

## Flaws and Hope: Reading the Thousand Faces of Night with Shades' Habits of Hope Theory

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### Abstract

Githa Hariharan in her maiden novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, has produced memorable women characters, who have been highly lauded by great critics and general public. Devi, the protagonists of the novel, is identified as an epitome of modern educated girl, who searches for her identity in the transition period of Indian society from conventional social practices to modern aspirations of a liberated woman. Eventhough, Devi is considered as a character, who suffers throughout the novel, she can also be seen as a woman with a determination to live. She has been enamoured with hope to face her challenges boldly. Patrick Shade, an American Psychologist, has brought out the theory, named Habits of Hope, which has provided a complete picture of the functioning of hope in human psyche. Hence, the application of the Habit of Hope theory on the life of Devi could unravel the mysterious pattern of the hope cultivated by her.

**Keywords:** epitome, transition period, liberated women, hope, human psyche, pattern of hope.

### INTRODUCTION:

Githa Hariharan, in her well acclaimed novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*, presents a series of women characters in pursuit of their goals. She has proved her versatility by creating women characters from various sections of the society and they are destined to pursue different levels of goals. Invariably, all the characters in the novels struggle to realize their goals and particularly the plight of Devi has reflected the struggles of the Indian educated women. Hence, analyzing the components of the hope possessed by Devi, with the parameters of Habits of Hope theory proposed by Patrick Shade, would clearly showcases the strengths and short comings of her. The nature of hope determines the quality of life and Shade describes the scope of hope as follows:

The scope of hope varies as widely as does its content. For instance, our hopes may concern objects or events that affect us as individuals (getting a promotion, for instance), our families (finding and maintaining a safe neighborhood in which to live), or most of society (establishing economic stability and political peace). Moreover, hope's compass can include the earthly goods of this life or extend to those of an afterlife (eternal salvation). Indeed, hope can even have itself as its own object, as when we hope to remain hopeful throughout the course of life<sup>2</sup>.

### HABITS OF HOPE THEORY:

Shade identifies three components of good hope, namely particular hopes, habit of hope and hopefulness. He has also proclaimed that among the three components of good hope, identifying and fixing a particular hope holds a important position in realizing the desired end, because once the hope is fixed, it consumes lot of time and energy for realizing it. As time is crucial in our life, we cannot afford more time to test and turn back to start the journey again. Hence, taking so many trails would result in the loss of available time and resource, which in turn would delay the success. Sometimes there is a danger of losing interest while so many failures are met. Considering these facts, he recommends for a thorough study, before finalizing any hope, because the particular hope should be worth of spending time and energy. Tracing the existence of exceptional canons of Habit of Hope Theory, namely Futurity, goodness, arduousness, possibility, persistence, resourcefulness, courage, proper direction and hopefulness of Devi would enable the reader to appreciate and realize the mental mettle of the character.

### HOPE OF DEVI:

Before analyzing Devi, understanding the choices made by her mother, Sita, would provide a framework for the comprehensive analysis of Devi's character. Sita exhibits her intelligence in fixing her goal pragmatically and executes it to perfection. As suggested by Shade, she analyses the futurity, goodness, its arduous nature and possibility, before committing her. She fixes her family's well being as her goal. Sita is the only woman character in the novel, who has got a pragmatic approach towards her life. Her attitude is explained as, "She hated all illusion,

however tantalizing a form it assumed. She knew what illusion was: she had seized it firmly by its roots and pulled it out of her soul till the enticing stems of the seven-noted scale, came apart, broken and disharmonious in a cluster of pathetic twangs” (TFN 105).

Devi, unlike her mother, does not possess the practical approach towards her life, hence she oscillates between her desire and reality. Sita has got a precise vision on her goal and demonstrates the perfect control over her family and her life, whereas Devi fails miserably to focus her attention towards any particular goal. As her mind is filled with the fantasy stories narrated by her grandmother during her childhood, she finds it very hard to approach her life practically. Her weakness in understanding the reality of life has left her in utter disillusionment towards her goal. When she is sent to US for higher studies, she considers getting a good job as her goal and completes her graduation successfully. She has developed love towards Dan in US, but she has broken her relationship when she is asked to return to India, after her studies. She is neither sure of her professional goal nor the personal need. She basically falls short in the ability to identify her particular hope, by analyzing the futurity, goodness and possibilities. Eventhough she possesses positive attitude towards her life, mostly she lives in the world of fantasy and takes decision momentarily guided by her desire than after a rational interpretation of the situation. Hence, she fails in identifying a particular hope and Snyder states the importance of finding a particular hope as follows:

Hoping is an activity of pursuing an end by promoting the growth of agency, whether individual or social. We grow, either by expanding our own abilities (as when I develop new capacities in writing the book) or by connecting with other agencies. Hope thus signifies the transcendence of limits through the growth of agency. This is hope’s larger meaning. It involves transcendence, but atranscendence rooted in actual conditions, chief among which is our own agency. (Shade 71-72)

She fails to stand for any of her decision, as she does not decide on anything in particular. She has just followed her mother’s direction and takes her life as it comes to her. She loves her mother and values her contribution towards her family. Devi expresses the same as, “She was always our anchor-rock, never wrong, never to be questioned, a self-evident fact of our existence. That she might need me, my hesitant, self doubting presence was intoxicating”(TFN 16). When she returns from US, she wishes to work in a reputed firm, but then when she is asked to get married, she accepts that immediately without even showing her protest to pursue her dream. Even when she is given an option of choosing her life partner, without contemplating much on her expectations practically, she chooses Mahesh for his honesty, without considering his nature of profession, which later proves to be a fatal blow to her. As she has not felt the manly affection from her father, she has developed a great expectation to get the same from her husband. But, she has not pondered over the fact, whether she could establish her expected emotional bondage while choosing her husband. Her blind hope, ignoring the profession and the life style of Mahesh, leave her in isolation and her soul hunts for the comforting hands. Her failure in marital life can be associated with her weakness of analyzing and fixing the hope practically as suggested by Shade. Shade always insists on studying the practical possibility of hope before fixing it as follows:

Hope needs to be practical by having grounds; yet it should not be restricted to present activities and conditions, for it is practical, in the sense of productive and expansive, to hope. Hope thus has two modes of practicality: being grounded in real conditions and being productive of new and better ones. Together, I shall argue, these two modes constitute hope’s essential nature as conditioned transcendence<sup>7</sup>.

Her father in law, Baba, has tried to give some practical insights by narrating anecdotes from saints’ life and he tries to instigate the practical approach to life, by enlightening her on the normal duties of married woman. His stories, to some extent, nullify the fantasy world of Devi and she tries to accept the reality slowly. His departure to US, to live with his daughter, leaves Devi in isolation and the compressed fantasy world in her mind again pops up and has started to haunt her mind. Even though her house maid, Mayamma, tries her best to make Devi to realize the practicality of the life, her advices are not sufficient enough to suppress her fantasies. She is once again possessed by fantasy thoughts and allows her mind to get influenced. As a result, she is not able to distinguish between right and wrong and lacks the skill of persistence to wait and win her husband’s affection. In his habits of hope concept, Shade advocates persistence as an important element which in turn will make the other two components, namely resourcefulness and courage functional. It has become evident that Devi’s lack of persistence in Mahesh’s issue has nullified the role of resourcefulness and courage in her to face and conquer the reality of her married life. Thus, the Habits of Hope concept has brought out the reasons behind the suffering of Devi.

After her marital disappointments, her longing soul has got enticed with the music of Gopal and she has started spending more time with him, to revive her spirit with the soothing nature of the music. The attraction towards his music resulted in establishing an emotional bond with him and further she has started believing that her union with Gopal would provide her the manly protection and emotional bond, for which her soul is carving. Her immaturity and lack of knowledge on reality of life came to lime light, when she decides to lead her rest of her life with Gopal.

Once again she has taken a hasty decision under the influence of her emotion, without considering the futurity and goodness of her action. As she has got fancied with the honesty of Mahesh, by blinding herself to his work nature, again she has blinded herself towards the magical spell music created by Gopal, without pondering over her practical predicament and status of her life, when she leaves Mahesh. Hence, mostly Devi's actions are not characterized by the futurity and goodness as recommended by Shade. As the pragmatic approach is missing in her choices, even though she possesses hope that cannot be considered as good hope as per Shade's theory and it is supported by even other psychologists as mentioned below:

Yes, there are evil things in the world, but just as genuine are the good things in the world: like friendship, love, and service. The real world is more complex than a Greek myth or a New York Times op-ed piece, and we should approach it in its full complexity, acknowledging good and evil, and recognizing good hope and bad hope. (Peterson 96)

Devi lives happily with Gopal for some months by enjoying his music and receiving his emotional responses, but when the time has passed, Gopal has got busy in his work and he is not able to respond to the emotional needs of Devi. Gradually she gets out of the magic spell created by Gopal's music and she has realized that she could not fit into the environment of Gopal legally. She has again started to experience loneliness in Gopal's house and she decides strongly to go back to her mother, with whom she could enjoy the unconditional love and genuine care. On the whole, she could not be considered as successful person in her life, as Sita and even though she is courageous and educated, her weaknesses in few elements of Habits of hope bring her eternal sufferings. Shade insists the crucial role of habits of hope in life as given below:

Habits can be individual or social, but in either case they are our primary tools or means of acting. While we can draw upon a vast array of habits in realizing any end, habits of hope are those vital abilities which directly and indirectly nurture our commitment to and realization of remote, obstructed ends. Chief among them are persistence, general resourcefulness, and courage. Although our hopes are partly contingent upon conditions beyond our control, it is by means of these habits that we play a substantial role in realizing them.

## CONCLUSION:

The close study of the novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, with the canons of Habit of Hope theory clearly points out the reasons for the success and failure of Devi. From the thorough examination, it is obvious that Sita, who follows the parameters of Habit of Hope theory, showcases strong personality, who has a complete control over her life and realizes her particular hope, whereas Devi suffers because of her weakness, with regard to Habit of Hope theory. Devi fails miserably, because of her fantasy nature and she lacks the positive trait of persistence to change her husband with her love and affection. While stressing the practicality of hope, shade says "By emphasizing hope's rich practicality, we can thus avoid the charges that hope is empty, necessarily dangerous, or too mundane to sustain us" (Shade 8). Though, Devi possesses hope, it is the two components of hope, namely the lack of practicality and persistence have led her into a miserable path.

## WORK CITED:

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