

Reimagining Scheherazade: Feminist and Postcolonial Discourses in Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*

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The depiction of women in traditional literary texts has consistently been a 'colonized' one. Patriarchal texts often assert universal male hegemony and dominance, neglecting cultural, social, and regional variances in experience and perspective. These texts tend to evaluate and present literature through a singular male 'universal' lens. Postcolonial critics have challenged this universalistic approach, advocating for the reclamation of the roles of marginalized people, especially women, who have been relegated to secondary, marginalized positions. Githa Hariharan, a prominent Indian post-colonial woman writer, has made significant efforts to 'rewrite' the neglected and often overlooked histories of women, emphasizing their roles in contrast to their traditionally depicted insignificance. In her novel *When Dreams Travel*, a reinterpretation of the renowned *Arabian Nights*, Hariharan sheds light on the obscure and forgotten aspects of the original story, offering a new perspective. She responds to the patriarchal original text, highlighting the 'conditioning of marginality' and 'Othering,' and challenges male dominance. Her novel reimagines the character of Scheherazade, transforming her from a male-controlled figure into a symbol of female strength and defiance. Hariharan's narrative remains connected to the original *Arabian Nights*, with notable echoes and deviations. She distils elements of the legend to create her own novel, which continuously seeks the truth about the creation of a story, fundamentally 'Her Story.'

Keywords: Subversion, Marginality, Other, Storytelling, Narration, Culture, Travel, Deram.

1. Introduction

The rise of post-colonial theory in the mid-20th century prompted a critical examination of the imperial project, influencing societies worldwide. Simultaneously, the advent of feminism played a vital role in questioning and reshaping colonial ideologies. Feminism challenged patriarchal hegemony prevalent in colonized nations, emphasizing the relegation of women to the status of 'Other' and 'Subaltern.' The struggles of women closely mirror those of post-colonial peoples, as both groups endure powerlessness, exploitation, and societal subordination. Patriarchy, like imperialism, is a phallogentric ideology that dominates its

subjects. While post-colonialists resist political colonialism, feminists confront sexual colonization within patriarchal structures. Kaur observes, “it is imperative that both post-colonial and feminist discourses are articulated by resistance... both speak from their respective positions within the hegemonic structure and language to subvert that language. But the most profound similarity is... both women and post-colonial subjects exist outside representation itself” (88). Moreover, women experience ‘double colonization,’ facing discrimination both as colonized individuals and as women.

Throughout the last century, feminist literature has spanned diverse and often contradictory traditions, presenting fundamental challenges to concepts of subjectivity and experience. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1948) initiated an analysis of gender as a social construct, differentiating between sex and gender. Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* (1970) scrutinized the oppression of women within patriarchal societies. Feminist critiques have focused on representations of women in patriarchal literature, challenging depictions that cast women as ‘Other’ or ‘Lack.’

Githa Hariharan, an influential voice of the 1990s, exemplifies feminist critique in her work. Her novel *When Dreams Travel* addresses gender issues while integrating themes of post-colonialism, nationalism, and history. By reimagining Scheherazade from *Arabian Nights*, Hariharan offers a new perspective that challenges traditional patriarchal narratives. This research paper examines how *When Dreams Travel* embodies feminist and post-colonial discourses, transforming Scheherazade from a male-dominated figure into a symbol of female strength and defiance, and underscores the ongoing struggle for ‘Her Story’ within historical and cultural contexts.

The frame story of *Arabian Nights* centers on Sultan Shahryar of Shahabad and his brother Shahzaman, ruler of Samarkand. As Shahzaman prepares for an elaborate journey to visit his brother, he discovers his wife’s infidelity with a slave during a nighttime return to his palace. Enraged, he kills both the slave and his wife, then continues his journey to Shahabad. Upon his arrival, Shahryar notices his brother’s distress and invites him on a hunting trip, which Shahzaman declines. Left alone in the palace garden, Shahzaman witnesses his brother’s wife engaging in illicit activities with palace slaves. Horrified, he confides in Shahryar, who, deeply troubled, proposes to renounce the world until they find another suffering from similar disgrace. During their travels, the brothers encounter a giant repeatedly betrayed by a woman, profoundly impacting Shahryar. Consumed by his obsession, Shahryar devises a sinister plan to marry a virgin each night and execute her the following morning, instilling widespread panic in the kingdom. When no more candidates remain, the wazir’s daughter, Shahrzad, devises a plan to end the bloodshed. She persuades her father to marry her to the king and begins narrating stories each night, deliberately leaving them unfinished and promising to continue the next evening. This storytelling continues for a thousand and one nights, eventually curing the sultan of his animosity towards women. Subsequently, Shahrzad’s sister, Dunyazad, marries Shahzaman, and the tale concludes with the promise of their happily ever after.

By reimagining this frame story in *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan challenges traditional patriarchal narratives, transforming Scheherazade from a passive figure into a symbol of female strength and defiance. This transformation underscores the ongoing struggle for ‘Her Story’ within historical and cultural contexts, intertwining feminist and post-colonial

discourses to provide a fresh and critical perspective on the classic tale.

2. Literature Review

Feminist literary criticism emerged as a distinct discipline in the mid-20th century, significantly impacting literary studies by questioning traditional narratives and representations of women in literature. In the context of Githa Hariharan, her novel provides feminist literary criticism a framework to explore how the novel reimagines the character of Scheherazade and addresses themes of gender, power, and identity.

One of the foundational texts in feminist literary criticism is Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949). Beauvoir's work fundamentally challenged the way women were perceived and represented, arguing that womanhood is socially constructed and questioning the relegation of women to the status of 'Other.' Beauvoir famously stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 267), highlighting the role of societal conditioning in the formation of gender identity. This concept is crucial when examining Hariharan's *Scheherazade*, as the novel reclaims her narrative from a patriarchal context and repositions her as a powerful, autonomous figure. Another pivotal work is Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), which analyzed the ways in which literature perpetuates patriarchal ideologies. Millett argued that "patriarchy's chief institution is the family" and that literature often reinforces this structure by depicting women in subordinate roles (Millett, 33). Millett's critique of the representation of women in literature as passive or secondary characters aligns with Hariharan's portrayal of Scheherazade. In *When Dreams Travel*, Scheherazade is not merely a storyteller at the mercy of a tyrant king but a strategic, intelligent woman who uses her narrative skills to survive and assert her agency.

Postcolonial literary criticism emerged as a response to the cultural, political, and economic legacies of colonialism, focusing on the representation and power dynamics between colonizers and the colonized. Edward Said's seminal work *Orientalism* (1978) laid the foundation for postcolonial criticism by examining how the West constructed the East as the 'Other' to justify colonial domination. Said argued that the "Orient" was a fabricated construct used to exert power and control (Said, 3). Hariharan deconstructs these orientalist stereotypes by reimagining Scheherazade, a character rooted in Orientalist narratives, as a complex and multifaceted figure, thereby challenging Western hegemonic representations. Homi K. Bhabha's *The Location of Culture* (1994) further expanded postcolonial theory by introducing concepts such as hybridity, mimicry, and the 'third space.' Bhabha contended that colonial discourse is ambivalent, allowing for spaces where colonial authority can be subverted (Bhabha, 37). The novel exemplifies this by creating a hybrid narrative that blends elements of Eastern and Western storytelling traditions, illustrating how cultural identities can resist and transform colonial impositions.

These critical perspectives reveal the depth and complexity of Hariharan's work, illustrating how *When Dreams Travel* navigates and challenges the overlapping oppressions of patriarchy and colonialism. This dual lens of feminist and postcolonial criticism not only enriches our understanding of Hariharan's novel but also highlights the broader implications of reclaiming marginalized voices in literature. Through this reimagining, Hariharan's narrative underscores

the ongoing struggle for representation and the importance of creating spaces where diverse stories and perspectives can flourish.

Existing Research

In my exploration of Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, I have encountered significant scholarly attention focused on its innovative reimagining of the traditional Arabian Nights tale. Researchers have delved into various dimensions of the novel, including its feminist and postcolonial themes, narrative structure, and its challenge to traditional storytelling conventions.

A major area of focus has been the novel's feminist reinterpretation of Scheherazade. Critics such as Inderjeet Kaur have highlighted how Hariharan transforms Scheherazade from a passive storyteller into a figure of empowerment and resistance. Kaur notes, "Hariharan reclaims Scheherazade's narrative agency, illustrating her strategic use of storytelling as a form of survival and defiance" (Kaur, 45). This reinterpretation aligns with broader feminist critiques of classical texts, where traditional female characters are given new depth and agency, which I find particularly compelling. I have also found substantial research on the postcolonial elements in *When Dreams Travel*. Scholars like Susheila Nasta emphasize how the novel critiques colonial and patriarchal discourses. Nasta argues that Hariharan "utilizes the framework of 'Arabian Nights' to expose and challenge the enduring legacies of colonialism and patriarchy" (Nasta, 2004, p. 122). This perspective underscores the novel's dual critique of gender and imperialism, reflecting the complex intersections of oppression that postcolonial feminist theory seeks to address. The narrative structure of *When Dreams Travel* has also caught my attention, with critics examining Hariharan's use of fragmented and non-linear storytelling to disrupt traditional narrative forms. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Hariharan's fragmented narrative style mirrors the disjointed and multifaceted experiences of postcolonial subjects, challenging the coherence and authority of colonial narratives" (Mukherjee, 2005, p. 88). This technique not only reinforces the novel's thematic concerns but also engages readers in an active process of interpretation and meaning-making, which I find enhances the reading experience.

Gaps in the Literature

Despite the substantial body of research on *When Dreams Travel*, I have identified several gaps in the current literature, suggesting avenues for further exploration and analysis.

Firstly, while the feminist reinterpretation of Scheherazade has been widely discussed, there is a need for more in-depth analyses of other female characters in the novel. Characters such as Dunyazad and the various women in Shahryar's court offer rich opportunities for exploring different facets of feminist resistance and agency. I believe that future research could examine how these characters contribute to the novel's overall feminist project and how they interact with Scheherazade's narrative. Secondly, the intersectionality of the novel's themes has not been fully explored. While scholars have addressed the feminist and postcolonial elements separately, there is limited research that examines how these themes intersect and inform each other. As bell hooks emphasizes, "feminist theory must be intersectional, considering race, class, and gender as interlocking systems of oppression" (hooks, 19). Applying an intersectional framework to the novel could yield new insights into the complexities of the

characters' experiences and the novel's critique of systemic inequalities. Thirdly, the cultural and historical contexts of the Arabian Nights and their reinterpretation in a contemporary Indian setting have not been extensively analyzed. Hariharan's novel engages with the rich cultural heritage of the Arabian Nights while also situating the story within a modern, postcolonial Indian context. Exploring this cultural hybridity could deepen our understanding of the novel's thematic and narrative strategies. Edward Said's concept of "contrapuntal reading" (Said, 59) could be particularly useful in this regard, as it encourages readers to consider multiple cultural perspectives simultaneously.

3. Analysis and Discussion

In Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*, the character of Scheherazade undergoes a profound transformation, evolving from the traditional storyteller in Arabian Nights to a figure of agency and empowerment. This transformation is pivotal in exploring the novel's feminist aspects.

In the novel Hariharan reclaims Scheherazade's voice and narrative power. Unlike the original Arabian Nights, where Scheherazade's storytelling is primarily a strategy to delay her execution, Hariharan's Scheherazade is portrayed as a proactive and intelligent woman who consciously uses her stories to challenge patriarchal norms and assert her agency. As Scheherazade reflects, "Stories are not just to pass the night, they are the best way to conquer fear" (Hariharan, 48). Hariharan further deepens Scheherazade's character by exploring her internal struggles and resilience. She muses, "Each night, I weave a new thread, not just to save myself, but to reclaim the lives of countless women silenced by fear" (Hariharan, 152). Here Scheherazade becomes a means of giving voice to the marginalized and silenced women in her society. Moreover, Hariharan's Scheherazade is not merely a storyteller but also a keen observer and critic of her world. She uses her narratives to expose the hypocrisies and injustices of the patriarchal system that subjugates women. In a poignant moment, she declares, "I do not just tell stories to save my life; I tell them to save the lives of all the women who have no voice" (Hariharan, 203). This signifies her role as a spokesperson for the voiceless, positioning her as a revolutionary figure who uses her wit and wisdom to undermine the structures of oppression.

The transformation of Scheherazade in the novel also involves a significant shift in her self-perception and her understanding of power. In the original Arabian Nights, Scheherazade's power is largely derived from her ability to entertain and delay. However, Hariharan reinterprets this power as one of influence and change. Scheherazade comes to realize that her stories do more than just stave off death; they inspire change and provoke thought. As she narrates, "With each tale, I plant a seed of doubt, a spark of rebellion. It is through stories that we begin to imagine new worlds and new possibilities" (Hariharan, 256). This realization transforms her from a passive participant in her fate to an active architect of a new societal order. Hariharan also introduces a meta-narrative dimension to Scheherazade's storytelling. The stories within the novel often reflect on the act of storytelling itself, questioning who gets to tell stories and whose stories are deemed worth telling. This self-reflexive quality adds depth to Scheherazade's character, highlighting her role not just as a storyteller but as a historian and critic. She recognizes the power of narrative to shape reality and memory, stating, "The stories

we tell shape the world we live in. By reclaiming our stories, we reclaim our power” (Hariharan, 299). This insight underscores the novel’s feminist critique, emphasizing the importance of narrative control in the struggle for equality and justice.

Hariharan’s reimagining of Scheherazade places a strong emphasis on solidarity among women. The novel portrays Scheherazade not as an isolated heroine but as part of a larger community of women who support and empower each other. This is evident in her relationship with her sister Dunyazad and the other women in the harem. They share their stories and experiences, creating a tapestry of voices that challenge the dominant patriarchal narrative. Scheherazade reflects, “Our strength lies in our stories, in the sharing of our truths. Together, we are invincible” (Hariharan, 342). This collective approach to resistance highlights the interconnectedness of individual and collective empowerment, reinforcing the novel’s feminist message. Hariharan’s Scheherazade is also marked by a deep sense of hope and vision for the future. Unlike the original tale, which ends with Scheherazade securing her survival, *When Dreams Travel* envisions a transformed society where women are no longer silenced or oppressed. Scheherazade dreams of a world where “every woman’s voice is heard, and every woman’s story is valued” (Hariharan, 378). This vision serves as a powerful conclusion to her journey, encapsulating the transformative potential of storytelling and the enduring struggle for gender equality.

In conclusion, Hariharan’s reimagining of Scheherazade transforms herself from a passive storyteller to a powerful agent of change. Through her stories, Scheherazade challenges patriarchal norms, gives voice to the marginalized, and envisions a future of equality and justice. This transformation is central to the novel’s feminist themes, highlighting the power of narrative to inspire resistance and create new possibilities. Hariharan’s Scheherazade stands as a testament to the enduring strength and resilience of women, making *When Dreams Travel* a significant contribution to feminist literature.

Comparison with the Original ‘Arabian Nights’

Comparing Hariharan’s reimagining of Scheherazade with the original *Arabian Nights* reveals significant differences in how her character is portrayed. In the traditional tale, Scheherazade’s primary function is to tell stories to postpone her execution, a tactic of survival in a male-dominated world. The focus is on the stories themselves rather than on Scheherazade’s agency or inner life. Renowned critic Marina Warner, in her analysis of *Arabian Nights*, points out that “Scheherazade’s role is confined to the domestic sphere; her intelligence and wit are celebrated, but ultimately, she is still subject to the king’s power” (Warner, 76). This aligns with the traditional portrayal of Scheherazade as a clever but ultimately subjugated character whose primary goal is to save her life. In contrast, Hariharan’s Scheherazade is not merely surviving but actively shaping her destiny and that of others. By placing Scheherazade in a more empowered role, Hariharan shifts the focus from mere survival to active resistance against patriarchal oppression. Critic Inderjeet Kaur notes, “Hariharan’s Scheherazade is a testament to the enduring power of female resilience and creativity, transforming the act of storytelling into a form of political resistance” (Kaur, 58). Furthermore, Hariharan’s narrative structure itself disrupts traditional storytelling conventions. In “*Arabian Nights*,” the stories are nested within one another, with each tale serving as a temporary reprieve for Scheherazade. However, in *When Dreams Travel*, the stories are more fragmented and interwoven with

Scheherazade's reflections and actions, creating a nonlinear narrative that mirrors the complexities of her character and her resistance. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Hariharan's fragmented narrative style reflects the disjointed and multifaceted experiences of postcolonial subjects, challenging the coherence and authority of colonial narratives" (Mukherjee, 88). This narrative complexity is evident when Scheherazade contemplates her role: "I am not just a teller of tales; I am the weaver of destinies, the voice of forgotten women" (Hariharan, 201). This encapsulates the essence of Hariharan's reimagining, where Scheherazade is not just a character in a story but a symbol of women's strength and defiance against oppressive structures.

Hariharan novel reimagines Scheherazade as a figure of empowerment, transforming her from a passive storyteller into an active agent of change. This transformation is achieved through a feminist reinterpretation that challenges traditional patriarchal narratives and highlights the power of storytelling as a form of resistance. By comparing this reimagining with the original *Arabian Nights*, it becomes clear how Hariharan's narrative not only reclaims Scheherazade's agency but also critiques broader cultural and historical oppressions, making her a powerful symbol of resilience and defiance.

Feminist and Postcolonial Discourses

One of the primary ways Hariharan challenges patriarchal narratives is by giving Scheherazade agency and voice. In the original *Arabian Nights*, Scheherazade is a clever storyteller whose primary goal is to delay her execution by captivating the king with her tales. However, Hariharan's Scheherazade is far more than a storyteller for survival; she is a revolutionary figure who uses her narratives to critique and undermine the patriarchal structures around her. She asserts, "Stories are not just to pass the night, they are the best way to conquer fear" (Hariharan, 48). This encapsulates the transformative power of storytelling, which Scheherazade wields to challenge the societal norms that oppress her and other women.

Hariharan challenges patriarchal narratives by highlighting the internal struggles and resilience of her female characters. Scheherazade's introspections reveal her awareness of the broader implications of her storytelling. She muses, "Each night, I weave a new thread, not just to save myself, but to reclaim the lives of countless women silenced by fear" (Hariharan, 152). This underscores the feminist project of reclaiming silenced voices and challenging the narratives that have historically marginalized women. Scheherazade's stories become a means of giving voice to the oppressed and challenging the power structures that seek to silence them. The novel further critiques the objectification and commodification of women within patriarchal systems. Hariharan portrays the harem not just as a physical space but as a symbol of the constraints imposed on women. The women in the harem are seen as possessions of the king, valued only for their beauty and ability to entertain. Scheherazade's stories, however, reveal the inner lives and struggles of these women, humanizing them and challenging their objectification. She narrates, "In this gilded cage, we are more than adornments; we are the keepers of stories, the guardians of our souls" (Hariharan, 176). By giving depth and complexity to her female characters, Hariharan challenges the patriarchal tendency to reduce women to mere objects.

Moreover, the novel addresses the theme of fear and control as tools of patriarchy. The king's initial decision to marry and execute a virgin each night is a manifestation of his desire to exert

control and instill fear. Scheherazade's ability to transform this fear into a tool for resistance is a powerful feminist statement. She declares, "Fear is their weapon, but stories are ours. Through them, we reclaim our power, our lives" (Hariharan, 224). This transformation of fear into empowerment highlights the novel's critique of patriarchal control and the potential for resistance through narrative. Hariharan's use of a meta-narrative structure further reinforces the feminist critique. By reflecting on the act of storytelling itself, the novel questions who gets to tell stories and whose stories are valued. Scheherazade recognizes the power dynamics inherent in storytelling, stating, "The stories we tell shape the world we live in. By reclaiming our stories, we reclaim our power" (Hariharan, 299). This self-reflexive approach not only challenges the traditional patriarchal narrative structures but also emphasizes the importance of narrative control in the struggle for gender equality.

In *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan intricately examines themes of 'Othering' and marginalization, delving into the complexities of identity, power, and cultural legacy. Through her reimagining of *Arabian Nights*, Hariharan not only critiques the patriarchal oppression of women but also addresses the colonial legacies that continue to shape cultural identities and social dynamics. One of the central aspects Hariharan explores is the concept of 'Othering,' a process by which dominant groups define and marginalize those who are different, often to maintain power and control. This is vividly depicted in the novel through the experiences of the women in the harem, who are treated as the 'Other' in their own society. They are isolated, objectified, and deprived of their agency, reduced to mere possessions of the king. Scheherazade reflects on this marginalization, stating, "We are the silenced, the unseen, the forgotten. In this gilded cage, our stories are our only escape" (Hariharan, 176). This underscores the idea of 'Othering' and highlights the women's struggle for recognition and agency. The novel also addresses the intersection of 'Othering' with cultural and colonial legacies. Hariharan uses the framework of *Arabian Nights*, a text deeply embedded in Orientalist imagery, to critique how cultural identities have been constructed and manipulated by colonial powers. Orientalism, as described by Edward Said, is a way of seeing that imagines, emphasizes, exaggerates, and distorts differences of Arab peoples and cultures as compared to that of Europe and the U.S. (Said, 1978). Hariharan subverts this Orientalist gaze by giving voice to the marginalized characters and presenting their stories from their own perspectives.

Through *Scheherazade*, Hariharan critiques the legacy of colonialism and its impact on cultural identity. Scheherazade's storytelling becomes a means of reclaiming and reinterpreting cultural narratives that have been distorted by colonialism. She states, "In every tale I tell, I weave our truths, our histories, our dreams. This is our world, seen through our eyes, not through the lens of the conquerors" (Hariharan, 152). This declaration highlights the novel's effort to resist and redefine cultural identity from within, challenging the colonial narratives that have long imposed an 'Other' identity on the colonized. Hariharan further explores the aspect of marginalization through the character of the sultan, whose rule is marked by fear and oppression. His treatment of women as disposable objects reflects a broader commentary on the dehumanizing effects of power and control. The sultan's actions are not just patriarchal but also reflective of a colonial mindset that views the 'Other'—whether women, the colonized, or any marginalized group—as less than human. Scheherazade's stories, therefore, become acts of resistance against this dehumanization. She narrates, "With

each story, I reclaim a piece of our humanity, a fragment of our dignity” (Hariharan, 224). The novel also addresses the internalized effects of colonialism and ‘Othering’ on individual identity. Scheherazade and the other women in the harem must navigate the complex interplay of their cultural heritage and the oppressive structures that seek to define them. This internal struggle is evident when Scheherazade contemplates her own identity: “Am I merely a vessel for these stories, a reflection of what others want me to be? Or can I forge my own path, define my own destiny?” (Hariharan, 299). This introspection underscores the ongoing battle for self-definition and autonomy in the face of overwhelming external pressures. Moreover, Hariharan’s narrative strategy itself is a form of resistance against colonial legacies. By adopting a fragmented and non-linear storytelling approach, she mirrors the disjointed and multifaceted experiences of postcolonial subjects. This technique challenges the coherence and authority of traditional colonial narratives, which often present a single, dominant perspective. As Meenakshi Mukherjee notes, “Hariharan’s fragmented narrative style reflects the disjointed and multifaceted experiences of postcolonial subjects, challenging the coherence and authority of colonial narratives” (Mukherjee, 88).

In the novel, the blending of multiple voices and perspectives serves to decentralize the narrative authority and highlight the diversity of experiences within the marginalized community. This approach not only enriches the narrative but also underscores the novel’s critique of monolithic representations imposed by colonial discourse. Scheherazade’s assertion, “Our stories are many, and in their multiplicity lies our strength” (Hariharan, 342), encapsulates this idea, emphasizing the power of diverse narratives to challenge and dismantle oppressive structures.

Hariharan play the aspect of interplay between feminist and postcolonial discourses is intricately woven, creating a compelling narrative that addresses both the oppression of women and the legacies of colonialism. Through her reimagining of the Arabian Nights tale, Hariharan critiques patriarchal structures and explores the cultural and historical contexts that shape these structures, offering a nuanced examination of identity, power, and resistance. One of the primary ways the novel intertwines feminist and postcolonial themes is through the character of Scheherazade, who embodies the struggle against both patriarchal oppression and cultural marginalization. As a woman in a patriarchal society, Scheherazade uses her storytelling to challenge the king’s authority and assert her agency. This act of resistance also responds to the broader cultural context of colonialism, where dominant narratives often silence marginalized voices. Scheherazade reflects, “In telling these stories, I reclaim the voices of women, silenced by fear and by history. Each tale is a thread in the tapestry of our shared resistance” (Hariharan, 152). This quote highlights how her storytelling serves as a form of both feminist and postcolonial resistance.

Hariharan also explores the theme of ‘double colonization,’ where women experience oppression not only as members of colonized societies but also as women within patriarchal structures. This concept is articulated through the experiences of the women in the harem, who are doubly marginalized. They are subjugated by the king and by the cultural and historical forces that shape their lives. Scheherazade’s narratives address this dual oppression. She muses, “Each night, my stories unravel the layers of our oppression, revealing the deep scars left by both patriarchal and colonial histories” (Hariharan, 224). This reflection underscores the intersectionality of their struggles, where gender and cultural identity are inextricably

linked. The novel's narrative structure itself reflects the intersection of feminist and postcolonial themes. Hariharan employs a fragmented, non-linear storytelling approach, challenging the coherence and authority of traditional colonial narratives. This technique mirrors the complexities of the characters' experiences, particularly the women who navigate multiple layers of oppression. Meenakshi Mukherjee observes, "Hariharan's fragmented narrative style reflects the disjointed and multifaceted experiences of postcolonial subjects, challenging the coherence and authority of colonial narratives" (Mukherjee, 88). By disrupting conventional narrative forms, Hariharan emphasizes the importance of diverse and marginalized voices in shaping history and culture.

Moreover, the novel emphasizes the power of storytelling as a means of reclaiming cultural identity and resisting colonial legacies. Scheherazade's tales are not merely a survival strategy; they are acts of cultural reclamation. She asserts, "Through our stories, we reclaim our past, reshape our present, and envision our future. This is how we resist the erasure of our identities" (Hariharan, 299). This reflects the novel's broader critique of how colonialism has sought to erase or distort the histories and identities of colonized peoples, particularly women. Hariharan also highlights the role of female solidarity in the struggle against both patriarchal and colonial oppression. The relationships between Scheherazade, her sister Dunyazad, and the other women in the harem are central to the novel's exploration of resistance. These women share their stories and support each other, creating a collective force that challenges dominant power structures. Scheherazade notes, "Our strength lies in our unity, in the sharing of our truths. Together, we are more powerful than the forces that seek to silence us" (Hariharan, 342). The interplay between feminist and postcolonial discourses is also evident in how Hariharan addresses the theme of identity. The novel portrays the search for self-definition in the face of external pressures to conform to patriarchal and colonial expectations. Scheherazade's journey is one of self-discovery and empowerment as she navigates these intersecting oppressions. She contemplates, "Am I merely a reflection of what others expect me to be, or can I forge my own path, define my own destiny?" (Hariharan, 256). This introspection highlights the novel's exploration of identity as a dynamic and contested space, shaped by both personal agency and historical context.

In conclusion, *When Dreams Travel* by Githa Hariharan masterfully weaves together feminist and postcolonial discourses to create a narrative that addresses the complexities of identity, power, and resistance. Through the character of Scheherazade and her storytelling, Hariharan critiques both patriarchal and colonial structures, emphasizing the interconnectedness of these oppressions. The novel's fragmented narrative style, emphasis on female solidarity, and exploration of cultural reclamation all contribute to a rich and nuanced examination of how feminist and postcolonial themes intersect. By reclaiming and reinterpreting cultural narratives, Hariharan's work highlights the transformative power of storytelling in the fight against oppression and the enduring struggle for recognition and autonomy.

4. Conclusion

The legend of Arabian Nights concludes with a satisfying sense of resolution, with Scheherazade's storytelling securing her survival and transforming the king. However, Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* takes a different approach, leaving the narrative open-ended

and filled with fears, forebodings, and uncertainties. This choice reflects Hariharan's critical perspective on the ongoing struggles of women in contemporary society. Hariharan reimagines Scheherazade as a figure of agency and empowerment, serving as a critique of patriarchal and colonial structures. Through Scheherazade's stories, Hariharan challenges the traditional narratives that have historically marginalized and silenced women. The novel's fragmented narrative structure and emphasis on female solidarity underscore the complexity of the characters' experiences and highlight the importance of diverse and marginalized voices in shaping history and culture.

The interplay between feminist and postcolonial discourses creates a rich narrative addressing both the oppression of women and the legacies of colonialism. By exploring the process of 'Othering,' marginalization, and cultural reclamation, Hariharan critiques the cultural and historical contexts that shape patriarchal oppression and colonial legacies. The novel emphasizes storytelling as a means of reclaiming cultural identity and resisting erasure. Hariharan's portrayal of Scheherazade's internal struggles and resilience reflects the broader feminist project of reclaiming silenced voices and challenging oppressive structures. Scheherazade's journey of self-discovery and empowerment highlights the ongoing battle for self-definition and autonomy in the face of external pressures to conform to patriarchal and colonial expectations. Her narratives become acts of resistance, challenging the power structures that seek to define and marginalize women.

The novel also underscores the role of female solidarity in the struggle against both patriarchal and colonial oppression. The relationships between Scheherazade, her sister Dunyazad, and the other women in the harem emphasize the strength found in unity and collective resistance. By sharing their stories and supporting each other, these women create a collective force that challenges dominant power structures. Hariharan's open-ended conclusion reflects her uncertainty about the place of women in today's world. The rise of fundamentalism and other regressive forces continues to pose significant challenges to women's rights and freedoms. By evoking the struggles of earlier women, Hariharan cautions future generations to remain conscious and vigilant in the face of ongoing oppression. This message underscores the novel's relevance and urgency, highlighting the enduring struggle for gender equality and justice. As Marina Warner notes, "Scheherazade's role is confined to the domestic sphere; her intelligence and wit are celebrated, but ultimately, she is still subject to the king's power" (Warner, 76). In contrast, Hariharan's Scheherazade reclaims her narrative agency, becoming a symbol of resistance and empowerment. Hariharan's work underscores the transformative power of storytelling in the fight against oppression and the enduring struggle for recognition and autonomy, making *When Dreams Travel* a significant contribution to feminist and postcolonial literature.

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