



Echo of Indian cultural heritage in A River Sutra

Abstract:

*The present paper examines the reflection of cultural heritage in Gita Mehta's popular novel **A River Sutra**. The paper interprets the meaning of culture and how it shadows in various incidents and characters of novel. It depicts depth and complexity of India's spirituality and Hindu mythology. The story is in the background of pious river Narmada. Through textual illustrations, the paper proves that **A River Sutra** echoes Indian cultural heritage.*

Key words: *heritage, culture, spirituality, mythology*

India is such a unique country of world which is famous for her rich variety of historical and cultural heritage, art, sculpture, social way of livings, dresses, foods, festivals. languages and dialects, religion and rituals, etc. from ancient times The golden thoughts reflected in Vedas, Upanishadas, Bhagavad Gita, Ramayan, Mahabharat and also of Aurveda, Yoga etc. are marvellous glory and cultural heritage of India .“ Culture may be taken as constituting the ‘way of life’ of an entire society...include codes of manners, dress, language, rituals, norms of behaviour and systems of belief” (Sharma, 213).

This research paper attempts to explore and to evaluate Gita Mehta's novel named A River Sutra as an embodiment of Indian cultural heritage.

Gita Mehta is the prominent woman novelist of India. She has written, produced and directed number of documentaries for American, British and European television companies and also plays the role of journalist. She divides her time among India, England and the United States. “Some plants if replanted in a new soil get dry and die but some find the new soil more suitable and flourish” (Mathur, 29). She has enlivened and acted like true carrier of culture and preservation of Indian identity. She has enriched the literary works like Karma Cola, Raj, A River Sutra, Snakes and Ladders and Eternal Ganesh. In Karma Cola and Raj, Mehta has focused on the interaction between India and the Western world. Karma Cola is a series of essays weaving the writer's impressions of India's mysticism. Her first novel Raj is a historical and colourful story of a young woman born into Indian nobility under the British 'Raj'. Snakes and Ladders is the collection of essays about independent India. Eternal Ganesh expresses the Hindu daiety Ganesh with the help of various images and illustrations by the writer. In A River Sutra, Mehta takes new direction in her writing and explores the diversity of cultures within India.

Gita Mehta's novel A River Sutra, published in 1993, is divided into sixteen chapters. She associates variety of themes with variety of characters mingled with their various cultures of different type of people of society. Culture is the umbrella word which contains the study of society, life style of persons of society, rituals and beliefs of people and also shows the physical objects like houses, roads, vehicles etc. and also depicts art, poetry, religion etc. Gita Mehta explores the diversity of cultures within India. “A River Sutra... is a lyrical series of interlocking stories that transport the reader to a contemporary India that is also the living present of myth”(Mehta, 283). The novel, through examples of various characters like narrator i.e. the writer herself, Monk, Tariq Mia, music teacher named Master Mohan, Naga Baba etc. reflect the same. The depiction of Narmada leads us to think as if she is the live character of novel. The novelist presents the various stories about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minerals, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics, music teachers and also about

tribal folk beliefs. The reference of snake is connected with the beliefs of people who live at surrounding area of Narmada. All these are harmoniously linked with one sutra and that is love.

The opening of the novel rotates round Vano village. The reference of sixty four arts like painting, flower arrangement, music, philosophy, jewelry, languages, literature etc. are expressed with reference of Courtesan's story. Chapter 12 depicts Mahado, the residents of inhabitants and their way of livings also. Through Executive story the writer also gives the reference of belief connected with moon – not to go out during the eclipse of moon, otherwise a man can become fatally ill or mad. The story is narrated through the diary of Nitin Bose, an executive. He is attached to the tribal woman for fulfilling his sexual desires. He is afraid of society. So he is unable to confess his immoral act directly to persons. So he confesses it in his diary.

The novel reflects the Indian culture and the depth and complexity of India's spirituality and Hindu mythology. "Shiva- o- ham, Shiva- o- ham" in the background of novel gives live spiritual effect to the novel. Through Executive story the writer reminds treasure of Hindu – Rigveda and its philosophy. The diary also reflects narrator's fondness to Purans and also to mythological tales and Aryan scribes. Hindu's devotion to many headed Gods is satirized here. Monk's chanting reminds the ideas of Bhavad Gita:

"You will be free from doubt,
You will be free from delusion,
You will be free from extremes,
You will promote stability... (Mehta 41)

Nagababa's endurance power is suggested in the beginning of Chapter- 15, as he bared unbearable cold, hunger, thirst at Himalaya mountain as his teacher Monk has challenged him and puts condition that if he overcomes such physical struggle, he will accept Nagababa as his disciple.

The reference of Om and its linking with three Gods- Brahma, Visnu and Shiva with interpretations reflect religious part which is the part of culture. The three sounds of Om are interpreted in Chapter-12. "The first sound is manifest world - waking consciousness. The second sound is unmanifest world- dreaming consciousness and the third sound is non manifest world- potential experience" (Mehta, 198).

Through Monk's character, the ideals of Jain religion are shown like ahimsa, practice of nonviolence, endurance etc. Monk's chanting reflects that he has digested the thoughts of Jain religion. The same chapter also narrates Mahavir as the great teacher of the Jain faith and pioneer of Jain religion. Through the character of Tariq Mia, the writer narrates the Muslim culture. "Tariq Mia is an acknowledged Islamic scholar" (Mehta 45). The words like ' Mosque', 'Allah', ' Quawwali', ' Sufi Songs' etc. enliven the world of Muslim. Really it is absolutely right: "Gita Mehta's consummate novel reflects the depth and complexity of India's spirituality like a diamond reflects light...Each bewitching tale is a rivulet pouring its truth into the long river of life" (Mehta 283).

The story is in the background of pious river Narmada. The depiction of Narmada leads us to think as she is the live character of novel. " ..the way the stories are told- the seamless flow of the narrative mirroring the flow of sacred Narmada, the variation of the tales reflecting the changing seasons ..." (Mehta,283). Nature and the beauty of water of river at morning, afternoon and evening are well expressed here. The various poetic lines of last chapter of the novel connected with Narmada river reminds ' Narmadashtaka' written by Shankaracharya :

"Sabindusindususkhalat,tarangabhangarangitam,
Dhviptsu papajatajata, karivarisa yutam,
Krutantadutakalabhutabhitiharivarmade,

Tavdiya padpankajam namami devi Narmade” (Shastri 553).

The river is associated with the religious faiths and beliefs of Indian people.

Thus, through all these textual illustrations, we can say that there is echo of Indian cultural heritage in A River Sutra. Gita Mehta expresses the psychology of human mind through various examples of the characters of the novel. She explains that human mind cannot deny the influence of culture, religion, faiths and beliefs. The novel offers authentic interpretations of Indian cultural values, music, art etc. Ramchandran says, “The novel acts as a mirror of culture of modern India”.

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