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RADICAL RE-FASHIONING OF SELF IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S WHEN DREAMS TRAVEL

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Abstract

*This research has been undertaken with the aim to comprehend a few aspects of the post colonial world (India), employed in Githa Hariharan's *When Dream Travel*. Hariharan, true, expresses her anguish over the collapse of the secular ideologies in India. To decipher in vivid terms the identity crisis encountered by women, in particular the 'third world women' (India) they are 'doubtly colonized'. On the whole, the identity crisis of women characters under the chaffing pressures of Patriarchy. *When Dreams Travel* (1999), Hariharan's novel is drawn on the "Arabian Nights" delineating shahrazad and her sister as the protagonists of this wonderfully crafted novel which brings to limelight the irrationality and brutality embedded in a patriarchal set-up. The tales of adventure narrated by the witty, eloquent, brilliant and quick-tongued shahrazad to the king sharyar to escape his sword and her ultimate win over him, allows a wide scope for gender locations, the constant struggle between sexes for power and love.*

Keywords: *Identity, Patriarchy, liberate of women, traditional stereotype*

Introduction

Contemporary Indian Women writers are bestowed upon with such craftiness for writing and are really known for their perseverance. These women writers, with their avowed seriousness and audacious effort, initiate themselves to free themselves from the Shackles of the restrictive, traditional methodologies and technique and voice out their revised experience through their literary works. Thus, the gamut of literary provinces in India has radically changed. The dual phenomenon of the woman writer and the woman critic is on the upsurge. Moreover, features namely quality, quantity, variety and complexity characterized their writings.

Githa Hariharan is a Social Reformist

Githa Hariharan was born in 1954 in Coimbatore, India, to a Tamil Brahmin Family, from Palghat, South India. Her father was a journalist with a renowned Indian newspaper *The Times of India*. She grew up in Bombay and Manila. She received her education both in India and in the United States. A personage of versatility, she has tried her hands in varied arenas. She has served as a staff editor in WNET – Channel 13 in New York, and from 1979, she served in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi as an editor, first in a publishing house, then as a freelancer.

Githa Hariharan is a social reformist and nationalist to the core. She engages herself in reforming the ills of our society. Thus, in 1995, Hariharan questioned the validity of the Hindu Minority and Guardianship Act as they are discriminatory against women. The case, "Githa Hariharan and another Vs. Reserve Bank of India", paved way for a Supreme Court judgement in 1999 on guardianship.

She has carved a niche for herself as a well-acclaimed writer. Her published works comprises novels, essays, short stories, newspaper articles and columns. Her first novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* (1992) won the Commonwealth Writer Prize in 1993. Her other novels include *The Ghosts of Vasu Master* (1994), *When Dreams Travel* (1999), *In Times of Siege* (2003), and the latest *Fugitive Histories* (2009). She is also the author of a collection of highly acclaimed short stories, *The Art of Dying*, which was published in 1993. She also published a book of stories for children, 'The Winning Team' in 2004. Also she has edited, a volume of stories in English translation from fine major South Indian Languages, 'A southern harvest'. Moreover a collection of stories for children, 'Sorry Best friend' (1997) has been co-edited by her.

The Chaffing Pressures of Patriarchy

Hariharan, as a post-colonial writer has presented the novel with varied ways of restructuring. Through this restructuring, she probably tries to signal that the novel is no longer an 'Arabian Entertainment', but a narrative with its prime focus on women's concerns. Moreover, it unleashes the pattern of misogyny and its ideologies. The novel thus is presented in two parts. Part one – entitled 'Travellers' is a rewriting of the original frame story of 'The Thousand and One Nights', the plot of which is incorporated in the first section entitled "In the Embrace of Darkness'. Again, in part two, we encounter completely fresh leash of events with feminist perspective. Moreover, the connection between sexuality and violence is perennially emphasized in the novel. Undoubtedly, it is a novel that consistently hints at sexuality and power.

In the novel, we find the plot gets untraveled when the Sulthan is found imposing restrictions and orders that he should marry a virgin every night and then execute her the next morning. This brutal, beastly action has been going on until the Wazir's daughter, Shahrzad, with her undaunted spirit for storytelling marries the Sulthan. Hariharan seems to echo through this inhuman attitude of Arabs thus: "...the same customs as the Arabs. The patriarchs were polygamous, and they put away their wives at will;... in case of adultery, the wives stoned..." (beauvoir 116) Hariharan is committed to raise questions about power. The second section of the novel entitled '*On the way to paradise*' is shown as the day after the thousand and one nights, with the royal couples sitting in comfort in a shady bower of the royal gardens. Sharzad, we understand, has succeeded through her wits and talent for story-telling, in escaping the sword, thereby saving her life. She has entertained the King, who revels in her stories for Thousand and One Nights. He questions her; out of curiosity:

"Sharzad ... Where did all these stories come from? (Hariharan 9)

We realise that Shahrzad answers in unromantic stern fashion that is for sure not designed to please: "From my dreams; only those whose necks are naked

and at risk can understand them" (Hariharan 9). Her reply foregrounds the power structure in original terms. It is apt to quote Michael Foucault at this juncture:

Women were generally subjected...to extremely constraints, and yet this ethics(or self regulation)was not addressed to women: it was not their duties, or obligations, that were recalled, justified, or spelled out. It was an ethics for men:...to free men, obviously. A male ethics, consequently, in which women figured only as objects or, at most, as partners that one had to train, educate and watch over when they were under the power of someone else (father, husband, tutor(...it was an elaborate conduct carried out from the viewpoint of men in order to give form to their behaviour." (pandey, miti 137)

True, Shahrzad, is a powerful female figure from a global literary canon. She, the witty narrator of the Arabian Nights, dismantles the patriarchal and orientalist stereotype that has been nurtured about women in general. According to patriarchal society a woman is:

"when she becomes a young girl, the father has all power over her when she marries he transfers it in to the husband. Since his wife is his property like a slave, a beast of burden, or a chattel..." (beauvoir 114).

Thus, Sharzad, in contrary to such patriarchal versions indeed has won over husband, and gains a respectable status of queen. Githa Hariharan, also, has re-visited from feminist perspective in portraying Shahrzad, an eastern woman (a third world woman), whose experiences are different from her western counterpart, to quote Gayatri Spivak's stand on third world woman,

She expresses her disapproval of the west's... monolithic construction of a third world, that conveniently wipes out all the differences of culture, history, race and ethnicity... (Jain Jasbir 73)

It is to be noted that Hariharan has struck the pivotal role of female bonding from the onset of the novel. Dunyazad, her sister has been with her (Shahazad) as a source of moral support and strength, when she decides to take up her venture: "With the help of her silent sister Dunyazad she must coax him to repent, and

acknowledge that all women need not be killed" (16). Thus, at the end of the first part we readers are told that the major task has been accomplished with a happy endings "... the brothers are united with the sister." This fascinating aspect of feminism, sisterhood, portrayed through the bonds of affection between Shahrzad and Dunyazad to liberate women from the despotic rule of Shahryzar is praiseworthy. This bond is presented as the necessary platform to unravel the enigmatic mysterious episodes of the novel. Shahrzad and Dunyazad are so powerful that they are described as the forerunners of alternative ways of living fanned by liberal/radical feminists. Hariharan seems to advocate Radical feminism that propagate the utmost need for the reorganization of society and gender roles. They assure that this could be achieved only when women were united. Hence emerged the concept of 'Sisterhood', which advocate the friendship between women:

The notion of shared oppression is intimately connected with a strong emphasis on the sisterhood of women....,there is a strange focus on women's similarities and the pleasures of forming political and other bonds between women in a world where such bond s are marginalized or dismissed". (Beasley, chris 54)

Dumyazad and Shahazad, more than sisters are intimate friends and Hariharan intends to utilise their relationship to overthrow the brutal hegemony of King Shahryar, thereby attempting to reorganize the society and gender roles. These two women characters, epitomizes the immense potential of female wit and intelligence that result in liberation, thereby striving to create a new non-misogynous universe.

Revisit to Classic

Scheherazade, true, is revisited as Shahrzad by Hariharan as an institutional mythical figure for feminism. Her qualities of immense strength and keen intelligence are rare in the wide canvas of feminine image in myths .She, described as a powerful storyteller, narrates stories for her life and the lives of other women. Another interesting aspect is, Githa Hariharan has succeeded in giving due weight age / recognition to her intelligent

Shahrzad who prove consistently women is in no way inferior than man, with regard to wit and intelligence, which indeed is an important theory in feminism that fight against men's notion about creativity of women:

....for a woman to indulge in creative writing was considered a kind of abnormality, a subversive function of imagination, act. A woman who wanted to write was designated as deviant. In fact, creative writing was almost a taboo to a woman who wanted to be considered "a perfect woman" because for a woman to write meant insubordination which was intolerable to the male dominated society. (kaur iqbal xv).

Later in the second part of the novel, in a flash back mode and through Dunyazad's and Dilshad's stories, Shahrzad married life and her character is delineated. Dunyazad and Dilshad engage themselves in telling each other stories, one tale answering the other for seven days and seven nights. There, this part of the novel, Shahrzad, the queen is shown as one who has achieved her goal. She is no longer a nervous girl fighting for her life. She has been revered as the saviour of the city; the martyr who listed her life to save the lives of other womenfolk and has been recognised for a martyrdom. She, undoubtedly, emerges as a feminist prototype worthy of emulation. Like a true liberal feminist, she seems to assert that women are not different to men:"liberal feminism follows this line of thinking in specifically asserting that women are not fundamentally different to men and yet are denied opportunities on the basis of their sex."(Beasley chris 53).

Dunyazad though initially has been under the impression that king sharyar's love for the dead Sharzad is true, later could understand the male chauvinism in King Shahryar. After his being held as captive, he writes a letter from which Dunyazad could infer that King Shahryar is a tyrant , who has been eulogising Shahrzad to create an impression among his public and Dunyazad that he ardently has loved Shahrzad. In reality, King Shahryar could not withstand the popularity of Sharzad and also her growing intimacy with the young traveller, Abdulla. Consequently, he has erased Shahrzad forever

Dilshad, again unleashes certain episode that tears the mask of King Shahryar. King Shahryar, as Dilshad, observes "the old man" still longs for women to satisfy his lust. Dunyazad is shocked to hear from Dilshad because King Shahryar, has built a stunningly marvellous tomb for the dead Sharzad, and a touching elegy written: "Life is a Sultan, and Sulthans, as we know, must marry now and then" (95).

Conclusion

A comprehensive view of feminism, thus deals in depth the fight against the subjugation of women and the traditional stereotyped concepts about them. Traditional ideas are imagined on the belief woman is incapable to share power with them. The feminists of today challenge then age old concept and questioned the patriarchal ideologies of confining women to the twin tasks of child

leaving and child rearing. Novel is pervasive and flourishes itself whenever there is transformation in the social and political structure. The fragmentation, riots, strife that is implicit in a society is reflected in this novel.

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