

ISSN 0976-8165

*The Criterion*



# The Criterion

An International Journal in English

Quarterly Refereed & Indexed Open Access Journal

April 2013 Vol. 4 Issue- II

**Editor-in-Chief**

**Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

**Managing Editor**

**Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)  
[criterionejournal@gmail.com](mailto:criterionejournal@gmail.com)

## Counterbalancing the Injury and Progress in Tradition: Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli*

**Sunanda Bose**

Asst Professor (Dept of Humanities)  
Siliguri Institute of Technology, WBUT (India)

**ABSTRACT:** The paper researches into the socio cultural perspective in particular with Rama Mehta's "Inside the Haveli". It is an endeavor to preserve women writer's effort towards the emancipation of their gender. It supports thoughts and missions of the protagonist and spearheads the discussion by evaluating the major incidents in the novel. Rama Mehta successfully accommodates the great Indian culture and her stand outside the tradition in the precinct of Indian literature. Her protagonist finds her recognition and values her identity without disturbing the traditional integrities. The paper also puts in high volume the traditional sophistication of the haveli and the protagonist's struggle to orient the women towards a progressive approach. Her message to the reader displays the confrontation between the centrally protected tradition and her consistency for a change the ultimate achievement of it.

Key words: Emancipation, Indian culture, confrontation, Progressive Achievement.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Women writers in India hassled for the custodian of women's rights and their independence through their works, where the enhanced profile of women provides ample opportunity to excavate the issues and aspects of Indian conventional society. One can find in their writing that the female characters are hued with distinct ability and aplomb and also hewed the role that "came from patriarchal society where customs shaped women's lives and declared what was or was not appropriate for women to be or to do."1. The novels of the Indian women writers have become incubators for the dynamic image of women and in its early phase have targeted the architecture of the society.

Rama Mehta's 'Inside the Haveli' discloses the perforated progress of women under the then phallogocentric society. The problems and responsibilities of women's immunity have lain undisturbed for years. This anatomic shortcoming of women's right had lead Rama Mehta to wage a struggle against the guidelines of image of 'softer sex' lain down by culture. Certainly Rama Mehta hints at the efficiency of women outside the feminine roles which is inherited by our past tradition and defiles the structural problems by illustrating the recovery of her own social rights. "In the light of transforming the traditional women's role, one of the central motifs of the women's writing of the late 60's 70's and 80's became the clash of traditional and modern values, which ultimately led to an identity crisis of the protagonist."2. Significantly after years of struggle Rama Mehta has successfully registered her question of existing social ethics in the Indian English literary canon. The substantial autobiographical drop in her novel cannot be ignored as we can witness "her own female self-intercedes in the narrative...forced to resign (from Indian foreign service) after her marriage. Thereupon she took up residence at Udaipur which was her husband's native place."3. The novel researches into how women are faring in their traditional roles and requirements cutting the outer world of her business and adhering to the strict manners and culture of the household.

### **Traditional roles**

The paper here examines the link between the circumscribed drama of women's life and the commitment towards the change. It produces the mixed picture of women trends offered by the novel. The society devotes and reserves the highest praise for women who can enroll themselves to the traditional demands and cultural propriety at the earliest. "According to Margaret Cormack in 'The Hindu woman', 'women, more than men carry on the cultural tradition'."4. The conservative outlook holds back the restoration of religious dictates that affirms the sheepish role of women in her family. This submission of her identity is celebrated as the 'honor of women' which erodes her self-awareness and self-worth. Holding the vein of fiction Rama Mehta presents the blueprint of the mentality of last generation who considered nuptial relationship to be the solitary aspiration of women's life. "May you have many many sons, my child, and may you always wear red" (p-33) The paper in depth analysis the position of women in a tradition bound society and though the revolution has begun which is being canonized by many writers and women themselves have reached the profound level of success devaluing gender inequality but it cannot be denied that the psyche of Indian women still needs to be reshaped which demands more concern and further research work afield.

### **Silence and choice**

Rama Mehta 's protagonist Geeta falls flat to the ethnicity of haveli and finds herself as a displaced person who is uprooted from her progressive ideas and makes her emotionally more vulnerable. This unexpected transition in her life reversed the role of the protagonist from an independent and assertive woman to a passive and overpowered wife, silently bearing the time honored conventions of the aristocratic family. This section will try to analyze Geeta's tectonic shift of being voiceless. Her dimension was limited to the silence under the pressure of social construction. Her shrinking identity was more closely tied to the obedient image of a contented and quelled wife. She is rebuked for questioning the imposed orthodoxy of the haveli. "There you go again attacking the havelis, whether you like us or not. It is here that you have to live and the sooner you understand us, the better."(P-91)

The only prospect that the haveli could offer is the role of 'good woman' which called for a promising motherhood. So, the gap between the protesting silence and being submissive is mended with the burial of anger, frustration and conflict of mind. The umbrella of orthodoxy over the haveli not only secluded the women from the outside world but also barred their thoughts from converting into speech before the males. The responsibility of keeping the males satisfied is the major determinant of women's moral education in the haveli. Nandini Mehta opines that "these ideas are reinforced by the women's magazine(to which her reading is confined), whose cover girls with 'beauty and brains' always end off by saying that, though they are talented at writing or physics' their ultimate aim is to devote themselves to being good wives and mothers-for this the true vocation of every woman."5 The remarkable uniformity of the maids and servants in ensuring the strict laws and regulation of the haveli even though it locks up their fate infuriates Geeta.

"In the haveli the men were regarded with awe as if they were gods. They were the masters and their slightest wish was a command".(page-21)

### **Purdah and Hinduism**

Hinduism also streamlines disintegration of women's existence. The haveli's orientation conforms to the limitation of the religion. Indeed the haveli boosted the protection of women in

order to cushion the effects of imprisonment of the same. The impediment of education and facilitating early marriage according to the Hindu customs can be seen as a mode of confinement and crushing rebel. The report presented by the ministry of education and social welfare in 1971 “highlighted the negative representation of women in ancient texts and the authoritarian nature of Hindu prescription for (women’s) good behavior...”<sup>6</sup> these conventions were channelized through the women of haveli towards Geeta, a well-educated woman with radical thoughts. “No, no you cannot do that...in Udaipur we keep purdah” (p-17). Not unnoticed goes the thought that the bigger the Surajmal’s haveli, Jiwan Niwas, the less the space for women. At this juncture it can be stated that in our Hindu society, veiling is the axis which sustains the symmetrical flow of religion and patriarchy. Apart from the narrow access to the male’s apartment and courtyard, the treatment meted out to a maid Lakshmi by her husband Ganga Ram on the false accusation of adultery provides a fertile ground for women to turn against the oppression. The alarming postnatal of this rebellion is that Lakshmi fragments and unsettles herself from the haveli leaving the child behind. The conservative feminism believes and “admits that some women do suffer hardships, but it does not see this suffering as a part of social oppression of women.”<sup>7</sup> The panorama of Lakshmi’s life outside the haveli has been seen as treacherous by the insiders of the haveli, undeniably suggests that these women belonged to, as Vaishali Naikar says, ‘the bold but bad woman.’

### **Education and marriage**

The haveli was charged with another blow, that Geeta’s annoyance with the regressive customs anticipates, the system of education. She injects and disseminates the importance of education through the young minds of haveli. Her decision, to send the maid’s servant Sita along with Vijay to school, bargains the space of women in the zone of tradition. There was no recognized social factor against the education system yet at the beginning she could not gather the confirmation of all the maids and servants. Her robust voice for Sita’s education though succeeds but failed to fracture the shallowness of their thinking.

“Coming first is all right Vijay, but you must also learn to cook. Don’t become like your mother, Bhagwat Singh ji’s wife teased.”

But Geeta turns this transition period in haveli more turbulent by starting classes for the women in the haveli. Though she fails to hold the class for the maids but it proves to be a head start as she wins over her mother-in-law and other members. She genuinely believes that the woman needs to be integrated with education to realize self-worth and independence. Resistance towards the oppression requires awareness which is fed by experience. Geeta integrates women for active resistance rather than passive. Her initiatives against the cultural paradigm were hostile also to the thought of Vijay’s marriage at this early age. She could not allow the in-laws to take the greater control of Vijay’s marriage. And she succeeds in placing education before marriage.

### **Conclusion**

To recapitulate, women in tune refer to the tuning of old generation with new thoughts as much as the young minds adjusting and balancing with the past one’s prime with time. The paper witnesses the novel as reaffirming “empowerment cannot be given, it must be self-generated”<sup>8</sup>. the novel acknowledges modern thoughts valuing traditional roots. From the first point of this paper, purdah which displays the helplessness of the protagonist to the last point of education and Vijay’s marriage, it not only expresses the injection of modernization in the haveli’s social standard but also making the advanced more durable to the traditional foundation

and peace. The elimination of Geeta's victimhood at the end makes her more adoptable to the design of the haveli as her efforts were showing colors of a new beginning which she has attained with much criticism.

**Works Cited:**

1. Ruby Mitra Banerjee (2009) From saris to skirts: A study of changing lifestyles of Indian women immigrants to the United States, Western Carolina University, 6.
2. Tina Grobin(2011) The development of Indian English Post-Colonial women's prose, *Actaneophilologica* 44.1-2 2011, Ljubljana,95
3. Tribhuwan Kumar (2008) Rama Mehta: An epitome of Indian feminism, *Cyber literature-A bi-annual journal of English studies*, vol.XXII no.II, 51.
4. N. Petrazzuolo, B.S.(2012) Dowry-murder,Female-Infanticide & Sex-Selective Abortions In Northern India, Georgetown University,21
5. Nandini Mehta, Women's Liberation Movement, *Vivekananda Kendra Patrika- a Distinctive Cultural Magazine of India-vol.39 no.1 77<sup>th</sup> issue*, 237.
- 6 .Geraldine Forbes (2003) Reading and Writing Indian Women: The 50 years since Independence, 1947-97, *Teaching South Asia- an Internet journal of pedagogy*, vol.II no.I 68.
7. Ivy Singh, Feminism: Various approaches and its value, *Indian Journal of Theology*, 61.
8. Report of the Secretary-General (1999) *World Survey on the Role of Women in Development: Globalization, Gender and Work, Sustainable development and international economic cooperation: women in Development*, General Assembly, Fifty-fourth session, 8.