TuijinJishu/Journal of Propulsion Technology
ISSN: 1001-4055
Vol. 44 No.6 (2023),

Paradigms of the New Woman in Gita Mehta's *Raj*

Dr. Mamta Bhatnagar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, GLA University, Mathura (India)

Abstract: Gita Mehta, in her works, has dealt with the contradiction of the old and the new as a noteworthy factor of the Indian culture. Scholars believe that the factors of tradition and Modernity do not negate but complement each other and work in unison for the progression of a personality or society. The binary of tradition and modernity is noticeable in the personality of the woman in the novel Raj. The present paper is an attempt to explore the psyche of Jaya, the woman protagonist of the novel, to understand the interplay of these two factors and to study how a traditional woman grows out of shackles, by rejecting the outrageous traditions and embracing positive norms of modernity.

Gita Mehta's second book, *Raj*, is a historical saga of a *Rajasthani* kingdom of Balmer and the North-Eastern Indian dominion of Sirpur, languishing under the British rule. The protagonist is from the royal family of Balmer, a young princess, Jaya Singh who finds herself torn between the warring factors of the troubled times. She lives through the culmination of the British colonial rule in India. The novel guides the readers through Jaya's life from her birth to the time she fills her nominations for elections in free India in 1950. The narrative concentrates on the history of Balmer and Sirpur, imperial British India and the struggle for freedom from the point of view of the protagonist Jaya.

Gita Mehta depicts fifty years (1897 to 1947) of the colonial India in which the country was suffering from a high degree of British imperialism. The states, rulers and the masses had become hopeless in the strong hold of the British power politics. Fear factor haunted the native kingdoms – the dread of displeasing the British, the fright of the nationalists spreading the message of freedom and the trepidation of the accession to the Indian union. The characters are seen getting shattered under this false sense of modernity, but some, like Jaya, enduring the upheavals of the traditional times, achieve what one may call, the true progressiveness without becoming the modernized.UshaBande has rightly asserted, Gita Mehta has tried to recreate history and position it within the socio-cultural context (*Gita Mehta*: *Writing Home /Creating Homeland* 84).

Jaya's mother, the Maharani of Balmer, is a staunch traditional woman governed by the conventional *Rajput* culture. She is much enamored by the lineage of the long-established traditional ancestry of Balmer ladies. Maharani's resilient traditional nature is revealed through her immediate reaction when Maharaja Jai Singh of Balmer asked her to discard *purdah*. Maharaja was genuinely concerned with the public welfare. When the drought in the state turned severe with no rains continuously for three years, he told her, "You (she) must break purdah" (*Raj* 31) to accompany and assist him in the drought relief activities as some other Maharanis were already doing so. The Maharani was shocked to hear the pronouncement: "A paralysis held her motionless as she waited for the moment to pass and her husband to withdraw those few words which would destroy a thousand years of tradition" (31). Here one witnesses a rigid attitude towards an age old tradition. When Jai Singh did not reverse his command, she begged him, "Hukam, ask anything from me but this" (31). But he asserted, "Savage times require savage measures! … I require your presence in the camps. Ask yourself this, woman. What is more important, your veil or your people's despair?" (31-32). She went to Kuki-bai, the old revered concubine of Maharaja's father. Sharing her dilemma with her, the Maharani broke down and uttered, "If I obey, I will become like the zanana eunuchs – neither a woman within the protection of women, nor a man in the world of men…. My predecessors would have killed themselves rather than endure such dishonor" (33). Kuki-bai persuaded her by saying, "Oh, child, you are too rigid. You must learn to bend with the times, or you

will snap in two like an old neem twig…." (33). Here Kuki-Bai comes forward as a symbol of communion between the old and the new. She has an inclination for change and acknowledges the psychological fact that inelasticity is always averse to growth.

In such uncompromising times,the clash between the progressive ideals and the traditional ethics comes again into play when the Maharani removes her veil outside the security of the walls of the *purdah.* Here UshaBande rightly asserts: "Removing the veil in the tradition-bound setup is easier said than done. It has its repercussions" (*Gita Mehta*: *Writing Home /Creating Homeland* 107). Maharani shrank back before removing her veil, as "unveiling her face would be as final an act of immodesty as unclothing her body; … before men who were not father, brother, husband or son to her" (*Raj* 33). Maharaja's argument that she was like their mother as they called him *Bappa* (33) did not seem to hold much water, neither for Maharani nor for the ritual bound *praja*. As she lifted her veil on Maharaja's command in the courtyard "the people of Balmer lowered their eyes in respect" (34). All the time she would swear to the spirits of her predecessors that when the rains came she would re-enter *purdah*. At this stage, one may blame her for being an eternal-conservative but at the same time, she tends to invoke one's sympathy for her single mindedness of purpose and relentless pursuit of her ideals.

At this juncture of her life, towards the end of the fifth year of the drought, the Maharani gave birth to Jaya. A girl child being groomed in such an atmosphere normally grows in her mother's image. However, the case of Jaya is different from that of a normal *purdah* girl. She has a traditional mother but a progressive father. On one side, her mother teaches her the customaries of being a conventional Rajput woman, on the other her father endeavors to groom her as a fearless ruler. When Jaya was three years old, the fortune of Balmer took a turn after many years of unrelenting skies. Jaya witnessed the first rain of her life. But before Jaya could make a sense out of this unexpected situation, the Maharani, with an obscured expression, led her up the steps to the *purdah* pergola. Jaya could not understand why the Maharani was re-entering the *purdah* as the drought ended.

Sati Pratha, a conventional practice of burning widows together with the mortal remains of their husbands is also shown in *Raj*. The practice became an essential feature of Hindu tradition in many sections of medieval Indian society. The exponents of *sati* advocate that its sanction has been given in the *Vedas.* However, the historians and the sociologists claim that the *Vedas* have never supported *sati*. Mandakranta Bose, citing hymns from the *Rig Veda,* infers, "… the custom (*Sati Pratha*) was neither approved nor practiced in the Vedic Age" (23). Sahajanand Swami, the originator of the Swaminarayan sect, while advocating against the practice of *sati* argued, "The practice had no Vedic standing and only God could take a life he had given" ("Sati Practice"). According to one description, the practice of *sati* received acceptance during the Mughal era because, at the time of invasions, it was considered indispensable to protect the honour and safety of Hindu women. Harlan, Parilla writes, "this Hindu practice (*Sati Pratha*) symbolizes the epitome of wifely devotion, especially among the Rajput caste of Northern India" (80). The woman who performed this practice attained the honour of being called *Sati Mata* or *Sati* goddess and secured a place for herself in heaven along with her husband. According to A.L. Basham there might have been some practical reasons. He believes, "The widow herself, if she had no young children, might well prefer even a painful death … to a dreary life of hunger, scorn, and domestic servitude" (188).

In *Raj*, it can be seen that Gita Mehta has very meticulously portrayed the traditional as well as the progressive ideology about *Sati Pratha.* The Maharani, a staunch orthodox and a compulsive-traditionalist, strongly supports the *sati* practice despite knowing the fact that it was prohibited in Balmer by her husband's grandfather. Kuki-bai, admonishes the Maharani against the acceptance of such wicked traditions and comments: "But you young women are still blinded by the heroic tales of the sati queens of Balmer" (*Raj* 33). It is very much ingrained in the Rajput psyche. In addition, it is glamorized, eulogized, it is drilled into us, whether we are educated or not, that the husband is a god figure" (Parilla5). Perhaps, the Maharani of Balmer must have been groomed in this manner. From the moment Jaya was born, "the Maharani had vowed her daughter would be raised in the ways of her predecessors…" (*Raj* 42). Her typical day started when she got up before dawn, woke up Jaya, asked the maidservant to give her a bath of purification and then took her to the temple of the Balmer Maharanis. There the child was made to recite "the ancestral litany of the Balmer Maharanis" (42) by invoking each Sati Maharani of the Balmer lineage. Jaya recited the vows mechanically, waiting them to get over, wondering, "…why there

were so many satis and so many vows" (43). The Maharani did not realize that instilling traditional inflexibility into a young child would be disastrous for her personality and for her future adjustments.

Against this customary view point, there are forward looking personages like the grandfather of Maharaja Jai Singh who had prohibited *Sati Pratha* in Balmer. Kuki-bai, although quite old, wants to perpetuate the modernist tradition set by Jai Singh's grandfather. She informs the Maharani, "Your husband's grandfather, the Lion of Balmer, prohibited the women of Balmer from ever burning themselves again on their husband's funeral pyres" (*Raj* 33).Citing the words of Bhikku Parekh, N. K. Jain states, "Many of the nineteenth-century reformers made use of these resources to successfully challenge unacceptable practices" ("Tradition, Modernity and Change"10). Prominent among them was Raja Ram Mohan Roy. J.T.F. Jordens writes, "As a social reformer, Ram Mohan's interest was mainly in the appalling condition of women…. He is rightly famous for his long and successful campaign for the abolition of *sati*" (367). Ram Mohan Roy "wrote and disseminated articles to show that it was not required by scripture. He was at loggerhead with certain section, who wanted that Government should not interfere in religious practices ..." ("Sati Practice").

The Novel *Raj* redefines the concept of *Sati*.The prohibition of *Sati* by the Maharaja's Grandfather can be looked upon vis-à-vis with the new awakening brought by the social reformers and the consequent banning of *Sati Pratha* by the princely states of India. The true *sati*, says the ascetic, *Sati Mata*, is a woman of righteousness, not the one who ablaze herself. She adds, "And the greatest virtue is endurance. I am called the Sati Mata because my gurus are the Five Satis, those five virtuous women who refused to burn themselves on their husbands' pyres. The true sati has the will to continue when the familiar world fragments around her" (*Raj* 127). Nevertheless, the Maharani resisted any kind of encroachment on the part of modernity into the domains of tradition. She rebelliously declared to Sati Mata: "I shall never live on as Jai Singh's widow! … I am a Maharani of Balmer. Like my great predecessors, I shall burn myself" (128).

A little later in the novel, events took turn and Maharaja Jai Singh died. Consequently, Maharani was engulfed into the grief of Maharaja Jai Singh's demise. As she was now prohibited to accompany her husband to his pyre (as *Sati* practice is prohibited in Balmer), she burnt herself in an effort to carry on the tradition of *Sati* of her predecessors. As Kuki-bai and *Sati Mata* desperately rush to rescue her, she exclaims, "'I am sati now!' the Maharani said with fierce pride. She pressed her burning hands against her long skirt. The skirt immediately caught fire. The Maharani began chanting 'Ram, Ram,' as though she were sitting on the funeral pyre cradling her dead husband's head in her lap" (*Raj* 160).The novel again presents Kuki-Bai and Sati Mataas personificationsof Indian modernity of the early 20th century.

The journey of the Maharani of Balmer does not end here, but takes an interesting but strange turn. Soon after the Maharaja's death, Raja Man Singh, Maharaja Jai Singh'sbrother, annexed the kingdom of Balmer. He exiled the Maharani on the plea of her being polluted due to widowhood. The Maharaja of Dungra accepted the exiled Maharani as his sister and offered her asylum in his state. She started living in an *ashram* and got engaged in social welfare activities. Gradually, due to her genuine involvement, she was raised to the figure of an ascetic having a chain of followers who believed in her. When Jaya, after a gap of almost ten years went to meet her mother in her *ashram*, she found that the Maharani of Balmer had achieved the status of a *Sati Mata*. Jaya's guide reported to her, "I have seen the Sati Mata only once, but I felt I was in the presence of a Saint. The way she moves. Her head held so high, as if she sees the face of God before her" (*Raj* 362). Jaya was shocked to learn that the Maharani had grown into a nationalist, deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's ideology and was going to join his Salt March to defy the imperial government's mighty and unjust laws.

In the *ashram*, Jaya witnessed that her mother had a large number of devotees spinning the legendary *Charkha*. Gita Mehta brings the narrative to a crucial point where one observes a staunch traditionalist metamorphosing into a nationalist-modernist. Later, when she comes to know that her mother has left for Dandito join the Mahatma to break the infamous Salt Law, Jaya contemplates, "… the woman from whom she had learned her sati prayers was at Gandhi's camp, waiting to break the British Empire's laws" (*Raj* 372). Jaya herself seems to be awestruck by this transformation. One may wonder whether such a makeover in the character of a person like Jaya's mother possible? This type of alteration appears to be conceivable if one experiences life in the raw like the Maharani did. Her psychic movement from orthodoxy to progressiveness becomes a reality mainly due to

some lessons that she had learnt in the past and partly due to the tragic ordeal that she went through, first after the death of her son and later, her husband. Life taught her a lesson of adaptability to the call of the time which she boldly imbibed.In the due course of time, Maharani comprehends the true meaning of *Sati* earlier explained to her by *Sati Mata* of Balmer. She consoles her heart-broken widowed daughter, Jaya, "It is not easy, child. It has never been so. Remember the Sati Mata's words, Bai-sa. The true sati continues to live when her world has shattered around her" (363). These are the words of a woman who has grown into a modernist by adapting herself to the new environment. She realizes the futility of running blindly after customs that never gave her any peace of mind. Consequently, she finds herself in her new role in which she is able to find her identity not only as a woman but also as a human being and as a nationalist Indian.

Maharaja of Balmer, Jaya's father, was different from the other Indian kings and princes who either had relented and accepted the British as their masters, under the captivating influence of the British imperialism and modernity of the white superiority or had Westernized themselves under the British design of cultural imperialism. He employed an *Angrez* Tutor, Captain Osborne, to teach Tikka the current trends of Polo and cricket but not before the prince took his lessons on his original *Dharma* i.e. administration at the State Secretariat. Maharaja was also very particular regarding Jaya's upbringing. He engaged the services of Mrs. Roy to impart teaching of English Language to Jaya (*Raj*64).

Jaya learnt the skills of horse riding, shooting and playing Polo from Major Vir Singh. He was a tough trainer who was indifferent to the fact that she was a girl. He would make Jaya ride a horse bare-back, doing all the rounds and jumps, with a coin stuck between her each knee and the warm hard skin of the horse. She would complete the rounds without dropping the coins (47). Although at that time Jaya would not have realized that this very training would be instrumental in building her confidence as a polo player and would earn her accolades from the Prince of Wales many years later. Mrs Roy made her read nationalists Indian newspapers, which not only acted as a medium to learn English, bur also gave Jaya "bloodcurdling accounts of the injustices of the Empire" (*Raj* 64). Mrs. Roy was always dressed in sober homespun saris. She told Jaya that she wore such a sari, because "it is woven in my own country, …. Each time I buy a garment like this I put food into the mouths of Indians" (65). She also talked about Indian patriots like Tilak who had been sentenced to six-year imprisonment by the British Raj. All such ideas shaped Jaya's patriotic feelings. These parental and extra-parental influences, which were conflicting at times, entered "…into her mental make-up and determine(ed) among other things her ambivalent response to monarchy *vis-a-vis* democracy" (Jain "From Purdah to Polo to Politics" 209-10). Soon Jaya stepped into the phase of matrimony but that happened after her father Jai Singh's death.

After King Jai Singh's demise, her cousin, Raja Man Singh having usurped the throne of Balmer, married Jaya off in haste as he considered her a potential rival to the throne. She was eventually married to Prince Pratap of Sirpur. He turned out to be an ultra-modern who was obsessed with Western values and viewed anything Eastern as inferior, including his wife. But ironically, he had the traditional male attitude towards women, which was in direct contrast to her father's progressive thinking. The marriage confronts Jaya with two conventions of male dominating ideology that belittles a woman's self-esteem – marriage *in absentia* and the tradition of unquestioned obedience of a wife. As Prince Pratap was in England and would be back only after two years, Jaya was given in marriage to the sword of a man whom she despised. When she saw Pratap's portrait with "heavy lidded eyes and bored smile," her "stomach contracted …bitter with bile …" (*Raj* 137). Although trained as a boy in valour, she was not empowered to protest and she had to accept her marriage in silence. There was no one to help her now except her courage, endurance and will power.

Pratap returned after almosttwo years and with his return Jaya had her confrontation with the royal tradition of the everlasting compliance of a wife. Jaya knew from her pre-marital days about Pratap's disgust for Indian women and his debauched way of life. After his arrival, instead of coming to her, he spent his first day and first night in the City Palace. On the second day, in order to welcome him and perhaps to relive her marriage, when Jaya appeared in her traditional bridal attire, he out rightly rejected her saying, "I' am afraid you won't do, Princess. You really won't do at all …. Wash all that nonsense off your hands and feet. And change out of these Christmas decorations …. By lunch I hope to find an improvement" (189). At lunch, when she came after scrubbing her hands and feet, he was blunter and attacked her self-esteem directly, "Rest assured that I shall

never approach you without undergoing the necessary purifications … In the unlikely event, that is, of my ever approaching you…. Ours is strictly a marriage of convenience, Jaya Devi. Should the necessity for children ever arise, I am sure we can both rise to our duty, but until then …" (190). Pratap informed Jaya that he had agreed to get married because he would be permitted to travel abroad only when he was accompanied by a wife as the British considered him to be an "irresponsible playboy" (191).

Pratap questioned Jaya, "By the way, what languages do you speak?" (*Raj* 191). Without waiting for her answer and continuing with indifference to her discomfiture, he added sarcastically, "French…Italian? Spanish?" (191). Jaya was speechless by his indignant behavior, all the more due to the fact that she was excellent in English and could read and write four Indian languages. But Pratap was not interested in her achievements. Finally, he informed her about the proposed visit of the Prince of Wales to Sirpur. As she was "still a rough diamond" (192), he gave her a year to adopt Western values with the help of a Westernized Indian tutor, Lady Modi, who would teach her "the intricacies of Western society" (192). Jaya, courageous and assertive as she was, could have given a befitting reply to these insults, but the traditional values that were expected from a wife, made her helpless.

Jaya learnt from Lady Mody many values of the West including how to "fix a Martini" for her husband and guests, dine with English-table etiquettes, eat English cuisines, carry hand-bags, cover hands with gloves, perform English dances, wear saris which were very much in vogue among the trendy Westernized Indians and so on (*Raj* 194-200). But, when it came to cut her hair, she assertively refused to comply. Similarly, during one of her dance sessions she made it clear by insisting that she would never permit any stranger, even if he were an emperor, "to put his arm around her body" (202). Jaya asserted to Pratap, "I'd rather play polo with the Angrez than dance with them" (221). She peeled her gloves off from her hands and offered the Prince the conventional Indian greetings with folded hands. N.K. Jain rightly comments, "In an atmosphere where everyone is mindlessly fashionable and trendy, there is a positive merit in being traditional" ("From Purdah to Polo to Politics" 211).

The incident of her participating in the polo match with the British is worth mentioning. She entered into the match after a three-day rigorous practice where all her training that she had received in her childhood trainer came for her assistance. Her performance, especially her goal in the match, was outstanding. She overwhelmed the English and the Indians alike, including Pratap. The Prince of Wales congratulated her saying, "Your goal was without question the best goal in the game" (*Raj* 225) and later invited her, along with Pratap, for a visit to England. Her success in polo gave her a sense of self-confidence and self-esteem which, in her later life, helped her resolve her conflicts and take significant decisions. In this regard, the Prime Minister of Sirpur, Sir Akbar's remark to Jaya would be quite suggestive: "A polo mallet can sometimes be as useful as a dagger. You have studied Rajniti, even if Prince Pratap has not. Such knowledge would give a wife a great power over her husband if she used it intelligently,Hukam" (227).

The story takes a tragic turn when, after Maharaja Victor's death, Pratap inherited the throne of Sirpur became the Maharaja. The need to have an heir for Sirpur took him to his Maharani Jaya. Even after the long awaited consummation of marriage, he did not treat her tenderly. He entered into his wife's chamber in a drunken state as if she were a concubine brought to him for the night. "The urgency with which he fulfilled his needs left Jaya bitterly regretting an intimacy which soiled her as his remoteness had never done" (*Raj* 287). The narrator further adds, " …night after night she watched him blow out the scented candles as though he could not bear to touch her until he could no longer see her …." (296). But Pratap never heard her silent screaming of protest. When she became the mother of a son, he forbade her to breastfeed her child with a crude display of power as that would be typically Indian. Thus, he was denying her the fruits of maternity after robbing her of the rights of a wife. The 19th and the 20th centuries were the times of great scientific revolutions and researches in England. It was a pity that a well-educated person like Pratap, who received his formal education from the British schools of England, was ignorant about the efficacy of a mother's milk. However, again one can see an imperative tradition being crushed by a senseless pursuit of Western ideology.

A stage came in her life when she seemed to get tired of her constant struggle between the demands of tradition and those of the Western world. She came to know about Pratap's affair with a prostitute of a Calcutta

brothel, Esme Moore, on whom her husband was diverting all his monetary reserves and attention. On getting the information that Pratap was in some kind of trouble with Moore, she visited the brothel of Calcutta to get more information on Esme Moor. She was sick with shame to know that besides being a regular visitor of the Brothel, the Sirpur ruler chose to wear the ancient crest of the state not on his turban but on his feet to copy his Western masters. Then she discovered with utter humiliation that Pratap "persuaded her (Moore) to become his mistress with the promise of marriage" (*Raj* 327). So far Jaya had suffered and endured her dilemmas silently but the last instance of her disgrace proved too much for her. She was forced to question the tradition that demanded only obedience from a wife. She gushes out her frustration at Lady Modi, as if all her humiliations that had been heaped upon her since her marriage would be wiped out in a single moment, "He shrinks from the sight of his wife giving breast to his son, but not from wearing his ancient crest on his feet to visit a brothel. Is this conduct of a husband? Of a king?" (329). Jaya was then naturally worried about the safety of Sirpur's sovereignty and consequently about her son's claim for the throne.

Jaya went to England where she learnt from Pratap that Esme Moor had been blackmailing him because he had promised to marry her. She offered to take the matter in her hand because being a woman she would be able to find herself in some bargaining position with Moor. When her husband agreed, she struck a strong bargain of her life. Jaya, with complete self-control and confidence, told Pratap, "There is a price for my services, hukam …. I wish to be named the Regent Maharani of Sirpur, in the event of anything happening to you, until Arjun is of an age to take the throne" (*Raj* 333). Jaya, with a prowess of an efficient bargainer, was able to save Sirpur by giving allowance as ransom to Moore as per her wish, along with a promise to provide her a break in Hollywood (337). In exchange Jaya was able to extract Pratap's letters and photographs from Esme Moor and handed them over to Pratap. Later, as per the deal with her husband, she got the document that recognized her as the Regent Maharani of Sirpur.

The empowerment, that Jaya achieves, puts her in the category of emancipated women who have courage and will power to assert their rights, but work within the established traditions. However, sometimes conventions subjugate progressive ideas, especially when it comes to the treatment meted out to a widow in the traditional Indian society. The novel depicts such obnoxious customs where women are helpless sufferers. Jaya once again got engulfed into the folds of a depraved tradition, and this time it was her widowhood when she lost her husband in an air-crash. Jaya was restrained in an unventilated cramped room for fourteen days as she had suddenly turned impure on account of surviving her husband. She was "locked in another world of rituals and priests" (*Raj* 354), while the professional mourners ritually cursed her with "obscene litanies of death in the corridors" (355). Her head was shaved. The treatment that was earlier meted out to her mother as a widow was now being directed towards her. Previously, when Jaya had seen her mother going through the same ordeal, she had hit the old women who were shouting curses at her mother with her fists. This was a silent rebellion of a girl who had been trained by her father's liberal ideologies. But today, ironically, when she herself was suffering the same humiliation, she was silenced by a dominating tradition. Here, one can clearly observe that the novel condemns the ill-treatment of widows. But it can also be observed if on one side the novel dismisses such ill-practices, on the other, it reconstructs the same by giving them a progressive aura.

However, traditions were not able to suppress Jaya for long. Although she had to remain in *purdah* during the period of mourning for one year, she kept a watchful eye on the schemers who were trying hard to negate her claim on her Regency. As soon as the mourning got over, she emerged stronger than before to take on the responsibilities of the Regent Maharani of Sirpur. As a Regent she worked with dignity keeping in mind her lessons of a ruler's *Dharma* that she received in her childhood. Her father's visualization of giving education of *Arthashastra* to a traditionally raised girl comes true. Now onwards, she is being guided by two major aims – to work for the welfare of her subjects and to safeguard the safety of her son's claim on the throne of Sirpur. She launched a well planned development programme for Sirpur, which included some major projects like building of dams to store water as well as to check floods and the construction of roads as well as air-fields to connect the isolated tribal areas with the capitol (*Raj* 390). After being a victim of the power, she became its executor. Unfortunately, as Jaya started making sincere efforts to develop Sirpur, she received the most tragic blow when her son, Arjun was killed in an attack of communal frenzy – the worst Hindu-Muslim riots which later resulted into the partition of the nation. While Jaya was trying her best to recover from this irreparable blow, she realized

that there was no heir to the Sirpurthrone and she was the sole guardian of its ancient line. Her ministers informed her that India and Pakistan had become two independent nations and the new government was pressing the royal kingdoms to sign "an instrument of accession and merge with India" (450). Jaya found herself standing on a crossroad where she had lost all – her father, her brother, her husband, her sympathizing brother-in-law, her faithful prime minister and finally her young son – no one to share her dilemma and guide her to such an important decision related to her kingdom.

With her able administration and confidence, earned from her *praja*, Jaya was able to sustain communal harmony in Sirpur when India itself was burning with this fury (457). She had reports that if she denied accession to India, her kingdom would be under the excessive pressure from the government and the nationalists alike and this might result in blood-shed. She visited her former teachers, the *Raj Guru* of Balmer and Major Vir Singh, who were quite old at that moment for guidance. The Raj Guru took her back to the first lesson of *Rajniti* i.e. *Dharma* of a king is the protection of people and motivated her to accept the changed world. He reminded her, "Your dharma is protection, Bai-sa. You cannot escape your destiny" (454). Jaya finally understood the indication of the time wherein she visualized the welfare of her people. She visited the office of the Secretary of India in Delhi and gave her written consent to merge Sirpur with the Union of India and thus formally declared Sirpur as a democratic state.

At this stage of the discussion, it can be argued that the novel, *Raj*witnessesfemale characters' rise from orthodoxy to progressiveness and from a ritual bound social order to an independent, skill oriented society. The protagonist, Jaya, Maharani of Balmer, Sati Mata,Kuki-bai, andMrs. Roy are the earnest travellers of the path of progress without getting uprooted from their traditional soil. Jaya is the victim of a relentless fate that snatches away her brother, father, husband and son and leaves her to face the realities alone. After every demise and frustration, she recovers courageously and moves further to fulfill her dreams. Fighting against the odds of Westernization, she marches ahead facing the challenges of her life with dignity. Bande rightly affirms "Jaya tosses between tradition and modernity all through the book"("*Raj*: A Thematic Study" 242). Although she values the past, she explores fresh pastures, in spite of, her familial and colonial/postcolonial political situations. The novel asserts a valid social dictum that the present cannot be secluded from the past as both are interconnected.Nehru observes: "The curious thing about India is the persistence of the old and the new at the same time; all the centuries seem to be represented in the India of today" ("India – Old and New"190). The traditional and the modern, the colonial and the postcolonial, the past and the present subsist in the psyche of the Indians.

Works Cited

[1] Bande, Usha. *Gita Mehta*: *Writing Home /Creating Homeland*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2008.

[2] ---. "*Raj*: A Thematic Study." *Indian Women Nivelists*. Ed. R.K. Dhawan. New Delhi: Prestige Books, 1991. 239-45.

[3] Basham, A.L. *The Wonder That Was India*. New Delhi: Rupa& Co., 2003.

[4] Bose, Mandakranta. "Sati." *Faces of the Feminine in Ancient, Medieval, and Modern India.* Ed. Mandakranta Bose. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000. 21-32.

[5] Jain, K. Naresh. "From Purdah to Polo to Politics: A Study of Gita Mehta's *Raj*." *Women in Indo-Anglian Fiction Tradition and Modernity*. Ed. Naresh K. Jain. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998. 208-13.

[6] ---. "Tradition, Modernity and Change." *Women in Indo-Anglian Fiction Tradition and Modernity*. Ed. Naresh K. Jain. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers, 1998. 9-27.

[7] Jordens, J. T. F. "Hindu Religious and Social Reform in British India." *A Cultural History of India.* Ed. A. L. Basham. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. 365-82.

[8] Mehta, Gita.*Raj*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1993.

[9] ---. "Snakes and Ladders." Interview by ShailajaNeelkantan. *Forbes.* 16 June1997. *shailja.net.*n.d. Web. 10 October 2010.

[10] Nehru, Jawaharlal. *TheDiscovery of India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985.
[11] Parrilla, Vanessa. "Sat: Virtuous Woman Through Self-Sacrifice." *Csuchico.edu*.n.d. Web. 5 June 2014.
[12] "Sati Practice." *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, inc., August 2014. Web. 14 August 2014.
[13] Vivekananda, Swami. "Modern India." *Between Tradition and Modernity: India's SearchforIdentity*. Ed. Fred Dallmayr and G.N. Devy. New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1998. 56-75. Print.