

GITA MEHTA'S LYRICAL STORY "A RIVER SUTRA" A- CRITIC

R.Nagajothi, PhD

Research Scholar, Department of English, Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai.

Dr.R.Viswanathan,

Assistant Professor of English, Thiagarajar College of Preceptors, Madurai.

Email: drvisva64@gmail.com

ABSTRACT- Gita Mehta is a well known novelist. She is a unique woman novelist. Mehta is a witty, opinionated person who is always open to new ideas and experiences. Gita Mehta's successive is *A River Sutra* (1993). It is a more deep by focused work. The novel goes around India's holy river the Narmada. The series of tales can be taken as modified Sutras. The energy of the novel is formed through Indian culture and mythology. Classical Sanskrit drama, Hindu cultural anthropology, Sufi poetry, Indian classical music are reflected and reiterated in the work.

KEYWORDS: Tranquility, Conceptualizing, *A River Sutra*, Pilgrims, Mythology.

Introduction

Gita Mehta is a well known novelist. She is a unique woman novelist. Mehta is a witty, opinionated person who is always open to new ideas and experiences. At the age of forty, she did a rescue equipment jump with a British military squadron. But she did not challenge herself with physically taxing adventures in pursuit of eternal youth, she assured Christa Worthington of Harper's Bazaar in 1989: "I am an Asian woman...Possibly because one is Indian; it's not alarming to grow up. As we grow older, we're given more authority and respect" (Patel 71). In her piece "Making India Accessible" published in Publisher's Weekly in 1997, Wendy Smith describes Mehta's home thus'

Gita Mehta was a journalist. She directed documentaries about India for BBC and ITV before she comes to the literary career. She said that writing fiction is not easy especially dealing with facts. When she started writing, fiction and non-fiction she did it with the self-confidence of an insider's familiarity

Gita and Sonny Mehta's apartment is an oasis of tranquility in midtown Manhattan. Outside on a chilly March day, Park Avenue traffic is at its mid-afternoon worst and the chatter of kids from a school next door nearly drowns out the honking horns and screeching brakes. Inside, all distracting sounds seem to be absorbed by the crammed floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, custom-built when the couple moved to New York from London in 1987 when Sonny replaced Robert Gottlieb as Knopf editor-in-chief.

Some writers incorporate Indian culture, history and Indian way of life into their literary works. Such works gives Indian a universal platform to Indians. Gita Mehta fits into this frame of mind. Her works focuses around Indian themes and Indian way of life. Her family was dedicated to the freedom movement. It has rooted her deeply in our Indian soil. Being a novelist or journalist, she has woven the essence of Indian culture and traditions. Experience of languor, nostalgia, historical and political changes in India and the recurrent themes of east-West encounters are the important areas of focus in her works. Gita Mehta is cautious enough in not allowing any other themes in her novels rather than Indian minds.

Gita Mehta's works are inseparable from her life. Therefore the readers need to have a quick glance at her biography and her works in the following few pages. Gita Mehta was born in 1943 to a family extremely active in the struggle for Indian independence. Her father is Biju Patnaik. He was a famous Indian freedom fighter. He became the major political leader of Orissa. When she was born her grandmother named her Joan of Arc. She was born into a community of freedom fighters who were often forced to go underground. Her father was imprisoned for his political activities after several weeks of her birth. Gita Mehta was grown up in the midst of such freedom activities. She often saw her father in prison and her mother kept tracing him from prison to prison. In this situation, Gita's parents could not spend time with their children. They worried about their children's future. Therefore they sent their children to the boarding school in India where she completed her early education. She did her graduation in Bombay University and she was sent by parents to study her master degree in English.

Gita Mehta's successive is *A River Sutra* (1993). It is a more deep by focused work. The novel goes around India's holy river the Narmada. The series of tales can be taken as modified Sutras. The energy of the novel is formed through Indian culture and mythology. Classical Sanskrit drama, Hindu cultural anthropology, Sufi poetry, Indian classical music are reflected and reiterated in the work. The river Narmada stands for the culture of oneness and the theme of the novel is integration of various religions and philosophies with the geography of the river. *A River Sutra* is a modern Indian work which hints at the problems faced by the modern

India. When the novelist actually came to writing after conceptualizing the idea of this novel, she was quite doubtful about the subject and wondered whether it will be pleasant to the Western readers. She was very much cautious about it.

The novel *A River Sutra* contains many interlinked stories within it. They are narrated to the narrator by other characters of the novel. Mehta presents unconnected stories in the novel. The stories are about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics, music teachers and tribal folks. The narrator is unnamed in the novel. He gains knowledge on the shores of Narmada where he meets many people and learns various ideas of life from them. The narrator reveals very little about himself. He seems to have no life story, on main event that has made him choose to live a retired life on the banks of the Narmada River.

In contrast to this, the people who meet the narrator have narrated stories which reveal the disorderly nature of human life. The novel *A River Sutra* is set in the banks of the river. In the novel the narrator often meets someone who comes to rescue in the banks of the river which gives shelter to everyone after facing some disturbance in their normal life. The narrator listens to their stories and gains experience/knowledge from them. Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* has been widely spoken as an Indian Canterbury Tales. It has a sequence of lyrical stories. The common conjunctive link in the novel is Narmada. They take place on the banks of the river Narmada. *A River Sutra* derives its vitality through more than one narrator. The narrator and Tariq Mia give the connecting link to the various characters, experiences and stories. *A River Sutra* is not an unlinked unpredictable novel. Nityanandam points out:

The first person narrator in each story helps us to get into the very skin of the characters from the Jain Monk seeking to free himself of the fetters of worldly desire through the vows of poverty, celibacy and non-violence" to the musician who learnt about the soul of the ragas, of its rasa which gave it life and the melodies of the six ragas that sustain the harmonies of living things. (144)

Gita Mehta has chosen the river bank for the protagonist. The people come to the river bank with predicaments and problems, seeking spiritual peace. The novelist presents different aspects of life and its problems, through the life-stories of various characters in *A River Sutra*. It is not the protagonist's firsthand experience of life but his active involvement in the happenings that the novelist presents.

The novelist has depicted the finished stories or events that have happened in the near past. He becomes completely involved in these happenings and many questions have clouded his mind. He drives him to ponder deeply into the matters of life and death. Each tale is a major enquiry into the tragic reality of life. It brings a unique problem with it. They deal with the relationship of man with the world where he lives. It is possible for a man to exceed the limitations of his own self. The bureaucrat comes to the banks of the *Narmada* for tranquility, instead learns his life about his life. The novelist has given her views about Indian through stories.

They are *The Monk's story*, *The Musician's story*, *The Executive's story*, *The Courtesan's story*, *The Naga Baba's story* and *the Minstrel's story*. These stories give vivid pictures of Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics, music teachers, tribal folk beliefs and the anthropologists. Such mixture of different aspects is kept tightly. They are connected by the presence of the Narmada.

The novel *A River Sutra* opens with the story of the narrator. He is a retired officer of Indian Administrative Services. He is the manager of The Narmada Guest House. He comes to the place to leave from all his worldly desires and lead the life of a recluse. He considers him as a *Vanprasthi*. *Vanprasthi* means a man who is trying to withdraw from the world. He has enjoyed his worldly life and consummated his due obligations.

The narrator is a emeritus civil servant. He has enjoyed special civil liberties during his service. Now he is on the bank of The Narmada in the quest for peace and equanimity. The location of the guest house is ideal for him to stay away from the town. The narrator loves the river, its surrounding and the timberland. His minute observation of the nature around him has beautiful depict. The narrator has keen interest to know about the people those who come to the river bank. The stories induce peculiar feelings in him and they stimulate his curiosity towards various elements of life.

A River Sutra explores the diversity of India which includes Hindu, Muslim, Janis and Tribes men alike and how all of them are interwoven alike. The setting of the novel is rich and culturally diverse as the central nameless narrator meets several people of different strata of the society, they listen to their stories and thus reveals the diversity of Indian culture actually. The title of the novel, *A River Sutra* itself signifies the basic theme of the novel that is Narmada as the binding factor. It binds variety and difference diffuse in the Indian society. Along with the central theme of the novel several other issues also could be analyzed and interpreted well. The whole novel is bound with the river Narmada which exemplify cultural and spiritual elements having richness, differences but an obvious unity as well. Religion of India and music are detailed

throughout the novel. Love is one such major aspect which is reflected in the novel as the essential emotion of life.

The stories of various pilgrims to the river tap the deep veins of Indian myth and mythology and artistic traditions while also forming a prose meditation on the country's secular humanist tradition. It contains many interconnect stories within it. They are narrated to the narrator by other characters of the novel. Mehta presents unconnected stories in the novel. The stories are about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics and music teachers, tribal folks.

Conclusion

Gita Mehta's narration of morality in *A River Sutra*. It deals with the themes of virtue love, lust, renunciations etc., And the themes of spirituality with places and pilgrims itself with the river Narmada forms a sutra. This narration spotlize the fact of spirituality that it is futile to seek nirvana anywhere else because one can find true salvation only in one's own self. In this paper highlights the Narmadha river and its natural resource

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