

## I. Indian Sensibility in Gita Mehta's Novels

Gita Mehta is a well known writer, a journalist, and documentary film maker. In this regard, Mehta is a versatile personality. In writing, Mehta specially tries to promote the Indian culture, art and her own individual experiences to the world. She has the style of writing which is not only distinct but also simple and attractive. Once in an interview she regarded herself to "a camera and the reader can see through her eyes"(53). Besides writing she has directed several documentaries on India including Indo-Pakistan war, Bangladesh war etc. She has directed the documentaries for BBC and NBC as well.

Gita Mehta has written many books including *Karm Cola:Marketing the Mystic East*, *Raj: A Novel*, *Snakes and Ladder: A Glimpses of Modern India*, *A River Sutra*. Significantly her books talk about the people, history, and personalities of modern India. The prevailing problems of social issues such as discrimination in the name of caste, religion, gender, marriage, and other political issues are addressed in her books and writing respectively. Gita Mehta is the daughter of a famous Indian freedom fighter, Biju Patnaik. Since, from her birth Mehta was surrounded by the activities of her parent's active involvement for the liberation of India, there are many traces of the scenes and events of struggle of freedom fighting in her writing. As a writer Mehta shares a focus on India, the country of her birth, its politics, cultures, and social status etc. The prevalent traditions of Indian aesthetic, Philosophical thought, political as well as social condition are addressed in her works such as *Raj: A Novel*, *A River Sutra*.

Initially Mehta was not a writer. There is an interesting story behind her writing career. In 1979 Gita Mehta was attending a cocktail party of Publishing Industry. Someone asked Mehta about 'Karma'. In response to that Mehta replied

"karma is not what cracked up to be"(54). The person in the party who asked in satirical tone inspires Mehta to write her experience about 'Karma'. After three weeks of that incident Gita Mehta came up with a book named *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East*, which introduces Mehta as a writer. By the time Gita Mehta has given several books which help her to be internationally known in the field of literary writing. N.Kalaamani about Mehta presents her views:

She has been acclaimed as an international cross-cultural critic. Her three works *Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979), *Raj: A Novel* (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. (125)

*Karma Cola: Marketing the Mystic East* (1979) is a series of essays which presents the impression of India in a beautiful way. Style of writing in *Karma Cola* is very much associated with almost all of her writing. The style of writing is followed in her other works too. Picture of India's mysticism is presented to hit upon the biased western image which generally defines India or East as a land of Mysticism and Spiritualism. *Karma Cola* informs the cultural collisions of east and west. There is the blending of satirical tone with humor and wit. N. Kalaamani says, "*Karma Cola* is a witty and sophisticated analysis of contacts between western in search of Eastern enlightenment and Indians becoming westernized" (291). Irony and satire is widely found in her works even then there is a human concern at its core. In *Karma Cola* Gita Mehta's version of east-west encounter is special because it is based on the excesses indulged in by its present incumbents.

*Raj: A Novel* (1989) is the first novel by Mehta which is a colorful historical story follows the progression of a young woman born into Indian nobility, the British

Raj. It throws light on the political leaders and Raj gures. *Raj* covers a turbulent period of both Imperial British India and Royal India. It dramatizes the important events such as the famine of 1898, British interference, emergence of Gandhi etc. Through *Raj*, Mehta weaves the story of Jaya, the princess. Though it is interwoven with the political events, it has all the tears and romance of a woman's existence in India, which prevents the novel from becoming just a record of history of the struggle of freedom fighting. By presenting a woman figure as its protagonist it gives a new dimension to the story of the novel from the woman's point of view. Gita Mehta presents a woman who is abandoned and is left alone to face the realities. It is historical novel more like a generic hybrid between gothic romance and orientalist harem fantasy. *Raj* distinguishes from some other works dealing with the princess is the women's angle which gives it a new dimension. There is the description of exotic life style of the princes, her superficialities and eccentricities. Regarding *Raj*, Usha Bande presents her views; "[...] despite usual themes and events, *Raj* is the saga of triumph- the triumph of "the people ",of democratic principle and of a woman who accepts the inevitable change gracefully"(240).

*Snakes and Ladder: Glimpses of Modern India* (1998) is a series of essays presenting well rounded picture of various cultures, civilizations, attitudes, represented by divergent people of India. This collection of essays, go on to show the unpredictability of success and failure in India, just as in the traditional games of snakes and ladders. This sort of presentation sounds like such stories of fiction by which Modern India is made up of. The political problems, the social problems, the economic problems are taken as the core subject matter. By examining the problems with the knowledge in finding answers to the problems, Mehta says that Indians have finally begun to acknowledge the works of ancestors which is significant in gaining

confidence and solution of the problems. The prevailing problems and the paradoxes of Indian societies are addressed in this book. Through the book Mehta gives a glimpse of pre-independent India, the movement of people against the British government. The basic theme of the essays in the books are poor condition of people, issues of poverty, pandemic corruption, low level of literacy, high population growth. This book of essays muses on things of India from politics, social unrest, the endless clash of religions and culture, spirituality, Indian Literature, Film, Industries.

*A River Sutra* (1993) is the second novel by Gita Mehta. It presents six different stories of different characters. The six stories including the Monk's, the teacher's, the Executive's, the Courtesan's, the Musician's, and the Minstrel's are interconnected not because of the plot or the narrative but because of the setting of Narmada River. In these stories Narmada River appears to be narrative structuring devices to thread the stories together. This novel gives a detailed and continuous record of events in which a retired civil servant is the narrator who by the time is manager of a government rest house on the bank of Narmada River. In different phases of time the civil servant encounters with holy men and other desperate people. There are series of bio-sketches of the characters which is narrated by a retired bureaucrat who tries to escape from the duty and obligations of the physical world. But, instead of escaping from the duties and obligations of the physical world, he is very much indulge with the obligations which he can not escape from. What the ex-bureaucrat views is that his fate and destiny has brought him there to; "understand the world" (268). The rest house where the narrator works is isolated from the rest of the world, he can not escape the obligations.

The narrator of the novel is not given any identical name. We have not much information about him. He has no one since his parents and wife died and he had no

child. He had come on the bank of the Narmada River in search of tranquility. As the narrator, the other characters of the novel in a way or the other are connected to Narmada River, which is regarded as holy river even today. Narrator, a manager of the rest house is a 'sutradhaar' of the stories of the people who come there in search of tranquility. The stories depict the complexity of human emotions and paradoxes of Indian life. The very basic strength of this novel is the pluralistic approach that Gita Mehta has been able to achieve. Indira Nityanandam argues:

The narrator and Tariq Mia, the mullah of the village Mosque, who is called "the wisest of all my friends" provides the connecting link to the various character, experiences, and stories. It is not an unlinked episodic novel or a Bildungsroman. (144)

Unlike her other works, Mehta in the novel *A River Sutra* passionately and persuasively shifts her concern to Indian sensibility specially to the interpretations to Indian cultural values, music, art forms and heritage. Since the contexts of the novel are varied, it is complex in which there is author's significant involvement with human subsistence in modern time. The novel presents the theme of love and its power, desire and its costs. Likewise, it is to untangle the deep feelings of the inner perception and knowledge of man. Regarding the novel *A River Sutra*, Pradeep Trikha says, "As quickly as we read, it melts and shifts in the memory" (135).

*A River Sutra* is the second fiction which was published in 1993. The novel has sixteen chapters, two hundred and eighty two pages. The sixteen chapters present the six different stories which is narrated by a retired civil servant who by the time is manager of a government rest house on the bank of Narmada river. All the stories narrated and the characters of the novel more or less are connected to the Narmada River, which is the 'sutra' or the connecting thread of the events and the stories. The

novel opens up with the brief introduction of the narrator. Narrator himself is narrating about him, who thought that he had fulfilled this worldly obligation so come there in the bank of Narmada River to become a 'banaprasthi', shortly after his wife's death.

The first chapter deals with the story of the narrator, how, why he come there is narrated. The setting of the river is described which is isolated because the nearest town of the Rudra is nineteen kilometers away from it which is connected by a road. The setting is beautiful. "A great aid to my meditations is the beauty of our location"(3). Since the Narmada is regarded as Holy River, white robed pilgrims visited the river bank all the time. They visited there to seek personal enlightenment. Various facts and the folk tales related to the Narmada is narrated thoroughly in this chapter.

Chapter two and three are about the monk. A Jain monk's story is narrated in the chapters. Being a rich fellow, the monk seeks to free himself from the fetters of the worldly desire through the vows of poverty, celibacy, and nonviolence. The rituals and the celebration of the renunciation ceremonies are narrated.

Tariq Mia, a mullah of a muslim village near by Narmada, is a wise friend of the narrator. In the chapter four, Tariq Mia narrates a story of a music teacher, Master Mohan. Thinking that the bureaucrat has problem in understanding the human heart he narrated it to him. The incident happens two years ago. A man named master Mohan along with recording of a small boy named Imrat visited Tariq Mia on the occasion of the anniversary of Amir Rumi's death. Because of the guilty feelings on the death of Imrat, Master Mohan commits suicide. A rich man hearing Imrat, cut his throat and killed him. He loved Imrat's voice so much that he did not want other to hear that voice. Mia by narrating the story wanted the bureaucrat to understand the

human heart and love. In this chapter there are specially three female characters: Master Mohan's wife, his daughter and Imrat's sister. Master's wife is described as what people called the evil. She is selfish and appeared as evil force which causes the death of Imrat. Master's daughter though has not significant role is described as cunning figure. Where as Imrat's sister is described as a character with love and feeling of sacrifice in her heart. Thus the paradoxical situation of female in the Indian societies can be seen in this chapter. Women have no identical identity and position. They are regarded as evil force at the same time are presented as good figure. One of the characters Paanwallah presents his views with master Mohan, "Wives ! don't talk to me of wives. I never take mine anywhere. Nothing destroys a man's pleasure like a wife" (54).

In chapter six, seven, eight and nine story of Nitin Boss, an executive of the tea garden of Calcutta is narrated. He visited the rest house with an exotic story and an unnatural problem. During the time in Calcutta he is narrated to have unnatural relationship with a spirit of woman called Rima. In this story due to the relationship with Rima a spirit, Nitin Boss falls in problem. To cure this he came in the bank of Narmada. Along with some rituals with the help of the tribal people, Nitin is cured and returned to home. The chapters thoroughly describe the myth created about women in the Indian societies as well as in the Indian continent. Women are regarded not as human being rather they are spirit to seduce man. There is created myth about women which describes women to be destructive force.

Chapter ten presents the Courtesan's story. One day a woman comes to rest house and stayed there for a night. As the story told by her, her daughter was abducted by a dacoit. She was so much beautiful that she seems like to be an angel. The dacoit Rahul Singh abducted her. Next morning when her daughter came there she

(daughter) told that Rahul Singh was her husband for many lives before. As the dacoit was killed sometime back, she had come to Narmada to commit suicide in his name. Though the custom of 'sati' was ended the traces of that evil practice is still there in India. Her mother too was happy for her because she believes dying in Narmada would purify all her sins.

Chapter thirteen presents the story of Musician. Musician is very much expert in classical Indian music. Even then she had been a victim of her physical appearance. Emotionally as well as physically, she is suffering from traumatic experience. A man who had promised with her father to marry her had left her and she was betrothed. How, why she had come to the temple of Mahadeo to purify of her attachment is narrated in this chapter. This chapter presents many accounts regarding the knowledge about classical Indian Music.

The last story of the novel is about Naga Baba. Tariq Mia narrates the story to the civil servant. Naga Baba is typical ascetic, did great penance. Once he adopted a girl child taught her the songs of Narmada. He named her as Uma. The child who was adopted from a brothel house in the course of time becomes a Minstrel. Some months after the story was told, a group of archeologist came to the rest house in the leadership of Professor Shankar who was non the other than Naga Baba. Naga Baba learned that the man is the greatest truth and nothing beyond. Thus the novel ends in the scene of Uma meeting with Professor Shankar whom he takes along with.

Unlike Mehta's other works which talk about India's Maharajahs, Indian mysticism as the west's perception, *A River Sutra* is not about East West encounter. Rather it is about illusion, sex, and musical ecstasy. As Nina Mehta says:

[...] *A River Sutra* isn't about the mingling of East and West. Instead, it braids together illusion, sex, and musical ecstasy by chronicling the



epiphanies of a highly stylized set of characters who improvise their way toward destiny. (7-8)

*A River Sutra* thoroughly presents the religious and secular characters, who have a significant role to play in the life of shallowness of secular modes of living. *A River Sutra* is a more intimate and deeply focused work. Erin Soderberg says; "The tales of various pilgrims to the river-tap the deep veins of Indian Mythology and artistic traditions while also forming a prose meditation on the country's secular- humanist tradition".

The whole story is weaved and threaded by the narrator along with the river Narmada. There are the issues on the themes of Hindu mythology, sufi poetry, classical Indian music, god of love 'kama dev', the passion and mysteries of the human heart. *A River Sutra* is a modern work, acknowledging the difficulties of modern India.

## **II. Third World Feminism**

Feminism is a movement started in the decade of 1960s with a target to reject all the traditions which are favorable for male's ideology. There is not only one belief regarding feminism because different people defined it in their own words. Some regard it as a political movement which based on the notion of 'gender' politics, where as other regard it as a feminist social movement seeking for equality in each and every field. Whatever , as a movement feminism got its impulses within the social history of modern women, since they recognized their equal status. The Oxford Learners' Dictionary defines feminism as, "the belief and aim that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men, the struggle to achieve this aim"(565). From the starting point of human civilization, along with hunting gathering age onwards women were confined within the domestic service. That means the domestic work had not have economic value due to which they slowly and gradually started to be treated as if they are the second grade citizens who can be used in domestic household, child caring. To rectify and to fight against the social, political, economic and other sorts of discrimination women started to band together in collective action which results the socio-political movement of feminism.

Feminism as a movement pave the way to those females/women who previously were confined within four walls of domestic household to come out and share the experiences of their plight, their vision without any sexual bias. The view concerning women to be men's ideology of denial of women's right to personhood, right of education, citizenship, voting is thoroughly observed in the domain of feminism. Feminism as a socio-political movement came into existence with questioning the position and their place in patriarchal society. M. H. Abrams views that as collective movement feminism was not started until 1960s. It was started in the

grounds of Europe and America voicing for various sorts of right from which women were deprived of. History witness that women were taken as inferior to men and the notion still exists. The thinkers of Ancient Greek period to the thinker of modern time had biased view about women. The Greek philosopher Aristotle had said that women are the 'misbegotten males.' In his *Politics* he argued that women are admirable when they are obedient and silent. Likewise Aquinas believed women to be 'imperfect man.' The modern thinkers Sigmund Freud's Psychology presents the notion of: "[...] that women are not only fundamentally different from men in character but inferior to them physically (in sexual capacity and equipment), emotionally (in stability and control) and, ethically (in the sense of honesty and justice)"(139-40 Ruth, Sheila). Feminism in this regard denied the control of men had on women, the biased attitudes and the created myths about women through which men had always been able to dominate and put women under their control. That sort of subjugation is challenged by Feminist.

As the time changes, by the time onward feminism is defined as a discourse that includes various movements, theories, philosophies, which are concerned with the issue of discrimination and differences regarding gender and sex. Feminism as a discourse advocates equality for women and campaign for women's right and the issues concerning them. Segal says about this; "[...] a feminist consciousness which is aware of the oppression of women's lives as vulnerable and exploited workers and hopelessly overburdened housewives, mothers and daughters" (214).

To achieve the aim of equality, to have the freedom of decision about the career, life patterns, and marriage is the fundamental assumption of feminism. To eliminate the inequalities, oppression, and injustices imposed upon women is the significant notion of feminism. Male are having privilege position, right, status and so

on which is specially determined by gender is challenged. Hans Bergen writes, "Feminism seeks to change the power relations between men and women that prevail under [...] patriarchy, a term that referred to the complete domination of men in western society"(96). Feminism is a movement seeks to subvert the society's prevailing stereotypes and notions which define women to relatively weak, passive, and dependent individuals. Likewise it tries to cross class and race boundaries. Chris Beasley adds some points to clarify it:

Dictionaries usually define it as the advocacy and women's right based on a belief in the equality of sexed and in its broadest use the word refers to everyone who is aware of and seeking to end women's subordination. In aware of and for any reason, feminism originated in the perception that there is something wrong with society's treatment of women. (27)

Feminist critic such as Simeon de Beavoir through *The Second Sex* (1949) says that women is constructed differently by men. They are constructed to be submissive, passive, and inferior. There is created myth about women that they are inferior to men. Myths always have been used to justify all sorts of oppressions. If women are studied thoroughly they are examined as if they are senseless, semi-human, creatures, who is unable to be constructed relative to man. The very notion should be challenged. Through the book she advocates for feminist consciousness by appealing to the idea that liberation for women was liberation for men too.

Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* (1977) emphasized on the issue of gender which has twin poles as biology and culture. For Millet patriarchy is the significant cause of women's oppression. Critics as Elian Showalter, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar questioned cultural sexual, intellectual, psychological, and as such stereotypes and

myths about women and their literature. They use essentialist and constructive model. Elian Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1986) presents the history of feminism by dividing it into three distinctive phases as Feminine Phase (1820-1880), Feminist Phase (1880-1920), and the Female Phase (1920 to onward). This shows the phases of modern women's literary development. Showalter's notion of need of female language to express the feelings and experiences about female is widely regarded in feminist criticism. Inspired by this notion several writers in the decade of 1960s started a campaign to have female language to express better of their feelings, desires and emotions. Showalter, in a way had tried to create 'space' to fight against the male domination in language through language itself.

Though the very foundation of feminism is voicing for equality, equal right and opportunities in each and every fields. There appear diversities in the feminism movement itself. Male's power politics, ideology and their dominate role in every sorts of resources is the due cause of female's subordination. But the changing time and the changing scenario not only talk about the various causes for female's subordination such as race, class, culture, religion but also regard the biological cause of sex and gender as significant in discrimination between male and female. The previously regarded cause of domination and discrimination by the present time are reanalyzed and studied not only as biological phenomenon but also as cultural discourse, practice and as social construction. In the modern time there appear braches of feminism as Radical feminism, Liberal feminism, Marxist Feminism, Socialist, Existentialist, Multicultural, Postmodern, Third World feminism.

Socialist and Marxist feminism appear to associate gender inequality, capitalist, system of production and division of labor as significant cause of women's oppression. They argue that the reason behind gender inequality is the unequal

distribution of capital. So they raise the issues of position of female in income generating sector, position of female in-term of socio-economic basis.

Psychological feminism is related to the issue of human neurosis. It studies specially Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva's notion of psychology. Freud as psychoanalyst brings issue of gender in center. He discovered the fundamental difference between male and female specially in terms of dream image in which male's dream is egoist and ambitious but women's as erotic. This sort of notion is challenged by the feminist as Helene Cixous, Irigaray, along with Julia Kristeva.

Liberal Feminist includes those who advocate for equal rights for female. Radical Feminism on the other hand offers a real challenge by putting women in its primary concern. The basic aim of Radical feminism is to gain control over their own bodies and celebrate them. Showalter is the precursor of Radical feminism.

Modern feminist argue that men are there to enjoy power that controls women. Men have historically dominated women and suppressed them, so the feminist seek for historical and social position of female writers. Feminist literary criticism is related to the movement of political, economic, cultural, and social freedom, equal status which is the product of long struggle by women and other feminist fighter who fight for women's right. Toril Moi regarding feminist criticism stated that " Feminist criticism then is specific kind of political discourse, a critical and theoretical practice, committed to the struggle against patriarchy and [...] not simply a concern for gender in literature" (204).

Feminism, Feminist criticism questions the male-centered ideologies, attitudes and male interpretation in each and every sectors, criticism, literature etc. Subversion of male patriarchal system and cultures of centuries is the foundation of feminism. In this regard Third World feminism appear as prominent movement which puts forward

the issues concerning the female of Third World who are doubly suppressed due to male in one hand and the imperial view of western feminism on the other hand. In spite of diversity, feminism is often represented as a single entity advocating gender equality and freedom. But besides the gender and sex there are the causes of economic class, race, culture, religion, which are to be analyzed in terms of position of female in Third World which are economically backward and are countries full of conservative notions regarding various things such as fate, marriage etc. Bell hooks writes:

To me feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism as a moment to ensure that women will have equal rights with men, it is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates western culture on various levels sex, race and class to name a few and a commitment to recognizing U.S. society, so that the self development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desire. (194)

### **Third World Feminism**

As nineteenth century first wave white feminism which was highly concerned with these issues of equality and universal humanity, Third World Feminism initially too was concerned with these issues of equality and universal humanity assimilating with the first wave feminism. They contributed their voices to the first wave agenda of including marginalized groups. As feminist theorist, Mary Wollstonecraft who advocated for the modernist project of universal emancipation. The variant of Feminism REI (Race, Ethnicity, Imperialism) feminism which is very much concerned with postcolonial position of female specially in third world has the assumption:

The modernist variant of REI feminist thinking in this sense offers a decidedly expanded version of the positive re-evaluation of black/ethnic minority, third world women. Modernist version of Gender Difference and REI feminists share a view of positive and independent identities associated with subordination. (78-79)

Gender difference and inequality regarding this though is the very concerned of Feminism as a whole, as other postcolonial theories, third world feminism is very much related to the issues of representation, voice, marginalization, and the relation between politics and literature. It is in a way or the other talks about the various factors of discrimination between men and women prevailing in the third world countries. The issues of discrimination are sexual division of labor, the family, the marriage, race, ethnicity, household, patriarchy etc. Even then the very nature of power discourse as talked by Edward Said is changing all the time and there is no universal and one single truth, generalization and universalization regarding the issues and position of Third World women should not be done. The Third World Feminists C.T.Mohanty, Sushie Tharu, Lata Mani, Uma Narayan, Saroojani Shao etc argue that issues of women of the third world is universalized and generalized by the western feminists. The feminist in the ground of first world countries try to universalize and generalize which is serious fault of western feminism. So there appear complexities of relationship between the First World (West) /Third World (Non-west) that is monolithic construction of non western women and the other is the seizing of the space of representation by third world women in the west. Regarding the emergence of the variant of feminism as the 'Third World' feminism the critic Judith Butler says:

The political assumption that there must be a universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist



cross-culturally, often accompanies the notion that the oppression of women has some singular form discernible in the universal or hegemonic structure of patriarchy or masculine domination. The notion of a universal patriarchy has been widely criticized in recent year for its failure to account for the workings of gender oppression in the concrete cultural contexts in which it exist. [...].That form of feminist theorizing has come under criticism for its efforts to colonize and appropriate non-western cultures to support highly western notions of oppression but because they tend as well to construct a 'Third World' or even an 'Orient' in which gender oppression is subtly explained as symptomatic of an essential, non western barbarism. (6)

After the Second World War specially, after the down fall of USSR, the whole world is divided into the three groups. The first world, the Second world, and the Third world. First world refers to the capitalist countries, the Second world refers to the socialist countries, and the Third world refers to the non alien and other once colonized countries. Thus the term 'Postcolonial' and 'Third World' is interchangeably used. In this sense the postcolonial feminism and the Third world feminism are used as overlapping term. Kumkum Sangari is of the view that 'Third World' not only designates specific geographical areas, but also imaginary spaces. By challenging the monolithic notion of western feminism, third world feminism focused on the issues of race, class, gender, sexuality in different communities of women along with mutuality and complication which suggests attentiveness to the interweaving of the histories of these communities. It focuses on the individual and collective experience of 'oppression' and 'exploitation' along with 'struggle' and 'resistance'. According to C.T.Mohanty:

Third World Feminism must address itself to two simultaneous projects: the internal critique of hegemonic 'western' feminism and the formulation of autonomous feminist concerns and strategies that 'geographically' 'historically' and 'culturally' grounded. (19)

That means Third World Feminism should deconstruct the concept of the western feminism and by doing this it further should reconstruct its own concept.

Deconstruction and reconstruction should be done simultaneously. This project seemingly appear to be contradictorily but fact is that the context, the socio-political situation, the environment, since is distinct ,the notion too should be distinct. The tendency of western Feminism is colonization and the construction of constitutive and systematization of the oppression of women in the third world but this discursive power of western feminism should be redefined. Addressing to the inherence of politics of hegemonization and imperialism Addel Malek presents his view:

Contemporary imperialism is in a real sense, a hegemonic imperialism, exercising to maximum degree a rationalized violence taken to a higher level than ever before - through fire and sword but also through the attempt to control hearts and mind. For its content is defined by the combined action of the military industrial complex and the hegemonic cultural centers of west, all of them founded on the advanced levels of development attained by monopoly and Finance capital [...] the second revolution itself. (145-46)

Women's engagement with feminism in the third world county is not so much long as the history of women's engagement in the western countries. Due to which women of third world countries have to walk a long way regarding the feminist issues and feminist questions. Since the third world's women have particular politics because of

the distinct socio-economic, political as well as historical locations, they have to formulate their own way in relation to feminism. Many third world feminist questioned the very term 'feminism' because the so called western feminist try to locate third world women in terms of underdevelopment, oppressive traditions, high illiteracy, rural and urban poverty, religious fanaticism, over population of particular Asian, African, Middle Eastern and Latin American countries. The very notion is grounded in the cultural imperialism and is short sightedness in defining the meaning of gender in terms of middle class white experiences, internal racism classicism and homophobia. Such created notion not only creates hierarchy but also freeze third world women in time, space, and history. Just as western women or white women can not be defined in a coherent interest groups the third world women also do not constitute any automatic unitary groups. They neither constitute automatic groups alliances nor are unitary in terms of division of class, religion, sexuality and history. Defining third world women in terms of their problems of their achievements in relation to an imagined free white liberal democracy effectively removes them from history freezing them in time and space. Third world feminist try to establish link between political struggle and feminist movement in Asian and other third world countries which is the struggle against racist, colonialist states and for national independence. Kumari Jayawardena writes about late nineteenth and early twentieth century feminist movement in Asia, "[...] feminism as embracing movements for equality within the current system and significant struggles that have attempted to change system" (50).

Third world feminist thus have argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggle of people of color and postcolonial peoples and on the day to day strategies of survival utilized by such people. There are multiple

contexts for the emergence of colonialism, class and gender, the state, citizenship, and racial formation, multinational production and social agency along with the issue of identity which should be closely analyzed.

### **Institutional Formations of a Woman: Indian Social Context**

India was colonized by British Empire for a long time. In 1947 India got its independence even then almost half population of India which is covered by female's population is still in the colonized stage. They are not still free from the socio-economic slavery by traditions and cultures. Indian societies developed the stereotyped ideals of 'Pativrata', 'Sati', 'Purdan', 'Zenana' etc. Most of the evil practices such as Sati are emancipated by law but the rooted belief and traditions of such practices can still be found in some Indian tradition and Indian societies. The Indian societies of the time though is very modern and changed from the eighteenth and nineteenth century's position of female which was very horrosome and terrible, still the condition is not very satisfactory. By the time Indian women are being strong enough to tackle with their male counter part whether in political, social, economic, sport, or any other fields but the condition of female in the traditional Indian societies is not very different from that of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.

The political leaders; as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawarharlal Nehru, and other emphasized on the equal status of female and male. Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru addressing a conference of Indian women in 1945 had said "I have long been of opinion that a nation's progress depends on the position of women"(15 Verma, Dominique). He had realized that the very status of county is based on how is the status of female in the country.

Since India is the country of huge diversity, there are various religious, cultural, social practices. Regarding the view towards women there is complex

feelings of ambivalence. There is hatred, disgust, hostility along with fascination, infatuation etc. Women at the same time there is the imagery of devotional as 'goddess', likewise there is too the imagery of evil force of 'witch', 'stepmother' etc. As India is highly dominated Hindu country other religious groups and communities too are influenced by the cultural and traditional practices of Hindu philosophy. In Hindu philosophical tradition there is contradictory view about position of female. There is the tendency of worshiping female as power of creativity but at the same time there are the views which regard female to be evil forces appearing as hindrance in the path of salvation. Beside Hinduism, there are Islamic religious communities, Buddhist communities, Christian communities in India. Likewise there are various shorts of other religious communities as well. 'Jainism' one religious community lays great emphasis on self denial, restraint of passion, and a life of renunciation. A woman in Jainism has a legitimate position, she can be nun but there is not clear view among the thinker and saints of Jainism whether a woman can attain salvation as a woman or not because they are of the view that to attain liberation she is to be reborn as man. Since woman in Jainism is believed to be born with some physical disabilities and mental weaknesses. Dr. Sushila Mehta is of the view that, "[...] there is severe condemnation of woman who is looked upon as a tempter and seducer and is called trickly, deceptive, hypocritical, fickle, untrustworthy, and treacherous" (18).

In Islam, *The Quran* emphasized modesty, decorum, and chastity for women. Women are not allowed to display their beauty in front of unknown male, they led to veiling which is also known as 'Purdah'/'Burkha'. There are restrictions like women should not converse with other men, they should not talk loudly, and they should not receive guests without the permission of their husbands. In Islamic religious practices

women are not allowed even to take part in communal prayer. There are two distinct worlds for men and women.

The orthodox of such religious practices which emphasizes the derogatory role of women in societies is challenged by Gita Mehta in her novel *A River Sutra*. There are various types of mythical stereotypes regarding female in Indian Societies. There is not the decisive role of female in the social institutions as family, marriage etc so the double standards morality for men and women is challenged by Mehta by presenting the characters of Rima, Master Mohan's wife, the Musician's daughter. The Musician's daughter in the ground appeared to have traumatic experience because there is betrayal of a male who promised her parents to marry her but the very intention of the novelist is to show her to challenge the notion of marriage in which there is the beast burden of the father-in-law's house. Marriage is regarded essential part of human life in the Indian continent. Particularly, in Indian societies marriage is directly connected to the destiny of women. The parents of girls/women felt an anxiety to get her (daughter) a husband as early as possible. Some parts of Indian societies are still in practice of child marriage though it is declared to be illegal by Indian laws.

In Indian societies various sorts of discrimination can be found which directly or indirectly connected to the moral code of conduct and also with religious aspects too. The subordinate position of female and other contexts of female issues are central theme of the novel *A River Sutra*. In the Indian social context the issues of domestic violence, discrimination and prevailing myths which are the causes of institutional violence over female are thoroughly presented in the novel through various characters.

### **III. Search for Female Selfhood in *A River Sutra***

The novel issues out the problems faced by women in Indian societies. The stereotype prevailing Indian women is pervasively raised in the novel. Women are assumed to be the eternally suffering and patient wives, mothers, who are sunked in ignorance and are too oppressed. The narrator, an ex-buerecrat and his wise friend Traiq Mia narrate the stories. The female characters are not actively involved in the action rather are narrated by the male and are perceived accordingly to the male's perspectives. The male characters such as Nitin Bose, Master Mohan, Punnahawala narrate their experience regarding female. Punnahawala says, "Wives! Don't talk to me of wives. I never take mine anywhere. Nothing destroys a man's pleasure like a wife" (54).

Nitin Bose like wise narrates his experience with a tribal woman named Rima in which she is presented as a spirit. A kind of hatred is found in the characters towards female. Female are presented as a supernatural being, an inanimate object without feelings and emotion. They are narrated as if they are the creatures who can do all things to please a man: "Armies of women. Real women who will do anything to please a man" (112).

Women are not human being with individual intellectuality but they are the objects to have enjoy with. The key factors behind the subordinate position of female in Indian societies are: underdevelopment, oppressive tradition, high illiteracy, poverty, and religious Fanaticism, overpopulation etc. Operation of power whether in social sector or in religious or in political sector, male ideology is dominant which regards female to be second grade citizen, deprived of rights and freedom. What a male decides become one and final, female can not speak against this even if she want to speak she has to be silent: "I was not hungry unable to ignore the tear falling from

my wife's eyes onto the table as she silently placed my favorite dishes before me"(17). When a Jain fellow decided to be a monk in his early thirties he did not think the decision to be discussed with his wife. But he alone decided it. Mostly in Indian societies female are liked to be silent, submissive, and modest. They are not able to involve in decision made neither in family nor in societies.

Natin Bose who speaks more about female in his diaries is much more oppressive. He is not an individual character but is a representative character of whole Indian societies: "As that musky fragrance enveloped me, calming me and exciting me at the same time, I felt a softness press against my shoulder. Stretching out my hand, I grasped the swelling firmness of a woman's breast"(124). Women in Indian societies still now are suffering from serious disadvantages. They are highly illiterate and are economically not sound enough. Because most of the female are engaged in domestic and agricultural works which do not have the economic value. That's why they widely are dependent in male:

Mohammed-sabid pulled at his mustache. "You have done a very fine thing, my friend. Prohibit your wife from interfering in your affairs. It is you who feed and clothe your family and put a roof over their heads. Your decision as to who shall share that roof is final and irreversible.

(65)

Women's lack of economic, social, and political power makes them vulnerable. In *A River Sutra*, no female character is politically conscious about her rights. There is wide dependency in the very private affairs as marriage. Since India is highly dominated Hindu country marriage is significant institution which generally is arranged by the parents of girls and boys. In boys' case they are rather free to make decision in their marriage but girls are not. Specially in case of female parents became



worried about marriage because it is the matter of prestige also. Parents since the birth of a girl child seem in worries regarding marriage. Though Indian Law declared 'Child Marriage' to be illegal there is the practice still now. The musician was only seven years old her mother was going sick because of the tension of her marriage (201-25).

What, is significantly observed in female is the physical fitness, and the beauty of appearance. Since attractiveness in people is a cultural phenomenon. Beauty is socially defined. In patriarchy men construct the ideal in their own interest, and women whose lives have no purpose outside of being chosen. The identities and fortunes of them, have been made subject to their appeal to men. For no human can be perfect in hair, skin, teeth, shape, proportion, and scent. The musician suffers from this culturally established notion of beauty. If the girls are not physically fit or they are ugly they could not have easily married. Since the musician was not beautiful to look, her parents could not find a spouse for her. A disciple had promised her father to marry her but he betrayed him. Such is the very condition of female in India. Due to some social and cultural values the parents too have to face suppression. There is the pressure of society. In case of musician she is doubly suppressed. There is the pressure of the family as well as of the society. The physical trauma and the psychological trauma is significantly hunting to female in Indian societies. Female until the marriage became burden to the parental family. In one hand there is the religious belief that parents should fulfill the parental responsibly of 'Kanya Dan' to have salvation and to have place in heaven, on the other hand it became the smatter of social prestige:

How can I describe my anguish in the years that followed, as I struggled to please my father inside the music room, and then outside the music room consoled my mother for my ugliness [...] I was too

preoccupied my own ugliness and my mother despair, my uncertain future looming before me as mysterious as the changes of my body.

(213)

The pathetic condition, brutality of maltreatment and the helplessness of female is open to Indian societies. They are helpless to resist against the brutality. So, sometime suicide became the easy escape than to tolerate the abuses. Female are seen as sinful creature. And purification is required. Female should be virgin, pure and modest. Otherwise they are out thrown from society. "Only that she was happy her daughter had died in the Narmada because she would be purified of all her sins"(190). The courtesan's daughter when released from two years abduction commits suicide jumping into Narmada. To tolerate the social abuses is hard, and suicide becomes an easy escape. The more she kills herself in the name of her husband, Rahul Singh who had once abducted her. It to some extent is the trace of 'Sati' system which still is found in traditional conservative Indian societies, rather in different form.

Victimization of female characters because of domestic violence, because of prevailing myths of religious dogmas, culture, and customs are the issues raised in *A River Sutra*. The cultural ideals of the submissive, self sacrificing, and unquestioningly obedient female characters in the form of wife, mother, and sister put tremendous pressure in receiving ill treatment to Indian women.

### **Equality and Justice in the Institutions: Marriage, Religion, Education and Politics**

Image of man in Indian Society is the breadwinner where as women is home maker, dependent to male. Women are the home decorer. They are more engaged in domestic household. The agricultural works and the domestic household is the field of degraded economic value in which wide female's population is engaged with. For the

reason they are living the life of dependency. Economically Indian women are dependent to male: "What sins did I commit in my last life that I should be yoked to this apology for a man" (54-55)? Religion on the other hand is practiced through social institutions, is a reflection of cultural ideals, attitudes. Indian society is highly religious. Indian culture as is patriarchal so is the religion. Religion to some extent is the reflection of male ideology. Although widely practiced Hindu religion in India has the philosophy of worshiping female's power as the incarnation of 'Goddess Shakti'. But in practice that is not found. Male always enjoy the privilege position. The socio-political structure of patriarchy is justified through theology. Gita Mehta in this regard has significantly used the myths of religion to show the subordinate position of female. Female can not have salvation neither they can have immortality themselves. The God Shiva should bless them to immortality, who is presumably a male:

The stream took on the form of a woman- the most dangerous of her kind: a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetic to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, at yet another as a seductress loose-imbed with the lassitude of desire. Her inventive variation so amused Shive that he named her Narmada, the Delightful one, blessing her with the words "You shall be holy, forever inexhaustible." Then he gave her in marriage to the ocean, Lord of Rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors. (8-9)

Male are in the mainstream where as female are marginalized. There is exploitation and subjugation to female and that is justified with the established myths that she does not possess intellectuality rather she is stupid. The concept, women are carnal- male are spiritual, women are body- men are mind, women are sex and sex is evil is widely

found in Indian societies. For example Rima is depicted in Nitin Bose is a carnal spirit, a body and sex who motivate him to the world of sensual pleasure that is the world of body:

My body knew the contours of her body, my hands the features of her face, but to my eyes she was an endless play of shadow, entering my bed in darkness when I was no longer capable of waiting for her so that she surprised my senses. She even knew when when our passion was in danger of becoming repetition. (126)

Women are the means of pleasure. They are means to excite passion to men. The very religions practiced in India are Sexist, Masculinist, and misogynist. Victimization is the sacred principle of womanhood. Male's decision, judgment is metamorphosized which lean on female to be subsidiary creature. Not only ordinary female are to lean on the abuses 'Sita', a character of the great epic *Ramayana*, regarded to be goddess had to pass on the fire ordeal to prove her virginity and chastity in front of the then society. Very condition of 'Sita' can still be found in traditional Indian societies. Religion, likewise intensify the consciousness of oppressor.

Marriage is an agreement of economic arrangement and for a woman husband is her premium. She pays for it with her name, her privacy, her self respect, her life as a whole. And it condemns her to life long dependency, parasitism, and uselessness. Woman in Indian societies should absorb herself in her husband, should remain inferior to him. Marriage is so much significant that all most all average girls are told marriage is their ultimate goal. So they are trained accordingly. The education is directed to the ultimate goal of marriage: "Remember if I teach you the raginis I will be giving you as wife to my gods, the god of music. Such a contract can not be broken. It will be a marriage sealed by Shiva himself" (214).

Very often marriage became the cause of unhappy life, misery, distress, physical suffering as well as psychological trauma. A woman finds herself shocked, repelled and outraged due to marriage. The Musician's daughter says, "It seemed to me that I could not escape the specter of marriage" (214). The institution of marriage incapacitates a woman for life's struggle, paralyzes her imagination, impose its gracious protection which is a travesty on human being. A woman whoever she is, either genius or not could not escape the marriage. She should be in the protection of husband: "[...] a woman without genius could be protected only by a husband in a harsh world designed for men" (212). A single woman can not live free in the society which is designed for men. Either one or the other way they should be in the protection of male. In childhood she should be protected by father, in young hood she should be protected by husband, and in later phase of adulthood she should be protected by son. This kind of attitude is widely dominant in Indian societies: "This is no city for a young woman alone" (65). The experience of fear, anxiety, and depression is found in the lives of female. Indian societies provide double standard to female which is less advantageous.

Men do intellectual and imaginative work where as female do biological and domestic work. The symbol of fertility for a man is his hand or pen that is the intellectuality but for a woman womb is the symbol of fertility, that is related to body only. Male's intellectuality is praised rather female's physical beauty is fantasized. True women in Indian societies are those who can sacrifice everything for a man, be modest, silent, polite, loving, caring, and beautiful to look at. The major requirements of femininity are beauty, selfacement, fragility, and domesticity. History, Poetry, Literature, Philosophy, and even Science have eulogized the women who embody these qualities."The beauty of a woman is the greatest snare (157-St.John

Snrysostom)". They are the embodiment of beauty and adorn ornaments, cosmetics etc. Female's physical aspects are praised but the power of creativity, intellectuality, 'Shakti' is fossilized. Thus subordination is there and it can not be denied easily. There is not acknowledgement of power of women in real sense rather the power of enchantment and spell is approved in male dominated societies like India: " Now the legends of Narmada merged with Nitin Bose's story as I struggle to understand the power of the woman who had enchanted him"(139).

Regarding the issue of sexuality, male hegemony is there. Only function of female in patriarchal societies like India is to serve as sexual playmate. Women's clothing, movements, and behavior are trained, coached to be seductive. Women should always be sexy to spellbound male. Sex and sensuality is used not for women's own ends but for male's pleasure. Sex and sensuality for woman herself is prohibited. Status of women is just as an object. They are to be touched, looked at, and enjoyed with. To prove manhood he should have at least a woman and she will not have the equal status: "Man of your age not to have had a woman for two solid years"(121).

Women in Indian societies have not enjoyable position, Neither inside family, nor in the social arena. She is not free to enjoy life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Women always are kept in object position, passive and inferior. Most of the time, in the name of religion, culture, customs, they are dominated. The rooted cultural values are hegemonic conducting over female's life. The established notion of male's supremacy is the cause of realization of marginalized position of female in society.

There is long history of human civilization which keeps female in subordinate position. The denial of female's equal status in family, negligence of female child is common practice found in India. Marriage is the legal institution to have power over female in India. The dominant myth of Hinduism and the rooted concept of Islamic

religion, are significant factors in dominance over female:" I have not left any calamity more detrimental to mankind than woman" (158-Islamic saying). Specially, after the development of *Puranas*, mostly after the publication of *Manu Smiriti* in Hinduism, subordination began severely. Mehta, in *A River Sutra* has intensely included these myths of hunting experience of domination and subordination. Women since then are seen as beautiful creature arousing lust even to the ascetic: "Did they brood on the Narmada as the proof of Shiva's great penance or did they imagine her as a beautiful woman dancing toward the Arabian sea, arousing the lust of ascetics like themselves" (139).

### **Search of Identity**

*A River Sutra* critiques on modern life exposing the shallowness of the spiritual, political and secular modes of living. It strikes rather a different note. It is a sequence of Lyrical stories their connecting point being that they take place on the banks of Narmada River. Narmada is the spiritual 'sutra' linking the lives of people and the different categories of people. The narrator, a retired bureaucrat who renounces the world and become the manager of a rest house narrates the whole stories. During the encounters with holy men, civilians, musicians he came to know a great secret of human life which is not knowledge, power, or god but 'love'. Nothing sustains life as human relationship. And if the river is sacred it is because of human being. Real salvation is there in accepting life, not in accepting death. Denial of life is not the way of 'Nirvana'. As Naga Baba, who became Professor Shankar by renouncing death, we should live to have life, identity. The whole novel revolves and reverberates with the idea that real life is in living not in annihilation. The innumerable saints, monks, mullahs bear the testimony to the fact. All the six stories seem to be individual stories but even then Narmada is the connecting thread.

Likewise Narmada gives the answers for the questions on life and death. The characters of *A River Sutra* are profound, wise, and loveable who have discovered the truth of life. And the fruit of their enlightenment is that religion is not a god hunt, its springs are in the human heart. Its outward springs are in the human heart. Its outward expressions are the 'ragas' on which the characters found the identity and meaning of life that is nothing but love. That love is 'Karma'. This is also the answer to the modern problem, the answer to the psychic constituent of the individual soul. And the female characters as the musician, the courtesan and her daughter, and Uma, minstrel came to Narmada in search of their identities.

All most all the characters of the novel came to the bank in search of peace and tranquility, where lies the real meaning of life. Like other characters, the unnamed narrator came there in search of peace but happens to confront the power of mythology, religion, music, philosophy etc. As the setting varies, these stories depict the complexity of human emotion and also the paradoxes of India. In the growing era of fretfulness, Mehta unravels the deep feelings of man over the issues of faith and value: "Man is the great truth. There is nothing beyond". The narrator voices for the author's philosophy. The diversity of the people provides with a constant source of interest to the narrator as well as to the readers.

The theme of survival is there. All the characters in different stories converge for one or the other reason near the bank of river to attain renunciation and tranquility. Life is to be free from 'doubt', 'delusion', and 'extremes' stability. To have complete self realization one ought to experience life oneself and should not escape from it by just renouncing the worldly things. Master Mohan's suicide is a sort of escape from life because he could not face the challenges. Unlike him, his wife who is charged to



be evil, uncivilized never dare to kill her rather struggle to the society. Though her detailed life story is not narrated, she never ends her life in suicide:

Master Mohan's father had made one last effort to help his son by engaging him in marriage to the daughter of a rich village land owner who loved music. He had lived long enough to see the marriage performed but not long enough to celebrate the birth of his grandchildren, or to witness the avarice of his daughter-in-law when her own father died and her brothers took the family wealth, leaving her dependent on Master Mohan's earnings. (56)

The female characters are not able to enjoy freedom. But they are struggling to survive in the world by accepting the challenges. As Uma become minstrel of Narmada, the musician comes to search tranquility in the bank of Narmada and there is the denial of marriage. The story of Master Mohan has a sensitive emotional unfolding, which consequently mark the ways of the world and generates tolerance towards inhuman acts of man.

Nitin Bose being a voracious reader could not escape the loneliness through his books and came a break through in the world of sensual pleasure. A tribal woman, Rima became his companion. Bose breaking the cocoon around him enters to the new world of sensual pleasure where he can enjoy life. This elaborates the theme of co-existence. Real meaning of life is in co-existence between man and woman but not in dominance. But very depiction of Rima is as spirit is what found in the Indian societies. In the novel, Mehta has used many parallel themes which support India is a county in which male are one and only determining power. Power is centered to male and their ideology. It is the world of degraded human values where women, poor, and lower castes are treated as inanimate objects having no basic human rights. As the

little girl, whom was adopted by Naga Baba, many girls are neglected. They even are sold as that little girl was sold to brothel house by her own father: "Her father had told her she was going to a new mother when he sold her to the brothel. She knew the Naga Baba had sold her again" (253). Poor living condition of Indian women is very much resembling to Uma the minstrel, Rima the tribal girl, Master Mohan's wife, the musician, the courtesan and her daughter, Imarat's sister etc. India is not the country for a single woman. Women must be in protection of male. Most often marriage is significant to make the life of female secure. Thus there is anxiety regarding the marriage and for a woman marriage is not a private affair. Parents or the elder members of family mostly male member determined whom a girl should be married with:

[...] I did everything to protect my child. With her beauty and her unblemished reputation, she could have married a respectable man. Who will believe in my child's virtue now? Who will accept her as a wife, a girl captured and kept by criminals for two long years? (173)

The most fascinating aspect of India is the dual position of female. Female are placed in respectable position of goddess at the same time they are reproduced as witch and evil. They have to prove their virginity and chastity to have good reputation. Even if they proved to be pure they are not easily accepted.

### **Women's Image and Society**

In Indian society women have dual positions. They are loved and respect as power, creativity, caring mother. But the very concept remains only in philosophies in reality the situation is adverse. Only the beauty of physicality is eulogizes. They are the attractive playmates for men. More than a human being they are spirit and angel.

No emotional attachment is found between male and female. Infatuation is found. The more female are looked as creature should be taken care of:

That I should love a coolie's wife. Waves of disgust engulfed me and I wanted to vomit with shame. At that moment the spell in which Rima held me was broken. [...] I could no longer remember my desire for Rima but I could not overlook her poverty, and I decided it was only fair that she should earn something from my association. (129-30)

The minstrel girl who was named as Uma seeks to be dominated. Her life is passive and is noticeably exotic. She is severely manipulated since her childhood. She is inferior and is considered as evil and ill omen. The Naga Baba rescues her from the clutches of brothel house and makes her daughter of Narmada River. She is reproduced and is manipulated by the ideologies of the societies.

Mehta portrays a very rural and traditional prehistoric India in *A River Sutra*. In India Rivers are loved and revered as holy place. Most of the events of the novels take place in the banks of Narmada River. Through the novel the glimpse of only the sparsely inhabited India where the terrain is hostile and the lives of people are unhindered and unaffected by the rapid progress in the outside world. India is still isolated from the mainstream of development in other countries specially, in the socio-political situation of female. She shows up everything that corresponds to the dominated and inferior image of female. Female are dominated and regarded inferior. Indian women till now are living a miserable life. In article fifteen of *Indian constitution*, there is the "right against discrimination on grounds of race, religion, caste, or sex" (23 Chatterjee, Dr. Mohini). Equal right of justice, equality, and liberty to every citizen remains only in word of laws not in practiced. Female, poor, and low

castes are still deprived of equal rights on property, development, and decision making sectors.

*A River Sutra* presents the different fragments of Indian society through many eyes. Mehta is involved committing herself in intended episodes, allowing herself to make acerbic moral points and judgment. The novel presents a theater of unrelated and indifference episodic stories which give a dim picture of life to be lived and felt, experienced in the real societal world of participation.

Many times female are immersed into abstract things. They are transformed to the goddess of power and equalized to abstract nature, love, etc. Such happen to Uma also. More than a woman, Naga Baba immersed her into the holy waters of Narmada and said "The Narmada claims all girls as hers. Tonight you became a daughter of the Narmada" (254).

Wide influence of myths and legends has led the people of India to believe in rebirth, reincarnation, immortality as well as to the subordinate position of female. Numerous uses of myths highlight the dominant patriarchal culture of India. Mehta has made ample use of myths to deal with basic questions about the nature of world, human experiences in India, and the position, condition and status of female. In India not a single thing is free from myth and religion. Social lives of India are surrounded by false myth and religion. It is largely surrounded by false belief and religious dogmas which is to present the real condition of female. Wide superstitious belief is there regarding female.

In chapter ten, the courtesan recalls her grandmother and her mother who were courtesan in the 'haveli' of shahbag. How they were the means of pleasure to shahbag and how they were treated is shown (16-64). In Nitin Bose's story, we can have glimpse of life of male and female respectively:

The colonial estate managers who came to Calcutta only to bid for wives, when the ships from England discharged their freight, consisting of desperate English women trying to escape poverty back at home. (111)

The story of courtesans worked both as a mistress and a tutor to the mightiest kingdoms of India. Mehta elaborately describe the work knowledge and the position of courtesan during the time and the attitude of people towards it.

Mehta has not overlooked the importance of religion in *A River Sutra*. She has included translated version of a number of hymns from Islamic and Hinduism. Since the Islamic and Hinduism are dominant sects of Indian culture, She significantly included the influence of religions in social life.

Very rural and traditional prehistoric India is portrayed in *A River Sutra*. Sparsely inhabited India where the terrain is hostile and the lives of people are unhindered by the modern development is pictured out in the novel. Mehta shows up everything that corresponds to the dominated and inferior image of female. Female are seen as second class citizen, deprived of freedom. Such portrayals echo the description of Indian women who are still living a miserable life, remaining silent to each and everything they have to face. They never raise their voice instead they accept domination as it is determined by their fate.

The diversities of Indian culture can be seen. Various mysterious stories are narrated for example the story of courtesan, in which courtesan first narrates the story of the abduction of her daughter by bandit, Rahul Singh. Then the daughter appears to narrate the story of the love and marriage between Rahul Singh and herself. She had realizes that Rahul Singh was her husband since many lives. This story adds to the

mystification of life. Eventually after realizing that Rahul Singh was her husband, she succumbs to his passion. After when Rahul Singh was wounded in an encounter, died soon after, she had arrived to Narmada not to perform a penance but to reassert her love:

He stretched out his arms to me. Suddenly I knew he was speaking the truth, and that night I entered my captor's embrace. Guided by his touch, I learned I had known his body in a hundred lifetimes before he took me again a virgin on the thin cotton quilt which was all that shielded our bodies from the ground. (184)

The narrator soon after realizes that freedom does not deny the world, rather it is in challenging the world and in asserting life. Life lies somewhere between the bureaucratic present tense and ecstatic illusion, a bit closer to illusion.

The musician's story tells the narrator about her broken engagement and unrequited love. The minstrel's story of the Naga Baba prove that life's experiences are to be deeply felt before one thinks of renouncing the worldly life. The stories are interestingly narrated, and the ex-bureaucrat leans second hand. The six oblique stories in this novel which runs through the nine traditional moods associated with music seem to take place in a past that shimmers somewhere between vibration and existence, where passion on the verge of being realized into surrender.

Myths deal with basic questions about the nature of the world and human experience. They can illuminate many aspects of culture. Myths are very popular in India and they are directly connected to religion. The mythology of dominant Hindu religion portrays the miserable condition of female and the dependency of them to male partner. It is very much paradoxical towards women. In one hand there is the notion, "Where women are honored, there the gods rejoice"(Hinduism believes). On

the other hand they are treated as mysteries which can not be understood easily. For example in the greatest epics : *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* depiction of 'Sita' and 'Devaki' are sketched as embodiment of love, virtue, and modesty where as 'Supernakha' and 'Holika' are the embodiment of evil force who are the causes of hostility and destruction and sin.

### **Politics of Resistance**

Indian society tends to place special emphasis on hierarchy within the family. Age and sex are the main ordering principles in family hierarchy. Women are subsidiary to male. Women are only a peripheral target of preferential policies. Thus, women are constituting backward class. M.S. Gore notes "The men have the more decisive authority in the traditional family as compared with women"(216 Basu, Amrita). A husband is expected to be his wife's superior and to receive symbolic and actual deference from her. A man can move freely wherever he wants to but a woman can move about within her household. Women in family should serve meals to all the members of family and she can eat only after all the members finished.

Women should be 'Pativrata', one who follows her husbands will and authority in all aspects. Reticence of the women is regarded to be her modest quality. If a woman denies it, she is regarded to be indisciplined. There is the belief on the fact that fate of a woman's soul depends on lifelong union with and service to husband.

The birth of a daughter is a less auspicious event than the birth of a son. Favoring son is to favoring male patriarchy. A girl has a paradoxical situation. She is said to be 'like a flower' which needs to be cherished and cared for because she will soon marry and come under the stern discipline of another family. A prospering man can demonstrate his power and enhance his family status is through arranging a prestigious marriage of his daughter. But father of the musician is shown to be

defeated. He could not arrange a marriage of his daughter. Rather he declared that he had given her to raga of music, which the Lord Shiva, himself: "Tonight I have fulfilled my duties as a father. Now I free this young man from our bargain"(224).

Denial of the physical marriage to the young boy, his disciple, father of musician's father resists against the brutality of marriage. In Indian society a principal level in competition of a family prestige is the marriage of the daughters. Presence of a pubescent daughter in a household is regarded to be ritually dangerous, and uncomfortable. Parents usually get worried about her sexuality may bring social disgrace, perhaps supernatural retribution, on the whole family unless she is promptly bound in marriage. Marrying a daughter is urgently felt duty to be conducted by parents. It is the social as well as religious duty to be conducted by them. Though *A River Sutra* does not speak much about marriage payment or the dowry, which is one of the most important cause behind the dehumanized treatment over female, there is an event which is very much related to the system of dowry:

I looked at the shawls piling up at my father's feet and recognized them as the gifts we had sent to my bridegroom's family, but I still did not understand what was happening until I heard the messenger say, "Your student thanks you for granting his freedom. He is betrothed in marriage to my daughter". (225)

Marriage payment is important part and a significant customarily in India. In India the choice of a spouse remains very largely a matters for negotiation and decision determined by the marriage payment. Generally marriage is the matter of decision by the elders of the family, specially the male.

Master Mohan's wife is a woman of self will. When she learned from Mohammed Sahib that her husband had refused five thousands rupees for letting



Imrat to sing at the home of a great Sahib, she agrees for that even though Master Mohan was against it. And Imrat went for that along with Master Mohan and his wife: "I have agreed the brat will sing before the sahib tonight, see they have already paid me"(84-6). She appeared to be challenging in front of her husband's decision. The more she is depicted as a woman who does not care for the established notion of society. She never is modest towards her husband. What is loved as femaleness in female is the softness in speech, but she is harsh to her husband and the fact is known openly to the community where she lives.

*A River Sutra* unfolds the tyranny of patriarchal ideology, which causes the suffering over female. To structure the institutionalized arrangements that subordinate and exploitation of women, Gita Mehta unfolds the reality found in Indian societies. Through different characters the lower position of female is shown. That position is the cause of inequality over female. The fact that one with more economic resources has greater bargaining power is shown. To evoke the issue of equality, women are expected to have economic power. In case of Rima, who is a worker in tea estate there is the pathetic condition because Nitin Bose being an executive with the power of authority and money exploited her sexually. He shows sympathy and pity towards her but Rima does not accept it:

I could no longer remember any desire for Rima but I could not overlook her poverty, and I decided it was only fair that she should earn something from our association. Hoping to avoid recriminations, I left money with the head bearer instructing him deliver it to Rima. To my surprise she did not try to see me. I knew she was in the tea garden because at night I heard a voice singing in the darkness outside. (131)

Unlike a common Indian woman Rima is such a character who does not restrict within the household. She works at the tea garden. She challenges the concept of 'Pativrata', restricting only women to be honest to their husband, though husband may not be faithful to her. Whenever, Nitin said her that he is returning back to Calcutta, she asks frankly that should she return to her husband. Such event, in Indian society is not acceptable in Indian society. Once a woman gets married she should be faithful to her husband lifelong. She even is not allowed to speak to other men in some cultures of Indian societies. A strong boundary is created justifying that women are to serve their husbands in ever steps of life:

Rima wept as if her heart were breaking when I told her I was leaving. Gratified by her tears, I made love to her with an ardor that surprised me, so exhausted by exertions I almost did not hear her ask" Should I return to my husband? He works as a coolie at the railway depot in Agartala. Should I join him while you are gone?. (129)

Importance of education is shown as an important aspect to attain freedom in life. The Musician's father tries to free his daughter through the education of music. By not arranging the marriage ceremony, he imparted her with the knowledge of education and thinks his duty to be fulfilled. General tendency in Indian societies, is that female are not allowed to have free single life. She should marry and she should be under her husband's watch. Though Musician is not unhappy with her single unmarried life, she is compelled to feel the essence of marriage as momentous part of life. She is condemned to feel the supremacy of male over female: "But I can not say that mine was an unhappy life"(216).

Mehta has unfolded the reality found in Indian societies so that to show the real condition of female, that depends upon national, cultural religious ideologies which are determined by Patriarchy.

Depiction of female characters in *A River Sutra* is to deconstruct and challenge the established notion. There are some male characters who help the women to realize the very condition of subordination and they try to free them from the fetters of suppression. Musician's father for example wants his daughter to be free and be able to realize the beauty of heart that is the freedom in fact. But unlike the father, mother worries about her daughter's future. Since she was ugly to look at, for the reason no man will marry her, no man will offer by for her hand:

On one side was my father's invitation to wander freely in the fields of music, where even a child like myself could fall on cushions of melody, run across bridges of notes, swing on the stretch of the veena's strings, make garlands of different colored notes to place before the goddesses of the ragas. Buy outside the room I saw my mother's face creased with worry, my ugliness reflected in her eyes. (213)

The novel issues out the theme of inequality, specially the differentiation between strong and weak, powerful and powerless which is the central defining aspect and the very assumption helps in promoting the concept that men should have greater authority than women and should rule over them. By doing this Mehta tries to condemn the patriarchal ideology which is dominating and is the hindrance in the path of proper development and equality. In *A River Sutra* women are exploited and are victimized. That is shown not to sympathize them but to empower them with the knowledge that the condition is worse in comparison to male.

The primary concern of the writer depicting women to be exploited and subordinate is to end patriarchal domination and to eradicate the oppression from family as well as from the society. The prevailing duality of women's status is shown in the novel. By doing this, the novelist tries to unfold the complex nature of woman's status in Indian society. To evoke the very reality of such duality is to make people aware of the situation so that they can do something for betterment of female's status in society. To create mass consciousness, Mehta presents her female characters as submissive creature as they are found in Indian society. Though the female characters are from the different strata of society, experience of oppression and domination is common to all. The diverse background of the female characters is significant to show the very reality of female's experience in different social backgrounds. The characterization is typical and important. Confrontation of the reality is significant aspect in the novel which is used as tool to resist against the brutality of patriarchal ideology.

Gita Mehta calls the readers to love womanhood in women and to resist dehumanizing concepts of masculinity, which is to be essential part of struggle. Such struggle is the process of bringing changes in human being that is vital to bring women in main stream. To eradicate patriarchal domination is the key factor of longing to make a world where every one can live fully, freely.

#### IV. Conclusion

Art sustains life. Artists present life in realistic manner through art. *A River Sutra* is a fictional creation which provides a distinctive way of looking at life.

Various literary devices are used to presents the issues of female. Female's quest for identity and the struggle is shown. After reading *A River Sutra*, a reader is likely to assume that India is dominated by patriarchal ideology. Female's position in India is dual and they are mystified.

Mehta being a female is noteworthy in depicting the experience of female which corresponds to the deconstructing notion of patriarchy. Male ideology is hegemonic in representation of female characters. Females in such subordination appear to be challenging to search their individual identity as a human being. Novelist has negated the actual living experience of women to depict the miserable condition and that is done not to empathize or sympathize them but to empower them. She has created a fictional world with characters and settings to represent the dominant ideology. Men are the power to rule over female and are given the authorial voice which reproduced the oppression over female. The Musician, Rima, Master Mohan's wife, and the Courtesan's daughter are the authorial voice to speak about the traumatic experience. Uma further is significant character who is living the life of duality and fluidity. The Narrator, Nitin Bose, the Naga Baba are the characters who represent male's ideology. Unlike them the musician's father is a character presented to show the changing attitude of male in the changing scenario. Directly or indirectly female are made to live under some sort of oppression that is to some extent is violence done over female.

Female are experiencing the physical violence as well as the psychological trauma. Various social, religious institutions compel female to live under domination.

In the name of marriage, family, social norms, values female are forced to accept such institutional violence as the customs and culture. There is double suppression over female because of race, gender, sex, and caste. In Indian societies caste system is dominant one which is responsible for the subsidiary role of female in family and social affairs. Female already had started to debate about the rights they have to have as a human being. Even then the condition is not satisfactory. Consciously or unconsciously female are not able to enjoy their life with full freedom. Mehta has openly discussed about the Indian culture, customs, traditions, religious belief which is dominated by a group of people in power and that is non other than male.

Females lack the access in progress and development not because they are biologically inferior, culturally backward, and peculiar subsidiary but because of the long rooted dominating patriarchal ideology that can not easily be rooted out. The setting of *A River Sutra* is isolated that signify the very isolated condition of female. Many incidents and references are included to support the representation of subordinate position of female. Reference of suicide of the Courtesan's daughter who died to reassert her love to her husband resembles to 'Sati' system. Uma was abducted by a 'shadhu' who was once sold to brothel house by her own father. This event of selling is the usual phenomenon found in Indian societies. The tragic story of the Musician helps in portrayal of India as dominating patriarchal country.

After a study on *A River Sutra*, we can look some issues which widely come in the texts of third world's context. How caste, race, gender, and sex become the determining factor in treating female to be secondary citizen? What are the causes behind the subordinate position of female? What is the brutality over female due to the rooted patriarchal ideology? How marriage is seen in the contexts of third world? The questions regarding the status of female in third world countries is significantly raised in the novel. And Mehta through the diverse characters try to raise the burning questions and presents the answers through the very characters.

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