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Tradition and Modern Reflection of Indian Women: A Feministic Study

Of Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*

Abstract

Githa Hariharan explores women and their experiences in traditional societies with a deep sympathetic understanding. The images of women in Indian scenario have gone through a change and they are taking the centre stage in the novel of Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel*. Githa Hariharan portrays her women sensitively and they are the leading spirits in her fiction. Hariharan disdains feminist attitudes undergone by the women in her novel. The novel portrays the women suppression by patriarchal society. The key argument of the paper explores the ways in which the novel possesses the status of men and women in traditional and modern society.

Keywords: Feminism, Love, Death, Power, disloyalty, Tradition, Magical realism.

Githa Hariharan is an exemplar of grace, intelligence and wit. She is one of the Indian English women writers who have been producing a body of Indian Literature that is committed to feminist and social issues. Myth used in *When Dream Travel* is taken from the

Arabian myth, *The Thousand and One Nights*. The novel forces the readers to think about the depiction of male- dominated society in the famous translation of the medieval Arab anthologies. Through this novel, Hariharan not only answers back to a male- dominated literary tradition but also deconstructs and erodes the sexist impact of the original tales. This novel can be mirrored as a strong manifesto of The Second Wave feminism. Githa Hariharan by recasting *The Thousand and One Night* brings into light one of the central ethical concerns of the novel, namely, to bring the marginalized to the centre in different ways of tradition and patriarchal power structures. The story again revolves around the problematic man-women relationship, the unfair power between male and women imagination. Feminism is an important progressive ideology based on male and female equality. There is a patriarchy of male domination in Indian society. In his work *The Second Sex*, Simone De Beauvoir says:

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole the produces this creature, intermediate between male eunuch, which is described as feminine. Only the intervention of Someone else can establish an individuals as an other. (Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*)

When Dreams Travel is mainly about Shahrzad's search for her identity. The story is about Sultan shahryar of Shahabad and his younger brother Shahzaman, ruler of Samarkand. Their life went on smoothly, until they disclosed their queen's disaffection. Shahryar orders the decapitation of his wife, woman-slaves and their black lovers. Then he hits on an abominable plan of marrying a virgin every night and after despoils her, kills her the next morning. This new policy creates a panic in the kingdom.

The realm's marriageable daughters having by now all either died or fled, there is no one left. However the Wazir's daughter Shahrzad comes up with an extreme plan,

volunteering to become Shahryar's next wife. Shahryar finally save her and others, and her father arranges the marriage with the king. Each night she tells a story, leaving it deficient and promising to finish it, and the following night, the king is eager to hear the end that he puts off her utilization from day to day and finally recklessness his atrocious plan. This story telling extends for a thousand and nights after which the sultan is cured of his obsession against women. In the Arab collection, Shahryar tells her tales to save her life by pleasurable her husband Shahryar, the sultan. In Hariharan's version, (part two) two women, Dunyazad and slave girl Dilshad, decide to re-enact the entire event of storytelling for seven days and night during their sojourn in the infertile.

The novel shows the association between sexuality and power. It is a story about the sisterhood of women, the two sisters are, Shahrzad, and Dunyazad triumphs over the presumptuous authorization and inaccurate control of the invented brotherhood of enervate men. The connection between male sexuality and violence is repeatedly ingeminate in the novel. Shahrzad is able to her Shahryar psychologically through her stories.

When Dreams Travel is an investigation novel like *The Thousand Faces of Night*, and mainly revolves around Shahrzad, Dunyazad and Dilshad who suffer from identity crisis. It is written in a self-assertive and women's convention passed from generation to generation. Hariharan's description of the character of Shahrzad indicates the superiority of women, her awareness and wage of her power for the salvation of not herself but also the whole city.

The Thousand and One Night is an example of a text that travelled from East to West and was incorporated into the annals of world literature and imprinted its artistic and philosophical patterns on several genres of European, Western literature starting from fairytales of fantasy. *When Dream Travel* is presented in two parts. Part one- entitled "Traveler's"- is a rewriting of the original from story of *The Thousand and One Night*, the opening section entitled "In the Embrace of Darkness". Part two- titled "Uirgins, Martyrs and

others”, and that is sub-headed as “As Dream, A mirror, which is followed by seven pairs of short-stories alternately narrated by Dunyazad (Shahrazad’s sister), and Dilshad (Dunyazad’s lover).

In the second part of the novel, there are completely new tales told by Dunyazad (Shahrazad’s sister) and Dilshad (slave girl) with feminist and moral agendas, there are totally different from the original collection of Arab. It is important that one of Sultan’s wives are always lower in social rank, actually, slaves or (one of the meanest officers of the household, and as revenge for, lovers and attending slaves are killed to make up for his wrong. The historical tale of Arabian Nights is a total mixture of adventure and fantasy, but Hariharan describes the physical suffering and brutality buried in its depth. The story is about the measure power of two brothers and only power defines their male identity. The traditional victim status of women to a position of empowerment even in the most adverse circumstances:

Her breasts heavy domes, her legs palatial pillars- Flows in one continuous

glimmer of movement. Her words are not always beautiful or apposite or even her own. But for the space of the night at least, all that is vital in this palace is here, in this sweating, exhausted, ambitious body. (WDT 7)

The novel connects between sexuality and power is continuously in *The Thousand and One Night*. The novel shows the age-old ethical debate between sexuality and power which is also discussed by Cixous in her gender theory when man is always in the centre and woman is always marginalized. The connection between male sexuality and violence is repeated in the novel. Freud, in his *Interpretations of Dreams*, discussed that dream is the conscious expression of an unconscious fantasy or wish, which is not individual in waking life. The dream images represent the unconscious wished or thought. Although not allowed to

travel physically, women always took to travel through imagination and repeated to manual survival, secretly for always from men.

The three women present the three different identities instead of playing a silent role in a traditional manner. *When Dreams Travel* is an emblematic example of her feminist ideology. Her attention is towards the problems of women throughout the novel. In *When Dreams Travel*, Githa Hariharan portrays some important elements of magical realism. M.H. Abrams opines that in the 1920s, the term magical realism had relevance to a school of surrealism German painters. The thread of magical realism is knitted well in this novel. In this novel magical realism is illustrated by the narrator. The novelist mingles the fantastic and dream like elements with the actual agony of women in the society. Githa Hariharan presents magical elements through her well-constructed stories told by Dunyazad and Shahrzad. The stories depict the bitter picture of the society. It enquires into the nature of reality and often takes recourse to formal competent way of communicating. The fantasy can be contemplating preference kind of reality. The novel also describes supernatural writing and challenges the notion of real world. There are three types of fantastic construction. The first is “speculative story- telling”, it is used as symbolism and extended metaphor. A second area of fantasy in literature is the realm of overt reality. A third area is called ‘magic realism’.

The typical magic realism story involves singular, aberrations of reality which hold within the truths. Githa Hariharan reveals her new spirit of feminism, and the art described as ‘magic realism’. Magic realism can be used to explain the reality of characters or communities, but the characters return from death. Githa Hariharan has turned it into a new style between east and west. Chitra sankaran has noted:

Githa Hariharan explores those significant issues with regard to narrative in her novel, *When Dreams Travel*. The narrator weaves around Scheherazade or

Shahrazad of the Arabian Nights- a vibrant and inventive story about a perennially

played out game: The quest for love and power.(Chitra sankaran)

The deep observation of the novel *When Dreams Travel* by Githa Hariharan, deals about the discrimination against the women, and her struggle to new order with true self identity. It is the investigation for love and power, and the investigation for identity which is identified with the journey of mind along times are extension, and at last she also warns her present generation to remain alert to her prediction so that they can accept the challenge when their turn come. One can definitely find their self- identity with their courage and unfailing will. A writer is best judged by his/her work and there is no defalcation of either fiction on non-fiction to Githa Hariharan's credit.

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