

GITHA HARIHARAN'S WHEN DREAMS TRAVEL AS PASTICHE

UJJWAL BISWAS

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPT. OF ENGLISH, KHATRA ADIBASI

MAHAVIDYALAYA, KHATRA, BANKUKA, (W.B.)

ABSTRACT

Githa Hariharan has employed the postmodern technique pastiche in *When Dreams Travel* to point out the misrepresentation of women in cultural representations. Patriarchal power which had been believed from ancient times is proved wrong through the technique of pastiche. Githa Hariharan has used the historical Arabic folklore collections, *The Thousand and One Nights* well known as *The Arabian Nights* as an element of pastiche in *When Dreams Travel*. The women characters Shahrzad and Dunyazad who were minor characters in the *The Arabian Nights* are cast as the protagonist in *When Dreams Travel* as an attempt to revision the existing text from a feminist perspective. Indian folklore and myth are used as pastiche through the character Dilshad and Satyasama. By revisioning these myths, Githa Hariharan has attempted to subvert the principles of patriarchy which were entrenched in the male centered narratives of the past.

Keywords: Githa Hariharan, *When Dreams Travel*, Pastiche, Postmodern technique.

Pastiche is a postmodern technique which means to combine, or paste together, multiple elements. Pastiche is employed by Githa Hariharan as a representation of the chaotic, pluralistic aspects of postmodern concept. It is also considered as a unique narrative technique that comprises of multiple genres to comment on postmodern situations. The mere limitation of Pastiche from that of Parody is that Pastiche has no place for humour or satire but it tends to imitate other texts. Hariharan has included the art of storytelling as an element of pastiche. Frederic Jameson in a conversation with Anders Stephanson explains the term "difference" in a narrative discourse as:

I tried to put this in the slogan "difference relates." The very perception of breaks and difference becomes a meaning in itself; yet not a meaning that has content but one that seems to be a meaningful, yet new, form of unity. This kind of view does not pose the problem "How do we relate those things; how do we turn those things back into

continuities or similarities?" It simply says "When you register difference, something positive is happening in your mind." It's a way of getting rid of content. (Jameson 6)

Githa Hariharan has used Pastiche to show the difference in the status of women. The difference between the representation of women in the literature of the past and in the contemporary literary text is discussed so that the distinct features of social structures would be clearly delineated. The women characters are sorted out and compared in relation to the different cultural and social setup to which they belong. Feminist discourses warrants majority of postmodern strategies which work as key to displace the dominant element such as patriarchy.

... feminist discourse draws within it a configuration of rhetorical and interpretative strategies. The concept of language as fluid and multiple frees it from its closed system. One of the original insights of the women's movement was that the personal is political, that is, the relation between experience and discourse constitutes feminism. The consciousness of self, like class or race consciousness is configuration of subjectivity, produced at the intersection of experience with meaning. This consciousness of self is never absolute or identifiable because it is constantly being reshaped, as it is grounded not only in personal history but also in the horizons of knowledge and meaning dependent on culture specifics at given moments. (Begum 145)

Githa Hariharan has applied postmodern concept to Indian context. Postmodern subversion is essential in the Indian context because patriarchy has dominated all spheres of a women's life. "Where modern feminist politics tend to fix the category of 'woman', by claiming status, recognition and rights for her, a postmodern feminist cultural politics deconstructs and transforms the meaning of 'woman'...it rapidly began to open up and destabilize dominant gender and sexual identities" (Roseneil, 169). Viney Kripal, while differentiating Indian postmodernism with Western Postmodernism, avers thus:

... while the same themes of gender relations and self-identity, history, political and social reform, have been addressed in the Indian English novel since the 1920's, the technique has changed dramatically since the 1980's. Again although the Indian novel has been influenced by the dominant literary trends and theories prevalent in the west, novelists have invariably adapted them or chosen out of them eclectically to suit representations of their society. Thus, the 1980's novelists may have been influenced by current postmodernist writing and post structuralist modes of thinking but their novel can, by no stretch of the imagination, be described as postmodernist in the Western sense. The postmodern novels of the Euro-American world are a continuation of the

modern novel and carry to the extreme its contra traditional experiments particularly those with language. (30)

Myths have been reinterpreted by Hariharan to create more relevant meaning to the myths and to certain new understanding of the myths. Myths are promoted by those in power: the prescriptive myths that may perpetuate divisions based on class, caste or gender. Such myths usually claim sanction by religion or tradition. Githa Hariharan has utilized this great and inclusive storehouse of myths as pastiche in order to render them a revisionist understanding. Githa Hariharan explores the existential anguish of the mythical women characters who could be compared with the characters of the novel.

Indian women writer's texts are 'fencing texts' where not only does the narrator want to sit on a fence that demarcates fields of perception, but more importantly from where she likes to fence – to be clad with gauntlets and masks, equivalents of irony and subtexts and flick out at the opponent with fast, deft, disguised strength and precise grace. The fencer should love the choreography of the game (the technique)... Anger is a necessary foil in Indian women's narratives- the middle passage between suffering and healing, between passivity and activity, between fear and forgiveness. Rage inspires movements, silence announces death, but anger keeps one alive and thus the question of 'self' trying to find itself is kept alive in our writings. (Bhargava 77)

Githa Hariharan's *When Dreams Travel* (1999) is a re-working or rather re-telling of the historical Arabic folklore collections, *The Thousand and One Nights* well known as *Arabian Nights*, which includes the Middle Eastern and south Asian stories as well. These tales were told by Scheherazade or Shahrzad, a woman who had been re-cast as the protagonist in *When Dreams Travel* by Githa Hariharan. The novel brings out an obvious solution for the oppression that was imposed on women in the *Arabian Nights* by deconstructing the whole meaning with a new vision. The major characters of this novel were drawn from the original text of *Arabian Nights*, while keeping the main plot similar Hariharan weaves the women characters Shahrzad and Dunyazad in a different dimension. She employs postmodern themes and techniques to establish a new perspective that she finds lacking in the original text of *Arabian Nights*. She has also added characters similar Indian mythological characters like Dilshad and Satyasama.

Shahrzad was a woman of wisdom and she used storytelling as a means of escapism from the merciless King's practice of marrying a virgin every night and killing her the next morning. This insane activity of the King made everyone upset including Jafar, the vizier of the

King and father of Shahrzad. At last, it's Jafar's turn to send his daughter but he hopes that his daughter would survive by her intellect. Shahrzad is strong willed and she never yields herself to male domination.

Shahrazad chosen variety of stories includes lessons for the king. She was a fearless warrior who with her intellect uses her stories as a sword and changes Shahryar's perception of women as nonentity. Hariharan voices women's predicament in a patriarchal setup which is evident through Shahrzad who through her stories represented women who were being suppressed by all means from physical to psychological levels. "She who repentant sultan has crowned with the words chaste and tender, wise and eloquent, replies, 'I don't have a sword, so it seems I cannot rule. I cannot rule, I cannot travel, I don't care to weep. But I can dream'" (WDT 20).

At the end of this story unlike its original anthology in *The Arabian Nights*, "He never sought forgiveness for those three years of murder to prove a pointless point. At the end of the thousand and one nights, it was he who granted a magnanimous pardon to Shahrzad, allowed her to live, to love and be loved, to be feted as the saviour of the city the trial of his reign was over, the chapter closed" (WDT 158).

Dilshad, who had served Shahrzad until her death, was now at the service of Dunyazad. In return, Shahrzad gifts her the transcript of her stories, written in gold as per Dilshad's desire. Dunyazad revives the status of Shahrzad with her art of storytelling. Dunyazad who is Queen of Samarkand, wife of Shahzaman, travelled a long way and finally reached the land of Shahabad, a fictional city, to see her beloved sister's tomb.

The travelling tale undergoes a change of costume, language and setting at each serai on its way. It adapts itself to local conditions, to this century or that, a permanent fugitive from its way. It adapts itself to local condition, to this century or that, a permanent fugitive from its officious parent, legitimate history. And Shahrzad - she too has learnt the lessons of the tales she told. She is now a myth that must be sought in many places, fleshed in different bodies, before her dreams let go of Dunyazad or her descendants. (WDT 25).

Dunyazad never wished to be her sister's shadow, she wanted to prove herself. "It flaunts pretend-windows that pay homage to a world outside. But they are really there to screen, to enclose, so that she is forced to turn inward, wallow in the past or in the palace's seductive, anachronistic tales. There is a present, in which she must act if she is to act at all, and surely that is the point of her dusty, hurried flight to Shahabad? (WDT 82) Dunyazad being the

descendant to Shahrzad travels along many cities to compile her sister's stories which tends to change its phase gaining varied interpretation and combining with similar stories.

The travelers move towards one of the gates of the legendary city, showpiece of wealth and high culture, pillar of surrounding countryside that works hard to sustain it. The kingdom needs this nucleus and the fantasies it breeds, both beneficent otherwise. Though tens of centuries may go by, though this city be reduced to rubble and a successor and yet another be built in a distant place, its grand design, of honour and chastity - and power - will never be left behind. (WDT 30)

Dunyazad was told of Satyasama for whom Dilshad had been a disciple. There arouses a healthy argument between Dunyazad and Dilshad and both employ themselves in telling stories as answer for the other. Dunyazad the narrator is possessed by Shahrzad and Dilshad by Satyasama they keep on framing stories in order bring their martyr, Shahrzad back to life. Satyasama, who has been a wandering poet in her country and was condemned by authorities.

Once Satyasama was invited to an old woman's house in order to hear her skill of storytelling. The story of Rupavati was told by the old woman, old man and Satyasama in different dimensions. The old woman narrated the story of Rupavati who tore her breast off to feed a beggar woman as she was about to eat her child out of hunger. Her husband was amused and frightened of such deed. He uttered towards the sky in order to bring back her breast if her heroic performance ever had any merit. A pair of breasts flew from the sky and affixed itself to her body. The Hindu God of Heaven, Indra who witnesses this sight and offers Rupavati a position of Goddess in his court. Through the boon of Indra Rupavati fulfilled her wish of becoming a man "Rupvata".

The old woman narrated the story centering the woman as a symbol of sacrifice. The old man stated that Rupvata is a man who gave life to Rupavati, the beggar with a child. According to the old man's description, Rupvata, the man gave food, shelter and the new lease of life to the woman Rupavati. Author here focuses that the male narratives wished to depict men as the life givers, saviors and women as sufferers eternally in need of men's support. The story of the old man implies that male narratives were designed to keep women always dependent on him.

Satyasama narrated the same story from an entirely different perspective. Rupavathi with her intellects tackles the situation. Rupavata fed and sheltered a tired Brahmin whose wife stood in front of their hut with a baby in the hand and was about to eat the baby in hunger. Brahmin requested Rupavati to tare her two breast and feed the beggar. Instead, Rupavati tore

the Brahmin's ears and planted it in the earth. This heroic deed charmed the sky and Brahmin was given ears again and the ears planted in the earth grew as corns. Rupavati fed the hungry woman and her baby with those corns. The Brahmin and Rupavata were unable to find a solution for the problem whereas Rupavati with her resolute decision solves the problem. The story narrated by Satyasama ensures the power of women over men but unfortunately both the old man and woman opposed the story of Satyasama and drove her out of their home.

Githa Hariharan suggests the status of revolutionary women writers who were condemned for breaking the rules and regulation that male writers had inculcated as an aspect of culture. Men subdued women by portraying them as weak characters and refused to accept the women when they started to write in order to create a unique narrative for themselves. The novel nourishes women empowerment in every aspect. The four women Shahrzad, Dunyazad, Dilshad and Satyasama have undergone several hurdles in their journey of life, through their wit and presence of mind they rose to the level of successful woman. The women characters are from different land like Shahabad, Samarkand, India, states of Vijaya, they are the representation of women who questions themselves and tend to find the answer for their existential anguish by revisioning the existing and accepted myths.

Githa Hariharan indicates that the dreams of the women traveled through their stories from over centuries beyond geographical boundaries. The novelist employs pastiche by drawing the major characters and the stories they narrate from *The Arabian Nights* as well as Indian mythologies to prove that the women of varied culture suffer from patriarchal domination.

The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network ... The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands ... Its unity is variable and relative. (Foucault 23)

Thus, Githa Hariharan points out the opposition of patriarchal influence and the enshrinement of feminist power in this novel by mocking over the misogynistic theory which is oriented in *The Arabian Nights* for it portrays women as symbol of pleasure. Therefore, this novel is a re-rendering of *The Arabian Nights* and it does not replicate the same plot but proves completely a different view point for the unique characters Dunyazad and Dilshad advocate women's liberation and autonomy by creating their own identity. Githa Hariharan carved the women characters as symbols of fortitude by combining myths, magic, fantasy and historical

evidence in creating a symbolic representation of postmodern women of this era. *When Dreams Travel* is a parody as well as pastiche to *The Arabian Nights* for it clearly brought to limelight the untold suffering of woman. In an interview with Joel Kuorrti, Githa Hariharan says,

By the time I came to write *When Dreams Travel* I really wanted to deal with this whole In a sense it is a stylized way to assume, briefly, another identity, to try to understand that identity. There might be a lot of commonality between that identity and your own which is why I identify and sympathise with that character which I cannot be. This is one way to understand what it is like to be you. They you create a story about that person, if you don't have access to a story. (Kuorrti, 118)

Hariharan's novels are concerned with the problematic delusions and raise women's questions; she formulates solutions to the current complexities of women with guidance of history and myths. Hariharan harbors Pastiche within the story that functions as a post-modern element which collectively imitates the style of various works that had been done previously. Hariharan very effectively relates the mythical stories and folklore to the present-day dilemmas faced by the characters in the novel.

REFERENCES

- [1] Bhargava, Rajul. "Infidel Heteroglossia? Postmodern Feminist Configuration in Githa Hariharan's *The Art of Dying*." Ed. Rajul Bhargava. *Indian Writing in English: The Last Decade*. New Delhi: Rawat Publication, 2002. Print.
- [2] Begum, Jameela A. "Postmodern as Feminist Text: A Reading of the Short Text of *Canadian*" Context ed. Shirin Kudchedkar. Delhi: Pencraft International, 1995. Print.
- [3] Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock, 1974. Print.
- [4] Hariharan, Githa. *When Dreams Travel*. India, Penguin Books, 2008. Print.
- [5] Jameson, Fredric and Anders Stephanson. "Regarding Postmodernism—A Conversation with Fredric Jameson." *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*. USA: Duke University Press. 1989. Print.
- [6] Kripal, Vinay. "Postmodern Strategies in the Indian English Novel." *Littercrit* Vol.22, No.2, Dec.1996 p.21-34. Print.
- [7] Kuorrti, Joel. Editor. *Tense Past, Tense Present: Women Writing in English*. India, Bhatkal & Son, 2003. Print.