

A Three-Lens Analysis of Male Characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Gita Hariharan.

P. Preethi Veronica¹, Dr. Sruthy Bharathkumar²

¹ Research Scholar in English, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam Campus, Visakhapatnam, India.

Email: ppudi@gitam.in

² Assistant Professor, GITAM School of Humanities and Social Sciences, GITAM University, Visakhapatnam Campus, Visakhapatnam, India.

Email: sbharath2@gitam.edu

Abstract

This study examines the representation of male characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Gita Hariharan through the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF). It addresses a noticeable gap in feminist literary criticism, where male characters are often treated as secondary. The framework analyses four key figures – Dan, Mahesh, Gopal, and Baba – through three perspectives. The perspective of social norms (general), reader expectations (proposed), and authorial representation (projected).

The study integrates feminist literary criticism, masculinity studies, and representation theory using qualitative textual analysis. It demonstrates that masculinity in the novel is not fixed but fluid and internally fractured. Each character reflects a different model of masculinity like hegemonic, romantic, alternative, or traditional. Yet, all of them reveal limitations in providing emotional depth or stability. These portrayals expose the tensions embedded within patriarchal structures.

The study argues that male characters play an active role in shaping gender relations within feminist narratives. The paper contributes to a more relational understanding of gender through the introduction of TLMF as a structured analytical tool. It also expands feminist inquiry by bringing male subjectivity into focus through a female narrative perspective.....

Keywords: Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF), Masculinity in literature, Feminist literary criticism, Indian women's fiction, Gender representation.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Indian English fiction often engages with feminist concerns. It explores how gender, identity, and power operate within specific cultural contexts. Among modern writers, Gita Hariharan stands out for her subtle and layered portrayal of women's lived realities. Her novel *The Thousand Faces of Night* examines female consciousness, memory, and resistance with remarkable depth.

Most critical readings of the novel focus on its female characters – Devi, Sita, and Mayamma. These studies are valuable. They illuminate the emotional and cultural struggles of women within patriarchal settings. Yet they also leave an important gap. Male characters are often treated as secondary figures or narrative add-ons. Their role in shaping gender relations is rarely examined in detail.

The men are much more than support to the storyline in the novel. They influence the emotional, psychological, and social trajectories of the women. Their actions reflect broader cultural ideas about masculinity. At the same time, they reveal how power operates within intimate relationships. Ignoring them limits our understanding of the text.

This study addresses that gap by bringing male characterisation to the centre of analysis. It asks two key questions. Why do men behave the way they do within the narrative? And why is the study of male characters essential for understanding gender in Indian women's writing?

The paper applies the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF) to answer these questions. This framework examines male characters through three perspectives – the general, the proposed, and the projected. The general lens focuses on social norms. The proposed lens considers reader expectations shaped by cultural narratives. The projected lens analyses how the author constructs and critiques masculinity within the text.

The study adopts a qualitative approach based on textual analysis. It relies on close reading to examine how meaning is created through language, context, and narrative structure. This method allows the analysis to move beyond surface description. It helps uncover how masculinity is constructed and questioned within the novel.

Ultimately, the paper argues that male characters are not peripheral. They are central to the novel's exploration of gender. Studying them reveals how masculinity is formed, challenged, and reshaped within a feminist narrative. This shift in focus allows for a more complete and relational understanding of gender in Indian English fiction.

Objectives

The present study aims to

examine the representation of male characters in the novel within the broader context of feminist literary discourse, analyse the portrayal of masculinity in the novel using the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework, investigate how the male characters embody different forms of masculinity, evaluate the role of male characters in shaping gender relations and influencing the inner lives and social realities of the female characters, demonstrate the representation of masculinity as a dynamic, relational construct shaped by culture, than as a fixed identity.

Review of Literature

The extant scholarship on Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night* has largely approached the novel through feminist, postcolonial, and gender-based lenses. Women's identity, agency, emotional life, and resistance to patriarchy have been the dominant concerns. Such readings have done vital work in framing the novel as a critique of the cultural and ideological forces that constrain women's lives. But because this body of work concentrates so heavily on female subjectivity, male characters have tended to fade into the background. That relative neglect opens up space to ask a different question: how is masculinity itself built, negotiated, and portrayed in the novel? Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's postcolonial feminist work provides an important framework for understanding the construction of female subjectivity within cultural and ideological structures. She emphasises the ways in which representation participates in the (re)constitution of the female subject in postcolonial contexts (Rajan 5–7). This perspective is valuable for understanding the gendered structures within which Devi's experience unfolds. However, it leaves open a further question concerning the male figures who participate in and shape those gender relations.

Susie Tharu, meanwhile, draws attention to the intersections of caste, gender, and social positioning in Indian literature. Women's lives, she shows, cannot be understood apart from the larger structures that generate identity and inequality (Tharu 1313–14). This structural lens illuminates the social world of *The Thousand Faces of Night* effectively. What it does not pursue very far, though, is what these same structures mean for the making of male subjectivity. Bringing masculinity into the frame alongside women's experience would build on this structural approach rather than abandon its feminist commitments.

Rekha Pande, in her broader historical survey of Indian feminism, traces how ideas of gender have shifted through social reform and literary representation (Pande 4–7). That work supplies useful historical and cultural grounding for reading Hariharan's treatment of gender. Simran Chadha's study of urban, middle-class women in Indian English fiction takes a related tack, foregrounding female agency as it plays out in women's dealings with men (Chadha 241–43). Both approaches usefully track changing gender dynamics. Yet the men in these relationships tend to appear only as backdrop to women's agency, rarely examined as subjects with masculine identities of their own.

Sarbani Guha Ghosal traces the development of feminist consciousness in India, highlighting changing understandings of women's position and the growing recognition of gender as an analytical category (Guha Ghosal 793–94, 799–800). N. Palani, writing specifically on *The Thousand Faces of Night*, centers the emotional journeys and endurance of Devi, Sita, and Mayamma under patriarchy (Palani 23–25). Between them, these studies reinforce how central female experience, resilience, and consciousness are to understanding Hariharan's novel. Their woman-centered focus, however, leaves little room to ask how the male characters embody, negotiate, reproduce, or push back against the masculine models available to them culturally.

Taken as a whole, this scholarship has mapped out several crucial dimensions of the novel: the shaping of female identity, the workings of patriarchy, the link between gender and social position, and the possibility of resistance within a restrictive culture. One thing it has not mapped out, though, is masculinity as its own analytical category. This is not merely a matter of male characters getting less airtime. The deeper issue is that the field's emphasis on women's experience can obscure how masculinity itself feeds into, reacts to, and gets reshaped by the novel's gender relations.

That gap matters because Mahesh, Dan, Gopal, and Baba each occupy a distinct place in Devi's emotional and social world – they resist collapsing into a single patriarchal type. Their conduct spans authority, tenderness, emotional distance, companionship, possessiveness, responsibility, and vulnerability. These differences raise a double question: how does masculinity function within patriarchal culture, and how do individual men take up, reshape, resist, or drift from the masculine expectations that culture sanctions?

Masculinity studies offers a useful conceptual toolkit here. R. W. Connell reframes masculinity as socially produced through gender relations, moving away from any notion of it as fixed or biologically given (Connell 67–74). Todd W. Reeser makes a parallel case for the historical and cultural variability of masculinities (Reeser 15–20). Together, these frameworks let Hariharan's male characters be read not as stand-ins for some essential "male nature," but as figures whose masculinity takes shape within specific social, cultural, and relational conditions. This is not a retreat from the novel's feminist concerns – examining masculinity means examining one more structure through which women's experiences are shaped.

All of this points to a further question: how does Hariharan build different forms of masculinity, and how does the narrative position readers in relation to them? Answering it takes more than sorting characters into those who conform to patriarchal norms and those who resist them. It also means attending to the expectations a character's gendered behavior sets up, and to how the narrative eventually confirms, complicates, or overturns those expectations.

This study takes up that gap through the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF). Rather than treating male characters as mere supporting cast in a female-centered story, it puts their construction and representation at the center of the analysis. The General Lens looks at the broader social and cultural norms defining acceptable masculinity. The Proposed Lens considers the masculine identity and behaviour that the narrative's context leads readers to expect. The Projected Lens then examines how Hariharan reinforces, complicates, subverts, or rebuilds those expectations. Together, the three lenses extend existing feminist readings of *The Thousand Faces of Night* while offering a sharper account of male subjectivity, masculine identity, and the narrative construction of gender.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on three interconnected strands – feminist literary criticism, masculinity studies, and representation theory. Together, they provide a strong foundation to analyse male characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Since the novel is written by a woman, it is important to examine masculinity through a gender-aware narrative perspective.

Feminist literary criticism forms the base for this framework. Scholars such as Rajeswari Sunder Rajan and Susie Tharu show how literature both reflects and reshapes gender relations. Gender is not merely represented in texts. It is actively produced through narrative. In Indian women's writing, male characters are not just neutral figures, but they embody systems of power, negotiation, and resistance. A close analysis reveals how patriarchy operates within everyday relationships.

The study turns to masculinity studies to understand male behaviour more directly. It specifically draws on R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that masculinity is not fixed but is socially constructed and organised in a hierarchy. Certain forms dominate, while others remain marginal or subordinate (Connell 67–81). This framework helps explain characters such as Mahesh, Dan, Gopal, and Baba. Each occupies a different position within this structure. Their actions are shaped not only by personal choices but also by cultural expectations.

Recent scholarship promotes this idea further. Masculinity is now seen as plural and evolving. Todd W. Reeser notes a shift away from rigid definitions towards the idea of "multiple masculinities" shaped by culture, history, and social context (Reeser 15–20). This perspective is especially useful in literary analysis. Characters often embody competing and contradictory forms of masculine identity.

Masculinity is, therefore, better understood as a process rather than a fixed trait. It is fluid, negotiated, and often unstable. Literary texts provide a space where this instability becomes visible. They allow masculinity to be explored as something that changes over time and across situations (Reeser 31, 35). This insight matches closely with the present study.

The framework also draws on representation theory, particularly the work of Stuart Hall. Hall argues that meaning is not simply reflected in texts. It is produced through representation (Hall 15–19). Characters do not merely

mirror reality. They actively construct it. In this novel, male characters encode cultural ideas about gender through narrative strategies. These representations invite readers to interpret, question, or resist those ideas.

Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF)

The theoretical strands discussed above converge in the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF). This framework provides a structured method to analyse male characters through three interconnected perspectives – the general, the proposed, and the projected. Each lens highlights a different dimension of masculinity, allowing for a layered and nuanced interpretation.

General Lens (Societal Norms of Masculinity)

The general lens focuses on widely accepted social expectations of male behaviour. It draws on R.

W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity and matches with Stuart Hall's idea of shared cultural meanings. Through this lens, masculinity is associated with traits such as authority, emotional restraint, rationality, and responsibility.

Traditional definitions often link masculinity with dominance, control, assertiveness, and stoicism. These traits are reinforced through cultural practice and social conditioning. However, they are not fixed or universal. As Khan and Khandaker argue, masculinity is socially constructed and shaped by context (259–60). What appears “normal” is often a learned expectation rather than an inherent quality.

When viewed through this lens, male characters initially appear familiar. They seem to fit into recognisable roles. This familiarity creates a baseline for interpretation and shapes the reader's first response.

Proposed Lens (Reader Expectations from Cultural Narratives)

The proposed lens shifts attention to the reader. It examines how expectations are formed through cultural narratives and literary conventions. Readers often approach a text with pre-existing assumptions about how characters should behave. These expectations are shaped by repeated storytelling patterns. A caring man is expected to become a dependable partner. A husband is expected to provide stability. Such assumptions are not accidental. They arise from deeply embedded narrative habits.

This lens draws on reader-response theory, which sees meaning as emerging through the interaction between text and reader. Male characters are, therefore, not only what they are in the text. They are also what readers expect them to become. These expectations influence how characters are interpreted and evaluated.

Projected Lens (Authorial Representation and Gender Critique)

The projected lens focuses on the author's role in shaping masculinity within the narrative. It examines how male characters are constructed, challenged, and reinterpreted through storytelling.

In this novel, Hariharan does not simply reproduce conventional models of masculinity, but reshapes them. Her portrayal often exposes the limits and contradictions of male roles. Characters do not fully meet expectations. Their behaviour is re-evaluated within a feminist framework.

This approach is consistent with the idea that gender is not fixed but produced through social practice (Khan and Khandaker 259–60). Masculinity is not merely represented; it is actively constructed and questioned within the narrative. The text becomes a site of critique rather than confirmation through this lens.

Integration of the Framework

These three lenses work together to create a layered analytical model. Each male character can be understood at multiple levels:

as shaped by social norms

as interpreted through reader expectations

as constructed through authorial intent

This layered approach reveals the complexity that masculinity is not a fixed essence. It is shaped by culture, filtered through interpretation, and reworked within narrative structures.

The Three-Lens Masculinity Framework moves the analysis beyond simple description. It offers a systematic way to examine how masculinity is formed, contested, and transformed in Indian women's fiction.

Methodology

This study takes a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in textual analysis and close reading. That choice makes sense given the aim: understanding how masculinity gets built through characterisation, dialogue, narrative positioning, relationships, and symbolism, not counting how often certain behaviours show up. The aim is to

interpret how masculine identities take shape within the social, cultural, and narrative fabric of Gita Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*.

The analysis stays focused on this one novel, with close reading as the main tool. Passages are read both in their immediate context and against the shape of the larger narrative. Dialogue is given particular attention, along with character description, encounters between characters, moments of conflict, expressions of affection or authority, emotional responses, and key turning points in how characters develop. None of these are treated as one-off moments. Instead, they're read as recurring patterns, the means by which the novel builds and reworks its masculine identities over time.

Four male characters anchor the study: Dan, Mahesh, Gopal, and Baba. Each has a distinct relationship with Devi, and each embodies a different kind of masculine behaviour, which is exactly what makes them useful for this research question. The selection is purposive, not exhaustive, these four were chosen and not simply included by default. They occupy different relational and narrative positions, and each combines authority, emotional involvement, companionship, responsibility, vulnerability, and detachment in his own way. Those differences are the point – they make comparison possible and let masculinity be studied as something differentiated and relational, rather than a single fixed category.

Where the novel's symbolic and intertextual layers feed directly into its construction of gender, they're brought into the analysis too. Myth, inherited literary traditions, and the novel's allusion to *Paradise Lost* are read in relation to the characters and moments where they surface. These aren't treated as subjects in their own right, but as pieces of the novel's larger representational framework – worth pausing on only when they illuminate the cultural assumptions, gendered expectations, or narrative positioning tied to the male characters.

The Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF) is the backbone of the analysis. It comprises three lenses, connected but analytically distinct:

The General Lens looks at the broader social and cultural norms that define masculinity – what counts as acceptable, desirable, authoritative, responsible, or deviant within the novel's cultural world. This sets the normative backdrop against which the male characters' actions can be read.

The Proposed Lens turns to the expectations the narrative sets up for the reader around masculine behaviour – the culturally familiar patterns, gender conventions, and character cues that prime readers to anticipate certain kinds of male conduct. The interest here isn't in what readers actually think, but in what the narrative and its cultural surroundings make available for them to expect.

The Projected Lens asks what the narrative ultimately does with those expectations. Does Hariharan reinforce them? Complicate them? Expose, question, or subvert them? This lens zeroes in on the gap – where one exists – between culturally available models of masculinity, what readers are led to expect, and how the narrative eventually represents or critiques those models.

The three lenses build on one another rather than working in isolation. The analysis starts by mapping the relevant social and cultural expectations around masculinity through the General Lens. It then turns to the Proposed Lens, considering what masculine behaviour the narrative invites readers to anticipate. Finally, the Projected Lens examines how the narrative actually positions that masculinity. Bringing all three together makes it possible to see whether a character's masculinity is reproduced, negotiated, complicated, or challenged by the novel.

For each character, then, the same core questions apply: What social norms shape his masculine position? What expectations does the narrative build around his behaviour? And how does Hariharan ultimately represent or critique those expectations? From there on, the analysis considers how these dimensions interact, and how masculine identity shifts depending on interpersonal and cultural circumstance.

TLMF is applied with structure, but not as a rigid box-ticking system. It works hand in hand with close textual analysis. No character gets slotted into a single masculine category. Instead, the framework helps surface tensions, continuities, contradictions, and transformations in how each man is portrayed. This matters because these characters often reproduce certain masculine expectations while resisting or complicating others at the very same time. The framework allows for comparison without flattening anyone into a fixed type.

Altogether, the methodology draws on textual evidence, contextual interpretation, and theoretical grounding. Close reading keeps the argument tethered to the language and narrative structures of *The Thousand Faces of Night*, while TLMF offers a systematic way of tracking how masculinity operates across social expectation,

readerly anticipation, and authorial representation. What the analysis ultimately aims to show is not just that the novel contains different kinds of men, but that it actively constructs masculinity itself as something culturally situated, relational, and open to negotiation.

Analysis and Discussion

Dan: Reconfiguring Romantic Masculinity

Dan first appears as emotionally open and at ease. He fits the image of a modern, liberal man through the general lens. He is attentive, expressive, and comfortable with intimacy. His relationship with Devi reflects a familiar model of companionship.

The proposed lens strengthens this impression. Readers are likely to expect commitment from such emotional warmth. His gestures, shared moments, and sense of closeness suggest the possibility of a stable relationship. However, this expectation is unsettled through the projected lens. Devi resists the idea of permanence. She articulates this clearly:

“The probability of imposing a permanence such as marriage, however flexible in transient America, was somehow obscene” (Hariharan 6).

This moment reshapes Dan’s role in the narrative. He shifts from a potential partner to a figure of transience. His relationship with Devi becomes a phase rather than a destination.

Hariharan uses this shift to question romantic masculinity itself. Emotional openness does not guarantee stability. Affection does not necessarily lead to commitment. Thus, Dan’s character challenges the assumption that intimacy must culminate in permanence.

Mahesh: Hegemonic Masculinity

Mahesh presents a contrasting model of masculinity. Through the general lens, he appears as the conventional Indian husband. He is practical, disciplined, and socially appropriate. He fulfils the expected role within a structured marriage.

The proposed lens encourages the expectation of stability. He is assumed to provide continuity and security even in the absence of emotional expression. This expectation arises from deeply rooted cultural norms.

The projected lens, however, exposes the limitations of this model. Mahesh is emotionally distant and intermittently present. His approach to the relationship is functional rather than relational. His criticism of Devi’s background further reveals a lack of empathy.

His character reflects what R. W. Connell describes as hegemonic masculinity, where authority is maintained, but emotional connection is weak. A useful parallel can be drawn with *Paradise Lost*. Adam declares:

“I do confirm me first as chief in sin” (Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book IX).

While this statement of Adam suggests solidarity, it also reinforces centrality. Adam places himself at the centre even in transgression. Mahesh operates in a similar way. His authority remains intact even as the relationship weakens. This parallel highlights the persistence of male centrality across different narrative contexts.

Gopal: The Illusion of Alternative Masculinity

Gopal initially appears to offer a contrast to Mahesh. Through the general lens, his relationship with Devi seems unconventional. It suggests freedom from rigid social structures.

The proposed lens encourages hope. Readers may see him as an emotionally expressive alternative. He appears spontaneous and less constrained by tradition. However, the projected lens complicates this view. Gopal does not provide stability. His connection with Devi is immediate but not sustained. He engages in the present moment without depth or continuity.

His eventual departure confirms this instability. What appears as freedom becomes another form of uncertainty. Hariharan avoids presenting Gopal as a solution. Instead, she shows that alternative masculinities may also fail to offer emotional grounding. As masculinity studies suggest, multiple masculinities can coexist without resolving underlying structural limitations (Reeser 15–20).

Baba: Subtle Patriarchy

Baba is perhaps the most complex male figure in the novel. Through the general lens, he appears wise and caring. He offers stories, guidance, and emotional reassurance. The proposed lens reinforces this perception. Readers may interpret him as a stabilising presence in Devi’s life. However, the projected lens reveals a more subtle dimension. Baba’s worldview remains rooted in traditional ideas about gender. His statement illustrates this clearly:

“Where women are honoured, there the Gods delight, great men earn through their spiritual power, the fortune of a virtuous wife” (Hariharan 65).

At first glance, this appears respectful. Yet it defines women in terms of virtue while placing men in a position of moral authority. Baba represents a softer form of patriarchy, one that operates through cultural values rather than overt control.

Myth, Memory, and Masculine Ideals

The novel deepens its exploration of masculinity through myth and cultural memory. Stories such as those of Damayanti and Nala emphasise choice and compatibility. In contrast, the story of Bheeshma raises questions about duty and ethical responsibility.

Bheeshma’s commitment to his vow is often celebrated. Yet his refusal to respond to Amba’s plea introduces a moral tension. It raises an important question – can adherence to principle justify emotional harm? The narrative invites a re-evaluation of traditional masculine ideals.

A similar dynamic appears in the domestic sphere. Sita’s father-in-law asserts control over her expression:

“Put that veena away. Are you a wife, a daughter-in-law?” (Hariharan 30).

Sita’s response is telling:

“Yes. I am a wife. I am a daughter-in-law” (Hariharan 30).

In this exchange, identity is reduced to social roles. Individual expression is suppressed. Masculine authority operates not only through power but also through everyday expectations.

These moments show that masculinity in the novel is not merely personal. It is embedded in cultural narratives, traditions, and institutions. As Todd W. Reeser suggests, literature often reveals dimensions of masculinity that remain hidden in everyday life (Reeser 12). The novel uses this narrative space to question and reinterpret those dimensions.

Findings

The application of the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF) reveals that masculinity in *The Thousand Faces of Night* is fluid rather than fixed. It does not function as a stable identity. Instead, it emerges through the interaction of social norms, reader expectations, and authorial representation. Each male character embodies a distinct form of masculinity, yet each form also reveals its limitations.

This pattern reflects a broader theoretical insight. Masculinity is inherently marked by tension and contradiction. It does not form a unified or coherent identity. Instead, it consists of overlapping expectations that often conflict with one another.

Through the general lens, masculinity appears familiar and culturally sanctioned. Dan is seen as the caring partner. Mahesh represents the dutiful husband. Gopal suggests a free-spirited alternative. Baba appears as a wise and guiding figure. These roles align with established cultural norms and create an initial sense of stability.

The proposed lens builds on this familiarity. It introduces expectations shaped by narrative conventions. Readers anticipate that Dan will move toward commitment, that Mahesh will provide security, that Gopal will offer emotional liberation, and that Baba will serve as a source of support. These expectations arise from deeply embedded cultural scripts.

However, these expectations do not hold. The projected lens reveals how the narrative disrupts them. Hariharan systematically unsettles each model. Dan’s emotional warmth does not lead to permanence. Mahesh’s authority does not produce intimacy. Gopal’s apparent freedom does not provide stability. Baba’s wisdom does not escape patriarchal assumptions. Each model fractures under closer scrutiny.

The result is a fragmented understanding of masculinity. It does not provide a stable foundation for emotional or existential support. Instead, it exposes the limitations of patriarchal structures. These limitations are not merely individual. They are structural, shaped by cultural expectations and social conditioning.

At the same time, the novel does not reduce male characters to negative figures. They are portrayed with complexity. Their actions are shaped by the roles they inhabit, and those roles are themselves constrained by larger systems. This balanced portrayal avoids simple judgment and allows for deeper analysis.

A key insight emerges from the narrative perspective. Masculinity is reframed through a female lens. Male characters are not evaluated solely by their intentions. They are understood through their impact on women’s lives. This shift places female experience at the centre while still engaging critically with male subjectivity.

Importantly, masculinity cannot be understood in isolation as it exists in relation to femininity. As Khan and Khandaker suggest, masculinity is inherently relational and defined through its distinction from the feminine (261). This interdependence reinforces the need for a relational approach to gender analysis.

Overall, these findings confirm that the study of male characters is essential to understand gender in literary texts. Masculinity is not a neutral background but is an active and evolving construct. The TLMF makes it possible to trace how masculinity is shaped by culture, filtered through reader expectations, and reshaped through narrative design. This layered approach allows for a more complete and nuanced reading of the text.

Conclusion

This study examined the representation of male characters in *The Thousand Faces of Night* through the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF). In doing so, it addressed a clear gap in feminist literary criticism. While existing readings focus largely on women's experiences, this analysis shows that male characters are equally central to the novel's exploration of identity, power, and relationships.

Through the general and proposed lenses, figures such as Dan, Mahesh, Gopal, and Baba initially appear familiar. They match with social norms and reader expectations. However, the projected lens unsettles these assumptions. Each character is re-evaluated within the narrative. Their roles are questioned, their limitations exposed, and their inability to provide emotional stability becomes evident.

The study offers a layered understanding of male characters by bringing together feminist literary criticism, masculinity studies, and representation theory. These figures are not merely narrative supports or foils. They function as sites where gender is constructed, tested, and contested.

Through them, the novel reveals how patriarchy operates not only through overt authority but also through everyday interactions and expectations.

This study contributes to existing scholarship by placing male characterisation at the centre of feminist inquiry and by introducing the Three-Lens Masculinity Framework (TLMF) as a flexible and systematic analytical model. It demonstrates that masculinity is not a fixed identity. It is shaped by cultural norms, interpreted through reader expectations, and reshaped within narrative structures. The study also reinforces the idea that gender is relational. Masculinity and femininity are not separate categories but interdependent constructs.

An important shift emerges through the narrative perspective. Masculinity is viewed through a female voice. This changes the terms of evaluation. Male characters are understood not only by their intentions but by their impact on women's lives. This approach offers a more grounded and critical understanding of gender relations.

Scope for Further Research

The Three-Lens Masculinity Framework offers strong potential for further application. Future studies can extend this model to other works of Indian women's fiction. Comparative analyses across authors, regions, and languages may reveal how masculinity is constructed in different contexts. Incorporating perspectives such as caste, class, and regional identity can deepen the analysis. In addition, reader-response studies may explore how different audiences interpret male characters. Such directions can refine the TLMF and contribute to the growing field of masculinity studies within literary scholarship..

..

References

1. Chadha, Simran. "IE Fiction and the Urban, Middle-Class English-Educated Woman." *Indian Literature*, vol. 56, no. 4, 2012, pp. 241–243.
2. Connell, R. W. *Masculinities*. University of California Press, 1995.
3. Guha Ghosal, Sarbani. "Major Trends of Feminism in India." *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 66, no. 4, 2005, pp. 793–812.
4. Hall, Stuart. *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage Publications, 1997.
5. Hariharan, Gita. *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Penguin Books, 1992.
6. Khan, Anisur Rahman, and Shahriar Khandaker. "Analysing Masculinity from the Key Theoretical Lenses and Searching for Linkages with Violence against Women." *Masculinities and Social Change*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2017, pp. 257–287.
7. Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Penguin Classics, 2005.
8. Palani, N. "Female Consciousness in Githa Hariharan's *The Thousand Faces of Night*."

9. International Educational Applied Scientific Research Journal, vol. 2, no. 12, 2017, pp. 23–25.
10. Pande, Rekha. “The History of Feminism and Doing Gender in India.” *Revista Estudos Feministas*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2018, pp. 1–17.
11. Rajan, Rajeswari Sunder. *Real and Imagined Women: Gender, Culture and Postcolonialism*.
12. Routledge, 2005.
13. Reeser, Todd W. “Concepts of Masculinity and Masculinity Studies.” *Masculinities in Theory and Practice*, Brill, 2015.
14. Tharu, Susie. “The Impossible Subject: Caste and the Gendered Body.” *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 31, no. 22, 1996, pp. 1311–1315.