

human values. Being influenced by W.B Yeats, Auden and Eliot's, some significant Indian Poets like Kamala Das, A.K. Ramanujan and Ezekiel became very conscious about their roots and values at the national level. In comparison with these Indian poets, Mamta Kalia, a junior voice in the realm of Indian English poetry, also craves for the restoration of human values.

The poem is an exposition of contemporary man's psyche, it provides a useful dialogue on spiritualism and materialism; modernism verses tradition. The poem delves deep into human psyche, particularly into a disturbed and materially possessed psyche. It points out that the loss of faith has led to a predominance of materialism in human affairs. This trend is spreading fast. The so-called advanced civilizations are looking towards 'wealth' as an ultimate goal that will give peace and purpose to life. Spiritualism has replaced by materialism. While the poet represents the modernity and materialism, the father represents the tradition and spiritualism. The father's belief in 'clean words, clean thoughts and clean teeth' represents higher spiritual values of life.

Tribute to Papa explores the individual's anguished consciousness. The daughter represents the twentieth century man who has lost his spiritual moorings due to the predominance of materialism. The poet sarcastically laughs at the father's wish who wants to be just like an angel. The father's virtuous life developed out of a strong but unobtrusive sense of honesty, self-control and even self-denial looks unimpressive, even weak to the daughter. It is these qualities of integrity that form the real strength of some people, and the father is one such person. The poem has the depth of personal integrity in relationships and the intense love-hate response as Sylvia Plath's "Daddy". Therefore, as Shirish Chindhade observes: "Expletives of disapproval and disdain are really ironical in the poem. The protest at the "weakness" of the father is ostensible. On the deeper level, it is really total appreciation, consideration and even caring for the same weak father's life" (Chindhade, 2009:93).

The poem opens on a note of exasperation as the poet asks in a rather irritated tone:

Who cares for you, Papa?
Who cares for your clean thoughts, clean
words, clean teeth?
Who wants to be an angel like you?
Who wants it (57).

A virtuous life developed out of higher spiritual values of life looks unimpressive to the child possessed by materialism. The grown-up child expresses her mood of despair over the life style of her father. Thus, Mamta Kalia presents a difference between two walks of life. According to poet her father is an unsuccessful man as he "couldn't wangle a cosy place in the world" (57). She complains that he has lived a life of limited dreams. The poem has a sting in the tail but the sting is not for the father but for the speaker, the daughter. So Kalia writes:

I wish you had guts, Papa,
To smuggle eighty thousand watches at a stroke,
And I'd proudly say, 'My father's in import-

export business, you know'.
I'd be proud of you then (57).

Here the so-called advanced daughter looks towards wealth as an ultimate goal that will give peace and purpose to life. Since the daughter's dream has not come into reality, there is a sense of despair and frustration on the part of the daughter.

The poet's father always wanted to be a model man. He wanted to be a sort of an ideal. When he can't think of doing anything, he starts praying spending useless hours* (according to the daughter) at the temple. The daughter being grown-up and nurtured in the post-modern era and being much adopted to materialistic consummation thinks the ways of the father to be useless. He wants his daughter to be like he himself or like Rani Lakshmibai. He wishes that his child should be great but the irony of the fact that he himself has not understood what greatness is? So the poet criticizes and makes fun of the father's idea of greatness:

You're not sure what greatness is,
But you want me to be great.
I give two donkey-claps for your greatness.
And three for Rani Lakshmibai (57).

Further the poet seriously thinks of disowning her father. She doesn't like her father's ideas of sacredness of holiness. At a certain point the daughter is in such a state of frustration that she says:

What if I start calling you Mr. Kapur, Lower
Division Clerk, Accounts Section? (58).

There is a sting in the word's "Lower Division Clerk". The feeling that her father couldn't create a cosy place in the world tortures her very much. Mamta Kalia has shown the clash between the two generations. That's why she says that everything about her father clashes with nearly everything about her. The father has the suspicion that his daughters having a love affair but he is too shy to have it confirmed. The poet shows rebellious signs and says:

What if my tummy starts showing gradually
And I refuse to have it cutured? (58)

But very soon she consoles her father that she will be careful about everything because she knows that if things went wrong her father might think of suicide. Thus, there is intense love-hate response.

Though in the poem Mamta Kalia speaks strongly against her father, actually it is tribute to her papa for having laid a life full of self-control, self-restraint and honesty. While pointing out the difference between the attitudes of two generations towards life, the poet has successfully provided a useful dialogue on materialistic consumption and on spiritual values. Tribute to Papa, thus, deals with the spiritual predicament of modern man as it focuses attention on the existential states of disappointment, normlessness, self-estrangement and meaninglessness.

Work Cited :

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Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra*- An Exploration

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Abstract

Gita Mehta's *A River Sutra* offers authentic interpretations of Indian cultural values, music, art forms and heritage. In this novel, we find Mehta's major involvement with human subsistence in modern times. The setting of the novel is on the banks of India's holiest river the Narmada. It is not only the setting but also the principle of the novel. It includes both a meditation and an exploration of the novel and also finds the simple pattern of the pilgrims' voyage in search of Moksha. The versatility of *A River Sutra* is that most of the characters only appear once. The progress of the six stories can be seen as variations on the theme of love and the secret of the human heart.

Keywords: spiritual bliss, spiritual freedom, renunciation, mystic rapture.

The river in India is generally considered as sacred and has the spiritual bliss. It is also believed that gods stay on the banks of rivers and thus there are many shrines on the banks of rivers. There is an assumption that if someone takes bath in any of the sacred rivers, the sins are purified. Since it is a spiritual belief even now also people are continuing washing away their sins. The novel, *A River Sutra* contains many interlinked stories within it are narrated to the narrator by other characters of the novel. Mehta presents unconnected stories in the novel - stories about Hindu and Jain ascetics, courtesans and minstrels, diamond merchants and tea executives, Muslim clerics and music teachers, tribal folks. The narrator is unnamed and unidentified in the novel, is gaining knowledge which brings on the shores of Narmada where he meets many people and learns from them various ideas of life. Unlike most first-person narrative, the narrator in this novel, reveals very little about himself. He seems to have no life story, no main event that made him choose to live a retired life on the banks of the Narmada River. In contrast to this, the people whom the narrator meets and the stories he hears, reveal the disorderly nature of human life. Without exception, the narrator meets or hears tales of extraordinary people; people who have made enormous sacrifices for love or who have been treated cruelly by life.

The novel, *A River Sutra* set in the bank of the river shows how the narrator is getting experiences from the people those come/reside on the bank 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 who comes after some disturbance in their normal life. The narrator listens to their stories and gains experience/knowledge from their experiences. Thus the shore becomes a guide to develop the narrator's knowledge by providing him the opportunity of meeting those strangers. There are six stories; The Monk's, The Musician's, The Teacher's, The Executive's, The Courtesan's and The Minstrel's. Almost all characters in different stories converge for one or the other reason on the banks of the river for renunciation and tranquility and breathe repeated motifs of love and rebirth. Mehta presents love as the dominant motive force in the stories.

The Indian River is considered as a religious one. Dr. Mitra in this novel also narrates how the people consider the river as a religious one. He discusses about the historical memory of the Narmada saying the great Alexandrine geographer Ptolemy wrote about Narmada. He also remembers that the Greeks and the Alexandrines had heard about the river Narmada's holiness and the religious suicides at Amarkantak. He adds that people fasting to death or immolating themselves on the river's banks, or drowning in waters to gain release from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Dr. Mitra says thus,

In the silence I can hear waves lapping at the riverbanks and I think of the ascetics meditating by the holy pool at Amarkantak, seeking through their meditations to liberate themselves from the cycle of rebirth and death (Gita Mehta : 42.)

Thus the spiritual bliss the river has was an age old belief and is being followed by many who come to the banks of the Narmada to worship her. Both the narrator and Dr. Mitra, narrator's friend, also believe that the river has some spiritual power within it. They somehow believe the stories told by the strangers. Dr. Mitra feels happy being in the banks of the river and shares his observations with the narrator as,

A mere glimpse of Narmada's waters is supposed to cleanse a human being of generations of sinful births. Just think how pure you and I must be, gazing on this river every day (Gita Mehta:151.)

In the novel, freedom becomes the question of spiritual one. The Jain monk's story which is narrated as the first story to the narrator shows the spiritual freedom, he wanted to get. On his way, he meets sturdy tribal women from the nearby village, Vano. On one occasion, he met a Jain monk who had recently renounced the world. The bureaucrat pretends ignorance to know why Jain monks must shave their heads and cover their mouths. The monk says that nonviolence is very tiring and most difficult for a man to practice and keep. A close look at the stories of the bureaucrat and the monk becomes evident that the bureaucrat retires from his active life hoping to find the meaning of life, as he lost his wife and had no children. So, he chose going into the forest by preferring a

less important job on the banks of the Narmada. But indifference to it, the monk suddenly decides to give up wealth, wife, children, friends and all the comforts of luxurious living. Commenting on his decision, Parasuram Ramamoorthi writes, "His decision is based on intuition and faith whereas the narrator's life is one pursuit guided by reason." (Parasuram Ramamoorthi:146)

Though the monk is young, he renounces everything, the description he told the narrator about the grand function by his father when he renounced the world shows that he is immature to renounce the world. The narrator understands his mission as,

Then I remind myself that the purpose of the pilgrimage is endurance. Through their endurance the pilgrims hope to generate the heat, the tapas, that links men to the energy of the universe, as the Narmada River is thought to link mankind to the energy of Shiva. (Gita Mehta:8)

Haunted by the Jain monk's encounter, the bureaucrat seems disturbed. Although Tariq Mia often teases the bureaucrat, he is the man who tells stories and clarifies his doubts. Tariq Mia explains that the Jain monk loves the human heart and its secrets because it has only one secret, the capacity to love. To understand the ways of the human heart, Tariq Mia tells 'The Teacher's Story'. It is about Master Mohan, who has a greedy family dominated by a nagging and scolding wife. Master Mohan is a music teacher and remains as an unsuccessful ambitious singer. Though he leads an unhappy life, his gentle nature always ushers him to small acts of kindness. He stood spellbound to the voice of a young blind Muslim boy, who enters the song leading two musical lines above the others:

I prostrate my head to the blade of Your Sword. O, the wonder of my submission. O, the wonder of Your protection. (Gita Mehta:61.)

As being kind, Master Mohan becomes the guardian of the boy, Imrat, and decides to train him. He grooms him in music and discovers that the boy to be a prodigy. He instructs Imrat to sing songs of Kabir, Mirabai, Khusrau, Tulasidas, Chisti and Chandidas. His singing becomes so popular and attracts the attention of a music records company. Unable to bear the rude behaviour of his wife, Master Mohan leaves the house for Imrat to continue his practice. The boy's popularity invites him to sing at a great Sahib's palace, but Master Mohan refuses. It is Master Mohan's wife, who wants to make some money out of the boy, accepts the offer and receives five thousand rupees. Later, the boy is forced to sing and his singing fills the hall with ecstasy and mystic raptures. When the great Sahib rises, Master Mohan thinks the Sahib is going to dance to the music of the boy. But when he slits the throat of the boy, his cold cruel logic is revealed,

Such a voice is not human. What will happen to music if this is the standard by which God judges us? (Gita Mehta:81.)

The gruesome end drives the Master to the verge of madness. He comes to the banks of the Narmada in search of peace, but he does not get it as the story leaves him with many questions unanswered. Tariq Mia's explanation is that he does not know answer and it is a story about the human heart. The bureaucrat questions himself whether police catch him or not and why the Sahib kills the boy. Unable to come to a conclusion, Master Mohan commits suicide on his way back. In this context, Pradeep Trikha comments, "The story indicates distrust in the goodness of human beings. It has a sensitive emotional unfolding, which consequently mark the ways of the world and generates tolerance towards inhuman acts of man". (Pradeep Trikha:176)

The novel *A River Sutra* shows the class difference in the society. The Executive Story is a case study of Nitin Bose, who is said to have possessed. Bose is an executive in Calcutta's oldest tea company. He is a well-educated orthodox and committed to duty. Unable to bear life in the humdrum of Calcutta, he opts for the tea estates despite the dreadful predictions of his companions. As he is a voracious reader, he has a sound knowledge of legends, myths and anthropology of tribals. To overcome his loneliness, he reads the Rig Veda and gradually follows the example of his predecessors with a bottle of whisky on his table. Then comes a break-through in the form of a tribal woman. One day, when he is in the company of whisky, he breaks the cocoon around him and enters a new world of sensual pleasures,

I felt a softness press against my shoulder. Stretching out my hand, I grasped the swelling firmness of a woman's breast.
(Gita Mehta: 124.)

He usually keeps women away from him, but now he does not like to lose the new experience that awakens the sensuous man in him. The urgency of his desire stays him awake after spending a few satisfied nights with Rima, and he realises he is enchanted. As the tribal priest said, Nitin Bose, a tormented soul, takes refuge on the banks of the river to immerse the figure of a goddess to weaken his possession. When the bureaucrat finishes the diary, Tariq Mia struggles to understand the power of the tribal woman and it made no sense to him. But his assistant Chagla understands it intuitively and explains,

It is Mr. Bose who is making no sense, pretending desire is some kind of magic performed with black arts... (Gita Mehta:143.)

Chagla explains that there is no life without desire, everything will stand still and it becomes empty. Analysing the story, Pradeep Trikha sagely comments, "The story suggests that man suffers from emotional and spiritual limitations but despite these there is a realization of achievement". (Pradeep Trikha:176)

Another story narrated in the novel shows the freedom of soul in the next birth. The story is narrated by a woman, whose daughter is kidnapped by

Rahul Singh, a bandit. The narrator could meet the daughter and she states that Rahul Singh and she were married in their previous births too, so he wanted her to marry in this birth also. She too believed that they were married together in the previous births and since he is a bandit she could not stay with him for a long time and therefore, she returned to her mother. When her mother got back her daughter, she thanked the river and when she lost her daughter dead in the river she felt that her daughter is lucky to die in the holy river,

Only that she was happy her daughter had died in the Narmada because she would be purified of all her sins. (Gita Mehta: 190)

The narrator thus understands that the river plays a major role for their religious and mythological beliefs and the death in the river is freeing her soul. In the novel, the river remains as a hope-giver by giving them peaceful mind to worship. The Narmada is portrayed from different points of view by many characters in all those stories. The main characters in those six stories come to the river banks of the river Narmada to find solution to their problems. Therefore the river is taken granted for life-giver, mind-consoler and remains as the symbol of hope those who suffer in their life. When the narrator is discussing about the river and the relationship to those with Dr. Mitra, another character who shares his ideas with the narrator talks about the river as,

Her holiness is believed to dispel the malevolent effects of Saturn so all manner of epileptics, depressives, and other unfortunates rush to her bands. And yet, the Narmada is also a magnet to scholars. Towns on the banks of the river are renowned for the learning of their Brahmins. (Gita Mehta:152-153)

The same experience is seen by one of the characters in the novel where the girl is expecting for a major change in her living and finally starts worshipping the river. The Musician's Story is about an ugly female musician, who learns to perfect her singing all her life. The bureaucrat meets her on the riverbank when she is collecting glass fragments. The bureaucrat cannot find any trace of beauty in it, but she admits that her father can understand it because he is a genius. The purpose of teaching music to his daughter is to free her from her own image. In this connection, Pradeep Trikha writes, "There is a purpose in teaching music to his ugly daughter; through music, he tries to free her from her own image so that she could love beauty wherever she finds it". (Pradeep Trikha:176)

Gradually, they respond to each other until the silence between them grows electric with desire. But the man delays the marriage till he completes the Bhairav, the raga of Shiva. After completing the last music performance, the pupil leaves for his family as the woman's mother is making preparations for marriage. Shortly, he sends thanks to the music teacher for teaching him. Later, it is revealed that the young man gets

married to someone else. To cure her physical attachment, the music teacher brings her to the riverbanks. But, Tariq Mia says that it is the bureaucrat's misfortune because he is too young to understand the world, "To hear of love without ever having melted in its embrace".⁽¹⁴⁾ Commenting on the bureaucrat's immature knowledge of the world, Indira Bhatt writes, "The man who has not loved a man is a man who has learned nothing from life." (Indira Bhatt:75)

The bureaucrat is left in ambiguity of the woman's broken engagement and unrequited love and how the river can exorcise her grief. But Tariq Mia tells that the river is born of penance, and named it by laughter where the forests are heavy with wild jasmine. He says Naga Babas usually sing the song of the Narmada. Tariq Mia tells The Minstrel's Story to understand the bureaucrat about the Naga Babas. It is about the Naga Baba, who rescued a girl of eight years old from the clutches of a prostitute and who later became a minstrel. The Naga Baba sits in the cremation ground without food and water for nine days. The people, who cross the road, fear the Naga's sight, as his skin is gray, matted hair and the human skull from which he eats and drinks. And they also believe the Nagas possess super human powers, the ability to levitate and curse anyone who displeases him. On the night of Shiva, the Nagas are supposed to beg at the houses of those who are unclean, untouchable or profane. So he sets out to beg alms from a third unclean house. He chooses a brothel house and accepts a child as alms. The woman tells she is not responsible for the trouble the child brings. The Naga Baba names her Uma, peace in the night, and they live in caves where he teaches the child how to read and write and at night trains to sing the song of the Narmada. In this connection, Pradeep Trikha comments, "He takes the child with him, meditates in a cave, makes the girl sing in the praise of the Narmada a minstrel is born". (Pradeep Trikha:176)

The Naga Baba leaves the singer-saint to follow the next stage of his enlightenment. Leaving Uma is a foolish deed of the Naga Baba because, if the Narmada is born of Shiva's penance, Uma is born of the Naga Baba's penance. The song of the Narmada is the last narrative in the novel in which the Naga Baba, who meditated in the caves of the Narmada reappears as Prof. Shankar and Uma as a minstrel. The bureaucrat is intrigued to discover Prof. Shankar, who renounced the world to understand the spirit of the river. He prefers its immortality to holiness. When the bureaucrat admits that he is on the banks of the Narmada for enlightenment, Prof. Shankar says that he has chosen the wrong place because so many lives converge on the banks of the Narmada. Prof. Shankar opines that the river is sacred because it has the individual experiences of human beings, who lived on its banks. At this point of view, Indira Bhatt writes, "It is the active life, the life of Karma and not a passive renunciation that brings not only knowledge but also enlightenment". (Indira Bhatt:75)

Thus, the novel *A River Sutra* ends in a note of ambiguity; however all the