

INNER JOURNEY IN RAMA MEHTA'S *INSIDE*

THE HAVELI

Rama Mehta's *Inside the Haveli* (1977) presents the story of the protagonist Geeta's identity-crisis in the cross-cultural content. Brought up in Bombay, Geeta the independent young woman struggles to maintain her modern identity in a traditional world of the haveli of Udaipur, where she is married. Therefore, the novel projects a journey to find woman space in the society and to search one's own authentic identity. The novel presents mind-boggling variety of theme as well as style. Geeta displays a disgruntled self which is at war with the patriarchal and conventional society. Geeta tried to speak in a distinctively personal voice, among the collective voice, asserting the autonomy of women.

Identity is a central concept for much contemporary cultural and literary criticism, which, along with its even vaguer terminological twin the 'self' has become a cliché without becoming clear. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar find "the woman's quest for self-definition the underlying plot of nineteenth century writing by women" (Gilbert and Susan Gubar 76), while Elaine Showalter sees 'self-discovery' 'a search for identity' (Showalter 13), as the main theme of women's literature since 1920's. *Inside the Haveli* explores a journey the protagonist undergoes to overcome her search for identity at the mental, social and physical level. Her journey starts in Physical manner when she moves to Udaipur by train after getting married to Ajay, an educated science Professor having aristocratic norms. There is also a movement from present to past and past to present which occurs in the mind of Geeta. She often feels nostalgic about her past, as being modern, she feels herself an outsider, unable to adjust herself

in accordance with the taboos and norms of conventionally webbed society around her. The narrator's description highlights: "Two years ago when she (Geeta) left her parents home in Bombay, she did not know that she was leaving behind a way of life in which there was a free mingling of men and women" (15). A Recipient of Sahitya Akademi Award (1979), *Inside the Haveli* presents an intimate picture of a system which existed since feudal times and is a revelation of attitudes towards women and their status in a certain section of Indian society. It is a presentation of life behind purdah in Udaipur and focuses on how Geeta arranges to be fitted in the most orthodox family of Udaipur and in the haveli as well as it is the study of metamorphosis brought to the haveli by her advent.

As being sociologist, Mehta has taken sociological approach, "the approach which starts with conviction that the relation of literature to society is vitally important" (Scott 125). As Coser points out, "fiction provides us with a wealth of sociologically relevant material. Literature, like sociology is pre-eminently concerned with man's social world, his adaptation to it, and his desire to change it" (Coser 3). It unfolds the classical clash between tradition and modernity. The two cities Udaipur and Bombay in *Inside the Haveli* stand for tradition and modernity respectively. "In Bombay, Geeta enjoys full freedom but in Udaipur she has to abide by the form and the etiquette of the haveli" (29). As Vijayalakshmi Seshadri says, "With the new women's writing starting in the 1970s, the conventional plot of the novel was replaced by the quest of the new heroine" (Seshadri 60). The topic of self-exploration which pervades the entire production of the contemporary women's writing, gives the heroine a **questing** status, thus liberating her from all the mythological and constraining stereotypes. As Uma Chakrawati in *Patriarchy* has pointed out that:

Women are seen as irredeemably weak, feckless and over-promiscuous. The social structure and practice of language itself naturalize notions of appropriate and inappropriate female behavior. A society lives by to be constructed rather than given and clearly authorized by systems of patriarchal powers. (Chakrawati 134)

Social structure and system postulate an inside/outside dichotomy on gender basis. In *Inside the Haveli*, this 'Inside' is assigned only to women, as women have no space in 'Outside' society. As V. Geetha notes:

The inside/outside dyad separates women and men, assigning women to the inside of homes, cultures – and men to the outer world, of labor, production and rule... and the outside is often a form for the exercise of local patriarchal authority... the home and hearth are conceptualized in folk, popular and much of literary. Culture – as an essentially 'feminine' space, whereas the outer world of commerce, rule and war is seen as a 'man's world'. Words in most Indian languages designate the woman as the queen of the household, as its guardian angel, its custodian and so on; where as a man is described as the one that brings in an income, as a protector and guardian of the hearth in his capacity as a public figure and as one who fashions the world, makes history. (Geetha 144 – 145)

Inside the Haveli also deals with this inside/outside dyad as the women of haveli. They are passive sufferers; unable to remove the conventional, orthodox and traditional rules and taboos of the haveli. However, Geeta has been differently brought up. She has gone to college and studied with boys. How would such a girl learn to live in the constricted atmosphere of a world of deep-rooted customs? Before getting married, Geeta is given an advice by her mother: “Keep your head covered; never argue with your elders; respect your mother-in-law and do as she tells you. Don’t talk too much.” (16) Meenakshi Thapan is of the view that “Women who transgress their habitual, ‘assigned’ socio-physical spaces run the risk of being labeled as of ‘loose virtue; and are subjected to strong censure by older member” (Thapan 115). Geeta tries to be an ideal daughter but her modern views come into clash when she first lands to Udaipur:

The minute she had put her foot on the platform she was immediately encircled by women singing but their faces were covered. One of them came forward, pulled her sari over her face and exclaimed in horror, ‘Where do you come from that you show your face to the world?’ Geeta, bewildered, frightened managed to get in to the car without talking to the women who followed her, singing as loud as they could. . . [When] Geeta had lifted her face and pulled the sari back to see. ‘No, no, you cannot do that,’ Pari had snapped, pulling back the sari over her face. ‘In Udaipur we keep purdah. Strange eyes must not see your beautiful face.’(17)

The above statement indicates the menace of Purdah system. According to Jung, the veil and Purdah are regarded as features of 'psychic empowerment' (19 Jung). Jasbir Jain in her article *Erasing the Margins: Questioning Purdah* states:

The practice of purdah in many Asian countries is not merely a form of dress or custom, but is indicative of a whole social system. Purdah reinforces the idea of female subordination in built in patriarchal societies; it also defines family and political structures and constitutes the basis of gender ideology. (Jain 243)

Purdah in India exists both in Hindu as well as in Muslim society and is both a manifestation and a symbol of power relations. The Muslims brought with them the institution of Purdah which segregated women not only from any activity outside their houses but even from their close male relatives. With the passage of time, many of the Hindu families adopted this custom and gradually it spread all over India and women started covering their head and partly the face. Tabassum F. Sheikh in her article *Muslim Women and Social Life* states about the practice of Purdah:

Purdah is a customary practice initiated by men and it is responsible for the subordinate role of Muslim women in the family. Moreover they are of the opinion that, in general, purdah is the root cause of the backwardness of the Muslim community. (Sheikh 154)

Ideologically, Purdah is the oldest form of colonization, of domination and of control. Here it is the female body, which acquires the metaphor of land, and it is this body, which needs to be controlled. Female bodies become what Foucault calls ‘docile bodies’. In an article *Women’s space “Inside the Haveli”:* *incarceration or insurrection?* the veil, although seeming to define boundaries of invisible borders and impose rules of space and sexual difference, is considered a ‘prison’ to the writers such as Fatima Mernissi. Shahida Lateef calls this veiling “an extreme form of sex role differentiation that contentiously provides both separate worlds and symbolic shelter” (Lateef 133).

My father-in-law never heard my voice.

My husband never saw my face.

I never saw the gate to my husband’s house.

Quotation recorded in 1954, Leigh Minturn (73)

The above quotation is typical of the descriptions of restrictions imposed by the complex customs of purdah on Rajput women of that time. Purdah is a severe form of cloistering women, observed by high-caste Hindus. This custom is so pervasive that young women usually cover their faces even in front of older low-caste serving men. This is a sign of respect. Purdah is based on the principle of inequality and establishes itself on the dual strategy of control and exclusion. It is often talked about as modesty, izzat, laaj, sharam, and is symbolic of conformity, while the concept of independence, freedom and self are all relegated to a world outside it. The practice of keeping purdah can be seen in upper–caste women rather than lower–caste. Sociologists Indira Parikh and Pulin Garg in article *Women’s space “Inside the Haveli”:* *incarceration or*

insurrection? describe the traditional state of purdah in India where upper-class women live mostly indoors:

They come as brides and leave only for the funeral pyre. The husband's home is their prison, their castle, and their palace. They believe, or are made to believe, or have no other choice but believe, that this is all for their good . . . however, within the walls of their home, within the feudal system of a large joint family, run parallel themes of exploitation, intrigue and counter-intrigue, all revolving around the control of resources through legacy and heritage. This is the only life they know as wives. (Parikh and Garg 90)

Rama Mehta's non-fiction text *From Purdah to Modernity* describes a fascinating study of her concern with the women and her country's coexisting and conflicting trends of time. In Hindu household, the observance of purdah falls to the portion of daughters-in-law. Geeta feels herself like other women of haveli as a doll. She feels:

Women behind thick walls had none of the exuberance of the women in the streets. They were like dressed – up dolls kept in a glass case for a marionette show. Women of the upper classes did not talk in the streets. (110)

Rama Mehta has very deftly presented that Upper class women are more confined and bounded in everything even in language also. When Geeta gets in the car and goes to Gopalji's haveli, on her way:

Geeta's eyes fell on the village women carrying their baskets of vegetables on their heads and their faces uncovered . . . As the car slowed down Geeta saw the eager faces of shoppers starting at the car , and she envied, their freedom. They were free to choose saris from a hundred different shades and designs, but she could select only from the bundle that the accountant brought to the house. Geeta watched some children pushing their way through vendor, and she yearned to join the happy boys and girls. (108–109)

Franz Steiner describes this as 'head and dorsal taboo' (Steiner 36-37). Even Laxmi, a maid–servant, is rebuked with these words: “Look at you with face uncovered. Were it any other man, he would beat out, but Gangaram is a saint!” (10). Even when her own daughter's birth is celebrated, Geeta has to sit in a corner with her face covered. Sometimes she feels suffocated in the veil and cannot inhale the fresh and clean air. So she pulls back her sari. Sometimes it becomes difficult for her to identify who is who because, with their heads bent and their faces covered, everyone looks alike. Geeta hates this 'purdah taboo'. Leigh Minturn in *Sita's Daughters* analyzes “the tradition of purdah in Rajput families and the manner in which it restricts interaction of wives with their husband and other members of their husband's household. These restrictions are designed to ensure that the alliance between husband and wife is

subordinated to the alliance of men with their consanguineous kinsmen” (Minturn 45–46). Resorted to within the family, it is not only a segregation between men and women, but also symbolic of the hierarchical position. “Architecturally, traditional houses,” says Jasbir Jain, “often has separate living quarters for women referred to as the ‘Zenanas’, with men spending most of their time in the front portion of the house. In Bengal there has been the practice of *antahpur*s, literally meaning the interior of the house” (Jain 249). This symbolized domestic space. The haveli is in Mehta’s novel also built with the same plan---

The Courtyards divide the haveli into various sections. The separation of self-contained units was necessary because the women of Udaipur kept purdah. Their activities were conducted within their apartments. The courtyards conducted their section with that of the men. The etiquette established through years permitted only close male relatives to enter the women’s apartment. Even so no man entered the Courtyard without being properly announced. (6)

For all that Geeta, has had no direct conversation with her husband’s grandfather and father, and has lived isolated from the men. Even after two years her father-in-law and his father were strangers to her. She had never spoken a word to them. Sudhir Kakar analyzing this situation comments: Communication with the older men is minimal (if it exists at all) since they . . . are traditionally expected to maintain a posture of formal restraint in the presence of the newcomer . . . (Kakar 63). Bhagwant Singh ji, her father-in-law inquires about Geeta’s health via maid-servants: ‘How is Binniji,’ he

asked Pari (83). Geeta hates this etiquette, this authority taboo that prevents a daughter-in-law from talking freely to her father-in-law. She is unhappy to realize that “even after seven years. I am a stranger to those that are mine, and I will always remain a stranger (83).” The authority taboo controls a woman’s relationship not only with her father-in-law but also with her husband. Dube observes that “an Indian husband and wife are not supposed to show any special concern for each other” (Dube 153). There is hardly any opportunity for them to meet during the day. Geeta and Ajay are no exception to this rule. Ajay realizes her need and occasionally comes upstairs on some excuse or the other. Once Ajay wants to take Geeta out for a drive, but she says, “No, I am not going out alone with you; the whole of Udaipur will be talking the minute we are out of gate” (166). Thus, neither she can enjoy freedom with her husband nor can she fondle and kiss her own child in the presence of her parents-in-law. The presence of authority feels every where. Nothing is done without consulting Geeta’s grand father-in-law and father-in-law. It is around their desires that the whole routine of the house revolved. “In the haveli men were regarded with awe as if they were Gods. They were the masters and their slightest wish was a command; women kept in their shadow and followed their instructions with meticulous care.” (21)

Gender discrimination is found throughout the novel. In the social structure, how the meaning of gender is constructed and reconstructed both biologically and ideologically. Gender expresses the universal inequality between women and men. Virtually, every society known to us is founded upon assumptions of gender difference and the policies of gender inequality. Rowbotham claims that we bow to the laws. Men give us status outside home. The social standing

of our models that have been upheld for us are still Sita and Savitri and an occasional Drupadi. In *Inside the Haveli*, Mehta also satirizes on this issue. In the haveli, when Sita the daughter of Lakshmi maid and Gangaram servant was born, there was no joy or excitement. Their reaction to the birth was dull, common and ideological. The following lines invite attention:

‘It is a girl,’ sighed Lakshmi’s husband Gangaram when he heard the child’s cry. He and Khyali, the cook sat on the verandah of the haveli waiting to hear the news of the birth. Gangaram was right; had it been a boy, Sarju would have come out in the rain and thunder shouting in her shrill voice, ‘it is a boy; it is boy. Give me money.’ Gangaram took a long puff of his bidi and then threw it away in disgust. ‘Why worry? God takes care of all those He sends into the world. Girls are a burden, I admit,’ said Khyali with sympathy. (7-8)

In *Socialization*, Leigh Minturn analyzes the fact that: “The differential status of boys and girls is apparent from birth. The midwife is paid twice as much as for delivering a boy as for delivering a girl. The birth of a girl occasions no public ceremony” (Minturn 273-274). Stereotypically, a Daughter-in-law is always blessed for having son. In the novel, when Geeta touched her grandmother-in-law’s feet, she is blessed as: “May you have many many sons, my child, and may you always wears red” (33). These words were barely registered in Geeta’s mind. Being a daughter one has to learn all the domestic tasks. Education is remained as secondary thing. When Vijay stands first in her class, Bhagwat Singh ji’s says: “Coming first is all right, Vijay, but

you must also learn to cook and sew. Don't become like your mother" (153). R.W. Connell, a prominent sociologist analyzing this discrimination comments in a poem:

*If I were a girl, I'd have to attract a guy wear make up; sometimes
Wear he latest style of clothes and try to be likeable.
I probably wouldn't play and physical sports like football or soccer.
I don't think I would enjoy myself around men in fear of rejection
Or under the pressure of attracting them.*

At the beginning course of her Journey to find a female identity, Geeta remains silent and passive. Along with physical veiling, emotions must also be hidden, Geeta finds that although the other women thrive on gossip, they never expressed an opinion and never revealed their feelings:

When at nineteen Geeta had come as a bride at Jeewan Niwas (Haveli), she was lively and spontaneous. She had not been taught to stint in giving affection; nor was she taught to keep her feelings concealed. Her parents had encouraged her to speak her mind . . . In the haveli no one really expressed their feelings. They covered their emotions in an elaborate exchange of formal gestures and words. Even her husband talked to his parents as if they were dignitaries with whom he could take no liberties. (32)

Veiling the face is symbolism of masking inner of emotion. In terms of the traditional Indian theory of aesthetics, this concealment could be compared to an externally imposed denial of *rasa*, or aesthetic emotion. *Rasa* is defined as a dynamic process of aesthetic response through which an individual perceives both the inner meaning of an art object or performance, and an appreciation of particular *rasa* (emotion) it evokes. Thus, this restriction is not only a physical restriction but also a spiritual one. At first, Geeta kept her inner emotion reserved. Even after two years in the haveli she felt nervous when relatives gathered; she was still not comfortable moving around with her face covered (29). It is called 'reticence taboo' which means the behavior of not revealing one's thoughts readily (Karve 242). The women of haveli remark: "She will never adjust. She is not one of us" (29). Her mother-in-law states that even an educated girl can be molded (30). Geeta never lost her temper. She was always seemingly considerate and gentle. She never raised her voice. She was patient and prepared to listen (31). Lakoff claims that "women are denied access to 'powerful' styles of speech (Lakoff 71). As Gayatri Spivak points out in her famous essay *Can the subaltern speak?* "The voice of subaltern woman remains silent and irreclaimable" (Spivak 35). Spivak regards the power of speech as synonymous with agency where as Jung suggests that "Silence could be language through which women in this land realized themselves" (20 Jung).

It seemed to Geeta that the women of the haveli were waiting for the day when they would be freed from their confinement. But on the surface they showed no dissatisfaction. Geeta finds Ajay a supportive husband but like Geeta, He is also meek and passive deep- rooted in life-long traditions and norms, unable to break conventions. He was not prepared to do anything to challenge his father's authority that he admired and respected. He said firmly: "I have not given up the idea of going

to Delhi University. We will some day, but I do not know when. Just now my father needs me here. I do not want to leave him alone, he is getting old . . .” (53). The novel has symbolic significance too. Haveli symbolizes tradition. Geeta is also inclined towards these traditions of haveli and feels pride of being the daughter-in-law of the haveli. Nothing can cause damage to this deep-rooted haveli: “Sangram Singh ji’s haveli like so many others of the nobility was in a gully . . . But like a banyan tree, once in had taken roof it spread. Today the haveli has many courtyards with many rooms. Its roots have sunk deep in the soil and nothing shakes the foundations . . .” (16) Srinivasa Iyengar ironically says: “Within the haveli, all is tradition-bound, and while this means strength and security, it also means isolation and stagnation” (Iyengar 753). The geographical description reveals the traditions and modernity as old and new city metaphorically: “The wall still divides Udaipur into two halves. The new township is beyond the old well and the city within it” (3). In two paragraphs of contrasting visions of each other, the novel points to the distance in terms which focus on the continuity with the past for the old city and an absence of collective memory for the new township. New Township is a body without past, without memory, without soul and without roots. The main theme of the novel starts with Geets’s alienation from the life of the haveli and leads to her gradual acceptance of its mores and rules. She learns and comes to respect some of the traditions. She starts feeling pride in these traditions.

She came to love the veil that her face, this allowed her to think while the others talked. To her delight she had discovered that through her thin muslin sari, she could see everyone and yet not be seen by them. (23)

At first, she tries to take comfort in the hope that her stay in Udaipur is temporary. Her husband was not quite satisfied with the University. They had often discussed the idea of going to Delhi. Geeta felt better as she dwelt on the prospect of leaving the haveli:

Geeta had been gradually drawn into the life of the haveli without even wanting to resist it. There was something in this way of life that frightened and fascinated her at the same time. Ajay understood her and said: This life in purdah is not meant for you . . . You are right, we men are spoilt, but surely you know how important you are to me. I never thought that you would also make my parents happy. Do you know, Geeta, I could never have been content in Udaipur had you not adjusted to the ways of the haveli. I would then have really run away from here . . . I am really proud of you, but that's little consolation to you. (52–54)

Geeta, though an educated but being an idealized Indian wife, was unable to reveal her opposition to her husband's idea, remains mum and "the dream of leaving Udaipur died in her heart. She realized that her husband was too rooted in the traditions of Udaipur . . . At last she was sure that her life was to be in the haveli" (54). Geeta, too, had changed. She had lost much of her girlish impetuosity; her temper was subdued. She had gradually forgotten her own carefree girlhood, in which there had been uninhibited laughter and freedom. Though, she still kept a little apart,

Geeta had become more and more involved in the routine of the house hold; she accepted the discipline of the haveli without protest. But there were many times when she felt the crushing weight of the walls that shut off the outside of the walls. Trying to search her inner self, her true identity, she sinks to her past, thinking something. Mehta has deftly explained her psychological state:

Geeta sat on a mat, a shawl wrapped round her shoulders; her hands were spread over the crackling twigs. She stared at the little flames that erupted each time a twig has added to the fire. The flames lit her face but her eyes were remote as if she was somewhere else, and there was weariness in her expression.

(88)

For the first time, she comes out of silence and raises her voice, crushing the walls of tradition when she demands education for Sita, the daughter of maid Lakshmi and servant Gangaram. Geeta sat up erect as if she no longer could contain her thoughts and said with quiet authority, “Pari ji, Sita must go to school” (198). But Pari opposed here at this decision. Geeta felt out raged at the maid’s accusation. Her eyes flashed in challenge, but she controlled her natural impulse to answer back. Geeta’s inner state to find her self-identity is described, as the room seemed to suffocate her, she felt trapped in the haveli, with its tradition and its unchanging patterns. She thought of the big gilt-framed portraits in the men’s apartments. Six generations of the family looking down on her, each face reflecting the confidence of his lineage. Geeta said to herself:

What if I cannot trace my ancestry beyond my grandfather?
That is no reason why I should surrender; she was filled with
rebellion and her face stiffened. She was determined not to be
crushed by the haveli. (100)

Geeta is fickle-minded. She is in conflict with her own inner self. Geeta was pricked by her own fluctuating ideas at Vijay's marriage: "the violence of her thoughts sent shafts of pain through her head" (164). After winning permission for classes from Bhagwat Singh ji, she thought that she had taken the wrong decision. But her decision won appraisal from the women of the haveli later on as Sita being educated, got suitable match for her marriage. Manju, her Bua sa appreciates: "I am glad you are bringing new ideas into the haveli" (115). Geeta found the woman of the haveli shared a common past. Tradition was like a fortress protecting them from the outside world, giving them security and a sense of superiority (114). Geeta felt an outsider, an onlooker.

Geeta also brought winds of change in the haveli when she started teachings the children of the servants and maids. But Kanwarni sa, her mother-in-law was not happy with her this activity. She remarks: "Let Binni ji amuse herself. Her enthusiasm won't last long; she will soon get tired of the women. Then let see what she starts next" (161). During this Journey to bring modernity in the haveli, she has to face many comments against her. As she had developed an admiration for haveli, she is filled with outrage when she heard critical words about haveli and against her mother-in-law:

The desire to change the life in the haveli seemed to have subsided in her. Instead she said to herself: 'How dare anyone say a word against the haveli, these classes are not worth continuing. I will stop the girls from coming.' There was a new fervor in her, which she had not experienced before . . . There was none of the desperation of being enclosed within windowless walls that she wanted to shatter. 'I don't want to leave Udaipur now. The haveli has made me a willing prisoner within its walls. How stupid I was not to see all that it holds. Where else in the world would I get this kind of love and concern?' (170)

Geeta no longer felt trapped in the haveli. She found that she had changed. She had seen the value of kinship ties and wanted to preserve the ancestral dignity of the haveli. She did not like the rigidity, but what irked her most was the ill-defined nature of her role in the family. She could not become one with the haveli women nor did she want to. She felt great pleasure during her classes. She also started sewing classes and engaged a woman to teach them to cut and embroidery. She revolted against her mother-in-law when there was a talk about Vijay's marriage. She at once speaks:

'Bhabhi, whatever happens; Vijay can't get engaged at this age,' blurted out Geeta. Bhagwat Singh ji's wife looked up surprised. This was the first time that Geeta had spoken in a raise voice to her . . . After the outburst, Geeta went up to her room and lay down on her bed . . . [she] was once again filled

with hate for all that Udaipur stood for. 'What a mistake I made to stay on here; I could have easily persuaded Ajay to leave. This had to come sooner or later. Now I am really trapped and cannot escape. But on this point I will never give in whatever happens. If I have ruined my life, the children are not going to ruin theirs. (205–206)

Geeta disagrees with Vijay's marriage when she is still a child. When Bhagwat Singh ji called Geeta and told her that he had told Daulat Singh ji that under no circumstances would he permit Vijay to be taken out of school. Geeta made her self convinced but some part of her conscious mind was not convinced. She was agitated with the thought. Geeta was glad that no one could see her face and guess the agitation and uncertainties of her private world (252–253). Finally, she emerges as the new lady of the haveli. When Bhagwat Singh ji dies Kanwarni Sa says: Don't cry, my child. Your father-in-law lived honorably. He has gone, leaving you the mistress of this house . . . Now it is your turn. (264)

The novel portrays the educated heroine's journey from modernity back into the traditional world behind the veil, where the severe restrictions of etiquette and subservience dominate life. Thus, Geeta is transformed into the mistress of the haveli and is entrusted with the duty of continuance of its traditions. When Rama Mehta wrote this book, the society itself was passing through the birth pangs of transition from tradition to modernity. The ethos of the novel is neither the victory nor the defeat but of harmony and understanding between the two opposing ideas of

modernity and tradition. The novel also brings attention to the aristocratic feudal system of Rajasthan. The following statement points:

She (Pari) had come to the haveli as a child of eight. The year her father brought her to the mansion there was a terrible famine in Rajasthan . . . He did not want to see her suffer from hunger and then slowly wither away like the other three. So he decided to give her away. In this he was following a common practice of feudal Rajasthan where villagers in desperate circumstances gave their sons and daughters to the care of aristocratic families. (9)

The novel focuses on the superstitious world inside the haveli and the stereotypical ideology of the haveli women. A widow's presence on religious occasions is considered inauspicious. In the novel, the victim of the ideology regarding widow is Pari. She states: "Then once I became a widow, she would not let me put on colored saris or bangles like the other girls. I don't know what colors a widow can put on in your part of India, but in Udaipur we can only wear grey or black" (23). Leigh Minturn states in an article entitled *Widows: Sati, Rand, Bhaktani* discussing about the condition of widows in Indian society states:

When the husband dies, then the crown is gone. Widows are unlucky. Hindus believe that misfortune is the result of bad *karma* earned by sins of previous lives, and widows may be blamed for their husbands' deaths. They are an unwelcome

burden on their husbands' families, particularly if they do not have grown sons . . . Rajput widows are still forbidden to remarry but remained in their husbands' homes as financial burdens and potential sources of scandal . . . A widow could escape this miserable life by dying with her husband on his funeral pyre. (Minturn 221-222)

The haveli people depend on Arjun, a village common man whom they regarded as fortune-teller. When Lakshmi runs away from haveli, Khyali says that only Arjun, the fortune-teller will know where she has gone. Both Pari and Khyali go to Arjun. When Khyali took out a five rupee note, Arjun at once leaves hukka: "As if there was magic in the paper note, Arjun . . . crossed one thin leg over the other and closed his eyes. His face was strained as if he were trying to pour all his energy of mind and body to see better what was happening in this world" (77). Ajay appreciates Geeta for bringing change in the haveli. He says that now the haveli women will come out of traditional way of life and purdah too. Geeta replies:

The change won't come as quickly as you think. You don't know the women here; they are all rooted in ignorance and superstition. For the slightest thing they run to Arjun the fortune-teller, even though he was so wrong with Lakshmi. He is such a convincing crook to these ignorant women. Ninety-nine times out of hundred he is wrong, but still it is to him they all go, clutching money in their hands. How can you educate such people? (138)

They all delve deep into *Karma ideology*. In this world, we get because of our past actions. So we should accept it as God's will. Pari says: "it was my fate to be a widow in this life. I had to learn to accept that. All of us have to pay for our past actions" (116-117). Pari mumbles: "No one but God can change one's destiny" (128). The novel ends abruptly revealing tradition gets the upper hand on the modernity. It is a blend of acceptance and rejection, flexibility and rigidity and above all revolt if the occasion demands and compromises for peaceful life. Though, the report given by Shikha Trivedy testifies to the fact that "even today people victimize their children in order to uphold their family honor and social customs. It is because of these traditions and taboo customs that we are far behind from western countries" (Trivedy 16-22). Z.N. Patil has explored "Indian kinship organization and Taboo customs in *Inside the Haveli*" (Patil 26). According to him:

We find Geeta passing from out of the constricted, suffocating atmosphere of the haveli to some breezes of freedom. But Mehta's attitude towards this conflict between tradition and modernity is ambiguous. Nowhere do we hear the author talking either explicitly or implicitly against the traditional, auto telic world of the haveli. Neither does she explicitly talk in favor of the little freedom Geeta gets at the end of the novel. Hence it appears that Geeta is now shown as the preserver of traditions of haveli. (Patil 32)

It could be said that the women presented in the novel are on the verge of being/becoming. Homi Bhabha terms it as “in-between spaces [that] provide the terrain for elaborating new strategies of selfhood – singular and communal – that initiate new signs of identity and innovative sites of collaboration and contestation” (Bhabha 2). The novel projects the educated woman who is unable to enfranchise the traditional background in which she is reared. Geeta’s acceptance of purdah passively clearly indicates her denial of self-identity about which she is in search. It reveals Geeta’s Journey from Unorthodox culture of her Parents to the conservative culture of the haveli and she also faces a quest for her identity which is curbed with purdah and which she is unable to get in the last. She has gone from dissatisfaction to acceptance, from tolerance to generosity, and finally to magnanimity. Talking about the style of the narrator, Mehta has exercised down-to-earth language. Very deftly Mehta has entangled various themes into one novel. Like distance-technique of Bertolt Brecht, she has distanced herself as she is giving no comments or remarks, and has left to the understanding and comprehensibility of readers.

According to Sarla Barnabas, the novel does not contain intricate plot, no deep character study, nor does it have as its background a canvas of epic proportions (Barnabas 259-260). The novel reveals intertextuality as Purdah and the resistance to/violation of purdah are present in novels like Bankim Chander’s *Rajmohan’s Wife and Indira*, Tagore’s *Home and Abroad*, Sharat Chanders’ *Parineeta* and a host of others. The drawback of the story is that there is a terrible denial of the rights of a woman to have her own identity, yet through Geeta, the novelist makes it clear that time has come to rid the haveli of some of its outworn practices, allow the outmoded concepts to die.

The novel also invites feminist critique's attention as it portrays the sufferings and disappointments of its protagonist and hidden issues. It is also important from Marxist point of view as we find class distinction: masters and servants in the novel. It is the story of Geeta who is trying to come out of her psychological conflict. However, it is a truth universally acknowledged that women have been denied existence as complete human beings though they are mentally and physically equipped to perform at par with men.

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