

# **Githa Hariharan and her Optimism in select Novels**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

This paper seeks to explore the theme of hope as portrayed by the women characters in the novels of Githa Hariharan, a renowned author celebrated for her commitment to advocating women's issues in society. In her three significant works—The Thousand Faces of Night, In Times of Siege, and Fugitive Histories—Githa Hariharan compellingly illustrates the countless struggles faced by women from various backgrounds, effectively positioning them as incarnation of their gender's resilience. Many women have successfully shattered barriers, entering fields that were once predominantly male-dominated. These trailblazers have demonstrated remarkable courage in embracing unconventional professions and excelling within them. The evolution of women's roles, particularly following the conclusion of the First World War, marks a significant shift in the development of women. This era catalyzed women to step beyond their comfort zones and challenge the outdated stereotypes imposed by the patriarchal society.

**KEY WORDS:** renowned, compellingly, unconventional, courage, patriarchal society.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The emergence of powerful new women writers, equipped with feminist perspectives, reflects a heroic approach to storytelling. Despite the numerous adversities faced by her characters, they consistently refuse to surrender to despair. Instead, they confront their challenges with extraordinary resilience and determination, embodying a spirit of hope that resonates throughout Hariharan's narratives. This examination not only highlights the complexities of women's experiences but also celebrates their unwavering strength and the transformative power of hope in the face of societal obstacles.

By examining the women characters through the lens of the Hope Circuit theory introduced by Martin Seligman, a renowned American psychologist, we can gain a deeper understanding of their optimistic perspectives on life. Seligman is widely acclaimed for his pioneering contributions to positive psychology, a movement that has profoundly influenced contemporary psychological thought. Applying Seligman's theory illuminates the unwavering spirit of Hariharan's women characters and underscores their ability to harness the innate positive energy that sustains them in the face of adversity. This exploration not only highlights their individual journeys but also celebrates the broader themes of hope and perseverance within the women experience.

Githa Hariharan, in her captivating novels, intricately explores the anomalies that pervade contemporary society. She is widely celebrated for her advocacy on behalf of marginalized individuals, particularly in her poignant depictions of the struggles faced by Indian women. Hariharan skillfully crafts memorable characters, such as Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Meena in *In Times of Siege*, and Yasmin in *Fugitive Histories*, who embody resilience and serve as inspiring figures for other women navigating their own asperity. While the characters endure a spectrum of sufferings, they never succumb to the thought of self-annihilation as a solution. Instead, they rise against their adversities, ultimately proving themselves to be the true heroines of their narratives. These women protagonists shine brightly, overshadowing their circumstances with an unwavering hope for survival.

This paper endeavors to conduct a profound analysis of these female characters through the lens of positive psychology, fostering a deeper understanding of the human mind. Positive psychology posits that human beings have an innate longing for joyful experiences that recharge them with positive energy. Even amidst the shadows of negative incidents, the human psyche patiently awaits the opportune moment to combat its challenges. Martin Seligman, in his groundbreaking work *The Hope Circuit*, articulates that true happiness in life encompasses the pursuit of meaningful accomplishments, including career success, friendships, freedom from pain, material comfort, civic responsibility, beauty, education, love, knowledge, and a clear conscience.

## **2. POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY**

Martin Seligman, the pioneer of positive psychology, expressed disappointment in the predominant focus of psychological research during the 1960s and 70s, which centered on the negativity of the human mind—such as mental illness, trauma, and suffering. He advocated for a paradigm shift in psychology, urging researchers to explore avenues for fostering positivity and enhancing positive emotions. Seligman envisioned a future where psychology emphasizes well-being rather than merely diagnosing abnormalities. He encouraged scholars to engage in research that ignites positivity within individuals, thereby shaping a more hopeful future generation.

Seligman introduced the PERMA model—a framework designed to steer individuals toward optimism. This model encompasses five key elements of well-being: Positive Emotions, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment. He ardently believes that positivity is a mindset that can be cultivated through consistent training and practice. Seligman proudly reflects on his own PERMA scores, indicating a high level of optimism and hope for the future.

Applying the PERMA model to the female characters in Githa Hariharan's works offers fresh insights into their actions. As highlighted in Seligman's *Hope Circuit*, these women continuously adapt various strategies to alleviate their sufferings.

From the outset of *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Devi, the protagonist, embarks on a quest for well-being. A girl driven by fantasy, she is deeply influenced by the mythical tales recounted by her grandmother during her childhood. Nurtured by these stories, she identifies with strong female figures, often envisioning a prince who would come to claim her love. Upon returning from her studies in the

United States, Devi embodies confidence as she confronts life's challenges. When faced with the prospect of choosing a life partner, she values the honesty of Mahesh, illustrating her positive emotions.

Throughout the novel, Devi showcases her mental fortitude by maintaining positivity, even in dire circumstances. Even when Gopal betrays her, she refuses to entertain negative emotions or contemplate ending her life. Instead, she embraces reality and patiently awaits brighter days.

### **3. MEENA IN IN TIMES OF SIEGE**

In Times of Siege opens with Meena's arrival at Shiv's house and culminates in her departure. Meena's support is crucial during Shiv's challenging moments, as she aids him in tracking events and strategizing timely actions. A sociology student at KNU, she conducts research on the plight of women during the anti-Sikh riots that followed Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984. Meena epitomizes courage and boldness, immersing herself in social welfare initiatives alongside her peers. Her commitment to societal issues reflects her desire to imbue her life with meaning.

Meena's positive emotions, cultivated through her social engagements, profoundly influence Shiv's outlook. When faced with confusion, Shiv draws strength from Meena's unwavering support. Seligman's insights regarding the transformative power of positive experiences resonate with Meena's character, as her involvement in social causes acts as a buffer against adversity.

### **4. YASMIN IN FUGITIVE HISTORIES**

Yasmin embodies the experiences of a young girl from a victimized Muslim family. As she navigates the turmoil of communal riots, she grapples with confusion and fear. However, despite the chaos surrounding her, Yasmin clings to hope, which manifests in her aspirations and actions. Inspired by film stars like Shabana Azmi, she envisions a savior who will alleviate her suffering. Even amidst the dangers she faces, Yasmin remains buoyed by her mother's encouragement.

Despite the trauma of losing her brother during the riots, Yasmin takes on the responsibility of caring for her parents. Her determination to excel academically and pursue higher education demonstrates her commitment to transforming her circumstances. Madhvi Parashar commends Yasmin's resilience, highlighting her strength as she strives to find her place in a society that seeks to diminish her worth.

### **5.CONCLUSION**

This analysis reveals the indomitable spirit of Githa Hariharan's women characters, offering a comprehensive examination of Devi in *The Thousand Faces of Night*, Meena in *In Times of Siege*, and Yasmin in *Fugitive Histories*. By crafting these invincible heroines, Hariharan underscores the significance of hope as a vital element of life. She empowers women to confront life's complexities, asserting that resilience and determination yield greater accomplishments than mere lamentation over failures and hardships.

Through these three compelling novels, Hariharan adeptly illustrates the complex and multifaceted role of individual identity in today's society. She skillfully contrasts the status and position of women within our cultural framework, offering a nuanced examination of their roles. By delineating the expectations and responsibilities assigned to women in traditional settings, Hariharan invites readers to reflect on the evolving nature of womanhood. In her works, she reassesses the concept of self-transcendence, utilizing symbolism and reflective elements to reinterpret the deep-seated wounds of one's aspirations. This reflective consciousness develops progressively, guiding characters toward a possible orientation that embraces transcendence through a classification of their experiences. The ultimate goal of such introspection is the attainment of self-knowledge or self-identity, achieved through a profound understanding of life.

Hariharan's narratives journey through various levels of intellectual self-realization, empowering characters to find liberation or reconciliation through their insights. She adeptly traces the struggles of women in their relationships with men and society, linking contemporary issues to timeless themes that resonate through the ages. Furthermore, her exploration of motherhood in modern fiction—addressing its power dynamics and vulnerability—adds another layer of depth to her narratives. In summary, Hariharan's novels serve as a rich tapestry that intertwines the personal and the societal, providing valuable insights into the ongoing dialogue about female identity and the quest for self-understanding. Her works remain relevant and poignant, resonating with audiences who seek to engage with the complexities of human experience.

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