

## I. Cross-Cultural Dialogue in *Karma Cola*

Gita Mehta is a writer in every sense of the word. She is a journalist, documentary filmmaker, promoter of the Indian experience and a versatile writer as well. She is said to be a witty opinionated person who is always open to new ideas and experiences. She writes nonfiction books and novels because she has something to say about her varied experiences to the world. As such, her books are smart investigations into the ideas, people, history and personalities that have determined and shaped modern India and ultimately into herself as woman of Indian descent.

Gita Mehta was born in Delhi in 1943, to a family, which was highly active in the freedom movement of India. It was into a unique family and juncture in India's evolution that Mehta has born a juncture that energized people with the dream of what India could be. Her father, Biju Patnaik, was a political activist in the Indian independence movement who was arrested for his activism three weeks after the birth of his daughter. Mehta was sent to travel and campaign for her husband's release. After India regained sovereignty from Great Britain in 1947 Mehta's father was released from prison and resumed his political career. Mehta travelled to England for higher education earning her university degree at Cambridge University. While at Cambridge, she met and later married Ajai Singh "Sonny" Mehta, with whom she has a son. Having chosen a career in journalism, Mehta has covered a number of significant world events, including the Bangladesh war of 1971 and the first elections in the former princely states. She has also written and directed several television documentaries for the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC).

Gita Mehta is the author of four acclaimed books *Karma Cola* (1979) marketing the Mystic East, *Raj* (1989) A historical novel about the Maharajas and the

early phases of Indian's independence struggle, *A River Sutra* (1993) a novel of quest stories woven into an exquisite tapestry of secular – humanistic philosophy, *Snakes and Ladders* (1998) a set of wide – ranging essays about India since independence.

Mehta's first book *Karma Cola* and her literary career began accidentally one evening while she was attending a publishing industry party in 1979. During that party, as she explained in an interview with Wendy Smith, somebody had sarcastically urged her to tell what Karma was all about. In response, Mehta had replied, "*Karma* isn't what it's cracked up to be." Mehta recalls how, upon hearing her responsive response, someone in the hall had incited her to write about "Karma" and her ideas on it. Just as spontaneous as her reply was, in only three weeks of works, she had completed *Karma Cola*.

The title *Karma Cola* itself has a significant meaning. Mehta urges us to understand that Karma means action in the sense of eastern spiritualism and Cola means western company coca-cola in the sense of western materialism. Mehta defines coca-cola as a metaphysical soft drink for a physical one. The Indian *gurus* have given a coca-cola to their disciples for their instant Nirvana through meditation and self – realization. Similarly the title itself has made up of two parts: Karma (east) and Cola (west). It deals with the dual cultural ideas like spiritualism and materialism and can be read as a satire on the hippies' pilgrimages to the mystic east in the 1960s.

The word Karma in general sense refers to different meanings like action, work, deed or function etc. In moral sense, it refers to right or wrong, good or bad, practical or unpractical deeds. Karma is also referred in Hinduism as Dharma 'duty'; and very duty would be there according to the circumstances of individual's living way of life.

It is also appropriate to relate karma with another significant concept Yoga. If karma means doing something or doing nothing , Yoga means ‘union’ or ‘add’ or feeling attuned to higher human qualities and to universal patterns and energies or union with God. Now the combined terms Karma Yoga stands for the Yoga of action in the world. In the discipline, one may take constructive action consciously and participate in a large plan of human evolution, thus achieve union with the greater whole i.e. with the good. To be spiritual does not mean merely sit alone in meditation or prayer, but to take the inner energies, insights or qualities and apply them in the world of everyday life. As Rabindranath Tagore says in his book *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore* says:

For human beings, life is not merely a physiological progress, but it is fulfillment of his karma. True karma is not a series of activities generated by blind impulse of instincts or appetites karma, which gives meaning to our life, cannot be performed in ignorance or loss of truth-physical and moral..., the life that has perfected enlightened karma, which is not fixed forms of ritualism, or unthinking conformity to customs but which represent in its varied activities. Man’s reason, and will, and power of aesthetic enjoyment, lays the path towards spiritual realization of the infinite. (810)

As Hindus believe actions are the same as thoughts, thoughts are same as the actions. The Hindu perspective makes quite a bit more sense because for an action to come into existence a thought must be there.

As westerners are more skeptical in the matter of the effect of karmas i.e. good karma lead to betterment in the next life, bad karma to pain; so they are equally skeptical towards the subjects like the practice of karma yoga can lead one near to

Godhead. If westerners were to study the Hindu notion of karma closely, they would find things which modern society completely lacks. Karma Yoga's method of action (or inaction) can lead them towards Brahma and spiritual enlightenment. Eliot was well read and had immense interest in eastern spirituality. Brahmins of western intellectual thought – Huxley, Yeats, Foster and others were led to the east by a genuine inquisitiveness, but those who came after- the Beatles and the Rolling Stones- were mere populists. But even this earlier wave of western immigrants belonged to a higher class than the ones that have taken their place. Today, the so-called seekers are the real scum who only yearn for kicks that to with violence and orgies. They sell themselves to hallucinatory drugs and end up in clinics and asylums spreading vermin wherever they go.

Gita Mehta in her book describes the transaction between the Indian *gurus* and their western disciples. The conflict between the claims of the body and of the mind, of materialism and of spiritualism enters into all such transaction between the east and west, and the so-called Indian *Guru*, whose power is often limited to controlling the bodies of others, and not his own, makes a convenient deal with his disciple saying, “you have the *Karma* we will take the Coca – cola – a metaphysical soft drink for a physical one” (107).

Mehta's book *Karma Cola* is delightful as well as wonderful. She is hardly against the mixing of east and west; she is a satirist laying bare the shallowness of hippies who trip and the *Sadhus* who trip them. *Karma Cola* by Gita Mehta is the story that begins in the late 60's, hundreds of thousands of westerners descend upon India, disciples of a cultural revolution that proclaimed that the magic and mystery missing from their lives is to be found in the east. An Indian writer who has also lived in England and the United States, Gita Mehta was ideally placed to observe the

spectacle of European and American ‘pilgrims’ interact with their hosts. When she finally recorded her razor sharp observations in *Karma Cola*, the book became an instant classic for describing, in merciless detail, what happens when the traditions of an ancient and long – lived society are turned into commodities and sold to those who don’t understand them. She writes remarkable prose. In the dazzling prose that has become her trademark, Mehta shows the entire spectrum of seekers: the Beatles, homeless students, Hollywood rich kids in detox, British guilt – trippers, and more. In doing so, she also reveals the devastating by products that the westerners brought to the villages of rural India, high anxiety and drug addiction among them. Brilliantly irreverent, *Karma Cola* displays Gita Mehta’s gift for weaving old and new, common and bizarre, history and current events into a seamless and colorful narrative that is at once witty, shocking and poignant.

Mehta’s first work, *Karma Cola*, was written as a critical response to the ways that the western counter culture community has regarded India and Indian culture. Due to the fascination of spiritualists, hippies, and popular rock musicians the Beatles with Hindu mysticism, large groups of Americans flock to India each year in search of religion drugs, and enlightenment. Through the essays in *Karma Cola*, Mehta seeks to debunk the notion that all Indians are experts on spiritual matters and to contrast the irony of western materialism being used to obtain traditionally eastern religious beliefs. In such essays as “*Om is where the Art is*” and “*Sex and the Single Guru*,” Mehta humorously and sarcastically exposes the emptiness behind placing one’s hopes for the future in the hands of *gurus* and transcendental meditation. Since the publication of *Karma Cola*, critics have heralded Mehta as a fresh new voice in Indian literature. Reviewers have consistently praised her wit and insight into western misconception of the east and cross cultural relations.

Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola*, since its publication, has stirred up much criticisms, debates and responses from all the nooks and corners of the world. While commenting on the *Karma Cola* Laxmi Parasuram says:

*Karma Cola* by Gita Mehta documents a series of episodes and scenes located in various parts of India during the 60s and 70s when thousands and thousands of them from the west arrived in India “clashing cymbals and ringing bells, wearing bright colours and wired clothes.”(36) Those visitors from the west are here in quest of “instant Nirvana” and they seek out *gurus* from whom they hope to drive *Shakti*, a direct transmission of cosmic energy from the *guru* to the devotee. There are a host of *gurus* in India who gather numerous disciples around them in special camps set up in all sorts of places – Delhi, Goa, and Banaras and beyond. These *gurus* take upon themselves to guide their disciples to a rediscovery of their environment, and outer aura, and the supreme *Shakti*, through meditation and self – realization and the disciples submit themselves to the inscrutable logic of their *gurus* which often takes them round the bend. This transaction between the Indian *gurus* and their western disciples, as Gita Mehta describes, is banal and it thrives on mutual incomprehension. (233)

Gita Mehta's portrayal of east- west encounter in contemporary time beats all previous accounts of the subject through sheer force, vividness and originality. In his review of *Karma Cola*, Laxmi Parasuram further says:

The meeting of the East and the West is doomed from the start- “the monomania of the west can never hope to comprehend the multimaniamia

of the east”,(35) and therefore, while the Easterner is engrossed in multiple possibilities of salvation, the westerner can never grasp the Hindu concept of *Maya* which enables the Indians to make “mind – blowing affirmations” while they themselves are lost in a “plethora of contradictions”. So it is the fate of west to be wrecked against infinity even as the Indian gurus sell their birthright for a mess of pot, shoddy goods and glitter of gold. (235)

Though eastern culture is heavily influenced by western globalization, the charm of eastern spiritualism is still there.

“East is East... West is West... the twain shall never meet” said Kipling in one of his prophetic verses. E.M. Forster in his *A Passage to India* brought about a very close confrontation between a question foreigner and a mysterious India with disastrous consequences. British versions of east-west encounter in the early twentieth century generated much through and gave rise to various perceptions and speculations on this topic. Many Indian writers in English also dwelt at length in their books with the complexity of east-west relationship in terms of its impacts on Indian situations and characters. Among these are Kamala Markandaya, Santha Rama Rau, Anita Desai, Ruath Prawer Jhabvala and others who portrayed east-west conformations of people and ideas with their far reaching implication on national and international scenes. The meeting of the east and the west is shown in their novels as a significant step which, brides changing the courses of history, also entraps individuals who are caught unwittingly crosscurrents of east-west interactions. In this connection Richard wells comments that, *Karma Cola* also deals with a situation arising out of search for self by westerns who play themselves into the hand of society for spiritual

Regeneration of the modern world and in only too eager to spread his message all around the world (237).

Though, Mehta's *Karma Cola* shows the debate about spiritualism and materialism. She gives much more emphasis to sit on the spiritualism where as Indian *Swamiji* gives salvation to the westerns through mediation and self-realization.

In the same vein Luke Brown argues:

Mehta basic premise is that occident flocks to the East, Specifically, Indian, in a somewhat desperate response to the popularized Notion that it is the land of transcendence. Systematically, she breaks down these ideas one by one to arrive at a human truth: on one hand, the Occident does not comes and cannot fully understand the cultural knowledge that comes with this version of spirituality; secondly, the *guru* don't make concessions for their global students because most of the time they are either too distracted by new-found fame or 'to evolved with their own enlightenment.' (193)

It is true that occident's creates their own image, representation, hegemony to control the orient. History of the eastern world also shows that the west always wants to colonize the east by the efforts, ideas, language, and culture.

While commenting on *Karma Cola* N. Kalaamani says:

Gita Mehta has been acclaimed as an international cross-cultural critic. Her three works *Karma Cola* (1979), *Raj* (1989), and *A River Sutra* (1993) are powerful critiques on modern life exposing the shallowness of the spiritual and political and secular modes of living. The two earlier books *Raj* and *Karma Cola* are poignant studies on the hypocrisy and sham of the princely class in colonial Indian and the



pretentious *gurus* ostentatiously profess and promise enlightenment to the westerners coming in search of “Missing magic” in their lives, in a post-colonial India. A close reading of Gita Mehta’s works reveals her interest in delineating instructors, teachers, monks, *gurus*, political and social leaders from her preoccupation with these “teachers, religious and secular it is apparent that they have a significant role to play in the life of Individuals. (125)

Mehta has a deep understanding of religion and culture, and the importance of knowing who you are and where you come from. She speaks of the confusion that ensues when people cross over and project their own meanings onto a culture of which they have very little true understanding, and she proceeds to explain the cultural differences that often cause confusion. She does it in a playful, satirical, and truthful way, and obviously with compassion for those who have become lost and whose lives have been destroyed. *Karma Cola* which is not very big can be easily picked up at any place, and has chapters devoted to various types of experiences. Mehta has beautiful writing skills with lush descriptions and English that most of us have lost. An important cultural book to remind us of our need to respect each other, and a caution about self-delusions and thinking we can own another culture.

*Karma Cola* deals with the spiritual equivalent of some financial bubble.

Disillusioned by their own culture, many westerners flock to the east to seek enlightenment. Exotic India becomes their spiritual resort. Many hippies who flocked to India during the 60’s and 70’s abandoned their own identities and decided to adopt traditional Indian ways and beliefs which have already become unpopular with better educated Indians.

Some of these hippies were genuinely seeking enlightenment. But they were parted with their money the moment they met some *gurus*. Bizarre Indian beliefs and practices which are no longer acceptable were taken to be gullible by the foreigners. Educated and modern Indians want clean, urine-free streets and coke. The jaded westerners saw paradise in the dirty and chaotic India. Some were even willing to drink their *guru's* urine to seek enlightenment. Other hippies use enlightenment as an excuse of group sex and cheap, readily available drugs. Some wake up from their dreams and go home. Others need psychiatric help. Mehta provides numerous anecdotes with lots of well- researched background information.

Thus, *Karma Cola* embraces variety of experience in the *ashrams*. The central issue in the novel is the *gurus* and their 'spiritual bedlams' as Gita Mehta calls them. The novel informs the cultural collisions of the east-west, the materialist *gurus* and their spiritual causalities. And through the apparent cultural encounter faced by some of the Britishers seeking inner peace in India, this thesis claims, Gita Mehta valorizes Indian art, culture, religion, norms and values as the storehouse of spiritualism and the ultimate source of happiness, inner peace and serenity of mind.

## II. Cross-Cultural Encounter

### Culture

Culture refers to the cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, and notion of time, roles, and spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of time. Culture is the systems of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. Culture is communication, communication is culture. Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behaviour; that is the totality of a person's learned, accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly, behavior through social learning. A culture is a way of life of a group of people –the behaviors, beliefs, values, and symbols that they accept, generally without thinking about them, and that are passed along by communication and imitation from one generation to the next.

Culture is symbolic communication. Some of its symbols include a group's skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and motives, the meanings of the symbols are learned and deliberately perpetuated in a society through its institution.

According to Barker:

Culture is common whole way of life. Its boundaries are largely locked into those of nationality and ethnicity that is the culture of, for example the English, the African. However globalization has made the ideas of culture as a whole way of life locked within definite boundaries increasingly problematic. (27)

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human core of culture consists of traditional ideas especially their attached values; culture systems

may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other hand, as conditioning influences upon further action. Culture is the sum of total of the learned behavior of a group of people that are generally considered to be the tradition of that people and are transmitted from generation to generation. Culture is a collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another.

Culture by now has borrowed the terminologies of other fields of criticism. Postcolonial criticism and postcolonial theory of discourse made culture a contested space. The cited terminologies, these days, in the study of culture are Foucauldian notion of 'power' and 'Discourse' and Gramsci's concept of 'Hegemony'. Postcolonial perspectives emerged from the colonial testimony of third world countries and the discourse of minorities within the geopolitical divisions of east and west, north and south. They formulate their critical revisions around issues of cultural difference, social authority, and political discrimination in order to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the rationalizations of modernity. Postcolonial criticism bears witness to these unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order. It forces us to engage with culture as an uneven, incomplete production of meaning and value often composed of incommensurable demands and practices, produced in the act of social survival. Culture reaches out to create a symbolic textuality to give the alienating everyday and aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure. As Homi K. Bhabha rightly observes:

Culture as a strategy of survival is both transnational and translational. It is transnational because contemporary postcolonial discourses are rooted in specific histories of cultural displacement [...] It is

translational because such spatial histories of displacement [...] make the question of how culture signifies, or what signified by culture, a rather complex issue. (438)

Edward W. Said, from the cultural dimension standing in a position of a cultural critic rather than a radical political theorist, is interested in studying the relationship between the east and west, which is governed by discourse. On the one hand he sees the 'scope of orientalism' as matching with 'the scope of empire'; on the other hand, he focuses on culture representing as well as functioning as a form of hegemony. Said in this connection finds Matthew Arnold as using culture as a powerful means of differentiation. Culture is an ideal for Arnold but Said argues:

Culture, with its superior position has the power to authorize, to dominate, to legitimate, denote interdict and validate: in short i.e. the power of culture to be an agent of and perhaps the main agency of powerful differentiation within its domain and beyond it too. (9)

Culture, for Said, is not only the positive doctrine of the best that is thought and known but also a negative doctrine of all that is not best. This double faceted view of culture makes one aspect of culture more powerful than the others. Culture, thus, becomes a powerful means of domination and appropriation.

Besides these, the application of the term culture occupies space in different fields of study and theories of criticism. Culture in anthropology is the integrated system of socially acquired values, beliefs and rules of conduct which delimit the range of accepted behaviors in any given society. Archaeology studies material culture, the remaining of extinct human culture (e.g. pottery, weaponry) in order to decipher the way people used to live. Ecological approaches explain the different ways that people live around the world not in terms of their degree of evolution but

rather as distinct adaptation the variety of environment in which they live. Historical-particularists look upon each culture as a unique result of its own historical process. Structuralists analyze the relationships among cultural constructs of different societies, deriving universal mental patterns and process from the abstract models of these relationships.

Thus, whether it is anthropologists' symbolic culture or archeologists' material culture or historians' concept of culture or of others, they all meet at a ground that culture deals with way of life in one way or the other. So the culture is the sum of attitudes, customs, beliefs and behaviours that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual institutions, and art from one generation to the next.

Culture, thus, is a way of life or the historically transmitted patterns of meanings codified in symbols is vast in itself to be studied here. It is not possible to deal with all the elements of the way of life or the historically transmitted patterns of meaning codified in symbols is vast in itself to be studied here. It is not possible to deal with all the elements of the way of life or all these codified symbols in this short thesis. Therefore, this thesis will deal with the east-west: cultural encounter of spiritualism and materialism as well as the valorization of Indian art, culture, religion, norms and values as the storehouse of spiritualism and the ultimate source of happiness, inner peace and serenity of mind.

### **Cultural Encounter**

Cultural encounter facilitate a pattern of mutual adjustment or reciprocal give-and-take by offering a space enough for coexistence and meaningful identity between cultures. But all the time it is not necessary that cultural encounter promotes blending or merging of perspectives. The meeting of culture is likely to be marked by

contestation struggle and agonism that matches the tensional relation between absence and presence, emptiness and affirmation. Such an encounter takes place when one culture (cultural traits) is introduced to the culture, which is different from it. Such exposure to alien culture initiates a moment of genuine self-transformation, that is, a reassessment of prevailing patterns in the light of newly experienced insights or modes of life. Cultural encounter doesn't take a single mode rather it is a process which takes various modes like acculturation, assimilation, adaptation, interaction, dialogical engagement and so on. In the context of globalization the encounter of diverse cultural traits and complexities are modified due to the constant contacts and cultural identities are becoming hybrid, in-between, and multicultural.

### **Acculturation**

The term acculturation refers to the process of change in artifacts, customs and beliefs that result from the contact of societies with different cultural traditions. Acculturation is one of the prominent mode of cultural-encounter in the context of shifting global tendencies. It refers to that process where diverse cultural traits and complexities are modified because of the continuous contact by making the cultures and cultural identities hybrid and the society-multicultural. The term is also used to refer to the result of trying to reconstruct cultures of presumably isolated societies. Such work was faulted for implying that various cultural groups enjoyed an unchanging, pre-contact period. In this view, the anthropologist's job seemed quite simple, since each culture could be perceives as a unitary whole.

When two or more different culture fuse, a new and composite culture emerges in which some existing cultural features are combined, some are lost, and new features are generated. The history of each culture is characterized by a set of values, beliefs and practices and each culture has a codified exhaustive set of

instructions concerning behavioral issues. Cultural interactions stem from the prolonged contact between two or more sets of values, norms which can be extremely different from one another and such contacts may extend” from domestic contacts to global interactions,” and “between hegemonic western culture and developing non-western societies”(Dallmayr 14).

People belonging to the acculturating minority maintain strong relationship within their group. They keep their own traditions, behaviors, and values. They create a separate sub-culture, which is minimally influenced by the dominant group. In such situation the contacts between the two social systems are subsequently very restricted. Individuals originating from the acculturating group are not accepted as member of the dominant culture. They are marginalized or segregated by the dominant group regardless of their wish to integrate and or to assimilate. Acculturating individuals manage to acquire values and behaviors characterizing the dominant culture in which they live, at the same time preserving their own traditions and habits. This kind of interaction with a dominant culture has also been labeled as ‘biculturalism’.

A bicultural individual knows and understands two different cultures and he/she is able to show dual modes of social behavior that can be alternately used depending upon which culture the individual is interacting with. But it does not necessarily mean that a bicultural individual daily comes into contact with the dominant culture, nor that the two cultures share a common geographical area. As Stuart Hall puts it:

Bicultural competence is a laborious task. It requires the creation of effective interpersonal relationships with both groups without losing personal identity. It implies knowledge of the dominant values.

Positive attitude toward cultural patterns, communication through the



use of the dominant language, sense of being grounded in both cultures. Not everyone is able to acquire this competence. (67)

However, the effort an individual has to perform in the acculturation process is too often not rewarded. In several cases integration remains a remote goal or even an unrealistic ideal. It is very difficult to estimate the intrinsic absolute value of one cultural system as compared with others. As a matter of fact, depending on the historical period and the geographical location, each model of social structure offers same advantage and imposes some constraints on individuals.

Cultural encounter does not always entail merger or fusion, but may lead to partial adaptation or assimilation, through a process of cultural borrowing. This happens when the respective cultures face each other on a more nearly equal or roughly comparable basis. Assimilation as Dallmayr quotes is, “a process of interpretation and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitude of other persons and groups and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated by them in a common cultural life” (Dallmayr 14). Assimilation is the process whereby individuals or groups once dissimilar become similar, share the same sentiments, values and goals and whereby attitude of many persons are united and develop into a unified group. It results because of the functional relation of the diverse cultural elements.

Assimilation is closely affiliated to the process of acculturation within the acculturating group; individuals lose their ties with the original cultural background, and acquire values, habits and behaviors from the dominant culture. It is usually applied to policies in some western or westernizing nations. In the post-imperial era assimilation is greatly abetted and intensified by nationalism and the idea of the nation-state.

Cultural borrowing is a continuous process characterized by the fusion and adjustment of various cultural traits. It facilitates partial adaptation and finally assimilation. Partial adaptation, in any case, involves a greater subtlety in self-other relations. Rather than self-imposition of hegemonic situation, selective borrowing requires a willingness to recognize the distinctions of other culture, coupled with a desire to maintain at least some indigenous preferences. That means the result of such borrowing that is assimilation, is not always motivated by the hegemonic influence rather it may turn otherwise. To quote Fred Dallmayr:

Assimilation is not only or exclusively a policy imposed from above, that is a process whereby a hegemonic culture is disseminated by elite to subordinate segments of the population. Sometimes[...] the hegemonic culture holds a powerful attraction for subordinate groups eager to gain social acceptance or recognition and thus to terminate discrimination. Where such acceptance is pursued deliberately and with some promise of success we are in the presence of acculturation through upward mobility. (17)

This is to say that the assimilating groups while acquiring new cultural values or making adjustment with the alien cultural milieu, still maintains an indigenous solidarity. Thus, cultural difference never becomes 'complex' and 'univocal' because it moves in symbolic formation from one enunciatory position to another leaving it further open to cultural translation. Any demand for the full representation of cultural difference is bound to lead to the loss of meaning because it involves interdisciplinary and the emergent cultural forms can't be contextualized in terms of some pre-given or already existing frame of reference.

The basic mode of cultural encounter is dialogical engagement or interaction where two diverse culture meet, there emerges a conflict as well as an adjustment. The conflict and mutual enmity are the facts of human relations through which communication or dialogue between cultures is possible where negotiation takes place for mutual and meaningful engagement in a new, social and cultural milieu. Cross-cultural dialogues are highly used in the non-western, post-colonial/ a post independent which established new metaphors of nationhood to write new history and to create and frame defining symbols for the purpose of imagining the nation. Cultural syncretism refers to the amalgamation of two contrary cultures. This fusion gives birth to multicultural society. It is said to be the pluralization of culture. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define syncretism as:

A term sometimes used to avoid the problems that some critics have associated with the idea of hybridity in identifying the fusion of two distinct traditions to produce a new and distinctive whole. The term often used in religious studies, but it has also found favor in theater criticism with reference to syncretic performance or a syncretic ritual.

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The interlocution between two cultures brings the new third culture into ground, which bears the ethos of both cultures. It clarifies syncretism as a term originally meaning the amalgamation of contrary opinions, but signifying more particularly the concept of a combination of religious faiths. The term syncretism can be religious, social, or cultural. Nevertheless, in postcolonial discourse it refers to cultural hybridity. The history of religion shows two kinds of syncretism: the unconscious mutual influence of religion whose representation are living together or near each other or are bound together socially or intellectually and a conscious syncretism based

on the desire for mutual tolerance and on the results of scientific research in the field of the comparative history of religion.

Syncretism consists of the attempt to reconcile desperate or contrary beliefs, often while melding practices of various schools of thought. The term refers to an attempt to merge and analogize several originality discrete traditions to theology and mythology of religious expression of culture etc. So, syncretism tends to facilitate coexistence and constructive interaction between different cultures, a factor that has recommended it to rulers of multi-realms. Religious syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious belief systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions. This can occur on many reasons and the religious scenario happens quite commonly in areas where multiple religious traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture. When a culture is conquered, the conquerors bring their religious beliefs with them, but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs, systems, and practices.

### **Dichotomy between Eastern and Western culture**

East and west are the terms in constant use, pregnant with meaning but difficult to define precisely. We cannot say precisely where the east ends and where the west begins. The terms 'East' and 'West' are used to refer not just to areas of spaces but also the modes of thought and behaviour. When we take a long view of history we will not find all eastern views are these and all western views are that. There is not the eastern view which is totally different from the western view of life or vice versa. As a matter of fact, eastern and western people had common beginning and developed from relatively independent views and acquired certain features, which marked them from each other.

Geographical areas are not cultural or anthropological entities. Neither east nor west is a corporate single entity. The North American Indians are authentic Americans as they owned the place but anthropologists relate them to eastern races. If we look at the problem from the point of history and culture, we are told a single family of related languages. The Indo-European runs almost uninterrupted, and without a definite break from western Ireland and the highlands of Scotland to the Ganges and beyond. Neither 'East' nor 'West' has had any monopoly of the values of civilization. All have crossed certain decisive steps during the development of civilization. Such as, Paleolithic (Stone Age or invention of stone tools), Neolithic (food producing and animal breeding) etc. Each term, east and west, therefore is a blanket term, used to cover a number of separate people and region in different stages of development. It is this mental reality that transforms the herd of animals into human society. It expresses itself through speech and symbols, through religions, political and social institutions or culture in our term.

The very names Hindu Indias, Buddhists Asia, western Christendom or Islam society suggest that spiritual traditions, philosophies of life underlie each society. The social institutions, economic arrangements and scientific beliefs are all bound together by certain ideals, by which men move. As long as a society lives by its ideas, its tools and forms have meaning. If the faith fails, the society loses its guide and direction. The withering away of vital beliefs is the symptom of cultural decline. All cultures have their roots, old and new. They receive influences from others. For example, the Chinese and the Hindu cultures were long ago in touch with these of the west and vice versa. Anyway India and Greece are the leading nations in the history of the world. As Radhakrishnan in his *East and West: Some reflections* rightly quotes the line that Bishop Westcott told to the late Mr. C.F. Andrews:

India and Greece were two great thinking nations who had made the history of the world. As Greece had been the leader of Europe, India would always be the leader of Asia. While India repudiates any claim to the leadership of Asia, and acknowledge the antiquity and importance of the Chinese culture. Indonesia, Indo-china, Malaysia, Thailand, Burma, China, Japan to some degree are the witnesses to the spirit of India, whereas all European countries whose history strongly marked by European immigration are the witnesses of the spirit of Greece which had its nourishment from Palestine and Rome as well.

(16)

From these statements we can generalize that the east namely stands for Asia and west for Europe. The differences between east and west are emphasized when western countries experienced a major transformation through the achievements of science and technology in 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> century and also when European Christendom established beyond which there was alien culture in the east. The crusades established a border between eastern and western culture. With the European colonization of Americas (north and south) the east/west distinction became global. The concept of an eastern or oriental (a member of oriental race) sphere was emphasized by ideas of racial as well as religious and cultural differences. Such distinctions were articulated by westerners in the scholarly tradition known as orientalism. Thus, whether it is Europeans' Asia or westerners' oriental or geopoliticians' east, it includes forty countries including India, china, japan, Korea, among others with their distinctive civilization.

Buddhism and Hinduism which arose in India and spread throughout Nepal, Malaysia, peninsula, Indonesia, Confucianism and Taoism which are purely Chinese

in origin and influential in Korea and Japan and Muslim, with whatever origin but influential in India, Pakistan, wholly marked the Asian or eastern civilization. But to speak of the Asian traditional culture India is found at the centre, Stephen N. Hay also agrees that “India was the home of Asian civilization” (252). “India, of course, was the teacher of Asia” (255). He also rightly quotes the lines of Tagore what he says in his lecture, “In former ages India was a sort of hermitage of thoughts and peace apart from the world[...] her thoughts flashed out over Asia and created civilization”(288). For Gandhi no less than for Tagore, India was the heart of Asia. He declared “If India falls Asia dies” he continued” India aptly been called the nursery of many blended cultures and civilization” (qtd. in Hay 288). Hay narrates Savarkar’s agreement that India meant Hindu: “Since Hindu and India both are derived from the same Sanskrit word *sindhu* (the land of the river)” (289). Hay also says that “India firmly excluded the Muslims...” (289). He also comments, “For Radhakrishna as for Ram swami Sastri India meant Hindus” (269). In this thesis also the concept of eastern culture refers to the Indian Hindu traditions.

Likewise, the term ‘West’ generally means the Europe, Americas (south and north) and Australia. The history of America and Australia is strongly marked by the European immigration. So, Europe is found at the heart of west or western countries as India of the Eastern. Still Europe also includes different civilization such as: Islam, Judaism, Christianity. The concept of western culture to which this thesis refers to is the modern European materialistic way of life – their beliefs and attitudes.

The traditional culture of India (Hindus) has its root in Vedas, “the truths suggested in the Vedas and develops in *Upanishad*” (22), said Radhakrishna in his book *East and West: Some Reflections*. As Northrop has also written “Every idea contained in at least the older Upanishads, with no exceptions, is not new to the

Upanishads, but can be found set forth or at least very clearly foreshadowed, in the older Vedic texts” (313).

This Indian culture is found to be very much old. As Northrop quotes the lines of Surendranath Das Gupta “When the Vedas were composed, there was probably no system of writing prevalent in India”. The Vedas were handed from mouth to mouth from a period of unknown. As Northrop writes “[...]even if one goes back to the earliest date at which they may have been set down the people had to look upon them not only as very old, but so old that they had theoretically at least no beginning in time”(313). Again Radhakrishna in his *East and West: Some Reflections* writes, “The Vedic period, on a most cautious estimate, covers the period between 1500 to 600 B.C.the Rig Veda is older than Homer or the old Testament” (21). Whatever the date is, Indian civilization is found to be older than other in the world. Hay quotes the line what Tagore had said, “For centuries we did hold torches of civilization in the East when the west slumbered in darkness” (63). He continues, “India is the cradle of the world’s oldest civilization...” (222). Raghvana Iyer in *The Glass Curtain Between Europe and Asia* agrees with the point, “The transmission of ideas, good and influences was mainly from east to west in the ancient world and west to east on the modern age...” (45).

But in fact, the date or the period from which the Indian civilization started is not much important, what is important is what set the tone this Indian (Hindu) culture. Spiritual yearning (truth is known by spirit and spiritual salvation is the end of life), immediate experienced aesthetic continuum (i.e. love, beauty, loyalty), transcendental thinking (i.e. other world hell or heaven is important than this world) set forth tone of Indian culture. As Radhakrishna in his *East and West: some Reflections* says:



There was neither being nor non-being. There was neither the air, nor the sky above, what is it that moves? In what direction? Under whose guidance? Who knows, who can tell it when the creation occurred? Whence it comes and whether the gods were only born thereafter? “...these words of spiritual yearning, metaphysical unease and intellectual skepticism set the tone of Indian’s cultural growth”. (21-22)

Besides this image worship is a marked feature of Indian culture. As a whole Indian culture is directed according to what is suggested in Vedas. As Northrop quotes the lines of Surendranath Das Gupta:

Even at this day all the obligatory duties of the Hindus at birth, marriage, death etc are performed according to the old Vedic ritual [...], a little insight into the life of an ordinary Hindu of the present day well shows that the system of image worship is one that has been grafted upon his life, the regular obligatory duties of which are ordered according to the old Vedic rites[...] the laws which regulate the social, legal, domestic and religious customs and rites of the Hindus even to the present days are said to be but mere systematized memories of old Vedic teachings, and are held to be obligatory on their authority. (314-15)

Through the rapid growth of science and technology Western/European countries began to experience materialistic civilization whereas eastern or Indian culture maintained a comparative constancy of belief and remains essentially spiritual. In the west the production of commodities is guided by the impulse of competition whose

end is the gain of wealth for individual because their living is determined by the Darwinism theory of ‘the survival of the fittest’.

The emphasis in the east is on life and not possession, intuition and not intellect, religion and not science, freedom and not direction. George Bearce rightly quotes the line of historian William Robertson in *The Glass Curtain Between Asia and Europe*: “Men in every state of their career are so satisfied with the progress made by the community in which they are members that it becomes a standard of perfection....” (203). In traditional India the production of commodities is brought under the law of social adjustment. Its basis is cooperation. Their food production is not for the individual but for the family. Hay also correctly quotes the lines what Rabindranath Tagore in his lecture says:

Western civilization is more mechanical than spiritual, more political than religious, more mindful of power than love and peace. On the other hand the people of the east do not organize themselves for power but for perfection. They do not hate and kill, suspect and envy but live and adore, love and worship[...]Europe after the war lies in her adoption of ideals of the east, namely spiritual love, beauty and freedom, which are not diminished by sharing. (270)

Religion in the east is the cultivation of the interior life. It is the attainment of spiritual freedom and is essentially the private achievement of the individual won by hard effort in solitude and isolation on mountain-tops and in monasteries. Radhakrishna further says:

[...] the meditation of thinkers in communion with the eternal, the rapture of devotee in love with the transcendent, the dedication of the saint raised above egoistic desires and passions into the selfishness of

divine possess value to the eastern mind higher than life of power and enjoyment. (54)

In the west, religion is a social phenomenon a matter of the ecclesia, of the community. Religion for them is a support for social stability. The western converts religion into a sort of police system for the sake of social order. For them God is the promoter of the social customs. Ceremonies, which bind the groups, are emphasized. Good citizens are good believers those who break the rules atheists while eastern religion is directed to the salvation of the individual soul rather than to the maintenance of society. Rites, ceremonies are emphasized, as they are the functions of morality to earn life eternal. For them salvation is not automatic. It depends on our effort. To make out that salvation is not something that we deserve or earn; it is entirely free and spontaneous gift of the supreme.

In the east, religion is the life of spirit. It is the presence of oneness of man with the spirit of truth, love and beauty in the universe. Religion is more a matter of spiritual culture than that of scholastic learning. Radhakrishna in his *East and West: Some Reflections* says:

We learn the truth not by criticism and discussion but by deepening life and changing the level of consciousness. God is not the highest form to be known but the highest being to be realized. Passive virtues are emphasized, like the meditative calm and the strength of spirit, which are outcome of self-control and waging war on lust, anger, and worry.

(52)

Eastern religion lays stress on the patience of spirit and the gentleness of soul. Vigorous life and active service appeal to the west. For westerners, "Life is a thing to be possessed and enjoyed" (53), comments Radhakrishna. The western mind is

rationalistic and practical while the eastern mind is more inclined to inward life and intuitive thinking. Western philosophy demands logic for real. It divides all statements into empirical and non-empirical, the empirical ones are contingent and verifiable in sense perception but non-empirical are tautological not verifiable and these are just simple nonsense. F.S.C. Northrop correctly comments on western philosophy as: “a practical philosophy...a philosophy which not merely argues but experiments [...] all that exist here. There is no need to throw eyes into the heavens for it” (365). For them what is expressed and is useful for our immediate ends, is real, what is inexpressible and useless is unreal. They search logical reasoning for things to be true. We see this philosophy vividly in Newton, Darwin and so forth.

On the other hand, in the east, religion is experience of reality. God is truth and service for god is service for the truth. What is given in religion is too subtle and too complex to be expressed in logical propositions. Radhakrishna comments in his *East and West: some Reflections*: “East believes that there are realities which cannot be clearly seen, and even assumes that logical attempts to formulate them in communicable propositions do violence to them...” (49). Thus eastern religion is mystic whereas western is intellectual. For easterners, God is not seen, He is everywhere, and His grace is attained by sacrificial deeds. God is divine power, which holds the key of the universe. They believe in stone shrine of god and kneel, bow and give pain to oneself in front of it to get the grace of divinity (God). While the Europeans believe in power and action that man, himself is responsible for his deeds that bring his fate. Henri Brugmans in *The Glass Curtain Between East and West*, comments:

The measure of man is man; this humanistic confession is acceptable even for the Christian mystic whose faith tells him that God almighty,

the creator of the universe, did not disdain to adopt the flesh with all its weaknesses and become 'Emmanuel', God with us-that is: Man among men. Therefore European might crusade for the glory of God they never forget that the lord is served through men. He saved so Europeans pay a certain respect not only for the individual but for individual conscience. (225)

Eastern religion aims at producing saints and heroes, western men that are sensible and can maintain social order. Radhakrishna also says that "they (European) are content to work with the material ready to their hands and reduce it to order and decency" (56).

In the west, we have the realism of the men of action; in the east the sensitiveness of passive imagination. The ideal of western culture is to train men for citizenship that they may be able to realize their full power in the state and for the state. In the east, the good man is one who feels at home in the whole world. Emphasis on logical efficiency, materialistic feeling, and individual selfishness are the characteristic marks of the western attitudes to life. On the other hand, mystic realism, familial life, salvation of individual soul are the markers of eastern civilization. Westerners with their science and technology have lost their spiritual feelings. They have been rude with their rationalistic thinking.

Spiritualism as a religious movement has a varied set of beliefs and practices related to the conviction that the living and the dead could be in meaningful communication. It is a conviction that all souls no matter what their earthly history will be granted eternal salvation immediately after death. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines spiritualism as "the belief that the people who have died can send messages to living people, usually through a medium" (1245). It is religious belief

that goes beyond the worldliness. In that sense, it is belief on supernatural things like spirit, soul, grace, etc. it considers spirit and soul as distinct from the body or material things. It is taken as a practical demonstration that the working of cause and effect extent to heaven and the afterlife.

In this connection, this research work attempts to explore the impacts of spiritual and material values on human existence as found in Gita Mehta's famous novel *Karma Cola* (1979). One can see through aforesaid opposing features of eastern and western everyday life that they always remain in a diametrical distance. But this is not the case in reality. After the world wars, the countries of third world started to import or imitate the western system in politics and economics in the name of development or modernization which essentially affected the culture. Even today people take the word 'westernization' for 'modernization'. In the novel *Karma Cola*, the dichotomy between spiritualism and materialism holds the focal point of analysis. Being dissatisfied with their materialistic norms, beliefs and values some of the westerners come to east (India) for the pursuit of spiritualism.

Thus, the encounter between the materialism (west) and spiritualism (India, east) will be the basic argument in the thesis where different patterns facilitated by such cross-cultural encounter will be analyzed in Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola*.

### III. Valorizing Eastern Culture in *Karma Cola*

The encounter between the diametrically opposite, east and west in the context of human relationships and cultural values constantly engages Mehta's attention and gets reflected in her novel. She weaves the impressions of India's mysticism with the impressions she receives from other people. The ultimate aim of the book is to hit upon the biased western image which defines India as a land of mysticism and spiritualism. These were the images that matter and brought, and which still brings thousands of westerners to India. These representations have also led to the emergence of many books by other prominent Indian writers. Just like in *Journey to Ithaca* by Anita Desai, Mehta's *Karma Cola* concerns India and spirituality. In *Karma Cola*, Mehta has done a great job of contrasting the eastern and western view of life and death. It is a satire on the major wave of foreigners swarming into India in the sixties in search of India's *karmic* powers. Blending humor with witty observations, she constructs a book that presents her own impressions through the experiences of many.

The oriental flavour is practically seen everywhere in the text. Mehta attempts to present a view of life in her chosen aspects of Indian society. She selects aspects of traditional spiritual heritage of Indian society. These are aspects which the western critics and readers consider to be an essential image of India. Mehta weaves a number of accounts around the narrator's experience to form a tapestry of life, spiritualism and relationships from an astern point of view. Even her verbs and adjectives are aptly picked to evoke mystery and texture. She has been able to give a taste of India, create a feeling of awe and a supernatural atmosphere, and as such, sustain the oriental view of India. Mehta has made full use of inciting and provocative ideas to instigate the readers as she takes them inside the heart of the Indian culture. It becomes a

phenomenon presenting India in rich colour and intricacy of design. Mehta has been able to disclose the hidden secrets of India, the unity in the diversity of traditions, faiths, and beliefs. The concept of 'the Mystic East' is a prevalent theme within the western understanding of India as 'the other'. This is particularly seen in scholarly approaches and their relation to the study of religion and mysticism. Most scholars had probably never seen this concept as an ideology but since Edward said defined it as orientalism, a system and style of thought dominating the western perception of the east in *Orientalism* (1979), its ideological character has become increasingly clear. In this style of thought called orientalism, the orient and occidental are respectively termed in relation to each other which is based upon an "ontological" and "epistemological" distinction made between the eastern and the western countries (Said 2). The relationship between the Occident and the Orient is thus a relationship of complex hegemony of power and domination. Orientalism has been an important subject in studying the culture and civilization of the orient.

In her book, Mehta tries to bring together all the experiences of India (East) so that the reader can get a glimpse of India's past and present. In an interview with wallia, Mehta says that she was trying to bring mythological time, historical time, contemporary time and narrative time all together within the scope of a single paragraph. There are various incidents in the novel, which gives the image of what eastern (Indian) culture is. She compares India's progress and value in terms of the west and as such, is always the superior. In the recurring incidents of the book, Mehta has clearly differentiated the difference between the east and west.

After reading *Karma Cola*, a reader can notice the numerous uses of myths to suggest and highlight the culture of east. Mehta has made ample use of myths to deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experiences in India,



and because of their all-encompassing nature, the myths have illuminated the many aspects of Indian culture. According to Mehta, India is a country where even classical music is not free from mythological underpinning. There are thousands of Gods and their subsidiaries, and all of them have numerous myths connected with them, even ascetics, rivers, animals and nature are revered and considered to possess supernatural powers. She has shown that everything in India is composed of myths and that the lives of Indians are ruled by such myths, which are abundant in nature. Therefore, the impression Mehta gives qualifies Indians as spiritual whose social lives are surrounded by true beliefs and religious dogmas. She truly presents culture of east (India) fit to be studied and thought of Hindu philosophy in terms of western materialism.

It was the time of 1960s and 1970s; Some of the westerners being frustrated with the impact of cold war, Vietnam war flocked to east, India, for the pursuit of spiritualism against the materialism. When the subject of science and technology comes it brings the subject of religion with it in controversy. Since long there have been sharp conflicting clashes between these two fields. Since the explosion of atom bomb in 1945 in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the question of social wisdom, morality and rationality has become more serious. On the other hand, the comfort and facilities provided by the advancement in science and technology is also seriously thoughtful. In the shadow of the Bomb (Atom Bomb) and in the face of such far reaching discoveries and changes in technology, the question of 'science and human values' has got a special urgency in the post-war years.

The writer describes herself as having been among the hundreds of westerners who traveled to India in the belief that they would find holy men able to free them from the boredom and despair of an increasingly material world. Soon after her

arrival, while walking down an Indian street, the young woman encounter a man clothed in the saffron robes of renunciation who offered to be her spiritual mentor. Delighted that enlightenment was already within her reach she became his follower, following him even into a cave in the high Himalayas where, she was told, other spiritual gurus were waiting to initiate her in the ways of eastern mysticism.

When *Karma Cola* was first published, critics from as far a field as the United States and South America to Europe and southeast Asia, reviewed it less for its merit than as an occasion to describe their own encounters with such causalities' of spiritual tourism. *Karma Cola* documents a series of episodes and scenes located in various parts of India during the 60s and 70s when thousands and thousands of them from the west arrived in India "clashing cymbals and ringing bells, wearing bright colors and weird clothes" (5). These visitors from the west are here in quest of "instant nirvana" and they seek out gurus from whom they hope to derive "shakti", a direct transmission of cosmic energy from the guru to the devotee. There are a host of gurus in India who gather numerous disciples around them in special camps set up in all sorts of places- Delhi, Goa, Benaras, and beyond. These guru take upon themselves to guide their disciples to "a rediscovery of their inner environment, and outer aura, and the supreme *shakti*" (53), through meditation and self-realization, and the disciples submit themselves to the inscrutable logic of their gurus which often takes them round the bend.

This transaction between the Indian gurus and their western disciples, as Gita Mehta describes, is banal and it thrives on mutual incomprehension. The conflict between the claims of the body and of the mind- of materialism and of spiritualism enters into all such transactions between the east and west, and the so-called Indian guru, whose powers are often limited to controlling the bodies of others, and not his

own, makes a convenient deal with his disciple saying, “you have the karma, we will take the coca cola – a metaphysical soft drink for a physical one”(107), of all the terms from Hindu philosophy that have captured western imagination none has greater currency than karma, and so it is karma that is offered to these westerners as a metaphysical soft option. This enables them, as they themselves have admitted, “to escape from that terrible (western) world where everyone is mindfucking everyone else.” “We left home to get away from that shift,” says one, “The fact is that I did not really come here to get here, I sort of drifted here to get away from there” (64). No wonder, therefore, those east-west encounters at this level are far from serious- it is all a big joke with gurus giving benediction from helicopters and disciples getting high on hallucinative drugs and sexual orgies.

To these so-called seekers from the west, karma had become almost anything they want- it was only a sort of mental vibration that could go with any casual recognition- coincidence, chance, *deja vu*, crossing the road- anything goes as karma. “The speed of jet travel appears to have eliminated the distinctions between geography and philosophy. Or those between hallucination and salvation. Or those between history and mythology” (19), comments Gita Mehta wryly on the situation arising out of this influx of disciples from the west. Reason and religion have now become targets of popular amusement and the stampede of people in pursuit of mind expansion and obscure salvation has wiped off our ancient values and thrown us into chaos and confusion. “Sacred knowledge in the hands of fools destroys,” says the Upanishads, and both Indians and westerners are grossly demoralized by their incursions into instant philosophy. It looks as though the meeting of the east and the west is doomed from the start- “the monomania of the west can never hope to comprehend the multimania of the east” (36), and therefore, while the easterner is

engrossed in multiple possibilities of salvation, the westerner is immersed only in his ego. The westerners can never grasp the Hindu concept of Maya which enables the Indians to make “mind-blowing affirmations” while they themselves are lost in a “plethora of contradictions.” So it is the fate of the west to be wrecked against infinity even as the Indian gurus sell their birthright for a mess of pot, shoddy goods and glitter of gold.

Gita Mehta’s portrayal of east-west encounter in contemporary times beats all previous accounts of the subject through sheer force, vividness, and originality. Mehta takes hold of the innumerable facts littered on the east-west meeting ground and turns them to original perceptions evoking a unique sensibility. She has rare knack for mixing facts with fancy in order to create sheer absurd situations that are strangely funny and bitterly serious. Even as her scathing wit cuts into the follies and illusions of people perpetrated in the name of God and religion, she touches us with a rare sensitivity that commiserates with the plight of these poor lost souls. The odds and ends of cultural interactions portrayed in *karma cola* takes them almost to the end of the tether. The division of the book under subtitle such as “Reinventing the Wheel,” “Karma Crackers,” “Tricks and Treats,” “The Odds and the Gods,” and so on condenses the situation into scintillating scenes marked by artistry and vigour.

It is true that the special quality of Mehta’s version of the east-west encounter is mostly based on the excesses indulged in by its present incumbents. Mehta is aware that she is depicting only an endgame which once had more intellectual dimensions. Brahmins of western intellectual thought- Huxley, Yeats, Forster and others were led to the east by genuine inquisitiveness, but those who came after- the Beatles and the Rolling Stones- were mere populists. But even this earlier wave of western immigrants belonged to a higher class than the ones that have taken their place.

Today, the so-called seekers are the real scum who only yearn for kicks that go with violence and orgies. They sell themselves to hallucinatory drugs and end up in clinics and asylums spreading the vermin wherever they go. As Mehta narrates:

At the height of the Nepalese Gold Rush, an Indian matinee idol showed up in Kathmandu, and immediately identified the names of God with the rampant drug scene. Out of his vision came an Indian film that grossed the biggest box office receipts of that year and the next five years. The film owes three quarters of its popularity to the hit song, “Dum Maro Dum.” The literal translation of the lyrics reads,  
 Take a drag. Take a drag. I’m wiped out.  
 Say it in the morning. Say it in the evening.  
 Hare Krishna Hare Rama Hare Krishna Hare Rama. (19)

But where one would have expected mass religious indignation, a non-secular India turns around with surprising openness. “The whole continent,” she writes, “rocked on to the lyrics” (20) as though aware of the creation of their own brand fetishism, but deciding to have fun with it anyway. Indian cinema, however, only mirrored the symptoms of the society.

Spaced-out, drugged-up hippies who believed they had gained access the root of all being, who insisted on seeing how “beautiful” everything is, ignorant of their own spiritual bigotry. After a morning discourse in a Poona ashram, the disciples ask Mehta:

Did you feel God’s aura? Did you get hit off the energy?’ they demanded  
 ‘Well, uh, he’s very widely read,’ I backtracked, trying to get a bit of room.

They looked at my coldly.

It's beautiful that you're here. But just why are you here?'

'As a tourist,' I explained.

'Oh,' they said and the steel shutters came down over their eyes. (30)

An American, who had been living there for six months, calls himself Yuddhistra, and when he meets a FOB American in the ashram who introduces herself as "Joanie"(31), he shouts in disbelief and says "That's really far out" (31) and, along with other disciples, mocks her name. Everyone laughs with glee. It's in little scenes like these that the simple skill of Mehta's writing becomes obvious; how she makes her point about arrogance, the plastic pseudo-enlightenment that at one moment sees everything as "beautiful" and in another is perfectly capable of hilariously catty ignorance- all without saying anything.

It is in this context that we may look another book on the same subject- Jhabvala's *A New Dominion*. This book also deals with a situation arising out of the search for self by westerners who play themselves into the hands of an Indian Swami ji. This Swami ji runs a Universal Society for Spiritual Regeneration of the Modern World and is only too eager to spread his message all around the world. Evie, Margaret, and Lee are his disciples and he wields a strange power over them with his hypnotic eyes and cool demeanour. His responsibility, he says, is "to mould and to make", but before he can mould and make he has to "break" (121). Deliberately, he proceeds to break the mind and will of all his disciples until they surrender totally and become "nothing." They have to endure extreme states of negation- hunger, filth, heat, vermin and what not, and become nervous wrecks while the Swami Ji coolly ignores them. His professed goal is to teach them overcome their ego, and while this is being tried, Evie becomes a mindless slave, Margaret dies of jaundice, and Lee is

left in lurch with no sense of direction. Jhabvala in her book depicts a new dominion- a dominion over which the mind dominates although with ambivalent connotations. The Swami Ji thrives on weak minds and pursues his own ends which ostensibly serve the cause of moral regeneration.

Now, we might as well ask one relevant question- how does *Karma Cola* reflect a feminine viewpoint? Can we, at all, make a claim that the distinctive qualities of its content and style belong to a woman's perspective? This question of "difference" in women's books is, of course, a controversial problem in feminist aesthetics, but we may point out that the so-called "difference" in women's outlook does not surely include a totally rationalistic outlook. Rationalism is patriarchal and authoritative and hence anti-feminist. *Karma Cola* is clearly rationalistic in its analysis of the contemporary situation and it does not indulge in any sexist politics or sentimentality or ambivalence. We may indeed call it a totally "liberated" book that depicts the unisexual trends of today's world, oblivious of distinctions and moving to mindlessness. It is a rare feat for a woman to take up the cudgels against the approach of "Zero" and stand up for clarity and reason. In doing this, Gita Mehta has also vindicated the rights of women for full equality and independence.

### **Hindu Notion of Karma**

The word *Karma* in general sense refers to different meanings like action, work, deed or function etc. In moral sense, Karma refers to right or wrong, good or bad, practical or unpractical deeds. Karma is also referred in Hinduism as *Dharma*, 'duty'; and the very duty would be there according to the circumstances of one's way of life. In Hinduism Dharma, 'duty' is initiated by most ancient Hindu scriptures Vedas, and the Dharma is not the same for all. It is very individualized, and depends on many situations such as caste hierarchy, age, gender etc. Then the question comes

what are the measures of one's action that requires Dharma or Adharma? What are those standards that help distinguish right from the wrong action? One thing we want to know about is justice. Will right action always earn reward and wrong actions punishment? It is not so, as in real this does not happen. Right actions are often unrewarded and wrong actions often unpunished. Human agency is unable to detect much right and wrong. So, human justice is incapable to distinguish it, one need cosmic or Divine Justice. It is that right and wrong actions result in a kind of deposit, charge or potential in the agent. Good deeds make a good deposit, evil deeds bad deposit. In this way, Karma is defined as "cause and Effect" or "Causality", since good actions ultimately cause good effects. If bad things happened to good people, it is said to be the consequence of certain prior evil actions, may be of previous life. If good happens to bad people, it is the fruit of some prior righteous deeds, even in a previous life time.

Gita Mehta's *Karma Cola* deals with the needs for spiritualism to the contemporary people living under the materialistic society and experiencing the trauma of great wars like cold war in the 1960s. Gita Mehta has extracted this title with the diametrical distance between the eastern spiritualism and the western materialism. Thousands and thousands of westerner are the traveler who came to India for their spiritual salvation through meditation and self-realization by Indian gurus. They had returned from the horrors of the Second World War, Vietnam War and are deeply troubled. From the very beginning, they are more interested in pursuing intellectual and spiritual knowledge for their own sake than in becoming part of the great western material, fashionable, luxurious and prosperous world. Some of the western hippies are also against the materialistically attached society. They are doubtful about the people of the society. They see all are heading towards the money



and money is everything for them, and they think money is a power and dignity of the state. In the second chapter of the book, Gita Mehta gives the message about Karma:

A seven-week seminar on *Kundalini* meditation is being given by Swami Muktananda to a respectably international and populous gathering, who sit cross-legged and patient through the discourses on meditation and long for the Swami's *Shakti*- the direct transmission of cosmic energy from guru to devotee.(12) The world conference on the future of Mankind was opened by the Vice President of India, and addressed not only by Indian *Yogis* and *Brahmacharis*, but also delegates from Nigeria, Rumania, Poland, Australia, South America, Germany, Britain, Canada, Indonesia, The United States, The Netherlands, France, and the United Nations. Among the speakers who addressed the conference were Supreme Court judges, heads of philosophy departments, journalists, film stars, income-tax officials, and maharajahs. It was a gathering worthy of the great debates of the cold war, except that the subject was no longer communism, for and against. This time, all these people from all over the world and from every conceivable background were discussing the meaning of karma, and the significance of moral action. (13)

But, more than half of population in the world is indifferent and ignorant from the practice of this karma Yoga. The westerners are so wrapped up in their egos that they are utterly unaware of the earth that they stand on. They divide thoughts from actions. As Hindu believes actions are the same as thoughts, thoughts are same as the actions.

The Hindu perspective makes quiet a bit more sense because for an action to come into existence a thought must be there. As westerners are more skeptical in the

matter of the effect of Karmas i.e., good Karma lead to betterment in the next life, bad karma to pain; so they are equally skeptical towards the subjects like the practice of karma Yoga can lead one near to God head etc. If westerners were to study the Hindu notion of Karma closely, they would find things which modern society completely lacks. Karma yoga's method of action (or inactions) can lead them towards Brahma and spiritual enlightenment. It helps in understanding this influence in T.S. Eliot in relation to Hindu text. Eliot was well read and had immense interest in eastern spirituality. His fascination toward eastern Spiritualism can be seen in his long poem *The Waste Land*. In a poem he brings different myths which are related with eastern Hindu philosophy and he also used Sanskrit words like "Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata. Shanti. Shanti. Shanti" (358). According to Milstead Claudia, in "After Strange Gods", T.S. Eliot had once said that studying Sanskrit for two years and Indian philosophy for one year left him "in a state of enlightened mystification"(Eliot 34).

At one morning session at the world conference on the Future of Mankind, some of the westerners, Indian gurus and meteorologist were discussing about "Science and Spiritual Wisdom" (17). After the third speaker, a meteorologist had delivered his speech, an earnest American student stood up and asked, "Sir? Isn't science leading us deeper and deeper into the possibility of total self-annihilation? All these armories, these nuclear submarines (bombers), the hunter-killer satellites, don't they prove we're all crazy?" The meteorologist was flanked on either side by continent ladies dressed in white saris. The ladies shook their heads and smiled compassionately at the anxious youth. The meteorologist hunched closer to the microphone. "Don't live in the shadow of death, young man," he warned. "Let us say there is a nuclear holocaust, what will it do? I shall tell you what it will do. It will cleanse the world!" (17).

Karma, i.e. good karma and bad karma are the things that keep one rounding and rounding in the cycle of life, death and rebirth. We live life according to the effect of the karmas of previous life. At present, we are getting life which is the combination of our free will and of predestination. And this is happening to us from the time eternal. There is no way to overcome those actions and ties. We perform Karma very often knowingly, unknowingly and in confusion by the choice of good action. But, still, we have not got a proper way of its solution. So, karma yoga is a good solution of our misery. Some of the western people know that Karma yoga explores the idea through work and dedication of its path one may be closer to Brahma. It teaches that our action and thoughts can lead us to a better, more fulfilled spirit through our deeds. It also emphasized on any work one does, be it any form of work, must be done for Brahma and not for one self. When one works for God then one can be unselfish and good. It also gives us the feeling of freedom in whatever work we choose to do. In a time of meditation Indian gurus said their western disciples about Karma yoga. “karma-yoga... is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. The Karma-yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatsoever. He may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realizing selflessness, and he has to work it out himself”(22). Such a description of karma-yoga shows that it emphasizes firstly the importance and value of action, and secondly of unselfishness.

In the tenth chapter of a book When a Frenchman asked his Indian guru about “what is Om?” Indian guru replied that “Om” is the Hindu religious word which has all the vibration of the world. “Om” is a mystical and sacred monosyllable in Hindu tradition. The sound of “Om” is believed to contain divine powers. It is used as a mantra for meditation and as an invocation in itself. “Om” is the three words, the

three fires, and the three gods of the Hindu trinity consisting of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva” (28). Myths are also very popular in India and are connected with almost everything that is holy or considered holy. The mythology of the Hindu religion portrays the deities Shiva, Vishnu, Saraswati and others. The mythology of these deities has significantly influenced Indian texts, from ancient epics in the Sanskrit language, to medieval poems in various languages of different regions to modern works in English. Karma cola abounds with such myths concerning Hindu deities along with supernatural elements and divine attributes of nature. It is noteworthy that Mehta has intensely included these myths so that it provides hunting and mystifying experiences to the readers. She has shown that myths are a part of the numerous tribes that abound India. Local deities are worshipped almost everywhere among the tribes of India. They can take any form and are usually connected to a myth.

According to the Hindu concept of karma, if the actions are not dedicated to God, they are not actions at all. So, some of the westerners were prepared themselves to worship the Hindu God like Shiva through meditation in the ashrams of Indian gurus. The French were in the ashrams to know about the Hindu philosophy for their spiritual salvation. One day Gita Mehta thinks:

The French were here for the aesthetics. A shopkeeper had told me that the French always asked for pictures or statues of the God Shiva. This had seemed entirely consistent with the national predilection for style. Who could be closer to Daddy cool than the Great Ascetic sitting naked on a mountain top, his only accessory the Third eye. The shopkeeper had expanded on his theme. When they come to me, the francesi, I can hear them under the breath chanting Shiva-o-ham, Shiva-o-ham. I asked one, ‘Brother, do you know what you are

saying?’ immediately he gave the reply. ‘I am saying I am Shiva.’ He knew the meaning of the mantra all right. The owner of a bookshop dealing in books relating to mysticism and the occult was more sympathetic. “At least when they come to my shop they buy books on holy subjects, Yoga, Tantra, The Gita, and The Upanishads.

Sometimes I get angry that they do no work when I have a family to feed and prices are so high. But even if they do not work, at least they take the name of God.” Our Indians, when they come to my shop, they only want to find hot books, about sex and other dirty things. You may say these foreigners, they work like donkeys but they think like kings.

We Indians, we think like donkeys and we work like kings. (76-77)

Karma has occupied an important space in the Hindu religion and cultural practices. The Hindus are accustomed to the concepts of predestination, fatalism, births, and rebirths and so on. They are aware of good or bad actions. Some westerners, many sages and great people have been practicing the karma yoga and karma sanyasa to get salvation from the ties of life and death, and rebirth. Equally, they have been preaching and the commoners have been taking its advantages.

### **Dialogue between Eastern and Western Cultural Values**

The terms ‘east’ and ‘west’ are used to refer not just to areas of spaces but also to the modes of thoughts and behavior. Though it is difficult to demarcate the frontier between the east and the west, for the purpose of this dissertation we have already specified the terms as ‘eastern culture’ means ‘eastern Hindu culture’ and ‘western culture’ means ‘western materialism’ in the preceding chapter. The dichotomy really lies in the modes of thoughts and ways of life. The world-wide expansions of western culture after the world wars, with its magically developed science and technology

overshadowed the eastern countries as well. As a consequence, there seemed some sorts of mixed culture in the world, which is beautifully depicted by Gita Mehta, an Indian woman novelist, in her novel, *Karma Cola*. Though the author has tried to generalize the theme universally, she has talked in the context of 1960s and 1970s where as some of the western hippies came to India for their spiritual salvation against Western materialism. Along with the rapid growth of science and technology they only received mass destruction, depression, dangers in ecosystem, poverty, and violation. Being dissatisfied with their materialistic norm and values they came to India for their inner peace and serenity of mind. As a result, two different cultural entities- eastern and western- are evident in the atmosphere of the novel.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a mammoth exodus of westerners descended upon India, disciples of a cultural revolution who proclaimed that the magic and mystery missing from their lives was to be found in the east. For Gita Mehta, the expatriate Indian novelist in London, the movement of these western “new nomads” epitomizes a global escapism masquerading as spiritual hunger. The “pilgrims” who are the ‘causalities of spiritual tourism’ are variously exploited by the gurus and the ashrams become places where the traditions of an ancient and long-lived society are transacted as commodities. The novel, with its fund of irony, satire and acerbic wit, is a probe into the ashram life where spirituality for all its wheeling and dealing in karma has turned into the most practical jokes of all.

The novel, according to the *Illustrated Weekly*, is “a short tant savagely satirical account of the hippies and western star freaks on a spiritual quest in India” (46). In an interview for this magazine, Gita Mehta says:

It was the product of my own experience. I was at university when Ginsberg arrived and there was the business of the Dharma Bums. And

I came back from university when John Lennon and the Beatles hit India. I had been watching this whole caravanserai arrive and also the anticipations of Indians who said, at last the west is coming to us; at last the rock'n roll show is on. (70)

The culture shock is for both. *Karma Cola* embraces an enormous variety of experience in the ashrams. The central issue in the novel is the gurus and their 'spiritual bedlams' as Gita Mehta calls them. The novel informs the cultural collisions of the east-west encounter, the materialistic gurus and their spiritual causalities'.

Everywhere people were speaking of Karma. And in an age of speed Karma is being realized through instant death ultimatums, to be more precise, as happened in Jonestown by drinking cyanide mixed with the soft drink Kool-Aid: Karma attained through orange flavoured cola. Karma is a spiritual drug for the occidentals and their come back to a world of reality is on the wings of insanity. Intellectuals dousing interms like Karma or Nirvana cannot achieve psychic transformation: "To go from the monomania of the west to the multimania of the East is a painful business. Like a sex change"(35), Gita Mehta observes. An incomprehensible truth this is for both, the east or the west. The result-endless rows of soul-questers pouring in from the west into India. The inpour was tremendous "Never before had the void been pursued with such optimism and such razzle dazzle" (6). How unfortunate the karma was not a commodity. As everyone suspected whatever America wanted, America got. Why not Nirvana?

And then the French came. Their numbers were overwhelming too. For two hundred and thirty thousand there is a record "but there are perhaps another twenty thousand who are here without papers" (21). With them come the Germans, Scandinavians, Australians, Canadians, Italians, south and central Americans, British,

Swiss and so on. All come searching for spiritual centres. The French, coming to India “always asked for picture or statues of the God Shiva” (76). They do not like the Indians, but are enamored of the Indian Gods: “They are like children, you see. It is our Gods, not us who comfort them. They like familiar things like mala, beads and incense. (76) And they like Kali, as the others have a predilection for karma. Karma lures the imagination of everyone. It has an international spiritual currency. It is also ironic that of all the terms Hindu philosophy has given them, this alone has been joyously received. It has accommodated itself excellently to the needs of those who use it. “I can’t visit London anymore. The Karma there is too heavy for me,” says the Iranian hairdresser. “ I crashed my car last night, I have bad karma,” says the Mexican student. “That dude’s dangerous. He has heavy karma,” says the Harlem drug dealer. “Craps- it’s a low karma game,” explains the American gambler’s girl friend. “My daughter is called Rani,” says the German mother. “The night she was born in Goa my friend and his lady had a daughter in Los Angeles and they called her Rani. We have such *close* karma.” (100) .

For us, eternal life is death- not in the bosom of Jesus – but just death, no more being born again to endure life again to die again. Yet people come in ever-increasing numbers to India to be born again with the conviction that in their rebirth they will relearn to live. The deceitful gurus give them a change of names and smugly complacent disciples become entangled in a magic spell that they have reached three quarters of Nirvana. Nirvana Karma, Cosmic Energy, Eternal Silence are metaphysical postulates whose essence their rational minds fail to grapple. Gita Mehta brings out the irony of the situation, when she interviews a western inmate of the ashram:

“What are you doing in India?”



“I am being”

“Pardon?”

“Being.”(34)

For the Indian mind these spiritual doctrines are the sacred conserves of the essential Indian experience. To the occidents, these spiritual pathways are pastimes ‘excruciating experiments in plumbing a beyond’. Putting on orange robes and changing names cannot undo identities, cannot exterminate differences. Change of names cannot be the food for their spiritual hungers. Whether the westerners is to be blamed for seeking Indian asylums or the Indian guru is to be accused for doling out alms indigestible to the westerners psyche is a rather perplexing issue. Escaping from an unwanted past, the materially advanced society turned to India for spiritual knowledge: “We’ve left the past behind us, see. And names. People like her and you...it’s from that terrible world where everyone is mind-fucking everyone else. We left home to get away from that shit.”(33) Building a cenotaph over their material drama with spiritual counters like Karma, Nirvana, and so on. Unlike the admirable Jain monks, mullahs and Sufi saints of *A River Sutra*, the gurus in Karma Cola are shallow mendicants exploiting the gullible and the knowledgeable alike.

Gita Mehta blasts at the hollow ritualistic life that is prescribed for patients seeking spiritual balms. With an iconoclastic violence, the writer lashes at these so-called gurus who sitting on cushioned chairs with blue denim hats on their head ‘spoke about revolution.’ There is the intellectual guru, who can predict the future in quite a rational way. When the disciples arrive, the Swami Ji talks about the perfection: “Everything is perfect. But also the Third World War is coming. That is going to be perfect too. It will kill utterly” (103). The prediction is threatening:

You are sitting on a volcano. Never before was it so dangerous. And you think. What are you doing there? Meditations? What else can you do? Meditate while the time is still there! If the volcano erupts and you die meditating you will know the taste of the deathless! (103)

This guru is reckoned as the thinking man's guru. For the less intellectual, there is Guru Maharaja Ji. He hires the Houston Astrodomes, and sitting on an elaborate throne, spotlighted from every direction, spreads his teaching. Then there are other gurus. When disciples grieve that their mantras are not working anymore, these gurus can deal new mantras for old ones. Bolstering the faith of his followers is another guru in an indoor football stadium in Delhi, promising proof of the existence of God, "The guru informs them that God exists because if you look in the Oxford Dictionary under the letter G, you will eventually find the word God"(104). This guru has become so renowned and his following over the last few years has become so extensive that he now has to give benediction from a helicopter.

The lure of the guru is so much that whatever he does. He is cheered and loudly acclaimed. He is spoken of as the spiritual doctor for all mental ailments. It has become a myth that in busy Manhattan is a basement consecrated to the religions of one hundred and ten countries: "It is indisputably the high temple of religious egalitarianism, Acropolis for the Aquarian Age" (54). Here is a guru, nice clean Brahmin, who is reputed to have healing powers, rolling his eyeballs. Here devotees come and roll their eyeballs at each other for an hour in dead earnest. True believers are convinced that if they rolled their eyes long enough they would, like their gurus, acquire healing powers. A reputed guru was sent for on the death of one of his devotees. He was expected to raise the dead into the living. The news of the arrival of

this world- renowned guru was cause of much commotion. The bewildered American disciple was questioned about this miracle which he witnessed:

“Was that the greatest miracle you saw in India? Your guru raising a man from the dead?”

“No man, the real gurus in India do that sort of thing everyday of the week. I didn’t think raising a guy from the dead was such a big deal after I’d been around India a couple of years.”

“What was the big deal? Did you think anything was a miracle? The American had thought a long time before he answered that question.

“Yeah, I saw a miracle. You should have seen that morgue, guys rushing all over the place, clerks. Morgue attendants, administrators. Nobody knew where anything was.

“I reckon the real miracle was when the Master found that body. The rest was peanuts.”(50)

*Karma Cola* does not underline the anguish or rootlessness of an expatriate writer. Gita Mehta’s views are objective; she is more like a westerner in her vision and portrayal of India. For all the irony and satire in her work there is a human concern at its core. When the guru in the ashram in western India, with a large number of followers, confides to a *Time Magazine* correspondent, “My followers have no time. So I give them instant salvation. I turn them into neo-sanyasis” (102), there is a tinge of sadness about the cultural decadence. “Nirvana for \$100 a Day” (102), and instant salvations are the outcome of the east-west encounters.

People in the east, towards the end of their life, desire some sorts of renunciation. They yearn for individual spiritual salvation visiting different

pilgrimage or meditating at the top of the mountain or inside a cave or in the jungle (with nature). They seem anxious about the life after death. For them transcendental world (i.e. heaven) is greater than this world. Easterners give pain to oneself to attain the grace of God. There is a belief that the more one suffers, the more secured the place in heaven after death. This is a typical eastern ritual. As Indians or easterners, believe in life after death, they believe that after death the soul goes to another world i.e. either hell or heaven. This world is just a gate way to another world. To go to heaven one should make *dharma* in this world.

The easterners have too much faith in God. They believe that the world is the god's design; God creates the beings in the world. Whatever happens in the world that is because of the God's will. The God is omnipotent and omnipresent. He punishes who goes against his will and blesses who pleases him. But the westerners do not believe in anything beyond explanation. Westerners believe in humanism. For them, service for man is greater than service for gods. Man is responsible for whatever happens in the world. The eastern society believes in mysticism but in the western society, love and dedication are replaced by individual selfishness. One school of Indian archeologist traces the origin of Christianity to exactly this confusion. They believe that:

Jesus Christ during his absence from the Bible between the ages of twelve and thirty, was in fact traveling in India. In India Jesus found a guru who taught him much about mysticism, fasting and levitation. The archeologists argue that these sixteen years of training enabled Christ to spend forty days in the wilderness without food or drink. Also, through yogic control, Christ was able to remain in the tomb for three days and nights after his crucifixion. And finally, because of the

meditations he did in the tomb during his incarceration, it was a simple matter for him to levitate on Easter Sunday, a feat not really worthy of the hallelujahs with which it has been commemorated for almost two thousand years. (46)

The archeologists are convinced that Jesus levitated his way back to India, and spent the last years of his life in the Himalayas, where he achieved *Moksha*, release from the cycle of life and death, and then allowed his body to die. His followers did not burn the body but buried it, so that the place could become a place of pilgrimage as befitted the tomb of a Master who had passed beyond karma, and because he was a Jew they built for him a tomb in the Jewish mode. The archeologists are now fanning through the mountains around the vale of Kashmir looking for this Jewish tomb.

The guru of the ashram had said there is a distinct difference between the Indian attitude toward sex and the western attitude toward it, a difference that required completely separate forms of meditation. The guru stated that foreigners still had an adolescent approach to sex, stemming from the society to which they had been born: a society that was deeply competitive and one in which the upheavals of the sexual revolution had only succeeded in accentuating sexual competition. The matter of sex is open in the western societies, where desire to have sex is considered as the hunger and thirst that should be fulfilled. They take sex as a matter of physical yearning (i.e. desire) rather than the matter of spirit. The guru exhorted his disciples to overcome their fear by any means they wished, which included for the western disciples the option of acting out all their sexual fantasies until they exorcised them. The guru quoted freely from the works of Freud and Jung. Few of the disciples knew the works of either thinker outside the popular clichés, so the guru had certain latitude for interpretation. He says, “There is no sin but self-loathing. The self is God. If you

loathe your body you loathe yourself. Go toward your body, go toward your desire, and then go past them. The death of desire is the birth of Atman” (149).

It is noteworthy that after the final chapter in *Karma Cola*, Mehta has put a chronology of events just to represent India in terms of the west. Mehta highlights the unity in diversity that is in India. She compares India’s progress and value in terms of the west and as such, is always the superior. In the recurring incidents of the book, Mehta has clearly differentiated the difference between the east and the west.

### **Acculturation**

When a society or people with a cultural tradition come into contact with another society or people with different cultural tradition in belief, artifact and customs take place and this is called ‘acculturation’. In this process some existing cultural features are lost and some new features (i.e. of other cultures) are adopted as a result a type of new culture is generated. In the novel *Karma Cola*, the society of western people comes in contact with the eastern societies, its innovation and changing thoughts, as a result westerner loses some of its indigenous cultural features.

Some of the western hippies participate in India to search for Indian mysticism. The Indian justly calls his country Rishi Bhoomi, the land of sages. For every seeker there is a sage, destined to teach him true enlightenment. An English aristocrat recently discovered an astonishing truth about India. The aristocrat had heard of a guru in a remote village in the depths of the Andhra Pradesh, remarkable not only for his enlightenment, but also for his urine, which changed daily into scented rose water. After some hard traveling, the aristocrat rolled up at the correct remote village. The aristocrats were too much fed up with materialistic norms and values because it brought different kinds of wars with the rapid development of science and technology. By the impact of war they saw only depression, frustration

and no brotherhood around the world. So that they flocked to India to receive Indian mysticism. While they went to India they were ultimately acculturated to the Indian culture. One of the westerner says “once I got to India I left the Europeans, because they only talked of drugs. But some spoke of gurus. They say in India the holy men are to be found in the mountains. I put all my belongings in a bag and set off for the mountains to find a guru. I had no money, but I was fed at the temples and slept in the fields” (130).

The hippies found Benares more than just a good place to beg. It was also the best place to get stoned and freak out on eternity. In the early days, the hippies used the simple joint to induce philosophy. They spent many pleasant hours “at the burning Ghats, watching the smoke from the funeral pyres unite with the smoke from their joints, the fumes spiraling upwards to the vultures circling in the hot Indian sky. Metaphors of living and dying and India” (136). Lately these visions of death and its marketplace have not been sufficient to entertain the growing number of voyeurs. People are demanding something more to heighten their experience of experience. An English aristocrat also practices the Hindu ritual while their members of family die. They bring dead bodies for the funeral pyres, and they chant, “Ram Nam Sat Hai, Ram Nam Sat Hai” ”The Name of God is Truth” (139).

Apart from their luxurious life in their homeland they couldn't embrace the Christianity because the atmosphere of that time was so boring and they received only depression, frustration and violence with the cause of World War II. For westerners “*Karma* was atmosphere. Not the wheel” (4) where as they couldn't embrace the Christianity because of the violence in the atmosphere i.e. the Christian world. They wanted only peace and serenity of mind so they came to India by way of Afghanistan for their *Moksha* through Hindu philosophy. “What an entrance. Thousands and

thousands of western aristocrats were wearing clothes in the saffron robes, wearing bright colors and weird clothes, clashing cymbals, ringing bells, playing flutes, singing, dancing and speaking in tongues”(5). When they sat on the Indian guru’s camp they realized that only Hindu philosophy can give emancipation to illuminate their nostalgic boredom condition. They usually uttered Hindu Mantra Shiva-o-ham, Shiva-o-ham. They worshipped Hindu deity like Shiva, Vishnu, Brahma and Saraswati. They wanted to know about the Eastern mysticism for their ‘Instant Nirvana’



#### IV. Conclusion

The eastern and the western cultural life find fictional reinforcement in the small world and confining spaces inhabited by Gita Mehta's characters. She explains the cultural differences between east-west and she does it in a playful, satirical, and truthful way, and obviously with compassion for those who have become lost and whose lives have been destroyed. The east-west encounter is depicted along lines of religion, love, sex, among other things. Gita Mehta's strategies of characterization play a great role for the treatment of cultural encounter. She shows the conflict and victory of eastern thought over the western ideas. Mehta presents herself as having been among the hundreds of western aristocrats who are inclined towards the eastern Mysticism and try to lead the life according to the Hindu philosophy. Due to the fascination of spiritualists, hippies, and popular rock musicians like The Beatles towards Hindu Mysticism, large groups of Americans flock to India each year in search of religion, drugs and enlightenment. Through the novel in *Karma Cola*, Mehta seeks to debunk such notion that all Indians are experts on spiritual matters and ironizes western materialism being used to obtain traditional eastern religious beliefs.

*Karma Cola* takes a sardonic look at the western belief that instant spiritual enlightenment could be acquired by hopping a jet to India and finding the nearest guru. She has some important, well educated, and deeply meaningful observations, and succeeds in presenting them with a great deal of wit and truth, and certainly with sensitivity and care toward the humanity involved. India has always been stereotyped as a country of mystery and antiquity by the westerners because of its mystifying diversities. Even today, it is considered as a land of living spirituality. It is interesting to study how Mehta selects certain aspects of traditional and spiritual heritage of India just to serve her purpose of representing India rather objectivity. These are the

aspects, which the western critics and readers consider to be the essential image of India.. She compares India's progress and highly values these aspects as well.

Through different incidents of the book, Mehta clearly differentiates cultural ethos of the east from that of the west.

The book documents a series of episodes and scenes located in various parts of India during the 60s and 70s when thousands of seekers from the west arrived in India clashing cymbals and ringing bells, wearing bright colours and weird clothes. These visitors from the west are in a quest of "instant nirvana" and they seek out gurus from whom they hope to derive *Shakti*, a direct transmission of cosmic energy from the guru to the devotee. There are a host of gurus in India who gather numerous disciples around them in special camps set up in all sorts of places- Delhi, Goa, Benaras and beyond. These gurus take upon themselves to guide their disciples to a rediscovery of their inner environment, and outer aura, and the supreme shakti. This transaction between the Indian gurus and their western disciples, however, as Gita Mehta depicts, is banal and it thrives on mutual incomprehension.

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