

Original Article

Exploring Feminist Consciousness in Githa Hariharan's Writings: A Feminist Perspective

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*Githa Hariharan belongs to new crop of writers who contributes commendably for the regeneration of women's lives. Githa Hariharan, a prominent Indian author, intricately weaves feminist consciousness into her narratives, challenging patriarchal structures and illuminating the multifaceted struggles of women in contemporary Indian society. Githa Hariharan's novels represent feminist phenomena in an interesting manner. She devotes most of her time for the uplift of the marginalized sections of the society. She has proved that art and activism could go hand in hand to bring changes for the eradication of poverty, rejection of patriarchal ideologies and male-dominated culture, campaign against deforestation and the creation of eco-friendly environment. This paper evaluates the feminist Consciousness theme through her major works, particularly *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), and *In Times of Siege* (2003). Using postcolonial and feminist ideas, this study explores how Hariharan shows women's ways of surviving, finding their identities, and resisting oppression. It examines these themes through stories passed across generations, new interpretations of myths, and small but meaningful acts of resistance. Hariharan not only points out gender inequality but also supports peaceful ways of resisting oppression and encourages women to develop identities free from colonial influences. This study shows that Hariharan has made an important contribution to Indian feminist literature by raising awareness about social issues and encouraging readers to question deeply rooted cultural beliefs. Through detailed analysis of her works and expert opinions, the paper highlights how literature can help promote feminist thinking and social change.*

Keywords: Indian women, Feminism, Consciousness, Identity, Resistance, Rejection of Patriarchal Ideologies.

Introduction

Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. She is an Indian author and editor based in New Delhi. She currently works as freelance editor. She is the author of Novels, Short Stories, Essays, Newspaper Articles and Columns. Githa Hariharan is a mouthpiece of Indian women and their rights. Her all novels and stories look at power politics in some way or the other. Her fiction has a thousand ways of giving us a new take on the dynamics of power relations. Her writing reveals the women's individual identity and the identity of the community. Githa Hariharan is a versatile writer whose novels, short stories, and essays, earning her accolades such as the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for "The Thousand Faces of Night". Her works are deeply rooted in the socio-cultural fabric of India, addressing themes of gender, history, and power dynamics with a nuanced feminist lens. Hariharan's feminism is not simply borrowed from Western ideas. Instead, it is shaped by Indian social and cultural realities. It combines ideas of equality and freedom from India's independence movement, constitutional rights, and modern education with traditional Indian myths and storytelling traditions. At a time when Indian women face challenges from both traditional expectations and the pressures of globalization, Hariharan's stories help readers understand feminist consciousness. This means becoming aware of how patriarchy limits and controls women and then striving for independence, mutual support, and the freedom to create one's own identity. This paper examines feminist consciousness in Githa Hariharan's literary works. It first explains the idea of feminist consciousness in the context of Indian feminism and then analyzes her major novels in detail.



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The study argues that Githa Hariharan uses different voices and the experiences of different generations of women to challenge patriarchal beliefs and traditions. Through her stories, she shows how women can come together, support one another, and gain strength beyond their individual struggles. By combining earlier research with new interpretations, this study presents Hariharan as a writer who connects the ideas of second-wave feminism, which focuses on equality, with third-wave feminism, which highlights diversity, multiple identities, and the reclaiming of cultural traditions.

Feminist Consciousness is the critical awareness of gender-based oppression, inequality, and the systemic structures of patriarchy that subordinate women and restrict their autonomy, agency, and self-definition. It also involves recognizing that social, cultural, political, and economic institutions can maintain gender inequality and make unfair treatment of women seem normal or acceptable.

Main elements of Feminist Consciousness:

1. **Awareness of Oppression:** Recognizing that gender inequality is not just a personal problem faced by individual women, but a larger social issue. It is deeply rooted in patriarchal beliefs, traditions, myths, laws, and everyday practices that give men more power and create unequal treatment of women.
2. **Rejection of Internalized Subordination:** Questioning and rejecting traditional roles such as the obedient wife or self-sacrificing mother when these roles restrict a woman's freedom, identity, and opportunities to grow and achieve her full potential.
3. **Agency and Resistance:** Moving from quietly accepting suffering to actively challenging injustice. This can happen through expressing one's ideas, telling personal stories, leaving oppressive relationships, or working together with others to bring about change.
4. **Reclamation of Narrative:** Looking at myths, history, and cultural stories from a woman's point of view to challenge male-centered interpretations and give importance to women's experiences, voices, and identities.
5. **Solidarity and Intersectionality** (in evolved forms): Understanding that discrimination against women is often connected to other forms of inequality such as class, caste, race, religion, and the effects of colonial history. This awareness encourages people from different backgrounds to work together in the struggle for equality and justice.

In **literary and cultural point of view** postcolonial and Indian feminist writing such as Githa Hariharan's works, feminist consciousness is often shown as a conflict between traditional social expectations and modern personal goals. This struggle helps women understand themselves better and develop a stronger sense of identity. It also turns personal experiences of pain and oppression into an awareness of larger social and political issues. Through storytelling, writers challenge old beliefs and help women think independently and confidently about their lives and identities.

Feminist Consciousness in Indian Literature

In Indian literature, feminist consciousness is often shown through a criticism of the powerful patriarchal systems that influence women's thoughts, feelings, and lives. These systems can make women accept their unequal position as normal. Over time, however, many women become aware of this oppression and begin to question, challenge, and resist it. Unlike Eurocentric feminism, Indian variants are inflected by caste, class, religion, and colonialism, where women's marginalization is perpetuated through myths, arranged marriages, and familial duties. Hariharan engages this by portraying women not as passive victims but as active agents who interrupt cycles of suppression through storytelling and introspection.

Her approach is similar to existentialist feminism, which encourages women to discover their true selves and achieve personal growth despite social restrictions. Her female characters often experience an inner conflict between traditional expectations of obedience and their desire for freedom and independence, reflecting the challenges faced by many Indian women. This struggle helps them become stronger and more self-aware. They reinterpret traditional stories and folklore from a woman's perspective, turning them from tools of male dominance into sources of strength, confidence, and empowerment.

Analysis of *The Thousand Faces of Night*

The Thousand Faces of Night, Hariharan's debut novel, serves as a foundational text for her feminist explorations, chronicling three generations of women—grandmother, mother, and daughter—whose lives intersect in a tapestry of suppressed desires and emergent defiance. The title evokes the multifaceted identities women assume under patriarchy, drawing from Hindu mythology to parallel ancient epics like the Mahabharata with contemporary oppressions.

Central protagonist Devi embodies the modern Indian woman's "split consciousness." Educated in the U.S., she returns to India, navigating the cultural chasm between Western liberation and familial expectations. Her arranged marriage to Mahesh, a domineering engineer, exemplifies patriarchal entitlement: he views women solely as "wives and mothers," reducing Devi to a vessel for domesticity. Devi's rebellion—leaving the marriage for self-actualization—marks a pivotal feminist awakening, rejecting the "hollowness and loneliness" of duty-bound unions. This act of flight, rather than confrontation, underscores Hariharan's preference for subtle, introspective resistance over overt violence.

Sita, Devi's widowed mother, represents generational continuity in oppression. Sacrificing her veena-playing passion at her father-in-law's behest, she internalizes wifely subservience, her "musical identity silenced by marital constraints." Yet, in advising Devi, Sita offers negotiated autonomy, hinting at evolving feminist strategies. Mayamma,

the childless servant, faces brutal rejection from her in-laws, her barrenness rendering her expendable in a society that equates womanhood with motherhood. Through these voices, Hariharan critiques arranged marriages as "imprisonments" that breed resentment, advocating for women's multiplicity—daughter, sister, wife, mother—as sites of potential reclamation rather than erasure.

The novel's narrative shifts—from third-person omniscience to Devi's first-person reflections—mirror this consciousness-raising, empowering readers to question cultural patterns that deny women authority. Ultimately, Devi's reunion with Sita symbolizes matrilineal solidarity, a feminist antidote to patriarchal isolation.

Analysis of *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, the eponymous protagonist, a retired teacher, heals his student Mani through fables and Ayurvedic wisdom, critiquing modern education's failure to value "practical wisdom." Vasu's first-person narration blends autobiography with ghost stories, portraying women's inferior societal worth and the healing power of female-centric lore. This work advances feminist pedagogy, where storytelling exorcises patriarchal ghosts, fostering collective self-definition. When Dreams Travel reimagines, *The Arabian Nights* with Shahrazad as a feminist icon, her tales delaying execution by the tyrannical King Shahryar and subverting male control over female sexuality. Shahrazad's narratives depict women as "fiercely passionate," claiming lovers and agency, transforming the body from a site of violation to intellectual rebellion. Her sister Dunyazad's introspective voice questions scripted female lives—"What could we be if we could tell our own stories?"—highlighting shadowed sisterhood and the reinterpretation of myths for autonomy. Multi-voiced and non-linear, the novel interrupts oppressive traditions, embodying feminist "willing suspension of disbelief" to reclaim desire.

Analysis of *When Dreams Travel*

When Dreams Travel, her third novel, is a re-construction of the Arabian Nights or The Thousand and One Nights. Written from a feministic perspective, the novel brings to limelight the frustrations, hopes, and determinations of the female characters that were put in the margin in the original legend. Shahrzad, Dunyazad, and Dilshad are the major female characters that are presented as subverting the submissive image of woman; they discover their identity as free women capable of taking their own decisions and are determined not to be oppressed by the patriarchal notions any more. The novelist gives voice to the other silent female characters of the original legend and focuses on women's determination to give a full-fledged fight to the patriarchal tyranny.

Analysis of *In Times of Siege*

In Times of Siege shifts to public spheres, addressing fundamentalism through Professor Shiv Murthy's historical reflections amid threats from Hindu nationalists. Women's endurance against orthodoxy—echoing Basavanna's doctrines—promotes non-violent resistance, critiquing political control over narratives. Characters like the professor's daughter navigate everyday cruelties, their consciousness awakened by intellectual solidarity against gendered violence. Across these works, Hariharan evolves feminist themes from personal identity crises to communal critiques, blending existentialism with cultural pluralism.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's literary works embody feminist consciousness as a transformative force shaped by generational struggles, the reinterpretation of myths, and subtle acts of resistance. Through her portrayal of women who evolve from conformity and silence to self-awareness and empowerment, she challenges readers to question patriarchal structures and rethink deeply ingrained social norms. Her narratives advocate change through reflection, resilience, and dialogue rather than confrontation, drawing upon Indian philosophical traditions to envision a more equitable and compassionate society. As Indian women continue to negotiate the tensions between modern aspirations and traditional expectations, Hariharan's writings remain highly relevant, inspiring both personal and collective resistance to gender inequality. By giving voice to women's experiences and struggles, her works contribute significantly to the ongoing feminist discourse in India and beyond.

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