

A Study of Indian Woman in Traditional Context in Gita Mehta's *Raj*

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Abstract

Gita Mehta is an eminent women writer writing in India. She has provided the Indian ethos in her writings. A close reading of her novels brings the peculiarities of incessant Indian traditional culture. *Raj* deals with Indian history during freedom struggle and Kshatriya dharma. Indian context relevant to traditional pattern and modern changes have been fused artistically and naturally. The changing aspects of theme regarding religion, spirituality, politics and female issue are well elaborated and make one curious about this country and life and so on. The historical novel *Raj* is about politics, freedom movement of India and divisions between religious groups and their struggle against British rule. During the novel covers the period from 1897 to 1970, the period from British imperial power to movement of freedom and then democratic country. This paper focus a woman traditional cultural context, Jaya is the marginalized and her husband, the patriarch is the centre, but by the reverse logic of the postcolonial text, it is Jaya who wields real power and she is the sufferer.

Keywords: context, traditional, historical, marginalized, politics, female issue and etc.,

The women are highly portrayed as silent-sufferers in India. They are presented as the upholder of an Indian traditional culture. They are expected to play various roles in India as mother, wife, daughter, sister, lady love, prostitute and so on. This life system is mainly due to the prevailing patriarchal society. Indian women took pride in service and self-sacrifice in the society. They followed the real images of Sita, Anasuya, Kantari and so on. However, Indian woman's freedom from all the shackles of illiteracy, subjugation and ignorance heralded the dawn of independence for them. The western education served as the transitional part when the Indian woman had to face the struggles between tradition and modernity. In a patriarchal world, a woman is never regarded as an autonomous being.

The women writer on the Indian literary scene with radical outlook is of the recent phenomenon. They present the idealized Indian context of image of woman in her novel. It is imperative that they write from women's point of view. They project well the emotion and experience of a woman in the image of a wise mother and so on. The emergence of women writers in Indian English Fiction is of great importance as they write about woman subordination and emancipation. In fact, the conflict between emotion and reason becomes a complex one as women are tossed between the desire and submission to the patriarchal set

up. Women writers have analyzed the socio-cultural modes and values that have given women their image and role towards themselves and the society. In order to achieve the harmony of relationships, Gita Mehta has analyzed the psychic and moral dilemmas of their woman character.

The historical novel *Raj* is about politics, freedom movement of India and divisions between religious groups and their struggle against British rule. During the novel covers the period from 1897 to 1970, the period from British imperial power to movement of freedom and then democratic country. It is a colourful historical story that depicts the progression of a young woman Jaya, born into Indian nobility in the period of the British Raj. Through young Jaya Singh's story, Mehta's readers are shown a portion of the British India's early struggle for independence. In her story, Mehta not only weaves colourful pictures of Indian culture and region together but also paints a picture of Indian colonial life from an Indian perspective. Mehta without being bitter and stern about history offers a complete story and leaves the reader to formulate his own position from which to read the history she tells..

General questioning the social-cultural aspects of the woman question through the 19th century and early 20th century. The great Indian writer Partha Chatterjee avers that 'nationalism did in fact provide an answer to the new social and cultural problems concerning the position of woman in 'modern' society and this answer was posited not on an identity but on a difference with the perceived forms of cultural modernity in the west.... The relative unimportance of the women's question in the last decades of the 19th century is to be explained not by the fact that it had been censored out of the reform agenda or overtaken by the more pressing and emotive issues of political struggle. The reason lies in nationalism's success in situating the women's questions' in an inner domain of sovereignty, for removed from the arena of political context with colonial state. The inner domain of national culture was constituted in the light of the discovery of tradition'. (Chatterjee, 117)

Jaya and the Balmer Maharani are governed by the inner domain of the traditional culture. The Maharani is not only conditioned by the traditional culture. The Maharani is not only conditioned by the traditions but she has also internalized those norms. She cannot and does not go beyond the accepted. Jaya is tender and raw, she could have adapted herself to the requirement of the emerging 'new' culture but he traditions hold fast and Jaya is pushed into the laws of the Purdah despite her father's disclaimer that 'his daughter was not to be raised in Purdah' (Raj 44)

For a few years Jaya develops a balanced her personality, she has all the virtues that the culture envisages for women plus self-assertion, decision making and the ability to form a new identity for herself which the colonial politics required. This does not mean, however, that the women's question is solved in the novel. That would be too simplistic to assume. Jaya as a woman has many more dimensions which we can understand only after we see the Maharani's position through her husband and the existing norms of the Rajput royalty.

Jaya's willing and her progressive father's strong reservations to her personal interest have to be sacrificed for the interest of the Kingdom. She is given in marriage to the sword of

a man she almost hated. Though trained as a boy in valour, she is not empowered to protest and she has to accept her marriage in silence.

Though Jaya faces her fears with fortitude and achieves her freedom from the confining limits of patriarchy which makes her, in a way, a historical figure. She is a part of royal history of Blamer and Sirpur and of the colonial history of India, but because she is like the women in the nationalist struggle of her times who appropriated both the feminine values and the masculine qualities. The writer seems to suggest that emancipation lies in women's world, the spiritual and the material worlds something that her mother, the Maharani of Balmer had achieved. Jaya's mother, the Maharani, we see the pathos of her situation. After the Maharajah's death, she is discarded as polluted by her widowhood and hence declared unclean and unfortunate.

Partha Chatterjee tells that the outer was considered the material domain which lies outside us and hence is a mere external that influences us, conditions us and forces us to adjust to it. It is unimportant. The spiritual which lies within, is our true self; 'it is that which is genuinely essential' (Chatterjee, 120).

Jaya is very ashamed and indignant but she cannot counter him. The irony of the situation is that Jaya with a sound mind in knowledge of four languages and excellent English was of no use to her husband. In the image of a 'good' wife, Jaya had even tried in Pratap's long absence to learn the local Sirpur language to please him. All this is of no avail. The man is callous, selfish and blind to his wife's needs. Jaya accepts the harsh verdicts of her husband with befitting poise and leads her barren existence alone, but she is not meant by the author to slide into oblivion. Mehta gives Jaya the visibility she could not have attained as Pratap's wife but which she gains by her personal abilities.

Maharajah Pratap highly comments on his wife's price: Jaya was unbalanced by the accuracy of his perception. After a lifetime as power's victim she wanted to be its executor, and she could taste the longing, even as she remembered that her husband was a fit and active man who would be reigning long after their son became an adult (Raj 375). Jaya prays for her husband's long life with more fervor than she did when she first entered Sirpur as his bride. But her wish gets shattered when only a few months after the agreement Maharajah Pratap dies in a plane crash. With a four years old son Jaya is now left alone to guard her son's throne for fourteen dangerous years.

Generally Mehta describes the strength of the Indian woman lies, traditional aver, in her supposed superiority and spiritual strength. Women were required to keep the inner sanctum away from outside gaze. In the colonial period this invisibility became a subject of much speculation and since the colonizer could not understand the enigma called Indian woman, they developed their own characters or different perspectives in India.

Gita Mehta wrote *Raj* in the decade of the 1980's and it was published in 1989. Mehta has all the advantages of hindsight. She exploits her post colonial situation and gives Jaya gives her abilities and intelligence, whereby she gains visibility in the novel. As a woman in the traditional culture, Jaya is the marginalized and her husband, the patriarch is the centre,

but by the reverse logic of the postcolonial text, it is Jaya who wields real power. Even then, Jaya is the sufferer. Kumkum Sangari points out in one of her essays that it is problematic to construct the history of because of the difficulty of owning a voice. 'It calls for a reconstruction of the complexity and historically changing definition of female agency' (Sangari, 36).

Gita Mehta portrayal of the image of Indian context for woman in her novel the present and part are inextricably interwove in her conception of the image of Indian woman in her novel. Most of her women frequent lose themselves in the memories of their early childhood life. Mehta captures these precious and enduring and endearing moments of value in her Indian women characters with perfect precision, irony and cheerful, tolerant passions. One may note that these flashes of early days are part of her narrative art; they are also her artistic strategy to position her characters in the context of a distant time and space and watch with glee how they emerge from there to become what they are now. Generally speaking, a deep and seemingly unmanageable psychological stress and the propensity in a weak-minded women characters of Mehta. She makes this ingenious use of this psychological aspect of human conduct in highlighting the precious desperate and momentarily imbalanced mental state or situation in her Indian women. At the same time, one has to admit that Mehta's major concern in showing the image of an Indian woman is to show that a woman, deliberately into an unethical, cannot live in peace, given the rigid, inflexible, throttling cultural values in the Indian social system.

Thus, the question of woman was at the core of the nationalist discourse is an accepted fact which post colonial studies scholars have considered as vital to the understanding of feminism in India. *Raj* has three strands running more or less parallel: first the native statues, second the nationalism and third the women's question in culture and in nationalism. Certainly life teaches many things for Jaya. The ends in novel the Balmer princess stands out as a free, self-assertive and self-confident woman of free India.

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