

BARREN WITCHES IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S
THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT

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Women's reproductive implication – their capacity to bear and nourish children – has to a very large extent defined a woman's role, her worth, her quality of life and the treatment meted out to her in and by the society. It has certainly come at a huge personal cost for women – subverting her identity and reducing her to just a womb. Her being a 'wife' also has its direct bearing on its essential counterpart of being a mother and carrying on the task of bearing and rearing children.

The patriarchal society has turned what could have been one of the most rewarding and procreative experience into a fearful trajectory. Blessed with the capacity of forwarding human race, motherhood could very well have been a symbol of utmost power and ultimate panoptic status of exaltation, but instead, in all its practicality, it is a major source of anxiety for woman. It is this power of bearing children and producing another generation of family that leads to her suffering at the hands of her husband and in-laws. Her capacity to bear children and the gender of the children she bears has direct implication on her worth in the society. Krishnaraj writes, "... the normative glorification of motherhood in Indian religious traditions, poetry and prose rarely translates itself into reality in the lives of mothers" (Pretacs). Instead, the traditional concept of motherhood is synonymous with a willing or unwilling tolerance of a life of sacrifices, suffering and often, exploitation. Motherhood is considered to be an inevitable, natural destiny and ultimate aspiration of a woman's life and it is a commonly held belief that a woman's happiness and fulfilment can only come through it. In fact, the idea of completeness of a woman is strongly projected through motherhood. Society, in all its limited and limiting view, looks at her only in terms of her procreative faculty.

Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a text heavy in women issues. It addresses a number of complexes resulting from various facets of being a woman – her preparation for a life of silent and silenced sacrifice, obedience, of her existence for the sake of comfort of others, her initiation into motherhood through menstruation, the perpetuation of her complete surrender reinforced by myths, traditions and culture, her grooming as a prospective bride, her endless