a Western-educated Indian girl finds that she is not suitable for Indian marriage.” (50)

In her very first award-winning novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* she presents husband-wife relationship through three generations- Mayamma and her husband, Sita- Mahadevan and Devi- Mahesh, except these three relations she also shows different shades of this relationship through the relationships of Gauri and her husband, Baba-Parvatamma etc.

Mahesh-Devi relation is the first and chief example of this husband-wife relationship. Devi the protagonist of the novel is a highly educated girl of a Brahmin family who gets her higher education from America. She recently returns to India from America on the call of her mother, Sita. Her mother settles her marriage with a Brahmin boy Mahesh after few days of her return from America. Sita, her mother who believes in traditional orthodoxy of Brahmanism, matches the horoscopes of Mahesh and Devi by a Brahmin astrologer and finds that the horoscopes of Mahesh and Devi not only match normally but the characteristics of the horoscopes of both fantastically match. So everyone in the house say: “Don’t worry, don’t worry. It will all be over soon, and you will be settled. What a lucky girl you are!” (Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, 23) After some days Devi’s marriage fixes with Mahesh: “A week later, lulled by the music in the air, the ripples of the promise in the sea, I met and accepted Mahesh.” (Hariharan, TFN, 22) In course of time Devi now turns in a matching girl or fiancée of Mahesh. She describes Mahesh’s personality in her words:

Mahesh the stranger, who is to be my husband, visits us for an hour every evening. He is no prince, but a regional manager in a multinational company that makes detergents and toothpaste. (Hariharan, TFN, 22)

Mahesh has a travelling job. He lives in Bangalore along with his old father and a maidservant, Mayamma. Mohit K. Ray rightly comments:

She had chosen Mahesh with the realization that her grandmother’s stories did not correspond with reality - Mahesh was no prince but a matter-of-fact individual ready to settle for a prosaic marriage and expecting the bare minimum from his wife – to cater to his needs, obey him when ordered and satisfy his organized social desires. (163)

Now Mahesh and Devi meet every evening to each other on the seashore. He tells Devi that the nature of his job is a field job so for this he travels a lot as he tells Devi, "I travel a big deal." (Hariharan, TFN, 22) Before marriage, Mahesh shares many things with Devi, especially, his job profile and then he also tells her that he can give her a little time in a month because most of the time he will be out of station due to his job. He frankly tells her:

I will be in Bangalore only ten days of the month, Are you ready to accept that? My father is there, of course, and our old maidservant, but you will be lonely sometimes. Have you thought of that? (Hariharan, TFN, 22)

After listening it from Mahesh, Devi admires him for his frankness and open-heartedness. She says:

And I like Mahesh's frankness, his willingness to be fair, even if he did seem to be an unbending pillar of propriety and good sense. He is honest at least, he admits to wanting a woman at home who will be wife and a mother. (Hariharan, TFN, 23)

After sometimes, when Mahesh returns to Bangalore, their wedding takes place, they get married. Now Devi lives in a new big home on Jacaranda Road. Mahesh and Devi begin the journey of their married life. In the beginning of this journey they have a long chat in evening in the terrace garden over tea. But still Devi feels that Mahesh is a polite stranger for her. She observes:

He has been a polite stranger in the first weeks since our wedding. I can't help admiring his restraint, his detachment which views marriage as a necessity, a milestone like any other. (Hariharan, TFN, 49)

Mahesh has his own mechanical definitions towards marriage. He never thinks that marriage is a harmonious relationship and base of human existence. Mahesh has not such ideas as marriage is a harmonious relation of two minds, two bodies as well as of two souls. He does not want to admit that that love and understanding is the foundation of any relationship, especially, husband-wife relationship. Marriage is the relation in which two personalities come closer to each other and take vows to become life partner to each other in every pain, suffering and joy of life. But Mahesh has totally opposite views regarding marriage. He thinks:

It (marriage) is a gamble, he says. You measure the odds as but you can, and adapt yourself to the consequences. But this he says in the vulnerable moments of intimacy. Otherwise he does not believe in talking about ifs and buts, at least not with his wife. (Hariharan, TFN, 49)

Mahesh fails to strengthen the bond of emotional attachment with the feelings of Devi. However, they live under one roof in a single room but they are strangers to each other, more in the sense of Devi, Mahesh is not a husband for her but "a reasonable stranger." (Hariharan, TFN, 49) Devi worries about her future

married life. Her life is now full of boredom and loneliness. She lives with a stranger. She feels about her married life:

A marriage cannot be forced into suddenly being there, it must grow gradually, like a delicate but promising sapling. What about us? What kind of a life will we make together? (49)

When Mahesh takes no interest in his wife Devi and does not think about the future planning for his married life. Devi feels that he is a successful manager, a man in business who has dedicated all hours, days, months and years of his life to the company affairs and products and has no time for his beautiful young wife. This irritates Devi and she starts feel like this:

What about us? What kind of life we make together? It seems too foolish, too intense a question to ask this reasonable stranger who has already carefully, examined, experienced, dissected, and is now ready to file away as settled, something as fragile and new born as our marriage. Can his acute businessman's eyes, with all their shrewd power, really be weak sighted? Does he not see that it is too early for quietness? Too soon for the companionship of habit? (Hariharan, TFN, 49)

Before her marriage with Mahesh, an idea occurs in the mind of Devi: "who was this man, this husband whose arms I was to live in every night?" (Hariharan, TFN, 49) Mahesh is a busy man who always remains engaged in his business deals. When he comes to home after his business tours only his body in the home but his mind and heart remains busy in company files. He has no interest in her beautiful wife. Even at his home he remains a company manager and his mechanical behaviour always like manager. In his whole life he remains a company manager; he never try to be a husband and a son. Actually, no doubt that that in our life career we become a magistrate, an IAS officer and prime minister of the country but when we return back to our home before enter the home we must need to leave our honorable posts outside the home because in home parents need a son, wife need a husband, children need a father, the family members do not wait for a magistrate, an IAS officer or a prime minister, they wait for a son, a husband and a father, so whosoever do this he can gain all the happiness from all relations, and who fails in this all relationships around him scatter or ruin before his or her eyes. Mahesh is such an unfortunate fellow who remains a company manager in his whole life, he never be a husband and a son. So their married life begins to be failure. Devi remains alone at the home. Now boredom and loneliness are her best friends. So she starts listening stories from her father-in-law to whom she call Baba. One day she requests to Mahesh that she wants to learn *Sanskrit* language because she wants to understand the quotations and notes in a better way which Baba uses during his story-telling. Mahesh denies this little request of Devi. Devi says him:

'I want to learn Sanskrit', I said.

'Why', Mahesh asked.

‘So I can understand Baba’s quotations better’, I said.

‘Don’t be foolish’, he said. ‘The English translations are good enough. And what will you do with all this highbrow knowledge?’ (Hariharan, TFN, 52)

Devi’s marriage with Mahesh turns her own life to the path of pains and sufferings. Happiness is now out of her life. Loneliness and boredom take place of happiness in her life. Devi expresses this condition of her life in the following lines: “I lay my cheek against the cool, a hard wood of the writing-table by window. The world outside is still, as if in deep mourning.” (Hariharan, TFN, 52) Mahesh’s behaviour towards his wife Devi is not only cold but indifferent also. He behaves in same way to his old servant Mayamma. He thinks only but never feels. He always takes work from his brain and locks her heart, no feeling for anyone. One day Mayamma has been lying on the mat due to her illness in a black room. On her illness condition Mahesh says to Devi, “so leave her alone, Mahesh said. If you fuss over her today, she will do it more and more often.” (53) Mahesh has a busy life when he just returns to his home then in hurry to go for next one. One day Devi finds that Mahesh just came in the home and preparing to next one. She talks to Mahesh to postpone the tour and remain in home and spend some time with her lonely wife because she has a right over her husband to live, spend some time in the company of her husband. On this, Mahesh harshly comments on her wife and on the all women of the world when Devi requests him to postpone his job tour. He says, “Why don’t I pray to be born a woman in my next birth, he teased. Then I won’t have to make a living at all.” (Hariharan, TFN, 54) Devi suffers a lot in the hands of this busy and indifferent husband. She expresses her sufferings and pains of her married life in these words:

The sacrificial knife, marriage, hung few inches above my neck for years, and I see now that I had learnt to love, to covet my tormentor. I am still a novice in the more subtle means of torture. I thought the knife would plunge in, slit, tear, rip across my neck and let the blood gush, the passion of the sacrifice whole, all-encompassing. Instead the knife draws a drop at a time. The games it plays with me are ignominious. It pricks my chin. (Hariharan, TFN, 54)

Mahesh in a long period of his married life only touched the body of Devi, her heart remains untouched and in search of true love. So she says, “The heart I have prepared so well for its demand remains untouched, unsought for.” (Hariharan, TFN, 54) Devi frustrates from the dullness and coldness of her boring married life. Marriage becomes so sour to her that she realizes failure of it and says:

After the early rites of initiation, learnt on old knees; the skills perfected under the eye of a jealous mother; the token rebellion, a concession to youth; this then is marriage, the end of ends two or three brief encounters a month when bodies shutter together, in lazy, inarticulate rest. (Hariharan, TFN, 54)

Mahesh stays only ten days in a month in his home and in these ten days only bodies come close to each other means an emotionless mechanical or automatic sex. Mahesh does not share a single word with her wife Devi during his stay at home. She becomes an inanimate object. She has never thought or even imagined that her life would become so boring and tasteless. She waits twenty long days and nights in a month for her tormenting husband. Waiting becomes the souring and integral part of her life. She says about her waiting for her husband:

And the rest? It is waiting, all over again, for a life to begin, or to end and begin again. My education has left me unprepared for the vast, yawning middle chapters of my womanhood. (Hariharan, TFN, 52)

One day the bridge of patience of this helpless and suffering waiting wife breaks when her sufferings gets out of control. She bluntly asks to Mahesh:

‘Why did you marry me?’ I asked

‘Whatever people get married for.’ Mahesh said. He peered into the mirror and readjusted the knot of her tie. ‘Thank God we Indians are not obsessed with love’. (Hariharan, TFN, 54-55)

In this suffocated atmosphere she thinks that she needs to be out from this torturing spell and cobweb and relax herself to connect with outer world. So she decides to do a job. One day she says to Mahesh:

‘I could look for some kind of job’. Mahesh looks at her with his doubtful eyes and says, ‘You could try. I suppose,’ he pauses, cautious. Mahesh is so even-tempered that he can make me feel guilty with a pause, an inward movement of his lips. (Hariharan, TFN, 55)

Further Mahesh uninterestingly gives another suggestion to weaken her courage. “There is so much for you to do at home. Mayamma is getting old, she needs help. If you need to get of the house, why not join Tara’s painting classes?” (Hariharan, TFN, 56) Then after little hesitation Devi says:

‘I suppose I can do that.’ I hesitate, but Mahesh has already forgotten my little problems. I have been taken care of; my idle hands have been directed to better use. (Hariharan, TFN, 56)

But after few minutes Mahesh forgets all about the serious talk about the job of Devi. Mahesh provides all materialistic comforts to Devi but does not time, freedom and love which are the basic requirements of Devi. She needs love, affection, care, feelings and emotions and more specially time from her husband Mahesh. But besides providing all these to his wife, he asks her, “Do you need the car to do any shopping?” (Hariharan, TFN, 71), and on this Devi replies, “I haven’t thought of it yet, I said nervously.” (Hariharan, TFN, 71) Mahesh never says any appreciating words during the long period of their married life. He does appreciate Devi for her higher education from America but does not allow her to do a job. But opposite of this, one night while they are in bed he comments about her education, “This is what comes of educating a

woman. Your grandmother was barely literate. Wasn't she a happier woman than you are? What is it you want?" (Hariharan, TFN, 74) Mahesh is a patriarchal Brahmin who passed his degree in management means a good educated man but still he does not agree upon the point that his wife is his life companion and requires freedom and equality which her counterpart enjoys from a long time. He continues Manu's tradition of woman slavery at present times. He forces his one sided decisions on his wife. So he demands a baby from Devi. "I want you to have my baby." (Hariharan, TFN, 74) But he does not say 'our' baby on the place of 'my' baby and does not say 'we' want baby on the place of 'I' want baby.

Now Devi repents on her decision to marry with Mahesh. She thinks that she destroyed her own life by her own hands. She targets to herself and reproaches:

Am I neurotic because I am a lazy woman who does not polish her floors every day? An aimless fool because I swallowed my hard-earned education. (Hariharan, TFN, 74)

Mahesh does not believe in the ideology of equality of men-women. He is an ardent follower of Manu who thinks that man is superior and woman is an inferior creature. One day Devi says that she also want to learn rummy- a game of cards, on this Mahesh replies to Devi, "Don't be silly, all the others are men." (Hariharan, TFN, 79) However, Mahesh is an educated man but by ideology he is a traditional Brahmin. Devi turns into a prisoner or captive in the home of Mahesh. She cannot take the decisions of her life and she becomes a non-living object. Mohit K. Ray rightly observes about Devi's suffering condition:

Her husband Mahesh expects from her merely the 'service' of a wife who will look after him, obey him, wait for him, bear children, be merely a puppet with strings to be drawn and controlled by him. (154)

She is a wooden puppet whose strings are in the hands of her tormenting husband. She declares: "I am a wooden puppet in his hands. I stand by him, a silent wife." (8 Hariharan, TFN, 3)

After the death of Baba, her father-in-law Devi feels more alone and job tours of Mahesh turns longer and longer than the usual tours. Ray judiciously observes the thinking of Mahesh about his wife Devi:

Mahesh keeps emotions and intimacy at abeyance for they give rise to vulnerability, is shrewd and devious in all his moves, want Devi to bear a child. Mahesh's insistence on this issue seems to Devi an enforcement of the 'roles' prescribed for a woman when she becomes a wife, even there may not be any genuine affection and love between the couple. (Hariharan, TFN, 164)

When Mahesh returns from his long tours he asks Devi about her pregnancy in this way:

When he returns, he waits for Mayamma to shuffle out of the room with his bags and he turns to me. Any News, he asks. His eyes quickly appraise my body, all bones and flat stomach. 'No news,' I say. (Hariharan, TFN, 86)

On such questioning Devi feels insulted in her own eyes because whenever Mahesh returns from his long tours this is the first and the last question or the only sentence of their conversation. Devi fed up to listen this question again and again then one day she aggressively asks him, “Why do you want a baby, I asked. What kind of a question is that, Mahesh said.” (Hariharan, TFN, 87) The gap between their married life now increased at a vast level. Now Devi stops think about Mahesh and develops an extra-marital affair with Gopal who is a singer by profession but Mahesh does not aware about this. Mahesh has only one thing in his mind that is his wish of a baby from his wife Devi. One day he returns from his tour and says to Devi: “I have been to the doctor, Mahesh said, his eyes not meeting mine. He says, I’m- I’m fine. I’ll fix an appointment for you to see the gynecologist.” (Hariharan, TFN, 89) Devi gets an electric shock after hear this from Mahesh. Now absolutely she feels tortured and insulted in the home of Mahesh. Devi thinks that however both the father and the husband are men but they are completely opposite to each other. She says:

It is useful to remember that a husband is a man. So is a father. He trembles if you climb a tree... He holds you back from journey, mistrustful of devils, snakes young boys’s legs, look, anything at all... He (the husband) ties a fine chain of beaten gold around your outstretched neck, he marks you with your name. (Hariharan, TFN, 92)

“Devi is faced with emptiness and meaningless of existence in her marital life.” (Ray, 163) So she decides to leave him and in the last one day she finally leaves the home of Mahesh in the presence of Mayamma and joins Gopal, her lover. This is the tragic end of this relationship. Mahesh’s expectations from his wife Devi has been rightly observed by P. Geeta:

Her husband Mahesh expects from her merely the ‘service’ of a wife who will look after him, obey him, wait for him, bear children, be merely a puppet with strings to be drawn and controlled by him. (154)

Mahesh and Devi relation is an example of husband-wife relationship which juxtaposes a lonely and suffering wife and a busy and indifferent husband. She says,

I have made very few choices but once or twice, when a hand wavered, when a string was cut loose, I have stumbled on stage alone, greedy for a story of my own. (Hariharan, TFN, 137)

Their relationship has a tragic end the wife finally leaves her husband in the presence of Mayamma and accepts her lover because the husband has no time, love and care for his wife. Mayamma says to her that she has a full life before her to live. So she appreciates Devi’s decision of leaving the house of Mahesh and addresses to Devi:

... my daughter, my tale nears its end... My words wing in a different direction and build a nest for the coming of the night. Yours, thirsty, seek the river, miles away, where the dim forest gives way to a clear, transparent flood of light. (Hariharan, TFN, 126)

In the last the married life of Mahesh and Devi prove to be a big failure. Mahendra Rana finds some autobiographical notes in the story of Devi and Githa Hariharan when he says:

Hariharan herself returned to India after attending graduate school of the United States and this novel is an account of the foreign returned Devi's attempt to find the way of living in contemporary India, cunningly interleaved with the tales of heroes and heroines told to her as a child by her grandmother: her use of these tales as a part of fluid tradition of story-telling question the close idea of 'tradition.' (408)

The relation of Mahadevan and Sita shows this husband-wife relationship with another angle. Sita is Devi's mother. She was twenty years old at the time of her marriage with Mahadevan. She has a fond of playing Veena. She was in the practice of playing Veena five to six hours per day before her marriage. Githa Hariharan depicts her devotion to Veena like this:

She had poured all her energies into her hours of practice on the Veena. The best gurus- the best a small town like hers could attract- could taught her all they knew- and Sita was a brilliant pupil, quick, deft fingered and perseverant. She practised for at least five to six hours every day, and at night she slept with hands stretched on either side, the callouses on her fingers gently massaged with warm olive oil. (Hariharan, TFN, 101)

When she met her to be husband Mahadevan and his parents she played her Veena before them. After listening to music of her Veena, Mahadevan and his family forgot her dark complexion of skin, and they were overwhelmed by her talent and their good fortune that is dowry.

But the lyricism of *sahana*, the splendour of *bhairvi* and *todi*, the wholeness of *sampurna* raga like *shankarabharanam*, did little to help the transition from talented bride to efficient, reliable daughter-in-law. (Hariharan, TFN, 102)

During her study period Sita has mastered in one lesson which she used in her whole life.

You did not get result with wishy-washy half heartedness. Tremble at blisters, callouses or blood, and you can forget about a raga whole and complete, a continuous sequence of notes perfectly stung together. (Hariharan, TFN, 102)

When she married with Mahadevan she brought a Veena along with her that she has inherited as a part of her dowry. She is now in her new house with new people and atmosphere. In her married home she plays Veena every day in morning. She plays so beautifully Devi's grandmother tells her.

Our household came to a standstill as the tears streamed down our faces. Through the wetness, your father's (Sita's husband Mahadevan's) eyes shone with pride as he settled on that head bent over the Veena, last in concentration. (Hariharan, TFN, 30)

Sita used to play Veena every day after she has finished her household work. But one day her father-in-law was sitting in front of gods, ready for her morning prayers. He does not find the thing which he needs. On that day flowers were not picked and the floor was not swept. He called to Sita in anger but she does not hear his voice in the musical sound of Veena and the spontaneous musical sound of Veena was coming from her room. He roared: "Put that Veena away. Are you a wife or a daughter-in-law?" (Hariharan, TFN, 30) Then Sita reached to the strings of her precious and loving Veena and then she pulled out them out of the wooden case. Then "she looked up at my husband, her eyes dry and narrowed, and said in a clear stinging whisper, 'Yes. I am a wife and a daughter-in-law'." (Hariharan, TFN, 30) After that day she never touched the Veena again. She became a dutiful wife and a daughter-in-law. The house never heard that heart-touching music again. Mahadevan knows before his marriage that Veena is the food of life for Sita. She loves playing Veena than anything else. She can become a Veena maestro if anybody provides opportunity to her. But after knowing the whole incident Mahadevan has no courage to request his father to allow Sita for playing Veena again. In other words, he fails as a responsible husband at this moment. If he dares and makes a courageous action then the picture of their married life may be totally different and Sita could earn name and fame with her Veena playing. But the timid and muted husband also registered his participation in murdering her talent and happiness. After this Sita stops playing Veena and puts her learnt lesson for the long hour she earlier sat bent over Veena and she used this talent in domestic household works.

She spent in her kitchen; or in her office (everyone called it that at first as joke), the windowless storeroom where she sat all afternoon under naked bulb, poring over her account books. She plotted and single minded devotion, till years later, her schemes bore ripe, fulfilling fruit. (Hariharan, TFN, 102)

Her husband is a passive person who never participates with her for her happiness and care. But on the other hand Sita plays her role of a talented and devoted wife who by her love and care changes the life scenario of her husband's life. By her relentless efforts and devotion she makes her husband Mahadevan a renewed and a publically recognized personality. Sita plays a vital role in the life-making of her husband and makes the saying hundred percent true that behind a successful man there is a hand of a woman and in the life of Mahadevan this woman is his own wife Sita. Sita pours her full energies into turning a dutiful wife. Githa Hariharan depicts her mastery as wife in household works:

Then it was Ambition. This was a harder raga to master; here she could only be an accompanist to her husband's solo performance. And this was a concert that seemed doomed to ramble, bluster about, and fizzle into a mediocre, amateurish ending. The budding maestro in Sita kept up appearances, and the reticent accompanist eased gently painlessly into the role of conductor, the guru behind the imitative disciple's brilliance on stage. (Hariharan, TFN, 102-103)

She saves money for the literary goals of her husband. She sacrifices her all ambitions, goals and dreams. She even takes little meal because of saving. After few days of her marriage, one night Mahadevan finds:

Sita in the kitchen at midnight, ravenously eating the chapattis left over from dinner. He realized with shock that she missed rice: all her life, she has eaten three square meals of life. Marriage has meant that Sita would have to learn to dry chapattis, which refused to go down the throat like sticky, wet balls of mashed rice. This was the sort of detail which overwhelmed Mahadevan. A woman who did not complain, a woman who knew how to make sacrifices without fanfare: Sita was such a woman, he thought, and she had earned his unswerving loyalty. (Hariharan, TFN, 103)

Mahadevan comes to know this hard fact of Sita's sacrifice for his career. He recognizes her loyalty to which he could never ignore or forget. But he is too late that he acknowledges her virtues. She does what she can to prove herself a dutiful wife. Now her life has a straight path and a single goal that is her wifedom. Veena is now an outdated dream of her life. Sita becomes so busy in playing her wifely duties that she forgets her other relations and relatives also. She sacrifices her love for Veena that is her lover. We find that "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 surgical cut." (Hariharan, TFN, 103)

She has no time to meet her gurus, friends, mother, and father. After her marriage she never could go to her own home, even she no time to remember her childhood days:

She seemed to forget, along with string less Veena condemned to dumbness, her own mother, father, gurus of her childhood. She wrote them occasional duty-dictated letter, but she could never find a time convenient enough to revisit the town where they still lived, or to indulge in a narcissistic voyage to the small, claustrophobic home replete with dated, obsolete memories. (Hariharan, TFN, 103-104)

Sita plays the role of a mentor in the life of Mahadevan. By her help and care he gets promotion after promotion, till he was within the exclusive circle of fast-raising executives. All this achievement of life he wants to say many things to Sita in the feeling of pay back:

Mahadevan would have said something, but he saw the artist's hands, soft and smooth from lack of use. He said less and less, but he dreamt through long high level meeting and earned the reputation of a discreet, good listener. (Hariharan, TFN, 104)

By the devotion to her husband as a dutiful wife, a life companion with care, love and affection, she wins all the grounds of a good wife. She makes her husband's dreams her own while sacrifices her own dreams, talent love and Veena. Now the dreams of Mahadevan are the dreams of Sita and his success is her success. It is sacrifice of Sita that now Mahadevan's reputation increases day after day. She sacrifices her own life or she fails in her own life due to her wifely duties and the result of her sacrifices is that that her husband becomes a reputed personality:

But Mahadevan (fifteen years, after all, is just a small chunk of a successful life), became a full-fledged sahib, a Brahmin among Brahmins (pure blood and a healthy bank balance), who could list among his achievements a new car, a chauffeur, three fulltime servants and a gardener, the best of schools for his daughters, a pension for that senile fabulist, his old storytelling mother in the village, and a large, renovated old house, chosen, said Sita, for its distinctive character. (Hariharan, TFN, 104)

All this he gains just and just because of Sita. This high success of Mahadevan is the long story of Sita's sacrifices, devotion and relentless care. Mahadevan is now in his fifties but he looks more tired and aged than Sita thinks. Mahadevan hardly enjoys the taste of his hard-earned success and high reputation. One day Sita finds him dead in his room by heart attack on his chair. She burns his body in Africa and returns to Madras. This is the end of their married life. Their relation is an example of husband-wife relationship in which a wife devotes her all life to her wifhood and to the success of her husband. Sita fails as an artist and gets success as a wife or it is a story of a failure artist and a successful wife where a wife turns to a guru and path maker who takes the lantern in her hand paves the path of success for her husband.

The relation of Mayamma and her husband throws light on the husband-wife relationship and shows a new side of this husband-wife relationship. Mayamma married to her husband when she was only twelve years old. She is so unaware of marriage at her marriage time that she rubbed her eyes and yawned as she lean back in her father's lap. The hairy bare chested Brahmin priest frowned at the girl bride at the time of Mayamma marriage and said:

Flourish without fierce looks and without harming your husband; be good to animals, amiable to everything else; be the mothers of heroes, be devoted to the gods and bringer of happiness. Large hearted Indra! Shower on the young bride brave sons and good fortune; give her ten sons; and make her husband his eleventh. (Hariharan, TFN, 79)

When the marriage ceremony is over she enters in her husband's house. But from the first day the behaviour of her husband towards her totally indifferent and the degree of this indifference increases day after day and makes Mayamma's life worse than worst. Hariharan describes her husband in these words:

When the smoke clear, she went to live with her husband. He grows a little more crooked every day. He ran away from school and gambled with village-corner riff-raff. His eyes turns silly when they rested on a woman's back, bent over her work. (Hariharan, TFN, 79)

So from the beginning of her married life Mayamma suffers a lot in the hands of her husband. But her sufferings become doubled when she is unable to born a child. She is tortured by her husband and her mother-in-law for her barrenness in a very extreme degree. His husband never stops her mother for her ill treated behaviour with his wife, Mayamma. Her husband is a drunkard who also enjoys extra-marital relations with the other women of the village. He enjoys "toddy and love-making in the fields." (Hariharan, TFN, 120) She becomes mother and gives birth a son after a long period of ten years of sufferings on an auspicious day of Diwali. After eight years her husband ran away from the house taking with him all the money in the house. So this husband-wife relationship shows an angle where a wife suffers extremely in the hands of her husband, mother-in-law and finally in the hands of her own son but there is no mercy in heart of her husband to save her from this cruel grip of sufferings but he also plays the role of a tormenter in the life of Mayamma and in the last, remains absent from the suffering scene of her life. Mohit K. Ray rightly observes about her life:

She (Mayamma) already beaten down both physically and psychologically, a victim of the arbitrary scriptural and social laws. She is a silent witness to the cross-currents in Devi's life and wishes for her a different future than her own. (162)

Gauri and her husband present another picture of this husband-wife relationship. Gauri is a maidservant in the house of Devi's grandmother. After her marriage she comes to know about her husband that is not a human-being but an animal. Gauri says, "My husband was an animal." (Hariharan, TFN, 32) He beats her mercilessly and not only he but also his father means father-in-law of Gauri also tortures Gauri at an extreme degree. Gauri tells her story of suffering in her own words when she says, "They treated me like dirt." (Hariharan, TFN, 32) So because of the brutality of her husband towards her she suffers a lot in her married life. Marriage proves to her a suffering only, not a single moment of happiness and joy but sufferings, tortures, and pains only. During the animal behaviour and mistreatment of her husband and father-in-law she develops an extra-marital relationship with her "albino trunk" brother-in-law and runs away with him from her laws' home which was a tormenting prison for her. So the relationship of Gauri and her husband presents

a new dimension of husband-wife relationship where a wife suffers under the animal behaviour of her husband and ran away from the home and save herself.

The relationship of Baba and his wife Parvatiamma presents another side of husband-wife relationship. Baba is father-in-law of Devi to whom Devi calls by this name. His mother tells him that there are three girls from decent families in her mind for the match of her loving son. She further tells him the names of these three girls; she says the names of them are, Hema, Parvati, and Mohana. This relationship is the example of the old times. The mother of Baba asks him whether he wants to see the photographs of these three girls and on this Baba replies to his mother:

No, no said Baba. If you think they are healthy and well-trained, why should I doubt on your word? But I don't like the names Hema and Mohana. They are too frivolous. They sound like back-chatting, tantrum-throwing, and modern girls. You can go see Parvati. There's an old, reliable name! Go see if you like her. (Hariharan, TFN, 62)

Here Baba, the boy believes only in name, he has a view that name presents the whole personality and all the characteristics of a woman. Even he does not go to see the bride. He says, "I saw my wife for the first time on our wedding day." (Hariharan, TFN, 62) Parvatiamma is very religious nature woman; most of her time she spends in worshipping. She obsesses with the ideas of traditional religious orthodoxy. Baba is also an ardent believer in the inhuman ideology of Manu. He has the ideas of patriarchy. So one day Parvatiamma thinks about to leave her husband's house with her obsessed religious views in searching of gods or spirituality. She does this because there is no bond or relationship of love and care which can stop her from her decision of leaving the house. There is no understanding, feeling and matching of thoughts between them. There is a little dialogue between them. So naturally single physical bond cannot tie up the husband-wife forever and after the birth of Mahesh and Lalita this bond also almost come to an end. Mohit K. Ray rightly observes about this couple:

Her husband's stories of saints and their dutiful wives had however evinced a different response from her – instead of abiding by the dictums and roles laid down by society, she chooses to move out and beyond the oppressive sphere of the familiar and known to the unknown and inexplicable. She had left the domestic, quotidian, domain ascribed to her, renouncing the worldly in search for god. By making a definitive move towards finding her 'own' story, repudiating the restricted space allotted to her as a woman, she in her quest of her identity and selfhood. (161)

So in the absence of emotional mutual bond Parvatiamma turns to the worshipping of gods and spirituality. One day, finally she leaves the house of her husband in the presence of Mayamma when her husband and son, Mahesh out of the house with a letter in the hands of Mayamma for her husband. But as a dutiful wife

she says to Mayamma, “You know how to look after him (her husband), and keep him comfortable.” (Hariharan, TFN, 63) When her husband comes back home, Mayamma gives him that letter which his wife Parvatamma left for him. Now after going of Parvatamma he comes to know the place and meaning of a wife in his life. Baba is one of them who come to know the price of the things when they leave them alone. Mayamma asks him that when will Parvatamma return. He replies, “Never again.” (Hariharan, TFN, 64) Further she adds: “She made her choice. For a woman who leaves her home in search of a god; only death is a home coming.” (64)

This is the end of this husband-wife relationship in which the wife leaves her husband’s home in search of gods left behind her husband alone.

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