CHAPTER-IV

*A RIVER SUTRA: AN INSIGHT INTO HUMAN PSYCHE*
CHAPTER-4

*A River Sutra: An Insight into Human Psyche*

"A River sutra... is a lyrical series of interlocking stories that transport the reader to a contemporary India that is also the living present to myth."¹

Gita Mehta's novel *A River Sutra* is a saga of interlinked stories which flows with same theme and same subject-matter. The novel centers on India's holiest river, the Narmada. The writer situates the novel on the banks of the river Narmada. The river is associated with the religious faiths and beliefs of Indian people. People worship the river and get salvation in her company. The river is a motherly figure for them. Therefore, frustrated and nervous people come on the banks of the river for getting solace of mind. In this novel Gita Mehta uses intricate narration or metnarration technique in which there is not only one narrator but sub-narrators. Much of the variety and vitality of this novel is due to its having more than one narrator. A narrative contains story elements which are narrated by a narrator who is a speaker of that narrative but not always a character in the work. An author's choice of point of view influences the kind of narrator used. The ancient Indian tradition of story-telling helps the novelist to present a crowded world in the novel. In ancient times story-telling was a skill. These stories give moral lessons to the people. The novel may appear to be a didactic work on account of its content and narrative technique. On the surface level it seems to be a collection of short stories but after reading these stories, the reader cannot separate one story from another. The technique of the novel is partially similar to the epic *The Mahabharata*. Vyasa wrote The Mahabharata but he himself is not involved in it as a character. He plays a role of Sutradhar who narrates
the stories from his point of view. In the same way the narrator of this novel plays a role of Sutradhar who narrates the stories sequentially and filled the gap between each story through his story-telling skill.

...the way they (the stories) are told the seamless flow of the narrative mirroring the flow of the sacred Narmada, the variation of the tales reflecting the changing seasons — puts the book leagues ahead of any other.²

Huge natural calamities round the world have compelled us to rethink our concern for the environment. Though all of us are talking much and worry less, and science and technology helping us, the root causes are neglected or haven’t eyed at all. Social science or science may bring forth mankind some solutions, but till our own responsibilities to responding nature aren't met with, everything would be nullified automatically. My view is that we have to be sensible and sensitive. This is where Mehta comes to the scene: ‘We cannot solve the problems of the world; we can only help those within our reach.’³

The novel set in a remote forest on the banks of Narmada meanders through Assam with the valleys of Vindhya, the plains of Malva and metaphysically set in two different banks of the river where the river separates the beliefs and calendars and-histories. Pre-Aryan and Aryan settings are imaged through the novel is an attempt at a flight from Realism. The remoteness is of the mind, though set in a never-land or a land of the mind; a kind of Mindscape is painted. The obvious difference between the outer world and the Mindscape is brought into limelight so that we journey through
the Mindscape without trembling the falling into some ditch. Against the backdrop of Narmada Bachao Andolan and Medha Patkar’s activities, a scene from contemporary socio-political scene, Gita Mehta’s, A River Sutra is an attempt at subversiveness to present the river as an eternal source of the flow of Life.

Turtles and river dolphins find refuge in your waters
Alighting herons play upon your tranquil surface.
Fish and crocodiles are gathered in your embrace.
O holy Narmada.
Bards and ascetics sing your wonders.
Gamblers, cheats, and dancers praise you.
We all find refuge in your embrace, O holy Narmada.

The Narmada River, with its banks flooded with religious activity, is the setting for Gita Mehta's A River Sutra. Mehta centers her story on a guesthouse manager, who feeling that he is rather pious in his religious beliefs, is confronted with many stories of other people's experience. The manager, throughout the course of the novel, written in English for a broad audience, undertakes a spiritual journey that does not end where he wishes. These stories make the manager question his own religious beliefs. The imagery surfaces in different forms, such as a young girl. Through unfolding the manager’s religious doubts, the Goddess emerges as a symbol as a form of cultural analysis. Also, feminist critiques of power struggles and religious symbolism as a form of agency within literature will be discussed.
A River Sutra is complex and permeates the tale. The story is centered on the banks of the Narmada River, a holy site in India, which many people claim to be a manifestation of the Goddess. Many rivers in India are imbued with this aspect. Anne Feldhaus discusses the numerous religious meanings of rivers in Water and Womanhood. Within her study she identifies festivals and worship, such as iconography devoted to rivers in India. The Narmada River is the first introduction of Goddess imagery within the novel, and the river is very significant to the manager. The manager perceives he to be a very devout believer in his own faith but has tremendous curiosity about the religious experiences of those around him. Every morning he meditates looking at the river, which is very holy to him and has become a cornerstone of his faith. To the Hindus, the river is considered, and is worshipped, as the daughter of the God Shiva.

A River Sutra can easily be described as “Metaphysical Novel.” Edwin M. Eigner in his book The Metaphysical Novel in England and America published in 1978 (Berkley: University of California Press) defined the novel as one which “often infests itself in a dim and shadowy allegory.” and the novel follow its own drift, set in “suitable remoteness”, with a passive hero. Characters undertake chartless voyages against the tyranny of everyday life. The structure of a Metaphysical Novel is determined by multiple voiced narration arid the mixture of genres. It employs a realistic beginning and grows in the direction of Allegory and the end purpose is to arrive at the reeming vision for Man. It is a breakaway from the cause and-effect world.
*A River Sutra* is essentially a novel about river Narmada and the novel gains much of its significance and meaning with the river as the central character. We have instances of a river being a major character in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and in several regional novels in India. Laksmi's *Kaveriai Pola* is an excellent example from Tamil Fiction where the river comes to be identified with the central character, a woman. A.K. Ramanujam's “A River” and R. Parthasarathy's Poem on Vaigai and many other poems also speak of the modern perspectives on ancient rivers. But *A River Sutra* is quite different from all these works of literature, in that it focuses on the river based civilization and its beliefs. *A River Sutra* is a record of the human race as it depicts the struggle between the Pre-Aryan life and the Aryan conquest. The Pre-Aryans managed to fight against the Aryans, but eventually lost the battle and the only source of comfort to them is Narmada and the banks of Narmada are their refuge. They worship the River and believe that the river has the power to cure many diseases, including madness and snake venom.

The river Narmada is described in many ways: it is the holiest pilgrimage site, daughter of God Shiva. It is a link between mankind and the energy of Shiva and married to the ocean, Lord of Rivers. It is the site of Vyasa's recitation of The Mahabharata, Kabir's poems, Kalidasa's *Meghdoot*. The Novel is a myth of the river and the novelist has succeeded in the myth-making.

River Narmada is the daughter of Shiva. The novelist turns a geographical reality into a myth and her myth-making is part of the Indian Psyche which turns every fact of the creation of the universe into a myth. It is said that Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of worlds, was in an ascetic trance so strenuous that rivulets of perspiration
began flowing from his body down the hills. The stream took on the form of a woman— the most dangerous of her kind: a beautiful virgin innocently tempting even ascetics to pursue her, inflaming their lust by appearing at one moment as a lightly dancing girl, at another as a romantic dreamer, at yet another as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire. Her inventive variations so amused Shiva that he named her Narmada, the Delightful One, blessing her with the words you shall be forever holy, forever inexhaustible.  

The river appears as a woman “indolently stretching her limbs as she oiled herself with scented oils, as a woman “painting her palms and the soles of her feet with vermilion as she prepared to meet her lover.” On the banks of the river, mystic rituals are enacted by Vano villagers, the remnants of Pre-Aryan Civilisation. The tribals will pray to their goddess to forgive anyone who has denied the power of desire. Even Lord Shiva could not deny the power of Desire, because without desire there is no life. The Pre-Aryan Goddess is the “principle of life. She is every illusion that is inspiring love.” When pilgrims chant “Save us from the serpent's venom”, the serpent is nothing but desire. Contraries are the principle of life. In most of us, there are two tendencies: to create fantasy and to kill that fantasy. We are increasingly lured by our scientific and rational thinking to kill the fantasy. We laugh at experiences like trance and being possessed. Dr. Mitra, the doctor who attended on Nitin Bose, the executive, has his own contribution to the many legends about Narmada. He says that the war between the “primal beliefs of the tribals and Aryan reason” was fought on the banks of the river. He recalls the meaning of “Narmada” as “Whore”. He is a scholar on the river Narmada. He tells the narrator: Her holiness is believed to dispel
the malevolent effects of Saturn, so all manner of epileptics, depressives, and other unfortunates rush to her banks. And yet, the Narmada is also a magnet to scholars.13

“It is the story of Man” — the celebrated Peter Brook Version of the Mahabharata declared and we have innumerable instances of commentators speaking of the Epic as the tale of human suffering and the triumph of Good over Evil. It is not an accident that the Novel is set on the banks of river Narmada, a deliberate attempt to link it with The Mahabharata which was first dictated by sage Vyasa on the banks of river Narmada, thousands of years ago. If The Mahabharata is a story of the battle between Dharm and Adharm and the final victory of Dharm. *A River Sutra* is the story of the battle between Desire and Renunciation and the triumph of Desire over Renunciation. If is also the war between Instinct and Reason and the Instinct triumph. The Novel is a celebration of Life and life-affirming impulses struggling against Death and life-negating forces. The River is seen "as an etema pncip e of Life. The Naga Baba who became an ascetic and lived in a cave seeking higher enlightenment “reentered the world.”14 With the knowledge that “I am only a man.” He tells the Narrator “Don't you know the soul must travel through eighty-four thousand births in order to become a man.” The epigraph to the novel, a song from Chandidas also points to the central principle of celebration of Man:

*Listen, O brother*

*Man is the greatest truth.*

*Nothing beyond.* -Love songs of chandidas.15
If Man is the greatest Truth, how can one seek the Truth running away from mankind? All attempts to renounce the world come to nothing and they become temporary escapes from Reality. C.N. Ramachandran commenting on the various tales in the Novel asserts that “what we get at the end of the novel is a multiple vision the 'man coloured dome' –Life”\(^{16}\) Prof. Ramchandran also speaks of the contrapuntal Pulls between attachment and detachment and he affirms that the novel “rejects the concept of total detachment as well”.

The above definition well fits *A River Sutra* with its multiple strategies and a passive hero as the central character. The principal narrator, a bureaucrat on the verge of retirement, attempts to tell his story, but he is told several stories by others. The framing is that of the Bureaucrat's story and there are inset, in the frame stories of the Monk, Executive, Courtesans, Teacher Minstrel and within these stories, there are stories of Shiva, Narmada, Kabirvad, Avatihuma, and hundreds of legends inlaid within the frame. The narrative flows like the river and the endless voyage of human beings over the ages. There is not much of a pause between one story and the other. It easily switches over from one story to another. The only difficulty with these stories is that almost all of them use the same dialect and the language does not change with the narrator. The principal narrator tells a story and he is being told stories. The narrator becomes a listener or the reader. The contract between Gita Mehta and the readers is symbiotic of the relationship between the Bureaucrat and the various storytellers. He is amused, amazed, shocked, surprised, disturbed, and what is significant is the fact that he is in the same state of confusion even at the end of the novel. There is no self-realization, no epiphany and not even a Frostian wisdom achieved.
In the novel *A River Sutra*, there are six stories: *The Monk's Story, The Teacher's Story, The Executive’s Story, The Courtesan's Story, The Musician's Story and The Minstrel's Story*. These six stories are divided into sixteen chapters and the last chapter *The Song of the Narmada* is a sequel to *The Minstrel's Story*. Gita Mehta uses multiple narrative techniques and at the same time she fills the gap between each story. The characters of each story appear only once and carry on the same subject-matter from one story to another. Each and every character of the novel represents a particular community. At the beginning of the novel, the nameless narrator enters with the details about his life and career from the first person point of view. He is a retired bureaucrat and joins the post of a manager of the Narmada rest house. He is trying to get this job because he wants to escape from the humdrum of bustling city life and live a peaceful life. After getting a job in Narmada rest house, he becomes a close friend of Tariq Mia, an old Muslim mullah. The nameless narrator hears the stories and at the same time gives background to each story. He seems to be a catalyst who describes all the stories objectively. The narrator while going towards Tariq Mia's ashram meets the monk.

In *The Monk's Story*, The monk is a narrator who narrates his story in first person narration. As a representative of Jain religion the monk tells/about the Jain principles and Mahavira, the pioneer of Jain religion. The narration of is story shifts from the narrator to the monk. The monk through his story explores principles of Jain religion such as non-violence his is considered as a sharp weapon of Gandhian ideology. The monk, as a son of a rich diamond merchant enjoys every moment of life and thinks that life is a blessing of God. He travels all over the world for fulfilling the purpose of trading. He returns from his journey and decides to renounce the world
because he observes and feels the depth of poverty and hunger. He thinks after returning from his journey, life is not a smooth path but it is full of difficulties and sorrows. He is confused when he observes his father's ill-treatment to his miners because he is a strict follower of Jain principles and breaks those principles while treating his miners. Through the character of the monk, Gita Mehta builds the image of Mahavira in reader's mind. The monk is a mirrored figure of Mahavira and follows the footsteps of Mahavira. For making the narration reliable Gita Mehta chooses the monk as a narrator of this story.

The Bureaucrat — Narrator keeps asking questions about life to the people he meets. He tries to understand Life through questioning. He is willing to listen to the stories of others and through the stories reason out the meaning of Life. In the first inset he ends, The Monk grows tired of story of the Jain Monk, towards his questions and tells him: No, I cannot stay longer. You must find someone else to answer your questions. He tells the Monk that he also has renounced the world and has the humility to ask the Monk the reason for his renunciation and what was the most difficult thing to give up. He asks the Monk to enlighten him with his story and he is willing to sit by his side and listen to the Monk's story. But at the end of the story the Narrator simply feels disturbed and the lasting impact is that the image of the Monk is imprinted in his mind.

When we analyse the stories of the Narrator and the Monk, it becomes evident that the Narrator retires from active life hoping to find the meaning of Life and it is like a planned Vanaprasthi. It almost looks like that one would say I have worked for so many years in cities. “I have nobody. My wife is dead. So, I should go
into the forest for Vanaprasthi.” He does not renounce his job. But prefer a less important job in a remote place on the banks of Narmada. There is so much planning and hardwork that point to his reasoning. The Monk, suddenly, decides to give up wealth, wife, children, friends, and all the comforts of a luxurious living. His decision is based on institution and faith whereas the Narrator's life Narrator's is one pursuit guided by reason. The friend Tariq Mia explains what the Monk's story means: The human heart has only one secret. The capacity to love. This secret is beyond the comprehension of Reason.

Each story of the novel completes in another chapter and the writer before telling any story, first creates suitable atmosphere to the story. In The Monk's Story the monk sss to the narrator. 'I have loved just one thing in my life', but he forgets to answer him. The narrator after his departure thinks about it but he cannot get its answer therefore he asks Tariq Mia about it. Tariq Mia is a narrator of The Teacher's Story. He wants to tell the narrator the secret of human heart i.e. for explaining the secret of human heart; Tariq Mia tells The Teacher's Story which is experienced by him. Tariq Mia is an old mullah who is attached to the verisimilitudes of the human life. Compared to the narrator Tariq Mia is a philosopher and like a torch for those whose life is in darkness. The narrator looks at each story on a surface level at the same time Tariq Mia observes the details of each story and tries to explain the philosophy of life. The writer chooses Tariq Mia as a narrator of this story because he is a witness of this event. Master Mohan is a music teacher with unfulfilled desire of being a famous singer. He meets an orphan Imrat and feels that he is his own self therefore he gives him music lessons devotedly. Unfortunately Imrat's murder leads him towards a path of madness and he comes on the banks of the river Narmada for
the solace of the mind. Tariq Mia cures him from his madness but while returning home he commits suicide. Master Mohan is a sensitive man who is totally involved in Imrat and cannot imagine life without him. Tariq Mia tells the narrator, Perhaps he could not exist without loving someone as he had loved the blind child. Tariq Mia narrates the story from third person point of view and makes the narration omniscient. Tariq Mia's narration of the story of Music Teacher, Master Mohan is meant to prick the pride of the Narrator: Drink some tea, little brother. How can you say you have given up the world when you know so little of it? Says, Tariq Mia and begins the story of Master Mohan, a Story meant to understand the ways of the human heart.

Master Mohan, by chance, found a boy and groomed him in Music and later discovered that the boy to be a prodigy. The boy's singing became so popular that a great Sahib invited him to sing at his place. But Master Mohan refused. Master Mohan's wife who wanted to make some money out of the boy accepted the offer and received five thousand rupees. Later the boy was forced to sing and he sang such notes that it filled the hall with ecstasy and mystic raptures. Suddenly the Great Sahib rose and Master Mohan thought that the Sahib, like the Sufis, was going to dance to the Music of the Boy, but realized, only after it happened, that the Sahib slit the throat of the boy and his logic was cold and cruel: such a voice is not human. What will happen to music if this is the standard by which God judges us? This story leaves the narrator with many questions unanswered. From simple questions like, “But did the police catch the great sahib?” to why did the Sahib kill the boy. Tariq Mia's explanation is that “I don't know the answer, little brother. It is only a story about the human heart”.

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The Executive’s Story is another story which is narrated through the dairy of Nitin Bose, an executive. His feelings toward her as a Goddess temptress had faded, and he felt that there existed some dignity in the way she was handling the situation, showing he still had feelings of awe about her. He relates her behavior "...which seemed so elegant in someone of her origins." 21 The next night was felt by the villagers of the plantation to be an unholy night. Bose was told to take care for his soul could be taken if he left the safety of his house. Bose, though many times in the story he tried to reconcile his own religious background with his modernity, did not believe in the superstitions of the villagers. His purpose was to meet the woman and then go on with his life.

The Executive’s story is also built on instinct. He falls in love with a Coolie's wife after making love to her in darkness for several nights. When he returns to the city and gets lost in the glitter of society-ladies, he still is haunted by the love song of that tribal woman, Rima. Nitin Bose, the executive visits the tea estate again, he encounters Rima and is subjected to some kind of tribal magic. It is believed that he is possessed and he believes that he is a woman. The tribal priest tells Nitin Bose that only the River has been given the power to cure and so he is taken to the river bed where he will immerse the figure of a goddess. The narrator and his assistant watch the scene from a secret place. When the narrator finished reading Nitin Bose's story it made no sense to him. But his assistant Chagla understands it intuitively and explains: The goddess is just the principle of life. She is every illusion that is inspiring love 22 Chagla goes on to explain that “without desire, there is no life. Everything will stand still. Become emptiness. In fact sir, be dead”.

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It was on this night that he heard a woman calling his name outside. Ignoring the tribal taboo on leaving his bedroom, he quickly followed the voice into the woods. He ran fast after the voice until he heard a loud sound, as if two coconut halves had been placed together quickly and he fell to the ground. He heard the same voice of the woman he had wronged, but he could not understand what she said there was a noise of something being clapped over something else, like two books slapped together. As I heard that sound I felt the air being sucked out of my lungs. Rima had taken his soul and left Bose feeling empty. He returned to his room and quickly wrote down his experience, so as to explain himself before madness hit him. He then searched the countryside in hopes of finding a cure of his madness. Bose learned of the Narmada's ability to help people who believed in the Goddess, which brought him to the manager. This touches upon the holiness of the river. Upon reading the account, the manager was confounded. He did not believe, as did the tribal communities around him, that a person could be healed in such a way.

However, upon journeying out to the countryside Bose returned with his sanity intact and thanked the manager for being so understanding. Bose left the manager with doubt about his own assumptions, for he could not believe the change that had come over Bose. Confused, he did not know what to believe. However his experiences with Nitin Bose are set aside when he reconciles his feelings toward the situation. He dismisses the event as ridiculous. His faith is never reinforced by other's experiences with the Goddess; he is only repelled by their lack of self-control. In the case of Bose he negates his story as nonsense, not believing that a shrine to the Goddess on the river saved him, though his own religious beliefs were centered on the holiness of the river.
Quickly after the manger's experiences with Bose he meets a young girl at a local merchant and spiritual area. He is taken aback by her ugliness, especially by his lack of control of his own disgust. Lie had prided himself in having more control over his own emotions. He is fascinated by the girl and provokes her to tell him her story.

The writer uses a different technique for this story. Nitin Bose while staying in a tea estate falls in love with a tribal woman, His love for the tribal woman is a materialistic love so when he returns from the tea estate, every night he dreams of her. In this failure of love he loses his mental balance, Ile is attached to the tribal woman for fulfilling his sexual desires. His relation with her is immoral and he is afraid of the regulations of the society because according to the society his act is a sin which is not excused by the people. Therefore he buried his immoral act in his mind and the effect of his suppression resulted in his utter madness, Afraid of society's regulations he cannot confess his immoral act lo anybody else so he confesses it in his diary. Diary is one of the means of confession through which one can get mental relief, Nitin Bose after writing his diary gets mental relief and is cured from amnesia. The story reflects the Indian psyche and tradition in which these kinds of acts are not allowed and if someone did it unconsciously then he is afraid to confess it. Nitin Bose as belongs to the same tradition suppresses his desire and wants to hide the truth from people. The writer, before telling the story, describes the myth of Kama, God of Love which is very helpful to create a suitable atmosphere. No one can confess his sin before anybody else so this technique is uniquely used by Gita Mehta. Through diary Nitin Bose narrates his story in the first person point of view and makes the narration reliable.
In *The Courtesan’s Story* the mode of narration is again changed from one narrator to another. The courtesan narrates her story in the first person narration and also includes the information about her daughter's kidnapping by a murderer Rahul Singh. The writer wants to provide the detailed information about Courtesan's life through this narrator represents the particular group of courtesans which is neglected by the society. The courtesans are not considered as human beings but they are used for entertainment only. In this story there is another narrator i.e. the Courtesan's daughter. She describes her life with the bandits to the narrator. She also tells the reason behind Rahul Singh's act that Rahul Singh kidnaps her because he thinks that she has been his nian lives before that one. As a witness she describes the life of bandits in the state of solitude. After marriage she and Rahul Singh live a happy life and he also decides to live a life of common man but the society may not be able to forget his deeds and he is killed in police encounter. At last the Courtesan's daughter commits suicide because as a murderer's wife she cannot return in society. Gita Mehta, through the character of the Courtesan's daughter, expresses the mentality of society. It also tells that many a times innocent person also becomes a victim of the regulations of society. Rahul Singh is not a murderer but society forces him to do the murder and at the same time the Courtesan's daughter who marries a murderer is forced to commit suicide. Both these are victims of social ethos. Even though the narrators are changed in the same story, the writer uses the first person point of view because no one can express the deep feelings and emotions of a particular person.

The story of the Courtesan’s, narrated by her mother and herself, is a tale of belief and faith based on intuition. Rahul Singh the notorious bandit kidnaps the young courtesan and keeps her in captivity in a cave. She refuses to surrender to him
sexually and when he tells her that she had been his wife in many births before this one, she refuses to believe him. But, one night when he to her, she realized that she had been his wife in many lives before: Guided by his touch, I learned I had known his body in a hundred lifetimes before he took me again a virgin on the thin quilt which was all that shielded our bodies from the ground. 25 Her mysterious disappearance near the cliffs and the mother reporting that her daughter is dead are full of improbabilities. “Nonsense, Chagla. The daughter was here, in my office, only half an hour ago” 26 — the narrator expresses his disbelief. On the whole the story seems like a tall-tale for a man of reason. The reader does not question like the narrator, having known the narrator through many such stories.

In *The Musician's Story* the musician's daughter describes her story to the narrator in the first person. Through her story she tells about her father and their popularity in the field of music. Her father is a devoted music teacher and cheated by his disciple. The disciple promises him to marry his daughter after learning the art of music but when the purpose is fulfilled he marries another girl. The musician's daughter is ugly that's why the disciple rejects her. His love is a materialistic love which gives importance only to external beauty the musician's daughter cannot tolerate his rejection but the musicians convinces her that beauty is a passing thing and it lies in the eyes of the beholder. In her narration she describes the details of every raga which can be told who has knowledge of music so the writer chooses her as a narrator of this story. The writer with the help of this narrator describes the selfish and materialistic world.
The story of the Musician who loved Music and his daughter again leaves the narrator with suspicion. When the girl tells him that she learnt Music along with another young man from her father on the condition that the young man will marry her and how finally the man got married to someone else, she was left desolate. Her father told her to meditate on the waters of the Narmada until she is cured of her attachment to her lover so that she can become again the ragini to every raga. She must become the bride of Music. The narrator looks at Tariq Mia in disbelief and questions: Of course not. The beauty of the Narmada makes it a perfect retreat for anyone like me wishing to withdraw from the world. But how can it exorcise a lover's grief? 27

In the next, The Minstrel's Story the narrator is Tariq Mia. He meets Naga Baba a few years ago and gets acquainted with him and a little girl who is saved by Naga Raba from the clutches of the prostitute. Tariq Mia who is well acquainted with Naas Baba the details of an ascetic's life. An ascetic is an alienated man who avoids the company Human beings and lives a lonely and peaceful life in the state of solitude. In the story Naga Baba is a representative of ascetics' community. The story also describes how people are victims of superstitions and religious faiths. The last chapter of the novel The Songs of Narmada is a sequel to the The Minstrel's Story. Dr. Mitra's attraction towards the river has its own story and he is full of information about the river. He says that “even the war between the Aryans and the pre-Aryans is still unresolved here” 28 and he informs that four thousand year old Aryan warrior still lives on the north bank of Narmada and his name is Avatihuma. Several songs about the glory of Namada are sung by river minstrels:
You leap through the earth
Like a dancing deer.
The devout call you Rewa
The leaping one.29
The sages meditating on your river banks say
You are twice-born,
Once from penance,
Once from love30

This chapter narrated by the nameless narrator in the third person narration which focuses on Naga Baba's reappearance in the role of Professor Shankar. Professor Shankar plays the role of Naga Baba because he is trying to change the bad practices in the society with the help of people’s religious faiths and beliefs. The writer with the help of these two narrators tells that because of some beliefs the little girl is left in a brothel by her father and at the same time Naga Baba saves that girl from the clutches of prostitute through the beliefs. A River Sutra ends again in a note of not being sure of anything. The narrator cannot believe that Dr. Shankar was once an ascetic and now a mere admirer of Narmada. “I stood there in the darkness watching them, unable to believe he had ever been a naked ascetic, unable to convince myself he had not.”31

Such songs record human sentiments and fears about the river. Though Dr. Shankar brushes aside all these legends, he accepts the fact “If anything is sacred about the river, it is the individual experiences of the human beings who have lived here.”32 The river is a source of information for Dr. Shankar who believes that there is
evidence of human life during the Stone Age in one of the caves near the river. Dr. Shankar also dismisses the idea that the river can be a place for Vanaprasthi, because “too many lives converge on these banks.”  

\[
\text{You were present at the Creation} \\
\text{By Shiva's command you alone will remain} \\
\text{At the Destruction.}\]  

All these stories converge at one point, that the river is a perennial source of Life and hence immortal. The river has witnessed the passing of civilizations and the songs celebrate her immortality. The beliefs about the powers of the river are manifestations of Man's faith in the River Narmada as against the rational mind's curiosity to know about Human Race.

Gita Mehta presents the principal narrator as a fugitive and some of the characters in the stories resemble him. A.G.Khan in an Interesting article identifies him with the Monk, Master Mohan, Executive, Naga Baba and Mr. Shankar and comments that all these characters try to escape from everyday reality, wealth, luxury, money, woman and go in search of peace, Nirvana, Freedom and enlightenment. Most of them do not see light at the end of the tunnel and characters like Tariq Mia do not run away from the reality and comprehend what they think is the meaning of life. To some, desire is the principle of life and to some to love humanity is the meaning of life. A River Sutra in this angle may be an allegory of Life itself and the various sutras are like the fabrics of Life.  

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People, who have searched for the solace of the river or to study it, tell stories to the manager. All of these stories begin to shape the man's character and make him question himself to the point of doubt. Stories of desire perplexed the manager as he learned of the story of a young man, Nitin Bose, who was consumed by passions for one woman who ultimately took his soul.

The manager was asked to care for Bose by the man's father, who was a friend of the manager. He was perplexed by the man's state. He was crazed and delusional, though he managed to give the manager an account of what had happened to him. Though the job Nitin Bose had taken on a tea plantation was well paid, the location took him far from friends and the city life that he had once enjoyed. Nitin Bose had grown weary of the consuming lifestyle he had become accustomed to, of drinking and womanizing. He felt empty and expressed the need for solitude. Amid these feelings of weariness about his own situation the beginning of many nightly visits by a young girl occur. She first appears nameless but beautiful, and he enjoys many nights of carnal pleasure with her. His doubt disappears as he is consumed by lust for her. Bose becomes happier and no longer has trouble with his work or late night thoughts of uncertainty. He likens her to the Goddess, for her beauty and his own desire to make more of their nightly sexual liaisons. He romanticized their relationship, especially centering himself on his own experience, such as how she bewitched him. She told him her name was Rima along with folklore from her village. These stories fascinated him, though he did not take them seriously, or as means of communication. He felt that she told him these stories for his own amusement alone. Upon receiving a new assignment away from the plantation he is deeply saddened about leaving his temptress. When he told her of his news she immediately became
renounced of her Goddess status. She cries and begs to be taken with him. Becoming an ordinary girl, Bose feels that she has even lost some of her beauty, which had for some time been the center of his thoughts. The Goddess had been transformed into an ordinary plantation worker, with her own problems, such as the desire to marry him. He leaves and is saddened by his unproblematic ability and his own need to leave her. However, he has slight feelings of shame about the way he left her, without a farewell. He returns to the plantation in hopes of reaching a resolution with the woman and relieving his own guilt. To Bose's approval, she did not return to see him that night.

The woman was raised in the family of a famous musician. Upon realizing that her ugliness has set her apart from society, her father, who has never taken a student, teaches his daughter. She excels as a musician. Later her father is propositioned by a young man to teach him. The father acquiesces, only if the man marries his daughter. He agrees without meeting her but is soon repelled by her ugliness. The daughter was wounded by her father's designs. She had fallen in love with the musician upon first sight, but because of her ugliness she felt unworthy of his love. Despite her dejected feelings she began to practice with him and her father daily. They found solace in each other from her father's callousness as a teacher. She had always felt the spirituality attached to the music she played and soon passed these feelings of reverence to the student. In return she believed that he might have fallen in love with her.

At a festival to Shiva, the famous musician played for an assembled audience. However, this year was let his two students play to fulfill his vow of offering his daughter to music as a bride. The young man and she played together,
and she felt bliss. She felt as if they had transformed into Parvati and Shiva. This symbolism shows how she had accepted in her heart that he actually would want to marry her and that they would be happy. It also characterized the feelings of spirituality that she possessed for her music. Released from his own VOW of making her a bride to music, the musician freed the man of his VOW to marry his daughter.

The girl was heartbroken. Though she felt their connection within the music as a conjoined couple, her own feelings of ineptitude, due to her outward appearance, surfaced. Nevertheless the man stopped saying that he would return and make her his bride. However, this was not to be. He declined their marriage as soon as his lessons were finished. The daughter no longer wished to play for her heart had been broken, and she felt as if her father had not protected her. She had been transformed into a longing Parvati. She longed to be a wife, like Parvati, and to find love but felt cursed for she had been denied it. The manger was troubled by this story for he felt such pity for the girl, and she could not find a solution to her feelings. Though his faith had been repeatedly called into question throughout the other stories the musician affected him seriously. He was unsure of feelings, despite the fact that he knew these feelings were negative. He went to a friend to try to explain his melancholy and find a reprieve.

In hopes of showing his friend a more merciful side of life, Tariq Mia begins to tell the manager of Naga Baba. The importance of the relationship of the Narmada River with the people who surround the banks is demonstrated through the story of Naga Baba and his disciple Uma. Having arrived at a whorehouse for alms on the night of Shiva, Naga Baba, an ascetic and worshipper of Shiva, found Uma enslaved.
there at a very young age. Feeling pity for the girl he instructed the Madame to give her to him, which she did out of fear. Naga Baba proceeded to raise Uma, whom he named in honor of the Goddess, and taught her songs to Shiva. He became her guardian and raised her in accordance with his ascetic lifestyle. He taught her how to read and write. At night he sang to her songs of the Narmada, which would serve her later in life.

Toward the end of the story the reader discovers the Goddess imagery has woven itself together to symbolize the characteristics of Uma and the Narmada. It had been said that the Narmada had been created as an act of Shiva's penance. Uma as well was given a Wthaiss meaning for Naga Baba by a temple priest who tells the story, given as a form of penance by the head of the whorehouse o Naga Baba, so as not to incur his wrath. Both Uma and the Narmada are intertwined, due to Uma's religious connection to the river. She becomes the embodiment of the Goddess for her faith and dedication to the river and its traditions. Her songs and religious reverence of the river begin to symbolize the nature of the river to those who worship the Narmada. Mehta uses Uma and the Narmada as symbolism for each other. They are both given attributes of the Goddess, through names, stories and the amount of worship that they engendered. Though Uma is a personification of the Goddess, the Goddess is always a living force within the novel, as the Narmada. Just as Shiva bore the weight of his penance by creating the Narmada, so does Uma bear the weight of transmitting this religious purpose? They become a part of each other. This is symbolized with Uma's emersion into the Narmada on her first night with Naga Baba. "Suddenly he gripped her arms and lowered her into the water. The Narmada claims all girls as hers. Tonight you become a daughter of the Narmada." This event shows
the power of the Goddess as a religious entity. She has the power to affiliate other females to herself, and is perceived as having the agency to do so.

Though Uma represents Naga Baba's "fruits of austerity", she also begins to generate her own holiness. With the songs of tribute she has learned about the Narmada she becomes a wandering ministerial at its banks when Naga Baba moves on to other stages of his journey to enlightenment. The manager was left with renewed faith in his position. The austere lifestyle of Naga Baba made him feel rejuvenated. He soon began an obsession with Uma. He felt that his spirituality would be restored if he could hear her songs of the Narmada. Uma had begun to personify the Goddess to the overseer.\textsuperscript{39} At the same time an archeologist and his crew overran the bungalow that the overseer managed. They were doing a study of the spiritual history of the Narmada.

Having attached his ego to the holy Narmada the overseer felt overjoyed by their enthusiasm for the river. He also began to enjoy their company, realizing that his solitude had left him lonely. He asked the archaeologist if he had heard of the minstrels that lived on the banks of the Narmada. He said he had. The overseer asked him to notify him of their location so he could hear them sing. The following day a minstrel appears singing devotion to the Narmada. This over joys the manager, and he feels his faith completely renewed by this holy experience. It seems as if the Goddess of the river has come to life in her song, and the manager knows in his heart that he was wrong to doubt his choice in life which is to devote himself to his worship of the river.
Ripped from his renewed feelings of holiness he hears the archaeologist refer to the singer as Uma. From their familiarity he begins to be thrust into doubt again. He asks the archeologist if he was Naga Baba, to which he replied positively. This shatters the overseer for Naga Baba's austerity had begun to be a cornerstone of his renewed faith. The overseer began flooding him with questions. Naga Baba's answers infuriated the overseer. He told him that he decided to leave his meditation, but he would not give him details. The archeologist told him that everyone's experiences were different and that he was only sure of his own experiences in life when the overseer asked him what was to become of him. Quickly, the archaeologist left the overseer dejected and in perpetual doubt.

Uma and Naga Baba had replaced the pillars of his faith, especially through Uma's representation of the Goddess. Their respect for the River, which the hotel overseer shared, helped him identify with them. Upon hearing their faith was not what he had imagined, he was once again cast into doubt, which had been growing since the beginning of the novel. In the end he is left with his faith close to destroyed. However his lack of conviction in his own faith of the river and the Goddess seems to be the result of his lack of spirituality. He needed other people too much, though he was slowly trying to become a renunciate. As is the goal of most house holding men in Indian society, they plan to devote their later life to religious reflection and seclusion. However, his goal as a renunciate is marred by his need to have his faith constantly renewed. Without others around him this would not happen. Mehta uses the overseer to show the frailty of people's spirituality and how lack of inner faith can destroy hopes of worship and austerity.
The novel mentioned in many forms. The manager bases his life around other people's perceptions of the Goddess and spirituality. With his faith shattered what will become of him? The end of the novel offers no into his future but leaves the reader with the knowledge that people still worship the river and the Goddess all around him, insight dejected by the river, which is affecting his spirituality once again.

Equally important in the discussion of *A River Sutra* is the strong female attributes given to certain characters in the story. The river is personified as female and a source of immense spiritual power. This power affects everyone in the story.\(^{40}\) The characters of Rima and Uma both defy perceptions of femininity, while simultaneously encapsulating gender roles. In many ways Rima is shown as a feminist character. Rima is a tribal woman. Due to this she could be regarded by caste-conscious Hindus to be outside of civilization. Therefore she is not controlled by patriarchal norms. She takes control of her own sexuality, initiating sex, which as R.P. Sharma suggests is anti-ethical to the traditional way women are portrayed in Indian literature. Subsequently she is not punished for taking control of her own sexual desires. Instead she is revered and given Goddess-like qualities. She is even worshiped by her sexual partner. She uses her sexuality as a means of getting what she desires, instead of being ashamed of it or trying to conform to traditional modes, as wife and mother. When scorned she does not lie down and accept her abuse. She resorts to stealing his soul, returning to her Goddess status by her ability to control Bose. This is symbolized by her supernatural powers that are accentuated by her ability to use them to get what she desires.
She displays this power as Bose finds her on his return to the plantation. "'You will never leave me now, no matter how far you go,' she said triumphantly, waving her trophy in front of me. It was a coconut... Picking up her lantern she disappeared into the jungle." On the other hand Uma though forced to become unchaste at a very young age is revered for her holiness and is also attributed with Goddess features. Her faith in the river and her ability to transcend gender roles due to this holiness personifies her as part of the Power of the river. She becomes a very powerful symbol who can make her own destiny. She is not looked down upon for her past as a child prostitute, and she is revered.

Uma's role as a prostitute can be viewed differently through a feminist lens. Shalini Shah states that femininity is directly affected by how women's sexuality is socially perceived. Though Uma is given a forced sexuality as a child prostitute she is quickly removed from that environment and placed within a genderless relationship with an aesthetic. Her prostitution makes her polluted, so she is set a part from society. This further enables her to enter a religious life with Naga Baba. Thus her forced sexuality can become her liberation from societal cruelties placed on her due to her gender. Again both characters use their abject status to achieve a new identity. The identity they gain is set apart from normative roles of gender division, such as women relegated to the home as protector. This identity is perceived through a religious viewpoint. This viewpoint uses the image of the Goddess to show the metamorphosis of the characters as well as other characters in the story.

Many authors have written about Mehta's works. Her work in *A River Sutra* is held by many to bring an Indian perspective closer to other countries. Merle Rubin stated that there is something for everyone, including every religion, in his works.
C.N. Ramachandran and A. G. Kahn compare this novel to Canterbury Tales remarking how each tale goes against others, but how each is meant to teach the reader something, in this case about religion. Marlene Fisher feels that it is a good book for everyone to read due to its dealings with various religions in the end the criticisms denote that the religious nature of the books enhances the readers experience and knowledge.

In conclusion the use of Goddess imagery with *A River Sutra* is used as a cultural agent and as a form of analysis. The spiritual journey of the manager emerges as filled with urgency and doubt. He however continues to be imbued with many visions of the Goddess that he can not resolve with his growing lack of faith. He reaches this impasse through other people's lives, their narratives to him. The Narmada, the main focus of the Goddess within the story, is the centre where many different forms of religious expression can be scrutinized and called into question. Mehta's characters, through the Goddess imagery attached to them, such as Uma and Rima, are given a certain agency that can be looked at through a feminist lens. Uma and Jima become Powerful characters that transcend normative modes of behaviour. When this behaviour is changed they are themed with Goddess imagery, such as power to entice and beauty. Due to these factors the Goddess imagery within this story helps to illustrate the religious discovery of the manager.

The river in India is generally considered as a sacred one and has the spiritual bliss. It is also believed that gods stay on the banks of rivers and thus there are many shhties 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 American rivers are not treated as a spiritual one and it remains only as part of nature. To make a comparative study the two contradictory ideas, Gita Mehta's novel *A River Sutra* and Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* are selected. In these novels rivers play major roles like the major characters and it is shown as a guide to human beings especially to the narrators/heroes of the stories by remaining as a spiritual scenario/natural scenario.

Gita Mehta's 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.

Though the narrator remains unidentified in the beginning is revealed to be the manager of a government rest house on the banks of the Narmada River, who describes his life and experiences in the first person. However, 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.
These novel set on the banks of the river show how the narrators are getting experiences from the people those come/resides on the banks of the river. In *A River Sutra*, the narrator in the Narmada River often meets someone who river which gives shelter to every in their normal life. 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.*

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.*

In *A River Sutra*, freedom becomes the question of spiritual one and in Huck's case it is literarily freedom of living. In *A River Sutra*, the Jain monk's story
which is narrated as the first story to the narrator shows the spiritual freedom, he wanted to get. The monk's story is the story of a rich man renouncing the worldly pleasures to become a Jain monk. The narrator wanted to gain some knowledge from the monk, but the monk did not respond any answer directly to the narrator, besides he said that he had to join with other monks and started his journey. He also admitted that since he was young, he could not clarify the doubts of the narrator. Regardless of religion many ascetics are coming to the shrines at e banks of the river and this Jain monk is one among them. Though he 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.*

Another story narrated in *A River Sutra* shows the freedom of soul in the next birth. The story is narrated by a woman, whose daughter is kidnapped by Rahul Sing, a bandit. The narrator could meet the daughter and she states Rahul Singh and she were married in their previous births to so he wanted her to marry in this birth also. She too believed at they were married together in the previous births and since hr is a bandit she could not stay with hull for a long time and there, she returned to her mother.
The story narrated by a servant about his land lord Nitin Bose, whose mental health is affected by his love affair shows his love-failure due to class difference. Nitin Bose was a rich man and he was tormented by love. It was believed that he was possessed by his lover and so he came to the banks of river Narmada to cure his possessions of the spirit. He was advised by a saint that if he wanted to recover from his mental illness, he must worship the goddess at any shrine that overlooks the Narmada River. Only that river has been given the power to cure him. Nitin's servant shares his experience with the narrator as: He told them, 'If your sahib wants to recover his mind he must worship the goddess at any shrine that overlooks the Narmada River. Only that river has been given the power to care him'. Thus the river gives mental purification/peace also when someone requires it and the narrator gains a new experience of life through this story. Hence it is believed that any shrine over the banks of the river Narmada has spirit of curing the obsessed. Thus Nitin Bose starts worshipping the river: "Salutations in the morning and at night to thee, O Narmada. Defend me from the serpent's poison". The same invocation song is sung by every tribal in the banks of the Narmada River, which the narrator often listens to and he describes it as:

_Saved from annihilation only by a divine personification of the Narmada River, the grateful tribals conferred on the river the gift of annulling the effects of snakebite, and I have often heard pilgrims who have never met a tribal reciting the invocation._

In _A River Sutra_, it 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 mariner 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.*

In *A River Sutra* where the girl is expecting for a major change in her living and finally starts worshipping the river. A musician's daughter was not married by anyone, because she looks ugly. Her father taught her music and finally one of her father's students was willing to marry her, but at the last moment, he sent a word to the family that he is married. This made her heart broken and came to the banks of the Narmada River since it is believed that the river cures the mental trauma of that girl. The last story is about Naga Baba, who took care of an orphan girl named Uma. Naga Baba is a professor, who is revealed at the end of the story and Uma continues reciting songs on the river Narmada. She praises Narmada as:

*But Shiva called you*  
*Delight*  
*And laughing*  
*Named you Narmada.*

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Bards and ascetics sing your wonders.

Gamblers, cheats, and dancers praise you.

We all find refuge in your embrace.

O holy Narmada. 

Though came back to the land, he may escape the bonds of civilization but his aim i.e. to detach away from the society is not possible. For, civilization, in the form of some elders like widow Doughlas or aunt Sally will catch hold of him away from all these experiences/knowledge, which he could gain when he go away from them. Huck would continue to remain there with those bonds, but cannot attain his aim even in future. His experiences are stopped since there is a pause to meet people if he stays with any of his responsible holders to take care of him to civilize him. Thus land becomes a symbol of barrier to his gaining knowledge though he is civilized there. Likewise, the narrator of A River Sutra has to move from the place and his experience will also be stopped when he shifts the place.

The Indian myths portray a river as a feminine being and the Narmada River is also not exempted from it. Dr. Mitra in A River Sutra, discusses the myth of the Narmada to the narrator, he tells that, when Shiva, Creator and Destroyer of Worlds, was in an ascetic trance the perspiration from his body flowed down the hills. The stream took the form of a woman and become dangerous to the ascetics tempting them by appearing as a dancer at one moment and as a romantic dreamer and as a seductress loose-limbed with the lassitude of desire. These attracted Shiva and he named her Narmada, the Delightful One, blessing her with the words: "You shall be forever holy, forever inexhaustible", then he gave her in marriage to the ocean Lord of
Rivers, most lustrous of all her suitors. Thus everyone looks at the river as a woman and the narrator too after a long period of stay in the banks of river start imagining the river as a woman:

\[I \text{ watched the water slowly redden, catching reflections from the rose colors of dawn, and imagined the river as a woman painting her palms and the sides of her feet with vermilion as she prepared to meet her lover.}\]

Later the discussion between Dr. Mitra and the narrator leads to the point whether the river is a whore or not. Dr. Mitra points out "So Narmada is unlike to mean whore." the narrator denies saying that the river Narmada is not a whore. These kinds of representations such as, river as woman/goddess are possible in Indian writings. This type of notions cannot be seen in the American novel, where the river Mississippi is never shown as the symbol of worship or any spiritual bliss and literally nobody treats it as a woman too.

In the novel the river Narmada is portrayed as river full of life and hope. They give shelters to many living things other than human beings also. The river tries to give a sort of experience to the narrator of the novel and others those who dwell in the banks of them and remained as a guide of giving knowledge and experience to them. The Indian River Narmada is seen with the spiritual bliss: "In the living stones of the Narmada, God is to be found."

In *A River Sutra*, the narrator observes the experiences of others and gets knowledge. In *A River Sutra*, the narrator is observing the experiences of different
kinds of people living on the banks of the Narmada River. It gives different experiences and so the narrator gets intellectual bliss through the real stories and also the spiritual nature of the Narmada River is realized by the narrator through other characters he meets. At the end of the novel the narrator is moving away from the banks of Narmada but the lessons given by it are pleasant memories to him.

The work ‘A River Sutra’ bears and imbibes the themes and motifs relevant to environment concerns. Mehta has shown how the Narmada and her surrounding forest have influenced the life upon her bank and to the people far away from her. People continue to come to her for their problems and on their solution they are satisfied. It’s not that Mehta deals with mythological, spiritual, religious significance but she also shows her concern to environment, and that’s my concern in this article to see how significantly she has harmonized her work. Way back our life matched to nature but our progress detached us to pay the price.

In the novel, the journey allows the narrator to gain experiences and thus knowledge; narrator starts and ends his journey then and there in the banks of Narmada and in the narrator stays at one place, but the people come and go from him and give him experiences; therefore the river stands for experience-giver/guide of knowledge in both these novels.

In the narrative technique the nameless narrator provides background to each story. The writer uses flashback technique in the novel. The writer's purpose of providing the background to each story is to create suitable atmosphere which captures the reader’s psyche. The use of narrative technique in this novel is different
from the regular concept of the novel. Generally the novel includes a saga of events related to the central character's life but the novel comprises different characters and different events. The novel highlights not only one character but with the help of various characters Gita mehta expresses the psychology of human mind. Human mind cannot deny the influence of culture, religion, faiths and desires on him and at last surrenders before it. So the technique of this novel is considered as unique one.

In this saga of interlinked stories which flows with same theme and subject matter the feministic approach of the writer has been depicted. She as a feminist writer has centred on the holiest river of India, Narmada. She treated ‘Narmada’ as the holy mother. The river is presented in the form of a powerful and purifying female who is associated with the religious faiths and beliefs of Indian people. One of the aspects of feminism is to project the female sex as a creator and reformer of human life. Here the river Narmada is presented in the form of holy mother; people come on her banks for getting peace and solace of mind, as a tired and hurt son get relief in the lap of mother. Narmada becomes the goddess when the frustrated and nervous people worship to get relief and peace of mind and soul.

Thus the author has, in a way tried to prove that a woman can be the saver of man from not only physical but also mental and psychological problems. The place of woman is equal to the holiest river like Narmada. On one hand, on the other hand in the courtesan’s story the daughter of courtesan is kidnapped by a murderer Rahul singh, here the narrator informed that the courtesans are neglected by the society and they are not considered at human beings but they are used for entertainment only. So the writer had depicted the exploitation of woman. Gita Mehta through the character of
courtesan’s daughter expressed the mentality of society towards women. Thus the feministic approach is expressed as the undercurrent of the novel.
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