

Tribhuvan University

Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta's *Raj*

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Submitted by

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Letter of Recommendation

Prakash Dutta has completed his thesis entitled “Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta’s *Raj*” under my supervision. I, hereby, recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voce.

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Date: March 2021

Letter of Approval

The thesis entitled “Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta’s *Raj*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Prakash Dutta has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

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## Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta's *Raj*

### Abstract

*Gita Mehta occupies a prestigious place in Indian Writing in English. Being a female novelist, her writings raise the issue of women's identity. Her novel 'Raj' mainly focuses about culture, tradition, and political condition of India. According to her, women are trapped in the circle of religion, culture, tradition, and all social taboos. In this novel the heroine of Mehta, Jaya Singh breaks the shell of all such taboo and emerges herself as a new individual in the society. This research paper will show how the novel 'Raj' viewed as a wide scope for feminist analysis.*

*The aim of this thesis is to explore and analyze how the protagonist, Jaya Singh along with other subordinate female characters struggle hard and create their own space in so-called male dominated society. With the help of Judith Lorber's theoretical perspective of the social construction of gender, Judith Halberstam's 'female masculinity', and Judith Butler's notion of 'gender performativity' the thesis analyzes how gender roles and ideologies are socially constructed, not something considered as natural. The finding highlights that gender is not something related with presence or lack of certain genes. It is the product of society and culture made to suit the ulterior motive of patriarchy. The main conclusion to be drawn from this work is gender is not inborn entity which is quite political issue hence; the female characters deployed in the novel are claiming their 'space' in the society.*

Keywords: Gender roles, culture, subversion, construction, space, politics, masculinity, femininity.

Gita Mehta is a well-known novelist in India. Her novel *Raj* reveals the issue of Hindu women in Pre-independent and Post-independent India in a realistic manner. In *Raj*, we can discover a royal woman who is the sufferer of patriarchal society and the victim of male chauvinism. The story of the novel covers the progression of a female protagonist under the British Raj and her hardships. This research paper focuses on the transformation of the protagonist, Jaya. She dismisses her identity as an Indian Princess and struggle hard to emerge as new politician. And this is how, she claims her 'space' in the politics of India.

The perspective of looking at something that has always been thought as natural, something embedded within body of an individual has changed. This thesis entitled as "Claiming Space for Oneself: Politics of Gender in Gita Mehta's *Raj*" questions universality of gender and attempts to analyze how gender roles and identities are not inborn physical qualities rather are product of society and culture one grows up in. But to do so, reader should firstly be aware of functioning of gender. This thesis proposes to make reader aware of that functioning in the text *Raj*, a historical fiction set in between 1890s and 1970s. Through the analysis of text, the researcher explores how gender roles are real only to the extent of being performed and is liable of being challenged and dismantled. It aims to advance understanding of readers on gender representation and thereby, making them able to see how they themselves have been institutionalized by this institution.

By gender we mean discursive institution established with certain expectations, structure, origin and history. Gender is so inscribed in our daily life that we do not notice it until something goes missing but if noticed carefully, we can see how it structures every aspect of our life. In all facets of our life, these gender ideologies play significant roles. Children learn to walk, behave, dress, move, eat etc.

differently on the basis of their gender category. Parents are expected to have different responsibilities and duties because they are male or female. Both boys and girls are treated differently and expected to play different roles because of their gender. Girls are not given guns and cars to play whereas boys are not ever seen with dolls and cooking stationeries. In short, people are taught what the appropriate way of behaving is and what to expect of themselves and others. These norms and values though seem inconsequential but plays important role in exploitation of women. Many cultures go beyond clothing and gestures in order to gender their children. “They inscribe gender directly into the bodies. In traditional Chinese society, mothers bound their daughters’ feet into three-inch stumps to enhance their sexual attractiveness” (Lorber 24).

Though the novel does not show gendering done on body, but it sure does have ample evidences on behavioral gendering. The protagonist, Jaya’s character is not the rebellious type where she overthrows all her assigned roles but she is not submissive type either. She is brave, confident, authoritative, analytical, engages in infidelity and so on. Jaya, the female character of the novel is endowed with stereotyped masculine characteristics and thus behaves differently from social expectations. The paper plans to expose all those instances in the text where characters reverse the social order and argues that gender roles are actually our performance i.e. what we do rather than what we are.

It is not the first time that this novel is being researched on. It has been analyzed in terms of colonial legacy, women’s identity, gender duality and historical validity but has left the void for the research exclusively on gender representation. The researcher intends to do that by following lead of Judith Lorber’s *Paradoxes of Gender*, Halberstam’s *Female Masculinity* and Judith Butler’s theory on performativity.

Gender plays crucial role in determining the 'space' in the society. Gender is social and cultural construction of the norms and values; the construction that defines what means to be a woman or a man. According to Lorber, gender establishes the differences between men and women, despite the evidences that “women and men are more similar than different” (5). Within gender, an individual, on the basis of his/her gender category is assigned with roles and responsibilities and is bound to perform in accordance with those roles and responsibilities. Whenever a child is born, he/she is firstly assigned with the sex category on the basis of genitals and thereafter begins the process of positioning him/her in either/or category of gender i.e. male or female. Once the gender is clear, the child is treated differently and slowly and surely started responding differently too. Boys always get gifts like sports car whereas doll’s house is all time choice for girls. These norms are inscribed in the way people move, gesture, and even eat. Men and women in the society learn to walk in a way that showcase their different position in the society. Though these differences in treatment, on surface level, does not seem to matter much but, if we analyze them, they result in subordination of one of the categories. It has confined the identity of an individual within the society. An individual has to act in certain way though he/she feels differently.

Gender is not biologically determined rather is constructed by those who is in power. Regarding the power relationship Lorber opines, “It has changed and will keep on changing in the future, but without deliberate restructuring it will not necessarily change in the direction of greater equality between women and men” (6). He further says that it is an institution where an individual is taught what is expected of him sometime by observing others while sometime getting reprimanded or encouraged of his/her activities and then has to fulfill those expectations. Like all other social



inventions - language, religion, education, etc., gender organizes human social life but at the same time gives the impression of 'ever present reality' too. Because of this impression created by gender, people are deceived with the idea that gender is natural. An individual is masculine or feminine naturally. There is presence of certain genes that makes people male and female, so there is nothing to be question about gender. However, this concept of gender being natural due to presence of certain genes in the body is changing. At present, gender is considered as an institution with expectations, structure and impact. The institution whose structure can be examined and changing effects be researched. In the same line Judith Lorber argues that "gender as an institution establishes patterns of expectations for individuals, orders the social processes of everyday life, is built into major social organizations of society, such as the economy, ideology, the family, and politics, and is also an entity in and of itself" (9). Because of its hold in powerful areas of the society, gender is managed and circulated. Because of our tendency to take gender for granted, we are not able to see how gender organizes our everyday lives. How our expectations and desires all in some way or other are the result of gender we belong to. It goes on producing and reproducing to suit with the change of time and in that way maintain its hold in the society. Only if we resist against these roles, we would be able to push the limits of established gender roles.

Judith Butler departs from common assumption of sex and gender being the same. She argues that like gender, sex is also a construction and therefore the very basis of considering an individual male or female is constructed. According to her, "Gender is 'unnatural', so there is no necessary relationship between one's body and one's gender; one may be masculine 'female' or feminine 'male'. A male can be equally feminine and vice-versa(46). She considers gender as a performance where an

individual is pre-informed about his/her character and thereby acts according to that. So, one's gender identity is not the reflection of their intrinsic essence, rather is product of his actions and behaviors. She asserts that our everyday dress code, speeches, gestures, activities etc. work together to produce what is thought to be essential quality of being male or female. She argues that being man or woman is not one's internal reality rather it is an ongoing process which gets continuously produced and reproduced.

People go along with their ascribed gender because of the morality as well as social pressure enforces them but that does not mean the urge to behave differently within an individual goes away just like that. People by having surgery, by cross dressing or some other means find their outlet in socially acceptable way. But what is noteworthy here is that people behave differently from social expectation. Judith Halberstam talks about tomboys in his book *Female Masculinity* to analyze the differences in behavior. He asserts that girls during their early stage are more masculine but this masculinity is not because of some male genes or hormones rather it comes naturally out of them just like any other behavior. Only after girl reaches her puberty stage and is in the position to threaten the order of gender, gender conformity descends upon them.

Judith Halbersatm even claims that there are several evidences of female masculinity in our society be it in movies, literature, theatres but "has been blatantly ignored both at culture in large and within academic studies of masculinity" (1). Indifference toward the existence of diverse masculinities in society does not make gender natural or its subversion non-existent. He even explains how by means of several artificial artifacts masculinity is promoted in the society. A male is not masculine because of his genetic construction rather because of ideologies working

around him. He is brave that is why he is masculine; he is rational therefore is masculine. Like these several other clichés are prevalent in society but what is so casually ignored is the point that the categorization of brave and rationality under masculine traits is construction in itself. “For Human beings there is no essential femaleness or maleness, femininity or masculinity, womanhood or manhood, but once gender is ascribed, the social order constructs and holds individuals to strongly gendered norms and expectations” (Lorber 25). Once our sex is distinguished, all the further process of gendering is done by the society. These processes are consciously planned, evaluated, and then only are circulated in society.

Gita Mehta’s *Raj*, being a historical fiction, has always been appreciated for its factual data collection and vivid description of incidents. But along with that, several critics have looked for several other issues in the novel. For example M.B. Gaijan looks for women’s struggle for identity and existence in the novel. She argues that “*Raj* is a historical fiction but under the wheel of historical events it represents woman’s struggle – Jaya’s constant struggle to deal with dignity” (190). Throughout her essay, she has given hefty examples of Jaya’s struggle followed by her own explanation. Gaijan’s way of narrative is quite impressive. Those who have read the novel and those who have not, both can understand her point at first reading.

Few critics like Amina Amin, K.C. Baral, Dhira Bhowmick etc. have analyzed the text by blending post-colonial analysis with gender, history, fiction and politics which obviously calls for the need to look at the text from different perspective i.e. gender studies. Amina Amin in her essay, goes for both imperialism and gender-politics issues side by side. On one hand, she discusses about huge grip British power has on the lives of the Maharajas by giving statements like: “It is not as if the empire is exploiting the kingdom at the political, economic and military level only. That is

consciously and nonchalantly being done. What is not so obvious is how the tentacles of British power seep into the private lives of the individuals” (156). While on other hand she discusses about cultures and traditions which confined women in the novel; how female characters in the novel have imbibed those biased norms and consider themselves as doing some sin if they break away from their tradition, how Maharani is hell bent on upbringing Jaya according to traditional style that is teaching “solah shringaar” (158). She claims that “Jaya can only ‘take’ what is ‘given’” (158). In this and many other ways, it can be seen that she has combined both gender and imperialism in her essay which consequently have not allowed either of the topic to have sufficient space. Similarly, K.C. Baral and Dhira Bhowmick in “In History, Fiction and Colonialism: A study of Gita Mehta’s *Raj*” talks about painful situation Indian rulers has to go through during British colonization. They even claim;

The British sense of justice was meant only to strengthen the cause of the empire in utter disregard to Indian ethos and feelings. Any signs of resistance to the paramount power was ruthlessly suppressed with excuses in the name of justice and fear play and Indian rulers were left to intrigue flattery and imitation to hold on to their thrones thereby continuing to weaken the institution of monarchy in the country. (51)

Along with talking about these aspects, they even discuss how novelist writing about colonial pasts “privileges Indian point of view in response to historical events and happenings” (48). In this way K.C. Baral and Dhira Bhowmick talk collectively about history, fiction and colonization and consequently miss out to elaborate on any particular subject in detail.

Likewise Y. Jaya Sudha has examined gender duality evident in the novel in her essay “Gender Duality in Gita Mehta’s *Raj*.” She asserts that “Every human being

is a blend of both masculine and feminine traits” (110) and brings forward all those instances where Jaya professes both the characteristics. However, her claim lacks that credibility since she has focused only on her protagonist. We cannot generalize conclusion based on single incident and that is what she has done.

Despite all of those researches, none of them specifically focus on gender studies. Some of them have looked for colonial legacies, others have looked into historical aspects, and yet others have looked into women’s identity; which has left the space for research from the perspective of gender studies.

The novel *Raj* mostly concentrates on periods after and before India’s struggle for independence but along with that it even concentrates its significant part on women’s life style and their transformation of identity in royal family. Set in between the time period of 1890s and 1970s, the novel strikes upon the fact that even in those times subversion of gender roles was quite evident. Mehta brings out masculine traits of her female characters and feminine of males. This research paper proposes to uncover and analyze all those instances and deconstruct how gender is structured consciously, therefore has nothing to do with one’s biological configuration. It is more like a performance where we are informed of our (gender) roles and have to act accordingly.

Our society is quite rigid when it comes to gender roles. It strongly believes that both of the genders have their respective responsibilities and they should definitely perform according to that. One who does not conform is forced in one way or other, as we are hegemonized by the idea that if someone does not possess their respective traits, there is something wrong with him/her. But the problem with these stereotypical gender roles is that they are much biased. It justifies the inequalities done to women. As said by Louis Tyson in *Critical Theory Today* “Traditional gender

roles cast men as rational, strong, protective, decisive: they cast women as emotional, weak, nurturing and submissive” (85). Whatever we consider as superior traits has been easily assigned to men whereas the inferior one goes to women. Such assumptions regarding gender roles does not apply to Jaya in the novel *Raj* though she has been forced to be submissive in her childhood days. Mehta has clearly described the psychological uphold these gender roles have upon people and how we anyhow try to belong to it if we behave otherwise. When Maharani feels that Jaya is getting overly educated, overly skilled, overly curious which is out of character for traditional female, she in order to make her belong to her social category starts to send her to rangoli and music classes (44) and considers this act of hers as “repairing the damage done by Raj Guru and Maharajah” (94). What is to be noted here is that Jaya does not intrinsically possess these so called “feminine traits” rather is trained to possess it. She is trained what it means to be a women and expected to perform according to that. In short, instead of born as women, she is made as one.

However, Jaya does not come out as such a feminine character rather shapes herself as inquisitive, courageous, rational, manipulative kind who finds excitement in hunting, rifle shooting, and playing games. She does not rebel strongly but is not seen submitting easily too. Whenever circumstances have threatened her dignity beyond limit, she is seen fighting for herself. When prince Pratap orders her to have dance with Englishmen, she does a deal with him and agrees to play polo instead of dancing (*Raj* 222). Similarly, when future of her child was in threat because of flamboyant nature of her husband, she proposes to be named as “Regent Maharani of Sirpur, in the event of anything happening to Prince Pratap, until Arjun is of an age to take the throne” (*Raj* 333) in exchange of saving him from the probable scandal that would abdicate prince from Sirpur. All these instances show the strength of her personality, a

strongly believed masculine trait. In the same way her inquisitive nature, again a masculine quality, is known with her first confrontation with British life style. She cannot stop herself from asking questions:

Jaya pointed at the bath tub “Is this for washing clothes?”

The Maharani laughed “Not for washing clothes”

The Maharani steered out of the bathroom. “The container is filled and then Angrez wash themselves.”

“They cannot wash their feet and their faces in the same water. Where do they wash their feet? In those other things? Those white chairs without handles?”

“That is enough Jaya” the Maharani said, sweeping her out of the house.’

*(Raj 56)*

These lines show Jaya’s eagerness to know about things she is unfamiliar with. She wants to know how Englishmen could wash their feet and body in same water. Is not it impure? Traditionally, curiosity is considered as a virtue only male possesses but here Jaya has obtained it and thereby subverts the roles she has been assigned to. Women and men are allocated to gender roles and they must act out the masculine and feminine traits as arranged by our society and our culture but Jaya time and again goes against such expectation of society.

Women’s virtue and purity is a big deal in the patriarchal society where male can indulge in as many affairs as he wants but when it comes to women it is associated with words like honor and reputation. Mehta challenges these biased norms and values in the novel by portraying Jaya, a female indulging in infidelity. Though being married, Jaya gets sexually involved with Arun Roy and has fleeting feelings for James Osborne too. She is afraid of being caught but does not stop herself from having voyeuristic pleasure in regard to James Osborne.

Conscious of James Osborne seated at her side, Jaya was unable to concentrate on the conversation about the royal visit. Without looking at him she could feel changes in the Angrez boy, the way his slim body has filled out into man's frame, yet kept, some point of vulnerability under the military carriage. Deep lines scared the skin on either side of the mouth, and Jaya remembered he had been in battle, on one front or the other for last eight years. (*Raj* 214)

The expression 'without looking at him' conveys the unwritten rules of gender where a woman, more particularly married one, is not allowed to check out males unabashedly. But Jaya's awareness on subtle changes in James Osborne features points out that she has already rejected such rules. Her rejection of these gender roles becomes more prominent in case of Arun Roy. In the former scenario, she is just an observer but in the latter, she is an active participant. She gives in to her desires for Roy.

Hands loosened the folds of her silk sari. The breeze was cool against her bare limbs as his mouth moved down her body as gently as gently as the leaves falling with the gust of wind. She felt herself expanding to contain not just Arun Roy's desire, but the jungle itself, seething with its predators and prey. The souging of the high elephant grass enveloped the manchan, as soft as the rustle of Roy's falling clothes, then she was in his arms, her thick hair like a garment between his hands and her naked body. (*Raj* 416)

From the above excerpt it is clear that Jaya unlike traditional married women who place their husband's need as top priority, goes for her own needs and desire. Her desires and needs are not only physical. She even attends to her urge to learn polo, hunting, clay shooting (qualities of male) and many others. The passion and perseverance Jaya feels while hunting indicates towards other masculine touch in her



character: “The sharp crackle of breaking sticks sounded behind her. Jaya swung around. The tiger has moved downwind to the elephant. Only a hundred feet away, it was crouched on its powerful hind legs to spring. Without conscious instruction from her brain, Jaya squeezed the trigger and shut her eyes for a split second” (*Raj* 85).

These examples suggest the idea that gender is a construction which has nothing to do with presence or lack of certain gene in an individual. There is nothing biological in it. It all depends on society and culture an individual grows up into. If taught otherwise, a female can be equally masculine and a male can be equally feminine. Jaya in the text has been taught to be brave “explaining that a Rajput princess had to learn endurance” (*Raj* 47) and, therefore, does not cry easily like normally females do.

Besides Jaya, Kuki- Bai, Mrs Roy, Lady Modi too reverse their roles. Kuki- Bai is a brave and courageous women. She proudly claims that “Lion of Balmer loved me because I was the only human being apart from himself who does not know the meaning of fear’ (*Raj* 46). Her adventurous nature is known when she does one act in her youthful days for the royal children. “The elephant wound its trunk around Kuki- Bai’s waist and lifted her small figure into the air, holding her suspended until her vermillion painted soles found balance on the ivory tusk” (*Raj* 55). Despite being a mere mistress of king of Balmer, Kuki- Bai has achieved significant status in royal family. The position where she is asked of her opinion regarding Jaya’s marriage. This reflect the strength of her personality. Apart from these masculine traits that is being brave, courageous, and formidable, Kuki- Bai is quite reasonable. She is aware of the fact that King of Balmer has antagonistic relation with British Empire and that is why Jaya needs to marry in a family who are good in terms with the Empire. This will provide security to the princess which no other states can guarantee. She states ;

First she will live in a world where the Angrez have undisputed power so she should marry into a kingdom friendly to the British Raj, like the kingdom Gwalior. Second, she has been taught all this business with guns and tent-pegging, so she must definitely marry a good sportsman, like Maharajah Ranaji or the Maharajah of Cooch Bihar. Third she is highly educated, so her husband must be an erudite man like the present rulers of Mysore and Baroda. (*Raj* 102)

Kuki- Bai's understanding of the actual situation and her suggestions in accordance with that situation is distinguishable. Reality is different from one's imagination and one should always work on the basis of reality rather than fantasy. Kuki- Bai is aware of this and that is why suggests Jaya's relationship with Pratap is not appropriate though Jaya protests against it. She very well knows only such kind of family will protect Jaya in future. This rationality of Kuki-Bai is conventionally a masculine trait.

In the same way, Mrs.Roy and Lady Modi are appointed to educate Jaya on English and Britisher's life style respectively. Both these characters are females but are highly educated. They have their own perception regarding British people but logical one. On one hand Mrs. Roy informs Jaya of British Raj hollowness: "Indians are dying like flies, but the indifferent British Raj has spent a million pounds of India's money on tents, and another half- million pounds on an Imperial crown" (*Raj* 81). On other hand Lady Mody informs Jaya to be less passionate. She exclaims, "This is the era of negotiations, not heroism" (*Raj* 260). So, Jaya needs be practical and keep her anger in check.

Though Lady Modi is the one who is highly influenced by British sense of good and bad but it is also to be noted that she has made her own place in the age where breaking out of purdah was also a big deal. She is equipped in a way that she is

appointed by royal families to teach. When Prince Pratap is dissatisfied with Jaya's lack of knowledge on languages like Italian, Spanish, and French, and conduct of western society, he decides to appoint "a highly respectable Indian Lady from Bombay who is just the person to teach you the intricacies of western society" and that is Lady Modi (*Raj* 192). She is equipped with foreign languages and foreign way of living. She is highly sophisticated. She teaches Jaya how to make Martini, one of the alcoholic drinks and have it herself too. "Without stopping for breathe she finished her Martini" (*Raj* 194) and orders for next glass. These traits (having drinks, skilled in foreign languages, being sophisticated) are certainly not what traditionally women are supposed to possess. Her knowledge on external affairs is also remarkable. She informs Jaya about other princes' time and again and in a way keeps her up to date: "Bikaner represented India at the signing of the Versailles Treaty at the end of the war, and then at the opening of League of Nations. As for Alwar- both British and Gandhi have called him the most intelligent ruler in India..." (*Raj* 245). Though unintentionally, but Lady Modi's abundant knowledge on what goes around has helped Jaya a lot. She even reminds Jaya that there is nothing wrong with her and her personality. It is just that she represents everything Pratap has been taught to hate and therefore reflects her own practical nature.

Similarly, Mrs. Roy has turned over traditional roles more in terms of her strong personality. More than appearance which is traditional, her intellectuality is catching. She time and again informs Jaya of the injustices done by British Empire and how because of such tendency empire is going to get destroyed. Her thoughtfulness is reflected when she doubts the reasoning of Indian Leaders. She questions:

Our leaders counsel for moderation. But how long can you gag the anger of young when they see signs all over their own country saying ‘Dogs and Indians are not allowed’? In three months, a British Judge assassinated in Calcutta, British Mill owners bombed in Bombay and now a British cabinet shot dead in London, the very heart of Empire. The British Raj is reaping the harvest of its own injustice. (*Raj* 66)

Being moderate or considerate does not work in every kind of situation especially when people are humiliated repeatedly. Mrs. Roy is known with this fact and that is why questions the thinking of leaders. Besides this, she reminds Jaya to be aware of reality. In order to please her husband, Jaya has been changing herself but changing her dressing style or other behaviors does not make her British. In her attempts to be someone she will end up being no one and that she should never forget. She encourages Jaya through statements like “I warned you Baisa. It takes courage to fight for your rights. Read the words of great poet Tagore: ‘Where the mind is without fear and head is held high, to that dream of freedom let my people awake’” (*Raj* 232).

Mrs. Roy attempt to keep Jaya always in touch with actual scenario of her India is remarkable whereas Lady Modi takes Jaya to Anglo- Indian theatre, Mrs. Roy takes her to Indian theatre, schools on the outskirts of city, ventilated restaurant that serves Indian cuisine and all that. She is always part of important discussions and among important people like Tagore, Sarojini Naidu, many other lawyers, painters and writers. This intellectuality, being able to quote writers and being able to teach others is not conventional for women. Along with these major subversions in gender roles, the novel fleetingly talks about younger girl who plays polo with her own women’s team in “public maidan” (*Raj* 236), about the Maharani who anonymously posted her letter in newspaper discussing about her subjugation and demanding her rights.

Gender theorist Judith Lorber in her book *Paradoxes of Gender* argues, “Like any other social institution gender exhibits both universal features and chronological and cross- cultural variations that affects individuals. As is true of other institutions, gender’s history can be traced, its structure examined and its changing effects researched” (1). Gender does have some features that can be seen in all kinds but at the same time it even varies culturally. Different cultures at some point differs in their notion on what it means to be a man or a woman. The notions themselves keep on evolving to accommodate with the changing circumstances. In the text Jaya has to go through the transformation of her personality because Balmer’s notion of being a female differed from that of Britishers and Pratap wants Jaya to be like a typical white woman. She is forced to unlearn what she has been taught means being a woman in Balmer: long hair, painted hands, having flowers in your hair, wearing sari, domestic knowledge (*Raj* 191) and thereafter is taught how to be like a woman of British Empire: “short hair, plucked eyebrows, wearing gloves, carrying handbags” (*Raj* 195) and all that. If gender as perceived by the society is an inherent human attribute, then its definition would have been the same regardless of time and location. If that was the case, changing and subverting gender roles would not have been possible. But its definition varies culturally and therefore makes its change and she claims her space.

Jaya’s mother who in the beginning of the novel is so into her established roles that being out of it seems great dishonor to her. She exclaims that “My predecessors would have killed themselves rather than endure such dishonor” (*Raj* 33) but she is also among the ones who subvert their gender roles fiercely. The total change in her personality is evidence of the claim that gender is actually a construction where changes and subversion can definitely occur. Maharani overthrows her assigned roles first by “moving out of Balmer Fort” (*Raj* 234) and thus breaks traditional purdah

system. She takes lead of her life and decides effectively what has to be done with it; the essential quality of a male. “She sold her jewelry, and from the proceeds she has made a school, a dispensary and an ashram for the needy” (*Raj* 235). All her actions in no way places her in the category of ‘female’; meek, submissive, passive etc. She discards her traditional world, traditional personality and adapts to the new one which normally is thought to be of males. The most significant change in her personality is the one where she takes the decision to take part in the revolution to break Salt Laws. The Maharani in the beginning of the novel who was ashamed to break simple tradition of purdah has gone to the extent of taking part in a revolt. Revolt which surely involves blood, violence, determination, courage, and perseverance is definitely not the characteristics of women. But Maharani takes part in it and proves presence of these attributes in herself. She is even ready to get imprisoned if it means to achieve her goal. She states clearly” I am free to follow the path of truth, even if leads to jail” (*Raj* 374). This overturn of her personality would not have been possible if being a women was her intrinsic essence.

Presence of third gender in Gita Mehta’s *Raj* also subverts gender stereotypes. The novel moves around the time period of 1890s and 1970s, the period when it was a firm belief that a person is either male or female. The idea that someone might belong in-between these categories was almost out of question. Even today many of the societies are with only two gendered statuses that is male and female, though are totally familiar with the fact that there is existence of other genders who does not fit in either of these binary categories. It is probably because instead of challenging these biased gender status, they prefer submitting to it. Transsexuals, as claimed by Lorber, “end up surgically altering their genitals to fit their gender identity” (84) and adopt all the landmarks set to be male or female whereas transvestites “change gender by cross

dressing, masquerading as gender of different sort for erotic, pragmatic, or rebellious reasons” (Lorber 86) but while cross dressing they too follow the society’s standard notion of male and female. Mehta during that context brings characters like eunuchs, a man whose genitalia is removed. The hijra caste of Indian transsexuals, practice this complete castration, who does not belong to this both category and thus, questions universality of gender and gender roles. In the novel *Raj*, she has discussed how these eunuchs have traits of both gender and therefore cannot be stamped with one through descriptions like: “The eunuchs crowded around them, clapping to the accelerating beat” (109), “coquettishly covering their faces” (107) and “The eunuchs giggled behind their hands, their over refined sensibilities” (36).

By physical appearance they are certainly males and even get addressed with masculine pronoun ‘he’ but their gestures and movements are that of a female. Giggling, clapping, dancing are mostly feminine traits and eunuchs do have these feminine traits. Even in the novel *Raj*, Mehta has presented detailed description of their singing trait. One eunuchs began singing in a high pitched voice:

Oh, there is a lovely woman  
 Who lives in a magic garden  
 Filled with honey and fruit  
 But the gates to her magic garden  
 Lies, alas, between her thighs. (107)

These lines with sexual connotations has been sung by eunuchs followed by other one. Here, what is important is not what they are expressing through these lines but their involvement in such activities. Apart from this, in the novel too eunuchs are addressed with the pronoun ‘he’ and it is evident when narrator describes a scene where she states “The Chief eunuchs grunted with effort as ‘he’ struck a particularly

hard opium pellets with 'his' pestle" (104). But they are part of "Malwar ceremony" (104) where men are absent. Presence of eunuch in ceremonies where males are not allowed but being addressed with masculine pronoun itself questions their gender status. Thus, by introducing identities like eunuchs, Mehta has reversed established social order.

Gender identities are changing. Today's fathers are taking care of children whereas mothers are up for the responsibility of family. Both boys and girls are having same education. There are changes in our choices and perceptions too. Hundred years ago, "the color pink was considered a 'decided and strong' color suitable for boys, symbolizing 'zeal and courage' while blue was considered more 'delicate and dainty' signaling faith and constancy and thereby suitable for girls" (Ah-King 2) whereas at present pink is definitely colour of girls and blue of boys. It is because our actions and behaviors are changing with time and therefore bringing changes in gender roles and ideologies too. Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity* argues that our gendered identity is the product of our actions and behaviors rather than our intrinsic essence. What we do, how we dress, how we talk, what we are encouraged and prohibited of determines whether we are masculine or feminine. Our daily acts which she calls as 'performance' determines our gender category. She further writes:

It is an effect of a 'decidedly public and social discourse' which requires the relentless reiteration of various gender act and styles which makes gender seem real/eternal/ a deep truth of our lives, by repetition. Gender, 'is a fabrication' a 'truth effect'. Here, identity is a fantasy that is imagined and experienced as a set in immutable concrete - which support power. (119)



Butler asserts on artificiality of gender and writes that all Identities are produced ones. There is nothing natural about them. Through the repetition of act and styles, gender seems as an eternal truth but actually is a fabrication of those in power.

As opinion by Butler, the repetition of gender acts is clearly visible in the novel *Raj*. In the initial phase of the novel, the readers come across life styles of both Maharajah and Maharani. Maharani is more into visiting temples, taking care of domestic affairs and Balmer fort stores, problems with the women of 'Zenna', whereas Maharajah's role is related with administration, politics, external affairs, adventurous hobbies. Though Jaya's character is not that of traditional female, she has definitely been intended by Maharani to be so. She has to do what her mother has been doing. She has to know 'the epic battle of God Rama and Ravan' (63), attend music lessons, be informed about crops and price hike, be taught about 'solah shringaar; sixteen arts of being a woman' (94), be explained which gemstones are auspicious for which occasion and so on. By doing all those activities done by her mother, she is made to believe that to be a woman she needs to have these qualities because her mother, and a generation before her mother that is kuki-Bai too possess it. Therefore, it is something natural.

Similarly, Tikka is stylized to act the way his father does. He is never sent to rangoli and music classes because his father has never been sent. Instead of that, from his early age onwards he has been sent to learn administration and politics.

Tikka accompanied his father to the new secretariat at the on east bank of Jalsa Lake, where he studied administration. Once a month, Tikka and the Maharajah left on a tour of the country side to attend the court of appeal, where under the shade of silk-cotton trees, the Maharajah held monthly

durbars to rule on these cases which had not been settled in the village or district courts. (43)

Whatever Maharajah has been doing, Tikka too is trained to do that and in coming future his child too will follow the same path. Same is the case with Maharajah Victor, Prince Pratap and Prince Arjun. Maharajah Victor is crowned king of Sirpur after the death of his father, Prince Pratap becomes after him and Arjun takes throne of Sirpur after death of his father, Maharajah Pratap. This act has been performed casually generation after generation. Because of that it is taken as natural if a son or brother takes after his father. But what is so conveniently ignored here is that Jaya or Downwager Maharani who are still alive after death of their husband are never thought to be made authority of Sirpur. Arjun, a four year child is made King of Sirpur but not Jaya because of the convention established by gender where a son of each generation continues the legacy of his father. This is how through the repetition of act gender establishes its biased hold in the society and lives of the people. It is a fabrication where both genders are ingrained with the concept of what it means to be male or female and performs according to that. That means if Tikka and Jaya's activities are reversed; Jaya learns whatever Tikka has been taught of and vice-versa, Tikka can be equally feminine and Jaya the masculine one. If their teaching patterns is inversed, different personality is produced.

On above discussed logic, in *Raj*, Mehta introduces Jaya with the world of politics, literature, games, adventure, challenges the stereotypical gender roles. Though Jaya is forced to learn feminine qualities that does not mean she is naturally feminine. Jaya's disinterestedness towards these feminine activities is reflected through the descriptions like: "Jaya looked longingly at the kites floating over the stables as the nearly blind Ustad shouted at her inattention" (44), "Jaya clapped her

hands furiously to frightening the monkeys” (44), “Jaya squirmed and wondered why there were so many satis and so many vows” etc. (43). She is more interested in hunting, shooting, playing games and all that. She does have knowledge on “four arms of kingship”; a masculine quality (89). She is an active figure who believes in growing herself, doing things rather than watching, thus, overthrows traditional gender roles.

Gender is ubiquitous in human society with the belief that it is genetic or physiological. A person is masculine or feminine by birth itself. Because of these assumptions people are stifled with several rules governing their gender identity. They have to behave differently from how they actually feel. Judith Halberstam dismantles this notion of inborn reality through the concept of tomboys. He argues that “tomboyish is quite common in girls and does not give rise to ‘parental fears” (5). It is even encouraged more in girls in comparison to boys until not crossed the line of stable identity. He claims that “Tomboyish is tolerated as long as child remains prepubescent; as soon as puberty begins, however, full force of gender conformity descends on girls” (6). Girls during their initial phase possess more masculine traits. That means being submissive, meek, docile is not their intrinsic quality. It is just after they reach puberty state they are imposed with the traits stereotypical of males and females. It even means that subversion of roles takes place in early stage of child itself and, therefore, has equal chance of being subverted in other stages of life as well.

Such kind of gender subversion is prevalent in the novel too. Jaya in her early stage is a masculine figure. With the encouragement she has received from her father, prime minister Vir singh and Mrs. Roy, she is a strong character, equipped in hunting, literature, medical qualities, clay pigeon shooting and politics. She goes for horse riding and is quite head strong in nature. While having the game of polo with Tikka,

she is more concerned with losing the coin than getting hurt. Her first whisper after gaining consciousness is “I never dropped the coin Tikka” (47) which in no way comes under stereotypical female quality. Females are supposed to cry with the blink of an eye and males are not supposed to show their emotions. Here Jaya behaves the way a male is expected to and therefore, subverts the conventional gender status. It is after Jaya reaches her puberty stage, Maharani has started getting more conscious of her unconventional personality. She often complains that “Who will marry such an overeducated girl? Her in-laws will resent her. Her husband will be insulted when she flaunts her learning in front him. She is twelve years old. At that age I was already engaged to be married. At the very time, she should become a woman, her father is trying to make her into son” (94) and that is why feels the need to take the responsibility of training Jaya. She attempts to make her a girl unlike Maharajah who was more for a boy. Puberty stage is the stage when a child starts becoming significant part of the society. His/her activities can no longer be ignored for being childish. Because of that, during this stage gender ideology are smeared upon. But that does not mean forcing the child through gender conformity makes them really masculine or feminine. Jaya continues her rifle practice, engages in adultery too, and becomes the authority of her state Sirpur and last but not the least stands for the election as a viable candidate. All these contradictions in Jaya’s character results to reverse of the conventional role of women.

In the book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam even claims that masculinity “is primarily prosthetic and in this (James Bond) and other countless other action films, has little if anything to do with biological maleness and signifies more often as a technical effect” (3). That means that a male is masculine not intrinsically but because of the ideologies revolving around him. Masculinity which is

often attached with male body is a construction where through several materialistic and idealistic impressions he is turned into a man. In the movie because of the gadgets like retractable belt, a bomb disguised as a pen, half smile, and cigarette and so on, Bond is presented as a masculine figure. If we detach these gadgets with Bond there is nothing extraordinary about his personality. Same is the case with Prince Pratap in the novel. His constructed masculinity becomes clearer when we look at how his whole personality is valorized just because the title 'Prince' is attached to him. His first physical appearance in the text is described as such:

A tall figure in tight fitting Jodhpur and a polo shirt standing in the doorway issuing instructions to a servant. Pale brown skin stretched smoothly over high, almost Mongol cheekbones. The long eyes were half-closed to the smoke rising from cigarette. Highly polished riding boots reflected the tin of cigarette held in one hand. An Alsatian growled behind his legs. The cigarette tin came down sharply in front of the dog's head, and the Alsatian sunk to the floor. (188-89)

His bored smile, dressing style, polished boots, and an Alsatian behind him depicts him as masculine and more so because he has a title of prince. Jaya marries his 'sword' because it represents him and his masculine power. All these add up in his character is acquired one. None of them are biological and consequently make Pratap's masculinity as acquired one which gets subverted in the text.

Traditionally, a male is supposed to be rational, responsible, always in control of his emotions, provider of his family, protective and all that. But when we look for these characteristics in Prince Pratap he possesses almost none of them. He is brave and courageous but along with that he is irrational, and because of him his child's future comes under threat. This in turn, also mars his image of being provider and

caretaker for his family. He also becomes uncontrolled when faced with challenges. All these traits are considered of females and since, Pratap possesses it, he has also tarnishes his typical gender roles. He is not able to fulfill desire of his wife too. There comes a moment when Jaya feels disgusted of his touch. The narrator in the novel describes Jaya's emotion: "she pushed him away, fighting back the waves of disgust that threatened to overcome her self-control" (333). Similarly, when comes the time to face the problem of Esme Moore, Pratap instead of taking lead and solving his problems, get drunk and whines regarding the problem "he moved unsteadily toward his wife. What am I going to do? Bikaner and Patiala won't let me attend any meetings until this matter is resolved. Wish the bloody whore would drop dead." (333), which again is certainly not a quality of traditional male. A true king and a husband gets troubled when has to hand over his state to someone he thinks as incapable but Pratap "Laughing, threw the envelope (Viceregal seal) on the bed and left the room" (338). For him, it does not matter who becomes Regent of Sirpur after his death. All that is important for him are the papers protecting him from scandal of Esme Moore. It highlights his imprudent nature toward his estate. That is why Pratap's masculinity is also a construction.

Maharajah Victor goes in same line with Prince Pratap. Instead of being responsible toward his state and people, he is more interested toward Cora Hart, an American actress. He is totally inconsiderate toward plight of his people in particular and his nation as a whole. A stereotypical version of king, a masculine figure is not like Maharajah Victor "who has already bought Cora Hart everything from most expensive jewellery and fur coats to a racehorse. Now is thinking of buying her villa in France" (*Raj* 274). Both brothers keep on whining on their problems instead of solving them and being rational. They act different from the expectation of society

that is to be rational and unemotional and thus make reader conscious of the point that these expectations which we assume to be natural themselves are construct of the society.

Gender is so pervasive in the society that we take it for granted. Something we believe is in our gene and, so is not to be questioned. It is hard for people to believe that gender gets constantly created and recreated. It starts with assignment of sex to a baby based on his/her genitalia and after that begins positioning of that sex in either/or category of gender. Once a child's gender is evident, everyone treats them differently. One gender is certainly treated different from other and the children respond to different treatment by feeling different and behaving different. So, "Gender, like culture is a human production that depends on everyone constantly doing gender" (Lorber 13). We do gender, sometime intentionally and sometime unintentionally, by categorizing people within the category of male and female. Parenting is gendered where expectations are different from father and mother. Whenever we see an individual, we look for clues in him/her that determines which is his gender. A baby with sports T-shirt is definitely a boy where as a baby with pink skirt is a girl. On the basis of that information, we treat them differently. All these process constitute social construction of gender.

The text *Raj* does not fail to garner our attention on its subversive part. The research paper manifests gender construction and its subversion in the novel in detail. And thereby concludes that the heroine of this novel along with other female subordinate characters have created their own 'space' in the society. Though Mehta has not overturned these gender roles in a rebelling way, she sure does have shown how it is inverted. The confident, courageous, analytical Jaya in many ways goes against expectation of society and reverses her roles. The remarkable part of text is that it is

not only protagonist who overthrows her roles, but its subordinate characters are also like that. They have their own thought process and does act on it. Through the presentation of characters like Jaya, Maharani, Lady Modi, Mrs. Roy, Chandani and others, Mehta subverts the traditional notion of gender representation.

The textual analysis of the text *Raj* leads us to conclude that gender is after all a construction. It is more of what we do rather than what we are. Its gets produced and reproduced within the society and because of this continuous process starts being considered as an eternal reality. The genetic qualities within an individual has nothing to do with one being masculine or being feminine. Gender is actually the product of culture and environment an individual gets acquainted with. So, if our culture raises a girl the way it raises their boys or vice-versa, girls can be equally masculine and boys can be feminine. How Jaya challenges the roles she has been traditionally assigned with forms the main focus of analysis. But along with that the novel even explores the gender subversion done by other subordinate characters.

The development and survival of Jaya's identity within the socio-political environment in which she stands finds herself is a major concern of the novel. Mehta does not allow her heroine to be pushed into a totally subservient role in her married status. She quietly fights the network of power structure' keeping herself within the boundaries of morality and prudence that her society has defined for herself and within the orbit of her own restricting domestic sphere. Similarly, she plunges into welfare work, building roads and dams, schools and dispensaries because she wants to prove to the Reformists that rulers still have the welfare of their subjects and also to withstand the efforts of the Reformists to sway her subjects against her.



Again, it is she who, after much deliberation and advice from her several mentors, decides to have Sirpur merge with free India much against protests and anger from the conservative quarters of her Kingdom. But the climax of Jaya's emancipation comes when she decides to stand as an independent candidate from Sirpur for elections in independent India, against Arun Roy who has been Jaya's mentor since her Balmer days. Mehta not only gives an ironical twist to the Jaya-Arun Roy relationships but emphasizes Jaya's political maturity also. Arun Roy has all along pretended friendship to Jaya, has even succeeded in seducing Jaya in Sirpur itself where there is a strong Reformist rising which Jaya and Sir Akbar are hoping Roy will be able to defuse. But instead the day after he has gone tiger-hunting with Jaya, he is heard making fiery speeches against the princes of India. Jaya acts swiftly and challenges Arun Roy on his ground.

Mehta portrays the movement from colonization to the Indian Independence simultaneously as she portrays the struggle which Jaya undertakes to free herself from the yoke of gender and imperial power politics of which she is a victim. Jaya's acquiring her gendered and national identity as a 'democrat' coincides with India's acquiring its identity as a 'democracy'.

By the time the novel ends, Jaya gradually develops and emerges as a matured woman who identifies her 'space' in the society. As Simone de Beauvoir in her work *The Second Sex* quotes: "A woman who is not afraid of men, frightens them. (Beauvoir 698). As the novel proceeds further, Jaya goes under the self-analysis and self-realization. She transforms herself as a strong woman in the midst of all troubles being still there in her life. After India attained Independence, she leads a meaningful life by serving her people not as Maharani but as one of them. True to her name Jaya

which means victory, she succeeds in general election. She is projected as a free, self-confident, self-reliant woman of free India.

Eventually, we see that Gita Mehta's *Raj* deals with social hypocrisies and the identity of Jaya is interwoven with anguish and conflict in order to depict today's world. Jaya is evolved as a strong freedom fighter who empowers herself to win over her husband and creates her space in her personal as well as political life.

By doing major and minor character role analysis with the help of ideas by gender theorists like Judith Lorber, Judith Butler and Judith Halberstam, the thesis is deduced to the point that the novel has actually subverted the overall traditional gender roles and all the female characters have claimed their space in their personal as well as political life. If we observe in our everyday life, there are several examples of female masculinity.

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