

**RESEARCH ARTICLE****Exploitation of Women in Gita Hariharan's Novel *The Thousand Faces of Night***

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**Abstract**

Literature is also one of the media that reflects feminist ideas and values effectively. The present study explores feminist elements reflected in all the novels produced by Gita Hariharan. The works of Gita Hariharan contain feminist elements to a great deal. The present research work is a critical study of feminist elements in the novels of Gita Hariharan. She has executed such reality with precision in style and with magical imagery concepts. She has vividly expressed women's hopes and aspirations in her striking collections. Gita Hariharan's novels amply testify to progressive feminist elements one after another. Her fictional creations have unity and continuity to bring out social upheavals and cultural turmoil. Her first concern is the exploration and realization of female selfhood. She has revolted against the social traditions and the dictum by proclaiming progressive values.

**Keywords:** feminist elements, Gita Hariharan, magical imagery, cultural turmoil

Indian women novelists in English have emerged as major writers in the recent past. They have presented different themes like the clash between tradition and modernity, women's struggle for emancipation, identity crisis, and psychological turmoil in a male-dominated society. They explore the existential predicament of the suppressed women in a patriarchal society controlled by rigid traditions and limitations. Being women, they understand and unfold the inner minds of subdued women, with their protagonists vibrantly alive in terms of feelings, intellect, and emotions. They present a feminist approach, outlook, and perspective.

Feminism is a philosophy and movement for ending forms of oppression, including gender-based oppression. It is not against family and marriage. It is about transforming these institutions to weed out their inherent injustices. Feminism, particularly in the South Asian context, has been defined as an awareness of women's oppression and exploitation in society, at work, and within the family and conscious action by women to change this situation. This definition could be extended to other interlocking sources of oppression, such as class, caste, ethnicity, and religion. Feminism is culture-specific, and, women's lives are culturally constructed, and the processes of socialization are rooted in their social reality.

Gita Hariharan was born in Coimbatore and grown up in Mumbai and Manila. She obtained a B.A. (in English) from Bombay University and MA (in Communications) from Fairfield University. She first worked in the Public Broadcasting System in New York and then with a publishing firm as an editor in India. Any literary contribution of a writer can be described as a part of her struggle and conflict he/she has undergone through her life.

After seven years of independence, Gita Hariharan was born (in 1954) in Coimbatore, India. Being born and brought up in Mumbai, she had a rich experience of cosmopolitan life to grasp social realities in a better way. Further, the Philippines is a pretty American state, and she enjoyed free literal air in Manila, the capital city of the United States. She worked as a staff writer with Channel 13. She led her life in New York

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since 1979. Later on, she worked in the metropolitan cities of India, such as Mumbai, Chennai, and New Delhi, as an editor. Her close observations of social realities and cultural changes around these cities are found and expressed in her literary work.

Gita Hariharan published her various works, inclusive of novels, short stories, essays, newspaper articles, and columns. Literature is a mirror of the author's life experiences. Gita Hariharan is not away from this. Today, Gita Hariharan is one of the leading women writers of fiction in English in India. Gita Hariharan is the recipient of the Commonwealth Writers Award for her *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), which made her popular with the world of literature. She has established herself as a top-ranking Indian writer.

Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), bagged the prestigious Commonwealth Writers Prize for the year 1993 as the best first novel in the Eurasian region. She published a story collection, *The Art of Dying* in 1993, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* in 1994, *When Dreams Travel* in 1999, *In Times of Siege* in 2003, and *Fugitive Histories* in 2009. She also edited *A Southern Harvest*, a volume of stories in English translated from the four major South Indian languages. Gita Hariharan is the fabricator of stories mingled with myths, legends, fables, and some twisting and retellings.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is not an exception to these stories. Feminism is a revolt against a male-dominated society. After marriage, the status of a woman changes. With arranged marriage, she plugs into a world of disillusionment, and *The Thousand Faces of Night* is set largely on her treatment of an Indian 'wife' in modern life, the most thorough and accurate in Indian literature. Her achievement is all the more significant in that so few writers have presented the traditional package that a woman carries with whom many Indian women can identify, intelligent, questioning, the women who are not content with their incurable life and who rebel against the established order. Devi has accepted her talent as a bride, but it is a curse for her. Her father-in-law orders her in anger to put away her Veena because, according to him, she is neglecting her duty as a wife and as a daughter-in-law. Sita's training as an Indian girl prevents her from asserting her individuality. She is like a volcano, seething with rage inside but presenting a cool and calm exterior. She gives up her passion for music. She never picks up the Veena again, which was a part of her dowry. It is true that,

Philosophizing and thinking ... outside and making possible, yet impossible to assimilate to male reason, matter is what makes women an identity and an experience of their own, forever apart from male power and male concepts. (Nawale 229)

This paper attempts to critically analyze elements in Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*. There has also been an attempt to thoroughly explain certain features in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. The most significant aspect of it is that the author has been successful in crafting the novel effectively, particularly on the basis of feminism. Initially, the background is given regarding the rise of Gita Hariharan as a novelist. Further, the feminist approach of Gita Hariharan is properly pinpointed. A specific study of myths and lore has also been conducted. A special focus on patriarchy and marriage relationships in India is given from the literary sociological perspective. Further, the four important characters in the novel are described. The struggle between tradition and modernity is also depicted.

The discourse analysis is based on three aspects and is properly conducted. The whole chapter analyzes success of Gita Hariharan as it appears in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her Gifted pen has taken a new colour of progressive ideas. Her keen observations of life and pains and splendor have affected unsuspecting wonders. Thus, the study of this novel shows that it is a new beginning and new era for mirroring pains of Indian women portrayed in three parts of novel, woven together effectively.

Indian society is traditional and caste-based. The system of patriarchy has prevailed in our society since the ancient Vedic period. The epics 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata' also express the feeling of patriarchy from different angles. Gita Hariharan carefully shows the Indian social system and depicts the patriarchal system in her novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Her depiction of patriarchy is based on her clear social inspection and realistic social analysis. Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a fiction that advocates feminist ideology. The theory of feminism is based on revolt against patriarchy prevailing in human society. Patriarchy is an important character of Indian society because the Indian social structure is deeply

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rooted in customs and traditions. Women are a mirror of society, and societal expressions to be accepted as women are part and parcel of family culture. This space search has been truly demonstrated by Gita Hariharan in her novel. The subordination of women is due to the patriarchal system. The logic of male theory is based on the logic of patriarchy. The male mind is considered superior to the female body; therefore, in the marriage market, it does not get the same status as the male mind. Male-dominated features also appear in the literature. Patriarchal power politics prevails in every traditional society and family system as well. Women's priorities are neglected by men in their marital life.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, three women, Devi, Mayyamma, and Sita, are all in the crunch of patriarchy. Male bias of Hindu men helps women to see their culture through their own eyes. This is what the novelist evokes in this novel. The study of Gita Hariharan's novel also shows how these differences are focused. Cultural structure in life has perpetuated patriarchy. In India, the cultural super sense today is based on patriarchy. The caste system and patriarchy are related to these cultural standpoints. Women's progress in society is not from myth to truth but from myth to myth, which has caused awe and terror in society. Women today are facing many complex problems in our society.

*The Thousand Faces of Night* is full of such complex problems. Devi's attempt to change old ideas into modern concepts miserably fails. Devi's character stands as a victim of cunning patriarchy. Gita Hariharan also shows the relationship between patriarchy and culture. Sita suppresses the artist in her in order to achieve her aim of sending her unmarried daughter to America. Thus, *The Thousand Faces of Night* is a novel example of women's sufferings in the patriarchal cultural matrix of Indian traditional society. In the novel, the author gives a patriarchal example, such as Devi's grandmother pretending to listen to the other heralds. It looks like Devi, the princess, would not be losing sight of her prince. Finally, she would get him only, though others divert and tempt her for them on her way to achieve her goal. The patriarchy in Indian society has exploited Indian women and kept them in the corner of Indian society and has kept them in exploited situations. The patriarchy is a rigid social system that is very complex and makes women suffer a great deal. The cogitations made by Gita Hariharan are true, realistic, and very much fearless. Her major works wake up against this patriarchal system and demand social justice for women. Thus, the patriarchy described by Gita Hariharan is an outcome of her serious investigation into a systematic mode.

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