

A Critical Study of Githa Hariharan's Novels: Gender, Myth, Identity, and Political Dissent

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Abstract

Githa Hariharan is an important contemporary Indian writer in English whose novels examine the intersections of gender, myth, history, cultural identity, education, communal politics, and individual agency. Her fiction questions dominant accounts of tradition and nation by bringing marginalised experiences, especially those of women and socially vulnerable people, into the centre of narrative. This article critically examines selected novels—*The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992), *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003), *Fugitive Histories* (2009), and *I Have Become the Tide* (2019)—to identify continuities and changes in Hariharan's literary concerns. Using qualitative textual analysis and insights from feminist, postcolonial, and cultural criticism, the study explores her rewriting of myth, multiple narrative voices, representation of memory, the politics of history, and resistance to ideological simplification. It argues that Hariharan's novels connect private experience with public power: family and gender relations are shaped by inherited stories, while education, citizenship, and historical memory are contested arenas. The article also considers the limits of her narrative strategies, including the challenge of representing diverse social groups without reducing them to symbols. Hariharan's fiction remains significant for its insistence that Indian identity is plural, historically contested, and continually reconstructed through acts of remembering, storytelling, and dissent.

Keywords: Githa Hariharan; Indian English Fiction; Feminism; Myth; Gender; History; Cultural Identity; Communalism; Narrative Voice; Dissent.

1. Introduction

Contemporary Indian writing in English has developed through sustained engagements with the histories, languages, social structures, and political conflicts that shape life in India. Githa Hariharan has made a distinctive contribution to this literary field by exploring the relationship between personal experience and public narratives. Her novels move between domestic life, mythological memory, education, political debate, and contemporary social conflict. Rather than presenting Indian culture as a single, stable inheritance, Hariharan examines how traditions are interpreted, transmitted, challenged, and sometimes used to legitimise unequal power. Hariharan's first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night*, won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book in 1993. Her subsequent novels including *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, *When Dreams Travel*, *In Times of Siege*, *Fugitive Histories*, and *I Have Become the Tide* extend her interest in storytelling, identity, history, and social responsibility. Her official author biography and publisher profiles confirm this body of work and its place in her literary career. (Hariharan, n.d.; Penguin Random House India, n.d.) The article critically examines the novels as literary constructions that illuminate particular conflicts and experiences while also recognising the limits of any single fictional representation.

2. Objectives of the Study

1. To analyse the major themes and narrative strategies in selected novels by Githa Hariharan.
2. To examine the representation of women, gender roles, family structures, and individual agency.
3. To explore how myth, folklore, and inherited stories are reinterpreted in contemporary contexts.
4. To investigate the relationship between history, education, citizenship, and political ideology.
5. To assess Hariharan's treatment of cultural identity, communal conflict, and pluralism.
6. To evaluate the literary strengths and limitations of her fiction and identify areas for further research.

3. Research Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative, interpretative methodology based on close reading of selected novels. It examines narrative voice, characterisation, plot structure, symbolism, intertextual references, and the relationship between private experience and public history. Feminist criticism is used to investigate gendered power and

women's agency; postcolonial and cultural approaches help analyse the construction of identity, authority, and national narratives. The article draws on published criticism and reliable author and publisher profiles to situate the novels within Hariharan's career.

The study is selective rather than exhaustive. It does not claim to offer a statistical analysis or a complete account of all Indian social groups.

4. Review of Literature

The reworking of mythology as a feminist and postcolonial strategy in Indian English writing has received a great deal of academic attention. Scholars in feminist and cultural studies have investigated how myth may sustain and challenge hegemonic power structures, particularly those associated with patriarchy and nationalism. Githa Hariharan's fiction has emerged as a vital location in these debates, where mythology is neither accepted at face value nor completely rejected, but critically revised to amplify marginalised female voices.

Kelaiya and Vaja (2023) pioneer the concept of "vernacular feminism" in Hariharan's work, emphasising how mythic subversion occurs not only on an epic scale, but also in the everyday and home domain. Their research on *The Thousand Faces of Night* suggests that mythology is discreetly embedded in everyday routines, household roles, and storytelling traditions. Hariharan's characters "enact resistance through their reinterpretations of ritual and speech" (Kelaiya and Vaja), implying that the home can be a subversive arena where sacred myths are challenged and repurposed. This is consistent with Nivedita Menon's broader contention that feminist politics in India must address localised and intersectional forms of gendered power (Menon 60).

T. Veera Swamy's 2023 article, "Cultural Identity and Modern Self-identity in the Novels of Githa Hariharan," studies how caste, religion, ethnicity, and gendered expectations shape identity in selected novels. It is relevant to the present study because it foregrounds the tension between inherited social roles and the reconstruction of selfhood.

The work of Kurrey and Tripathi (2021) expands this view by examining how Hariharan's novels critique both caste and patriarchy through the lens of myth. In their comparative analysis of multiple Hariharan texts, they argue that "myth is a double-edged sword while traditionally used to justify social hierarchies, it can also be wielded as a tool of disruption when reinterpreted from below" (203). Particularly relevant is their reading of *When Dreams Travel*, where *The Arabian Nights* are transformed into a palimpsest of female voices resisting silencing and death. They

further note that Hariharan's narratives echo Gayatri Spivak's call to "strategically essentialise" in order to foreground subaltern agency (Spivak 281).

Phate (2021) strengthens the field by focusing on the narrative methods Hariharan uses to undermine patriarchal mythological authority. Polyphony, intertextuality, and narrative layering are identified as important instruments that "disrupt the monologic male-centred epic tradition" (5). This lends support to Homi Bhabha's concept of the hybrid story as a place of resistance in which fixed identities and cultural codes are deconstructed and recombined (Bhabha 113). Hariharan's use of many perspectives and broken timeframes creates what Phate refers to as "counter-mythography," in which female characters are afforded narrative power that has previously been denied to women.

Ashok Singh's 2021 article, "Feministic Approach in the Novels of Githa Hariharan: A Critical Study," examines feminist concerns across *The Thousand Faces of Night*, *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, *In Times of Siege*, and *Fugitive Histories*. Its focus on gender hierarchy and women's self-definition provides a useful starting point for further analysis.

A 2024 study titled "Perception of Religion and Gender in the Select Novels of Githa Hariharan" also considers the relationship between religious tradition and gender discrimination in selected works. Scholarship on *In Times of Siege* has further examined the political uses of myth and historical memory. These studies indicate that feminist readings and analyses of cultural politics are central strands in criticism of Hariharan's fiction.

The present article builds on these critical directions by considering Hariharan's novels across a wider chronological range. It places feminist questions alongside narrative form, pedagogy, pluralism, and political dissent, while avoiding the assumption that every novel makes the same argument or uses the same literary method.

5. Githa Hariharan and Indian English Fiction

Hariharan's fiction belongs to the broader tradition of postcolonial Indian women's writing, alongside authors such as Arundhati Roy, Kiran Desai, Shashi Deshpande, and Anita Desai. However, her distinctive contribution lies in her sustained engagement with myth as a living cultural archive rather than a fixed moral inheritance.

Her novels are interdisciplinary in scope. They draw upon the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, folk narratives, oral storytelling, history, political commentary, and feminist theory. This blending enables Hariharan to show that the past is not inert: it continues to shape gender roles, religious identities, family structures, and political behaviour in the present.

6. Major Themes in Hariharan's Novels

Gender and Patriarchy

1. Women's Lives under Patriarchy

Hariharan's fiction repeatedly exposes the restrictions imposed upon women through marriage, motherhood, family honour, religious custom, and social respectability. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi's return to her maternal home after the breakdown of her marriage becomes the starting point for a wider reflection on female obedience, desire, and survival.

The novel presents three generations of women—Devi, her mother Sita, and Mayamma—whose lives reveal different forms of accommodation and resistance. Critics have read the novel as a feminist work that questions the confining codes of patriarchy and highlights women's survival strategies across generations.

2. Marriage, Motherhood, and Female Agency

Marriage in Hariharan's fiction is rarely presented as a natural fulfilment of womanhood. Instead, it appears as a social institution that can regulate women's sexuality, mobility, labour, and self-expression. Motherhood, too, is examined critically: it may offer emotional connection, but it can also reproduce patriarchal expectations.

In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Sita's eventual willingness to listen to Devi and to recognise her daughter's need for autonomy suggests the possibility of a more affirmative mother–daughter relationship. Storytelling becomes a means through which women exchange experience, reinterpret inherited roles, and imagine alternative futures.

3. Masculinity and Power

Hariharan does not portray men as uniformly oppressive; rather, she shows how patriarchal power operates through both men and women. Male characters often

embody social authority, intellectual confidence, or political power, but they are also shown as emotionally limited, insecure, or morally compromised.

In *In Times of Siege*, the historian Shiv becomes involved in a controversy over the teaching of history. The novel shows how masculine authority, religious nationalism, and institutional power can converge to police knowledge and silence dissent.

4. Gender, Patriarchy, and Women's Agency

The *Thousand Faces of Night* is a key text for examining Hariharan's feminist concerns. The novel brings women's experiences into dialogue with mythological narratives and inherited expectations about marriage, motherhood, duty, and female virtue. Myth is not simply decorative material: it becomes a cultural archive through which gender roles are taught and justified.

By placing women's lives beside stories passed down through generations, Hariharan shows that tradition is neither neutral nor unchanging. The meanings attached to myth depend on who tells a story, whose experiences are emphasised, and which interpretations become authoritative. Women's agency emerges through the difficult process of recognising and contesting the roles assigned to them.

A critical reading should avoid treating all women in the novel as identical representatives of oppression. Their responses to family and tradition differ, and these differences reveal the complexity of negotiating autonomy within social structures. The novel's feminist force lies not in offering an uncomplicated escape from tradition but in exposing the competing meanings through which tradition shapes identity.

5. Myth, Memory, and the Power of Storytelling

Storytelling is a central organising principle in Hariharan's fiction. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel*, mythic material is revisited from perspectives that complicate familiar narratives. The retelling of inherited stories makes visible the relationship between narrative authority and social power.

When Dreams Travel engages with the world of *The Arabian Nights* and the frame of storytelling associated with Scheherazade. The novel invites readers to consider how stories can preserve life, challenge authority, and open spaces for alternative voices. At the same time, storytelling can reproduce hierarchies when some narrators control the meanings available to others.

Hariharan's use of myth should therefore be understood as critical reinterpretation rather than simple rejection of the past. Her fiction suggests that cultural inheritance remains alive because each generation retells it, selectively emphasising some elements and questioning others.

6.Education, Authority, and the Politics of Knowledge

The Ghosts of Vasu Master explores education, language, memory, and the relationship between teacher and learner. Its interest in teaching extends beyond the transfer of facts. Education becomes a process of listening, interpretation, and recognising the limitations of established authority.

The novel's engagement with pedagogical practice offers a useful contrast to models of education based solely on discipline and rote learning. Knowledge is represented as relational: teachers and learners must negotiate different experiences, forms of expression, and expectations. The narrative also raises questions about whether language can adequately communicate trauma, memory, and emotional complexity.

A critical assessment should consider the strengths of this approach while asking whether the novel's experiments with narration and pedagogy always achieve equal clarity. Its formal choices are part of its argument, but they may also demand more interpretative work from readers.

7.History, Ideology, and Academic Freedom

In Times of Siege moves Hariharan's concerns more directly into contemporary political and institutional life. The novel examines the pressures that arise when historical interpretation becomes a public ideological battleground. A university and its teaching practices become sites where questions of evidence, authority, cultural memory, and freedom of expression are contested.

The novel's central concern is not simply whether a particular historical account is correct. It is also concerned with who has the power to define legitimate knowledge, how institutions respond to pressure, and what happens when scholars are expected to conform to an approved interpretation of the past.

The novel's relevance to India lies in its exploration of the relationship between education and citizenship. It asks readers to consider whether universities

can preserve critical inquiry when history is mobilised to produce a single cultural or national identity. Its political engagement is a strength, though readers may also examine how literary characterisation and plot shape the presentation of competing positions.

8. Communal Conflict, Memory, and Plural Identity

Fugitive Histories examines the impact of communal violence and inherited divisions on personal relationships and family memory. It considers how people understand themselves through stories about religion, community, belonging, and the past. The novel resists the idea that identity is formed in isolation; instead, individual choices are influenced by social histories and collective memories.

Hariharan's treatment of communal conflict highlights the persistence of violence beyond a single event. Fear, silence, mistrust, and inherited narratives can shape relationships long after immediate violence has ended. The novel also asks how individuals can form meaningful connections across boundaries that public discourse treats as fixed.

Its emphasis on plural identity is particularly significant in a society as diverse as India. Yet the novel should not be read as suggesting that all communities experience conflict in identical ways. A careful analysis must attend to differences in power, vulnerability, and historical circumstance.

7. Contemporary India, Youth, and Political Change

I Have Become the Tide extends Hariharan's engagement with contemporary social and political realities. Its inclusion in the author's later work suggests a continuing interest in how individuals respond to changing public conditions and how personal identity develops amid broader social pressures.

A full close reading of this novel should examine the specific ways its characters encounter questions of youth, activism, belonging, and change. Researchers should consult the text directly rather than infer detailed plot claims from bibliographic summaries alone. Read alongside the earlier novels, it can help establish continuities and changes in Hariharan's treatment of dissent and social responsibility.

8. Myth as Feminist Revision

8.1 Revisionist Myth-making

Hariharan's most distinctive technique is revisionist myth-making. Rather than accepting myths as timeless truths, she reinterprets them from the perspective of women and marginalised figures. In *The Thousand Faces of Night*, characters from the Ramayana and Mahabharata such as Sita, Amba, Gandhari, and Draupadi are placed in dialogue with modern women's experiences.

This strategy reveals that traditional myths have often naturalised female suffering, obedience, and sacrifice. By retelling these narratives, Hariharan exposes their gendered assumptions while also recovering moments of female strength, anger, desire, and resistance.

8.2 Sita, Draupadi, and Female Voice

The figure of Sita is especially important in Hariharan's work. In dominant retellings, Sita is frequently idealised as the obedient wife. Hariharan reopens this figure to question the costs of such idealisation. Similarly, Draupadi's anger and Amba's demand for justice provide models of female resistance against humiliation and patriarchal control.

Myth therefore becomes a language of protest. It allows Hariharan's women characters to recognise that their private struggles are part of a longer history of female silencing and survival.

8.3 Folktales and Oral Narratives

Alongside classical epics, Hariharan draws upon folktales and oral storytelling. These forms are significant because they are often associated with domestic spaces, grandmothers, servants, and community memory. They provide alternative sources of knowledge outside official history and elite male authority.

In *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, storytelling becomes a mode of healing and self-discovery. The novel uses fable-like narratives to explore illness, memory, desire, and the relationship between teacher and student. The oral tale thus becomes a democratic form that admits contradiction, fantasy, and marginal voices.

9. Identity and Self-Formation

9.1 Female Identity

Identity is a central concern in Hariharan's novels. Her female protagonists are not presented as stable, unified subjects; they are shaped by conflicting demands of family, tradition, education, sexuality, and social expectation. Devi's crisis in *The Thousand Faces of Night* represents a struggle to move beyond inherited definitions of womanhood.

Hariharan suggests that female identity is relational but not wholly determined. Women can reinterpret the stories imposed upon them and create new narratives of selfhood. This process is painful and incomplete, but it is also potentially liberating.

9.2 Memory, Trauma, and History

In *Fugitive Histories*, Hariharan connects personal memory with collective violence. The novel explores the aftermath of communal conflict and asks how individuals live with historical trauma. It shows that identity is not formed only through personal choice but also through inherited histories of displacement, prejudice, and political violence.

The title itself is significant: histories are "fugitive" because they escape official records, survive in fragments, and reappear through memory, rumour, and storytelling. Hariharan therefore challenges the idea that history can be fully controlled by the state or by dominant communities.

9.3 The Marginal Subject

Hariharan's interest in identity extends beyond gender. Her novels give attention to children, servants, teachers, minorities, and socially marginal figures. These characters often possess knowledge that official society ignores. Through them, Hariharan questions hierarchies of class, education, religion, and cultural authority.

10. Political Dissent and the Politics of History

10.1 In Times of Siege and Censorship

In Times of Siege is Hariharan's most overtly political novel. It is set against the attempt by dominant political and religious forces to rewrite history and give

education a partisan ideological direction. The novel dramatises how universities, textbooks, and public debate become sites of ideological conflict.

The novel presents political dissent as an ethical responsibility. When history is manipulated to serve communal or nationalist agendas, the writer, teacher, and citizen must resist the suppression of complexity and pluralism. Hariharan's concern is not merely academic freedom but the future of democratic public reason.

10.2 Communalism and Religious Nationalism

Hariharan's fiction is deeply concerned with the dangers of communalism. She shows how religious identity can be converted into a tool of political mobilisation, producing suspicion, violence, and historical amnesia. Her novels resist the simplification of India into a homogeneous religious or cultural community. Instead, she emphasises plurality: multiple languages, regions, faiths, genders, and memories coexist within Indian society. Political dissent in her work involves defending this plurality against forces that seek to impose a single, exclusionary national identity.

10.3 Dissent through Narrative Form

Hariharan's dissent is not limited to explicit political themes; it is also formal. Her fragmented narratives, embedded tales, shifting perspectives, and intertextual references resist linear, authoritative modes of storytelling. This narrative plurality mirrors her political commitment to multiplicity and debate. By mixing myth, history, dream, and everyday realism, she refuses the authority of any single version of truth. Her fiction therefore enacts dissent at the level of form as well as content.

11. Narrative Techniques and Literary Form

11.1 Multiple Voices and Narrative Perspective

Hariharan often complicates the authority of a single narrator by placing different voices, memories, and stories in relation to one another. This technique is especially suited to novels concerned with myth and history, because it reveals that accounts of the past are shaped by the position and interests of the person telling them. Multiple perspectives also challenge the assumption that a community possesses one uncontested identity. They create space for disagreement and make readers responsible for comparing accounts rather than accepting a single authoritative version.

11.2 Intertextuality and Mythic Rewriting

Hariharan's novels are densely intertextual. They refer to epics, folktales, historical events, political discourse, and literary traditions. These references create a dialogue between past and present, allowing readers to see continuity as well as change in Indian social life.

References to inherited stories connect Hariharan's novels with older literary and cultural traditions. Intertextuality allows the novels to speak simultaneously to familiar narratives and to contemporary social realities. By changing the emphasis or perspective of a known story, Hariharan exposes the assumptions that may have become invisible through repetition.

This method is particularly effective when the original story has been used to define appropriate behaviour for women or to legitimise a hierarchy. However, readers unfamiliar with the source traditions may not recognise every implication. This makes contextual explanation important in teaching and research.

11.3 Symbolism, Memory, and Silence

Memory in Hariharan's novels is not merely a record of events. It is selective, emotionally charged, and shaped by present concerns. Silence may indicate fear, exclusion, resistance, or the difficulty of expressing an experience. Symbols and remembered stories allow the novels to represent what characters cannot always articulate directly.

Such strategies deepen the psychological dimensions of the fiction, though they can also produce ambiguity. Rather than treating ambiguity as automatically successful, critics should ask whether the narrative provides enough context for readers to interpret its symbols and silences productively.

11.4 The Personal and the Political

One of Hariharan's most consistent techniques is to connect apparently private conflicts with larger systems of authority. Family relationships reveal gender norms; classrooms reveal the politics of knowledge; personal memories reveal the effects of communal history. This movement between intimate and public spaces prevents the novels from treating social issues as abstractions.

The technique also shows that political power is not exercised only through formal institutions. It can operate through everyday habits, inherited expectations, language, and the stories people tell about themselves and others.

11.5 Embedded Storytelling

Stories within stories are a recurring device in Hariharan's fiction. In *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *The Ghosts of Vasu Master*, embedded tales interrupt the main narrative and provide alternative perspectives. This technique reflects the oral tradition and gives voice to experiences that might otherwise remain marginal.

11.6 Fragmentation and Non-linear Structure

Hariharan often avoids straightforward chronological plotting. Her narratives move through memory, dream, reflection, and association. This structure is appropriate to her themes because identity and history are themselves fragmented, contested, and reconstructed.

11.7 Symbolism and Allegory

Mythological figures, dreams, journeys, and historical episodes often function symbolically. In *When Dreams Travel*, Hariharan revisits the Arabian Nights tradition through a feminist lens, using the figure of Scheherazade to explore storytelling, survival, and female agency. The novel transforms a familiar tale of narration into a reflection on power, desire, and resistance.

12. Critical Evaluation

12.1. Strengths

- Hariharan successfully connects feminist concerns with larger questions of history, mythology, and politics.
- Her revisionist use of myth gives new interpretive possibilities to familiar Indian narratives.
- Her novels foreground women's interior lives without reducing them to victims.
- She links personal identity with collective memory and political history.
- Her narrative experimentation reflects the complexity of postcolonial Indian society.

12.2 Major Achievements

- Feminist reinterpretation: Hariharan questions inherited gender roles and creates space for women's experiences and alternative readings of tradition.

- Intertextual richness: Myth and older stories are reworked to illuminate contemporary concerns rather than simply repeated.
- Connection between private and public life: Domestic relationships, education, memory, and citizenship are shown to be shaped by larger social structures.
- Political engagement: In Times of Siege and Fugitive Histories engage with contested history, communal identity, and the conditions of dissent.
- Formal experimentation: Multiple perspectives and layered narratives reflect the complexity of memory and cultural identity.
- Plural conception of India: Her fiction resists narrow definitions of Indian identity and highlights internal differences and contested belonging.

12.3 Limitations and Questions for Further Criticism

A balanced critical examination should also recognise potential limitations. First, the dense use of myth and intertextual references may make some passages difficult for readers unfamiliar with the relevant traditions. Second, when novels engage directly with political debates, there is a risk that characters may be interpreted primarily as representatives of ideological positions rather than as fully individualised people. Critics should examine whether each novel avoids this risk.

Third, the emphasis on gender and cultural identity may leave other dimensions of social inequality less fully developed in particular texts. Class, caste, region, language, disability, and economic structures should be considered where the novels make them relevant, rather than assumed to be equally central in every work. Fourth, multiple narrative voices can enrich a novel but may also complicate pacing and coherence.

These questions are not reasons to dismiss Hariharan's work. They provide a framework for assessing how effectively each novel balances political argument, narrative complexity, character development, and aesthetic form.

13. Githa Hariharan and Contemporary Indian English Literature

Hariharan's fiction belongs to a wider body of Indian English writing that questions inherited social roles and examines the contested meanings of history and identity. Her distinctive contribution lies in combining feminist inquiry with mythic rewriting and direct attention to institutions such as schools and universities. The

result is a body of fiction that treats storytelling as both an aesthetic practice and a form of cultural power.

Her novels are also useful for comparative study with writers who examine women's agency, communal conflict, historical memory, or the politics of education. Such comparisons should be based on specific textual evidence and should avoid treating Indian English literature as a uniform tradition. Hariharan's work is most productive when read in its own formal and historical contexts.

14. Findings and Discussion

- Gender and tradition are closely connected in Hariharan's fiction; inherited narratives help shape social expectations, but they can also be reinterpreted.
- Storytelling is a form of power. The authority to narrate the past influences how communities understand identity and legitimacy.
- Education and historical interpretation are political arenas in which authority and dissent are negotiated.
- Personal memory and private relationships are inseparable from larger histories of communal identity and social conflict.
- Plural identity is a recurring alternative to narrow, singular definitions of Indian culture.
- Formal experimentation supports the novels' concerns with uncertainty and competing perspectives, though it can create challenges of accessibility and narrative coherence.
- Future research can deepen the analysis through intersectional feminist criticism, studies of caste and class, comparative myth studies, and close readings of individual novels.

Representative Novels

Novel	Year	Major Concerns	Narrative Strategy
The Thousand Faces of Night	1992	Gender, patriarchy, marriage, myth, female identity	Revisionist myth-making, embedded tales, mother–daughter narrative
The Ghosts of Vasu Master	1994	Memory, healing, pedagogy, marginality, storytelling	Fable, oral narrative, symbolic journeys

When Dreams Travel	1999	Female agency, storytelling, desire, power	Feminist retelling of Arabian Nights, intertextuality
In Times of Siege	2003	Censorship, communal politics, history, academic freedom	Political realism, debate, allegory
Fugitive Histories	2009	Communal violence, trauma, memory, identity	Fragmented narrative, multiple perspectives, historical memory

Githa Hariharan's novels offer a powerful critique of the forces that shape identity in contemporary India: patriarchy, religious nationalism, historical manipulation, caste and class hierarchy, and social respectability. Her fiction demonstrates that myth is not merely an inheritance from the past but a contested cultural resource that can either reinforce domination or enable resistance.

Through revisionist myth-making, embedded storytelling, fragmented narration, and political engagement, Hariharan creates a fiction of dissent. Her women characters do not simply suffer within patriarchal structures; they reinterpret their inheritance, reclaim silenced voices, and imagine more autonomous forms of selfhood. In this respect, Hariharan's novels remain essential texts for understanding the relationship between gender, memory, myth, and democracy in modern India.

Conclusion

Githa Hariharan's novels offer a sustained critical examination of the ways gender, myth, education, history, and political power shape individual and collective identity in India. From *The Thousand Faces of Night* to *In Times of Siege*, *Fugitive Histories*, and *I Have Become the Tide*, her fiction repeatedly questions the assumption that tradition or national identity has one uncontested meaning. Her characters inhabit worlds in which stories can both preserve authority and make resistance possible.

Githa Hariharan's literary refurbishment of mythology is more than just a creative undertaking; it is also an intentional feminist and political action. Her books *The Thousand Faces of Night* and *When Dreams Travel* deconstruct the inherited power of sacred traditions, reassembling them as locations of resistance, plurality,

and autonomy. Hariharan subverts traditional representations of legendary figures such as Gandhari, Ganga, Shahrzad, and Duniyazad, giving them voices that challenge patriarchal institutions ingrained in both mythology and contemporary life.

Hariharan's narrative technique is based on feminist and postcolonial theory, using Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity to challenge essentialist notions of femininity. Her characters do not accept the roles that mythology has assigned to them; rather, they reinvent them via acts of disobedience, storytelling, and silence. Gandhari's blindfold becomes a symbol of resistance rather than devotion, and Ganga's maternal rejection becomes a reclaiming of agency. These reinterpretations demonstrate how myth, which has long been employed to justify female subjugation, may be turned against itself when reappropriated by feminist voices.

Hariharan reclaims mythology as a malleable and revolutionary text through intentional intertextuality and cultural critique. Her story reveals how rewriting cultural memory may question dominant notions and open up narrative spaces for dissent, redefinition, and transformation. By doing so, Hariharan positions mythology as a living, evolving discourse that can and must be modified to incorporate previously excluded perspectives. Furthermore, Hariharan's mythopoeic resistance validates storytelling's ability to recreate rather than simply recollect. Her work advocates for a continual examination of the tales that build identities, encouraging both writers and readers to take part in the rewriting of tradition, as well as the larger feminist effort of reclaiming the sacred as subversive.

The principal strength of Hariharan's work is its connection between intimate experience and public structures. Women's lives are shaped by inherited narratives; classrooms become sites of ideological conflict; and personal memories carry the effects of communal histories. Her use of multiple perspectives and intertextual references enables her to challenge singular accounts of the past and to emphasise the contested nature of cultural identity.

At the same time, critical engagement should consider the accessibility of mythic allusions, the balance between political argument and characterisation, and the extent to which different axes of inequality receive attention in each novel. These

questions strengthen rather than weaken the study of her work by encouraging close, text-specific analysis.

Ultimately, Hariharan's novels make an important contribution to contemporary Indian English literature because they treat reading, remembering, and storytelling as active forms of cultural negotiation. They invite readers to question who has the authority to define tradition, whose experiences enter public history, and how a plural society can protect disagreement and dissent.

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