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Publications

GITHA HARIHARAN'S WHEN DREAMS TRAVEL AS PASTICHE

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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.

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

Shahrazad's 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 Shahrazad who through her stories represented women who were being suppressed by all means from physical to psychological levels. "She who repented 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 Shahrazad, 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 Shahrazad until her death, was now at the service of Dunyazad. In return, Shahrazad gifts her the transcript of her stories, written in gold as per Dilshad's desire. Dunyazad revives the status of Shahrazad 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 Shahrazad - 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).

Dunyzad 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) Dunyzad 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)

Dunyzad was told of Satyasama for whom Dilshad had been a disciple. There arouses a healthy argument between Dunyzad and Dilshad and both employ themselves in telling stories as answer for the other. Dunyzad 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.

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POST-MODERN FEMINIST CONCERNS IN GITHA HARIHARAN'S THE THOUSAND FACES OF NIGHT

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to explore the ideals of post-modern feminism in *The Thousand Faces of Night* by Githa Hariharan. In accordance with the postmodern perceptive Hariharan has made a remarkable breakthrough by re-evaluating patriarchal practices in this novel. Githa Hariharan has placed the politics of sexuality and hierarchy within the family at the centre of her fiction. As a Postmodern feminist women novelist Githa Hariharan uses all these post-modern techniques such as revisioning mythology in order to subvert the patriarchal society which had been dominant for a long time.

Keywords: Postmodern feminism, Gita Hariharan, *The Thousand Faces of Night*

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Post-Modern Feminist Concerns in Githa Hariharan's

The Thousand Faces of Night

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Githa Hariharan has been regarded as one of the prominent postmodern Indian women writers. Githa Hariharan won the Commonwealth Writers prize (1993) for her first novel *The Thousand Faces of Night*. Githa Hariharan, wrote about changing socio-cultural scenario in the

postmodern contemporary India. She enriched the genre of fiction with new narrative techniques and escalated the genre of fiction to a new height in India through her contributions.

Feminism is defined as cultural, economic and political movement that has focused towards establishing legal protection and complete equality for women. In Indian writing, feminism is used as an instrument to appraise the status of women in the domestic and social sphere. The main focus of feminism is to subvert the patriarchal norms that is deep rooted in society which has in turn fostered the seeds of gender inequality.

Feminism originates in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. It attempts to analyse the reason for and dimensions of women's oppression, and to achieve women's liberation. To some, liberation is defined as social equality with men, while others feel that the narrow definition reflects the class bias of what is described variously as bourgeois feminism, career feminism, mainstream feminism or liberal feminism." (Tuttle, 107)

Indian feminist writers had to undergo intense struggle to chisel out an independent identity for feminism in India. The feminist women writers have carved a niche for themselves in the male dominated world of creative writing. In India, right from the ancient days, women have crossed several setbacks and they have been subjugated by the men and the orthodox norms of the society at large. Women have always been depicted as mute, submissive and yielding. There are several Indian novelists have mirrored the realistic status of women in the current scenario.

The Indo-English woman writers have a special advantage in this respect as they have themselves been exposed to the stresses and strains to which the "New woman" is subjected. Also writing in the English language is sometimes more helpful to an uninhabited frankness so necessary to the portrayal of the emotional, moral and spiritual problems of the "new woman". (Srivastava, 2)

Postmodern feminists believe that the concept of gender is constructed and literature plays a prominent role in reinstating the cultural percept of the binary apposition man/woman. The cultural norms were established through male narratives which created female stereotypes in order to subjugate women. Postmodernism refers to a social condition where the social institutions which operate upon the accepted hierarchical opposition no longer retain its allegiance. In this postmodern age women are economic empowered and socially liberated but they yet have to reconstruct their

gender identity and take initiatives to bring positive changes to the problems that they face. Women are primarily looked upon as care givers in the family, they have to strive against the cultural precepts of womanhood to realise their potentials in the social front. “Postmodernity is the era of enhanced reflexivity, in which processes of detraditionalization and individualization mean that people are increasingly aware of creating their own life narratives, and of their ability to exercise critical judgements about expert systems” (Roseneil, 165).

Postmodern feminism is a movement anteceded by the publication in 1949 post war France of Simone de Beauvoir’s *La Deuxieme Sexe* (The Second Sex). Asserting that “woman is made not born,” de Beauvoir investigated how woman has historically functioned as the culturally constructed and conditioned other of man. The question she posed in *La Deuxieme Sexe* is why woman remains, in the dominant cultural discourse, immanent while man realizes transcendence. “To emancipate woman is to refuse to confine her to the relations she bears to man, not to deny them to her; let her have her independent existence and she will continue none the less to exist to him also; mutually recognizing each other as subject, each will yet remain for the other another” (Beauvoir 248).

Family is centrality to the discussion of Hariharan’s work. In the Indian traditional family system these myths have a unique importance as they are verbally and orally transmitted from one generation to another generation in order to “establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives” (Abrams 170). Indian Mythology is connected with the stories about goddesses and the legendary heroes mentioned in the epics like the Ramayana and Mahabharata. Githa Hariharan has perfectly blended the myth and reality in the modern Indian life in her fiction.

Githa Hariharan’s novel, *The Thousand Faces of Night* can be considered as a postmodern feminist novel where she reformulates myth, an element from epics to be relevant in the present times. The author employs digression; a relevant myth is intruded as a parallel for the present crisis. Mayamma or Sita or any women can be associated with the characters retrieved from ancient mythologies for patriarchal dominance prevailed as a barrier for every woman in her quest for feminine self-identity. Devi grew up listening to the mythological stories narrated by her grandmother. These stories instilled a brave attitude in Devi. “She day-dreamed more and more about female avengers” (40). Devi not only considered these stories as a mere entertainment but created greater impact upon her consciousness. She confesses, “I lived a secret life of my own; I

became a woman Warriors, a heroine, I was Devi. I rode a tiger and cut of the evil magical demons heads” (41).

The mother of Devi’s rebirth are, thus, manifold. Besides her mentors there are, many other women whose lives offer new and useful lessons to Devi. She draws on her biological matrilineage as well as spiritual and mythical heritage. The invisible energies of the ancient goddesses — Devi, Kali and Saraswathi among others as well as genetic inheritance from all women who lived in the past ages and experiential wisdom of her own contemporaries — all these contribute to the eventual psycho-spiritual growth of the protagonist. (Vijayshree 181)

The three women in the novel are prototypes of the Women Phase referred by Elaine Showalter in her *A Literature of Their Own*. Mayamma symbolises the Feminine phase whereas Sita and Devi represents the Feminist and Female phase respectively. During the Feminist phase women wrote about the sufferings and injustice done to them.

Though Mayamma had underwent a pathetic life still she disregards self-pity and just accept it as fate. Though she faced rude and offensive treatment in her life, she never hurts others and accepts to be a victim. She lived regardless of her own desires, burying her own self in serving others so Mayamma's character is portrayed as the typical Indian feminine prototype of suffering and sacrifice.

Sita, being a married woman had to keep up with her household duties and responsibilities without realising her self-identity. She was forced to leave her passion for music in order to prove herself as an ideal wife. Mayamma and Sita were identical in concealing their wishes for the sake of their position in family just like the women of the past. Mayamma was a mere victim but Sita though crushed her ambitions tends to shape her future by manipulating her husband. Both these women had to accept their fate as they had a cultural binding which they preferred not to break.

Postmodernism states the absurdity of human relationship which is brought out by the character Devi. Devi is disillusioned with her marital life and breaks the sacred bond of marriage. Restarting her life with her mother again gives scope for Devi to create a new world for herself wherein she could taste the spirit of freedom. Like woman who belong to the Female phase as ascertained by Showalter, Devi creates a world for herself without any trace of her past but to recreate a world where she could sustain on her own. Devi yearns for freedom wherein her thoughts

and feelings could be expressed whole heartily without any restriction. Devi had broken the past stereotype of typical women and formulated a new strategy. Devi as a postmodern feminist was able to subvert the patriarchal rules that Sita and Mayamma followed permanently and never thought to break.

Devi subverted the general belief of womanhood after her breaking her marital bond with a rebellious decision. She at the end of the novel returns back to her mother. While she opened the gate of her home, she could hear a faint sound of veena that welcomes her homecoming. Devi with a smile entered her home for now her mind has found an enlarged space not only in the home but also in heart of her mother.

Devi had at last won the battle with the exploitative men. She struggled being a typical woman pertaining to the Indian context to which her mind refused to fit in and remained in a chaotic situation. Devi puzzled at the divergent tangent her life has taken and glimpses at the past which seems impossible to be rectified. Devi unable to undo her predicament and decided to restart her life from the very beginning. Devi proves that it is possible to re-correct all the misfortunes that she faced right from her marriage.

When Mayamma came to know about the flight of Devi she didn't stop her rather she blessed her to proceed with her journey and Sita awaits Devi's return home. This shows that traumas faced by women in the past made them desire for subversion of male domination in their subconscious mind which allowed them to accept the decision taken by Devi to break her marriage. Present day woman finds her success in not being identified as someone's wife or mother but in creating her own identity. Devi proves to be a post-modern woman who has walked out of her bonds of marriage in order to retain her self-respect and self-identity. The tradition that had been set by men had suggested a subverted place for women in the family as well as in the society. Men who agree the victory of women in every field ignore to accept her as a capable and equal partner in the family.

This commonplace story of marital discord and woman's quest for identity outside marriage is tuned into a remarkable rendering of the collective struggle of women for self-liberation through the author's play with narrative structures — framing texts within texts overlapping in curious ways: her carnivalesque accumulation of intertexts ranging from the tales from the Mahabharatha to folk stories and her deft interweaving of these with lives of real women.

Hariharan's narrative voices strike a powerful chord in contemporary literature returning to the multi-dimensional vibration of voices unfolding within a vast mythic social time space. (Vijayasree 177)

Postmodern feminism purports to deconstruct the ideals of cultural and social context propounded by the grand narratives. Representation of women in the metanarratives are reinstated to propagate the gender disparity in society.

The 'grands récits' are great narratives and the narrative has an end in view. It is a programme which tells how social justice is to be achieved. And I think the post-structuralists, if I understand them right, imagine again and again that when a narrative is constructed, something is left out. When an end is defined, other ends are rejected, and one might not know what those ends are. So I think what they are about is asking over and over again, what is left out. (Spivak, 1990:18)

Githa Hariharan attempted to write on the female subjectivity. She is very keen to portray the changing image of woman in the postmodern era. Her characters pass through three stages: tradition, transition and modernity. The close study of her novels will reveal that the women in Hariharan's novels pass through the three mentioned stages and emerge as the personifications of 'new' women who have been trying very hard to shed the burden of inhibitions they have shouldered for ages. Githa Hariharan says in an Interview with Arnab Chakladar states:

Am I a writer particularly concerned with "women's issues"? And am I a feminist? The answer to both questions is yes. I want to make it quite clear that in my life my choices have been dictated by what I perceive as the feminist choice....And anyway, however you define yourself, all our work is informed in some way or the other by feminism, along with the ideas of Freud and Marx. And this goes for both men and women, of course. So ...I am a writer (as opposed to a woman writer) who is a feminist, along with several other things!"

Githa Hariharan's women characters are depicted as an epitome of the changing image of Indian women who tend to move away from traditional portrayals of being enduring and self-sacrificing. They are the new women who are self-assured, assertive and ambitious in interrogating the image of the stereotype of ideal womanhood established through the metanarratives. Literature is a mirror that reflects the society in all its myriad aspects. Githa Hariharan was well aware of the purpose of her writing, hence her writing reinstates feminist views and is all set for a silent revolution or total metamorphosis in the attitude of modern Indian women.

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