



## ECHOES OF EMOTIONAL AND TRAUMATIC TRANSCENDENCE IN RAMA MEHTA'S *INSIDE THE HAVELI*

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### ABSTRACT

*The Post Independence period has brought to the forefront a number of noted women novelists who have enriched Indian English Fiction. The women novelists depict the feministic problems more ardently in their writings. They have mainly focused on women's problem in their works. The problem of adjustment in the husband's home has been the most widely treated problem in the novels written by them.*

### INTRODUCTION

Rama Mehta, who is recognized for her novelty and wits, is one of the prominent writers of post modern era. In her works, she concentrates on emotional world of the female characters. Her Fictional characters are not mere characters but representatives of the society. They are real flesh and blood protagonists. Her works show a profound understanding of feminine psychology. The novel *Inside the Haveli* presents the simple family story. The protagonist Geeta is an educated girl. She has been brought up in a modern family and city like Bombay. She has her own opinions and desires of life. She wants to lead her life on her terms. The atmosphere in her father's home is liberal. She had taken her education with boys in a co-ed college of Bombay. It seems that she is enjoying her life before marriage. With the passing of time she happens to marry with Ajay Singh, who is a Professor in an Udaipur College. It seems in the society that girls dream a happy married life but their dreams shatter into pieces when they are treated differently on the basis of gender. On one side we consider them the better half of the man and on the other hand they are humiliated, tortured in the male dominated society.

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In the novel Geeta has to face many problems regarding gender bias such as Purdah system, early child marriage, prohibition of women's education. Geeta attempts successfully to fight against these outdated norms of tradition in the Haveli. Men and women follow silently their age old customs and codes of conduct in the haveli. No one questions on the problems of plight of women in the society. But such type of questions rises in the mind of Geeta after marriage. Here one thing is clear that the husband and wife -Ajay and Geeta are from entirely different background and culture. In such a situation, women have to suffer a lot in a patriarchal society. It is nothing but the disparity on the basis of gender. She doesn't know that after marriage she has to face problems in the home of husband. Ajay Singh is the only heir of Jeevan Niwas Haveli of Udaipur. He belongs to aristocratic Rajput family. His parents follow their age-old customs of Haveli right from the beginning. The novelist describes very minutely the things happened inside the Haveli.

Jeevan Niwas is a large haveli where many servants with their masters are living happily. They sincerely follow the code of conduct of the haveli. In the haveli, men and women have their different living rooms. Women cannot interfere in the works of men. After marriage with Ajay, when Geeta- a modern educated girl arrives at the station of Udaipur, she has been informed by one of the maids that she has to cover her face by her saree. Geeta comes to know that she has to follow the tradition of Purdah system; she feels awkward because she was not habitual of this. The following lines introduce the Purdah system:

*She was immediately encircled by women singing but their faces were covered. One of them came forward, pulled her saree over her face and exclaimed in horror, "Where do you come from that you show your face to the world?" (Inside the Haveli p.14)*

Another incident of this is that when Geeta was going toward the Haveli by car, maid shows her a building belongs to her uncle-in-laws. Geeta naturally pulls back her saree to see it but again she has been informed regarding the code of conducts of the Haveli:

*No, you cannot do that...In Udaipur, we keep Purdah. Strange eyes must not see your beautiful eyes" (Inside the Haveli, P.15).*

*Regarding this Rama Mehta writes in her book The Western Educated Hindu Woman, 'the Purdah System traditionally represents the feminine code of modesty among high caste women in some parts of India.' (Rama Mehta, P.9)*

In the haveli, Geeta feels suffocated due to veil. It is the code of conduct of the haveli and she has to follow it mutely. There are large numbers of servants in the haveli but the servants and



their masters have different norms of conduct. The men and women servants mix freely and maid servants do not need to follow the Purdah System. The aristocratic women of the haveli have to wear Purdah and do not meet their men in public. Geeta is entirely unaware of such customs. She is shocked that still it is followed mutely by women in some parts of India.

Though outwardly she seems to enduring all these outdated customs but inwardly she rages and longs for freedom. It seems that though Geeta comes from cultured, nuclear family but she has been taught by her mother to be an obedient person:

*Keep your head covered, never argue with your elders, respect your mother-in-law and do as she tells you. Don't talk too much. ( Inside the Haveli p.14)*

It is clear that adjusting to the new surroundings suffocate her. She longs for her free, natural and homely atmosphere of her parents' home. Her desire of leaving Udaipur comes to an end when she is told by Ajay that he cannot leave his parents alone in old age as he gets an opportunity to go to Delhi. Every woman wants to live a free, natural life even after marriage. There are some limits of adjustment in the home of husband. Sometimes she becomes the sandwich between the two cultures. She has to follow some social bindings silently. As a result of it, she rebels against the age old traditions of her society which denies women their natural rights. In a fit of anger Geeta thinks seriously to leave her husband if he does not want to come out of the haveli of Udaipur. Regarding this situation Geeta says:

*I know the men have no problems in this world of Udaipur, you are all pampered. You lead your lives and think women are mere chattels'; In fact, I don't even see any point in being here. I may as well go and stay with my parents. You won't miss me; there are hundreds of people to take care of you. (Inside the Haveli p.45)*

The above statement clears that Geeta does not happy inwardly in her husband's home. Being educated Geeta makes up in her mind to educate girls and women as it is essential for their progress. The idea to educate girls and women has been opposed by mother-in-law and women servants in the haveli. But Geeta takes the most important decision to educate women and to send Sita, a motherless servant-child to school. By doing so, she brings wrath upon herself from both the world of servants and masters. She stands on her decision to educate female firmly. Here it is proved that women are the enemies of their own sex. They create barriers in the development of women. Finally, she convinces her father-in-law to educate the females. In this way she brings so many changes inside the haveli and some age old traditions bring changes in Geeta. She does not accept such norms of customs which become the obstacle in the women's progress. In this way Geeta wins the battle regarding women's education and brings the transformation in the member of the haveli.

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Another important female character in the novel is Lakshmi- the maid servant who is not satisfied with the haveli world. She does not like to work as a servant. She also hates the tyranny of her husband. She rebels against the humiliation by the hateful husband for a wrong cause. She decides to leave the haveli and her husband and child. She lives with different kinds of men in the same city and leads a wretched life as a homeless woman. She denies Pari's offer to return to the haveli proudly. It is significant that she never repents her choice of leaving the haveli to be free from the tyrannous husband in spite of the worst suffering outside the haveli. Like Lakshmi, Geeta faces the problem of choice –either to stay inside the haveli and lose freedom or to leave it to be free as she hates the hypocrisy that flourishes under the mask of ritualistic ways of dignified conduct, and the rigidity of the old customs. She is compelled to stay because of her husband's reluctance to leave the place.

At the end of the novel, Geeta has to go through the difficult situation as she gets the proposal of marriage for her thirteen years old daughter, Vijay by Vir Singh's family. Vir Singh is the only son of Daulat Singhji of Udaipur. He is an art graduate, handsome and bright young man. He always respects the elders and desires to go to England for higher education. Geeta opposes early marriage. That is why she does not accept the proposal earlier. She does not want her daughter to be married in early age or without completing her education. Thus her rejection for the proposal of early marriage for her daughter, Vijay may be regarded as one more attempt at change. She refuses the proposal of marriage in the following words:

*My daughter's marriage is my concern...Even if it were the son of The Maharana of Udaipur, I wouldn't agree. (Inside the Haveli p.171)*

The above reply of Geeta shows that she firmly stands on her decision of protesting early marriage. But later on she accepts the proposal on her own terms due to the insistence of her father-in-law and her own visits to the Vir Singh's haveli.

Here it is to be noted that the main female characters in the novel are not rebels but they seem to trying to generate the power to cope with the harsh realities of life pushed upon them by male dominated world. As we are all acquainted with the things and events related to women being happened in a patriarchal society, Indian women are puppet in the hands of cruel system. We are more troubled when we come to know that this social system has been consolidated and cemented by giving religious and mythical touch to it. Women living without raising her head against the selfish and cruel system are considered to be pious, chaste and obedient. It seems that most of the women followed the system mutely and unconsciously helped the system to be flourished. By this way or that way, they themselves went on crushing their own desires. In the haveli, Geeta experiences the disparity and tension which create a strong sense of alienation and frustration in her. There is a persistent quest for

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intellectual freedom and choice –making. Women of haveli accept their suffering as fate and the will of God. In this way, the men and the women nurture tradition through their devotion. Especially women play an important role in this preservation of tradition. The acceptance of the traditional way of life becomes the goal of their lives and they attain happiness and satisfaction through it.

To sum up, in the novel, Rama Mehta focuses on the reality that the Indian woman faces a painful choice –whether to continue using her mind, to question and defy the injustice and wrongs of the society, and become a rebel, or to surrender her freedom and ability to think for the benefit of becoming integrated with the society and family.

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